

THE LUTHERAN ART OF DYING: CARING FOR THE SCARED WITH THE CERTAINTY
OF CHRIST

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ABSTRACT

The fear of death is common for all people. Every person will face death at the end of their life. As their church members confront their fears of dying, WELS pastors may find a helpful tool for consolation in the Lutheran art of dying. It redirects the dying believer's focus to the certainty they have in Christ. This paper will examine what outcome there might be in making use of the Lutheran art of dying. This will be accomplished by examining Martin Luther's connection with the late medieval *ars moriendi*, how he began developing the Lutheran art of dying in the sixteenth century, and finally how his reformed version of consolation has continued even to this day.

INTRODUCTION

In May 1519, Georg Spalatin sent a letter to Martin Luther.¹ Spalatin was forwarding a request on behalf of Mark Schart, a counselor for Frederick the Wise. The request asked for Luther to address how a Christian should deal with the fears that plague humans when dying.

This was a busy year for Luther. In the summer of 1519, he would be at the Leipzig Debate, and so his answer to Schart was not completed until November 1 later that year. He sent the finalized booklet to Schart with the title, *A Sermon on Preparing to Die*. What Luther did not know was that with this writing he was beginning to reform the way pastors comfort and train people how to handle death. He had created a Lutheran art of dying.²

Luther had been influenced in writing his *Sermon on Preparing to Die* by a late medieval tradition of consolation. This tradition was produced in a genre of literature known as the *ars moriendi*.³ In this genre both clergy and laity were given guidelines for comforting others in their fears of dying. Luther's work contains elements of this tradition. His work, however, improved

1. History for this section is taken from Martin Luther, "A Sermon on Preparing to Die" (1519): vol. 42, p. 97–8, in *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957–86).

2. This phrase "Lutheran art of dying" may seem new to most WELS readers. I found it in the heading of the article by Reinis, "The Lutheran Art of Dying in Sixteenth-Century Wittenberg: Commemorating the Founders of Lutheran Orthodoxy and Celebrating Confessional Identity after 1592," *Seminary Ridge Review*, Luther Colloquy 2016, 19.2 (2017): 18–44.

3. Latin for "the art of dying."

on the *ars moriendi*, because the medieval tradition “taught that Christians were to spend their life preparing for death, but stopped short of assuring them of salvation.”⁴ Luther’s new understanding of justification in Christ alone would take that uncertainty away and provide them something built on hope in the resurrection instead.

This new method of care influenced other reformers. It taught Luther’s followers and future pastors how to comfort the scared with the certainty of Christ. This consolation would be used in many works from 1519 on. Luther had begun a literature reform. These other writers would copy and modify Luther’s reform, thus creating a variety of literature for the Lutheran art of dying.

The fear of dying was not new in Luther’s time, and it is not new in ours. Part of a pastor’s responsibility is comforting others when they are scared to die. Death disturbs people. One of the most powerful examples of how death affects humans is when Jesus saw the tomb of Lazarus. “Jesus wept” (John 11:35 NIV). Death causes sorrow and fear. It happens at the loss of a loved one or even when sinful human beings face their own mortality. Pastor Steven P. Petersen wrote in 1994 at an Evangelical Lutheran Synod and Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS/WELS) Forum that death is as relevant for us today as it was for Luther for the same reason: “Death and all the trouble in this world are caused by man’s fallen status before God.”⁵ Since sin will plague us until our end, talking about death and consoling the dying was, is, and will be a part of the church’s work until Christ returns.

4. Austra Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying: The Ars Moriendi in the German Reformation (1519–1528)*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Theological Seminary, 2003), 433.

5. Steven J. Petersen, “We Are Guests at an Inn Whose Keeper Is a Villain: The Subject of Death in the Devotional Writings of Martin Luther,” (Milwaukee: WLS Essay File, 1994), 2.

There is not necessarily a problem for pastoral care in WELS when it comes to comforting the dying. Lutheran pastors take their cue from God's Word, as Luther and the reformers did, to bring the gospel to those who are scared. It is only in the gospel that the scared can hear the comforting certainty of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. This paper is endeavoring to raise this question: what outcome might there be in making use of the Lutheran art of dying for pastoral care today? WELS pastors undoubtedly use elements of this genre already. But could they benefit from this tool, the art of dying, when it comes to caring for their scared sheep?

This paper will provide a summary of the history of the Lutheran art of dying while also showing that this Lutheran method of care has practical applications for today. Studying the Lutheran art of dying tends to lead WELS pastors to examine what they already do in pastoral care. It is hoped that this will cause pastors to examine how they can be more proactive in the ways they train their members to handle death. It will also give pastors a resource to use to improve on being reactive when tragedies arise.

This paper will first examine the history of the late medieval *ars moriendi*. The tradition that influenced Luther has roots going back to the fourteenth century. It developed because of the Black Plague culture and the efforts of the church to comfort the dying. The first part will finish by examining the popular genre of literature of the *ars moriendi* by looking at its various forms and functions.

The next part of this paper will focus on a brief history of Martin Luther and how he was influenced by death. It will be a study of the early influence of death on his life with various examples from 1483–1519. This background of Luther's early life will provide insight into his 1519 work, *A Sermon on Preparing to Die*. This part will conclude with a study on how Luther

approached death after 1519 until his own death in 1546. This will also be accomplished by studying specific examples.

The third part of this paper will show how Luther's practice of handling death, the Lutheran art of dying, continued after 1519. This will be accomplished by studying how Luther's work was practiced by other reformers from 1519–1548. Then an example of the Lutheran art of dying will be examined to illustrate how the new method of consolation can be used and taught. This example is Johann Spangenberg's *A Booklet of Comfort for the Sick & On the Christian Knight* (1548).⁶ The third part will conclude with a brief examination on how the *ars moriendi* tradition still relates to pastoral care and how WELS pastors can still make use of the Lutheran art of dying today.

The goal of this paper is not to replace the current practice of pastoral care. It is mainly to suggest a new way in which to think about the system of pastoral care by introducing WELS pastors to the Lutheran art of dying. There is little mention of the art of dying in WELS, and it could be a helpful resource. Caring for dying members will not go away. The art of dying provides methods to carry out pastoral care today. It will also provide pastors with a tool they can use to teach their people how to die with their eyes focused on Christ.

6. Appendix 2 contains a list of Spangenberg's catechetical questions and statements.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarship surrounding the art of dying literature usually focuses on whatever era that work comes from. For example, in his master's paper at the University of Ottawa, Jeffrey Campbell provides an excellent English version (alongside the original Latin) of the late medieval *ars moriendi*, complete with woodcuts.⁷ This is a comprehensive compilation of texts that make up the *ars moriendi* tradition from the fifteenth century.

One especially helpful authority on the Lutheran art of dying is Austra Reinis, professor at Missouri State University. In her dissertation at Princeton Theological Seminary, she analyzed the Reformation art of dying literature from the years 1519–1528. Reinis' research is instrumental in understanding the historical links between the *ars moriendi*, Luther's work, and the work of future reformers. Reinis has other works that prove helpful in understanding the death literature of the reformers after Luther. These works focus on the genre of the Lutheran funeral sermon, a part of the new Lutheran art of dying tradition.⁸ Besides Reinis' works, the best place to begin examining the Lutheran art of dying begins with Luther's 1519 *Sermon on Preparing to Die*.

7. Jeffrey Campbell, "The Ars Moriendi," (Master's Thesis, University of Ottawa, 1995), Woodcuts from 1450 have been added as an Appendix for this paper, (Appendix 1).

8. Austra Reinis, "How Protestants Face Death: Johann Gerhard's Funeral Sermon for Kunigunde Gotsmannin, Widow of Hans Dietrich von Hablach Zu Stockheim (d. 1616)," *Theological Review* 25.1 (2004): 24–45. and Reinis, "The Lutheran Art of Dying in Sixteenth-Century Wittenberg," 18–44.

It is helpful to study the history of Luther's life to understand the full scope of his work on reforming the *ars moriendi*. Eric Metaxas' biography helps us understand Luther's own struggles and fears with death throughout his life.⁹ Examining the *Table Talk* volume of Luther's Works provides insight into how Luther vocally spoke about death.¹⁰

Other works deal with the growing theology behind Luther's reforms. Berndt Hamm provides a flow of Reformation theology on the art of dying genre in *The Early Luther: Stages in Reformation Reorientation*.¹¹ Hamm's work helps researchers familiarize themselves with where Luther is at in his theology when he wrote his *Sermon on Preparing to Die*. Robert Kolb examines how this theology changed how pastoral care and funeral practices were carried out following 1519.¹² The practices were adjusted based on this new shift from uncertainty to certainty. A work by Irene Dingel which was printed in the *Lutheran Quarterly* in 2013 also helps shed light on this practice.¹³

Robert Kolb also provides a wonderful example of the Lutheran art of dying, more matured and in catechetical form, in his translation of Johann Spangenberg's *A Booklet of Comfort for the Sick & On the Christian Knight* from 1548.¹⁴ This way of teaching people how

9. Eric Metaxas, *Martin Luther: The Man Who Rediscovered God and Changed the World*, (New York: Penguin Random House, 2017).

10. Martin Luther, *Table Talk*, ed. by Helmut Lehmann, vol. 54, in *Luther's Works, American Edition*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967).

11. Berndt Hamm, *The Early Luther: Stages in Reformation Reorientation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2014).

12. Robert Kolb, "The Reformation of Dying and Burial: Preaching, Pastoral Care, and Ritual at Committal in Luther's Reform," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 81.1–2 (January/April 2017): 77–93.

13. Irene Dingel, "'True Faith, Christian Living, and a Blessed Death.' Sixteenth-Century Funeral Sermons as Evangelical Proclamation," *Lutheran Quarterly* 27.1 (2013): 399–420.

14. Johann Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort for the Sick & On the Christian Knight*, trans. Robert Kolb (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press 2007).

to die or answer questions concerning death would be a common format throughout the following decades, even up to Johann Gerhard in 1611, when he wrote his well-known *Handbook of Consolations for the Fears and Trials That Oppress Us in the Struggle with Death*.¹⁵ This work, written in the art of dying tradition, was completed almost one hundred years after Luther's 1519 work. From this booklet, it is evident that the Lutheran art of dying literature did not disappear, even long after Luther had been dead.

There has been little research or mention of the Lutheran art of dying in WELS. There have been conference papers that have covered some aspects of death, including two that studied the state of the soul after death, one by Professor Siegbert W. Becker and the other by Pastor Harold A. Schewe.¹⁶ The closest work concerning Luther and his thoughts on death is a paper by Pastor Steven J. Petersen titled, "We Are Guests at an Inn Whose Keeper Is a Villain: The Subject of Death in the Devotional Writings of Martin Luther."¹⁷ In this paper, Petersen points to how Luther acknowledged the horror of death in his devotional writings. He also provides some perspective on Luther's views of pastoral care for the dying. However, Pedersen never mentions the art of dying. In fact, the only mention of the art of dying or the *ars moriendi* literature in WELS is in a review of Gerhard's *Consolations* by Pastor Johann Caauwe.¹⁸ There is a healthy amount of literature in WELS on pastoral care, the most recent being in John D. Schuetze's 2017

15. Johann Gerhard, *Handbook of Consolations for the Fears and Trials That Oppress Us in the Struggle with Death*, trans. Carl L. Beckwith (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009).

16. Siegbert W. Becker, "The State of the Soul After Death." (Lyons, IL: WLS Essay File, 3 May 1957), and Harold A. Schewe, "What Happens to the Soul After Death?" (McIntosh, SD: WLS Essay File, 3 Oct 1978).

17. Petersen, "We Are Guests at an Inn Whose Keeper Is a Villain."

18. Johann Caauwe, "Review: Handbook of Consolations," n.d. <https://www.wisluthsem.org/review-handbook-of-consolations/>.

book, *Doctor of Souls: The Art of Pastoral Theology*,¹⁹ but again there is no mention of the Lutheran art of dying. There are similar elements emphasized such as care for the soul, addressing fears, use of Bible passages, etc.

Most studies on the art of dying have occurred outside of WELS. Missouri Synod's *Lutheran Witness* September 2020 edition was wholly dedicated to the art of dying tradition.²⁰ There have been other modern Christian writers who have tried to encourage a modern art of dying. Examples include Lydia Dugdale's *The Lost Art of Dying: Reviving Forgotten Wisdom*,²¹ and Allen D. Verhey's *The Christian Art of Dying: Learning from Jesus*.²² While both these sources try to encourage an approach to death that emphasizes care for the dying, they lack the pastoral touch that Luther emphasized in his 1519 work. Dugdale and Verhey are mainly concerned with how the secular world has taken dying and made it nothing more than another medical term. They wish to see people comforted in a more meaningful way in the medical world and both authors use their Christian background to approach this care. In the *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, John Gillman wrote an article on reframing the way we approach death titled, "Memoirs and the Ars Moriendi."²³ Gillman encourages pastors to try and communicate with an art of dying to answer the questions that plague sinners at the end. A similar plea is made by the blog Funeral Zone in a posting on the art of dying.²⁴

19. John D. Schuetze, *Doctor of Souls: The Art of Pastoral Theology*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2017).

20. Roy S. Askins, "Ars Moriendi: The Art of Dying Well," *The Lutheran Witness* 139.9, (2020).

21. Lydia Dugdale, *The Lost Art of Dying: Reviving Forgotten Wisdom*, (New York: Harper One, 2020).

22. Allen D. Verhey, *The Christian Art of Dying: Learning from Jesus*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2011).

23. John Gillman, "Memoirs and the Ars Moriendi." *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 73.3 (2019): 160–8.

24. "The Illuminated Art of Dying in the Middle Ages," *Funeral Zone*, 24 July 2017, <https://www.funeralguide.co.uk/blog/ars-moriendi>.

On May 15, 2021, Kara Mason wrote an article for *AP News Online*. This article is titled, “Embracing Death: End-of-Life Doulas Growing in Popularity.”²⁵ In the article, Mason makes the interesting observation that people are looking for professionals to guide them through the process of dying. She sees death doulas filling this role. What is interesting in this article is that the role of the doula is exactly what a WELS pastor is used to filling. An article like this demonstrates the need for pastors to be aware of death in our world. It is not hard to see that people are still bothered by it. Examining the literature dedicated to the Lutheran art of dying may help pastors become more aware of how they continue to build up the scared with the certainty of Christ.

25. Kara Mason, “Embracing Death: End-of-Life Doulas Growing in Popularity,” *AP News Online* (15 May 2021), <https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-lifestyle-health-business-3b4e6af60889b69fde4f8fc14d01f7af>.

PART 1: HISTORY, FORMS, AND FUNCTIONS OF THE MEDIEVAL *ARS MORIENDI*

Late Medieval Origins of the *Ars Moriendi* (Late Fourteenth Century)

Late medieval Europe was a dark and scary place. There were many reasons that someone might feel that death was close. The fourteenth century was filled with wars, plague, a corrupt church system, etc.²⁶ It felt as if God was missing. However, God was also the answer to so many fears. This chaotic environment drove scared people into the arms of their local clergyman, to “their faith for reassurance.”²⁷

Priests had three deathbed sacraments to use to comfort the dying: confession, (extreme) unction, and communion.²⁸ But it was not enough to just receive the sacraments. You had to prove you were sorry for your sins. Austra Reinis writes that “in preparation for receiving the sacrament, the dying person was expected to make a plenary confession of sins. This requirement often gave rise to doubts or scruples. What if one had forgotten and therefore not confessed a mortal sin?”²⁹ In other words, comfort for the dying was more about what the dying was supposed to do at the end.

