DEATH WILL DIE: FINDING ETERNAL LIFE FROM A JOHANNINE *ARS MORIENDI*

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by

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APPROVAL SHEET

DEATH WILL DIE: FINDING ETERNAL LIFE FROM A JOHANNINE *ARS MORIENDI*

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“You can’t see anything properly while your eyes are blurred with tears.”

C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*

To Gina Kathleen Eckel

God will wipe away every one of our tears until that final day when they are no more.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NTT	New Testament Theology
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary

PREFACE

I chose The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary because I wanted to do doctoral work at a place I knew believed in the authoritative Word of God. I am grateful for the supervision of Dr. Jonathan T. Pennington during the writing of this thesis. His wisdom and guidance challenged me and helped me grow as a Christian and a writer. I'd like to thank my editor, Jennifer Stec, whose work has saved me countless hours for which I will be eternally grateful. I have entrusted my theological education to Southern Seminary, and that investment has been worth the journey.

I could not have written this thesis without the countless people who have supported me along the way. I do not know any more appropriate place to start than my parents, Matt and Jackie. I have never known a life where Jesus was not talked about because they were faithful to show me that all of life is measured in relation to the God we serve. To my siblings, Amanda, Luke, and Kami, I am thankful for the way you all have taught me that family is more important than anything. Luke, you were the best man at my wedding, and that title was not nominal. I am also thankful for my in-laws, Kevin and Annette LaFaive. They have encouraged and supported my family in ways that we will never be able to justify with words. I love you all.

I am grateful for the places God has given me to serve. As a hospital chaplain, I have been able to care for those on the journey of death and dying in ways that have deeply shaped me. To Pastor Steven Axe and Rev. Deborah Damore, I am indebted to you for the opportunities you have provided me in hospital chaplaincy. To the Venerable Kevin Hickey, you have been instrumental in the origins of this thesis and challenged me to approach death and dying seriously. To the chaplains with whom I have served, it has been a joy to serve the people of our community with you.

Words are hard to find to express the love I have for Christ Community Church. I was baptized here, I have watched my loved ones get baptized here, I was married here, I dedicated my kids here, I have served among the kids, in the youth, and as a deacon, I was ordained here, and now I serve as one of your pastors. Virtually every milestone in my life has been tied to this family. Christ Community Church, you are my family, and I am forever grateful for you. You have loved and cared for my family in ways I will forever be grateful for.

To the elder board specifically, it has been one of the joys of my heart to serve alongside you. Kevin McGuire, Zachary McGuire, Bobby Owens, Mike Champoux, Dr. Alex, and Andrew Loginow, thank you for your leadership and commitment to the Word of God. You all demonstrate what godliness looks like, and Christ has been honored in the ways you have led our church. Kevin McGuire, you have been a mentor and a friend that has kept me grounded and encouraged. Mike Champoux, your gracious heart, open spirit, and friendship have been a constant encouragement to me. To Bobby, Zack, and elders Randy and Gerry who have served with me before, I am thankful to be counted among you men.

It would be a failure not to offer my gratitude to two men specifically whom I count as brothers, best friends, and the iron-sharpening tools that helped this thesis come to fruition. To Dr. Alex Loginow and Andrew Loginow, you have challenged me intellectually, encouraged me personally, and have always loved me. You keep me accountable, have been an anchor for me, you pour into the life of my family, you have pastored me, and you have pastored alongside me. I would ride into any battle with you two brothers, and I hope you know that.

During the writing of this thesis, I have had to practice what I preach. My grandpa, my wife's grandparents, and my aunt Donna all died during the writing of this thesis and went to be with Jesus. In a season of reading, researching, and reflecting on what it means to die well, I was reminded daily of their faithful lives. I am moved when I

think about their lives and the example they left behind. I hope the fruit of this work reaches into the lives of those I love to show what it means to die well.

While I am grateful to all mentioned here, there are three people in my life who at this point could care less about my "ministry" and think of me as their dad. To my three children—Calvin, Ezekiel, and Elise—you mean the world to me, and being your father is the greatest theological training God has ever given me. I love you all dearly and pray daily that the content found in this thesis will be embraced by you one day—if for nothing else because you, too, will one day face death, and the God we pray and sing to every night together is the only source for eternal life.

To Gina, my beloved bride, I have dedicated this thesis to you because there is no one on this planet to whom I owe more. Thank you for your encouragement, love, and support. Life is hard, suffering comes, and death is unavoidable. I am thankful that on that journey, Jesus has provided me with a bride who strives for godliness, is a mother of unparalleled love, and is a force in her own right that this world is blessed to have. I love you and I always will.

Brett Eckel

Sterling Heights, Michigan

May 2024

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Humans live and humans die. This has been true ever since the fall of humanity into sin (Gen 3). The topics of death and dying, when introduced, often scare people away entirely or, at the very least, can feel unpleasant to discuss.[1] Despite this fear and inability to speak about death and dying, humans have a long tradition of thinking about what a good death looks like. Various texts in the ancient world speak about death and dying to prepare people to die intentionally. This tradition of "dying well" eventually found its way into a performative attempt referred to as *Ars Moriendi*. The tradition of the *Ars Moriendi* originated formally in the medieval period, in which there was an effort to approach death and dying as an art to be crafted and executed with skill and intentionality.[2] The *Ars Moriendi* tradition was a combination of practice and belief that were never divorced from one another but always re-enforcing the other.[3] Death would not merely be something that occurred; rather, preparation for death became intentional

[1] Geoffrey Gorer, "The Pornography of Death," *Encounter* 5, no. 4 October 1955, 49–52. Gorer demonstrates how death has been considered a taboo topic of conversation, as it is not perceived as polite or pleasant to discuss. See also Matthew McCullough, *Remember Death: The Surprising Path to Living Hope* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 45–46.

[2] Allen Verhey*, The Christian Art of Dying: Learning from Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 5–8. See also Amy Plantinga Pauw, "Dying Well," in *Living Well and Dying Faithfully: Christian Practices for End-of-Life Care*, ed. John Swinton and Richard Payne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 21. Pauw points out that the tradition of caring for the dying "spans more than two millennia." While the performative aspect and perception of dying well as an artform formed out of the medieval period the tradition among Christians of intentionally approaching death and dying from a distinctively Christian perspective was not new.

[3] See Pauw, "Dying Well," 29. Dying well for the early Christians involves "the regular rhythms of worship" and "participation in complex, difficult, communal practices" but also "rests on the promise that there is a divine ground beneath us in all the passages of our lives" (29).

and part of one's life.[4] In the *Ars Moriendi* tradition, death would move from being approached as a passing event to the realm of an art form.

For early Christians, the *Ars Moriendi* consisted of anticipating and performing death from a distinctively Christian perspective, as those who have obtained eternal life through Jesus's death and resurrection. Death and dying as an art form required understanding a theology of death and therefore included theological education and formation as well as spiritual practices that would demonstrate preparation, much like an athlete who trains for a sporting event.[5] Some have argued that this preparedness for death, this art form of dying, has fallen out of practice and needs to be reclaimed by the church so that Christians can intentionally die well.[6] David Elliot notes how reclaiming the virtue of hope in the art of dying is not a solitary project but a communal project. The art of dying must maintain such hope, which is the freeing of the individual from the temporal to the eternal. In Christ, Christians have hope in the gospel and apply this as a virtue that shapes their approach to dying well. The performative nature of dying well as Christians is a virtuous death because it is tied to embodied hope. The church needs to offer insights into an *Ars Moriendi* that is ecclesial in nature because Christians are more than individuals; they belong to the collective people of God.[7] Elliot correctly points out that "death has gone from an inevitability prepared for beforehand and given public liturgical meaning afterward to a monstrosity we can make no sense of."[8] Christians in

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[4] David Elliot, "The Theological Virtue of Hope and the Art of Dying," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 29, no. 3 (2016): 301.

[5] Elliot, "The Theological Virtue of Hope and the Art of Dying," 305. Elliot describes how this *ascesis* included such things Christians were already doing, including reading Scripture, prayer, and receiving the Eucharist. These were all to be done in a "hope-shaped way" as they performed the art of dying.

[6] Rob Moll, *The Art of Dying: Living Fully into the Life to Come*, exp. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021). See especially chap. 3, "Losing the Christian Death," in which Moll describes how Christians have fallen away from the performative tradition of seeking to die the good death.

[7] Elliot, "The Theological Virtue of Hope and the Art of Dying," 306–7.

[8] Elliot, "The Theological Virtue of Hope and the Art of Dying," 304.

the church cease to perform the art of dying from a distinctly Christian perspective when they concede the art of dying to foreign philosophies and the possibility that Christians will grasp for hope in these foreign philosophies rather than finding hope in the death and resurrection of their Savior Jesus Christ.

The *Ars Moriendi* tradition has since been utilized by different philosophical and theological traditions to assist people in approaching their own death in an intentional manner. Given the recent generations' increasing dialogue around death and dying and the growth in the field of thanatology and other related fields, the task remains for Christians to reclaim a biblically rooted *Ars Moriendi*.[9] Furthermore, Christians need to understand how dying well helps them grow in their confidence in the faith.

Christians are not exempt from the processes of struggling through death and dying. People of other cultures have faced death differently, expressing a variety of emotions such as grief, shock, sadness, anger, and even denial. When faced with death, some experience emotional catharsis while others feel numbness. Why do Christians face death the way they do? Why does death bother Christians just as it does the rest of humanity? At the heart of Christianity are questions about death, so Christians need to ask the pertinent questions surrounding what it looks like to die well as Christians.

Christians have always been a people with a sacred text. Christians look to the Bible to provide them with spiritual guidance in doctrine and practice. Therefore, Christians are not only interested in discussions around death from an abstract viewpoint; they desire to utilize the authority of sacred Scripture as the grounds from which they process and explore death and dying. What do the biblical authors say about death? A helpful analysis of the biblical text is necessary to understand how the church should face these questions in the present and future. One such place to look is among those closest to

[9] Lydia S. Dugdale, "Desecularizing Death," *Christian Bioethics* 23, no. 1 (2017): 22–37. See also Verhey*, The Christian Art of Dying*. Dugdale writes about how death has been moved to secularized fields and utilizes the work of Verhey to demonstrate how the secularization and medicalization of death has decentered death from its theological and philosophical roots for Christians.

Jesus; therefore, this thesis will focus on the Johannine literature.

Thesis Statement

How Christians face death is a part of shaping and defining their faith and speaks to their openness to engage in the theological and practical matters of a faith lived out. This thesis argues that a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* recenters death and dying with an eternal perspective, drawing on the beliefs and practices of the Christian tradition to help Christians die well. This thesis will assess the Johannine literature, focusing primarily on the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation, to provide a biblical *Ars Moriendi* that is rooted in Christian Scripture.[10]

The apostle John, the beloved disciple, was one of the most prominent New Testament writers and spoke of death at length throughout his writing. John juxtaposes the hope of eternal life with the possibility of facing eternal death. When one reads of eternal life in the Johannine literature, one ought to keep in mind that a benefit of eternal life is, in part, the defeat of eternal death. This provides the Christian with a better perspective on living and dying. Though eternal life has been widely discussed among Christians, it is vital to reflect on how a Johannine theology of death and eternal life can appropriately reinforce their faith amidst the weight of grief caused by death and dying.[11] Scripture speaks of death as an enemy (Rev 20). Death is an enemy to the church in part because amid grave darkness and grief, Christians can lose their faith. A Johannine *Ars Moriendi* can guide Christians in their dying to appropriately perceive death within its eternal context, helping them turn their hopes to resurrected life.

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[10] Relevant passages of the Johannine Epistles will also be addressed. Chapter 4, which will develop a Johannine *Ars Moriendi*, utilizes insights from the Johannine Epistles, such as the role of Christian faithfulness and love as well as liturgical practices of the church, including confession and pardon.

[11] See Billy Graham, *Facing Death and the Life After* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987). As a world-renowned evangelist, Graham offers insights from an evangelical and pastorally-sensitive approach into how one can face death, taking seriously the theology of eternal life. See the final chapter, "Before I Die."

Part of what it means to die well as Christians is to appropriately understand new creation. When Christians make statements such as "When I die I want to go to heaven" or "I want to live forever," do they fully comprehend these words? Are they grappling with the gravity of what death and dying will bring when it comes? To some people, "forever" may sound horrifying and boring. Matthew Levering writes, "We do not want everlasting existence of the kind we have now, marked by toil, suffering, and boredom."[12] Eternal life is not boring; it is the fulfillment of peace for which humanity longs. Philosopher James K. A. Smith notes,

> What if forever weren't just an extension of a sad, solitary present but instead meant being welcomed home—to the place that made up for all those lonely Sundays that you hoped could be otherwise? What if it's not just that *I* live forever but that *we* live forever? What if forever was meeting your mother, who could finally convince you that she doesn't see a failure but only a son, whom she loves?[13]

Smith taps into what it means to long for eternal life as opposed to eternal death. Dying well necessarily satisfies our existential longings, as we begin to look forward to an eternal life that leads to peace. Christians who experience a longing for forever are not merely hoping for an endless continuation of time. Rather, it is a longing for life that is restored, divorced from the curse of death and all that the death-curse brought into this world. This research demonstrates that eternal life in the resurrection is indeed a hope worth longing for and that Jesus shows Christians how one can die well.

When Christians face death in a way that genuinely addresses the existential reality ahead, their lives can be altered toward Christlikeness. Smith, drawing upon the work of existentialist philosopher Martin Heidegger, states, "To face up to death in this way is to face up to what I'm doing with my *life*."[14] Here again is the life/death

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[12] Matthew Levering, *Dying and the Virtues* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 49.

[13] James K. A. Smith, *On the Road with Saint Augustine: A Real-World Spirituality for Restless Hearts* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2019), 207 (italics original).

[14] Smith, *On the Road with Saint Augustine*, 210 (italics original). Smith here is speaking of the existentialist Martin Heidegger and his understanding of authenticity. Smith is showing that to "face

dichotomy Christians are to think of when mapping out an *Ars Moriendi*. Christians are not just called to live well; they are called to die well. Christians have long seen death as an enemy—the curse the church longs to see overturned—and the church has long lived in preparation for the deathbed, knowing it leads back to God. John reminds Christians that death itself will one day die. When a Christian stares death in the eye and is ready to fight its sting, the Christian enters this existential struggle about how one lives and dies in this life.

A Johannine *Ars Moriendi* recenters death and dying with an eternal perspective, drawing on the beliefs and practices of the Christian tradition to help Christians die well. From its inception, various communities in the global church have suffered and faced the question of how to address death and dying; at times, this reality has caused great harm to the church. It is not sufficient to merely name an alternative approach toward dying well. Rather, it is necessary to demonstrate how dying well as a Christian is a matter of obedience to Jesus and a matter of enduring faith and perseverance in the hope of resurrected life. It serves as a tool for defending one's faith from the pains of grief and despair that death can bring Christians. When Christians experience death and dying, feelings of doubt can cause them to question God's presence and comfort. Employing a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* guides Christians in combatting such faith defeaters; it helps Christians face these concerns and reassures them their faith is grounded in the resurrection. When Christians cling to the biblical longing that death is an enemy and that Jesus's cross represents victory over death, then comfort finally comes from resurrection hope that leads to never-ending life.

The Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation both pick up on key aspects of death and dying as they relate to the death of Jesus and the way we ought to face death.

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up" with death is to existentially face death head on. See also Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 303.

Jesus's death is a central theme of the Johannine literature. John frames death in contrast to life, showing how eternal life is the place of a long-awaited peace where death will be no more.[15] The Johannine corpus addresses death as the looming enemy (Rev 1:18) that has come down through the biblical narrative from the curse of Genesis 3. Jesus stands as the Lamb of God (John 1:29), the light of the world (John 8:12), the bread of life (John 6:22–59), and the one who brings eternal life (John 3:16; 11:25–26; Rev 20–21). The Lamb imagery is saturated with the sights of death and sacrifice within the Old Testament; the light juxtaposes Jesus with the darkness of death; and the bread imagery represents sustenance and life.

Revelation addresses death and dying by offering a high Christology in which Christ defeats death finally on the Last Day.[16] While the whole of the Johannine corpus points the biblical reader back to the Lamb that was slain, it also points forward to the coming day when death itself will die and those found covered with the blood of the Lamb are welcomed into eternal life. Along with this triumphal picture over death, John provides insights into key themes such as appropriate responses to grief, the desire to see every tear wiped away, and the importance of preparing for death through rituals and communal dialogue.

The focus of this research is on the life and victory of Jesus Christ as narrated by the largest and most relevant Johannine texts, the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation, as death and dying are central themes in both books. The Johannine Epistles of 1, 2, and 3 John are also referenced where relevant to add to a Johannine *Ars Moriendi*.

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[15] This contrast will be further highlighted in the assessment of Johannine theology to show how focusing on eternal life is more than a unending stream of events; rather, it focuses on life that does not end, or put another way, life that does not meet death.

[16] Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 944–49. See section title "Destination, Occasion, and Purpose" on the Book of Revelation.

Familiarity with the Literature

A wide range of different works offer theological and philosophical insights into the questions that death and dying bring to humanity. It is important to assess the fields of thanatology as well as works within Johannine scholarship to provide insights into a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* because of their relevance in contemporary discussions around death and dying. The primary sources for constructing a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* are the New Testament books of John and Revelation; the Johannine letters are secondary and useful sources.[17] Secondary sources include works that address death and dying from other religious and philosophical traditions as well as apologetic works to show how questions of dying well are more than theoretical but are lived out in people's lives every day.

Thanatology

Thanatology is a growing field that looks at the study of death, dying, and bereavement from an interdisciplinary approach. Thanatology includes research from fields such as philosophy, anthropology, medicine, and spirituality.[18] While death in modern cultures has often been removed from the public eye, recent generations have shown an increasing interest in death awareness. Classic works in the field of thanatology have borne witness to the reality that while death is an unwelcomed topic for some,

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[17] This work assumes rather than defends the apostle John's authorship of the Gospel and the Book of Revelation. While the writer acknowledges that there have been debates over Johannine authorship, this debate does not detract from a coherent Johannine *Ars Moriendi*. Even if one concedes a Johannine community over a Johannine authorship approach, the collected works still create a coherent and useful approach to dying well for Christians. For an argument supporting Johannine authorship, see Andreas J. Köstenberger and Steven O. Stout, "'The Disciple Jesus Loved': Witness, Author, Apostle—A Response to Richard Bauckham's Jesus and the Eyewitnesses," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 18, no. 2 (2008): 209–31. For an argument that the Gospel of John was passed down through oral traditions and comprised from a Johannine community, see Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John: A Concise Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1988), 9–12. For a defense of John as the author of the fourth Gospel, see D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 68–81. For argument concerning Johannine authorship for Revelation, see Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 2–5.

[18] Heather L. Servaty-Seib and Helen Stanton Chapple, eds. *Handbook of Thanatology: The Essential Body of Knowledge for the Study of Death, Dying, and Bereavement*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Association for Death Education and Counseling, 2021), 2.

others have continued to engage the old traditions around death and dying.[19] One modern classic in the field is anthropologist Ernest Becker's *The Denial of Death*, which spoke into the culture's sense of heroism and refusal to reckon with its own mortality. Becker helpfully points out how humans avoid death even while knowing death is inevitable because it is too much to face. Becker argues that humans cannot escape death, although they try in every possible way; this denial of death still avoids the reality of human existence. Becker speaks of the fear of death as a "terror," noting this fear is "all-consuming" when faced head-on.[20] John's Gospel shows the importance of death preparation and demonstrates how Christians have an exemplar, a hero over death, in Jesus; this knowledge helps them approach death and dying with intentionality.

Avery Weisman's *On Dying and Denying: A Psychiatric Study of Terminality* offers insights into the way people manage their terminal nature. Weisman provides personal insight into his work as a physician caring for dying geriatric patients. In his preface, Weisman notes the commonality of death in the field of medicine: "Death is already here; it is within the gates, dogging our footsteps, echoing our voices, and constraining most of what we do. When we seek to deny, mitigate, or transform the sounds and sights of death into more congenial and compatible forms, we usually end up out-witting life itself."[21]

John's writing provides insight into the meaning of life and what it means to thrive. To combat death anxiety and feelings of hopelessness as one approaches death and dying, a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* offers hope by pointing to the reality of the Christian's

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[19] McCullough, *Remember Death: The Surprising Path to Living Hope*. McCullough writes within the *memento mori* tradition, which refers to remembering death. See also Sr. Theresa Aletheia Noble, *Memento Mori: Prayers on the Last Things* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2019). Noble writes and collects prayers around the theme of remembering one's death; this work can serve as a devotional and apologetic tool in support of implementing a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* by accompanying dying well with a necessary remembrance of death.

[20] Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1997), 15.

[21] Avery D. Weisman, *On Dying and Denying: A Psychiatric Study of Terminality*, Gerontology Series (New York: Behavioral, 1972), xvi.

resurrected life.[22]

In 1969, physician Elisabeth Kubler-Ross wrote *On Death and Dying*, now considered a crucial and definitive work in the field of thanatology. *On Death and Dying* propelled the discussion of death and dying into the public eye and highlighted the stages of grief: denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.[23] Clinicians have used these stages to inform the way they engage with patients and families in the grief process. Kubler-Ross asked compelling questions about death and dying, including, "Maybe the question has to be raised: Are we becoming less human or more human?"[24] Like Smith and Heidegger, Kubler-Ross asked difficult but important existential questions concerning the dying process, such as how dying shapes who we are. She contended that the way in which we answer questions around death and dying may end up speaking into the way we view humanity itself.

John's writing demonstrates that suffering occurs and physical healing or rescue is not always granted; examples include those who seek healing in John's Gospel and the martyrdom described in Revelation. Are Christians becoming more or less human with the reality of a world where death and dying exist? These questions seek answers from the fields of thanatology, theology, and apologetics.

As one spans the field of thanatology and sees how different disciplines have faced questions of death and dying, works by Virginia Morris and Allan Kellehear are helpful in mapping out ways to talk about death and the emotional responses people have toward death and dying. Morris's work, *Talking About Death*, and Kellehear's work, *The*

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[22] Lynne Ann DeSpelder and Albert Lee Strickland, *The Last Dance: Encountering Death and Dying*, 10th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2015), 27–29. Death anxiety perpetuates feelings of hopelessness and can be counteracted through refocused hope in resurrected life.

[23] Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying: What the Dying Have to Teach Doctors, Nurses, Clergy, and Their Own Families*, 50th anniv. ed. (New York: Scribner, 2014).

[24] Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*, 9.

Inner Life of the Dying Person,[25] address the human perspective on death and dying, giving particular attention to the emotional and personal experiences of real people. Morris and Kellehear show how personal interaction is crucial to honoring the humanity of the dying.

Although this research focuses on the most relevant works in thanatology from a theological perspective, the field of thanatology also addresses scientific and clinical questions, including questions concerning death determination.[26] Death determination refers to the criteria by which someone is pronounced dead.[27] In the field of healthcare, death is medically determined by considering cardiorespiratory or neurological brain criteria. When there has been an "irreversible cessation of circulation and respiration," death is determined to have taken place.[28] When there no identifiable brain activity, brain death is determined to have taken place.[29] For Christians seeking to discern a Johannine theology of death, it is important to note that the criteria for death points to current discernable scientific testing. The language of irreversibility becomes important for clinicians in determining such things. To consider whether resurrection is possible is to consider miracles, which is outside of the realm of science. Even in the death of Lazarus, Jesus makes plain that Lazarus has died and the reversibility of his death (his resurrection) requires the miraculous work of God.

James Bernat and Karen Scheib provide insight into theoretical and practical ways to address how one understands what constitutes death. Bernat addresses the

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[25] Virginia Morris, *Talking about Death* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2004); Allan Kellehear, *The Inner Life of the Dying Person*, End-of-Life Care: A Series (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

[26] Admittedly, the focus of this research as a work on *Ars Moriendi* will focus minimally on the more scientific matters regarding death, such as death determination by neurological criteria. Such bioethical issues are outside of the scope of this thesis.

[27] Servaty-Seib and Chapple, *Handbook of Thanatology*, 19–34.

[28] Servaty-Seib and Chapple, *Handbook of Thanatology*, 21.

[29] Servaty-Seib and Chapple, *Handbook of Thanatology*, 24.

finality of death while Scheib addresses experiential issues that family and friends face concerning death determination when their loved one does not appear dead.[30] Douglas White and Thaddeus Pope point out how people often approach death with a lack of acceptance, even when the medical prognosis indicates that their loved one will not recover and further medical intervention is futile.[31]

Johannine Theology

The Johannine literature assessed in this thesis is a combination of theological works and commentaries on the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation. Kenneth Grayston's *Dying, We Live*, provides a Johannine theology of death that considers John's Gospel and the Book of Revelation. According to Grayston, Christians are freed from death in one sense but still have to die in order to be free. Grayston writes, "Faith produces its immediate reward in nourishment, but finally the life of faith needs to be rescued from the death that awaits all human activity."[32] The Christian understands the long-held truth that all people will die because of their sin but also recognizes that death is a necessary part of the journey toward eternal life. Freedom only comes through death.

Richard Bauckham's *Gospel of Glory* highlights the centrality of death in John's Gospel. Bauckham notes, "The whole of John's theology is strongly focused on

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[30] James L. Bernat, "The Biophilosophical Basis of Whole-Brain Death," in *Defining the Beginning and End of Life: Readings on Personal Identity and Bioethics*, ed. John P. Lizza (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2009), 413–33. Bernat walks through the biophilosophical basis of whole-brain death, providing insight into what determines death. See also Karen D. Scheib, "'Make Love Your Aim': Ecclesial Practices of Care at the End of Life," in *Living Well and Dying Faithfully: Christian Practices for End-of-Life Care*, ed. John Swinton and Richard Payne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 35.

[31] Douglas B. White and Thaddeus M. Pope, "Medical Futility and Potentially Inappropriate Treatment," in *The Oxford Handbook of Ethics at the End of Life*, ed. Stuart J. Youngner and Robert M. Arnold (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 67. See also Verhey*, The Christian Art of Dying*, 13–23, and Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Knopf, 1981). Verhey, picking up on work of Ariès, notes how the "tame death" turned into the "medicalized death" (11). White, Pope, Verhey, and Ariès all acknowledge the reality in which contemporary societies face new challenges given the advancement of technologies and offer insight from their respective philosophies about how one ought to engage the current medicalized death environment.

[32] Kenneth Grayston, *Dying, We Live: A New Enquiry into the Death of Christ in the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 298. See chapters 8 and 9, which cover Johannine writings and the Book of Revelation.

the death-and-resurrection/exaltation of Jesus."[33] John not only explains the theology of the death of Jesus, but he also demonstrates that Jesus is an exemplar for Christians on how to die well.

Other themes are featured in the Johannine theology of death, including the Passover and the Lamb of God. Paul Rainbow's *Johannine Theology* covers several of these themes. Rainbow cites the way John uses Lamb of God in his Gospel and in Revelation, contending both books speak of the Lamb as an atoning sacrifice.[34] John centers the death of Jesus—the Passover Lamb—in his Gospel.[35] In the annual rituals pertaining to Passover, the Jewish people considered death and salvation, so these themes were deeply rooted in the history and identity of God's people.

Another insightful resource is *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament*, in which Andreas Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles Quarles provide an overview of the New Testament. Speaking to the Johannine theme of eternal life, the authors write, "Eternal life is not merely a matter of life after death; it begins and is experienced already in the here and now."[36] The authors show how the Christian cannot relate to the gospel story only in futuristic terms. Rather, the Christian life is a lifelong endeavor that includes one's death. The authors argue, "Thus, when someone believes in Jesus as the Messiah, that person at that moment possesses eternal life (3:16) while simultaneously possessing future life (6:40)."[37] In Jesus's death, Christians have tasted death as they die to self. They can die well because in Christ, they

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[33] Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 63.

[34] Paul A. Rainbow, *Johannine Theology: The Gospel, the Epistles and the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 183. See especially chapter 5, "God's Self-Revelation in Christ's Work," for relevant discussion on Johannine theology around Christ's death.

[35] Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 215–17.

[36] Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*, 381.

[37] Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*, 381.

have already died to self and lived unto Christ. They are tied with Christ in his death and resurrection, and they possess the present life and the life to come.

M. C. de Boer's *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus* provides another useful resource for a Johannine perspective on the death of Christ.[38] One intriguing aspect of de Boer's work is in chapter 6, which discusses the Eucharist and the "flesh." Our bodies deteriorate, and end-of-life rituals and liturgies are important responses to death and dying. Whether communally engaging in the Eucharist or practicing burial rites, the church can practice dying well by engaging an appropriate theology of the body.[39]

Johannine Commentaries

In addition to an examination of Johannine theology, exegesis of key passages in John's Gospel and Revelation will also help shape a Johannine *Ars Moriendi*. Commentaries, including D. A. Carson's *The Gospel According to John*, offer key insights into passages including Jesus's raising Lazarus from the dead and the week of Jesus's death and resurrection. Carson writes that in John 11:4, when Jesus remarks that the sickness of Lazarus will not end in death, he is referring to the reality that life is still to come.[40] Jesus knew that the sickness would end in death. This is not an example of Jesus refusing to accept the reality of death; rather, Jesus is showing that death does not have the final word. Jesus centers death within an eternal perspective. This account and Jesus's approach to death will inform a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* and help us to recognize what is true about the finality of death considering the sovereignty of Jesus and his power over death.

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[38] M. C. de Boer, *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus*, Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology (Kampen, Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1996) 219–51.

[39] Verhey*, The Christian Art of Dying*, 333–76. In the chapter "Some Practices Old and New," Verhey offers communal practices churches that Christians can seek out.

[40] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 406.

Carson notes that John emphasizes several motifs and titles in his Gospel. Carson writes, "The cross is not *merely* a revelatory moment (*contra* Forestell): it is the death of the shepherd for his sheep, the sacrifice of one man for his nation, the life that is given for the world, the victory of the Lamb of God, the triumph of the obedient Son who in consequence of his obedience bequeaths his life, his peace, his joy, his spirit."[41] The images and language of these motifs enable Christians to envision Jesus as their shepherd, their unblemished sacrifice, and their Passover Lamb. Their death to self, their victory over death through Christ, and their access to peace and joy are understood through the lens of Jesus's death, who has gone before them and shown them how to die in faithfulness.

Leon Morris's *The Gospel According to John* offers insight into John's purpose for writing his Gospel. Morris highlights John's use of contrast; for example, either one accepts and follows the message of the Messiah, or one walks away. Morris notes, "Either they [humans faced with the message of Jesus] commit themselves to Christ in faith and so enter life or they refuse to commit themselves and in so doing remain in darkness and a condition of lostness."[42] This darkness is the opposite of life. Those who do not want to follow Jesus remain lost in the present and eternally lost after death, in contrast to those who die well in obedience to the risen Messiah.

Morris also provides insight into the way Mary and Martha face the death of their brother Lazarus (John 11),[43] noting how the sisters emotionally react to Lazarus's death and the response of Jesus. A discussion on how to die well must deal honestly with the wide range of emotions that are part of death and dying. Given the prominence of Lazarus's resurrection from the dead and its proximity to the passion week of Jesus's own

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[41] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 97.

[42] Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 34.

[43] Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 484–92.

death and resurrection, this passage will be an important part of developing a Johannine *Ars Moriendi*.

Robert Mounce's commentary provides an expositional approach to the Gospel of John. Mounce asserts that "the centrality of the death and resurrection of Jesus in the gospel narrative is emphasized by the description of the fourth gospel as the passion story with an extended introduction."[44] Mounce's work also provides insights into the scene at and around the rising of Lazarus.[45]

In producing a Johannine *Ars Moriendi*, it is worth considering whether weeping over death categorizes someone as weeping as those without hope.[46] If this indeed is the case, there seems warrant to note that much of recorded Christian grief would be disenfranchised grief not lining up with this norm. Christians have always wept over the death of loved ones, and their tears are not without hope. Disenfranchised grief is by definition, "grief that persons experience when they incur a loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, socially sanctioned, or publicly mourned."[47] However, as John demonstrates, Jesus does not wholly rebuke those grieving Lazarus's death as inappropriate or overblown. Rather, Jesus himself is seen at one of his most vulnerable times as he weeps at the death of his friend.

Dennis Johnson's commentary *Triumph of the Lamb* describes how John engages his audience in the Book of Revelation as they process their suffering.[48] The

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[44] Robert H. Mounce, *Luke*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, *Luke-Acts*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 609.

[45] Mounce, *Luke*, 520.

[46] The language of not grieving as "those without hope" from 1 Thessalonians 4:13 is Pauline and not distinctly Johannine. The Johannine *Ars Moriendi* avers that with the death of his friend and with his own death, Jesus himself grieved but did not do so from a place of hopelessness.

[47] Kenneth J. Doka, *Disenfranchised Grief: Recognizing Hidden Sorrow* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1989), 4; Servaty-Seib and Chapple, *Handbook of Thanatology*, 254.

[48] Dennis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001).

concluding chapters of Revelation are central to the New Testament understanding of eternal life and shed light on the way Christians ought to live in hope. Johnson writes from an amillennialist point of view and assesses Revelation's key messages through this lens. To provide insight into a Johannine approach toward eternal life, it is crucial to establish the Christian's appropriate longing for new creation.

James Hamilton's commentary on *Revelation* provides a pastoral and exegetical commentary with insights into how the Book of Revelation faces death. Hamilton writes from a premillennial position, offering some nuanced differences in the way particular passages will be interpreted. Hamilton shows how John writes to Christians who are suffering and highlights how Christians ought to face their current situation of death and dying through the lens of Christ's victory. Hamilton points to Revelation 2:8–11, highlighting the main point of the passage: "In order to be faithful unto death, the knowledge of Jesus must be bigger to us than the reality of death itself. Jesus is the First and the Last, the Conqueror over death, the Giver of the crown of life to those who are faithful unto death. Jesus must be bigger to us than death itself."[49] Hamilton correctly points out how the answer for suffering Christians facing death is to reorient their lives based on their Savior who died and now lives (Rev 1:18). Only when Christians have sought to live distinctly as Christians following their risen Savior will they be able to achieve a good death because only then will they find satisfying and life-giving peace.

[49] James M. Hamilton Jr., *Revelation: The Spirit Speaks to the Churches*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 74.

Other Contemporary and Historical Approaches toward Dying Well

Though death is a biological fact, DeSpelder and Strickland note that "socially shaped ideas and assumptions create [death's] meaning."[50] Dying well is not a biological question but a spiritual, religious, and philosophical question; therefore, it is important to see how other religious and philosophical traditions have interpreted what it means to die a good death. This thesis considers how Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and Stoicism have faced the questions of what it means to die well.

Apologetics Dealing with Death

Resources in apologetics related to resurrection, grief, processing suffering, and death prove helpful when considering how a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* will impact Christians. Two resources useful in speaking to the doctrine of the resurrection, an essential doctrine for a Johannine theology, include N. T. Wright's *The Resurrection of the Son of God* and Michael Licona's *The Resurrection of Jesus*.[51] Wright and Licona offer a defense of the resurrection, though from very different approaches. Even amidst the early church's suffering, Christians were able to endure death because they believed that one day, death would die, and they would live eternally with Christ. Without a resurrection, a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* is futile.

Apologetic resources are useful in demonstrating how an *Ars Moriendi* is reasonable and practically lived out among Christians. Death has often been obscured from the public eye, especially in Western culture, where thoughts of death are minimized and tucked away as a distant moment in time. Christians must decide if they

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[50] DeSpelder and Strickland, 89. See also chap. 3, particularly the section on "Cultural Viewpoints" (pp. 108–30).

[51] N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003); Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010).

will live to die well or if they will seek to avoid death.[52] Matthew McCullough's work, *Remember Death*, helps Christians who want to think more deeply on the way the church should remember and face death. McCullough cites John 11:17–44 to remind readers that Jesus's "posture toward death" is one of weeping, but *death is not the final word*. McCullough writes, "The death of death is as certain as the resurrection of Jesus."[53] McCullough argues that engagement with death and dying from a Christian perspective ought to reinforce the Christian's sense of peace and encourage them that their resurrection is certain in the resurrection of Jesus. McCullough helpfully reframes the concerns surrounding death and dying by offering a framework in which he contrasts problem/promise; for example, he reframes the problem of loss with the promise of eternal life and reframes the problem of death with the promise of hope (the assurance of eternal life). This approach does not dismiss the grief or suffering that people endure. Far too often, Christians can rush to hope or believe a promise without fully reckoning with the reality of the problem. McCullough's problem/promise framework shows Christians how they can remember and face death and dying from a place that honestly deals with their grief while remaining hopeful.

Other Christians who have written concerning a philosophical engagement of death and dying include Peter Kreeft, Francis Schaeffer, C. S. Lewis, and Nicholas Wolterstorff. These Christians sought to engage death and dying critically from a distinctly Christian worldview. Christians are called to die well, to die distinctively as Christians. Christians are called to practice dying well every day. Taking up one's cross daily and engaging death with all their being is important to the concept of dying well. Preparing intentionally for a Christian death has implications for end-of-life rituals,

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[52] McCullough, *Remember Death*, 45. McCullough writes, "Death has not just become invisible, swept away into the alien world of hospitals, nursing homes, and assisted living facilities. Death has become unmentionable" (45).

[53] McCullough, *Remember Death*, 55.

including those that demonstrate such cross-bearing like the confession of sin, taking the Eucharist, praying, or singing spiritual songs.

There are countless examples of faithful Christians who have written of their suffering, offering insight into facing death and dying.[54] These works demonstrate a wide range of emotions, and Christians should give weight to their insights, as their experiences help the Christian face death and dying in a way that is true to who they are and what they know. Christians need a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* because the problems of suffering and death affect the most existential depths of our beings, and faith can wither or be destroyed. Formulating a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* is more than a mere philosophical and theological discussion; it is an apologetic in which spiritual health itself is at stake.

Void in the Literature

Theological and philosophical works have been written on death and dying for thousands of years. However, there is not an abundance of resources answering the question of dying well from a distinctly Johannine perspective. While theologies or philosophies of death have been written from a Johannine perspective, these works tend to focus on the role death plays in the life of Jesus, key events in the Messiah's life, or regarding the second death. A Johannine *Ars Moriendi* approach asks how Christians can perform the art of dying well, dying a good and, by necessity, faithful death that is rooted in Scripture. This thesis demonstrates how these concerns can be addressed by looking primarily to John's Gospel and the Book of Revelation.

Judith Kovacs provides insights into the cosmic battle described in John 12. She maintains that John "sees the death, resurrection, and the ascent of Jesus as the

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[54] See John Gillman, "Memoirs and the Ars Moriendi," *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling* 73, no. 3 (2019): 160–68. As a board-certified chaplain and educator, Gillman shows how *Ars Moriendi* has practical and not just esoteric roots. The discussion for an apologetic use of *Ars Moriendi* is exemplified by the countless Christians who endure death and dying from a distinctly Christian place in order to die well.

turning point in the conflict between God and the forces of evil."[55] She argues against the notion that the death of Christ is not as significant for John; rather, John knows the death of Christ is central to the defeat of death for Christians. Kovacs contends, "The cross is not merely the metaphorical jumping off point for Jesus's renascent to his heavenly Father. It is the locus of a cosmic battle, in which Jesus achieves a decisive victory over Satan."[56] While Kovacs highlights the importance of death in John's Gospel as an eschatological thrust, she does not argue or imply how this theology of death should inform the way Christians face their own death and dying well.

Another example is found in Jan van der Watt's work, *An Introduction to the Johannine Gospel and Letters*. Van der Watt argues that in the Gospel of John, "Jesus is not portrayed as the powerless, suffering one, but as the one who has true power, that is, the one who has everything under control."[57] To be charitable, one can concede that John does indeed highlight the perceived calmness of Jesus as opposed to the Synoptic traditions, which demonstrate more emotional vulnerability in his Passion. While John's Gospel does highlight Jesus's calmness, this shift in emphasis should not be considered in disagreement with the Synoptic traditions. John is not showing that Jesus is an emotionless Savior but that he is a sovereign Savior. John describes Jesus's calmness to encourage Christians who are facing suffering. It is necessary to connect these different descriptions of Jesus's Passion in order to better inform the church's understanding of dying well.

Karl Rahner offers another example of a theology of death that attempts to consider the theological and philosophical concerns around death while also considering

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[55] Judith Kovacs, "'Now Shall the Ruler of This World Be Driven Out': Jesus' Death as Cosmic Battle in John 12:20–36," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114, no. 2 (1995): 231.

[56] Kovacs, "Now Shall the Ruler of This World Be Driven Out," 246.

[57] Jan van der Watt, *An Introduction to the Johannine Gospel and Letters*, T&T Clark Approaches to Biblical Studies (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 18.

the reality that death is unpleasant and common to all men.[58] When one faces death, one must do so with a willingness to trust in God's workings in this life. Christians face death in the correct position toward God when they surrender to God. This disposition centers God as the source of life upon whom all are dependent.

In summary, various theologies of death have been produced from a broad Christian standpoint and provide helpful truths, but the need remains for a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* in which a biblical approach to dying well can help the church effectively guide Christians in maintaining their faith. Given the void in the literature, the fields of theology and apologetics need additional study and engagement with dying well.

Death is the final enemy, and it can bring grief, bitterness, and suffering. Christians ought to be prepared to face such things in order to die well. Through the biblical authors, God has provided the instruction Christians need. Given the apostle John's prominent place in the New Testament canon as the beloved apostle, Johannine literature is a notable place for further research.

Outline of the Chapters

The remainder of this thesis offers a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* derived primarily from the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation to encourage Christians on how to die well as followers of Jesus. Chapter 2 takes an expositional approach and assesses the Gospel of John to demonstrate a Johannine theology of death. This chapter demonstrates how John's description of the life of Jesus is the foundation for building his insights into death and dying; these insights are applied to developing an *Ars Moriendi* in chapters 4 and 5. This chapter speaks to death, dying, grief, and death preparedness by addressing passages describing eternal life, the death of Lazarus, and the death of Christ. This chapter demonstrates how John's Gospel positions Jesus as the Messiah who brings

[58] Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death* (New York: Seabury Press, 1973).

eternal life to God's people, saving them from eternal death. He is the exemplar for Christians on how to die well.

Chapter 3 continues chapter 2's expositional approach and provides an assessment of the Book of Revelation to demonstrate a theology of death. This theology is utilized and applied in chapters 4 and 5 in support of a Johannine *Ars Moriendi.* By assessing relevant passages concerning death in Revelation, the reader will see how John addresses death, dying, and grief. Key passages describe Jesus as the Lamb, the church as conqueror, the martyrs and the witnesses, the woman and the dragon, and the new creation. This chapter demonstrates how the Book of Revelation provides a theology of death that centers Jesus's victory over death to comfort Christians facing death.

Chapter 4 presents and defines a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* while comparing alternative contemporary and historical traditions to demonstrate that a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* is preferable in offering a source of comfort and peace. These alternative approaches assess what it means to obtain a good death. A Johannine *Ars Moriendi* focuses on utilizing John's Gospel and the Book of Revelation to demonstrate how centering death and dying within an eternal perspective and refocusing on resurrection hope is the most satisfying way to obtain a good death.

After establishing the need for a Johannine *Ars Moriendi*, chapter 5 focuses on the implications on the global church, identifying five ways the church can employ an *Ars Moriendi* to practice daily cross-bearing and dying well as a Christian community.

CHAPTER 2

A THEOLOGY OF DEATH ACCORDING TO THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

This chapter is the first of two chapters that will lay the foundation for a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* by providing a theology of death according to the Gospel of John, which will later be adapted to an *Ars Moriendi* approach to dying. This chapter will demonstrate how the Gospel of John tells of Jesus as the Messiah, the Savior who brings eternal life to God's people and saves them from eternal death; in so doing, Jesus serves as the exemplar of how to die well.[1] John's emphasis on death and resurrection is not escapism into a future disembodied euphoria. Rather, Messiah Jesus brings eternal life devoid of sin, suffering, and death.

This chapter is intentionally expositional in nature.[2] A Johannine theology of death will assess pericopes in which John shows Christians how Jesus has defeated death and how Christians should face death with faithfulness. The Gospel of John has a lot to teach Christians on death and dying and how Christians ought to die as followers of Christ. John addresses real-life situations in his Gospel, engaging in what some have referred to as "the Johannine *spiral* of thought," in which he weaves theology and

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[1] Richard Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 207–38. Bauckham's tenth chapter, "Jewish Messianism According to the Gospel of John," offers helpful insight into understanding that John perceived Jesus in the Christ/Messiah role, which is also the perception of the Synoptic Gospels.

[2] The expositional nature of the present and following chapter will examine pericopes within Johannine literature recognizing a Christocentric hermeneutic. For one example arguing for expositional preaching from a Christocentric hermeneutic, see Alex Ryan Loginow, "Greater Than the Former: A Christocentric Approach to Haggai in Light of Recent Christocentric Homiletics" (DMin thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018). Loginow argues that all of Scripture is Christ-centered, which is a concept employed throughout the *Ars Moriendi* assessment of the Johannine literature. All death and dying perspectives must be held in light of who Jesus is, was, and forever will be.

narrative.[3] John uses "relational theology," demonstrating the practical ways that theology affects relationships. John's Gospel offers unique theological insights for the church concerning the nature of death, how Jesus faced death, and the role Jesus played in defeating death.

Defining death has a long history, with the origins of the definition often rooted in myths or sacred texts. According to Lynne Ann DeSpelder and Albert Lee Strickland, a "mature concept of death" includes five aspects: (1) the universality of death, meaning all things will die, (2) the irreversibility of death, meaning once someone/something has died, the death is final, (3) the nonfunctionality of death, meaning that physiological functions cease, (4) the causality of death, meaning there are reasons for the death, and (5) the personal mortality of death, meaning that death does not merely come for all, but death comes for the individual.[4] While not inherently dismissive of philosophical and theological belief systems, this "mature concept of death" seeks to define death as a biological reality in naturalistic terms. At the outset of this chapter, it is important to note that this concept of death is not considered mature but rather reductionistic. All five of these criteria align with the theology of death found in the Johannine literature, with the exception of the irreversibility of death. To concede the irreversibility of death is to recognize that death carries a sense of finality in *naturalistic* terms. John's Gospel demonstrates that naturalistic understanding of the irreversibility of death proves useful in discerning the reality of Lazarus's death, as Jesus clearly points out that Lazarus is dead. Where the irreversibility of death criterion is reductionistic is in its exclusively naturalistic explanation, which rules out the miraculous resurrection power of

[3] Jan van der Watt, *An Introduction to the Johannine Gospel and Letters,* T&T Clark Approaches to Biblical Studies (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 28 (italics original).

[4] Lynne Ann DeSpelder and Albert Lee Strickland, *The Last Dance: Encountering Death and Dying*, 10th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2015), 51–52. See also Charles A. Corr, Donna M. Corr, and Kenneth J. Doka, *Death and Dying, Life and Living*, 8th ed. (Boston: Cengage, 2017), 453–54. Here the authors point out how death creates a categorical difference between the nature of the living and the dead. This emphasis retains the notion that death truly occurred in cases when death was reversed, such as in the story of Lazarus.

Jesus. This thesis will use these five criteria to define death, with the additional recognition that the definition of death must also consider the philosophical and theological realities of death.

This chapter also argues that John specifically emphasizes the language of eternal life in his Gospel, and this emphasis sheds insight into the way death should be understood.[5] This chapter considers five parts of John's Gospel in which Christians can begin to identify a Johannine theology of death: (1) the use of Johannine language of eternal life especially in symbolic formulas, (2) the second sign of healing, (3) the death of Lazarus, (4) Jesus's preparation for his own death, and (5) the death of Jesus. John's comprehensive view of death offers key theological truths for Christians to implement into their own life and practice. He argues for an approach that acknowledges death, roots grief in belief, centers death and dying within an eternal perspective, and focuses on the resurrection hope of eternal life.

Eternal Life and Symbolism

One of the unique aspects of John's Gospel is its emphasis on eternal life and belief. Jesus the Messiah, the Savior from whom shalom and salvation come, stands as the one who will deliver the people of God from their final enemies, including death.[6] The Synoptic Gospels tend to offer more insight into the Galilean healing ministry; however, by focusing on eternal life—a life never-ending and devoid of sin, suffering,

[5] J. C. Coetzee, "Life (Eternal Life) in John's Writings and the Qumran Scrolls," *Neotestamentica* 6 (1972): 51. Coetzee points out that "eternal life" is used in a technical sense to mean "glorious and continued oneness with Christ and his Father" (51).

[6] Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 192. Bauckham points out how the Jesus found in John's Gospel is complementary, not contradictory to the Jesus found in the Synoptic Gospels. John's perceivable lack of kingdom language and use of eternal life language is a prime example. Bauckham argues that "in John, all of Jesus' miracles signify, in different ways, the eternal life that Jesus will give, just as in the Synoptics the miracles are indications of the kingdom of God that is coming through Jesus" (192). Eternal life can be perceived as the Johannine language of the kingdom of God.

and death—John's Gospel assures the reader that death will not triumph.[7] To begin to understand a Johannine theology of death, one must understand its juxtaposition with life and—more importantly—eternal life for those who will believe and follow Jesus.[8]

John's use of symbolism speaks to the meaning of eternal life by tying imagery to aspects of physical life such as thirst and hunger. Connecting eternal life to relatable, everyday needs serves as a reminder that the living and dying process for Christians always engages both body and spirit. Death is spiritual and physical. It is useful to note that early Christians coming out of Judaism envisioned the afterlife as restoration with God. This is evident in the account of Lazarus's death, in which the eventual resurrection of the dead is assumed (John 11:24). Those who were following Jesus did not assume this life ends ultimately with death; they believed that God would raise the dead.[9] John's Gospel recognized the finality of death to this life, but death was not final in an ultimate sense, for that was the purview of the sovereign God.

One important element in John's development of a theology of death is observing how the belief in restoration and resurrection informs the expectations and hopes in one's approach to death and dying. Resurrection became prominent in early Christian theology because amid their suffering and grief, early Christians held on to the longing that death itself would be reversed, the hope that even if their tears were falling

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[7] D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 202. Carson points out how the first appearance of the phrase "eternal life" appears in chapter 3 of the Gospel of John, which points to resurrected life.

[8] To avoid a disembodied future spiritual reality, John shows Christians that resurrection and living forever are central to the faith passed down through the ages. Death would die in the age to come, and they would live forever with the emphasis on *living* rather than *forever*. The fixation remains not on a philosophy of time but rather on a restoration of life without death. The focus of this chapter in part will be pointing out how John is showing the reader that those who believe in Jesus will have never-ending life; they will receive eternal *life.*

[9] While different Jewish sects such as the Sadducees did not hold to a belief in a future resurrection, the belief in a future resurrection was a crucial aspect to other sects of Judaism and was common in their theological/religious expectations. For more on the Sadducees' belief in no resurrection, see Matthew 22:23 and Luke 20:27. See also N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 121–22. Wright points out how belief in the resurrection was not a late addition but a "reaffirmation" of the resurrection hope of Israel.

now, they too would be met with a future day of blessedness. This focus on eternal life dated to the prophets and the patriarchs, who longed for a future without death, where tears disappeared and enemies did not penetrate their gates. John demonstrates the theological truth that for the Christian, death does not have the final word, for Jesus has gained victory over death and promised eternal life.

When Jesus speaks of eternal life in terms of thirst and eternal, he shows the people of God that the peace they longed for on earth is fulfilled in himself. The daily stings of death that lead to dissatisfaction and longing in this world remain, but Christians find fulfillment in the new life Jesus offers. They longed for the kingdom their father David promised, an eternal kingdom where their enemies, including death, would die. John writes that Jesus has brought this kingdom of life in which death is not welcome. The curse of Genesis 3 is lifted. This is not merely a futuristic eschatology; rather, it is a present reality, a realized eschatology that demonstrates that the kingdom is already here, and death has begun dying.[10] Those who follow Jesus will possess eternal life now as members of the family of God.[11] They can begin living and dying as citizens of this eternal kingdom, understanding death through a new eschatological lens.

The Eternal Thirst

John uses thirst to symbolize eternal life by contrasting physical thirst with the everlasting water Jesus offered to the Samaritan woman (John 4). Jesus is tired and stops at Jacob's well to drink. It is important to point out that Jesus is tired and that he is thirsty; he knows the human needs of the Samaritan woman (John 4:6–7). As truly human, Jesus was susceptible to thirst and knew what it meant to long for thirst. However, Jesus makes the argument that everyone who drinks the water from Jacob's

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[10] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 97.

[11] Van der Watt, *An Introduction to the Johannine Gospel and Letters*, 73–76. See also Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 381.

well will be thirsty again; the well's water is not ultimately sustaining because its effects are temporal, not eternal. In John 4:14, Jesus points out that he offers the everlasting water of life that will quench their thirst.[12] Their physical and spiritual needs and longings will be ultimately satisfied in Jesus. For the Christian, death's perceived power becomes a temporal sting; it has no power over those who would follow Christ.

Jesus's offer was a paradigm shift in the way people approached meeting their physical and spiritual needs. It was also a shift in the way one approached death and dying. He knew that death was an enemy that threatened the shalom that humanity longed for. Jesus offered himself as the living water, the ultimate satisfaction to all their needs. Christians facing their deathbed can rest in Jesus's offer, knowing that the true satisfaction over death and dying comes through unity with Christ.

The Eternal Food/Bread

Jesus also uses the image of food and bread when speaking of eternal life. Leon Morris notes that the reader "must bear in mind that the figure of eating and drinking is widely used in the Old Testament. It is a figure of prosperity," while "contrariwise, not to be able to eat is disaster."[13] Jesus's discourse on the bread of life is part of a series of passages demonstrating his divinity through various miracles, such as the feeding of the five thousand and walking on water. Like offering everlasting water, Jesus shows his followers that the only way to live and die is to follow him. To consume the bread of life is to prosper; to refuse the bread of life is disaster. In Jesus, no need goes unmet, and even in death, this is promised to those who follow Jesus. As God delivered the sustaining manna to Israel, so too does Jesus deliver the sustaining bread of life to his followers.