26. Campbell, “The *Ars Moriendi*,” 6.

27. Funeral Zone, “The Illuminated Art of Dying in the Middle Ages.”

28. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 53.

29. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 122.

This uncertainty in the face of death did not stop priests from trying to console the dying. In fact, this effort to comfort the dying gave rise to a popular genre of literature in the Middle Ages on preparing to die, known as the *ars moriendi*. Reinis writes that this genre was intended to help the dying promote reconciliation with everyone (family, friends, enemies, etc.), take care of earthly affairs, and have spiritual instruction.³⁰ It all centered on helping a person come to terms with their end and die well.

Comforting people at their death was not the only goal. Berndt Hamm writes: “Healthy people needed to know already what will or will not be important when they are at death’s door. In that way, every teaching about how to die, even if it were only concerned with the final hour, was also teaching how to live every hour.”³¹ The *ars moriendi* was also meant to teach the people how to die so that they may also know how to live.

These writings were particularly helpful in dealing with the various deathbed fears that people wrestled with. In his biography on Martin Luther, Eric Metaxas points out that this is something that Luther struggled with, his *Anfechtung*.³² The word suggests a “struggle or fight.” Historians are not exactly sure what the specific fear was for Luther, but it is known that this fear led to despair, similar despair that the *ars moriendi* attempted to address. The *ars moriendi* even used the same word, *Anfechtung*, for the fears that came on the deathbed. Fear of death gripped people, and they needed a consoling message.

By the fifteenth century, the *ars moriendi* had become well-known, but no one knows who began the genre.³³ There were many versions throughout Europe, including well-known

30. Reinis, “How Protestants Face Death,” 29.

31. Hamm, *Stages in Reformation Reorientation*, 124.

32. Metaxas, *Martin Luther*, 28.

33. Campbell, “The Ars Moriendi,” 4.

versions in Germany, France, and England. Some researchers believe that French scholar Jean Gerson created the *ars moriendi* (c.1408–1412), but the *ars moriendi* had been around for some time.³⁴

This literature developed mainly because the clergy and priests “felt it necessary to prepare people for death even while they still were young and healthy.”³⁵ People wanted comfort when they realized the sobering truth that Isaiah spoke of: “All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass” (Is 40:6–7 NIV). Life did not last forever but would fade away.

What people began to realize, however, is that their spiritual leaders were not always reliable. This was another reason that people desired guidance from the *ars moriendi*. They found that at times the clergy were unable, unavailable, or even unwilling to be at the deathbed of scared believers.³⁶ This was due to the culture of the Black Plague.

The Culture of the Black Plague

About one-third of Europe died from the Black Plague in just two years.³⁷ The fear of death permeated every part of European society, even the church. In an article for the *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling* from 2019, John Gillman writes that this lack of care left “the

34. According to Campbell this theory is no longer held, but it is still worth mentioning that Jean Gerson had some influence on the *ars moriendi*. Campbell, “The Ars Moriendi,” 4–5.

35. Reinis, “How Protestants Face Death,” 29.

36. Campbell, “The Ars Moriendi,” 6–7.

37. About 20 million people according to Campbell, “The Ars Moriendi,” 6.

dying with little professional assistance.”³⁸ That category of professional assistance included the priests and clergy. They were expected to be there to comfort the dying, but often were not. The lack of pastoral care during the Black Plague was one reason the *ars moriendi* flourished during the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries. The literature was available for use when priests were not.

Why was the church absent at a time when death was so present? In his master’s thesis at the University of Ottawa, Jeffrey Campbell says that priests and clergy members were “expected to perform last rites and hear the confession of the dying, [but] their mortality rates were high.”³⁹ The death rate was as high as 35% of the clergy of Europe.⁴⁰ Campbell provides this chart to give an idea of just how serious the situation was for pastoral care:

	Died During the Black Death	Disappeared	Uncertain	Survived
Popes	0	0	0	1
Patriarchs	1	0	0	4
Metropolitans	25	1	0	44
Bishops	207	13	20	368
Total	223	14	20	417⁴¹

Campbell goes on to state that with the limited number of clergy available, “the *ars moriendi* filled a void and showed the way to salvation without the presence of the priest.”⁴² The layperson who was able to read would be able to function without the clergy. They could comfort themselves and others.

38. Gillman, “Memoirs and the Ars Moriendi,” 161.

39. Campbell, “The Ars Moriendi,” 7.

40. Campbell, “The Ars Moriendi,” 8.

41. Campbell, “The Ars Moriendi,” 8.

42. Campbell, “The Ars Moriendi,” 9.

The *ars moriendi* had become a manual for the medieval Christian.⁴³ People could read it and find guidance on dying a good Christian death. This was especially true in the time of the Black Plague when the clergy was not necessarily available. Pastoral care was still needed. Scared people wanted comfort. The *ars moriendi* would help fill the void of the missing clergy by offering some amount of comfort to the dying.

Forms and Functions of the *Ars Moriendi*: Guides, Pictures, Sermons, Etc.

What exactly is the *ars moriendi*? It is an *ars*, that is “the sense of an acquired skill and readiness.”⁴⁴ In other words, it is a way in which you learn how to die, a craft, or an art. Quite literally, it is “the art of [the] dying.”⁴⁵ The *ars moriendi* was part of the death literature movement towards the late fourteenth century. It was like other works of the era. It presented a method for overcoming fears and securing heaven.⁴⁶ There are over 300 manuscripts of the *ars moriendi* in Latin or Western languages that come from the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries. They were some of the first works that the woodblock and movable types printing press popularized.⁴⁷ The goal of the *ars moriendi* was to comfort the dying and warn the living to keep the faith. “If they (the dying and living) followed its instructions, their soul would be saved.”⁴⁸

43. Campbell, “The Ars Moriendi,” 1.

44. Hamm, *Stages in Reformation Reorientation*, 124.

45. Meaning the “one who is dying” aka “the dying one.”

46. Campbell, “The Ars Moriendi,” 1.

47. Campbell, “The Ars Moriendi,” 1.

48. Campbell, “The Ars Moriendi,” 1, 6.

There are two standard versions of the *ars moriendi* genre in literary form. The first is the *Tractatus Artis Bene Moriendi* also known as the *Speculum Artis Bene Moriendi*.⁴⁹ The second is the *ars moriendi*.⁵⁰ These two versions were among the first printed on the movable type printing press.⁵¹ It is helpful to note that the entire genre is referred to as the *ars moriendi*, so it is possible to speak in a broad sense (many works) or a narrow sense (one work) about this subject.

Campbell believes that the Dominicans were responsible for the production of these literary works. The theory is that these monks received a request from the Council of Constance (1414–1418) to organize the genre because there were several versions in existence in Europe and the church wanted a more standardized form. The Dominicans supposedly then wrote devotional works for the genre. The international links to the Council of Constance allowed for the widespread nature of the genre. The *ars moriendi* would be found all over Europe.⁵²

Here is an example of the Latin and English text taken from Campbell’s paper:

<u>Ars Moriendi</u>	<u>The Art of Dying Well</u>
<p>Quamvis secundum philosophum tertio Ethicorum: “Omnium terribilium mors corporis sit terribilissima,” morti tamen animae nullatenus est comparanda; teste Augustino qui ait: “Maius est damnun in amissione unius animae quam mille corporum;” teste etiam Bernardo qui dicit: “Totus iste mundus ad unios animae pretium</p>	<p>Although according to the third book of the Ethics of the Philosopher: “Of all terrible things, the death of the body is the most terrible,” however by no means can it be compared to the death of the soul; witness Augustine who said: “The loss of one soul does more harm than the loss of a thousand bodies;” witness also Bernard who said: “The</p>

49. Sometimes you will see this referenced as the Long Edition or *Cum de Praesentis* (CP edition). Austra Reinis refers to this version as the “Mirror of the Art of Dying” (translated from Latin). Reinis, “How Protestants Face Death,” 29.

50. Sometimes this is referenced as the Short Edition or *Quamvis Secundum* (QS edition). Austra Reinis refers to this version as the “Illustrated Art of Dying” (translated from Latin). Reinis, “How Protestants Face Death,” 29. Note that the version of the *ars moriendi* I will be referencing from now on in the paper is from Campbell’s thesis paper. He translated the Latin of many manuscripts into English for the sake of having one text rather than many. His version of the Latin is taken from manuscripts of the shorter version of the *ars moriendi* (QS edition). Appendix 1 has the woodcuts that Campbell has from his paper (74-84) to accompany the Latin text. See Campbell, “The Ars Moriendi,” 12–16 for more info on the translation process that Campbell chose to use.

51. Funeral Zone, “The Illuminated Art of Dying in the Middle Ages.”

52. Campbell, “The Ars Moriendi,” 5.

aestimari non potest.” Mors ergo animae tanto est horribilior atque detestabilior quanto anima corpore est nobilior atque pretiosior. Cum ergo anima tantae pretiositatis existat et dyabolus pro morte ipsius eterna hominem in extrema infirmitate maximis temptationibus infestet, ideo summe necessarium est ut homo animae suae provideat ne morte illa perdat.

Ad quo maxime expediens est tut quilibet artem bene moriendi, de qua est praesens intentio, frequenter prae oculis habeat at que extremam infirmitatem mente sua revoluat, quia ut ait Gregorius: “Valde se sollicitat in bono opera qui semper cogitate de extremo fine.” Nam si futurum malum praeconsideretur, facilius tolerari potest, iuxta illud: “Futura si praesciantur, levius tolerantur.” Sed rarissima aliquis se ad mortem disponit tempestive eo quo quilibet diutius se victurum existimet nequaquam credens se tam cito moriturum, quod instituc dyaboli fieri certum est. Nam plures per talem inanem spem seipsos neglexerunt indispositi morientes. Et ergo nullatenus infirmo detur spes nimia corporalis sanitates consequendae. Name secundum Cancellarium Parisiensem: “Saepe per talem falsam consolationem et fictam sanitates confidentiam certa incurrit homo damnationem.” Ante omnia ergo inducatur moriturus ad ea quae necessario ad salute requiruntur.

whole of this world cannot be valued at the worth of one soul.” Therefore as the soul is much more noble and more precious than the body, the death of the soul is so much more horrible and detestable. Therefore since the soul has such a great value, in order to ensure its everlasting death the devil attacks a man in his final sickness with the greatest temptations; for this reason, it is very necessary that man provide for his soul lest it be destroyed in death. For that purpose it is very important that everyone should have the art of dying well, which is presently of concern, before their eyes frequently and they should turn over in their minds their final illness, as Gregory said: “He who always thinks about death is very much concerned with a good work.” For if future evil is considered in advance, it can be borne more easily, according to the saying: “If future events are known in advance they are borne more lightly.” But very rarely does someone prepare himself properly for death at the right time, as everyone believes they are going to live for a long time and they never believe that they are so close to death; this, it is certain, happens through the instigation of the devil. For, because of such an empty hope, many neglected themselves and died unprepared. Therefore in no way should too much hope of physical health be given to the sick. For according to the Chancellor of Paris: “Often such false consolation and a lying belief in recovery, man incurs certain damnation.” Therefore above all else, the one about to die should be made to understand those things which by necessity are required for salvation.⁵³

There is an obvious emphasis on piety in the text. Robert Kolb observes that this was not necessarily a dreadful thing for the dying medieval believer. He says that in the *ars moriendi* the

53. Campbell, “The Ars Moriendi,” 18–22. The whole text of the *ars moriendi* (QS) is available in his paper.

emphases on good works and the uncertainty that sinners had in themselves were used, “so that in their dread of hell and purgatory they would strive to form the appropriate disposition and make every effort to please God with actions performed in conformity to his law and the laws of the church.”⁵⁴ The dying was to focus on working towards heaven. It was not as much about being certain the believer had secured heaven, but at least that they had some hope or purpose in pursuing it. Then they could have the proper attitude toward their fears and die well. Reinis agrees, stating that work on the deathbed was not a guarantee of salvation, but merely a motivator for building up hope.⁵⁵

Campbell writes that the *ars moriendi* was written specifically for the middle to upper classes (landowners and merchants) in late medieval society. He says this was due to literacy, the need for money to purchase books, and that the woodcuts that accompanied the versions often portrayed those who are not poor. He says they are “not lying on a pile of hay, but rather on a carved poster bed with thick pillows in a clean room.”⁵⁶ This suggests that the intended audience was not someone from the poorer classes.

There were some features that were common in the *ars moriendi* genre. They included: words of comfort from the church fathers or Scripture; a description of the devil’s attacks or temptations (the fears, *Anfechtungen*); questions to guide the dying toward comfort (sometimes with accompanying answers); instructions on how to die well (use of sacraments) and what to pray (to God or the saints); and “inspirations from angels.”⁵⁷ The angels would accompany a

54. Kolb, “The Reformation of Dying and Burial,” 79.

55. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 39. Luther would be critical of the deathbed rites later on in his life. This would be a reason why.

56. Campbell, “The Ars Moriendi,” 9–10. See Appendix 1 for woodcuts.

57. Campbell, “The Ars Moriendi,” 2.

virtue that God would use to fight off a specific temptation.⁵⁸ The angel was seen as bringing relief from God to the dying believer.

The *ars moriendi* emphasized a humble spirit before God because one could not be certain that they were saved when they died. Rather, the best a dying believer could do was confess sins, look to the sacraments of the Lord's Supper and extreme unction, meditate on Christ's passion, and suffer patiently.⁵⁹ The strong emphasis on struggling was supposed to encourage people to do these things. Berndt Hamm writes, "The constant visualization of the hour of death therefore was to inspire people not to put off until their final hour anything that would serve their salvation."⁶⁰ The problem with the *ars moriendi* though is that uncertainty, even if it can offer someone a glimmer of hope, is no certainty.

People were searching for guidance in the late medieval Black Plague Culture. The *ars moriendi* attempted to provide it. The literature was really functioning in place of the priest. A layperson could read it to another. The emphasis on Satan's attacks, sacraments, pious suffering, church tradition, and many other elements all contributed to a false sense of salvation based on works righteousness.⁶¹ As people faced death and looked to God for help, all the *ars moriendi* could do was prescribe a way to die. It did not offer any certainty of heaven.

The *ars moriendi* was unique. It inspired a genre of death literature that did not fade after the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This literature led many to create their own kind of death

58. Campbell's English and Latin text of the *ars moriendi* has five temptations along with five corresponding virtues: temptation concerning faith versus strength given to faith; despair versus against despair; impatience versus patience; vainglory versus against vainglory; and avarice versus against avarice. Campbell, "The Ars Moriendi," 18–89.

59. Reinis, "How Protestants Face Death," 29–30.

60. Hamm, *Stages in Reformation Reorientation*, 118.

61. Campbell, "The Ars Moriendi," 18–22.

literature and devotional writings.⁶² Part II will demonstrate that this genre of literature would provide a backdrop for a dramatic shift in consolation literature by none other than Martin Luther.