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[12] Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 232.

[13] Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 301.

In John 6:33–35, Jesus states he is the bread from God, the bread of life. Like the living water, Jesus says that whoever takes of the bread of life will not hunger. Again, people could understand this physical analogy of needing food. When they were hungry, they ate and were satisfied. But their need and the bread were temporal. Jesus related their temporal need and satisfaction to their eternal need and satisfaction. Temporal water and bread cannot satisfy the eternal need; only Jesus offers that which is eternal. The analogy is strengthened by the surrounding passages describing Jesus's miracles; Jesus demonstrates that he can do what he claims. Jesus's divinity displayed in his miraculous actions are precursors to demonstrate his power over death. Christians have spiritual sustenance that leads to eternal life, rooted in the person and work of Messiah Jesus.

The language of Jesus as the bread of life found in John 6 is instructive for the church, particularly with respect to the Eucharist.[14] John's Gospel does not contain the eucharistic passage included in the Synoptic Gospels, which shares similar sentiments showing Jesus as the bread of life.[15] There are differing views on the relation of Eucharist to the imagery of Jesus as the bread of life.[16] The bread of life discourse speaks to consuming and trusting in Jesus as the sustainer of one's life.[17] This is a sustaining unto life and points to the reconciliation between God and man. This is also the purpose of the sacrament of the Eucharist. Participating in the Eucharist has often served as a ritual that

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[14] By the time the Gospel of John was written, the Christian church would have been participating in the Eucharist, which was centered on remembering the death of Jesus, making the death of Jesus an instructive and formative ritualistic practice for the church from its earliest days.

[15] Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John: A Concise Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1988), 45–47.

[16] Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 311–15. See also Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 276–80. Carson argues that John's Gospel is evangelistic in nature and therefore the picture to which the sacrament points is the spiritual reality spoken of in John 6. For an overview of various viewpoints on the sacraments in in John's Gospel, see Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, 77–107.

[17] M. C. de Boer, *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus*, Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology (Kampen, Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1996), 235. De Boer notes that to "eat the flesh" is to be "understood in a distinctive metaphorical sense, is to submit to an unpalatable form of discipleship (the risk or the actuality of martyrdom), which is made palatable by insisting that such a metaphorical eating (and drinking) is in fact the mark of the presence of life (salvation)" (235).

connects the believer with God's people, the church. The church takes the Eucharist to remember Jesus's death, and the sacrament reminds them of the bread of life, Jesus.

Even today, many Christians prefer to take Eucharist before they die.[18] In so doing, Christians join humanity in recognizing that "in the face of death, which threatens the very meaning of life, memorialization and death rituals, involve personal, social, and spiritual meaning-making."[19] Memorialization has been common with death-related rituals all throughout human history.[20] As the believer prepares for death, the ritual of Eucharist functions to connect the dying to God's people. The Eucharist has spiritual meaning, as it recalls the Christian's part of a community who shares in the life and death of Jesus.

Jesus also reminds the reader that those who ate manna in the wilderness died (John 6:49). The manna they received was temporal, not eternal. Like the manna in the wilderness, the bread Jesus fed to the thousands would only bring temporary satisfaction. Jesus states that those who eat of the bread of life will live forever (John 6:51). His language shifts from the temporary to the eternal; those who would live and die well would be permitted to eat the bread of life. God provided sustenance to their fathers in the wilderness by sending manna from heaven, but they still died. Jesus was the bread of life that would lead to life eternal.

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[18] This is particularly true in Roman Catholic end-of-life care with the sacramental anointing of the sick, communion, and confession. See also Matthew Haste, "A Treasure above All Treasures: Martin Luther on Dying Well," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 21, no. 4 (2017): 103–20 for an example of how Martin Luther engaged death and dying in connection to the sacramental rituals he was accustomed to and his intentional decision to not take sacramental rites at the end of his life. While not dismantling the entire appropriateness of end-of-life rituals including the sacraments, Luther provides insights into an alternative Protestant approach.

[19] Heather L. Servaty-Seib and Helen Stanton Chapple, eds. *Handbook of Thanatology: The Essential Body of Knowledge for the Study of Death, Dying, and Bereavement*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Association for Death Education and Counseling, 2021), 226.

[20] William G. Hoy, Carl B. Becker, and Margaret L. Holloway, "Memorialization and Death-Related Rituals," in Servaty-Seib and Chapple, *Handbook of Thanatology*, 206–26. The authors write extensively about how death-related rituals have been part of end-of-life care especially in terms of funerals. They go as far as to say, "Historically and culturally, virtually every human society addresses death with some kind of ritual, whether simple of intricate and elaborate" (207).

Verses 66 through 69 reveal that after his address, many of Jesus's followers abandoned him. Jesus asks if the twelve will leave as well, and Peter famously responds that Jesus has the words of eternal life (v. 68). Jesus is the bread of life; he is the way to eternal life. John's Gospel makes it clear that when Christians are dying, they need the bread of life—they need the words of eternal life.

The Eternal Giver of Life

The Passover is a crucial time in the life and ritual of the Jewish people, in which they recall the blood of the lamb applied to their doorposts so that death would pass over. God accepted their sacrifice and preserved their lives. John the Baptist says Jesus is the Lamb of God who will remove the sin of the people through his own death (John 1:29–34). A Johannine theology of death presents Jesus as the unblemished Lamb of God who was slain, whose blood was applied on behalf of those who would follow him so that the ultimate death would pass over and they too may live.

In John 5 and 8, Jesus is presented as the giver of new life. He reiterates that just as the Father raises the dead, so the Son gives life to whom he desires (John 5:21). For those contemplating a Johannine theology of death, the theological insight of Jesus as the giver of life provides confidence that Jesus's gift of life was and is not merely potential but actual. Jesus can and does give life. For those who have struggled with wondering where God was in their suffering—through miscarriages, tragic accidents, or any other scenario—John tells the reader that Jesus is the giver of new life. John's Gospel encourages the Christian to have a disposition toward death that centers death within an eternal perspective. Amid death and dying, Christians can acknowledge their suffering and emotion while remembering that they will live again because Jesus has given new life. Sometimes God brings healing, but sometimes God's healing is the sustained new life offered and secured in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

In John 2:21–24, Jesus states that if one does not believe in him, he will die in

sin and miss the eternal life he offers as the Lamb of God. If anyone believes in Jesus, he will never see or taste eternal death (John 8:51–52). Just as in Passover, the one who believes in the promise of deliverance will be delivered, not only in the present but from the coming judgement. Likewise, one who holds a Johannine theology of death believes in the promised shalom in the present life and in the life to come.[21] Salvation meant that the Christian is united to Jesus in his death and resurrection. The Christian can recenter his own death experience within an eternal perspective, knowing he will live again. Death will come but is not ultimately final. The Christian will be resurrected through the power of Jesus, who gives new life.

A Johannine theology of death does not shy away from the reality that all humans will die. Jesus himself endured death. Christians who find themselves struggling through death and dying can be encouraged that they will never see or taste the final death. Such liberation from the final death only comes from the giver of eternal life. John does not shy away from a discussion of death, instead showing the reader how to understand death with an eternal perspective rather than avoiding its reality.

Jesus stated that he gives eternal life, and no one will snatch his people from his hands (John 10:28). The language and symbolism of eternal life in John's Gospel are instructive and encouraging. When Christians battle cancer and are fearful for their future, they can remember that one day their pain will be no more because they have a future in which sin, suffering, and death will be no more. They will no longer need chemo treatments to fight for life because their needs will be fully satisfied. For Christians struggling through poverty or starvation, they will have the sustenance for which they

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[21] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 97. As noted, the kingdom theology in the Johannine literature is not merely futuristic. Similarly with the Jewish people in the Passover, their salvation was futuristic but not exclusively so. Those who placed the blood on the doorpost did find salvation from judgement. See James M. Hamilton Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgement: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 94–95. Hamilton demonstrates how the Jewish people were delivered: they were saved in the present, but this salvation also pointed forward to a future salvation. Those who would not place the blood on the doorpost during Passover would not have found salvation from judgment.

longed. The Christian waiting for a transplant, a successful treatment, or favorable test results can look to a Johannine theology of death and know that Jesus promised to be the living water, the bread of life, and the giver of life. He will sustain them.

Jesus and the Second Sign

The second sign in Jesus's ministry is found in John 4:46–54 and has been summarized as "the Gospel in a nutshell."[22] In this pericope, Jesus is approached by an official whose son is at the point of death. He asks Jesus to heal his son, but Jesus responds, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe" (v. 48).[23] The official is undeterred by Jesus's response and persistently seeks the healing he knows only Jesus can bring. Jesus tells the official that his son will live, and his son does indeed live.

At times, people's beliefs are predicated on seeing signs. As they grieve, many desire a miracle. This passage teaches Christians that as the giver of life, Jesus has the power to heal, but some will be tempted to cling to signs instead of the sign-giver. Establishing a theology of death helps Christians develop a disposition toward death and dying that is guided by faith. Biblically and theologically speaking, healing is always a possibility because Jesus has the power over sickness and death. However, Jesus wants Christians to seek the healer over the healing, for he alone is the giver of life and the one worthy of their attention and affection.

Power to Heal

This passage describes a father facing the death of a son he dearly loves. The first thing to note in this passage is the official's belief that Jesus could heal. H. A. Ironside writes, "He had no understanding of the true nature of the Lord Jesus Christ, but

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[22] Van der Watt, *An Introduction to the Johannine Gospel and Letters*, 12.

[23] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is quoted from the *English Standard Version*.

he did feel that He was one who could meet his need."[24] Ironside continues, "How often, when men are in distress or in trouble, they feel that if they could get to Jesus, He would do something for them, and yet they do not really know Him as God the Son."[25] The official knows that without miraculous intervention, his son will die. He is clinging to hope even when death seems inevitable.

What separates him from the crowds Jesus rebukes for only seeking signs and wonders? D. A. Carson remarks, "The royal official is not interested in Christology or fulfilled prophecy or even in signs and wonders: he is interested in the well-being of his child (*paidion*)."[26] Carson notes that the prayer of the father "wins the Master's healing powers."[27] He persists in trusting that Jesus is able to heal, rather than seeking mere signs and wonders. One demonstration of this is that he leaves Jesus and returns to his home. The official believes Jesus can heal his child. Once he has found Jesus and pleaded his case, he knows that the healer has heard his plea. He also did not show up with a list of requests for his numerous family members, and he did not desire to be mesmerized by a powerful display. He simply came with a need and trusted that Jesus could deliver.

Miracles have long been discussed not only in theology but also in the field of medicine, where many are unsure how to deal with the topic.[28] When people are suffering, they seek out something bigger than themselves to transcend their suffering and offer deliverance. Christians facing death and dying must ask themselves what role

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[24] Harry A. Ironside, *Addresses on the Gospel of John*, 9th ed. (Neptune, NJ: Seabury Press, 1965), 166.

[25] Ironside, *Addresses on the Gospel of John*, 166.

[26] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 239.

[27] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 239.

[28] Servaty-Seib and Chapple, *Handbook of Thanatology*, 186–90. See also Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 607–13, for Morris's discourse on how miracles are used in John's Gospel.

desiring signs and wonders or miracles plays for them in facing death and dying.[29]

Signs

Jesus's response to the official's persistence reveals that many sought out Jesus because they wanted signs and wonders. They wanted the healing, not the healer, the signs, but not the Savior. Francis Moloney notes that Jesus addresses the crowd rather than the official alone; Jesus warns that "true faith cannot be based on signs alone."[30] Jesus's focus was ultimately the defeat of sickness and death, not just a demonstration of signs and wonders.

The official's persistence was not a problem, nor was it that he sought healing. Jesus teaches the official and the onlookers, as well as the modern church, that genuine healing does not come rooted in signs alone but must be accompanied by faith. Eternal life and the defeat of death only come through faith in the Messiah. Certainly, people facing death and dying often seek out healing and are persistent in their pleading with God. This is not spiritually unhealthy and displays a reliance on God. However, seeking healing must be accompanied by faith in the healer. Jesus's ministry looked toward the cross, where he would face his own agony and death without deliverance.

As Christians consider what it means to die well, they must contemplate

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[29] One thing commonly discussed in interdisciplinary meetings among hospital physicians and ethicists is how religious people perceive terminating life-sustaining treatments and the discussion of desired miracles among families. This thesis demonstrates that dying the good death is not merely about maximizing the amount of life on this earth but rather dying distinctly as a Christian. Discussions in palliative care and hospice commonly include a distinction between quality of life and quantity of life. A Johannine *Ars Moriendi* argues that end-of-life care is neither about maximizing the amount of time one lives (as is often found among those seeking a miracle); nor is the desired goal the quality of life (for merely ending suffering is not the goal of dying well). Rather, obedience to Christ recenters the dying process with an eternal perspective and refocuses hopes on resurrected life. To merely seek quality of life standards devoid of a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* is to begin borrowing from philosophies outside of Christianity such as Buddhism or Western individualism. For further discussion, see Virginia Morris, *Talking about Death* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2004), 79–82. Morris points out how not all "good deaths" look the same for all people (82). This current thesis points out how the good death looks like an artform—a performative approach to dying well distinctively as a Christian rather than a obedience to a strict list of practice(s).

[30] Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina 4 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 153.

whether they desire the sign over the sign-giver and healing over the healer. Jesus used healing to demonstrate that he was the Messiah and to show the goodness of God as the ultimate healer and restorer of peace. When Christians fixate on miracles, signs, or wonders without a disposition of gratitude and openness to God's sovereign plan, they have traded the healing for the healer. Sometimes, the Lord hears the cries of the Christian and provides healing. Sometimes he uses death and dying to build his people toward Christlikeness.

Jesus Is the Giver of Life

A Johannine theology of death trusts in Jesus, the giver of life. In John 4:50, Jesus tells the official, "Go; your son will live." Verse 53 reveals that the moment the boy recovered is the same moment in which Jesus stated the man's son would be healed.[31] Jesus does not just teach about giving life; he demonstrates giving life. Moloney writes, "It is not the presence of Jesus that effects the healing, but his word."[32] Jesus does not need to be physically present for his command to be effective. Likewise, those who approach death and dying can face their suffering with the knowledge that if healing comes, it comes from Jesus. In his divine providence, he can heal, if he chooses, for the glory of God. Christians can rest in his sovereign goodness and place their desires securely in their healer's hands.

The Death of Lazarus

The death and resurrection of Lazarus is a prime example of how Jesus is the

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[31] This pericope demonstrates how Jesus is not only capable, but he is sovereign. When Jesus speaks, people listen. Jesus proclaims healing over the official's child, and healing occurs. This type of sovereignty over death and dying is a great comfort and can be a source of great hope for those who experience a loved one's death following countless hours of prayer. God could intervene and bring healing in the case of any individual death, yet people die every day. The Christian's role in this death and dying process is not to relentlessly distrust God but to know and understand that God is the giver of life, and that life eternal has ultimately been offered and secured so that death will not ultimately triumph over any Christian.

[32] Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 154.

giver of physical and spiritual life. The story of Lazarus is one of the most important pericopes in John's Gospel and helps Christians develop a more comprehensive Johannine theology of death.[33]

While the official in John 4 is a stranger to Jesus, Lazarus is a dear friend. Those who were present at the grave were Jesus's family and friends. This narrative shows how siblings, friends, and communities deal with the death of a loved one, and it shows the unique way in which Jesus handles the death of a dear friend even when he knows he will raise him from the dead.

Through his remarks, Jesus demonstrates that he is not insensitive to the reactions of those who have lost a loved one. He knows that facing death is hard and emotionally draining. He is not unsympathetic. He knows that people desire healing, but he also knows the type of healing they need. In the story of Lazarus, John recenters death with an eternal perspective and focuses on resurrected hope.

From the grave, the lifeless Lazarus hears a familiar voice and obeys.[34] Rather than looking at the responses of family, friends, the community, and Jesus in chronological order, the following sections will focus on the different characters described in the narrative.

Mary

Mary is one of Lazarus's two sisters, the one who later anoints Jesus (John 12:3). Mary is a friend of Jesus, and when Lazarus is gravely ill, she and her sister

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[33] Leslie J. Blackhall and Kunchok Gyaltsen, "Cultural Aspects of End-of-Life Care," in Servaty-Seib and Chapple, *Handbook of Thanatology*, 186–91. Here, Blackhall and Gyaltsen point to the Lazarus narrative, a recognized narrative in the field of thanatology in which people look to the role of miracles and God's healing power as having the potential to prevent the inevitability of death. This concept is noteworthy, in that the narrative surrounding Lazarus's death and the response of religious people in general has been continually discussed within the field of thanatology. Blackhall and Gyaltsen juxtapose the parable of the mustard seed in Buddhist-influenced Tibetan culture to show how the Tibetan people approach death acceptance, whereas the Lazarus narrative is perceived as being death avoidant.

[34] Robert Murray M'Cheyne, *Comfort in Sickness and Death: The Sickness, Death, and Resurrection of Lazarus* (London: Counted Faithful, 2018), 54–55.

Martha send for Jesus. They wanted their friend Jesus to know Lazarus was ill; they wanted Jesus to be near. The family dynamic here is important because it is an affirmation of the communal nature of grieving. In the Jewish culture, death was an unwelcome reality. It was the separation of an individual from the community in a way that would not be restored. This communal response to grief is later demonstrated at the cross, when the women who followed Jesus ministered to him.

Mary is one of many who have watched their loved one die and are emotionally undone. Mary's approach to death, dying, and bereavement appears to be one of expressed grief. Even as Jesus was coming to their house, Mary remains in the house and does not go out to meet him (John 11:20). She remains with the other mourners who consoled her (John 11:31). Later, Martha goes to get Mary and brings her out to see Jesus (John 11:28–30). Mary sees her beloved friend Jesus face to face, and Jesus joins her in grief, weeping over the loss of his friend. Mary reiterates language similar to her sister Martha (John 11:21), stating that if Jesus had been present, her brother would not have died (John 11:32). The remarkable difference between her statement and Martha's is her public and emotionally unrestrained response—she falls at Jesus's feet (John 11:32).[35]

In no way does Jesus rebuke Mary or make her words or actions seem inappropriate.[36] Instead, he allows her the space to grieve and display her emotional distress. John's Gospel shows that Jesus makes space for grief, questioning, doubt, and hope, but he then recenters their grieving by pointing to himself as the resurrection and

[35] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 415. In this regard, her grieving is expressed rather than restrained. Her grieving presents itself externally rather than being kept internally.

[36] Even if Jesus's response of being troubled is interpreted as anger at the disbelief that Jesus would heal or a lack of belief in resurrection, Jesus's comes alongside Mary in her grieving over the death of Lazarus. Jesus weeps. He comes to comfort his friends. This rebuke would be pointed toward the disbelief or grieving as one without hope in the resurrection rather than the grieving itself.

their eternal hope.[37] In the case of Lazarus, this was not a future hope but a present reality.

Like the official in John 4, Mary's response demonstrates that seeking signs or healing apart from belief is futile. Mary believes that Jesus would have been able to save her brother if he had been present. However, in contrast to the story of the official's son, Mary and Martha mistakenly assume that Jesus's presence would have saved Lazarus from death. Eventually, Jesus does raise Lazarus by his command, but we know from John 4 that his physical presence was not necessary.

Mary stands as an exemplar on how one can view the death and dying of a loved one. She demonstrates a healthy disposition of grief and sadness; she wrestles with trust and doubt; and she ultimately draws near to Jesus, whom she loves. These actions are vital in developing a theology of death. Observing the death of God's people shapes Christians. Christians who die are not merely individuals; they belong to the collective family of God, and their death is a great loss to the community. They will be overcome with emotion, but their reactions are not abnormal nor are they inherently perceived as negative. Mary's response shows Christians how one can grieve openly and emotionally, desires the presence of Jesus, and trust in Jesus's healing.

Martha

Martha, Lazarus's other sister, is the first to meet with Jesus after both sisters sent for their friend (John 11:3). She is also the first to comment that if Jesus had been present, Lazarus would not have died; she even mentions that Jesus could bring him back (John 11:21–22). It is important to note that Martha, like Mary, wrestles with doubt, uncertainty, her beliefs, and a longing for hope.[38] If Mary is portrayed as the more

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[37] Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John*, 63. Brown points out that while Jesus will let physical death touch his loved ones, he will not allow spiritual death.

[38] See Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying: What the Dying Have to Teach Doctors, Nurses, Clergy, and Their Own Families*, 50th anniv. ed. (New York: Scribner, 2014). Kubler-Ross's work

emotional sister, then Martha portrays a more controlled grief. The difference in the way the sisters grieve demonstrates that everyone's grief presents itself in ways unique to their personality.

John provides insight into the conversation between Martha and Jesus: "Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day'" (John 11:21–24). Martha affirms her belief in the future resurrection but seems to miss the reality of what Jesus is about to do. For Martha, the resurrection is a future event; she anticipates it at the end of time, which is consistent with the commonly held beliefs among Jews. Carson remarks that Martha's words are not a rebuke; instead, "they are words of grief and of faith. . . . In her bereavement, she has not lost her confidence in Jesus," showing that Martha still believed.[39] She reiterates her confidence that the Father will respond positively to whatever the Son asks. When Jesus responds, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" she responds, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world" (John 11:25–27). Martha believes that Jesus is the resurrection and the life; she believes that he will bring about resurrection on the final day. However,

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on the stages of grief overlaps with both Mary and Martha in elements of denial, isolation, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Both demonstrate elements of bargaining and denial in their claims that (1) had Jesus been present, their brother would not have died, and (2) now that he is present, Jesus can bring Lazarus back to life. While depression would need to be more strictly defined, Mary and Martha demonstrate overwhelming grief and mourning. Their resurrection dialogue indicates that, amid the family's mourning, they believed in a future resurrection. They also manifest to some degree a level of acceptance of death. As grief studies are closely related to the research underlying this thesis, the focus on dying well will recognize such elements described by Kubler-Ross, but these studies will not be the primary lens for understanding death and dying.

[39] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 412. In this regard, Martha stands in contrast to those just seeking signs and wonders. She stands as one who truly believes.

she and Mary did not realize that this resurrection hope was not merely an eschatological victory but was nearer than they had ever imagined.

Martha retrieves Mary and brings her to meet Jesus (John 11:28–30). She also speaks up in response to Jesus's request for Lazarus's stone to be removed; she logically notes that there would be a foul odor emanating from the tomb (John 11:39). Her reaction to Jesus's command indicates that she did not anticipate that resurrection would be on display that very day. Jesus gently reminds her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" (John 11:40).

There are numerous insightful contributions to a Johannine theology of death in the account of Lazarus's death and resurrection. John reiterates the religious framing of death apart from the mere biological reality of death. Through the responses of the two sisters, John demonstrates that people engage death and dying in ways that are unique to each person. Martha understands death and dying from an eternal perspective and focuses her hope on the future resurrection. In her grief, Mary plainly says that she knows Jesus could have prevented Lazarus's death. While grief studies have demonstrated common themes in grieving, grief is not always linear, replicable, or predictable.

The sisters' reactions are also connected to their belief in the person and work of Jesus Christ. They both believe that Jesus could have healed Lazarus at any time. Martha further recognizes that Jesus has resurrection power; she trusts that one day, death itself will die and her brother will be raised. With the official's plea for healing and the two sisters, belief is an essential component of an approach to death and dying. The next part of this passage demonstrates the importance of belief, especially when one struggles with doubt or lack of confidence.

The Others

The others featured in this pericope include Thomas, the disciples, and the Jews who mourned with Mary and Martha. At the beginning of the account, when Jesus

told the disciples they must return to Judea, they responded in confusion, so Jesus spoke plainly: "Lazarus has died" (John 11:14). The disciples are initially reluctant because it is dangerous to return to Judea; previously, the rabbis had attempted to stone Jesus (John 11:8). However, in contrast to the disciples' concern, Thomas tells the other disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11:16). Is Thomas to be commended for his courage and solidarity with Jesus, or is he reluctantly conceding to an inevitable outcome? Leon Morris points out "It is good accordingly to see this act of leadership and courage. In a way it fits his doubting, for it is a gloomy saying and not marked by any abundance of faith."[40] Although "gloomy," Thomas speaks "brave words."[41] He is willing to face death with Jesus because he believes Jesus is who he says, the Son of God. This is instructive for Christians who are considering a Johannine theology of death because it demonstrates that even if one wavers in confidence, his faith in the Messiah can sustain him through great fear.

The other mourners mentioned in this account are those who arrive to support and grieve with Mary and Martha (John 11:19, 31, 33). This may speak to the prominence of this family in the community. Not all families would have had a similar turnout, even conceding that public bereavement was culturally valued.[42] It was customary for professional grievers to be present, and in John 11:33, "When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled." Carson notes that the phrase "deeply moved in his spirit and

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[40] Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 484.

[41] Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 484. They are brave words in that, if death is part of following Jesus as indicated in the passage, then Thomas understood that inevitability and was willing to press on, even if pessimistically.

[42] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 411. Two important points noted here are (1) wealth and prominence mean a greater number of people with whom to grieve, and (2) communal cultures grieve in communal ways.

greatly troubled" (11:33) suggests "anger or outrage or indignation."[43]

Jesus is angry at those who are not facing death with an appropriate perspective. Grieving as though death carries with it a finality outside of the divine prerogative concedes too much to a naturalistic worldview and is a theological falsehood. Jesus is the victor over death. Jesus's anger is not directed toward those who trust in Jesus's authority as Messiah but rather those who make up the community of grievers inappropriately grieving.

This demonstrates to the reader that it is appropriate to console those grieving, but there can also be a disposition toward death and dying that leads to disbelief. To console those who are grieving is appropriate because Christ-followers possess eternal life and know that death is a temporal enemy that will be defeated in the end. However, to console those who are grieving in an emotional yet ingenuine manner can lead to disbelief in the purpose of God to resurrect his people to eternal life. The latter is an unacceptable approach for the Christian toward death and dying.

The Death of Jesus's Friend

Jesus's response to the news of Lazarus's death is to be patient (John 11:5–16). He first seeks the will of his Father and then shows patience in God's plan. Jesus was not being insensitive to Mary and Martha's call or failing to rush to the aid of his friend Lazarus in his illness. Instead, he heeded the plan of his Father, a plan set out so that many more would believe in him. In John 11:15, he says, "For your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." This is an important lesson in a theology of death: at times, it is the will of God that death comes so that the glory of God may be displayed. Carson writes, "Lazarus' death and the resurrection that follows are not only to glorify the Father and the Son, but are for the good of Lazarus and his

[43] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 415. According to Carson, this snorting is compared to that of horses. See also Robert Mounce, *Luke*, 519. Mounce points out that the "snort" of indignation originates with Luther and German scholars following him. The emphasis is clear—death angers Jesus.

sisters."[44] Jesus would later embody this reality in his own death.

Jesus's response does not minimize the depth of his affection and emotion for Lazarus and his sisters. He is not indifferent; he loves them, he uses terms of endearment for them, and he lets the disciples know that despite the potential danger of returning to Judea, he is willing to go to his friends (John 11:7–10).[45] John's account teaches Christians that in responding to death, the most faithful disposition is one of trust and patience in God's sovereign plan. To that end, H. A. Ironside writes,

> When we come presenting some problem we hope that He will intervene immediately and answer our prayer in the way we would like to have Him do it without any delay. But often He seems to wait so long and apparently appears to be so indifferent. He is never indifferent; He is always interested. And we may be sure of this: if He permits delay in the answer to prayer, it is because there is some plan that He desires to work out in connection with that answer, and it should be ours to wait in faith for Him to act.[46]

Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead so that many would witness and see the glory of Jesus displayed as the one who brings resurrected life.

A Johannine theology of death follows Jesus's example in approaching death with an attempt to discern God's will. Jesus sought the will of his Father, and Christians must do the same. Jesus sought to display the glory of God through his power over death. Christians likewise can understand that God's purposes will serve the glory of God, so they can be assured that through death and dying, Jesus is not indifferent. Rather, he desires to display his love and care, as he did for Mary and Martha.

Jesus does not just seek his Father's will alone; he also offers instruction on death and dying to those around him. He states that Lazarus's sickness is not one that

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[44] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 407.

[45] Jesus knew that raising Lazarus would ultimately lead to an uprising among the observers. He knew of the dangers from people who sought to take his life. But Jesus's intention was to demonstrate his love for his friends, to be present and to offer comfort, and to demonstrate the glory of God. This provides the reader of John's Gospel not with an insensitive Jesus but with a Jesus who is selfless and sacrificial.

[46] Ironside, *Addresses on the Gospel of John,* 456–57.

leads to death (John 11:4). Superficially, this may appear odd to the reader because Lazarus is obviously physically dead. Jesus has plainly stated this fact. But Jesus is speaking of the second death, the spiritual death that leads to eternal death. Lazarus's illness led to his physical death but would not lead to his final death because, as a believer in Jesus, Lazarus would never truly die in a spiritual sense. His illness was not more final than Jesus's resurrection power.

In John 11:34, Jesus asks, "Where have you laid him?" In response, the mourners say, "Lord, come and see" (11:34). Moloney notes that Jesus is acting with intention. From calling for Mary, asking to be taken to Lazarus, and then calling Lazarus from the tomb, he is orchestrating the event for God's glory so that people may believe.[47] Likewise, his weeping in the next verse is intentional. When Jesus encountered the death of a close friend, he wept with Mary and Martha because he too cared about Lazarus. Robert Mounce argues that Jesus's weeping was less for Lazarus and more for those around him, as some grieved appropriately and some inappropriately.[48] Richard Bauckham argues along similar lines, noting that the crowds misread Jesus's tears for Lazarus when, Bauckham maintains, Jesus was weeping because he knew that in raising his friend, he (Jesus) was laying down his own life; this event precipitated his road to the cross.[49] Both of these views unnecessarily reduce the humanity of Jesus's tears and strip

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[47] Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 330. Jesus is acting intentionally; he is on a mission to display God's glory.

[48] Robert H. Mounce, *Luke*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, *Luke-Acts*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 520. Mounce argues that the tears of Jesus are not due to the death of Lazarus per se for he argues that he weeps as one with hope. He knew that he would raise Lazarus. Jesus' weeping is due rather to the way in which death has impacted those around him that he loved.

[49] Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, 66–67. Bauckham argues along similar lines as Mounce, in that both see the idea of weeping over Lazarus's death to be missing John's point. Bauckham notes that there is an overcommitting people make in acting as though the tears of Jesus were for Lazarus. Both authors perceive that Jesus, knowing that he would raise Lazarus from the dead, also knows there is a lack of need to weep for Lazarus.

them of the emotion that attends the grief of those who have lost a friend or family member.

An important question to ask in reading this pericope is whether knowing that resurrection will come one day makes weeping unnecessary. Lazarus's sisters believed in a future resurrection, and yet they wept. At every funeral or gravesite, mourners observe a visual display of the sting of death. For the believer, however, graveside liturgy proclaims victory over death. One day all tears will end, and death will be no more. This does not mean that Jesus, and those before and after him, should not grieve with tears. This does not accord with the emotions displayed by Jesus elsewhere in Scripture. To reduce Jesus's tears and those of Mary and Martha and Lazarus's friends by characterizing them as unnecessary is to miss the wider theological context at hand. Jesus's tears fall because he knew the damage that sin brings into the world and the reality of death that he was actively undoing.[50] Ironside points out that Jesus wept "as He contemplated the awful ravages that death had wrought because of sin."[51] He wept because he knew how to approach death and dying in a way that loved his friends, honored his Father, and took seriously the cost of ending death.

Likewise, Christians weeping amid death act appropriately in response to the wages of sin. However, Christians also face death as a people with hope. The reaction of Lazarus's sisters and their fellow mourners was a foretaste of the joy that will be experienced at the final resurrection. Jesus knew the reaction that would result in raising a man from the dead in the presence of many Jews.

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[50] Both Mounce and Bauckham overplay the scenario of Jesus weeping, even where elements of truth come through in their arguments. Both neglect aspects of the relational and personal in a way that accounts for both. See previous sections from Mounce, *Luke*, 520. See also Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, 66–67.

[51] Ironside, *Addresses on the Gospel of John*, 462.

Jesus's Death Preparation

From the healing of the official's son to the raising of Lazarus, John presented the ways in which Jesus and others in the Gospel approached death and dying. Now John turns to the ways in which Jesus faced his own death and dying. Jesus died the good death. He died well, centering death within an eternal perspective. He set his eyes on resurrection, as he would become the life-giver to all those who believed in him. When Jesus knew his time had come and death was near, he did not turn away from this reality but "resolutely set out for Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). Jesus was preparing himself and his disciples for his death.[52]

Mary's Anointing

In John 12:1–8, Mary anoints Jesus, an act that Jesus says prepares him for burial. Carson says that Mary's anointing was "an act of costly, humble devotion," and while she may not have made the connection that her anointing was burial preparation, "she signalled more than she knew."[53] Jesus was gracious in including her in his own death preparation.

Anointing and other ritual practices are common ways people prepare for death and practices that help shape the way Christians view life and death.[54] The church

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[52] The following section was inspired by a video clip used for a seminar offered at the Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine. As part of my role as a hospital chaplain, I was the guest lecturer for the course attended by medical students. The video speaks of advance care planning, end-of-life care, and spirituality and makes the argument that Jesus prepares his disciples for his death, and this preparation is an example Christians ought to follow. See PBS NewsHour, "Why African American Seniors Are Less Likely to Use Hospice," May 5, 2015, YouTube video, 7:39, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dypoYEvBfs4.

[53] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 430.

[54] Dru Johnson, *Knowledge by Ritual: A Biblical Prolegomenon to Sacramental Theology*, Journal of Theological Interpretation Supplement 13 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 41–50. Johnson points out that there are four distinguishable markers of ritual in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. He lists them as "1) scripted, 2) prepared and practiced, 3) logical, and 4) formative" (41). Jesus's death preparation presents a ritualistic approach toward death rooted in the rites of the biblical worldview. Jesus is following the script laid out by his Father; Jesus is preparing for his own death and practicing trust, obedience, and patience; Jesus's acts and words are logical in accordance with the will of the Father; and Jesus's death preparation is formative because through his death would come victory over sin and death for the church. Further, the death preparation as ritual construct is employable and repeatable at the individual and communal level for Christians and the church.

continues to observe ritual anointing in many traditions.[55] Mary's anointing reminds the reader that dying as a Christian includes the communal act of caring for one another. Mary is an important part of Jesus's death and burial preparation process. The fact that Jesus included burial preparation in his approach to dying shows that Jesus was working out God's plan and trusting the Father all the way to the cross. Death did not sneak up on Jesus. Jesus lived obediently as unto death.

Mary's act and Jesus's response show that rituals can play an important role in end-of-life care. As people are dying, they too seek rituals or practices that will be part of their death preparation. Christians looking to implement a Johannine theology of death can observe how Jesus approached his death preparation. The practices described in John are not prescriptive but descriptive in nature; Christians are not required to practice the same rituals but should notice that preparation for death was an intentional process and considered a part of life.[56] Christians, for example, can generate advanced care planning documents, obtain life insurance to ensure familial provision, arrange funeral instructions, identify liturgical practices such as songs and prayers, or consider the use of sacraments.[57] Christians can discuss end-of-life rituals and ensure that they are spending time with loved ones.[58]

This reflects how Jesus considered others, not only himself, in his death

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[55] Matthew Levering, *Dying and the Virtues* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 135–47. Levering discusses the anointing of the sick as an example of the virtue of surrender in dying. Anointing of the sick is considered a sacrament within the Roman Catholic Church, but aspects of anointing can be found in various Protestant traditions such as Anglicanism and Pentecostalism.

[56] See chapter 10, "Practicing Safe Ritual Improvisation," in Dru Johnson, *Human Rites: The Power of Rituals, Habits, and Sacraments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 125–32. Johnson points out that Christians need to learn how to practice improvisation in their rituals/rites, which is applicable in death preparation. Jesus demonstrates an example of death preparation without commanding his followers to specific rituals/rites. However, the Christian church has been wise to follow the example of Jesus in similar ways of death preparation.

[57] See the appendix, "Examples of a Ritual Inventory" in Johnson, *Human Rites*, 135–45, for a template on how Christians can be intentional about discerning rituals to be used in death preparation.

[58] Jesus's high priestly prayer in John 17, in which Jesus prays for his followers, is another example of his death preparation. Jesus uses the anointing of Mary, prayer, and time with his disciples at the Passover meal as ways in which he is preparing for his own death.

preparation; he cares for his people. Jesus knew and accepted the necessity of his death. Many family members struggle with the coming death of a loved one and seek to prolong life. However, more than desiring the prolongation of life, God desires Christians to faithfully look to him.[59] Coming to a place of acceptance and hope prepares people who are dying and their loved ones to begin to reshape their expectations and think reflectively about death, no longer from a merely clinical point of view but from a theological and religious point of view.[60] For Christians, the mere prolongation of life is not the end goal; rather, it is living and dying as those who have hope.

Jesus Foretells His Death

Jesus spoke several times of his death, noting that the Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep (John 10:11), as does the one who lays down his life for his friends (John 15:13).[61] Jesus also foretells his death in John 12:27–36, telling the crowd, "The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light" (vv. 35–36). Though many did not understand, Jesus told of his death so that they may hear and believe and become sons of light. In preparing them for his death, he prepared

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[59] Allen Verhey*, The Christian Art of Dying: Learning from Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 214–15. See also Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*. See the section at the conclusion of the book, "Statement of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, M.D., Flossmore, Illinois," in which Kubler-Ross notes, "As long as a patient is alive, he needs hope, but not the projection of our hope, which is usually a prolongation of life. Besides the need for hope, patients need a reassurance that they will not be deserted, yet most of our patients who become beyond medical help feel deserted."

[60] Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*. See the section at the conclusion of the book, "Changing Basic Attitudes," in which Kubler-Ross states, "We train physicians basically in the science of medicine, that is, the cure to treat, to prolong life. I think we should also add a few lectures on the art of medicine, and that is how to take care of the dying patient, and some old people who are not living and not dying." Kubler-Ross's point is clear: more modern, clinical approaches toward death and dying attempt to perpetuate life at virtually all costs. The process of dying well requires a paradigm shift in which we think of dying altogether toward Christian obedience.

[61] Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*, 63, 196–97. Bauckham also notes, "The one point at which Jesus says with clarity that he is going to die and rise again is designed to counter any impression that his death will be other than voluntary (10:11–18; cf. 15:13)" (63).

them to become the family of God. He prepared his disciples by telling them that his death would be their salvation. He prepared his people to follow after him in death as so they could live forever.

Washing of Feet at Passover

In John 13, Jesus continues his death preparation by sharing the Passover feast with his disciples. The Passover was a meal saturated in history and meaning, as it was a celebration of the passing over of God's judgement when death was required.[62] Jesus approached the meal by serving his disciples and washing their feet to demonstrate a cleansing they would later understand with greater clarity.[63] Washing feet was an intentional act that held deeper spiritual meaning than mere cleanliness.[64] He did not wash their feet when they arrived; instead, he did so during the meal, symbolically teaching the disciples what it meant to show humble and servant-like love.[65] He knew that the hour of his death was at hand (Luke 13:1). In serving his disciples at this moment, he showed what it means to love his people until the end. Likewise, as Christians face death and dying, they ought to model serving one another until the very end. Jesus reiterates in John 13:34–35: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." He calls his followers to follow his lead in loving and serving one another. His death preparation models both attributes in his living and in his dying.

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[62] Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 193–94.

[63] Mounce, *Luke*, 547.

[64] Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*, 192–93, 203–6. Bauckham offers a useful description of the role of foot washing in antiquity as well as the history and practice of foot washing.

[65] Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 544.

Sending the Holy Spirit

John 14 to 16 continues the theme of Jesus preparing his disciples for his death. He offers his disciples insight into their union with him; he makes his followers aware of the way they will be treated; he demonstrates to them the importance of love and endurance; and he promises them the Holy Spirit. Jesus promises that while he is going where they cannot come, he is leaving them the Spirit, the Comforter, who will guide the people of God. In Jesus's high priestly prayer, Christians can hear the comforting words of Jesus and can trust the Comforter sent to guide them through their own death preparation, knowing that they are the possessors of eternal life.

Jesus Died

A Johannine theology of death would be incomplete without an assessment of the central element of the theology, the crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus suffered greatly and demonstrated that he could identify with sufferers. John Swinton writes,

> The life and experiences of Jesus would indicate strongly that living life abundantly does not immunize us from the pain, suffering, loneliness, and desolation that accompanies death. But such a way of living *does* enable us to integrate death within a narrative of hope that offers the process of death and dying a radically different framework and meaning from those of our normal expectations.[66]

Jesus was faithful to the point of the cross, where he died as the sacrificial Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world. Jesus identified with sufferers, served as their exemplar in the face of death, and died in the place of sinners.

Facing Death through Crucifixion

In John 18, Jesus stands before the high priest and Pilate (John 18:19–23, 28–40). John gives the reader insight into the way Jesus is approaching his own death. John omits the scene found in Gethsemane that is included in Matthew, Mark, and Luke,

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[66] John Swinton and Richard Payne, eds., *Living Well and Dying Faithfully: Christian Practices for End-of-Life Care* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 7 (italics original).

showing a remarkably calm Jesus as he faces his death.[67] John depicts the Son of God obediently going to his death, faithful to the plan of the Father. He obeys the Father's will, setting an example for Christians wanting to follow Jesus.[68]

Some scholars argue that a Johannine theology of the cross is uniquely void of atonement language when compared to the Pauline tradition or the Synoptic Gospels.[69] However, John's Gospel focuses on Jesus's death in light of his messianic ministry, as the One who comes to deliver God's people from death to eternal life. This is not a contradictory, but complementary, theology of death.

In John 19, John tells of Jesus's crucifixion, a death that was as cruel as the society knew.[70] He was then buried, and in John 20, the reader learns of the resurrection of the Son. Jesus is no longer dead. Moloney writes, "Not only is the tomb empty but the trappings of death are also empty. Lazarus was raised from the dead but he came forth bearing the clothing of death. The risen Jesus has no such trappings."[71]

Jesus rose from the dead to serve as King over his people. Matthew Levering writes, "Christ acts as King of his holy people Israel not by this-worldly power but by the

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[67] Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 673. Morris points out that the emotions surrounding individuals in John's Gospel are excluded, and "John concentrates rather on the facts." It is important not to miss what John is doing in his Gospel. He is portraying Jesus as the faithful Messiah who stands in the place of God's people as their sacrificial lamb who takes away their sins. Jesus is presented as following his Father's will, highlighting the Son's devotion to the Father rather than his emotional nature.

[68] Even in his passion, Christ serves as an exemplar, not just as a victor or substitute. There is a need within Christian scholarship to reclaim the significance of Christ's example in death preparation as a model for dying well. While there are aspects to Jesus's death that are not meant to be perceived as replicable for Christians, such as his substitutionary atonement, this chapter demonstrates how Jesus faced death and dying in ways that Christians can model.

[69] Van der Watt, *An Introduction to the Johannine Gospel and Letters*, 56–57. Van der Watt points out how the fourth Gospel is written amid conflict between "Johannine Christians and the disciples of Moses" and that John does not shy away from atonement and blood language in 1 John. While Johannine Epistles are not primary focus of this thesis, the Johannine literature bears witness to the notion that a Johannine theology of atonement is not contradictory to a Pauline or Synoptic Gospel theology of the atonement; rather, they highlight different emphases. See also 1 John 4:10, where Jesus's death is seen as a propitiation.

[70] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 610. Carson describes the brutality of the cross in further detail.

[71] Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 520.

power of his cruciform love, enacted on the cross."[72] He has reconciled God and humanity through his death on the cross and his resurrection victory over death. In his resurrection, Jesus demonstrates that he is the only king worthy to follow.

Conclusion

The Gospel of John shows Jesus as the Messiah, bringing eternal life to God's people and saving them from eternal death. John's Gospel also shows Jesus as the exemplar of how to approach death and dying by centering death within an eternal perspective and refocusing hope in eternal life. Jesus symbolically calls himself the living water, the bread of life, and the giver of life. He demonstrates his resurrection power by healing the official's son and resurrecting his close friend Lazarus. In these passages, Jesus says that to seek signs and wonders apart from faith or to wail in an emotional and ingenuine manner is to grieve inappropriately. Rather, intentional grieving that acknowledges sin's damage and penalty while seeking to honor loved ones and obey the Father's will are acknowledged as part of the death and dying process.

The last two sections of this chapter point toward Jesus's own preparation for death. For several chapters, John displays different ways in which Jesus intentionally prepares for death, rather than being passive in his approach. Jesus prepares his body through the anointing of Mary, encourages his disciples, and promises to send the Holy Spirit, the Comforter for the church. In his death on the cross, Jesus is the Lamb who bears the sins of the world and dies for his people. Finally, Jesus is seen as the resurrected One whom Christians follow to eternal life. In every step, Jesus models an approach to death and dying that focuses on an eternal perspective, enabling Christians to follow his example and place their hope in his resurrection and promise of eternal life.

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[72] Matthew Levering, *Jesus and the Demise of Death: Resurrection, Afterlife, and the Fate of the Christian* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), 25.

CHAPTER 3

A THEOLOGY OF DEATH ACCORDING TO THE BOOK OF REVELATION

This chapter will establish how the Book of Revelation offers key insights into a Johannine theology of death. John depicts Jesus as the champion over death, bringing assurance to those in his eternal kingdom. This chapter continues the expositional assessment of Johannine literature to demonstrate that, like the Gospel of John, the Book of Revelation addresses how to think about death and dying. John spends significant time addressing death and dying in the Book of Revelation—from discussing suffering leading to death, to the churches who have conquered death, to the death of death itself. Throughout the book, John emphasizes that death does not have the final word for God's people but gives way to eternal life where Christians will find their ultimate hope.

Revelation's emphasis is not merely escaping this present world. Instead, the apocalyptic vision culminates in the coming of a new world. John's imagery and language around death and the new creation shape his focus on comforting suffering Christians.[1] John writes to remind them of their certain victory and life in a place where death would cease to reign. John uses a high Christology and the language of conquering to point to God's sovereignty because John understood that suffering people need to know the chaos around them would not ultimately defeat them and that hope can only be found in knowing that God is in control.[2]

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[1] John writes to an audience that is suffering. See Dennis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001), 16–19; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 10–11. Also, see 1 John 2:18–25, as John encourages the church to be faithful in the midst of antichrists, for the church's promise of eternal life is sure.

[2] Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Joy of Hearing: A Theology of the Book of Revelation*, NTT (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 67. Schreiner points out how questions about God's sovereignty and

John writes to Christians who were suffering at the hands of people in their community as well as facing the impacts of sin and death within the church.[3] He continues themes from the Gospel of John, offering insight on how Christians can die well. The Johannine theology of death addresses questions around the finality of death for Christians and non-Christians by reframing sin, suffering, and death within an eternal perspective, placing an emphasis on resurrected hope in eternal life. In the Book of Revelation, death is real and present, death comes for God's faithful, and death has been defeated in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Revelation displays the disposition of those experiencing death and dying and demonstrates that, as they face death, their endurance is rooted in the finished work of Jesus.[4]

The Book of Revelation is a comfort to suffering Christians and provides critical insight into how the early church faced the inevitability of death and dying. Revelation gives Christians a Holy Spirit inspired word on how the church should face questions of death and dying, as the subject of death features heavily throughout its

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suffering are highlighted by the reality that God is in control and victorious even when it looks like chaos abounds. Suffering people do not need to be kept from a sovereign God amid suffering. They need to know that their God has power over sin, suffering, and death.

[3] See Thad Lee Key, "Preaching the Seven Churches of Revelation 2–3" (DMin thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016). Key points out that the Book of Revelation is written to churches, demonstrating that the recipients of Scripture were facing the real-life situations of death and dying. The churches needed to be addressed and corrected. The Book of Revelation is not less than the story of Christ's defeat over Satan and death; it is more in that it provides Christians with a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* in which they can implement in their own death and dying processes. While John writes the book to suffering Christians, he spends substantial time speaking to Christians facing death for their faithfulness. It is important to note that the Isaianac vision which is inferred in Revelation 21 (cf. Isaiah 65) singles out how all suffering, sin, and death will be done away with in the new creation. Not only will murder, martyrdom, and oppression have no place in eternal life, but the presence of death itself will be defeated. See also Timothy Paul Jones, "'Something Divine Mingled among Them': Care for the Parentless and the Poor as Ecclesial Apologetic in the Second Century," in *Rich in Good Deeds: A Biblical Response to Poverty by the Church and by Society*, ed. Robert L. Plummer (Dallas: Fontes Press, 2022), 157–74. See particularly 168–71, where Jones argues that the early church apologetic of the *Epistle to Diognetus* offers the second-century church an apologetic which saw "care for the poor as preparation for martyrdom." There, the author of the epistle argued, "These things do not look like human works; they are the power of God, they are the proofs [δειγματα] of his presence [παρουσιας]" (*Diogn.* 7:9)" (169). Dying well involved living faithfully, whether Christians would face death through martyrdom or other causes.

[4] Schreiner, *The Joy of Hearing*, 115. Schreiner notes that Revelation 1:5 is best translated "freed," highlighting that even though God call's his people to endure when facing death and dying, the root of their hope is in the finished work of Jesus.

pages.[5] Leonard L. Thompson writes,

> In Revelation John is preoccupied with the death of both Christ and Christians. From the epistolary greeting to the final vision of Christ on a white horse, Christ's death is highlighted: his place among dead bodies (πρωτότοκος των νεκρών) as a corpse (νεκρός) (1:5, 18; 2:8); his presentation in heaven as a slain lamb (ἀρνίον ἑστηκός ὡς ἐσφαγμένον, 5:6); and the value of his blood when he died (1:5; 5:9,12; 7:14; 12:11; 19:13). Christians are urged to be faithful unto death (2:10; 12:11), like Antipas of Pergamum (2:13). Blood must flow, whether that of prophets (11:7–8; 16:6), saints (18:24), or servants (16:6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2), for a great tribulation is soon to come (7:13). Non-Christians do not escape John's scenes of gore and slaughter: The four horsemen slaughter indiscriminately (6:1–8), and at the great supper of God, birds gorge themselves on the flesh of kings and others (19:17–18).[6]

The Book of Revelation focuses on the core of the Christian's hope: the Savior who died and has now risen from the dead. Likewise, John emphasizes new life and a coming kingdom where God's people are victorious over their enemies, including death.

To face death, John's audience need to know how to rightly grieve and prepare for inevitable physical death in light of their certain hope. This chapter will exposit pericopes from Revelation 1, 5, 12, and 19–22 to address key themes in a Johannine theology of death: Jesus as the champion over death (Rev 1), the example and witness of those who face death as conquerors (Rev 5), the woman and the dragon as a picture of the battle of death (Rev 12), and finally, the new creation vision of Revelation 19–22, which provides comfort in the face of death and dying.

Jesus: Champion over Death

John addresses the fear of and attitude toward death and dying by displaying Jesus as the victor over death in the messianic war for an eternal kingdom.[7] Through the

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[5] Given that Revelation is written to dying Christians about the victory of Jesus over sin, suffering, and death, the book has an *Ars Moriendi* focus. In essence, any *Ars Moriendi* discussion is a question about how to live faithfully. John writes so Christians would be encouraged, remain faithful, and remember their victory over death through the death of Jesus.

[6] Leonard L. Thompson, "Lamentation for Christ as a Hero: Revelation 1:7," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119, no. 4 (2000): 691.

[7] Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation,* NTT (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 67–70. Bauckham points out how one of the major themes of Revelation is the messianic war in which Jesus ultimately brings the death of death.

work of Jesus the Messiah, death begins to unravel and die. Thompson argues that John acknowledges the human need to have an answer for the presence of death and utilizes the cultic hero theme of being a champion over death: "John managed the problem of death, in part, by portraying Christ as a hero with a human past."[8] Throughout the myths of the Ancient Near East and Greco-Roman cultures, it would not be uncommon to find the portrayal of heroes seeking to conquer death. John recognizes these myths but demonstrates that, from Genesis 3 to Christ's coming, the Bible assures the Christian that the defeater of death, the death hero, has finally come in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is champion over death, ensuring that death would not gain final victory over the church.[9] Such good news reshapes the way one approaches death and dying, instilling confidence in living and dying in obedience to Christ.

Firstborn of the Dead and Key Holder

In the opening words of the Book of Revelation, John writes that Jesus is the firstborn of the dead and the ruler of kings on earth (Rev 1:5). The kingdom theology that speaks of eternal life reminds the audience that Jesus is the firstborn of the new creation and serves as its king. Likewise, John encourages Christians that they have been reborn as new creatures as they follow Jesus, the firstborn of the dead. They have been united to him in his death and resurrection. For example, writing to the church at Smyrna, John directly addresses their fears with reassurance. He reminds them of Jesus's death and encourages them to be faithful unto their death; their conquering through Christ will save them from the second death (Rev 2).

A theology of death must see that part of living well includes dying well.[10]

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[8] Thompson, "Lamentation for Christ as a Hero, 693.

[9] See 1 John 5:4 where those with faith have overcome the world.

[10] See Virginia Morris, *Talking about Death* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2004), 251–57, for discussion on *ars vivendi*. Morris points out how the "brilliance in the shadow of death" is that dying well helps people live well.