62. Campbell, "The Ars Moriendi," 6.

PART 2: MARTIN LUTHER: THE BEGINNING OF THE LUTHERAN ART OF DYING

Martin Luther and the Influence of Death – Early Life (1483–1519)

When examining Luther's death literature, it is helpful to look at his thoughts and interactions on death, both before and after 1519. Death was a looming presence in Luther's life. It may have been death, and Christ's victory over it, that inspired Luther to do so much impressive work. For example, in 1527 Luther received word that a believer named Leo Kaiser was burned at the stake in Bavaria for being a Lutheran. That same year he also received word that Johannes Bugenhagen's sister and daughter both died. Metaxas suggests that these deaths may have been the motivating factor for Luther's great work, "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott" ("A Mighty Fortress Is Our God").⁶³ It is understandable why Luther would feel the need to encourage himself and others that year.

A study of Luther's life reveals that death had a deep impression early on. As a young man, he nearly suffered death from his own sword (c. 1503–1504). This gave Luther some time in which to contemplate his mortality while he was recovering.⁶⁴ In 1505 he was attending classes at the University of Erfurt and learned that two young lawyers, close to his own age, had

63. Metaxas, *Martin Luther*, 86.

64. Metaxas, *Martin Luther*, 29.

been killed by the Black Plague.⁶⁵ That same year two classmates were also killed.⁶⁶ Luther was shocked by these encounters with death, especially the deaths of these people who were so close to his own age.

Luther's confrontation with death led him to realize the horror that death can inflict on humans. This worry about death, and securing heaven, may be what gave rise to his famous *Anfechtungen*.⁶⁷ His fear of God as an angry judge also would contribute to this distress. He would write late in life that fighting the devil off with God's Word was of prime importance.⁶⁸ Luther's battle was with his *Anfechtung* and with the devil, a struggle with his eternity on the line. But Luther realized this was not just something he could ignore. He was aware of how the sinful nature can create persisting fear in humans. Metaxas writes,

So, for Luther, this *Anfechtungen* was a vivid picture of the nightmare of hell itself, a place in which one had indeed been utterly forsaken by God, with no end to the hopelessness. And perhaps it was even something worse than that. Perhaps it was not merely a vivid and horrifying picture of hell but the actual beginning of hell itself, a black tendril that would in time put him down to Sheol itself. It was not something Luther could easily ignore.⁶⁹

Metaxas believes that Luther's fears concerning death must have come either before or while he was studying at Erfurt and facing these various tragedies.⁷⁰ These fears were part of the reason that Luther joined the Augustinians and becoming a monk.⁷¹ It was in the monastery where he

65. Metaxas, *Martin Luther*, 30.

66. Metaxas, *Martin Luther*, 30.

67. Metaxas, *Martin Luther*, 28.

68. Metaxas, *Martin Luther*, 28.

69. Metaxas, *Martin Luther*, 28.

70. Metaxas, *Martin Luther*, 27.

71. LW 42:98.

found solitude in God's Word and assurance from his supervising priests. It is also possible that this is where he first encountered the death literature genre called the *ars moriendi*.⁷²

Luther's *A Sermon on Preparing to Die* (1519)

Luther lived in an environment filled with death literature. There were several versions of the *ars moriendi* that Luther could have been familiar with. These include the Latin versions referenced in Part 1, Jean Gerson's fifteenth century version, or a German version prepared by Henry Suso in the early fourteenth century.⁷³ Perhaps the most direct and likely version would have been by his spiritual and academic supervisor, Johannes von Staupitz.⁷⁴ In 1515, Staupitz had written about dying to comfort a woman, Countess Agnes von Mansfield.⁷⁵ The influence of death and contemporary thoughts on it were powerful for Luther.

Luther's 1519 *A Sermon on Preparing to Die* was not a sermon to be preached in public, but more of a general treatise.⁷⁶ Like many of his sermons did from 1519–1520, the goal of this

72. Note that there is no evidence of a specific time when Luther picked up and read the *ars moriendi*. In my research, I found that most researchers focus on the influence of the *ars moriendi* for Luther's 1519 sermon, but do not have a specific reference from Luther himself that he was using it. Rather from the historical standpoint, it is reasonable to conclude that Luther would have at least known about the *ars moriendi* early in life, because it was widespread throughout Europe and was also a popular booklet in the church. It is also reasonable that the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt would have had some reference or copy of the booklet to train the clergy on how to comfort the sick and dying. This means that Luther would have been introduced to the genre in his study and training. The next section on his 1519 sermon will shed light on the connections between Luther and the *ars moriendi*.

73. Hamm, *Stages in Reformation Reorientation*, 111–2.

74. Hamm, *Stages in Reformation Reorientation*, 114.

75. Hamm, *Stages in Reformation Reorientation*, 115.

76. Kolb, "The Reformation of Dying and Burial," 82, footnote 12.

sermon was to provide information on a certain topic, in this case, death.⁷⁷ In his writing on death, Luther is sharing his insights as pastor and confessor.⁷⁸

The goal was to point Mark Schart to the certainty in his salvation, thereby “moving him emotionally from despair to joy.”⁷⁹ Luther gave him a reason to be content in the face of death by pointing to Christ. This was not the only time that Luther did this in his writings. Kolb states that Luther used several forms of literature from his environment to move people towards a different outlook on life because reliance on Christ led the believer to “cultivate devout living.”⁸⁰ His sermon in 1519 was significant because it was “the first Reformation writing in the popular genre of the *ars moriendi*.”⁸¹

A Sermon on Preparing to Die was unique because Luther decided to depart from the traditional structure and features of the *ars moriendi*. He kept the focus on the *Anfechtung* and deathbed sacraments but rejected the Catholic doctrine of the uncertainty of salvation, the teaching on free will, and the teaching that man must “do what is in him” to be saved.⁸² Luther’s sermon “describes the several stages of preparation for death and strengthens the sufferer’s conscience against the temptation to despair because of his sin in the hour of death.”⁸³

It should be noted that even though Luther had taken a step away from the original *ars moriendi* tradition, he did keep extreme unction in his listing of sacraments and called for prayers

77. Hamm, *Stages in Reformation Reorientation*, 111.

78. LW 42:98.

79. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 140.

80. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 10.

81. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 91.

82. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 91.

83. LW 42:98.

to be made to Mary and the saints.⁸⁴ This is not surprising, however, for in 1519 he was still developing a grasp of what God's Word said and taught.⁸⁵ Reinis points out that the remaining four of the seven Roman sacraments would be rejected before the end of the year, so extreme unction will quickly be set aside by Luther. He would outline his thoughts on the sacraments further in the following year in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*.⁸⁶

Reinis provides a helpful outline for understanding the flow and rhetorical structure of the sermon, so her structure will be used for understanding the sermon.⁸⁷ Luther begins in the first three paragraphs by calling for the dying to prepare for their physical departure. He does this by encouraging the dying to have their earthly affairs in order, to forgive and seek the forgiveness of others, and to go towards death in joy. In order to bring out the joy that the dying should have, Luther points to Jesus' words in three separate gospel stories: the first is in Matt 7:14 when Jesus emphasizes entrance into eternal life through the narrow gate. The second is that Jesus described death similarly to childbirth in John 16:21. When a woman no longer remembers her pain when she holds her newborn child, so it will be for believers on their deathbed. The third gospel section is John 14:2 which Luther uses to state "that in dying we must bear this anguish and know that a large mansion and joy will follow."⁸⁸ Hamm says that in using Jesus'

84. LW 42:98.

85. It is interesting to think what Luther would have said if he had written the sermon before the Leipzig debate in 1519. At the debate, he was forced by Dr. Eck to clarify much of what he was not sure about. For example, he found that he agreed with Jon Huss more than he originally thought. Waiting to write this sermon may have been a blessing in disguise. For more information on the Leipzig Debate, see Metaxas, *Martin Luther*, 164–192.

86. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 141.

87. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 93–4.

88. LW 42:100.

childbirth metaphor, Luther “illustrated the heightening fear and its transformation into the greatest joy.”⁸⁹

The next two paragraphs show how Luther encouraged reception of the sacraments and what their function is.⁹⁰ The sacraments are signs, they must be received in faith, and they are from God who is speaking.⁹¹ In this section Luther emphasizes especially the sacraments of confession, communion, and extreme unction, the traditional deathbed sacraments.⁹² He says, “I show them due honor when I believe that I truly receive what the sacraments signify and all that God declares and indicated in them, so that I can say with Mary in firm faith, ‘Let it be to me according to your words and signs’ [Luke 1:38].”⁹³ Luther believes the sacraments will prepare a person to be content and accepting on their deathbed because the end is God’s will.⁹⁴

In the fifth paragraph Luther introduces us to something that he expands on in paragraphs six through eight. He has adjusted a traditional approach to the *ars moriendi* that the dying person should rely on the sacraments and utilize God’s Word because they will help a dying believer fight off and recognize three enemies: sin, death, and hell.⁹⁵ The traditional approach

89. Hamm, *Stages in Reformation Reorientation*, 131.

90. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 93–4.

91. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 93–4.

92. LW 42:100. It may be of note to mention here that Luther does not include baptism in this sermon among the sacraments that a believer should look to for comfort. While this may surprise us, the focus for sacraments in this sermon was on the deathbed sacraments, and baptism was not usually included in that category. The same month he published *A Sermon on Preparing to Die*, Luther published another work titled *The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism* (1519). It is in this work that he more fully points to baptism as a comfort for the dying. See Reinis, *The Art of Dying*, 142 for more information.

93. LW 42:101.

94. Hamm, *Stages in Reformation Reorientation*, 142. Hamm also states that this view of the sacraments may have been a reason that extreme unction would eventually be left out of Luther’s sacraments, because extreme unction had a “meritorious” function.

95. LW 42:100.

had five enemies.⁹⁶ According to Reinis, one of the original five that was omitted is meaningful: “Luther’s omission of the fourth—the temptation of pride in all the good works one has done—is significant. It reflects his rejection of the idea that human beings have free will with the help of which they can contribute to their own salvation.”⁹⁷ The omission does not lessen Luther’s point in paragraphs 6–8 that sin, death, and hell will do whatever they can to get the scared believer to fall away.⁹⁸

In following the *ars moriendi* tradition, paragraphs nine through twelve offer the three corresponding virtues to the *Anfechtung*. The dying believer was supposed to “look at death while you are alive and see sin in the light of grace and hell in the light of heaven.”⁹⁹ The dying believer was to focus on the things that overcome their *Anfechtung*. These good things were found in one person. Luther points the dying to Jesus’s words: “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33 NIV).

The emphasis on Christ’s victory continues into paragraphs thirteen through fourteen, describing how Jesus’ work is accomplished.¹⁰⁰ Luther specifically stresses in paragraph fourteen that Jesus “himself suffered and overcame the temptation which these pictures entail for us.”¹⁰¹ Jesus suffered just as we do but he did so *pro nobis*, for us. This was meant to be consoling for

96. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 101. Variations of the *ars moriendi* were not uncommon, but the way in which Luther wrote was noticeably different.

97. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 106. I will confess that I personally have some doubt about this conclusion. Luther tended to think of things in three. He certainly did not think that pride was a sin we could ignore. Reinis’ point though, that Luther wanted to get away from a works-righteous attitude, is certainly reasonable.

98. LW 42:101–3.

99. LW 42: 103–6.

100. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 93–4.

101. LW 42:107.

the dying on their deathbed. It pointed them to the certainty that Christ gave for them by reminding them of his work.

It should be highlighted here that Luther's view of Christ's passion is different from the Catholic view presented in the *ars moriendi*. Reinis writes that "Luther removes contemplation of the passion from the context of any system of merits."¹⁰² When Luther points to Christ's passion, he is departing from the traditional approach, even the approach that Staupitz had used just four years prior to Luther's 1519 sermon. Hamm makes the point that Staupitz (and others) told believers to imitate and ponder Christ's passion.¹⁰³ Luther goes away from this, focusing not on imitating Christ or any action in and of ourselves, but solely on Christ as our substitute. This was a profound shift for consoling the dying. Hamm says, "to people who labor under fear of death and who suffer for sins, faith above provides the saving external connection to the *Christus pro nobis*, thereby delivering them from their legalistic self-obsession."¹⁰⁴ It turned people away from the uncertainty of self and works towards the certainty of Christ.

In paragraphs fifteen through eighteen, Luther returns to the sacraments to remind believers of what their function is in respect to Christ's victory.¹⁰⁵ The sacraments are signs that Christ beat the dying believer's *Anfechtung*, they are to be received in faith from Christ himself,

102. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 115.

103. Hamm, *Stages in Reformation Reorientation*, 140. It should be noted that another part of medieval contemplation that is lacking from Luther's sermon is an emphasis on the thief on the cross. In the *ars moriendi* genre the thief functions in a similar way to Christ. He was an example to follow. Luther omits the thief entirely. See Hamm, *Stages in Reformation Reorientation*, 140, footnote 129 for more info.

104. Hamm, *Stages in Reformation Reorientation*, 140.

105. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 93–4.

and they testify that the dying believer is part of the community of saints.¹⁰⁶ Paragraph seventeen contains this interesting exhortation from Luther:

We should then, learn what the sacraments are, what purpose they serve, and how they are to be used. We will find that there is no better way on earth to comfort downcast hearts and bad consciences. In the sacraments we find God’s Word—which reveals and promises Christ to us with all his blessing and which he himself is—against sin, death, and hell. Nothing is more pleasing and desirable to the ear than to hear that sin, death, and hell are wiped out. That very thing is effected to us through Christ if we see the sacraments properly.¹⁰⁷

Luther valued understanding the sacraments. He wanted people to rely on what God was doing, something beyond themselves. Reinis concludes from this emphasis that Luther wanted to teach people through his version of the *ars moriendi*. His method was all about, “putting words into the reader’s mouth... to persuade the reader that his own interests are at stake.”¹⁰⁸ It is no surprise then that Luther would go on to develop the Small and Large Catechisms to accomplish exactly this purpose.

Paragraph nineteen encourages the reader to “humbly ask God to create and preserve such faith in and such understanding of his holy sacraments in him.”¹⁰⁹ Luther returns to some Catholic beliefs at this point, encouraging the dying believer to call on angels, guardian angels, Mary, saints, etc.¹¹⁰ Reinis also points out that not only was this Catholic tradition, but it was also a common feature of the *ars moriendi*.¹¹¹ Paragraph twenty finishes the sermon with a call

106. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 93–4.

107. LW 42:111.

108. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 99. Booklets that taught *how* to die well were part of the *ars moriendi* tradition, but what makes Luther’s unique is that he cared that people understood the theological parts too. In his mind, it was not enough to just go through the motions. Knowledge of what the sacraments *are* builds on the certainty that the dying should look to Christ.

109. LW 42:113.

110. LW 42:113.

111. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 131.

for the dying to accept death willingly because God has given us our solution and comfort in Christ.¹¹² He closes with these words of comfort:

Therefore, we ought to thank him with a joyful heart for showing us such wonderful, rich, and immeasurable grace and mercy against death, hell, and sin, and to laud his grace rather than fearing death so greatly. Love and praise make dying very much easier, as God tells us through Isaiah, ‘For the sake of my praise I restrain it [wrath] for you, that I may not cut you off.’ To that end may God help us. Amen.¹¹³

Luther did not deny the struggle a believer faces on their deathbed. Rather, he saw the dying believer as being in a “dramatic battle.”¹¹⁴ This image of fighting death was not uncommon for the literature of the *ars moriendi*. The image that would be frequently used for the dying believer was a knight. This will be examined in Part 3 of the paper.