John encourages the churches' suffering members to be faithful amidst their suffering, even unto death, because their ability to die well demonstrates a life lived in faithful obedience. James Hamilton writes, "In order to be faithful unto death, the knowledge of Jesus must be bigger to us than the reality of death itself. Jesus is the First and the Last, the Conqueror over death, the Giver of the crown of life to those who are faithful unto death."[11]

What brings assurance to people as they face death and dying? What allows them to persevere despite expected suffering, death, and dying? John points to the fact that Jesus holds the keys to death and Hades. The gates of death and Hades are not guarded with the sole purpose of keeping those within in torment. Jesus holds the keys in order to set his people free from eternal judgment. He seeks to release people *from* eternal death; he does not keep them *in* death.[12] Thompson points to 1:17–18, writing, "By claiming authority over death and Hades, Christ joins a group of superhumans who are said to watch over the underworld."[13] This imagery would have been clear to the audience. Jesus stands as a king with authority. He died but now he lives, and death does not have dominion over him.[14] Therefore, death and Hades no longer hold power over Christians, as the keyholder's victory has set them free. Christians can hold an eternal perspective and die well because their blessed hope in eternal life is secure. Death has been conquered for them.[15]

John's Christology also considers Jesus's suffering. Jesus "has everything to do with death, the grave, and Hades, and it is his continued affiliation with death and

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[11] James M. Hamilton Jr., *Revelation: The Spirit Speaks to the Churches*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 74

[12] Thompson, "Lamentation for Christ as a Hero," 703. See also Osborne, *Revelation*, 96.

[13] Thompson, "Lamentation for Christ as a Hero," 695.

[14] Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb*, 61.

[15] Osborne, *Revelation*, 94.

funerary ritual that makes the Christology in John distinctive."[16] Thompson argues that instead of highlighting a glorified body of the Son, "John emphasizes Christ's appearance as a slain victim, and for that he is honored and remembered," which demonstrates that Jesus identifies as the suffering one.[17] Jesus knows and identifies with their pain. This distinctive Johannine Christology highlights Jesus's sufferings, showing that even in his glorification, Jesus identifies with sufferers. He is described as the one who was slain, the worthy Lamb, and one who aligns with and is counted among those suffering.

Jesus is deeply invested in the way that John's audience approaches death and dying because his messianic mission sought out and accomplished the defeat of sin, suffering, and death. The whole Book of Revelation is an *Ars Moriendi* in that John is offering the victory of Christ over death and encouraging the church to live in this reality. A Johannine theology of death is not isolated to doctrinal belief; it should be lived out among the churches.

The Lamb of God: Jesus, the Sacrificed One

In Revelation, John continues to portray Jesus as the Lamb of God who was slain. The lamb is a symbol of sacrifice.[18] Identifying Jesus using the imagery of the lamb prevents God's people from detaching Jesus from the reality of his sacrificial death. Any approach to death and dying would be deficient if it focused on his identity as the victorious lion and ceased to draw upon the example of their once dead and now risen Messiah. This is why John continually calls Christians to be conquerors as they find victory in Jesus. Jesus is the living sacrifice, which is a seeming paradox because

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[16] Thompson, "Lamentation for Christ as a Hero," 700.

[17] Thompson, "Lamentation for Christ as a Hero," 700–701.

[18] Thompson, "Lamentation for Christ as a Hero," 699. Hamilton argues, "Once John saw these visions, he thought about them and carefully chose the language he would use to describe the things he saw. Not only did he carefully choose his language, he chose which details he would include in his descriptions." Hamilton, *Revelation*, 131.

sacrifices are not living but dying.[19] Likewise, God's people are called to follow in faithfulness, to be living sacrifices as their Lamb was before them. They are to have no fear over the second death—eternal death—as their salvation necessarily comes through the first death.

In Revelation 5:1–4, John describes a scroll sealed with seven seals, and "a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?'" (Rev 5:2). When no champion is worthy to open the scroll, John laments.[20] In Revelation 5:5, however, an elder says to John, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." The Lion of Judah symbolizes the power and effective work of Jesus Christ. In the next verse, John presents Jesus as "a Lamb, as though it had been slain" (Rev 5:6). John is pointing the audience to the source of that power: the champion over death is the Lamb that was slain. In verses 9 and 10, John writes the hymn of those who worship the lamb, tying the language of the Lamb directly to the sacrificial life and death of Jesus for his people and their salvation.[21]

In the heavenly places, Jesus is worshiped for conquering the enemies of God's people and defeating death. This worthiness is more about sufficiency than morality and more about authority than virtue.[22] Jesus is worthy because his victory over death was sufficient. Jesus now has authority over death and can open the scroll and preside over its names and judgements.

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[19] Hamilton, *Revelation*, 155.

[20] Craig S. Keener, *Revelation*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 186.

[21] Keener, *Revelation*, 189.

[22] Keener, *Revelation*, 251. See also Hamilton, 136–37. The idea of worthiness being tied to moral virtue is also argued by Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 129.

Those Who Conquer in Christ

As Thompson noted, Revelation's theology of death must take into account that John spent a substantial amount of effort talking about those who face death as conquerors through Jesus Christ.[23] John opens the book by speaking to the churches in which death is a real threat. As the seven seals are opened, the fifth seal, described in Revelation 6:9–11, causes those who have been martyred for the Lamb to cry out with a lament familiar to that of the Old Testament authors. It is a cry for vindication.[24] It is a cry for divine justice.[25] Verse 11 says the martyrs are given white robes and called to be patient until God's providential time of completion. This demonstrates historical continuity with God's people who have witnessed and cried out against oppression, showing that Jesus does not dismiss their cries of injustice. He does not take lightly the sin, suffering, and death that affect his people, and he will deliver them. The white robes signify God's heavenly blessing and victory and are a visual image of the Lamb's recognition of their cry for vindication. The Lamb points them to the eternal life they will be granted when the time he has appointed has been completed.[26]

The trumpets that ensue show that God will enact judgement upon a sinful world. John's intent is to make clear that divine judgment is coming.[27] Those who belonged to the Lamb would be sealed and covered by the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:9–17). The two witnesses in Revelation 11 reiterate the promise that the Lamb will ensure vindication and justice for his people. Johnson writes that the "measuring of the sanctuary

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[23] Thompson, "Lamentation for Christ as a Hero, 691.

[24] Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 148.

[25] Osborne, *Revelation*, 286.

[26] Osborne, *Revelation*, 288; Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb*, 126.

[27] Modern readers may be tempted to connect news clippings to the trumpet passages; however, John's intent was to warn the churches of his time (and future generations) that the timing of God's judgement has already been set in motion. See Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb*, 143.

(11:1) and the invincibility of the two witnesses until their task is done (11:5) reaffirm the promise of Revelation 7: God will let nothing separate his people from his love."[28]

John then transitions from addressing the churches to his apocalyptic vision that addresses the church at large. Revelation's narrative is a schema for Jesus's people; they don their robes of blessing, sealed in the blood of the Lamb, knowing that they wait with hope. They can die with dignity and honor because of their faithfulness. While people desire to root "dying with dignity" in many different philosophies, the Johannine literature roots the dignity of a Christian's death in their conquering King Jesus.[29] Grief is complex and not as linear as once thought. God's people would be comforted amidst grief and suffering in a way that only hope in the resurrection could bring. David Elliot points out, "From a Christian perspective, such prayers of reliance do what needs doing with a greater spiritual richness and psychological rawness than Kübler-Rossian stages of grief."[30]

The cry of the martyrs was heard, but still, they must wait. Death would die, but still, they would have to wait. Imparting this knowledge to the church was not only to inform them of future events; it was to shape how they behaved as Christians in the present and how they lived and how they died. Commenting on John's address to the church at Smyrna in Revelation 2:8–11, James Hamilton writes, "We need to understand what it is that keeps people faithful unto death, so that we can live and die well ourselves."[31] Those suffering should be comforted and steadfast in their faith, knowing

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[28] Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb*, 165.

[29] For a helpful discussion on the role of death and dying as it pertains to dying with dignity, see Morris, *Talking about Death*, 90–92. Morris correctly points out that death itself is not a dignifying process, at least in the ways often romanticized. However, dignity is something derived internally; it is a descriptor of the kind of person one is and what they were like. From a distinctively Christian perspective, this dignity is rooted in being image bearers and conquerors through Christ.

[30] David Elliot, "The Theological Virtue of Hope and the Art of Dying," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 29, no. 3 (2016): 307.

[31] Hamilton, *Revelation*, 74

that their Creator God has defeated death and will be there for them.[32] John writes to encourage the church at large to live well and die distinctly as Christians, being assured of their hope in the Lamb's victory over death.

The Woman and the Dragon (Revelation 12)

Revelation 12 is an important point within the apocalypse. John is writing to a Greek and Jewish audience familiar with heroic stories of deliverance. This vision of the woman and the dragon and the subsequent defeat of the dragon echoes stories that the audience would have recognized.[33] Genesis 3:15 had foretold that a serpent would strike the heel of God's victor before having its head crushed. Jesus, who has already been declared victor over death and Hades, is here depicted as the one who escaped the throes of defeat. In his bid to reign supreme over the woman and her offspring, the dragon (Satan) has waged war against the Anointed One. The dragon plans the defeat of the Messiah. However, as Johnson notes, the dragon's plans are twice unsuccessful, and he turns to "wage war" against those who have faith in Jesus.[34] The woman flees into the wilderness where God has prepared a place for her (Rev 12:6). While some have argued that the woman represents Mary, the most accurate understanding sees the woman as symbolic of both Mary *and* God's covenant community in the Old and New

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[32] See chapter 5 for more on a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* apologetic. Christians who face death and dying are often faced with the reality of whether to persevere or to flee from their faith. The comfort offered in a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* is transformative as an apologetic and a disposition that offers reassurance for keeping one's faith. See also Jones, "Something Divine Mingled among Them," 162n12. Jones addresses second-century apologists to show how apologies in early church history "may have been intended less to convert the unconverted and more to create a strong group identity among Christians."

[33] Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Apocalypse*, New Testament Message, vol. 22 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1979), 85–87. See also Keener, *Revelation*, 316. The cosmic battle is a theme the audience would have known from stories, such as the dragon who sought to prevent Apollo, son of Zeus by Leto, from coming to power. In addition to the cosmic battle etched into the mythology of the ancient Greek and Hellenistic world, the stories harken back to the exodus as stories of deliverance from evil powers. For connections between the woman fleeing and the exodus narrative, see G. K. Beale with David H. Campbell, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2015), 248. See also Keener, *Revelation*, 318–20.

[34] Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb*, 186. Quoting from Revelation 12:17, Johnson demonstrates the importance of the Dragon's continual waging of war against the Woman's offspring in his effort to destroy the people who follow the Messiah.

Testaments.[35] One supporting reason for this understanding is that the woman's pain, torment, and suffering are consistent with the suffering that the persecuted Christians endure in the Book of Revelation.[36]

The story of the woman and the dragon also broadly symbolizes God's provision for his people amidst the rage of war. This is the testimony of God's people throughout the ages and is the case for the persecuted churches of Revelation and those who are called to be faithful (Rev 12:11). Satan rages, but God is present and provides for his people. Keener notes, "The saints here continue to overcome the devil as they overcome the world—by faithfully testifying of Christ's victory even to the point of death (12:11)."[37]

God's people can persevere because of their belief in the testimony of God and the blood, that is, the Lamb's victory over death. The woman is spared from the throes of the dragon because the dragon was not able to defeat the Anointed One (cf. 1 John 3:8). Yet though she was spared, the woman does not see the immediate defeat of the dragon. Instead, she is brought into the wilderness, which is symbolized by wandering and daily reliance on and trust in God's provision.[38] Even among her wilderness wandering, God cares for the woman and has prepared a place for her.

Verses 7–17 depict the defeat of the dragon. G. K. Beale and David Campbell state, "At the cross it appeared that the devil finally had succeeded, but the resurrection snatched Jesus out from under the power of death wielded by the serpent."[39] Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection have won victory for God's people. The blood of the Lamb

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[35] Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb*, 179–82. Given the symbolic nature of apocalyptic literature, the connections to both are applicable.

[36] Beale and Campbell, *Revelation*, 244.

[37] Keener, *Revelation*, 322.

[38] Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb*, 185.

[39] Beale and Campbell, *Revelation*, 247.

declares defeat over the dragon's attempt to reign supreme. In the next section, a review of the last four chapters of Revelation demonstrate how a Johannine theology of death centers the discussion of death and dying within an eternal perspective and roots hope in resurrected new life.

Death Will Die: A Look at New Creation

In Revelation 19–22, John provides a vision of what the new creation will look like for Christians. Revelation 18 portrays the fall of Babylon and demonstrates that death is coming for those who are not found in Christ. Those who have opposed God and tried to destroy God's people will face their end when the Anointed One passes judgement.[40] In a recapitulation of Genesis 3, John shows that the war has been raging since the garden of Eden. Those who seek to kill and destroy God's people will come under the judgment of the seed of the woman, the Lamb who has conquered death.

Revelation 19: Enemies Defeated

In Revelation 19, the vision gives way to rejoicing and crying out in praise, as God has judged their enemies and victory has been won. As he nears the conclusion of the book, John begins to focus on the new creation, which provides final comfort in the face of death and dying. To the people of God who have experienced bloodshed and terrible suffering at the hands of their oppressors, John presents a Messiah who is a warrior and king. In a picture of victory, they offer praise to the appearance of the Word of God on the white horse.[41] God's people have overcome their enemies and sin, suffering, and death and would now be able to live in peace.

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[40] See Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 338. Mounce points out how John poetically describes the fall of Rome, which is representative of the enemies of God and the oppressor of God's people. This judgement impacts not only the rulers, but the very economic system and culture built by Rome (338). See also Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb*, 255–57.

[41] Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb*, 272. The use of the title the Word of God harkens back to the Gospel of John 1:1–14. See also Osborne, *Revelation*, 683.

The Book of Revelation readily shows God's people that a Johannine theology of death often takes Christians *through* trials, not around them. Throughout the book, God's people have suffered while ultimate peace was promised in God's own time. Revelation is a book covered in blood—from the blood of the martyrs to the blood of the Lamb to the blood of those defeated by the Warrior-Messiah. John has described Jesus in many ways—the Messiah, the keyholder to the gates of death and Hades, the Lamb, the Anointed One, the Alpha and Omega, and now, the Warrior-Messiah who arrives at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. His presence comforts God's people and reveals that peace is ready to prevail.[42] The Marriage Supper of the Lamb shows us that Jesus is faithful in providing for his bride, the church.

Now John repeats another title he used to describe Jesus, referring to him as the King of kings and Lord of lords (cf. Rev 17:14). Osborne reminds us that in a Roman context, "It is not Caesar but Christ who is sovereign over all other earthly rulers."[43] The early church knew well that social, economic, and political life is in part a reflection of who reigns as king. As Jesus has no equal and is the King and Lord, when he arrives for his bride, all the enemies of God's people fall, including death.

In Revelation 19:20, the beast and the false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire.[44] This judgment will be replicated for Satan and "the faithless" (Rev 20:10, 15; 21:8). This judgement is not temporal but eternal. This would have been crucial for the people of God who knew their suffering to be great, for they looked forward to a kingdom where peace and righteousness would rule as promised in the Davidic

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[42] Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 350–56.

[43] Osborne, *Revelation*, 686.

[44] Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 359. Mounce points out that Gehenna was a valley south and west of Jerusalem that John refers to as the fiery lake. The emphasis here is that judgment is actual and severe. See also Osborne, *Revelation*, 690; Jonathan Lusthaus, "A History of Hell: The Jewish Origins of the Idea of Gehenna in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark," *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion* 21, no. 2 (2008): 175–76, 185. Lusthaus argues that, while the origins of Gehenna likely carry over the influences from Greek, Egyptian, and other sources, the idea of eternal punishment likely originates within the Jewish tradition.

Covenant. Jesus Messiah ushered in the messianic reign promised to God's people in an already/not yet reality that endures forever.

Revelation 20: Resurrection and Death

As John moves into Revelation 20, the reader finds one of the most hotly debated portions of the Book of Revelation: the millennium. The thousand-year reign of Christ is portrayed as a period when Satan is bound from deceiving the nations (Rev 20:1–4). What is most relevant to this thesis is the fact that Jesus is victorious over Satan, who will not be able to thwart God's plan to save his people. The nations cannot be deceived as Satan is bound because Jesus stands as a risen Savior.[45]

As John describes the victorious scene, he depicts the souls "of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus" who have now come to life to reign with Christ (Rev 20:4–5). It is important to note that John uses language that continually identifies Jesus with the suffering of God's people and continually identifies God's people with their suffering. The victorious souls who are seen with Christ are those who were beheaded for their faithfulness. John writes that they have participated in the first resurrection and, therefore, the second death has no power over them (Rev 20:5–6). Likewise, the church should heed the instruction to be faithful unto death.[46]

The second death is a crucial element of a Johannine theology of death because it speaks to the finality of death. The second death is eternal death.[47] The second death in Revelation 20:6 is defined in 20:14 and 21:8 as being characterized by sharing in the eternal state of those thrown in the lake of fire.[48] Death and Hades join this eternal state

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[45] See Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb*, 278–96. Johnson offers a helpful overview of different millennial views on what is meant by the binding of Satan.

[46] See also 1 John 2:3, where John argues that Christians know they know God when they keep his commandments.

[47] Osborne, *Revelation*, 709.

[48] Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 370.

as well.[49] All will participate in the first death, but Jesus, who holds the keys of death and Hades, spares those who believe in him from the second death. It may seem that death is the victor, but this is a temporal victory; the reader must note that the defeat of death comes in the context of new creation. Thomas Schreiner argues that "death and Hades cannot claim final victory since they are part of the old creation that will be quashed and removed from the realm of the new creation on the basis of Jesus's death and resurrection."[50]

The second death is eternal and irreversible for those who "bear the beast's brand rather than the Lamb's seal."[51] John encourages the Christians to remain faithful to their King, who has already won the victory over death.[52] He warns the faithless to repent and turn away from following the enemies of God and follow the Anointed One and the testimony of his Word. This is the same message of John's Gospel: it is a consistent plea to believe in Jesus for eternal life.

The Johannine theology of death contrasts with more popular ways to view death. Some spiritual traditions have perceived death as something to befriend or as a companion in this life.[53] John, however, reminds his audience that *death will die*.[54] Philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff, who experienced the death of one of his children,

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[49] Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 377–78.

[50] Schreiner, *The Joy of Hearing*, 121. Schreiner shows how Revelation 1:17–18 and Revelation 20:14 mirror Jesus's victory over death.

[51] Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb*, 299. As earlier noted, most modern definitions of death consider death irreversible. This thesis argues that we must approach death from predominately a theological lens, which assumes the supernatural is possible. If the first death is categorically defined as being irreversible, the supernatural is presumed to be impossible, and even Jesus could not have been raised from the dead—merely resuscitated. However, the second death is indeed by Scripture's own terms is irreversible, for it is the time appointed by God in which eternal fates are sealed.

[52] See 1 John 2:13.

[53] Judith L. Lief, *Making Friends with Death: A Buddhist Guide to Encountering Mortality* (Boston: Shambhala Productions, 2001). Buddhism will be visited next chapter in more depth to show how a Buddhist *Ars Moriendi* contrasts with the idea of death as an enemy in the Johannine literature.

[54] Amy Plantinga Pauw, "Dying Well," in *Living Well and Dying Faithfully: Christian Practices for End-of-Life Care*, ed. John Swinton and Richard Payne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 24.

once pointed out, “When the writer of Revelation spoke of the coming day of shalom, he did not say that on that day we would live at peace with death.” Wolterstorff continues, saying John’s instruction reiterates that “on that day ‘There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’”[55] Wolterstorff knew that the Christian hope of resurrection is based the promise of the death of death.

Wolterstorff picks up on the longing of God’s people to live and exist apart from the pains of death. John is not only addressing death as a result of oppression from foreign governments or suffering at the hands of those who would seek to kill and destroy the church. Rather, a Johannine theology of death harkens back to the introduction of the curse of sin, which led to death in the first place. This is clear because the visions of the new creation in the Old Covenant point to the death of death as tears are wiped away and pain ceases. Death for the people of God has always been an enemy, not a friend.

George Eldon Ladd writes, “The death of Christ on the cross was a victory over the enemies of God’s people. . . . The great enemies of God’s people are Satan, sin, and death. Satan will not be finally destroyed until he is cast into the lake of fire after the return of Christ; but by his incarnation, death, and resurrection, Christ has already defeated the powers of Satan.”[56] Whether through the sword, chronic illness, irreversible injury, or any other form of suffering, John assures God’s people that one day, it will be different. Jesus’s victory over death did not dismiss their current reality. Rather, their ability to hope with an eternal perspective was rooted in being united to the Messiah who would deliver them from the second death.

The Johannine theology of death is one of accountability. All those who have died will be raised. All will pass through the first death, but only some will pass through

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[55] Nicholas Wolsterhoff, *Lament for a Son* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 38–41, 63, quoted in Pauw, “Dying Well,” 24.

[56] George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1972), 84.

the second death. John encourages Christians that those for whom Jesus has died are found in the book of life—their fate is secured. Those raised from the first death who are not found in the book of life receive the second death—eternal death.[57] The future resurrection of the dead is a New Testament truth that remains an important part of Christian theology. This belief in resurrection of the living and the dead is crucial to the Book of Revelation in particular because Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of David for whom the eternal kingdom was promised, and the eternal kingdom he brings is one in which death no longer bares its teeth against God's people.

Revelation 21–22: New Creation, Eternal Life

The whole Bible points to the new creation ushered in by Jesus Christ.[58] In a homily on death and dying, the English Reformer Thomas Cranmer reflected on the responsibility of Christians in death and dying and pointed people toward what was everlasting, not temporary. David W. Atkinson notes that Cranmer does not recognize the notion of purgatory; rather, "the condition of man's soul on the day of death determines the future of his soul."[59] Cranmer was correct on two points: he noted that the condition of the soul on the day of death determines the future because (1) Jesus has secured them and (2) because the Book of Revelation makes clear the juxtaposition of the faithful and the faithless.

First, Jesus will not lose any of those whose names are written in the book of life. Their fate is as secured as the resurrection of Jesus. By virtue of his death and resurrection, Jesus stands in victory over death, as do those who believe in him. Jesus is

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[57] Osborne, *Revelation*, 722. Osborne points out how the book of Daniel in the Old Testament refers to "the book of life" in Daniel 12, which John picks up on here.

[58] Osborne, *Revelation*, 726.

[59] David W. Atkinson, "Thomas Cranmer's 'An Exhortacion against the Feare of Death' and the Tradition of the Ars Moriendi," *Christianity and Literature* 27, no. 1 (Fall 1977): 25.

sovereign over salvation and death. Second, while the Bible is clear that one is not saved by works, there is a tension worked out in Revelation that the souls of the faithful will remain faithful to the end—what is commonly called the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.[60] The temporal gives ways to the eternal; this is promised to the secured soul on their dying day because of the doctrine of the new creation.

As Revelation 21 begins, the Isaianac vision becomes clearer, indicating how through his defeat of sin and death, Jesus fulfills the longing of God's people from of old.[61] In verse 4, John recognizes the emotional toil of God's people, writing, "He [Jesus] will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more." John is not making a generic statement about the existence of tears in the new creation, for tears are produced by different emotions, from happiness to fear or shock. John indicates that Jesus will wipe away every tear as a sign that all sadness and suffering will cease for those who belong to him.

The Book of Revelation opens with theological truths steeped in a high Christology, laying the groundwork for the death-conqueror Jesus Christ. The book quickly transitions into addressing the churches, giving encouragement and rebuke. One cannot overlook John's pastoral tone; he recognizes that suffering people need hope.[62] The curse of death is not less than the cessation of this life, but it is more. The curse of death brought suffering into the world—from pain in childbirth to the groaning of creation in hurricanes, from the development of viruses like COVID-19 and HIV/AIDS, to cancer and cardiac problems. The curse of death has fractured creation, and humanity

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[60] See Ephesians 2:8–10 and Galatians 3:6, among other passages, for a clear presentation of *sola fide*.

[61] Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 379; Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb*, 305; Osborne, *Revelation*, 729.

[62] John self-identifies as a servant and offers pastoral insights living up to his title.

needs saving and healing. In the new creation, Jesus assures Christians that these too will be made right (Rev 21:4–5).

Furthermore, John demonstrates that the blessed new creation will be one of fulfillment, conquering, and enjoyment. For example, John continues the eternal water symbolism from his Gospel by providing the water of life to those who are thirsty (Rev 21:6). John notes that the conquerors from Revelation 21:7 are those who receive the glorious New Jerusalem of Revelation 21:9–27. While Adam and Eve had brought about the curse, all those in the New Jerusalem will experience healing and the absence of death.[63] Before closing the Book of Revelation, John reminds the suffering Christians that even in their present suffering, their sure victory is to come because Jesus is coming soon (Rev 22:7). John's picture of the blessed new creation is held in balance with his pastoral note to remain faithful to the testimony of Jesus because their delivery from death and their only hope rests on the validity of that testimony. The Book of Revelation tells the churches that this testimony is trustworthy and true.

Conclusion

This chapter assessed a Johannine theology of death by expositing pericopes from Revelation 1, 5, 12, and 19–22. These pericopes included key themes that inform a Johannine theology of death, including Jesus as the champion and key holder over death and Hades (Rev 1), the example and witness of those who face death as conquerors (Rev 5), the gospel picture of the woman and the dragon (Rev 12), and finally, the eternal judgment and the new creation described in Revelation 19–22, which provides the final comfort in the face of death and dying.

This chapter acknowledged that the context and historical setting of Revelation's churches and their suffering members helped shape why John centers the

[63] Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb*, 322.

victory of Jesus over death to comfort Christians as they face death and dying. It was vital for John to address the finality of death for Christians and non-Christians and the differing eternal destinies of the faithful and the faithless.

John does not shy away from addressing the suffering that Christians face in this life; in fact, he shows that the suffering people of God often go through much death. John centers the book on an eternal perspective of hope and comfort. Because Jesus has defeated death, as Thompson states, "Even when death seems to have gained the upper hand and you lie in the dust or the city street, its victory will be short-lived."[64]

Finally, this chapter reframed suffering with an eternal perspective, emphasizing the hope of eternal life in the new creation. The Book of Revelation argues for an approach to death, dying, and grieving that reorients the fear of death and dying with an eternal perspective, acknowledges grief and suffering, and shows how Christ, who is champion over death, will one day bring about the death of death.

[64] Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb*, 335.

CHAPTER 4

A JOHANNINE *ARS MORIENDI* AND THE ALTERNATIVES

A Johannine *Ars Moriendi* entails both beliefs and practices. This chapter will consider four distinct alternative contemporary and historical traditions: Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and Stoicism.[1] The beliefs and practices of each toward death and dying will reveal how each tradition defines "a good death." Chapters 2 and 3 provided an expositional approach to exploring a theology of death, using Johannine literature predominantly from the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation. This chapter will move from a theology of death and dying to considering the practices of *dying well*. Those who embrace a performative approach toward death and dying will benefit from understanding how beliefs and practices work together to provide a good death.

Contemporary and historical traditions acknowledge the reality that every human dies on their own. In *Talking about Death*, Virginia Morris points out how a good death is one that is "claimed" or individually realized.[2] Yet, when people die, they do so not only as individuals, but also in the context of their communities. Death and dying cannot be approached passively, presuming that one will die a good death. While death is a biological reality, defining a good death requires more than biology or a naturalistic worldview. Although death is a biological fact, Lynne DeSpelder and Albert Strickland

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[1] As a point of epistemic humility, I note that I am a Christian and not a practitioner of these alternative contemporary and historical traditions outside Christianity. I have chosen scholarly works from people within the respective traditions to represent these traditions fairly.