Martin Luther did something unique with his newly crafted art of dying. He drew on the old *ars moriendi*, but he adjusted things as he saw fit. Hamm writes: “While the traditional temptations led the dying to believe something false, the three images of which Luther spoke placed before their eyes an existential reality in which all people do in fact find themselves: in mortality, in sinfulness, and having deserved just condemnation of their entire existence.”¹¹⁵ But Luther’s solution to these fears did not leave the dying alone in their struggle. “[Luther’s] soteriological finality of justification meant freedom from focus on the hour of death and brought nonanxiousness for living and dying.”¹¹⁶ Hamm goes on in his analysis to say that Luther’s sermon should not technically be called an *ars* or “art” in the medieval sense of the word.

112. LW 42:114.

113. LW 42:115.

114. Hamm, *Stages in Reformation Reorientation*, 129.

115. Hamm, *Stages in Reformation Reorientation*, 134.

116. Hamm, *Stages in Reformation Reorientation*, 127.

Luther's version was no longer a craft that the dying performed. Rather, it should be called an "anti-art" because it is not a skill that humans acquire or perform, but a work crafted by Christ.¹¹⁷

Hamm concludes that it is this certainty in Christ, something *extra nos* ("beyond us"), that gives meaning to Luther's 1519 sermon.¹¹⁸ It would be this shift of perspective from internal to external that would reform the *ars moriendi* and ultimately define the Lutheran art of dying.¹¹⁹

Hamm quotes Luther in paragraph twelve to summarize the theme of this new art of dying:

"Seek yourself only in Christ and not in yourself and you will find yourself in him eternally."¹²⁰

How was a Christian to die well? Mark Schart had Luther's answer.

Kolb says that researchers have noticed Luther's shift in teaching pastoral care following his 1519 sermon.¹²¹ Encounters with death were now, according to Luther, good opportunities for a distinction of law and gospel to be taught, forgiveness to be pronounced, and they are chances to proclaim the death and resurrection of Christ. The end was no longer only a time of sadness but also a time of contentment and joy. Reinis sums up Luther's work in his 1519 sermon well with this:

[Luther] taught that salvation had been made available through the work of Christ on the cross and could be appropriated through faith. Through faith Christians could be certain of their salvation. By asserting the certainty of salvation he rejected the notion that the aim of consolation was to keep human beings in tension between hope and despair. In light of these new theological commitments Luther wrote his *Sermon on Preparing to Die*. The deathbed was still an arena of struggle with demons, but the temptations were of a different nature. Because human beings were regarded as incapable of contributing to their salvation through good works, spiritual pride was no longer a temptation. Instead, despair of salvation caused by the fear of death, fear of punishment for one's sins, and the possibility that one was predestined to hell, posed the principal danger. As in the *ars*

117. Hamm, *Stages in Reformation Reorientation*, 151.

118. Hamm, *Stages in Reformation Reorientation*, 121.

119. Hamm, *Stages in Reformation Reorientation*, 136.

120. Hamm, *Stages in Reformation Reorientation*, 136, quoting from LW 42:106.

121. Kolb, "The Reformation of Dying and Burial," 84.

moriendi, the temptations were to be overcome by contemplating the passion. For Luther, however, contemplating the passion meant seeing, understanding, and believing that Christ's victory over the evil powers of death, sin, and hell was accomplished for the sake of the Christian. The sacraments no longer were occasions for dying persons to exercise themselves in good works like true contrition and complete confession. Instead, the sacraments became a sign and assurance of Christ's victory accomplished for the sake of the Christian. The Christian who believed in Christ's victory for him could rejoice in his salvation. He no longer found himself in tension between the two extremes of hope and despair, nor did he have to wonder whether or not his humility and hope were sufficient at the last moment to earn him salvation.¹²²

Luther and the Influence of Death – Later Life (1519–1546)

Luther had created something different with his *A Sermon on Preparing to Die*. His way of looking at salvation was in “sharp-contrast” to the medieval *ars moriendi*.¹²³ This would influence him throughout the rest of his life. Hamm says that in giving the dying believer confidence by pointing them to the certainty of Christ, “Luther’s *Sermon on Preparing to Die* is characteristic of the total structure of his Reformation theology.”¹²⁴ However, it should be kept in mind that Luther’s Catholic background is still present in this 1519 sermon. In time this would change.

Mark Schart and others had a new reason to find comfort when wrestling with death. Luther did not ignore the fears and *Anfechtungen* that people felt on their deathbed but instead created a more effective way of dealing with it. He acknowledged that “the greatest thing in death is the fear of death,”¹²⁵ and that death creates “in Christians a sense of fear that is truly unnecessary because of what Christ has wrought. However, the Holy Spirit uses this fear to bring

122. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 453–5.

123. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 138.

124. Hamm, *Stages in Reformation Reorientation*, 146.

125. LW 54:430.

sinner to repentance.”¹²⁶ The Old Adam is foolish and at war with the New Man until entrance into heavenly glory. Luther states that it is this war that makes dying difficult and it would be easier if Christians “didn’t know that God’s wrath is connected with it.”¹²⁷ Rather, it is the work of the Holy Spirit that directs us to focus on the grace of God, demonstrated to us in Christ that allows us to put those fears to rest.

Luther was aware of who the true enemy is in deathbed consolation. In 1532, he used John 8:44 to say, “the Scripture states that [Satan] causes death and is the author of death.”¹²⁸ Luther returns to the theme of the devil’s antagonizing work throughout his writings. In a study on Luther’s devotional writings in volumes 42–43 of *Luther’s Works*, Pastor Stephen Petersen has observed several key questions that Luther believed a Christian will wrestle with:

1. What is it (death)?
2. What is its fundamental cause?
3. What is the Christian’s attitude toward this terror?
4. How can one prepare for death?¹²⁹

Petersen concludes that “the devotional writings reveal Pastor Luther’s perspective on ministry to those facing death.”¹³⁰ Much of what Luther wrote on death throughout his life demonstrated his care for his people. When it came to death, he took special care in addressing topics such as the Black Plague, women who suffer a miscarriage, and even specific situations such as that of a

126. Kolb, “The Reformation of Dying and Burial,” 83.

127. LW 54:190.

128. LW 54:145.

129. Petersen, “We Are Guests at an Inn Whose Keeper Is a Villain,” 1.

130. Petersen, “We Are Guests at an Inn Whose Keeper Is a Villain,” 1.

church whose pastor had been murdered.¹³¹ It is here in his 1519 sermon where Luther set the tone for pastoral care and instruction on death.

A critic might quickly note that Luther also had moments where he emphasized that a fear of dying was unnecessary. In 1538 Luther said, “astonishing is the stupidity of the man who fears death... for they have Christ, the destroyer of death, and have [eternal] life and resurrection.”¹³² Is Luther pushing for pious acceptance here while advocating for gentle consolation elsewhere? Does he truly believe that people are stupid for being scared?

In this case, it is helpful to keep in mind the context of when Luther is speaking. For the 1538 quote, Luther had been very sick and seemed to think that he was going to die at this time.¹³³ Rather, his quote on the stupidity of man is telling. It showed how even someone like him could be affected by the pains of death. A fear of dying can cause believers to react negatively to the subject of death.

Moments throughout Luther’s later life show he was not immune to death’s influence. In 1538 he received word that a good friend, Nicholas Hausmann, had died.¹³⁴ Luther cried much, eventually saying,

Thus God takes away those who are good. Afterwards he’ll burn the chaff. It’s in accordance with the saying in the Scriptures, ‘The righteous man perishes,... devout men are taken away’ [Isa. 57:1]. The times are perilous. God will clean out his storehouse. I pray that when I die, my wife and children may not live on very long, for dangerous times lie ahead. I would have expected such wickedness in the world. God help us to remain steadfast in his Word and to better ourselves!¹³⁵

131. Petersen, “We Are Guests at an Inn Whose Keeper Is a Villain,” 1.

132. LW 54:295–6.

133. LW 54:293–6. Note that we are not told when the illness ended.

134. LW 54:319.

135. LW 54:319.

What is impressive about the way Luther approaches death here is that he understands who is in control. His approach to death reflects his reform of the *ars moriendi*. Death causes much sorrow for us while we are here on earth, but in the end, our joy is made complete in Christ. It is that eternal joy in heaven that is ours. Luther beautifully states his confidence in this joy a month after Hausmann's death:

Human reason can't grasp [heaven] by speculation. With our thoughts we can't get beyond the visible and physical. No man's heart comprehends eternity. One might suppose that according to the saying, 'Even pleasure becomes burdensome,' one would get tired of eternity. What pleasure is like in eternity we can't imagine. Isaiah said, 'Be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create.' [Isa. 65:18]¹³⁶

Luther would give a particularly powerful example of how a believer can approach death when Magdalene, his daughter, was dying in 1542. He comforted his wife Katherine when he pointed to the gospel comfort by saying, "Think of where she is going."¹³⁷ Luther's pastoral heart was working for his wife that day. Magdalene died "in the arms of her father" on September 20, 1542.¹³⁸ Luther is quoted to have said, "I am joyful in the spirit but I am sad according to the flesh."¹³⁹ He and his wife would grieve the loss of their daughter, but one thing Luther was certain: Magdalene was in heaven with her Savior. Luther also understood that dying with the certainty of Christ guaranteed that he would see Magdalene again. Dramatically, Luther expressed his thoughts on a believer's death, when as his daughter's casket was lowered into the

136. LW 54:326.

137. LW 54:428.

138. LW 54:431.

139. LW 54:432.

ground he said, “there is a resurrection of the flesh.”¹⁴⁰ This statement reflects what Luther had written in 1519, that the art of dying for a believer was about certainty found in Christ.

The certainty in Christ is found in the gospel message and the sacraments. Luther would constantly refer to the means of grace in his writings on death.¹⁴¹ His emphasis on the use of the sacraments in pastoral care was similar to the *ars moriendi*, except he added the stressed focus on Christ. The difference was that he wanted to help people in their dying by pointing them to Jesus. Luther did not merely desire to give a guide on how to die well. According to Hamm, preparing people to die was all about leading the tortured soul to the moment when they could be asked on their deathbed, “Are you happy that you are dying in the Christian faith?” and also speak the answer, “Yes, I am happy.”¹⁴² Luther taught that the answer was a confident yes, thanks to Jesus.

Petersen observes that in everything Luther wrote about on death, he wanted to comfort people as well as give advice to pastors on how they “should care and provide for the soul in the time of death.”¹⁴³ Petersen calls Luther’s thoughts on death animation for pastoral ministry.¹⁴⁴ Luther’s work certainly changed the way pastors approached pastoral care for the dying. His followers would carry on his reformed version of the *ars moriendi* in their pastoral care and

140. LW 54:433. Luther used similar language in a letter to Melanchthon after his father, Hans, passed away in 1530. Luther “rejoiced that [Hans] has lived until now so that he could see the light of truth.” See Metaxas, *Martin Luther*, 402–4 for more information on Hans’ death or Scott Hendrix’s *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer*, 216, for the content of the letter that Luther wrote to Melanchthon.

141. Petersen, “We Are Guests at an Inn Whose Keeper Is a Villain,” 5.

142. Hamm, *Stages in Reformation Reorientation*, 129.

143. Petersen, “We Are Guests at an Inn Who Keeper is a Villain,” 1, quoting LW 43:134.

144. Petersen, “We Are Guests at an Inn Whose Keeper Is a Villain,” 1.

preaching.¹⁴⁵ Part 3 of this paper will examine how the reformers continued to use the Lutheran art of dying.

145. Noted by Robert Kolb in Kolb, "The Reformation of Dying and Burial," 87 and in his foreword/introduction to his translated book, Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort for the Sick & On the Christian Knight*."

PART 3: THE REFORMERS: CONTINUING THE LUTHERAN ART OF DYING
TRADITION

Luther's Work Practiced by the Other Reformers (1519–1548)

Martin Luther had begun to reform the *ars moriendi* with his 1519 *A Sermon on Preparing to Die*. Others continued his work, but Luther's sermon was the most popular Reformation writing on a "well-preserved" death.¹⁴⁶ Dingel points back to Luther's theses in 1517 as evidence of his changing attitude towards death, stating that "the attitude of repentance that embraces all of life, is what prepares for and guarantees a good, blessed death."¹⁴⁷ We remember that God brings comfort to a believer not because we have fruits of faith, but because he has given us faith through Christ's work. The Lutheran art of dying was "essentially different from the medieval *ars moriendi* when it came to salvation."¹⁴⁸ For Catholics it was always about hope in one's own merits, but for Lutherans, it was now about Christ's gift, secured on the cross.

Other reformers wrote in the style of the new Lutheran art of dying. The names include familiar figures such as Georg Spalatin, Johannes Bugenhagen, Wenceslas Link, the reformer Johannes Oecolampadius, and Johann Gerhard. Less familiar names include works by

146. Hamm, *Stages in Reformation Reorientation*, 110.

147. Dingel, "True Faith, Christian Living, and a Blessed Death," 410.

148. Hamm, *Stages in Reformation Reorientation*, 126.

Johannes Odenbach, Johann Spangenberg, Georgius Mohr, and others.¹⁴⁹ Reinis states that the work of these men connects to Luther in this way: they continue his work of reforming the art of dying, thus building on Luther's version of that genre. She states:

a theological study of their [death literature] shows that they perceived their readers for the most part as despairing of salvation. In the face of this despair they assured their readers that on account of Christ's victory on the cross they could be certain of salvation. This constituted a radical break with traditional doctrine, according to which no one could presume to be certain of his or her eternal destiny.¹⁵⁰

These men had the same goal as Luther: to bring comfort to the scared with the certainty of Christ.

The writings of these men vary in content. This was typical of the *ars moriendi* genre. For example, Luther does not include baptism in his sermon and Link does not include the Lord's Supper in his work, two things that are found throughout other writings.¹⁵¹ There was room for flexibility when it came to death literature. Reinis says, "just as the authors differ in the extent to which they make use of the late medieval tradition, they differ in the degree with which they are dependent on specific works of Luther."¹⁵² If one of the reformers tried to compose an art of dying, he did not have to copy Luther. The writer could make it unique.¹⁵³

149. These names can be found in Reinis, "How Protestants Face Death," 30, and Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 157–440. The latter source examines their writings in depth. Reinis' book is an excellent source for looking at the texts of these other writers.

150. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 1.

151. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 315.

152. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 344.

153. This was true for the reformers in another way. Since Luther was still influenced by medieval Catholic teaching in 1519, it would follow that they could use his *Sermon on Preparing to Die*. They could make their work their own and choose to leave out the Catholic teachings that Luther had used. Some Catholic elements remained in the reformers' literature, such as the anonymous *Euangelisch lere* (1523), which contained prayers to Mary. See Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 264–292 for an analysis of this work.

However, there is something to keep in mind about the reformers. While Reinis believes that they were inspired mainly by Luther's work, it is helpful to remember that these were men who also read their Bibles.¹⁵⁴ For example, men like Bugenhagen and Spalatin understood that it was not Luther's teaching that pointed them to the certainty of Christ, but God's Word. The gospel is the essence of the Lutheran art of dying.