[2] Virginia Morris, *Talking about Death* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2004), 85–88.

write that "socially shaped ideas and assumptions create [death's] meaning."[3] While there have been considerable efforts to reclaim death and dying from an overly medicalized approach, it is necessary to recognize that attitudes toward death are ultimately shaped by humanity's deepest longings, which can only be answered through philosophy and theology.[4] Leor Halevi writes, "To study death rites and related beliefs about the afterlife is, in some sense, to study religion at its core."[5] David Kraemer notes, "Religions make sense of life by making sense of death. This struggle with the meaning of death is central to the purpose of any religious community, from the mists of antiquity until the present day."[6] Dying well is not a biological question but a spiritual, religious, and philosophical question.

Christians live within the community of the church, and therefore the church will shape and inform their ideas of dying and what it means to die distinctly as Christians. Similarly, other contemporary and historical traditions inform their adherents' understanding of what it means to die a good death. Since the *Ars Moriendi* tradition has always been a combination of practice and belief, this chapter will divide each of the contemporary and historical traditions under these categories. Finally, this chapter will evaluate a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* approach and demonstrate how the application of a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* assists Christians in seeking to die distinctly as Christians.

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[3] Lynne Ann DeSpelder and Albert Lee Strickland, *The Last Dance: Encountering Death and Dying*, 10th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2015), 89. See also chap. 3, particularly the section on "Cultural Viewpoints" (pp. 108–30).

[4] Glennys Howarth, *Death and Dying: A Sociological Introduction* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007), 34–36. Howarth points out how a "good death" at times is perceived in terms of older age because this can be seen as a more acceptable timetable for death and dying. With life expectancy rates higher than in past generations, death and dying need to be re-centered within a theological lens precisely because death attitudes within a culture are often socially shaped and can be misguided when dominated by an overly medicalized approach. Maximization of days alive does not equate with having died a good death.

[5] Leor Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave: Death Rites and the Making of Islamic Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 3.

[6] David Kraemer, *The Meanings of Death in Rabbinic Judaism* (New York: Routledge 2000), 3.

Islamic *Ars Moriendi*

Islam is a monotheistic world religion, founded in the seventh century on revelations experienced by Muhammad, the "Prophet of Islam." Within Islam, there are various traditions and sects, so the intention of this section is to address commonalities with Islam.[7] Muhammad's revelatory experiences and works were collected and constitute the sacred text of Islam known as the Qur'an. Muslims have a ritualistic faith consisting of adherence to the Qur'an, saying prayers, taking pilgrimages, and other practices that identify one as a faithful Muslim. The term "Islam" means "submission to God." When applied to death and dying, for a Muslim to die a good death is to die in submission to Allah.[8]

Islamic Beliefs about Dying Well

An Islamic *Ars Moriendi* is based on one's ability to live and die wholly devoted to Allah, which requires total adherence to the Qur'an. In Islam, the "goal of Muslims is to die in the knowledge that one has submitted to the transcendent reality and has passed the test of this life."[9] Just as being a Muslim requires a disposition of life in total adherence to Islamic teaching, so too do death and dying have a sense of performative spirituality. They are not approached passively but actively, as a way of passing the test of servitude to Allah. Upon dying, Muslims believe they will be united with Allah in the afterlife.[10] The Islamic *Ars Moriendi* is shaped by three themes on death and dying, which are "best understood by seeing the interrelationship of three major

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[7] As an additional point of epistemic humility, within these various traditions, there will be different interpretations. Similar to other traditions, the assumption should not be that every Muslim would interpret every matter the same way.

[8] Gisela Webb, "Death and Dying in Islam: 'This Day Your Sight Is Made Keen,'" in *Death and Dying in World Religions*, ed. Lucy Bregman (Boston: Pearson, 2004), 78 (italics original).

[9] DeSpelder and Strickland, *The Last Dance*, 543.

[10] Webb, "Death and Dying in Islam," 77. The focus for Islamic eschatology is being reunited to Allah in the afterlife.

Qur'anic themes: creation, revelation, and the end time."[11] The following sections explains each of these theological categories that inform a Muslim's approach to death and dying.

Islamic Beliefs about Creation

Islam teaches that Adam and Eve were created in the "naf," or the "soul" of Allah. Although they disobeyed Allah, they are said to have repented; therefore, with the creation account, Islam does not teach a sense of "cosmic or ontological breech, or rupture, in the relationship between man and God, expressed in the doctrine of original sin."[12] In Islam, people are not inherently evil or broken by their sin; rather, they are judged based on their merits and considered, by Allah's mercy, able to live lives of servitude that reflect their creational purpose. Creation is an important concept connected to revelation and eschatology because the creator/creature relationship sets the stage for judgment following death. Allah created humanity and desires to be worshipped, therefore Muslims are not permitted to live and die as they will. Rather, they are called to be in submission to Allah and live and die in accordance with the revelations in the Qur'an.

Islamic Beliefs about Revelation

The revelations of the Prophet Muhammad provide insight into how one dies in submission to Allah. Muslims look to Sura 17 to see the descent of the Qur'an to Muhammad and the "night journey" that shapes Islamic eschatological thoughts. In the night journey, Mohammad goes from "the sacred mosque to the farthest mosque" where eternal judgments are discussed; hell is determined to be a justified punishment for those

[11] Webb, "Death and Dying in Islam," 77.

[12] Webb, "Death and Dying in Islam," 78.

who do not submit to Allah, while comfort is the reward for those who prove faithful.[13]

Also in Sura 17, the Qur'an teaches that the soul will continue between death and the end of the world in a "period of in the grave," an intermediary stage called barzakh.[14] Barzakh, the time between the corporeal and the ethereal, is described as a holding place where one goes and cannot return. There is a finality to the one life given to all humans; therefore, Muslims believe there is only one life, an opportunity to pass the test of life and obtain the blessings of the afterlife.

Islamic Beliefs about End Times

A Muslim's view of the end times is drawn from "twin messages of the Qur'an," which are "the oneness of God and the inevitability of the day of resurrection and judgements."[15] According to Islam, Allah is the one and only God. There is none other, and to assert otherwise is blasphemous. In barzakh, there is no returning to earth to pay off past debts or seek further restitution; there is only the wait for the Day of Resurrection.[16] Surah 23:100 describes a partition or barrier separating the land of the living from those who have died; this is to reiterate the significance of this life for those awaiting the Day of Resurrection.[17] Once one has died, the "traditional creeds mention the questioning of the soul upon death by the angels Nakir and Munkar and the punishments of the grave (*adhab al-qabr*)."[18] Muslims are judged on whether they have lived lives in submission to Allah. While Islam is a ritualistic religion combining beliefs

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[13] Webb, "Death and Dying in Islam," 79.

[14] Webb, "Death and Dying in Islam," 79.

[15] Jane Idleman Smith, "Islam," in *How Different Religions View Death and Afterlif*e, ed. Christopher Jay Johnson and Marsha G. McGee, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Charles Press, 1998), 132.

[16] Angela Sumegi, *Understanding Death: An Introduction to Ideas of Self and the Afterlife in World Religions* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 147.

[17] Smith, "Islam," 137.

[18] Webb, "Death and Dying in Islam," 81 (italics original).

and practices, Muslims will argue that receiving the blessing of eternal life should not be considered "dependent entirely on one's own efforts; one attains to paradise only in the context of God's mercy."[19]

Islamic Practices of Dying Well

To die well is to die in submission to Allah, to have passed the test of life, which is determined by a Muslim's adherence to the Five Pillars of the Islamic faith. The Five Pillars inform the *Ars Moriendi* of Muslim tradition, as they lay out the basic tenets of the Islamic religion. The Five Pillars are as follows:

1. The providing of verbal testimony (shahadah) and belief that there is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Prophet of God.
2. Participation in public prayer (salah) five scheduled times throughout the day.
3. Participation in the monthly fast (sawm) of Ramadan.
4. Sharing wealth with the poor through paying alms-tax (zakat).
5. Making a journey once in a lifetime on the great pilgrimage (hajj) to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina.[20]

Since judgement is based on the quality of the ethical life, performance of these five pillars is necessary for dying a good death.[21] Even "as with the *barakh*/grave experience, the notion of individual accountability is paramount."[22] The five pillars are the pathway where beliefs and practice join in practical ways for Muslims striving to submit to Allah.

For example, the first of the pillars speaks of the *shahadah*, the basic testimony of the faith. The shahadah contends that recognizing anyone or anything as a deity other than God (Allah) is blasphemous and subject to divine punishment. Recitation of the shahadah is fulfilling the requirement to submit to Allah, which leads to blessing rather

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[19] Sumegi, *Understanding Death*, 154.

[20] Smith, "Islam," 134. See also Webb, "Death and Dying in Islam," 76.

[21] Smith, "Islam," 132.

[22] Webb, "Death and Dying in Islam," 82 (italics original).

than judgment. A Muslim must confess the faith to receive the blessing of the afterlife. Reciting the shahadah is both performative and a preparatory sign that shows one is a faithful Muslim who will die in submission to Allah.

The second pillar is *salah*, which guides the public prayer life of Muslims. These ritual prayers occur five times a day and are a necessary act of devotion, serving to reiterate a sense of theological reverence as well as communal solidarity. Surah 11:114 teaches that such devotion removes evil deeds. The third pillar, *sawm*, is another ritual that requires fasting during the holy month of Ramadan. Muslims fast for purification and serve and care for the poor, which is an Islamic priority and part of the fourth pillar. In both daily prayers and in observing Ramadan, Muslims embark on a life centered on the revelations of the Prophet Muhammad. In the fourth pillar, *zakat*, Muslims demonstrate their care for the poor. This crucial tenet of the faith shapes a Muslim's disposition; to be faithfully submissive to Allah, one must regularly give to the poor.

The first four pillars of Islam are not expected one time; they are expected to be routines in a Muslim's life. However, the fifth pillar is the holy pilgrimage, or *hajj*, to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. This holy pilgrimage is expected one time of all faithful Muslims if it is within their means. This experience is considered spiritually enriching and pays homage to the history of the great holy cities of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad's journeys. The hajj is also a mark of a Muslim's solidarity with the wider Islamic community. Completion of the hajj with the other four pillars means that the Muslim has completed the requirements for faithfulness and thus are prepared for death. The Five Pillars of Islam serve as a blueprint for the Islamic *Ars Moriendi* and make plain the Islamic beliefs and practices required for Muslims when approaching death and dying.

A good death for a Muslim is to obtain final reunion with Allah in the afterlife. A disposition of faithfulness honors Allah and ultimately passes the test of this life. Sumegi describes what Muslim Persian theologian al-Ghazali (1058–1111) wrote in his

final theological exposition on the Islamic faith:

> In it, al-Ghazali contextualizes what is to come by beginning with an exposition of the excellence of the remembrance of death as an antidote to the pursuit of, and indulgence in, worldly desires. Knowledge of the afterlife and its relation to this life is regarded as the necessary impetus to overcome moral frailty and the baser inclinations of human beings.[23]

Muslims are not to succumb to the merely common mortal or fleshly desires but to keep the goal of a good death in mind. This comes to fruition in end-of-life rituals at the time of death and in the bereavement period. In the Islamic tradition, after someone has died, often a trained individual such as an imam will read verses of the Qur'an to show reverence and commitment to the revelation of the Prophet Muhammad.[24] In other cases, some traditions will read of Iblis, the Islamic understanding of the devil, who some believe may come to tempt the Muslim to abandon faith in the basic testimony that God is one and Muhammad is his prophet.[25] This reading is one performative ritual of dying well by proactively seeking to reaffirm the faith of the dying.

It is a common practice to care for Muslims who are actively dying, as this is an important reflection of the Islamic theology of the Day of Resurrection. Muslims will oftentimes provide drops of water to the dying through the mouth as a way of showing continual care to the death.[26] Muslims also do not practice cremation, based on their theology of the body and belief in the future Day of Resurrection.[27] Upon hearing of another Muslim's death, some will customarily recite "Allah Karim," which means,

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[23] Sumegi, *Understanding Death*, 148.

[24] Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 29. Halevi shows how origins of using the Qur'an in prayers for the dead are evident as early as the eighth century based on inscriptions found on tombstones. The possibility of predating this period is certainly possible, but this shows development in the focused rituals around death for the Islamic world.

[25] Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2002), 37–38.

[26] Smith, "Islam," 136.

[27] Smith, "Islam," 136.

"From God we came and to him we shall return."[28] The intent of this prayer is to realign the death, dying, and grief within the Islamic understanding of who Allah is and life after death according to the Qur'an. The Islamic community will engage in cleanliness and purification rituals involving washing the body of the deceased.[29] The body is enshrouded and not embalmed.[30] The funeral will often take place at a mosque, and burial will be expedited, within twenty-four hours of death if possible. Finally, Muslims place bodies of the deceased in wooden caskets and arrange them facing Mecca, after the pattern "traditionally associated with Prophet Muhammad's burial."[31] While grieving is appropriate for those who mourn, the Prophet forbade mourning for the deceased because their fate is secure and they no longer are able to change course.[32]

The Islamic *Ars Moriendi* consists of dying in active submission to Allah through adherence to the Qur'an. To achieve this, one must actively live and die considering and practicing the Five Pillars of Islam. Other theological beliefs, including what Muslims believe about the Day of Resurrection, inform Islamic rituals and bereavement. These reflect a Muslim's desire to die the good death and maintain a trust in the perceived goodness and mercy of Allah to judge them justly.

Judaic *Ars Moriendi*

The second tradition assessed is Judaism, the first of the Abrahamic

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[28] DeSpelder and Strickland, *The Last Dance*, 543.

[29] Smith, "Islam," 136. See Webb, "Death and Dying in Islam," 83. Webb shows how, with the washing and purifying ritual, "it is considered a grace for children to assist in the washing of their own parents" (83).

[30] Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 85. These shrouds "conveyed personal style, economic status, and ideological commitment. They commemorated a sense of self at a time of personal transformation, signifying aspects of the person one wished to become after death" (85).

[31] Webb, "Death and Dying in Islam," 84. See also Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, where Muhammad's grave, burial, and rituals of the early Islamic world demonstrate how Muslims sought to honor and replicate elements of Muhammad's death rituals. This is particularly the case as it pertains to being buried facing Mecca, as was Muhammad. This provides a sense of honor and egalitarian solidarity with other Muslims.

[32] Smith, "Islam," 136.

monotheistic religions. As in Islam, Judaism does not have a monolithic voice but has taken the shape of various different traditions under the umbrella of Judaism.[33] The Jewish people "trace their ancestry to semi-nomadic tent-dwelling Hebrew tribes of the second millennium BCE."[34] Like Islam, Judaism has always been a ritualistic faith consisting of belief in one God, communing with God (prayer), and religious practices that ascertain faithfulness. Rabbi Earl A. Grollman writes, "Judaism is more than a creed; it is a way of life. And death is a reality of life."[35] Different sects of Judaism have different interpretations of death and the afterlife.[36] However, Judaism recognizes that death is inevitable in this life, and, being a faith of action, Judaism is intensely interested in what it means to die well.

Judaic Beliefs about Dying Well

According to Judaism, death came into the world following the creation story of Genesis 2 and 3 and is now an inevitability for all individuals. However, rather than fixating on the life to come, Jews focus on living lives of responsibility and faithful observance to the Torah; in this way, they serve God and care for others.[37] DeSpelder and Strickland note that for the Jew, "righteous conduct is advised because it leads to

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[33] Judaism has various traditions such as Orthodox, Reformed, Conservative, and Constructionist. Some have referred to these as "Judaisms" to describe the multifaceted religion. In the present work, Orthodox Judaism is the predominant form represented; it is perceived as the more "traditional" of the four. While there is considerable overlap among the sects of Judaism, there ought to be no assumption every Jewish person would adhere to every facet of a more "traditional" interpretation. For further explanation of the diversity within Judaism, see "Diversity of Judaism," in *Judaism: A Supplemental Resource for Grade 12 World of Religions: A Canadian Perspective* (Winnipeg, MB: Government of Manitoba Minister of Education and Training, 2019), 49–56, https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/world_religions/judaism/diversity.pdf for further explanations on the diversity within Judaism.

[34] Sumegi, *Understanding Death*, 74.

[35] Rabbi Earl A. Grollman, "Death in Jewish Thought," in *Death and Spirituality*, ed. Kenneth J. Doka with John D. Morgan, Death, Value and Meaning Series (Amityville, NY: Baywood, 1993), 22.

[36] Kraemer, *The Meanings of Death in Rabbinic Judaism*. Kraemer traces meanings of death from early rabbinic death practices through post-Talmudic developments of Jewish death practices.

[37] DeSpelder and Strickland, *The Last Dance*, 129.

harmony in the present life, not because it guarantees future rewards for the individual."[38] Rabbi Alan L. Ponn states that the "first and primary responsibility of the Jew is this life and not the world to come."[39] Therefore, fulfilling the law and commandments are designed to improve one's life now.[40] Jews believe they are responsible not only to live faithfully for a future reward, but also to flourish in the present. The *Ars Moriendi* for Jewish people reflects life in the present, not merely a futuristic hope.

Dying a good death is an extension, or the end, of their focus on faithful observance in the present, maintaining and ultimately fulfilling a sense of duty to the God who delivered and sustained them. Maurice Lamm writes that for faithful Jews, "death has profound meaning . . . full of sound and fury that sometimes signifies nothing, but often bears eloquent testimony to the Divine power that created and sustained him."[41] For some, death comes in tragic or dramatic ways; for others, death comes in routine or common ways. In either case, Judaic thought is centered in the God who sustains. This disposition of reliance focuses on the goodness of God as they approach dying and death; they trust in God's mercy and their life-long observance of Torah. Therefore, according to Judaism, to die well is to die within the community, maintaining observance to the Torah and worshipping God, their sole sustainer.

Jack Riemer studied death and dying within the Jewish tradition and came away with five key insights. Jewish tradition faces death with a sense of realism and honesty, equality and simplicity, community, Halakhah (Jewish law), and an appropriate

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[38] DeSpelder and Strickland, *The Last Dance*, 534.

[39] Rabbi Alan L. Ponn, "Judaism," in Johnson and McGee, *How Different Religions View Death and Afterlife*, 147.

[40] Ponn, "Judaism," 147.

[41] Maurice Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*, rev. and exp. ed. (Middle Village, NY: Jonathan David, 2000), 247.

sense of God to whom "*attention must be paid*."[42] Jews do not seek to deny death's commonality in the narrative of human history, nor does Judaism seek to be dishonest about the grief that comes with death. Death is simple, and it is an equalizer; it comes to everyone, and no one is more or less important. However, Riemer's next insight is important: Jews do not face death alone. They view death and dying through a communal lens and find solidarity in shared rituals, prayers, and grief.

Whereas realism and honesty, equality and simplicity, and community are general dispositions toward death and dying, there are two "supreme" dispositions that serve as an umbrella, overarching the general dispositions. The fourth insight is the Halakhah, or Jewish law, which highlights how Judaic thought is inherently a philosophy guided by laws or regulations. The fifth key insight relates to the Jewish sense of God, that is, their sense of reverence for God. To die well within Judaism, the Jew must consider who they are as humans created by God, the purpose God has for them, and the redeeming and sustaining character of the God who gave them life.

One final belief crucial for understanding a Judaic *Ars Moriendi* is their longing for resurrection. In Judaism, acceptance into the afterlife is based on good conduct, not necessarily on creedal fidelity. Hence, they focus on caring for others and their internal community rather than condemning those outside the community.[43] The desire for a future resurrection is a desire to be reunited with loved ones and to be under the divine care of God; this theology developed especially in the Talmudic times.[44] While some have noted that Jewish views of resurrection appear to have developed later within Jewish thought, Kraemer points out that many modern rabbis who reject bodily

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[42] Jack Riemer, *Jewish Insights on Death and Mourning*, ed. Jack Riemer (Philadelphia: Schocken Books, 1995), 19. Riemer writes, "The point of this whole book—is: *up to, at, and after the end of life—attention must be paid*" (italics original).

[43] Ponn, "Judaism," 150.

[44] Ponn, "Judaism," 147–48.

resurrection of the dead may be "individuals who were trying to rationalize Judaism for modernity," but this view is not a "popular belief" of many.[45] Belief in a future bodily resurrection is still a common belief among many Jews and contributes to a Judaic *Ars Moriendi* in that belief in an afterlife serves as further motivation for ethical behavior in the present.

Judaic Practices of Dying Well

The belief that God will continue to sustain the community is the foundation for Jewish death practices. This belief is reiterated through lived experiences, rooted in the ancient sacred text of the Hebrew Bible, and practiced ritualistically through the Jewish grief process. Dying well looks like dying within the community of mourners who have gone before you.[46] While each dies his own death, dying in a communal context means no one dies alone. Anita Diamant writes, "Jews learned how to bury the dead and how to comfort the bereaved simply by living their lives."[47] The practice of dying well starts with being among fellow Jews who have suffered and accompanied those on the path to death before. Death is inevitable, so approaching it becomes another part of life.

Part of living in community involves observing the Jewish calendar of feasts and holy days. One way that Jews practice an *Ars Moriendi* is through their annual celebration of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, which is (among many meanings) an "annual rehearsal for and confrontation with death."[48] This rehearsal, or confrontation of sorts, reorients the Jewish mind and practice each year, as they reflect upon and confess

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[45] Kraemer, *The Meanings of Death in Rabbinic Judaism*, 148–49.

[46] Anita Diamant, *Saying Kaddish: How to Comfort the Dying, Bury the Dead, and Mourn as a Jew* (New York: Schocken Books, 1998), xv. Diamant demonstrates this, writing, "My father died a good death. He said good-bye to the people he loved and made his wishes known. His end was peaceful and dignified. . . . As lonely as I was without my dad, I was not alone. My family and my community comforted me, and I felt myself traveling down a path made smooth by centuries of Jewish mourners" (xv).

[47] Diamant, *Saying Kaddish*, 3.

[48] Riemer, *Jewish Insights on Death and Mourning*, 8.

past and present sins as a way of finding atonement for their sins. This also serves as a recommitment to the service to God for another year. In this annual celebration, Jewish people prepare themselves before God with a purifying and cleansing ritualistic confession of sins that itself is a sacrifice. Confession of sin and repentance before a loving God and neighbors teach the Jewish people how to be better prepared to die a good death because they have annually practiced humility by laying aside their mistakes to be made right with God.

In Jewish thought, it is important to ensure that people are tended to, cared for, and not left alone by loved ones when death is nearing.[49] Maurice Lamm writes, "The principle governing the care of the body immediately following death is the sacredness of man."[50] Reliance on God's providence and understanding the inevitability of death are means of appreciating the sacredness of life and death. Riemer writes, "This is not a morbid way to live. On the contrary, the fact that life is fragile and precarious, the fact that each new day is a gift and not an entitlement, makes it even more precious, more to be appreciated, more to be savored."[51] Living in light of death provides a spiritually beneficial perspective. Riemer argues that considering death makes living more "precious," "appreciated," and "more to be savored."[52] There is a finitude in death that enables Jews to appropriately understand who they are and what their purpose is in this life.

Judaic death practices highlight other aspects of their beliefs and how they grieve. For example, the Jewish focus on a flourishing life influences Jewish funeral homiletics. Few Jewish sermons draw hearers toward blessings or curses of an afterlife;

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[49] Ponn, "Judaism," 154.

[50] Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*, 3.

[51] Riemer, *Jewish Insights on Death and Mourning*, 7.

[52] Riemer, *Jewish Insights on Death and Mourning*, 7.

instead, they focus primarily on a life well lived in faithful observance.[53] Jewish tradition tends to favor a quick burial that is modest and simple, demonstrating that all are equal in death.[54] Further, funerals are not happy occasions and do evoke sadness.[55] Many traditions have found ways of redefining the term "funeral," including calling it a "celebration of life" or "memorial service." In Jewish tradition, a good death is accompanied by a funeral, a somber time when mourning is permitted and expected. It is not a time for humor or lighthearted conversations but a time of reflection and care for one another.

Another key death ritual for the Jewish community is the burial practice. The community almost universally does not practice cremation regardless of fears that external conditions (such as lack of burial space) could potentially hinder possibilities for burial.[56] Given the popular belief in a future resurrection as well as a long tradition of burial, the Jewish community hold a theology of the body that reinforces their death practice of burial over cremation.

In addition to Yom Kippur, Jews have a systematic approach to grieving following a death. Jews utilize the concept of a House of Mourning, where mourners grieve for an extended period of time, and those grieving are released from the monotony of everyday life to mourn the loss of their loved one properly.[57] Yizkor is a memorial service in the synagogue recalling the deceased, while the anniversary of the death is

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[53] Ponn, "Judaism," 149.

[54] Ponn, "Judaism," 153. Ponn points out how this simplistic and modest approach toward funerals points to the Jewish concern for caring for the poor. In death, all are equal, and the funeral is one place where the poor can be esteemed in similar ways that the rich can.

[55] Ponn, "Judaism," 154.

[56] Ponn, "Judaism," 155. See also Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*, 55–56. While there may be exceptions found among some more liberal traditions of Judaism, the consensus is that cremation is almost never acceptable; this is unlikely to change regardless of limited space in local cemeteries.

[57] Ponn, "Judaism," 155.

honored in the yahrzeit.[58] As they mourn the death of a loved one, they say the Kaddish prayer, an "essential part of the mourning experience."[59]

Another key aspect to death practices comprising a Judaic *Ars Moriendi* is the use of the Torah as a spiritual guide. For example, following death, psalms such as Psalms 23 and 91 may be recited as a way of centering the loved one in the story of Jewish heritage under a sustaining God.[60] The Torah offers important examples of observant Jews who trusted in God's providence and guiding spirit to lead them. Simcha Paull Raphael writes,

> in the deathbed stories of our Biblical ancestors, we see an attitude of honesty and openness toward death. Abraham is not anxious and fear-filled when having to purchase a burial chamber for his wife Sarah. Neither Jacob nor Joseph are in denial of their inevitable death, but instead speak openly and comfortably with their families about their impending demise. These stories provide us with an ideal model for learning to deal more openly with death and dying in our families, to be able to speak honestly with spouses, children and siblings about our own and each other's death and final wishes.[61]

The Hebrew Bible offers examples of Jews who faced death in similar ways described by Riemer. These examples lead the Jew to strive toward the good death and find oneself counted among those who have lived and died before them. In summary, "practices and beliefs surrounding death in the Jewish religion are meant to reflect God's purpose — for his creatures to have a meaningful and righteous existence in this world and in the hereafter."[62] The Judaic *Ars Moriendi* consists of reliance on the sustainer God, living life among the community in observance of the Torah and caring for others. The Jewish

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[58] Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*, 197–205. See also Diamant, *Saying Kaddish*, 148–51.

[59] Ponn, "Judaism," 157. See also Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*, 63, 144–68.

[60] Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*, 4.

[61] Simcha Paull Raphael, *Living and Dying in Ancient Times: Death, Burial, and Mourning in Biblical Tradition* (Boulder, CO: Albion-Andalus, 2015), 83–84.

[62] Ponn, "Judaism," 157.

people have set up annual rituals as well as a thorough grieving system that permits people to honor and mourn the loved ones who have died.

Buddhist *Ars Moriendi*

The third alternative *Ars Moriendi* tradition in this assessment is Buddhism, an Eastern religion and philosophy. As with Islam and Judaism, Buddhism has various traditions, and in discerning an *Ars Moriendi* for Buddhism, one must recognize that different Buddhist traditions would address some complexities differently.[63] Buddhism traces its roots to Brahmanic India and holds the Buddha as its most venerable figure.[64] Buddhism, like virtually all other world religions and spiritual traditions, has many different schools of thought. When considering a Buddhist *Ars Moriendi,* it will be important to consider key beliefs and practices rooted in mindfulness, meditation, and sacred texts.[65]

Buddhist Beliefs about Dying Well

Buddhism is similar to Hinduism, another major world religion and Eastern philosophy, in its understanding that karma leads to a cycle of rebirth and death referred to as *samsara*.[66] The Buddha rejected the idea that in the midst of this cycle of samsara, an "eternal soul (*atman*)" transmigrates from one life to another; hence, Buddha rejected the orthodox Hindu understanding of the individual self or soul.[67] The idea of rejecting

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[63] Buddhism has many different sects or traditions. The predominant tradition assessed throughout this section comes from the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. As was the case within Islam and Judaism, the intention here is to paint with a broader brush to analyze alternative approaches towards dying well from spiritual traditions outside of Christianity.

[64] Sumegi, *Understanding Death*, 197–201.

[65] See Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup, trans., *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (London: Sirius, 2022). The Tibetan Book of the Dead is a famous Buddhist text that speaks to matters of death and dying. See also Bhikku Anālayo, *Mindfully Facing Disease and Death: Compassionate Advice from Early Buddhist Texts* (Cambridge, UK: Windhorse, 2016).

[66] Sumegi, *Understanding Death*, 197 (italics original).

[67] Sumegi, *Understanding Death*, 197 (italics original).

the individual self in the rejection of the soul's transmigration to other life forms shapes the ways in which Buddhists distinctly approach a good death. Anne C. Klein points out that there are four important aspects for Buddhists when it comes to death and dying: (1) the importance and method of facing one's own mortality; (2) the relevance of this understanding for a classic presentation of the path to enlightenment; (3) the stages of dying and their significance for practitioners of meditation; and (4) descriptions of the period after death and of rebirth.[68] Each of these four aspects will be assessed to demonstrate key beliefs about death and dying within Buddhism.

Facing One's Own Mortality

Buddhism recognizes that life comes with limitations and that death is inevitable. Joan Halifax writes, "However unbearable any discomfort seems, ultimately everything we experience is temporary."[69] Therefore, the Buddhist's focus on seeking peace prioritizes the acceptance of the normalization of death. Within Buddhism, the concept of *dukkha* is important; though it has different meanings, it refers to the loss, decay, or destruction of things people desire and the felt loss they experience when something is gone.[70] Buddhism points out the "four noble truths": the reality or truth of dukkha, the "arising" and "cessation" of dukkha, and the "path leading to the cessation of *dukkha*."[71]

To face one's own mortality is to recognize the impermanence of this life. Buddhists utilize different mindfulness practices, such as kindness and generosity, to "help settle us into an awareness of impermanence" because it is "the realization of the

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[68] Anne C. Klein, "Buddhism," in Johnson and McGee, *How Different Religions View Death and Afterlife*, 51.

[69] Joan Halifax, *Being with Dying: Cultivating Compassion and Fearlessness in the Presence of Death* (Boston: Shambhala Productions, 2009), xix.

[70] Sumegi, *Understanding Death*, 202–3 (italics original).

[71] Anālayo, *Mindfully Facing*, 9 (italics original).

imminence of death can be a direct path to the discovery of meaning in life."[72] While a Buddhist believes they will lose everything, they believe giving helps them find meaning amid the mortality of impermanence. Furthermore, good deeds and being virtuous assists a Buddhist from potentially reaching the end of their life with the shadow of regret, guilt, and the "frightful shadow of evil conduct," which may impact their sense of liberating their peace of mind.[73] In fact, the Buddha is said to have "reached the deathless through full awakening, [in which] one is no longer affected by the mortality of one's own body or that of others."[74]

Path to Enlightenment

Aggregates leading to enlightenment are virtue, concentration, wisdom, liberation, knowledge, and vision of liberation.[75] If one does not face his own mortality, he will not develop spiritually and be prepared to progress in the journey toward liberation. Furthermore, dukkha is experienced by all; therefore, all humans will face their inevitable mortality. The path toward enlightenment necessarily includes recognizing dukkha and the mortality of this life.

Part of the path toward enlightenment is cultivating the idea of befriending death and perceiving death to be a teacher. Judith Lief writes, "Cultivating an awareness of death is at the same time cultivating an awareness of life. We are reconnecting with the experience of *actually living a life*."[76] On death as an instructor, Lief says that "the ongoing contemplation of death, so that it is never out of our awareness" is "a powerful

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[72] Halifax, *Being with Dying*, 50.

[73] Anālayo, *Mindfully Facing Disease and Death*, 173.

[74] Anālayo, *Mindfully Facing Disease and Death*, 117.

[75] Anālayo, *Mindfully Facing Disease and Death*, 124.

[76] Judith L. Lief, *Making Friends with Death: A Buddhist Guide to Encountering Mortality* (Boston: Shambhala Productions, 2001), 6 (italics original).

form of spiritual training."[77] The goal of befriending death and seeing death as a teacher is to "stir people from complacency and reawaken their reverence for life."[78]

Further, the Buddha's death is considered his twelfth act, known *parinirvana*, or the place where the cycle of death and rebirth ceases to continue.[79] To reach a state of nirvana, one no longer needs to continue through the cycle of death and rebirth and has obtained true liberation from the endless cycles of death. This is why the Buddha's death is so important for Buddhism; Buddha is an example that liberation is obtainable.

Stages of Dying and Their Significance for Meditation Practitioners

In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, a person's impending death is perceived in stages or phases.[80] One cannot overstate the importance of the spiritual practice of meditation within Buddhism. As the Buddhist works through the stages of dying, they work toward reducing suffering. Halifax writes, "Freedom from suffering lies within suffering itself, and it is up to each individual to find his or her own way."[81] Halifax continues, noting that "suffering is a sword that can cut both ways—it can free us or send us into hiding."[82] The Buddhist aim is to alleviate suffering and obtain inner freedom through meditation. Part of this is recognizing one's own attachments and that "one should let go of one's own attachments."[83]

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[77] Lief, *Making Friends with Death*, 67.

[78] Lief, *Making Friends with Death*, 67.

[79] Sumegi, *Understanding Death*, 201.

[80] Lief, *Making Friends with Death*, 23.

[81] Halifax, *Being with Dying*, 4.

[82] Halifax, *Being with Dying*, 20.

[83] Anālayo, *Mindfully Facing Disease and Death*, 156.

Descriptions of the Period after Death and of Rebirth

Buddhism teaches that death begins a transition from death to rebirth to death again and back to birth—a cycle until one has reached nirvana.[84] The afterlife is important for Buddhists because they attend to their mental state in an effort to make progress toward the ultimate goal reached by Buddha: ultimate liberation from the cycle of birth and death. If a Buddhist is not perceived as being at peace or having accepted death as inevitable, then he will be open to prolonging death.[85]

Buddhist Practices of Dying Well

When it comes to dying a good death, Halifax notes that people "can put unbearable pressure on dying people and caregivers and can take us away from death's mystery and the richness of not knowing."[86] Within Buddhism, there is a perceived richness in the unknown but also in the notion that a good death can serve to perpetuate denial if the mind is not clear to understand the present reality. Halifax continues, "The stories we tell ourselves—good death, death with dignity—can be unfortunate fabrications that we use to try to protect ourselves against the sometimes raw and sometimes wondrous truths of dying."[87] When it comes to embodied practices, Buddhists place a strong emphasis on the spiritual practice of clearing the mind through meditation and reflection.[88] The *upaya*, translated from Sanskrit as "skillful means," are "the techniques and technologies we can use to be more skillful and effective in our living and

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[84] Lief, *Making Friends with Death*, 15. Lief points out how the transition process in Buddhism is perceived as a doorway into another life. See also Sumegi, *Understanding Death*, 211–14.

[85] Halifax, *Being with Dying*, 131.

[86] Halifax, *Being with Dying*, 65.

[87] Halifax, *Being with Dying*, 66.

[88] Lief, *Making Friends with Death*. Lief offers examples of ways that Buddhist spiritual practices can be implemented to think through one's own death and the death of others, including slogans to assist the dying process. See also Halifax, *Being with Dying*. Halifax includes a list of meditations to accompany death and dying.

our dying through training our heart and mind."[89] This training of the mind is helpful in grounding oneself and providing hope for future liberation. Such training in meditation also considers contemplation as a form of analytical meditation.[90]

Contemplation can assist one in their dying process by helping him ponder the inevitability of death, work to rid himself of fear, and obtain peace. The intent of meditation is to move death from being something to fear to something that is accepted and welcomed, something that makes "death less fearful."[91] In fact, internalizing the inevitability of death creates a sense of urgency to prioritize spiritual formation.[92] The very fact that death can come at any moment makes the spiritual practices of meditations, reflection, and contemplation crucial for Buddhists. Since Buddhists believe that someone's state of mind at the point of death is important, they encourage one to be proactive and intentional with their spiritual practices.[93] For one to die well, one ought to mindfully engage elements of peace and acceptance. Therefore, Buddhists spends substantial time and effort to practice mindfulness, meditation, and seeking peace amid dying.[94]

The Buddhist who dies the good death is prepared to be in a place where they are mentally relaxed and peaceful.[95] This disposition prioritizes acceptance of death as normal: "Those who are released in this way from the power of death will of course still

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[89] Halifax, *Being with Dying*, xvii.

[90] Klein, "Buddhism," 52.

[91] Klein, "Buddhism," 52.

[92] Klein, "Buddhism," 52.

[93] Lief, *Making Friends with Death*, 25. Lief argues further that one's emotional state of being can negatively impact one's own awareness; therefore, the principle of grounding and spending time in meditative reflection is a crucial part of dying well within Buddhism.

[94] Anālayo, *Mindfully Facing Disease and Death*. This text serves to show how sacred Buddhist texts influence the Buddhist's focus on mindfulness as they approach living and dying.

[95] Andrew Holecek, *Preparing to Die: Practical Advice and Spiritual Wisdom from the Tibetan Buddhist Tradition* (Boston: Snow Lion, 2013), 67. Holecek calls the Buddhist to "simply relax" because they are experiencing what everyone must experience.

pass away, but the way they do so becomes a manifestation of their inner freedom, of their unshakeable mental health even at the time when the body is sick and about to fall apart."[96] Buddhists seeks to reach a place of inner freedom from the pain and suffering of the breaking down of the body in part by recognizing the inevitability of death for all people. All people die; death is just another stop on the journey toward more life and more death until one finally reaches the place of final liberation. As one author put it, "The best death is the one that is the last death."[97] Until then, the Buddhist seeks to ensure each rebirth will be a good rebirth.

Since Buddhism teaches the cyclical nature of birth and death, the idea of a next life or an afterlife is important. Given their rejection of the soul's transmigration and any concept of bodily resurrection (as found in the Abrahamic religions), there are differing death practices for disposing of the body. The life that continues is not considered the unchanging essence or soul but is indeed everchanging. Therefore, there is no need to maintain burial that would be perceived as preservation. The body does not continue; only the mentality or consciousness is part of the rebirth. Therefore, the body is often burned or dismembered for animal consumption.[98]

Buddhists engage in end-of-life rituals by devoting time to caring for one another. While one is still able to relate to loved ones, the family and friends are to wish them farewell but without a disproportionate number of tears, out of concern that the appearance of longing or regret could display discontentment and a lack of peace.[99] At the bedside, Buddhists are encouraged to care for their loved ones through prayers, mantra recitations, incense, or other offerings that may be made for the person's

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[96] Anālayo, *Mindfully Facing Disease and Death*, 158.

[97] S. N. Goenka, "What Happens at Death," in *The Art of Dying*, ed. Virginia Hamilton (Philadelphia: Charles Press, 1998), 30.

[98] Klein, "Buddhism," 55.

[99] Klein, "Buddhism," 55.

benefit.[100] To the Buddhist, an *Ars Moriendi* includes attention to mindfulness, meditative reflection and acceptance, and inner peace accompanied by ritualistic practices that bring about contentment and peace.

Stoic *Ars Moriendi*

Stoicism was a contemporary philosophy of the New Testament period and is the last alternative to a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* described in this thesis.[101] Stoicism is a philosophical tradition that originated with Zeno and was later developed by philosophers such as Cicero,[102] Epictetus,[103] Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius.[104] Stoics lived by the aphorism of *amor fati* (the love of fate). Jonathan T. Pennington writes that Stoics followed *amor fati*, which "describes a way of seeing and being in the world that teaches that to be happy we need to embrace all that we experience, not longing for something else, some other fate."[105] Stoicism focused on living a life of contentment, contemplation, virtue, and control while offering practical philosophical insights into living and dying well.

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[100] Klein, "Buddhism," 57.

[101] Runar M. Thorsteinsson, *Jesus as Philosopher: The Moral Sage in the Synoptic Gospels* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 11. Thorsteinsson points out that Luke was familiar with the Stoic philosophers (Acts 17:18) as well as knowing Seneca's brother Gallio (Acts 18:12–16) and argues that the authors of the other Synoptic Gospels likely had a familiarity with the Stoic philosophers. See also Jonathan T. Pennington, *Jesus the Great Philosopher: Rediscovering the Wisdom Needed for the Good Life* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2020), 91.

[102] Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On Living and Dying Well*, trans. Thomas Habinek, Penguin Classics (New York: Penguin Books, 2012). Cicero was one of the most influential early philosophers who undoubtedly impacted the world in which the Johannine literature was written. Cicero was not a professed Stoic, but his account and writings are closely associated with and influenced Stoicism. See also Runar M. Thorsteinsson, *Roman Christianity and Roman Stoicism: A Comparative Study of Ancient Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 20.

[103] Epictetus, *Discourses and Selected Writings,* trans. and ed. Robert Dobbin, Penguin Classics (New York: Penguin Classics, 2008).

[104] Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations: The Philosophy Classic*, trans. George Long (1862, Bell & Daldy, London; repr., Chicester, West Sussex, England: Capstone, 2020), xvi. See also Kevin Vost, *The Porch and the Cross: Ancient Stoic Wisdom for Modern Christian Living* (Kettering, OH: Angelico Press, 2016), 10–11. Vost highlights four prominent Stoic philosophers and offers an insightful and accessible introduction to Stoicism.

[105] Pennington, *Jesus the Great Philosopher*, 62.

Stoicism historically was popular within the Greek and Roman world, which highlighted the importance of a lived and practiced philosophy. Socrates once noted, "The one aim of those who practise philosophy in the proper manner is to practise for dying and death."[106] Stoicism took this mantra seriously, and many of the Stoic philosophers directly address the topic of death and dying. The Stoic philosophers wrote about death and dying to show their disciples how they should approach death by living well. These insights were not only speculative and esoteric, but "a *way of life*, a way of being in the world."[107]

Stoic Beliefs about Dying Well

The practices of Stoicism are an application of beliefs. Seneca, one of the most prominent Stoic philosophers and Nero's tutor/advisor, encouraged his friend Lucilius to "study death always" because death was seen as inevitable.[108] Death was considered a natural part of life and not something to be feared. Within Stoicism, one can be a slave or one can even be royalty and still abide by the same philosophical beliefs; this, in part, was the appeal of Stoicism. In order to life a virtuous life in which one was not ruled by their passions but remained grounded in present reality, Seneca offers a prescription for dying a good death: one must prepare themselves, have no fear, have no regrets, be willing to set themselves free, understand nature, and recognize that in death, they are united as part of the whole of everything that is.[109]

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[106] Plato, *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo*, trans. G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981), 100.

[107] Pennington, *Jesus the Great Philosopher*, 21 (italics original).

[108] Seneca, *How to Die: An Ancient Guide to the End of Life,* ed. and trans. James S. Romm (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 26.

[109] Seneca, *How to Die*. Seneca's book is broken into chapters, each reflecting one of these beliefs.

Prepare Yourself

Since death is universal, one must prepare for it. The Stoic does not merely approach death passively but applies beliefs and practices to develop a virtuous character. Citing Epicurus, Seneca instructs his adherents to see life as a rehearsal for death.[110] When Seneca himself experienced health concerns, and death seemed a possibility, he saw that as an opportunity to practice his death. This performative nature shows that an *Ars Moriendi*, though formulated more succinctly in later generations, was a studied approach in philosophical traditions for centuries. The Stoic was to prepare himself in body and mind, with the mind being the primary focus. Stoics prioritized the study of ethics, viewing all of life as a preparatory exercise toward becoming a virtuous person. Many extant Stoic texts directly address crucial questions of death and dying, and it is evident that the Stoic emphasis on living virtuously was also applied to how they perceived what it means to die well.

Have No Fear

Stoic belief holds that one must not approach death and dying with fear. Rather, one should fear the fear of death. Epictetus explains,

> Death, for example, is nothing frightening, otherwise it would have frightened Socrates. But the judgment that death is frightening—now, that is something to be afraid of. So when we are frustrated, angry or unhappy, never hold anyone except ourselves—that is, our judgements—accountable. An ignorant person is inclined to blame others for his misfortune. To blame oneself is proof of progress. But the wise man never has to blame another or himself.[111]

To die well, one must approach death without fear, acknowledging that death is natural, and everyone must experience it. Death within Stoicism is morally neutral, "neither good nor bad."[112] If one is angry at death and seeks to place blame somewhere, then they have

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[110] Seneca, *How to Die*, 2. *Meditatio mortis*, meaning "rehearsal for death," was a term provided for people who experienced times of coming close to death, such as was the case with health issues Seneca experienced (7).

[111] Epictetus, *Discourses and Selected Writings*, 223.

[112] Seneca, *How to Die*, 27.

failed to appreciate the inevitability and universality of death. Death is not to be feared; whenever death comes, then the end has come.

According to Seneca and the Stoics, death was nonexistence.[113] There was no future judgment or a period of purgation to fear. Seneca writes, "Death is the undoing of all our sorrows, an end beyond which our ills cannot go; it returns us to that peace in which we reposed before we were born."[114] Seneca saw death as freeing to those who face it because the grief and sorrow of this world ceased at the point of death. In death, there was no reason to fear what one could not feel or experience.[115] Stoics universally saw an inherent absurdity in fearing one's own death because that fear was believed to be a projection of concerns for which the individual would not have to account, feel, or experience.

Within Stoicism, the view of fearlessness in death required detaching oneself from the value of temporal things and included counting life as "cheap."[116] Stoics valued character, integrity, contemplation, and virtue. To count life as cheap was not to perceive it invaluable but to count it as part of a greater schema within the world. The life of the individual was not greater than the nature surrounding it. There was no preconceived notion that one human life was substantively more valuable than another. Therefore, the Stoic should approach his death with humility, knowing that death was inevitable and must be accepted as fate.

Have No Regrets

Acceptance of the universality of death leads to having no regrets in this life. Continuing his thoughts on having no fear, Seneca noted that "we don't fear death but the

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[113] Seneca, *How to Die*, 9.

[114] Seneca, *How to Die*, 13.

[115] Seneca, *How to Die*, 20. See also Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 107.

[116] Seneca, *How to Die*, 14.

contemplation of death."[117] His point was that it is not death itself that brings people fear but the thought of nonexistence, the thought of not being around, the thought of having no representation in life. This is what people fear when they contemplate death. Stoicism posits that one who has found an inner peace with death's inevitability has no reason to be afraid. One reason people have regrets when they are facing death and dying is that they wonder if they have lived a good enough life or if they have accomplished enough. Stoic belief frequently points out that the assessment of a well-lived life is not based on material success but rather how virtuous a person has become. Seneca writes, "There's only one way we can say that the life we live is long: if it's enough."[118] To those who may grieve dying, regretting that life appeared too short, Seneca showed that the Stoic's standard was to value not the longevity of a life, but the quality of the life lived.

Set Yourself Free

Once one has sought to prepare himself for death and dying by being content with dying without fear or regret, Seneca offers another insight: setting oneself free. Seneca recalled the suicide of Marcus Porcius Cato, a Stoic who opposed Julius Caesar, and argued that such a death could be liberating.[119] Seneca contended that accepting death's inevitability provided the opportunity to free themselves from the slavery around them. Ceasing to be fearful or regretful in death and dying was itself liberating from those who would assert their dominance over the Stoic. This is how one could be a Stoic while being enslaved or while living in royal corridors. Seneca argues that the power of setting oneself free occurs by not opposing death by suicide, as liberation could be obtained in theory by refusing to abide in such a place of discontentment. Suicide would be taking back one's sense of freedom. Seneca wrote, "The foulest death is still preferable to the

[117] Seneca, *How to Die*, 26.

[118] Seneca, *How to Die*, 35.

[119] Seneca, *How to Die*, 65.

cleanest slavery."[120] For the Stoic, setting oneself free included understanding nature and the source of one's problems. This is also demonstrated in the Stoic approach to illness, which was not considered a problem of the mind but of the body.[121] Such a distinction reiterated the Stoic belief that the mind is more important than the body.

Become a Part of the Whole

The final belief derived from Seneca's work is that all things will die, and nothing will remain but become part of the whole. This pervasive belief emphasized living a virtuous life now rather than later. Stoicism was not a futuristic philosophy awaiting a blessed afterlife in the future. Stoics understood that upon death, there was no more life; hence, one should devote time to and wisely cultivate the present life. Part of this cultivation was recognizing how to live and die with a sense of contentment. Seneca wrote, "Indeed most are tossed about wretchedly between their fear of death and the tortures of life; they don't want to live, but don't know how to die."[122] People often do not know how to cultivate a virtuous life or see the point in living virtuously. Stoicism argued for beliefs and practices resulting in a fuller life of meaning and purpose.

Stoic Practices of Dying Well

Ancient Greek and Roman philosophies could be perceived as "therapy for the soul, providing practical guidance for both the individual and society."[123] Stoic philosophy fit into the ancient philosophical tradition and was intended to be lived out. Runar Thorsteinsson notes that according to Seneca, "Written philosophy is inferior to

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[120] Seneca, *How to Die*, 85. While Seneca does not oppose the idea of suicide, he does not reject that there may be reasons to avoid death by suicide, such as leaving behind dependents who would be harmed by such an action (88–89).

[121] Epictetus, *Discourses and Selected Writings*, 224.

[122] Seneca, *How to Die*, 104.

[123] Pennington, *Jesus the Great Philosopher*, 29.

lived philosophy,"[124] and "to adhere to a specific philosophical school or teaching, then, was not simply to philosophize and give thoughts to certain teachings, but to *live* those teachings, to embody them in one's being and way of life."[125] If one merely had words and not actions or practices, then virtue formation would not occur. If such a philosophy merely pontificated about esoteric topics, there would be no need for it among the ancient philosophers, especially the Stoics. Therefore, it was impossible to divorce the beliefs of Stoicism from the practices of Stoicism.[126] Given this connection, the remainder of this section will describe the beliefs and how they were practiced.

Prepare Yourself

To prepare oneself for death, one must contemplate death. Contemplating death was an activity of the mind that was superior to more emotive behaviors. Epictetus wrote, "Keep the prospect of death, exile and all such apparent tragedies before you every day, especially death—and you will never have an abject thought, or desire anything to excess."[127] For Epictetus, the role of contemplation, keeping an eye on the present and on death, serves to gain a sense of perspective. If one has grown accustomed to the inevitability and universality of death, he will acknowledge that in death, he will leave this world with what he brought to it: nothing. Therefore, the first Stoic practice in dying a good death is to regularly contemplate death. Seneca wrote, "Dying well means dying willingly."[128] If one seeks to die a good death, he must first be willing to contemplate and willingly accept the way death may come.

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[124] Thorsteinsson, *Jesus as Philosopher*, 16.

[125] Thorsteinsson, *Jesus as Philosopher*, 17 (italics original).

[126] Vost, *The Porch and the Cross*, 11. Vost highlights how, among Zeno and the early Stoics philosophizing on the "Painted Porch," ethics was the most important topic. From its origins, Stoic philosophy was centered on how to live and die.

[127] Epictetus, *Discourses and Selected Writings*, 229.

[128] Seneca, *How to Die*, 38.

Stoics also employed a cognitive view of emotions, specifically a studied detachment from emotions.[129] *Apatheia* kept one from being ruled by emotions; our word apathetic comes from this word.[130] This approach of detachment from the world and emotions is similar to the Eastern contemporary philosophy of Buddhism in that there is an inherent desire to remain grounded and rational.[131] Preparation of the mind first and the body second may also include the notion of deprivation.[132]

Have No Fears

To "have no fear" when it comes to dying, the Stoic focuses on living a grounded life. Epictetus writes, "Don't hope that events will turn out the way you want, welcome events in whichever way they happen: this is the path to peace."[133] As they resist being ruled by emotion, Stoics do not seek to get too optimistic or pessimistic regarding the world around them. Rather, to live without fear was a daily practice of contemplation, centering themselves on beliefs and practices that would enable them to face dying and the day of their death without fear of leaving something undone or not being enough.

Have No Regrets

The Stoic life was less like a dance and more like a wrestling match; therefore, they were instructed to be aware of obstacles in their path.[134] Aurelius put it this way: "The art of life is more like the wrestler's art than the dancer's, in respect of this, that it

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[129] Pennington, *Jesus the Great Philosopher*, 91–92.

[130] Pennington, *Jesus the Great Philosopher*, 92.

[131] Pennington, *Jesus the Great Philosopher*, 113.

[132] Vost, *The Porch and the Cross*, 33–34.

[133] Epictetus, *Discourses and Selected Writings*, 224.

[134] Vost, *The Porch and the Cross*, 172.

should stand ready and firm to meet onsets which are sudden and unexpected."[135] To die well, one must realize that life is often complicated and troublesome, and obstacles will be a reality. Given its emphasis on virtuous living, it makes sense that one pitfall of a Stoic might be the regret of not having more time to be virtuous. But Cicero notes, "No life is too short if virtue is complete. Many times I've felt the time was right for me to die—if only I could have done so! For there was nothing left to seek, the duties of life were fulfilled, all that remained were struggles with fortune."[136] Therefore, practicing a belief in having "no regrets" was itself a virtuous act, recognizing that if life ends but was lived virtuously, there is no need to believe that one needed more time.