The reformers' works are similar to the *ars moriendi*. There are certainly differences, but "at the same time, the diligent use by the Reformation authors of the themes and structural elements of the *ars moriendi* demonstrates their familiarity with the genre."¹⁵⁵ Common features include contemplation, *Anfechtung*, exhortations, questions, prayers, instructions for how to aid the dying, examples of saints to look to for encouragement, demonic assaults, the Christian knight, and how to make a will.¹⁵⁶ Reinis says that you did not need to have all these features to accomplish deathbed consolation. Generally speaking, the reformers kept the confession of sins, receiving communion, and the focus on Christ.¹⁵⁷

The Lutheran art of dying goes back to the *ars moriendi*, but Luther's work began a break with Catholicism's "traditional piety."¹⁵⁸ Rather than focusing on the attitude that man could gain heaven eventually with their own merits, the reformers built on Luther's effort in the Lutheran art of dying. They directed the scared back to the work God has done, thus accomplishing a goal of consolation, in bringing joy to the dying. Reinis says,

In sum, the Reformation theology of piety reflected in the [death literature] is both inward and emotional. It is inward in that it involved a reduction in the number of rituals

154. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 465.

155. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 72.

156. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 70–72, 462.

157. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 31, 43, 70–72.

158. Hamm, *Stages in Reformation Reorientation*, 110.

required of dying persons and insists that the remaining acts—confession and communion—be understood and used with faith. It is emotional in that it seeks to replace an earlier apprehensive piety in the face of uncertain salvation with a new piety of joy and contentment on assured salvation.¹⁵⁹

A word of caution should accompany any talk of piety. A pastor's job is not necessarily to make the person happy when they are dying as if that is the only objective. The goal is to comfort the dying with the certainty of Christ. Luther and the reformers understood this. Reinis clarifies that while a piety of joy is not the goal, it cannot help but be a result of this new kind of comfort. She observes the inevitable outcome that “the certainty of salvation freely offered by God cannot but result in joy.”¹⁶⁰

The reformers' work of confessionalization in the sixteenth century helped the Lutheran church standardize its doctrine. This standardization also included changes in the practice of preparing believers for death.¹⁶¹ It affected the way funeral sermons were written and the way that burial practices were performed.¹⁶² Churches reevaluated their liturgical practices, viewing funerals as somber but also happy occasions. The people could now attend a funeral to mourn the loss of a loved one, while also joining a community of believers in “singing songs of joy and hope in the resurrection which Christ shares with his people.”¹⁶³ Funerals were no longer performed for the benefit of “the guilt of the deceased,” but for the benefit of those who were still living and mourning.¹⁶⁴ They would have comfort based on *sola gratia*.

159. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 471.

160. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 11.

161. Reinis, “Commemorating the Founders of Lutheran Orthodoxy,” 25–6.

162. Kolb, “The Reformation of Dying and Burial,” 80.

163. Kolb, “The Reformation of Dying and Burial,” 80.

164. Dingel, “True Faith, Christian Living, and a Blessed Death,” 399.

The Lutheran approach to death improved the way pastoral care was carried out. Caring for the sick and dying had become about “empathy, urgency, and clarity in addressing the existential crises felt by all.”¹⁶⁵ Pastors now confronted the crises of personal mortality with the certainty of Christ. Not only was pastoral care applied at the funeral, but it was also applied through religious instruction.¹⁶⁶ It was thought that in teaching or preaching to people about death, like in funeral sermons, people were being given “a kind of Reformation *ars vivendi* (art of living), harmonizing faith and life.”¹⁶⁷

Instruction on death was not limited to one form or another. Various forms included sermons, guides on the use of texts for various situations, and manuals on how to console someone when they fear death.¹⁶⁸ What was common throughout these writings was the call for the dying to look to Christ’s resurrection and their baptism for assurance of the reunion that they will have with their loved ones.¹⁶⁹ Listeners of these sermons were reminded of the presence of death in our lives, but were also pointed to the wonderful truth that God will always provide deliverance for his people.¹⁷⁰

One particularly helpful example of the Lutheran art of dying was a 1610 book of Lutheran funeral sermons. The book is titled

Report of the Christian Departure of Dr. Martin Luther Along with Six Funeral Sermons Delivered at the Internments of Outstanding Theologians Having Served Christ’s Church: Dr. Martin Luther, Dr. Aegidius Hunnius, Dr. David Runge, Dr. Salomon Gesner, Dr. George Mylius, and Dr. Polycarp Leyser, All Formerly Doctors of Holy

165. Dingel, “True Faith, Christian Living, and a Blessed Death,” 400.

166. Reinis, “How Protestants Face Death,” 28.

167. Dingel, “True Faith, Christian Living, and a Blessed Death,” 403.

168. Kolb, “The Reformation of Dying and Burial,” 91.

169. Kolb, “The Reformation of Dying and Burial,” 81.

170. Kolb, “The Reformation of Dying and Burial,” 81.

*Scripture and Professors in Wittenberg, etc., Now [Gathered] Printed Together in [Chronological] Order for the Benefit of All [and] in Thankful Remembrance of the Same.*¹⁷¹

This book demonstrated how the Lutheran art of dying is based on our confessional principles.¹⁷²

The unknown author emphasized the confession of sins, the reception of the Lord's Supper, and the confession of faith given on the deathbed by Christians of old. These believers differed from past ones in that they were able to hear about the assurance of salvation in the face of impending death.¹⁷³

Luther's followers continued to bring comfort to the scared with the certainty of Christ.

Hamm says:

The basic tenor of this teaching about dying lies in the intense connection among *sola fide*, personal certainty of salvation, the fundamental *solus Christus*, and a programmatic liberation from fear and relief for the dying. The faithful can meet their last hour and divine judgement without fear, with a peaceful confidence, and free from any strategies about taking precaution or attaining perfection, since there is no purgatory and Christ has wiped out the punishments of hell, opened heaven, and appointed believers as heirs of salvation.¹⁷⁴

This form of consolation set the tone for pastoral care.¹⁷⁵ This care brought a new way of dealing with death. It centered on "the preaching of God's Word to emphasize repentance and the saving, resurrected work of Christ."¹⁷⁶ This will become evident in the next sections which will examine two examples of the Lutheran art of dying in a more mature and catechetical form.

171. Reinis, "Commemorating the Founders of Lutheran Orthodoxy," 19.

172. Reinis, "Commemorating the Founders of Lutheran Orthodoxy," 34.

173. Reinis, "Commemorating the Founders of Lutheran Orthodoxy," 34.

174. Hamm, *Stages in Reformation Reorientation*, 153.

175. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 258.

176. Kolb, "The Reformation of Dying and Burial," 77.

Examination of Johann Spangenberg's *A Booklet of Comfort for the Sick and On the Christian Knight* (1548)

A more developed Lutheran art of dying was written by one of Martin Luther's followers and contemporaries. This man's name was Johann Spangenberg, also known as the reformer of Nordhausen, a town about one hundred miles southwest of Wittenberg.¹⁷⁷ Spangenberg (1484–1550) probably met Luther while the former was attending the University of Erfurt. Spangenberg was part of a biblical humanist group and through this group, he made connections with other future reformers such as Justus Jonas, Johann Lang, and George Spalatin. Spangenberg served as a school rector and preacher until 1524 when he was called to be the pastor of Nordhausen. He carried on reform work here until 1546, when he moved to Mansfield to join other Gnesio-Lutheran critics of Philip Melancthon.

While Spangenberg was not a university professor, he took up the cause of education. He followed Luther and others by using the printing press. Spangenberg created catechetical guides, textbooks, postils, booklets, liturgical aides, sermons, etc.¹⁷⁸ He even took part in reviewing the works of professors. For example, he wrote an introduction for Melancthon's *Loci Communes Theologici*, specifically an introduction that would aid in the studies of secondary students and pastors.¹⁷⁹ Spangenberg seriously valued Luther's call to educate. After Luther composed his Large and Small Catechisms in 1529, Spangenberg promoted their use and even wrote an expansion for the Small in 1542.¹⁸⁰ He appreciated Luther's reforms and agreed that "the best

177. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 11. History from this paragraph is taken from pages 12–3.

178. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 14–8.

179. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 16.

180. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 15, footnote 18.

weapon against the deception and murderous designs of the devil was the proper use of God's Word, especially in baptismal form."¹⁸¹

Spangenberg grew up, like Luther and the other reformers, in the Roman Catholic system of theology while also taking part in its reform. He was familiar with the theology and teachings of the Catholic church, and in particular, the medieval version of the *ars moriendi*.¹⁸²

Spangenberg saw the problems that other reformers did, that the Catholic *ars moriendi* was based on doctrine that results in an uncertainty of salvation. It was thanks to Luther's *Sermon on Preparing to Die* and the death literature of the reformers that Spangenberg's work was so well-founded on the new Lutheran art of dying. He saw a new skill to teach pastors in this new system of consolation. He could "assist pastors and lay people in attending to the needs of the dying."¹⁸³ Spangenberg embraced this opportunity to educate people on death with the new emphasis on the certainty of Christ.

From 1541–1548, Spangenberg would work on the new Lutheran art of dying style with his work titled *A Booklet of Comfort for the Sick and on the Christian Knight*.¹⁸⁴ The goal of this book was to provide "an evangelical substitute for the medieval *ars moriendi* (art of dying) literature."¹⁸⁵ In reality, he was merely continuing the work Luther had begun in 1519. Kolb says, "Spangenberg sought to engage people and lay people in the midst of their daily lives with

181. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 27.

182. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 22.

183. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 23.

184. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 19. Note that Kolb's edition from 2007 is based on the 1548 German edition. The original was printed in 1541 adjustments being made until the 1548 edition.

185. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 19.

a program of pious living and confident dying that actualized the vision of Luther and his Wittenberg colleagues for the Christian Church.”¹⁸⁶

The emphasis on pious living in this booklet might give pause to WELS pastors, given issues over piety in the past, but Spangenberg’s emphasis behind his piety is all about education. He is particularly concerned with educating the youth about death, something uncommon in our modern day. Kolb gives several reasons why Spangenberg believed that young people should be taught about death:

1. Young people were more likely to die young in the sixteenth century.
2. Young people were more likely to encounter death at an earlier age (life expectancy for parents in medieval times is one example.)
3. Instruction taught young people how to comfort others.
4. Instruction showed young people how to read the Bible on their own.
5. Instruction also showed people how to pray.¹⁸⁷

Spangenberg accomplished this work with the youth via the catechetical method. His questions and answers would encourage students to read their Bible, while also showing them how to use their catechism.¹⁸⁸ The questions and answers were intended to help bring comfort to a suffering or dying believer while also providing guidance for a believer’s life according to God’s Word.¹⁸⁹

186. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 32.

187. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 19–20. Note that these reasons could apply to adults too.

188. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 16.

189. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 23.

This guidance would connect to the imagery of the Christian Knight in the third part of Spangenberg's booklet.¹⁹⁰

The booklet is divided into three parts: 1. A manual for pastoral care to the dying; 2. An admonition to live like a Christian Knight; 3. A critique of medieval piety.¹⁹¹ Throughout the first part of his booklet Spangenberg seeks to address the fears that plague a believer when they face death. He emphasizes catechetical exercises (forty-one questions and statements and accompanying responses that were expected). This is similar to how Luther's 1519 sermon addressed various *Anfechtungen*. By using the Bible, he points to God's call for the believer to be patient in their suffering, thereby preparing them for a good death.¹⁹² The first section finishes with seven short forms that a believer is to learn to comfort the dying as well as seven prayers to accompany the forms.¹⁹³ Spangenberg then closes this first part with a blessing.¹⁹⁴

In the second part of the booklet, Spangenberg directs the believer to encouragement in their struggle with a metaphor that is found throughout the *ars moriendi*: the Christian Knight.¹⁹⁵ According to Reinis, "the motif of the Christian Knight is derived from the medieval consolation literature."¹⁹⁶ Kolb explains that not only was the knight a metaphor found throughout church

190. Questions from the booklet are included in Appendix 2. These questions are provided as an example for how a pastor could craft catechetical questions to instruct his people on dying.

191. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 21–2. In Kolb's translation, he has section headings for the three parts: "Booklet of Comfort for the Sick (39)," "On the Christian Knight (89)," "On the Knighthood of the Papists (123)."

192. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 41–73.

193. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 75–81.

194. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 81.

195. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 19. The humanist scholar Erasmus also used the imagery of the knight in his *Enchiridion of the Christian Soldier*, and Albrecht Dürer used it in his art.

196. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 442.

history, but it was also a very biblical one (cf. 1 Cor 10:3; Eph 6:17; 2 Tim 2:3; and 1 Thess 5:8).¹⁹⁷ Spangenberg's use of Scripture in this second part of the booklet indicates that the Bible is a major source of inspiration for his use of the imagery.

The section on the Christian Knight is as thorough as the previous section on comforting the sick and dying. With another forty-one questions and statements in this second part, Spangenberg encourages the believer to fight off the attacks of the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh while he also emphasizes the recognition of faith, love, and the mortification of the flesh.¹⁹⁸ This second part is also full of scriptural passages, with a particular emphasis on the "Armor of God" section from Eph 6.¹⁹⁹ Citing Ephesians, Spangenberg teaches that the Christian Knight's struggle is a model for the Christian's life of repentance.²⁰⁰ He also teaches that a life of prayer is key, helping the believers keep the focus on Jesus while urging the believer to fight the world, Satan, sin, hell, etc.²⁰¹

The third and final part of the booklet begins rather abruptly. According to Kolb, this section is the equivalent of a disputation.²⁰² Spangenberg uses this disputation to lead people

197. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 24–5.

198. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 91–123.

199. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 91–123. The reader of the book should note that Spangenberg does make use of allegory in questions 31–41. This is not entirely surprising, since allegory was a method of interpreting Scripture that Spangenberg had probably been taught. What is surprising is that Spangenberg wrote this book in 1541, well after Luther had made his thoughts (distaste) on allegory known in the latter part of his life. It seems that Spangenberg held on to some of those allegorical methods, even after years of helping in the reforming the church.

200. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 29.

201. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 21.

202. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 30–2. The disputation is the intellectual's joust which would make sense since this section takes place right after the Knight Section ends. Kolb includes this third section in the second part of the book which covers the Christian Knight, though it technically stands alone from the Knight section.

away from the medieval piety.²⁰³ He criticizes the papal usage of Scripture and other abuses, He also teaches the catechumenate how they can attack the Catholic arguments with a proper understanding of Scripture.²⁰⁴ This final section of the book closes with prayer.

With this booklet Spangenberg strove to bring consolation to the sick and dying and to encourage the believer in their fight. Kolb concludes, “[Spangenberg’s] concern to help the sick and dying understand the faithfulness of the God who had raised Jesus Christ from the dead was easily combined with his desire to help readers and hearers learn how to read the Bible and use its texts in their own lives.”²⁰⁵ Spangenberg wanted to train believers to grapple with death with their eyes fixed on Christ.

Not only was Spangenberg concerned about instructing the laity with the Lutheran art of dying, but he was also thinking of pastors. Kolb states that “[Spangenberg] prepared this work to give parish pastors a model for preaching on the occasion of the death of a member of the congregation. Thus, he combined Luther’s postil with the Wittenberg professor’s amplifications of the single funeral sermon into a special form of devotion literature in itself.”²⁰⁶ This emphasis on the specialty of the Lutheran funeral sermon would be found in Spangenberg’s other work, *Fifteen Funeral Sermons*.²⁰⁷ This work also followed the tradition of the *ars moriendi* but with the unique Lutheran emphasis on Christ. The Lutheran art of dying provided the shift pastors needed in order to honor the memory of the deceased while also “providing pious reading for the

203. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 30–2.

204. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 123–139.

205. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 21.

206. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 17.

207. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 17.

living.”²⁰⁸ Kolb says that Spangenberg’s “funeral sermons reminded readers that a significant part of the art of living well is preparing for death.”²⁰⁹

The work of the reformers put a high emphasis on the certainty of Christ which would impact the way Christians could live their lives. This was especially true of Johann Spangenberg’s work.²¹⁰ The scared could be comforted with the certainty of Christ. Kolb writes this description of Spangenberg’s work, saying that after helping the dying acknowledge their sin:

[Spangenberg] then proceeded to offer counsel on preparing to die, in the tradition of the medieval *ars moriendi* but with different content. Christians prepare to die, first, by living a godly life in their callings, “in true faith, in brotherly love, and in the mortification of the Old Adam.” This will permit a death “with a joyous heart and a good conscience before God.” Second, the Christian must “renounce your love of the world and everything that has been created, and even of yourself, for the sake of God.” Third, “you should impress some comforting passages from Scripture and the gospel on your memory, passages to use against all temptations.” Fourth, “you should recall your Baptism and how you bound yourself through it to God. To be precise, you want to repudiate the devil and all his gang, and to believe in God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and to demonstrate this faith as well, with the fruits of faith toward other people, to mortify the Old Adam, the sinful flesh, and to subdue the evil desires and longings, and from day to day become a new creature of God.” Fifth, “think about the power of the holy sacrament of the body and blood of Christ that you have received, and cast all other concerns, burdens, fears, and tribulations into the lap of the Christian church, and cry to God,” in words that Spangenberg then supplied. Clearly, Spangenberg had absorbed Luther’s understanding of God’s *modus operandi* with his word and the heart of the gospel in the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation wrought through Christ’s death and resurrection.²¹¹

The next section will examine how WELS pastors can utilize the Lutheran art of dying today. In some ways, this method of pastoral care has already been in use. Examining its relevance for

208. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 17.

209. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 18.

210. Spangenberg, *A Booklet of Comfort*, trans. by Robert Kolb, 18–9.

211. Kolb, “The Reformation of Dying and Burial,” 88.

pastoral work is key to understanding the Lutheran push to comfort the scared with the certainty of Christ.

The Lutheran Art of Dying and WELS Today

This paper has examined the history and development of the Lutheran art of dying. Is this a tool that Lutheran pastors can use or should use today? What would the outcome be in making use of this tool? Death is a topic that pastors have to address, a topic that still scares people. This is not surprising. Pastor Petersen points to the reality of living in a sinful world when he quoted Luther that human beings, “are guests at an inn whose keeper is a villain.”²¹² During their stay in this “inn,” believers can and will struggle with the reality that they too will die. Death will scare the pastor’s sheep and those outside his congregation.

Dr. Lydia S. Dugdale comments that to reclaim the beauty of the art of dying in our modern world, caretakers need to acknowledge how people react to death. She says that modern care workers, whether they are pastors or medical professionals, need to recognize that twenty-first century people are not necessarily denying death, but they are trying to ignore it.²¹³ By not acknowledging the elephant in the room, people do not die well, or they do not handle death well. Petersen says that this “sanitized” version of death is something unique to our day.²¹⁴ Death was not something that sixteenth century Christians could or would ignore.

Death is something that all humans struggle with. The law written in our hearts leads to the awareness that we will suffer the consequences of sin, death being one of them. Christians

212. Petersen. “We Are Guests at an Inn Whose Keeper Is a Villain,” quoting LW 43:146.

213. Dugdale, *The Lost Art of Dying*, 27.

214. Petersen. “We Are Guests at an Inn Whose Keeper Is a Villain,” 1–2.

are not the only ones searching for some sort of comfort to this problem. When writing on the state of the soul after death, Siegbert Becker made this observation about how death is perceived in our world: “This doctrine, that the soul, or the spirit of man lives on after death is so universally believed and so generally accepted by men that we may say that it is a part of the natural knowledge of reality possessed by all men.”²¹⁵

In 2021, Kara Mason of *AP News Online* published an article on death doulas, a solution for finding comfort at death.²¹⁶ A death doula is someone who regularly confronts death by comforting the dying on their deathbed, helping arrange funerals, etc. Death doulas are growing in popularity, as people deal with death more frequently in our world. Mason claims that doulas fill a role in reaching out to comfort the dying why also fulfilling their own interests. They seek to fulfill their own curiosity with death by comforting the scared.²¹⁷ People are looking for comfort, and death doulas are filling that role of comforter. However, the problem with society’s solution of death doulas (or any solution for that matter) is that death will continue, and people want answers as to why. People are searching for reasons for why death continues. Without anyone to answer their questions about death and to give a lasting comfort, people can feel lost. Death doulas can attempt to answer questions, but without God’s Word, those questions will go unanswered. Without a shepherd to address their fears, sinners will struggle with their own emotions and fears as they feel death’s sting throughout their lives.

John Gillman writes, “The tragic events in the news and the captivating memoirs raise questions about where we stand regarding our own mortality, and how to face it, on the other

215. Becker, “The State of the Soul after Death,” 2.

216. Mason, “Encouraging Death.”

217. Mason, “Encouraging Death.”

hand, work to keep it tucked away in unexplored recesses of our inmost self.”²¹⁸ It is not that people do not want to talk about death, but that our world simply teaches them not to talk about it. This leads people to feel lonely, desiring someone to be by their side to guide them through death’s door when that time comes or to answer their questions or comfort their fears. Mason writes, “Imagine having someone on your side, someone who is really right there with you, walking alongside you in this process... Someone that you could call that was there with you, that saw certain things that maybe you missed, and you can call them and just be validated.”²¹⁹

Someone... like a pastor?

Lutheran pastors find themselves in a very unique position when it comes to the topic of death. Kolb points back to Luther’s work in reforming the *ars moriendi* that gives pastors this advantage. Kolb says that Luther’s followers continued the work of comforting the scared, pointing to where Christians find comfort:

In practice, Lutheran preachers in the second half of the sixteenth-century pursued the basic themes mentioned earlier—justifying mourning since Christian love naturally regrets the loss of companionship and friendship when a loved one dies; reminding people of the ubiquity of death, which made repentance and living the Christian life imperative; presenting the faith and new obedience of the departed as an example for the hearers; the comfort, peace, and hope gained from God’s providence; and the comfort, peace, and hope given by Christ’s resurrection and his bestowal of the promise of resurrection through his word in oral, written, and sacramental forms.²²⁰

Now, death was not an end filled with uncertainty. It was, as Luther beautifully quoted Jesus, a rebirth. Pastors could console with the beautiful and certain truths that are found in God’s Word.

A few things should be kept in mind in pastoral care. Petersen says that in view of our members “we must be pastors who will learn to bring to their parishioners a ministry which

218. Gillman, “Memoirs and the Ars Moriendi,” 160.

219. Mason, “Encouraging Death.”

220. Kolb, “The Reformation of Dying and Burial,” 91–2.

prepares them for their own last days.”²²¹ Since preparation for death should be a focus, pastors should be aware of how their members view death. Believers are in a state of wavering between faith and unbelief until they die.²²² They are part of a world that tells them to subscribe to the unsatisfying movement to “make each day count.”²²³ They struggle with the fear of death which makes them “worried, weak, and despairing” and gives them a false desire to “cling to life, and escape death and judgment.”²²⁴ For these reasons, a pastor should give serious consideration into examining the Lutheran art of dying. It could help him identify his congregation’s own *Anfechtung*. It can also provide a pastor with a method of care that could also serve in teaching his members about death.

Some have called for a revival or reexamination of the art of dying for our modern world. Reinis suggests that it might be worthwhile for laypeople, academics, pastors, and medical professionals to work together to draw up “guidelines” for helping those scared to die.²²⁵ Dugdale agrees, citing the ancient example of the victorious Roman general in a triumph. As the general rides past the crowds during his triumph, his slave would ride in his chariot whispering in his ear, “*Hominem te memento* (Remember that you are only human).”²²⁶ Dugdale says that perhaps our world needs more of that, people whispering and reminding us that we are mortal because only then will humans be ready to die.

221. Petersen. “We Are Guests at an Inn Whose Keeper Is a Villain,” 1–2.

222. Petersen. “We Are Guests at an Inn Whose Keeper Is a Villain,” 1–2.

223. Gillman, “Memoirs and the Ars Moriendi,” 166.

224. Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*, 102.

225. Reinis, “How Protestants Face Death,” 45.

226. Dugdale, *The Lost Art of Dying*, 30.

Allen Verhey suggests that the *ars moriendi* could be a modern voice on death for the church. He believes that the art of dying could help “Christians to consider again what it might mean to die well and faithfully.”²²⁷ However, Verhey believes that while a catechesis, such as the art of dying, could be useful for the modern church, it could be something that could easily lead people away from the norm: Scripture.²²⁸ Verhey is realistic in warning Christians against making too much of the art of dying alone.

Pastor Harold Schewe agrees and cautions against an aggressive teaching approach to death. For his research on the dying process, Schewe examined other writings from Christian writers and found a problem: those Christians who try to comfort people by suggesting confident ways to die generally have “no Scriptural basis and are actually contradictory to what the Bible has to say.”²²⁹ Schewe is cautioning against a pastoral theology that tries to step away from God’s Word that could give people a false certainty. Could that happen if a pastor tries to systemize the way he consoles people with the Lutheran art of dying? Would setting up a more guided way of instructing people with questions and answers take away the uniqueness of dying? In other words, would pastors be too methodical and logical in their approach to death, or more reactive and organic if they used the Lutheran art of dying?

Schewe’s comments reflect a wise approach to death. He is being distinctively Lutheran. Like past believers, we look to God’s Word, “not that we are so eager to get rid of this present life, but that we always have our eyes set on the heavenly life which daily sustains us.”²³⁰ This is a language that reflects Luther’s shift in pastoral care to the means of grace. Believers are certain

227. Verhey, *The Christian Art of Dying*, 174.

228. Verhey, *The Christian Art of Dying*, 174, 356–7.

229. Schewe, “What Happens to the Soul after Death?” 7.

230. Schewe, “What Happens to the Soul after Death?” 2.

that they are going to heaven because Jesus Christ won our victory on the cross. Schewe points to 2 Cor 5:1–8, in which Paul reminds believers that life is better after death because of Christ’s victory for us. We are reminded that earth is not our eternal home. We have a more certain destination ahead of us.²³¹ This certainty will influence the comfort that pastors can bring to the deathbed.

Becker also points to the Bible for inspiration behind the Christian death in the story of the rich man and poor Lazarus. In this parable (or story) the Bible gives us a picture of the next life.²³² The Bible is where Christians find assurance at their deathbed. Becker beautifully states:

After death, we will not be vague shadows of our former selves, without will, without emotions or feeling, as Plato pictures the disembodied souls of men, but we will still be what we were, persons in every sense of the term. Such a thought surely underlies the words which St. Paul wrote to the Philippians, “I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better; nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you” (Phil. 1:23, 24). It is the “I,” the ego, the person, who goes to be with Christ when death comes to the Christian.²³³

The comfort Christ gives to us is beyond anything the world can give on the deathbed. This is what makes the Lutheran art of dying unique and worth examining.

There is little mention of the Lutheran art of dying in WELS. The closest resource to this kind of literature is *Doctor of Souls* by John Schuetze. In his book, Schuetze has a section that could be characterized as an art of dying. He guides pastors through pastoral theology when it comes to comforting and caring for the bereaved, facing the fears of death, and other death-related topics such as suicide and death culture. And yet, Schuetze does not mention the Lutheran art of dying.²³⁴ Chapter six of the book covers how a pastor comforts the bereaved,

231. Schewe, “What Happens to the Soul after Death?” 1–2.

232. Becker, “The State of the Soul after Death,” 4.

233. Becker, “The State of the Soul after Death,” 3.

234. Schuetze, *Doctor of Souls*, 155–187.

which is extremely similar to the way that the Lutheran art of dying structure functioned as a guide. In this chapter Schuetze says,

The truth is that death is not natural. It is the punishment for sin. Because we live under the cross, we also face death, even though Christ has freed us from the eternal consequences of sin. Because death is the result of sin, the Christian also fears death. The new man's desires to depart and be with Christ. He looks forward to the time when he will enjoy heaven. But the sinful nature creates doubt. What about my sins? Does the gospel really apply to me? Maybe I won't make it. As pastors, we remember that Satan works hard in a person's final hours to plant doubt and destroy faith. The best prescription we as doctors of souls can provide our "patients" is to apply the encouragement of Colossians 3 and Hebrews 12: Fix your eyes on Jesus; set your mind on things above. The way we have lived our lives gives little comfort, especially in our final hours. Satan's accusations are strong. The sins he lists are real. But the cross of Christ is also real and it is stronger. As people of God, we must remember that the gospel always trumps the law. The law says you are a sinner and deserve to die forever. But the gospel says you are forgiven and will live forever. These two are at odds with each other. Both can't be right. Both can't win. The gospel wins. For the Christian, physical death is a doorway from this life under the cross to the new life of heaven. Crawling through that doorway of death brings fear and pain—it is part of the cross. But the life on the other side of the door brings joy. There we will be free from the cross as we live in the joy of Christ's cross.²³⁵

What Schuetze says here covers a wide range of features of the Lutheran art of dying. Pastors address fears and direct the scared to the power and comfort found in Jesus.

An art of dying for WELS pastors looks incredibly similar to what they already do today in pastoral care. For example, a WELS pastor might go to a hospital to comfort a member on their deathbed. On the way they grab their pocket Bible. Inside the back cover of the Bible are passages that the pastor noted for himself to quickly reference. This kind of quick reference could be a type of art of dying. It is a shorthand guide for the pastor to use in an emergency to comfort the dying, to help their members in their transition to eternity. Schewe says pastors should think of death in the terms of 2 Pet 1:13–15. Peter recognized he could die soon, but he

235. Schuetze, *Doctor of Souls*, 164–5.

also knew that he had the confidence of heaven. It is because of this confidence that Schewe labels Peter's death as "moving day."²³⁶ He is about to move to his heavenly home.

Pastors should consider what the Lutheran art of dying offers them. Readings of relevant portions of Scripture, Luther's 1519 sermon, or the works of men like Spangenberg or Gerhard can help remind pastors of the ways to approach and teach about death. It can also give pastors a kind of rubric to use to evaluate their own approach. Does a pastor have a regular resource on dying to reference? How are they using God's Word at the deathbed of believers? Is there a passage that might work better in certain situations? These are the kind of questions that the Lutheran art of dying can help answer. Spangenberg's work is an ideal resource for pastors to have a stockpile of questions and passages on death. With these resources, the Lutheran art of dying can be used effectively in the pulpit, the classroom, and at the deathbed.

For example, a pastor might find it frustrating or perplexing when he tries to bring comfort to a believer on their deathbed. He brings the gospel to the scared and encourages with scriptural passages, and yet the dying believer still suffers due to their *Anfechtung*. The Lutheran art of dying can help address the *Anfechtung*. Through the use of writings available to us on comforting the dying from Luther and the Reformers, pastors can learn to better anticipate the fears that a believer will face. A reading of Spangenberg's work demonstrates that the fears that plague people are fairly universal. It could make a big difference for pastors to know what to say or which Bible passages to use.

A helpful modern resource on the Lutheran art of dying is the September 2020 *Lutheran Witness Magazine*, a publication of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.²³⁷ The entire edition is

236. Schewe, "What Happens to the Soul after Death?" 2.

237. "Ars Moriendi: The Art of Dying Well." *The Lutheran Witness*, September 2020.

dedicated to the “*Ars Moriendi*-Art of Dying.” Many articles in it address the fears of death in a modern and confessional Lutheran light. Kolb, also from LCMS, believes that the art of dying could be useful for pastors, and that reading Luther’s sermons on death might help a pastor gain perspective.²³⁸ They can benefit their members by adjusting their preaching and their care. This can be done by looking to God’s Word and to the example set by the Lutheran art of dying, exhibited in Luther and the reformers’ works.

Why should a pastor use the Lutheran art of dying? The history of the genre gives the answer. Luther’s 1519 sermon addressed fears and pointed the scared back to Christ. Spangenberg’s booklet provided detailed questions and answers for catechetical instruction. The other reformers offered resources and sermons to serve and comfort the bereaved. A WELS pastor can use the Lutheran art of dying to comfort the scared on their deathbed while also giving them plenty of catechetical material to use in Bible Classes, sermons, confirmation classes, etc.

Dugdale offers a reminder for pastors to consider: “Does control of death truly mitigate fear?”²³⁹ In other words if a pastor trains his members all about death, (i.e., make sure they can recite the answers for the Lutheran art of dying), does that mean they will not be afraid? Of course not. Sin can cause any person to be scared to die. Luther himself had moments throughout his life when he was terrified even though he was certain. A fear of dying is natural because of the fallen status of our world.

The Lutheran art of dying, being far superior to the original *ars moriendi*, will not necessarily remove the fear from a person at their death, but will give them the certainty of Christ as a comfort. The original medieval *ars moriendi* was not capable of removing all fears,

238. Kolb, “The Reformation of Dying and Burial,” 90.

239. Dugdale, *The Lost Art of Dying*, 102.

but that was not the point. The point was that the art of dying puts another tool in the hands of believers and pastors to comfort one another. That is the same purpose for today. The Lutheran art of dying is not a replacement for the current WELS pastoral practice, but merely another tool to be used to comfort people.

Reinis asked this interesting question in 2004: “Might it be that we modern Protestants have lost sight of the fact that the gospel can provide powerful comfort and consolation to the persons facing death?”²⁴⁰ We have the answer to that question. The Lord has blessed our WELS church body with a strong understanding of the true gospel. We look to Christ to give us the strength at our end. As Becker stated, “To get to heaven, then, it is not necessary for us to travel great distances when we die. The veil is simply lifted from our eyes, or the curtain goes up, and we, too, shall stand with the angels before God and see our Savior in his Glory.”²⁴¹ A WELS pastor who examines the Lutheran art of dying will be reminded of this wonderful comfort: in Jesus, we have a promise that the veil will indeed be lifted from our eyes. When we are scared of death or dying, we have a hope and comfort in Christ *pro nobis*. We have the certainty of heaven forever.

240. Reinis, “How Protestants Face Death,” 45.

241. Becker, “The State of the Soul After Death,” 6.

CONCLUSION

The Lutheran art of dying is another tool for WELS pastors to use. Reinis says that if we read these resources, “we might learn from them how to combine helpful teaching and profound comfort and consolation.”²⁴² Thanks to Luther, the *ars moriendi* had a new focus: “death, the enemy, became—through Christ’s death and resurrection—the entrance into eternal life.”²⁴³ This was not Luther’s victory, but Christ’s.

Luther had begun something new with his 1519 *Sermon on Preparing to Die*. In it, “Luther showed how this theology rolled away the heavy stone that was placed on the hour of death, relinquishing extreme finality of the late medieval instructions for dying.”²⁴⁴ A pastor should be aware of how he comforts those scared to die. He should be aware of how he can comfort those left behind. The Lutheran art of dying can offer a mirror for the pastor to examine his own efforts in the light of previous work.

Spangenberg’s catechetical instruction on death could be pursued in further research. Is there a place for his kind of catechetical instruction in the classroom? Is there a good time to teach WELS Christians about death? Should it be included in confirmation? Earlier? Later?

242. Reinis, “How Protestants Face Death,” 45.

243. Kolb, “The Reformation of Dying and Burial,” 93.

244. Hamm, *Stages in Reformation Reorientation*, 151.

What is the place of teaching death in our world today? Such questions go beyond the scope of this paper but are well worth pursuing.

This paper's goal was to examine what outcome there might be in making use of the Lutheran art of dying today. This was accomplished by looking at the history of the *ars moriendi* and its reform in the Lutheran art of dying. The outcome is seen in the continued emphasis on the gospel by WELS pastors. We are continuing the work that Luther and the reformers begun.

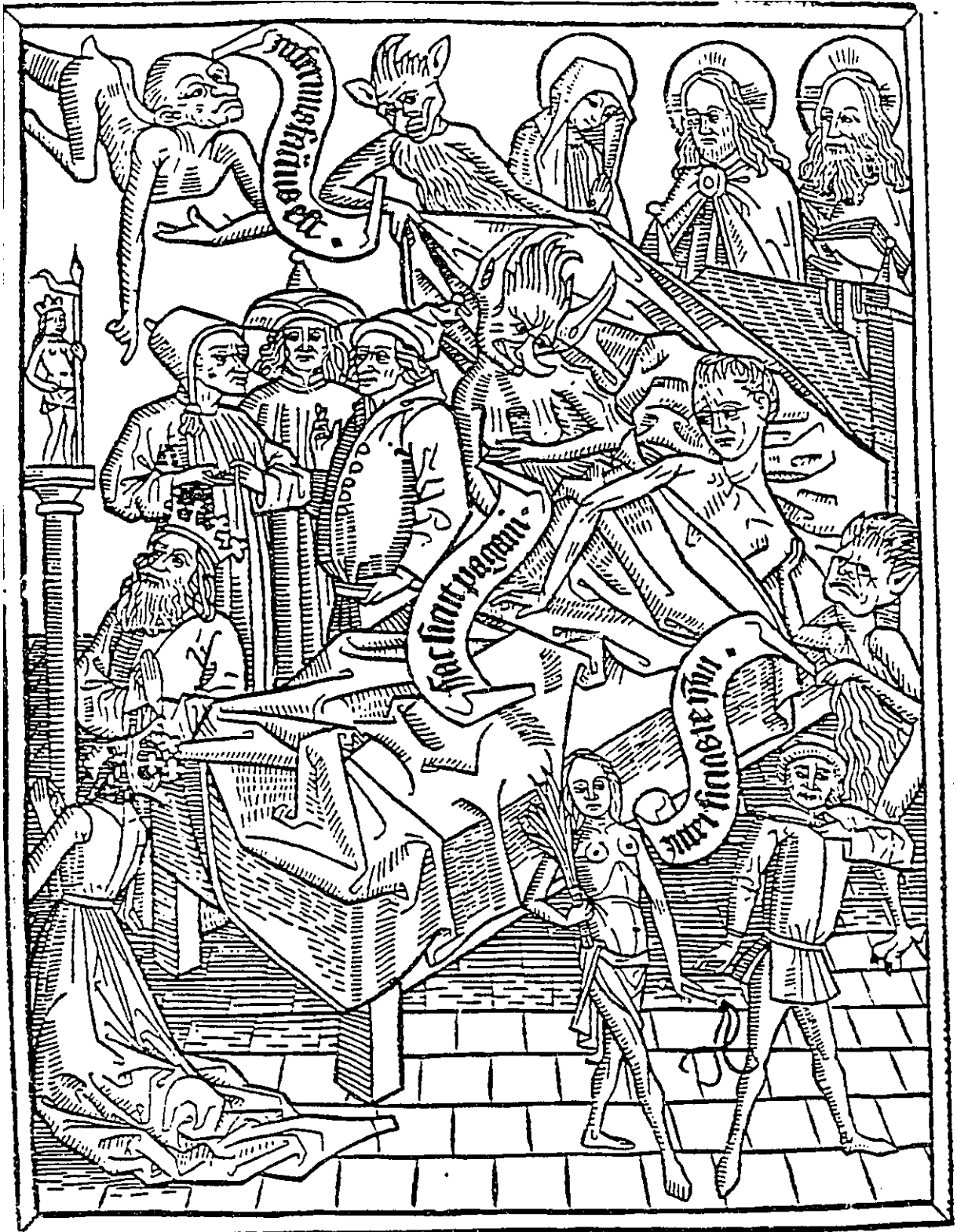
Thanks to God's Word, pastors can continue to comfort the scared with the certainty of Christ. In his comments later on in life on 1 Cor 15, Luther uses dialogue to describe the song that Christians sing at the resurrection thanks to Christ:

Death lies on the ground. It has lost its kingdom, might, and victory. Indeed, it had the upper hand. The entire world was subject to it because of sin, and all people have to die. But now it has lost its victory. Against death's rule and triumph our Lord God, the Lord of Sabaoth, has his own victory, the resurrection from the dead in Christ. For a long time death sang, "Hurray! Triumph! I, death, am king and lord over all human beings. I have the victory and am on top." But our Lord God permits himself to sing a little song that goes, "Hurray! Triumph! Life is king and lord over death. Death has lost and is on the bottom." Previously death had sung, "Victory! Victory! Hurray! I have won. Here is nothing but death and no life." But God now sings, "Victory! Victory! Hurray! I have won. Here is nothing but life and no death. Death has been conquered in Christ and has died itself. Life has gained the victory and won." ... This is the song that will be sung by us in the resurrection of the dead when this mortal covering becomes immortality. Now death is choking off our life in many ways and making us miserable, some by sword, others by plague, one person by water, another by fire. Who can count all the ways death is strangling us? Death was alive, ruled, conquered, and sang, "I won, I won, I, death, am king and conqueror of the whole world. I have power and rights over everything that lives on earth. I strike with death and strangle everyone, young, old, rich, poor, of high and low estate, noble, commoners. I defy those who want to protect themselves against me." But now death will soon sing itself hoarse and to death. Then his cantata will soon be laid to rest. For on Easter another song came forth, that goes, "Christ is arisen from all suffering. We shall be joyous, Christ will be our comfort." Death, where is now your victory? Where do you find him who lay in the grave, whom you killed on the cross?²⁴⁵

S.D.G.

245. Kolb, "The Reformation of Dying and Burial," 86, quoting WA 49:768.25–39; 769.19–32. Kolb also directs his readers to the description Luther gives "of the victory of Christ over Satan and death in his Large Catechism, second article of the Apostles Creed, in Kolb and Wengert, eds., *Book of Concord*, 434–435; BSELK, 1054–1059."

APPENDIX 1: WOODCUTS FROM THE MEDIEVAL *ARS MORIENDI*



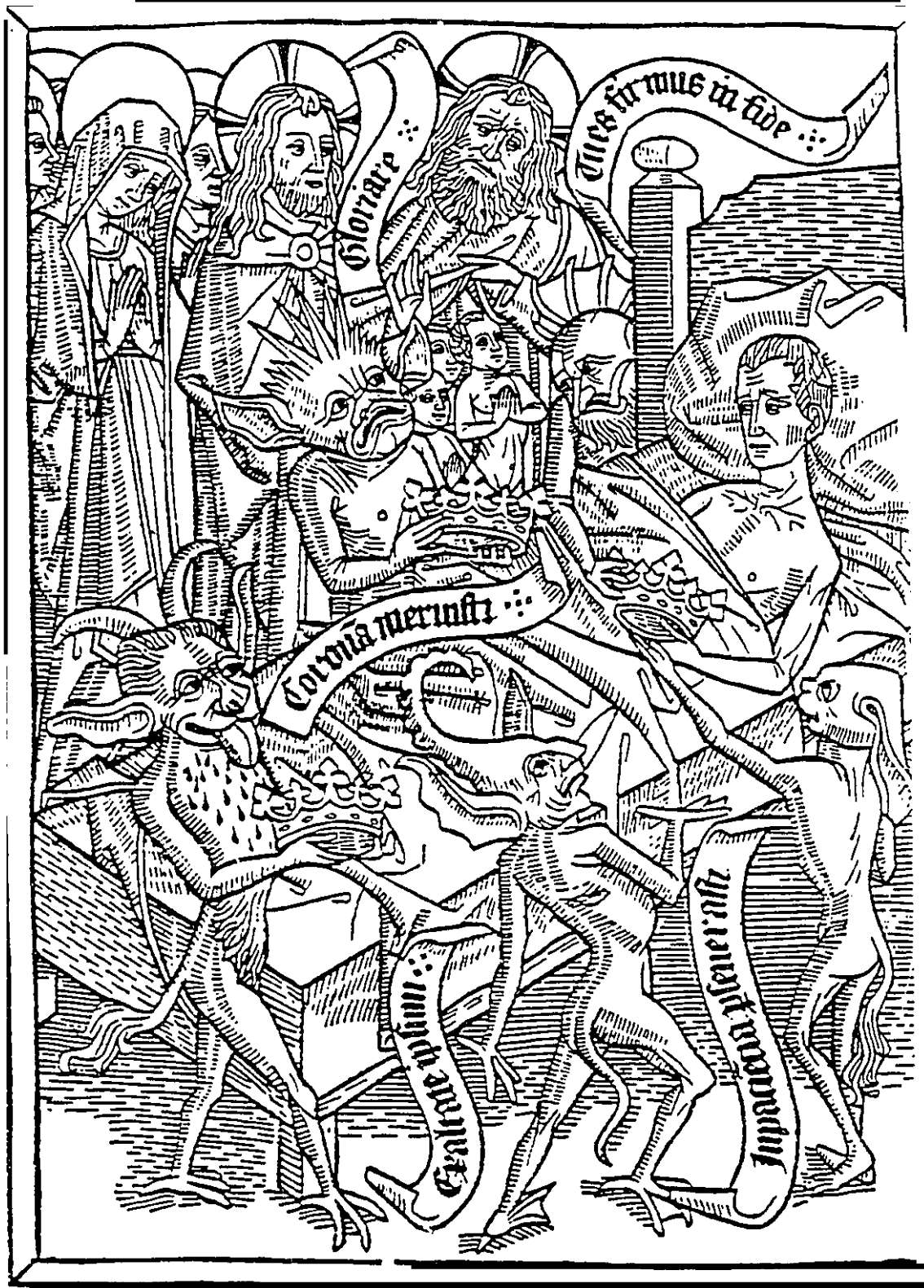




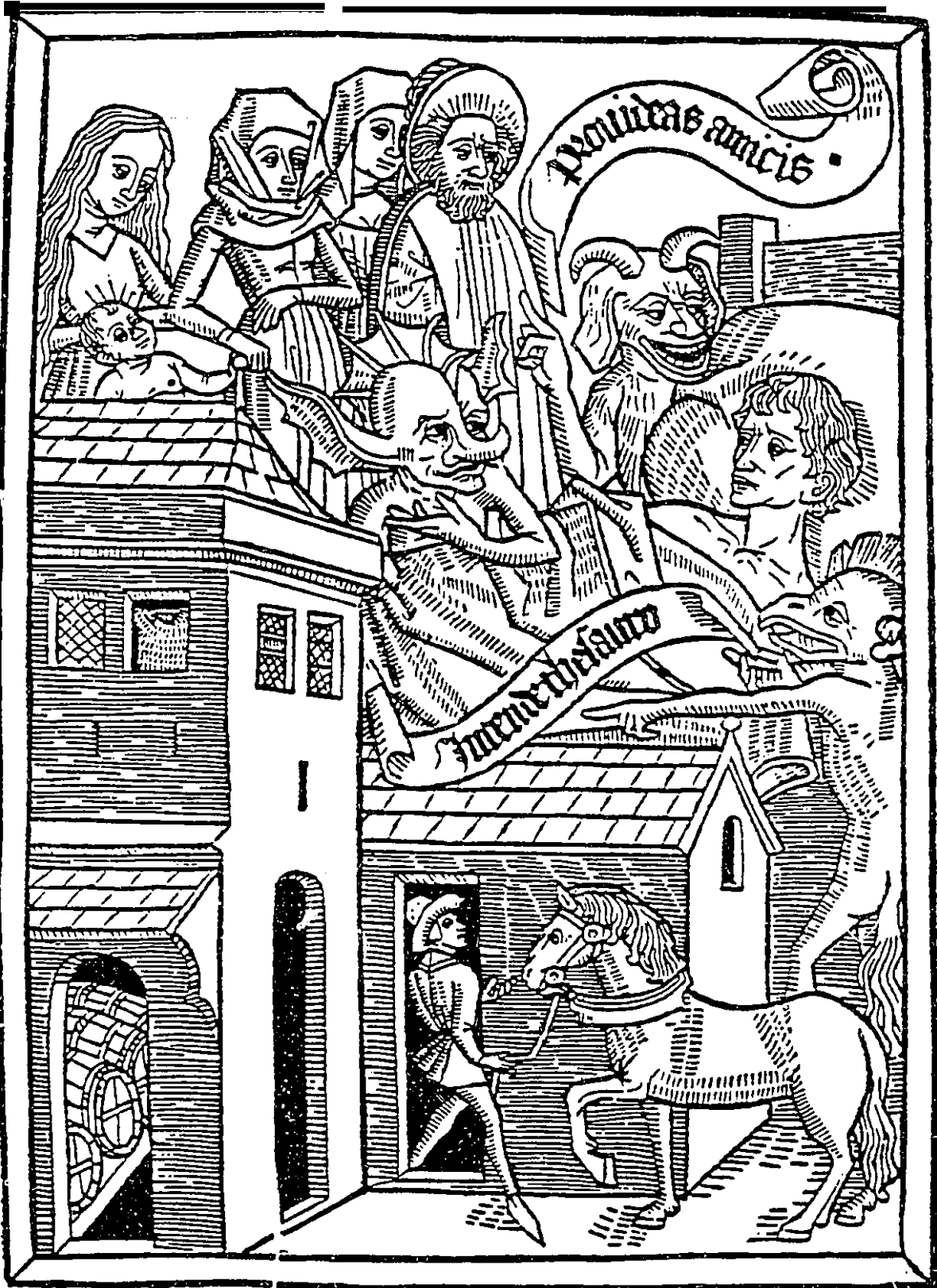


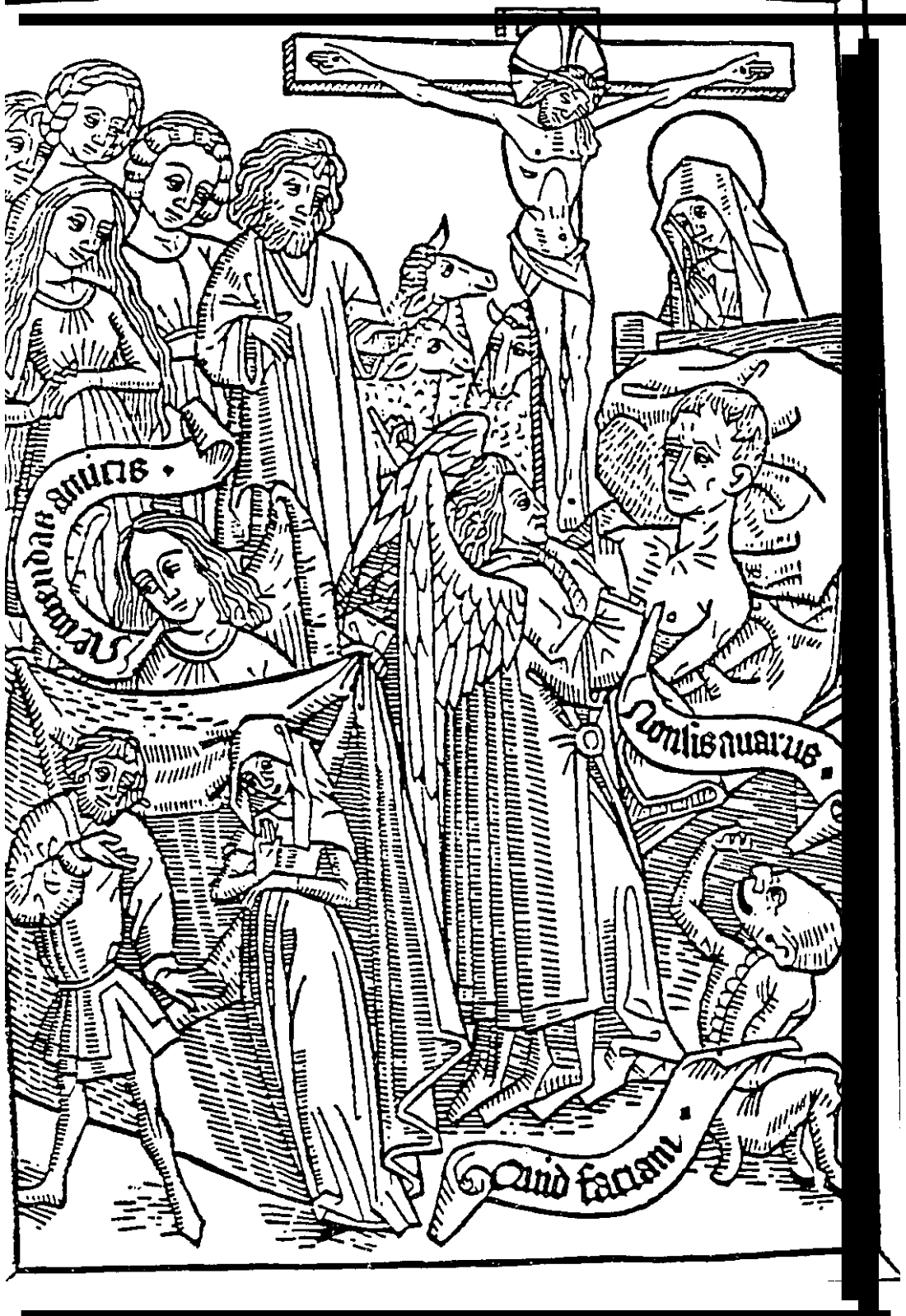


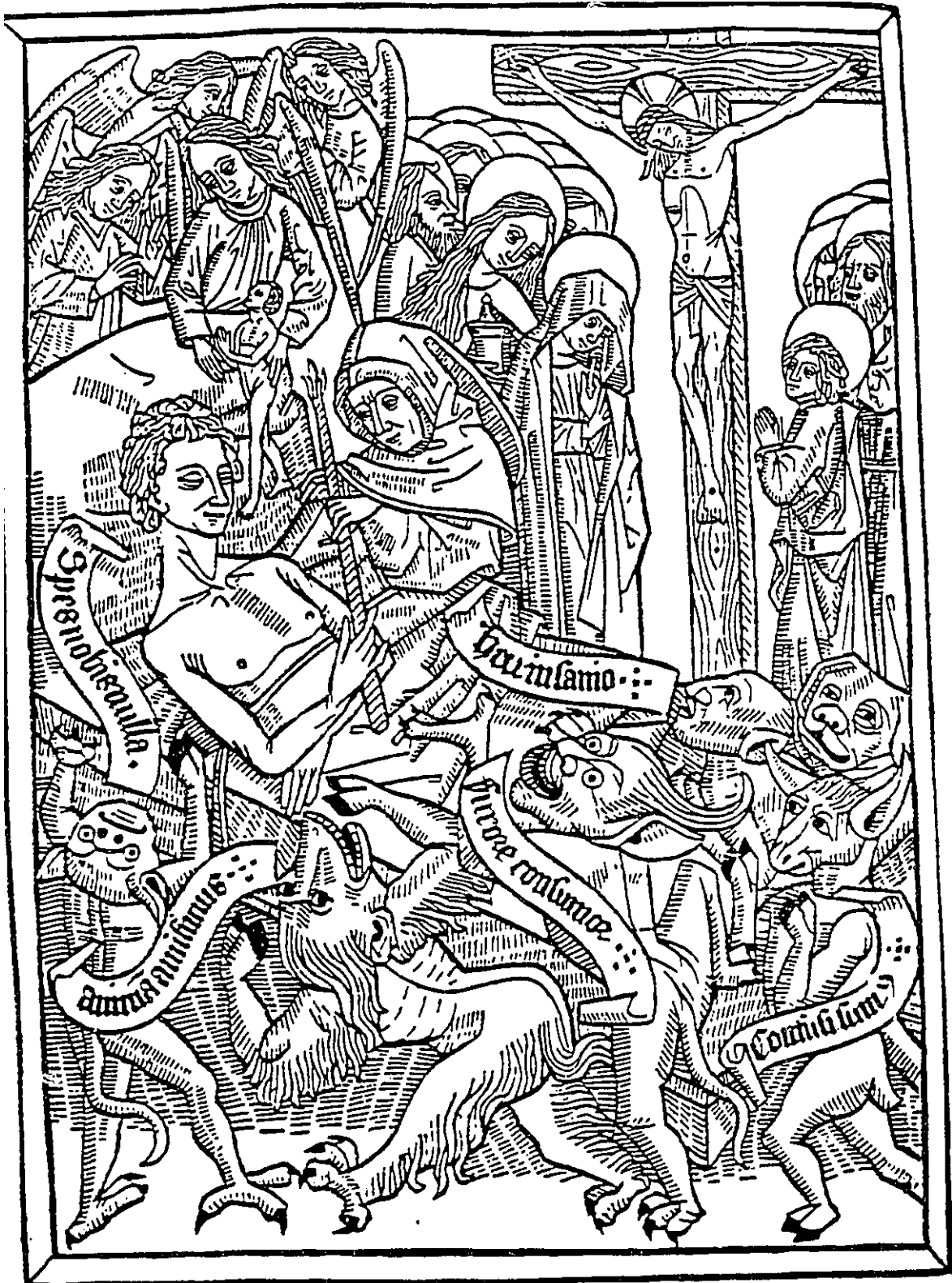












APPENDIX 2: CATECHETICAL QUESTIONS FROM SPANGENBERG'S BOOKLET

By Johann Spangenberg, 1548

“How people should prepare for a blessed death. Christian Instruction, composed in questions and answers by Master Johannes Spangenberg”

1. How many kinds of dying are there?
2. What does it mean to die temporally?
3. What is eternal dying?
4. How many kinds of death are there?
5. What is eternal death?
6. What is temporal death?
7. Where did death come from when it came into the world?
8. Is then no one secure in the face of death?
9. Does death then fear no power or ability?
10. That is really a miserable, wretched state of affairs, is it not?
11. What is human life?
12. Is the time of death fixed?

13. So, do I hear correctly: we must simply die?
14. How can I prepare for a blessed death?
15. This the first preparation...
16. So the rich and powerful experience a good death since they have always had a good life?
17. How is that?
18. [What if] I am afraid of death for other reasons?
19. I fear death because my children will not be taken care of.
20. What is the second way to prepare to die in a blessed fashion?
21. What should call this renunciation to mind?
22. But isn't the gate too small and the path too narrow?
23. In what does the renunciation of the world consist?
24. How will it be for those who do not die in this way?
25. It is difficult to lay aside desire and love for everything created and cling only to God, is it not?
26. But is that not impossible for human nature?
27. What is the third preparation for dying?
28. What should remind us of that?
29. For what kind of temptations should I collect these passages of comfort?
30. [Can you] give some passages of comfort for illness?
31. Give some passages of comfort for persecution and afflictions.
32. [Can you] give some passages for assaults of the devil?
33. [Can you] give passages of comfort for terror and fear in the face of death?
34. [Can you] give passages of comfort against the assaults of hell?

35. What is the fourth way to prepare to die a blessed death?
36. But how am I to find comfort in my baptism?
37. What is the fifth way to prepare for a blessed death?
38. How is this possible when sin attacks me directly?
39. Did Christ come into the world for that purpose?
40. But what if death still wants to terrify me?
41. How is that possible if the devil keeps wanting to attack me?
42. Give me a short form, how I should admonish a dying person to be patient and to surrender to God's will? (*Seven steps to be recited followed by prayers that people could give on behalf of those who are dying.*)

“On the Christian Knight and the Enemies with which He must Fight; a Brief Instruction from the Holy Scriptures by Johann Spangenberg, 1548”

1. What is a Christian knight?
2. In what does Christian knighthood consist?
3. Where does the Scripture admonish us to deny the devil?
4. What sort of thing is the devil?
5. What names are ascribed to the devil?
6. Where does the devil dwell?
7. So I guess I am hearing that the devil has not yet been thrown into hell?
8. Where does Scripture admonish us to deny the world?
9. What sort of thing is the world?

10. Where does Scripture admonish us to deny our own flesh?
11. What sort of thing is the flesh?
12. Where does Scripture admonish us to practice the faith?
13. What is faith?
14. What does this kind of faith produce?
15. Where does Scripture admonish us to love?
16. What is love?
17. What does love produce?
18. Where does Scripture admonish us to the mortification of the flesh and the renewal of the spirit?
19. When does the mortification of the flesh begin?
20. When is it completed?
21. When does the renewal of the spirit begin?
22. When is it completed?
23. Must all Christian Knights have these three elements?
24. Against how many enemies must a Christian knight fight?
25. What can the knight do to defend himself against these enemies?
26. What is the belt of truth?
27. What is the breastplate of righteousness?
28. What are the shoes or the boots of the peace of the gospel?
29. What is the shield of faith?
30. What is the helmet of salvation?
31. What is the sword the spirit?

32. Give an example of Christian knighthood from Holy Scripture.
33. How is that?
34. What do Pharaoh and Egypt represent?
35. What do the Red Sea, the wilderness, the Jordan, and the Promised Land represent?
36. How does this battle take place?
37. What do you say about the mountains? about Sinai and Zion?
38. Which is the first mountain?
39. Which is the second mountain?
40. Which is the third mountain?
41. Does a Christian have to come to these mountains?

“On the Knighthood of the Papists”

1. In what does the knighthood of the Papists consist?
2. How do they prove and support this kind of knighthood?
3. What is this example?
4. Is there another example?
5. On the Abuse of the Cross, Spear, Nails, and Crown [of Thorns] of Christ
6. On the Abuse of Relics
7. On the Abuse of the Mass
8. On the Abuse of the Holy Scriptures
9. They speak in this manner: [a quote on papal insistence for clerical celibacy]
10. They say: [a papal attempt to use Scripture to support their point. The catechumenate would disarm this quote with proper understanding Scripture.]

11. Further they say: [a papal attempt to use Scripture to support their point. The catechumenate would disarm this quote with proper understanding Scripture.]
12. Nothing can make these papists and their goose-preachers and rag-washers responsible, for they have flown the nest too soon.
13. On the True Cross of Christians.
14. Psalm 114 (as a prayer)

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