Set Yourself Free

In conjunction with a life of no fear and regret, the Stoic sets himself free when he structures his life such that at the end, he is not unduly burdened by a sense of enslavement to anyone or anything. In addition to intentionally living the virtuous life, Vost suggests at least five other practices within Stoicism that helped in setting oneself free. The first is writing down key ideas; this serves as an embodied form of contemplation and self-reflection. The second practice is that of the daily rituals/rites that reiterate virtuous living. The third Stoic practice is to meditate on significant themes such as peace, friendship, death, and life. The fourth practice is recognizing first impressions or "first thoughts," to avoid overreacting but instead to remain composed in human relations. The final Stoic practice in setting oneself free is choosing the upper hand, or "grabbing the right handle," which refers to approaching situations with a balanced and charitable perception.[137]

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[135] Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 88.

[136] Cicero, *On Living and Dying Well*, 52.

[137] Vost, *The Porch and the Cross*, 186–87.

Become a Part of the Whole

The final practice of Stoicism is reaching a place of acceptance. Aurelius writes, "Death is such as generation is, a mystery of nature; composition out of the same elements, and a decomposition into the same; and altogether not a thing of which any man should be ashamed, for it is not contrary to [the nature of] a reasonable animal, and not contrary to the reason of our constitution."[138] He continues, "I am composed of the formal and the material. Neither of them will perish into non-existence, as neither of them came into existence out of non-existence. Every part of me then will be reduced by change into some part of the universe, and that again will change into another part of the universe, and so on forever."[139] The good death for the Stoic is to put these beliefs into practice so that one dies well, having accepted the inevitable and following a virtuous life. Dying the good death is intentionally utilizing contemplation, fearlessness, and acceptance in the dying process. Vost writes,

> The Stoic art of living is not acquired merely through a reading of the Stoics accompanied by an appropriate "Aha!" at their insights. Each Stoic makes it clear that *to live a life guided by philosophy requires repeated and persistent efforts.* It takes ongoing, strenuous training throughout the course of one's life in the form of *askesis*, philosophical and spiritual exercises.[140]

This is the case not only for the art of living but also for the art of dying. Stoics die a good death when they successfully have lived a life of contemplation and virtue, when they accept the inevitability of death as a natural occurrence of life.

A Johannine *Ars Moriendi*

A Johannine *Ars Moriendi* is the final approach to the art of dying and the central focus of this thesis. Christians look to the Bible as the authoritative sacred text on

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[138] Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 36.

[139] Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 53.

[140] Vost, *The Porch and the Cross*, 184.

which they develop beliefs and practices, including a Christian *Ars Moriendi*.[141] The Johannine corpus is historically rooted in Judaism and set in the context of Hellenistic Judaism and the Greco-Roman philosophical world.[142] The apostle John's work is particularly influential in developing an *Ars Moriendi* because it encapsulates the life of Jesus of Nazareth, addresses Christian beliefs regarding death, and includes pastoral words of hope and comfort. A Johannine *Ars Moriendi* considers the sensitive issues around death and dying and helps Christians recenter their understanding of death and dying with an eternal perspective, helping them learn what it means to die well.

Johannine Beliefs about Dying Well

The Johannine literature places an emphasis on life, calling Christians to consider that eternal life has already begun and will continue even after physical death. John's Gospel highlights the importance of eternal life, while Revelation speaks of the eternal destiny of all people and points to the blessed hope that Christians will experience. Christians do not necessarily find a way out of present suffering but are comforted that suffering will one day end. Christians neither befriend death nor do they see death as an end to their existence; rather, Christians are comforted in knowing that they will live forever and that Jesus will defeat the enemy, death. The emphasis in Johannine literature on eternal life and the new creation highlights our longing for life unstained by sin, suffering, and death. The Christian's desire is not only for an unending

[141] The Johannine *Ars Moriendi* section in this chapter utilizes content and arguments from chapters 2 and 3 in this thesis, which lay out a Johannine theology of death and form the basis of an approach to death and dying. While the author of this thesis adheres to a Protestant interpretation of *sola scriptura*, this present section does not require agreement on final authority. Christians from Catholicism, Protestantism, and Eastern Orthodoxy all recognize the Bible as sacred and authoritative for doctrine and practice.

[142] Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *John and Philosophy: A New Reading of the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2017), 112. Engberg-Pedersen gives insight into the Johannine Gospel as it relates to other philosophical schools of thought, such as Stoicism and Platonism, while still seeing strong Jewish roots.

future but for a future where God's people can truly live and flourish under the rule of Jesus, no longer subject to the curse.

Emphasis on Eternal Life

A Johannine *Ars Moriendi* is rooted in an emphasis on eternal life. John is not speaking of a future spiritual existence devoid of physical reality. In his Gospel, John uses analogous relationships to reiterate that the Christian's hope is not unrelated to this world. Christians have temporal longings, including hunger and thirst. John relates the Christian's longing for temporal sustenance to an ultimate fulfillment of our longing for eternal sustenance. In John 4, Jesus meets the Samaritan woman. Being fully human, Jesus understood her need for water, as he, too, desired a drink. He emphasized that no matter how much water she drew, she would always remain unsatisfied. The very need to consume water is a reminder that we need constant sustenance. Jesus tells her about everlasting water that will quench her spiritual thirst for meaning and belonging. In John 4:6–7, he identifies her needs and presents himself as meeting her needs. He can quench her thirst forever. Likewise, John 6:33–35 uses the analogy of the bread of life to show that those who consume the bread of life will not hunger again.

In both circumstances, Jesus offers himself as the solution. Living for and following Jesus leads the Christian toward living the good life and dying a good death. Jesus fulfills the Christian's longing for eternal sustenance with everlasting water and the bread of life. When Christians approach death and dying, their faith will deepen as they recall that Jesus will forever satisfy their needs.

Later, in John 6, Jesus asks his disciples whether they will stay or abandon him, and Peter offers his classic response that Jesus is the one who has the words of eternal life (6:68). Jesus's offering separates a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* from other spiritual traditions. Jesus is not offering a "pathway" to merely handling death, a set of works or practices required to make death acceptable, attempting to dismiss the

emotional and existential sting of death through denial, or accepting the inevitability of death. Instead, Jesus offers himself as sustenance; those who have faith in him, his life, death, and defeat of death have the solution: Jesus faced death and defeated it. He is the exemplar; he goes before Christians and teaches them how to approach death and dying.

Jesus and Death Preparation

Jesus did not have a passive approach to death; he faced death by intentionally preparing himself and those he loved for his death. A Johannine *Ars Moriendi* reminds Christians that all of life, including death, is to be lived in faithful preparation for and completion of God's desires. Jesus sought and trusted the will of his Father, sacrificing himself as the Lamb who would take away the sins of the world. He approached death knowing that he would endure death and emerge victorious, knowing that he was the resurrection and the life for Christians who would believe and follow him.

There are several examples of preparing for death in the Johannine *Ars Moriendi*. First is Mary's anointing as part of his death preparation (John 12:1–8). Anointing is usually associated with a divine purpose: one is anointed to be set apart for a holy reason. The anointing is worthy of Jesus's time, and Jesus is worthy of Mary's devotion. Anointing is practiced across several Christian denominations as a sacred marking of time in which one acknowledges death is nearing and cleansing is necessary.[143] Unlike some Eastern religions and philosophies, the ritual/rite of anointing is not centered on individual grounding or gaining a sense of inner peace but is rooted in communal involvement. Jesus permitted another to anoint him; it was a gracious gift to his friend Mary to be part of his death preparation.

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[143] Such cleansing looks different depending on what denomination is presenting the anointing, but the overall point across all such anointings is that God is present and gracious in the anointing act, which provides a source of comfort that comes with the forgiveness of God. See also Matthew Levering, *Dying and the Virtues* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 135–47. Levering's discussion on the Catholic sacrament, Anointing of the sick, provides insight into the ways Catholicism views virtuous dying.

Jesus also prepares for death through prayer. John's Gospel often depicts Jesus praying to and communing with his Father. In John 17, Jesus prays the High Priestly Prayer, in which he prays for his disciples even as he knows he is facing death. He spends the hours leading up to his death preparing through anointing, spending time with those he loved, especially his disciples, and praying.

In observing a Johannine *Ars Moriendi*, Christians can involve their community in their death preparation, demonstrating that Christians do not belong to themselves but are part of a greater body, the church. Christians in end-of-life care can follow Jesus's example by seeking anointing or other end-of-life rituals that highlight the significance of their coming death.[144]

Jesus also prepared those he loved for his death by speaking on several occasions to his followers and disciples to foretell his death (John 10:11; 12:27–36; 15:13). He comforted his followers and disciples, telling them his death would be for their salvation and that they would become "sons of light" (John 12:36). Jesus's death preparation was familial; he cared for those he loved and considered to be family.

He also prepared for his death by serving those around him. In John 13, Jesus shared the Passover meal with his disciples and washed their feet. He commanded his followers and disciples to serve one another after his example (John 13:34–35) This is further reiterated in the call to the churches of Revelation to love and serve one another during their suffering.

Finally, a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* shows that part of Jesus's death preparation included his promise to send the Holy Spirit for their comfort amid trials to come (John

[144] Dru Johnson provides an array of ritual and rites that can help Christians honor their faith in a formative way as they prepare for the moment of death. For examples of rites that can assist Christians in spiritual formation, see the appendix, "Examples of a Ritual Inventory," in Dru Johnson, *Human Rites: The Power of Rituals, Habits, and Sacraments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019, 135–45.

14–16).[145] He prays that the Holy Spirit will guide the disciples to faithfully live out the mission God has given to them. Death and dying can be terrifying, and Jesus knew this. He does not leave his church without a source of comfort and guidance as they approach death and dying. Christians likewise can encourage one another to approach death and dying with the assurance of the gift of the Holy Spirit and the presence of God in Christ Jesus, promised to those who believe and follow Jesus.

Jesus Is the Victor over Death

The third significant belief in a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* is that Jesus is the victor over death. John's Gospel highlights Jesus's ministry and focuses on the significance of his death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. From Jesus's substitutionary death, highlighted in the Gospel, one looks to Revelation to see how the scope of redemption extends to Jesus's victory over sin, Satan, and death. In his Gospel, John shows Jesus's power over death in the healing of the official's son (John 4:46–54), the raising of Lazarus (John 11), and in his own death and resurrection (John 18–20). When Jesus healed Lazarus and the official's son, it required only his word. When Jesus approached his own death, he did so accepting the will of his Father (John 18). He knew that his mission from birth was to meet his divine appointment with a Roman cross and an empty tomb.

In the Book of Revelation, John shows Jesus's victory over death displayed in majesty as the Warrior-King who defeats death. Revelation opens with Jesus presented as the keyholder of death and Hades, the victor over sin and death (Rev 1:18). Christians can strive to die well by clinging to the one who holds the keys to death and Hades, the one who will release them from the finality of death. Jesus does not welcome or befriend

[145] Engberg-Pedersen writes, "In John 17 Jesus is 'praying' ('asking') God to do to the disciples (upon his departure: 17:13) what he had himself told them in John 14 that he *would* ask God to do (14:16). The prayer of John 17 *is* the prayer announced by Jesus in John 14: the prayer that God may send the 'Paraclete' to the disciples, now that Jesus is going away." Engberg-Pedersen, *John and Philosophy*, 282 (italics original).

death, for death is an enemy to be defeated. Christians seeking to employ a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* do so with the belief that following Jesus does not keep them in the grave as reconciled to death or a friend of death but frees them from death's power and resurrects them to new life. Jesus's faithful followers are death conquerors. John reminds the church at Smyrna of this in chapter 2. He comforts the church and urges them to continue in faithfulness. Those who are faithful to God endure suffering; they identify with Jesus's suffering, but in following their Warrior-King to death, they also are recipients of his victory over death. Christians living out a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* persevere, recognizing that dying a good death is parallel to living a good life in obedience and fidelity to Jesus.

Death Will Die

The fourth significant belief for observing a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* is that Jesus has not only defeated death but that death itself will die. Christians will not face the second death, or eternal death. This understanding is derived primarily from the Book of Revelation. John describes the martyrs' cry for the victory of their Warrior-King Jesus. Jesus assures them the victory has been won, but they must endure and wait on his providence. Christians waited for the peace of the Davidic Kingdom, an eternal kingdom that death could not threaten. However, John notes in 8:24 that those who do not believe in Jesus will die in their sins; they will not inherit eternal life but be condemned to eternal death.

God's people have waited for victory over death since Genesis 3:15. John argues that Jesus's resurrection gives Christians certain victory and blessed hope, but they must now persevere in faithfulness and wait for Jesus to bring about the end of death's reign at his second coming. In the interim, through Christ, Christians have overcome the world (1 John 5:4) and know that these truths are abiding and secure (2 John 1:2).

Before concluding the Book of Revelation, John focuses on the blessed hope of the new creation. While alternative spiritual traditions believe in continuity from this life to the afterlife, it is a Christian distinctive to maintain such continuity while also recognizing the discontinuity of an eternal life absent of sin, suffering, and death under the reign and rule of Jesus. A Johannine *Ars Moriendi* approaches death and dying reminding Christians of the eternal life that is already and not yet.

Johannine Practices of Dying Well

Christians have long sought to employ practices to die in ways that are faithful to Jesus.[146] A Johannine *Ars Moriendi* can be broken down into three broad practices that help Christians die well: appropriate grieving, striving for Christlike imitation through a call to love one another, and practicing liturgies of the church.

Grieving

Grief is an important aspect of death and dying, and any comprehensive *Ars Moriendi* must be able to address the way people process death and loss. The Johannine literature describes appropriate grieving; these approaches serve as acceptable ways Christians can grieve. In John 4:46–54, the official whose son was near death shows clear signs of grief; he approaches Jesus fearing his son will die but believing Jesus can heal his son. The official's love for his son is apparent. Although death seems inevitable, the distressed father believes in Jesus's ability to heal his son. He is not seeking signs and wonders, but he is persistent. He has a disposition of trust in the divine healer and is

[146] Allen Verhey, *The Christian Art of Dying: Learning from Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 300–385. Three chapters of Verhey's work address practices the church has implemented, both old and new, including the practice of caring for one another, which is helpful for a broader discussion. The three broad practices described here are drawn from the Johannine tradition. For example, the use of Eucharist does not negate the importance of baptism but presumes baptism is a practiced ritual that has already taken place. Many of the practices named within Verhey's three chapters could be implemented by Christians to assist them in living and dying with a Johannine *Ars Moriendi*.

willing to place his son in Jesus's hands. This disposition of trust is a model for Christians and loved ones who are facing death.

The second example is Jesus's friend, Lazarus (John 11). He is no stranger to Jesus; he and his sisters count Jesus among their loved ones. Again, John shows Jesus individually and communally tending to the grieving. He is neither insensitive nor unsympathetic to their grief, and he does not expect or demand a singular grieving response to death.

Mary, Lazarus's sister, is expressive and emotive (John 11:32). She is part of a community of grieving mourners (John 11:20, 31). Jesus weeps as he cares for her and his deceased friend. Jesus knows the cost of death; his tears reflect his love for his friends and the damage that sin has brought to the world. Jesus does not tell Mary to show less emotion or that her tears are inappropriate or evidence of faithlessness, nor does he rebuke her for not coming to him immediately. Jesus is gentle and loving, allowing her to grieve in ways natural to who she is.

Lazarus's other sister, Martha, displays another form of grief. She meets Jesus (John 11:3) as he arrives. She is inquisitive and wrestles with her grief while maintaining trust that Jesus could have and still could heal her brother (John 11:21–22). Contrary to Mary, Martha displays a more controlled grief. Once more, Jesus does not rebuke her for the way she grieves, nor does he become insensitive or unsympathetic toward her.

Thomas's example is also instructive to Christians who are grieving. Before journeying to Mary and Martha's home, Jesus tells his disciples they are going to see Lazarus, who has died. Although Thomas is scared, he states, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11:16). Thomas is not known for his courage, but his statement displays a form of grief, regardless of whether he uttered it in confidence or while trembling. Either way, he is fearful of death, and he must face the death of one of his friends. This is helpful and important to consider while grieving because Christians, at times, can waiver in their confidence.

The reader sees that Christians can differently grieve the death of a loved one, and their pain is deeply felt and appropriate. They can shed tears for loved ones, not as a source of hopelessness but as a sign of love for them and the cost of redemption that Jesus paid. Christians can weep knowing there will be a final day when, as John points out in Revelation 21:4, "[Jesus] will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more."

The grieving that Jesus rejects is the grief without hope. It stirs anger within Jesus because it denies the victory over death that God has promised through Jesus. This is inappropriate grieving for a Christian. A Johannine *Ars Moriendi* is ultimately rooted in recentering a Christian's hopes within an eternal perspective, focused on the promise of eternal life secured in the person and work of Jesus. Jesus's death preparation leads Christians to the final two practices of a Johannine *Ars Moriendi*: Christlike imitation and liturgical practices.

Christlike Imitation: A Call to Love

An *Ars Moriendi* is a performative approach toward death and, for Christians, requires adherence to biblical belief and practice. To die well, Christians must live well, imitating Christ through love. Christians should be imitators of what is good (3 John 11). John calls Christians to love one another and to be known by their love (1 John 2:9–11; 3:11–24; 3 John 6). Christian love is an integral part of spiritual formation and growth and enables the Christian church to support Christians in dying well. Christian love was first and foremost demonstrated through the cross of Jesus. Christians are called to follow Jesus to death, embodying his love and servanthood.

Christians should also imitate Jesus in how they care for those who are grieving and those who are dying. John's Gospel provides examples of how Jesus cared for those who faced death and dying in different ways. Not only does John describe Jesus's different approaches to those who are grieving, but John also describes the variety

of relationships between Jesus and his followers. Jesus cares for a man he does not know personally by healing his child; he addresses his friend Lazarus's death with his dear friends (his disciples); and he addresses the same death with Lazarus's family members. Likewise, Christians can practice Christian love toward those dying or grieving death to assist the community of believers as they seek to die well.

Liturgical Practices

Finally, Christians practicing a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* can employ liturgical practices, including confession of sin, the Eucharist, prayer, and singing.[147] All four of these liturgical practices shape and grow Christians to die faithfully as Christians.

John provides the verses often used in liturgical applications of Confession and Pardon (1 John 1:8–9).[148] Over time, liturgical practices mold Christians into the kind of people they want to be. John instructs people not to hide in darkness but live in the light. One cannot die a good death at peace with God while living in delusion and darkness. John says that to acknowledge and confess sin is a necessity. John assures Christians that if they will confess their sin, they will be pardoned. John also addresses confronting sins that do not lead to death and sins that do lead to death (1 John 5:16–17). Sin has grave consequences, and reconciliation ought to be sought and granted. Christians are instructed to seek and gain restoration. Confession of sin can bring about restoration in relationships, which leads to restored Christian love. For Christians to die the good death, they are instructed to be a confessing people, for confessing people are those who are faithful to the commands of the Bible.

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[147] Liturgy in this section is being used in the broadest sense of the term, meaning public and ritualistic worship practices within a church community. The thrust of this section is to highlight that a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* is necessarily lived out within the community of local believers. Christianity is not an individualistic religion but requires love of God and love of the church.

[148] Confession serves as a sacrament in Roman Catholicism, though it is not a sacrament in other traditions, such as Protestantism. However, Protestant traditions often utilize public confession of sin in worship as well as highlighting the significance of confessing sins to one another.

The second liturgical practice is the Eucharist or, in the Johannine literature, the analogy of the bread of life (John 6). John's letters highlight Christian love and community; this is displayed in the Christian life in no greater way than at the Eucharist table amongst baptized Christians. Troels Engberg-Pedersen writes,

> *They must themselves come to possess the pneuma*, and this happens both in baptism as we know (John 3)—*and also in the Eucharist* (John 6). Then they will at long last understand fully who Jesus is, and then they will also themselves eventually reach the goal of the whole set of events that have been staged by God . . . : their own resurrection on the last day.[149]

The sacraments of the church are part of a Christian's spiritual formation. These sacraments remind Christians what it means to live faithfully and distinctly within the Christian community. In the Eucharist, the church is called to remember the death of Jesus. This regular, death-saturated ritual/rite of the church recalls the death of their Lord to whom they are united. The consumption of the bread of life is a reminder to be devoted to the gospel, to remember Jesus's death until he returns as Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 11:23–26. John concludes Revelation with the same comforting reminder that Jesus is coming soon (Rev 22:7), so the church must remain faithful to the mission God has given.

Prayer is another liturgical practice of the church. Jesus regularly demonstrates prayer, and it is an active part of his death preparation. Christians must cultivate a prayer life to grow in godliness. Christians cannot grow apart from prayer. Christians can pray individually or with other Christians, especially as it pertains to end-of-life care, as they pray for God's peace and mercy. Christians seeking to live out a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* recognize that Jesus embodied this practice, and the church quickly followed this example.

The final liturgical practice for employing a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* is singing. The church has always been known to sing spiritual songs. Biblical tradition is

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[149] Engberg-Pedersen, *John and Philosophy*, 171 (italics original).

rich in poetry and songs, with wonderful examples in the Psalter. In Revelation 5:9–10, John writes the spiritual song of the faithful church, piecing together beautiful portraits of Jesus as the Lion of Judah and the "Lamb, as though it had been slain" (Rev 5:6). Jesus is worshipped and praised for his worthiness, his victory over death, and for securing God's people. Dying well as a Christian is dying faithfully; dying faithfully comes with joy. The Christian church has long been a singing community, and spiritual singing encourages Christians as they prepare for death, experience death, and grieve a death.

Following a Johannine *Ars Moriendi*

All religious traditions have sacred texts and revered teachers that influence their traditions, including their *Ars Moriendi* traditions. Christians should seek to die distinctly within the Christian religious tradition, which is rooted in Scripture, and reject the influence of eclectic spiritual traditions.

Christians recognize and accept that Scripture says death is the punishment for sin. Unlike the Stoic and Buddhist traditions, which consider death a friend to be accepted, Christians view death with an eternal and theological lens, knowing that the natural body must die but being assured that Jesus's victory over death gives the Christian resurrected life in him. All traditions accept that death is inevitable and part of the natural end of the life cycle. However, Christians also see the death and dying process as a sacred process and event. Christians employing a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* perform the art of dying through practices such as grieving, loving, and serving one another, and through the liturgical practices of the church. This is seen especially in the burial practices and remembrance of the saints, which praise God for the hope Christians have in the promise of resurrected life.

A Stoic or Buddhist *Ars Moriendi* encourages adherents to practice mindfulness, obtain peace, and avoid emotionalism by developing their reason—practices that affect the temporal but not the eternal. However, a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* develops

the Christian holistically because it is rooted in Scripture, which addresses all matters pertaining to life and death. It develops Christians temporally and eternally by rooting them in what it means to be saved by Christ, formed by the Word, and sanctified in his truth. Dying well does not only look like completing one's journey in the present; it is preparation for eternity. It connects Christians to those who have gone before them and those who will come after them by being caught up in the grander story of God's redemption of the cosmos. Christians are part of the catholic church, the gathering of saints throughout time and history.

Christian belief in an embodied afterlife following resurrection differs from Buddhism and other Abrahamic religious traditions in kind and specificity. While Buddhism proposes a cycle of death and rebirth, continuing until one achieves liberation, Christians recognize that there is one physical death for all people and then an eternal life of blessing with God or eternal punishment and death apart from God. Although Christianity is similar to Islam and Judaism in believing in a bodily resurrection, Christians believe that eternal life is promised only to those who believe in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Christians do not believe in and practice rituals merely with the hope that God will grant them futuristic bliss where troubles will cease. Rather, Christians practice rituals that shape them to be more like Christ and imitate his love and care for others beginning in the present. The Johannine *Ars Moriendi* encourages Christians to seek the kingdom of Christ because there is no other kingdom that can satisfy. Jesus is the center of eternal life and the ultimate reward for Christians in the afterlife.

Further, Christians believe in eternal punishment for those who are not in Christ. Salvation is only found through Christ's obedience and not through the obedience of the religious participant. Observance of the biblical laws and commands devoid of belief and trust reveals that the adherent has not truly known Jesus (Matt 7:21–23). This is important because Christians, like Muslims and Jews, prioritize a matter of obedience

as a faithful practice of dying well but differ on the importance assigned to such obedience. All three Abrahamic religions would claim obedience to one divine being, whom they would assert is the true God. Christianity differs in that appeasing or gaining approval from God is demonstrated in different ways, namely by grace through faith—not by works. Christians root their soteriology and eschatology in the person and work of Jesus alone.

While all three traditions would highlight a sense of grace, Christianity differs in that grace alone can bring salvation from judgment. The practices of dying well are not to gain divine favor; they are practiced as a result of having been shown favor and given the promise of eternal life. Christians maintain obligatory sacraments for sanctification in such a way that to not practice such rituals is detrimental to one's own spiritual health. This contrasts the Jew's strict observance of the law of the Hebrew Bible or the Muslim's adherence to the Five Pillars of Islam as effective for reaching reconciliation and salvation.

Further, while Islam, Judaism, and Stoicism specifically emphasize doing charitable deeds, living virtuously, and producing good works, Christianity differs in that loving one's neighbor is rooted in Jesus's example. Jews, Muslims, and Stoics emulate various individuals, but Christians see only Jesus Christ—truly God and truly man and without sin—as worthy of emulation. When it comes to dying well, Christians following a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* follow Jesus's example. In considering these various *Ars Moriendi* traditions, the goal for Christians is not to syncretize these various traditions but to demonstrate how following a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* is the only option for Christians because it is rooted in the truth of the Bible.

Conclusion

This chapter argued that dying well is not a biological question but primarily a spiritual, religious, and philosophical question. This required an assessment of the

philosophies and theologies of other traditions. This chapter provided four alternative contemporary and historical traditions of *Ars Moriendi*: Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and Stoicism. Each was assessed based on its beliefs and practices toward death and dying, demonstrating how each of these traditions defines a good death. This chapter showed that one of the central aims of an *Ars Moriendi* tradition is an active rather than passive approach to living well in order to ensure a good death.

An Islamic *Ars Moriendi* consists of dying in active submission to Allah through adherence to the Qur'an and the Prophet of Islam. A good Muslim must actively live and die observing the Five Pillars of Islam. Muslims maintain other theological beliefs concerning the Day of Resurrection. Ultimately, their death and bereavement rituals reflect that having died the good death, a Muslim trusts in the perceived goodness and mercy of Allah to judge them justly.

A Judaic *Ars Moriendi* consists of relying on their sustainer God, living life among the community, observing the Torah, and caring for others. The Jewish people have structured annual rituals, including Yom Kippur, and offer a thorough grieving system that permits people to honor and mourn loved ones who have died.

A Buddhist *Ars Moriendi* recognizes one's own mortality, establishes what it means to reach enlightenment, and acknowledges the stages of dying and the cycle of death and rebirth. Buddhists care for loved ones who are dying by offering prayers, mantra recitations, and the burning of incense. A Buddhist *Ars Moriendi* emphasizes the role of mindfulness, meditative reflection and acceptance, and inner peace.

A Stoic *Ars Moriendi* is achieved when one has accepted the inevitability and universality of death and prepared themselves through contemplation. Dying well includes having no fear or regrets but remaining grounded in the reality that upon death, one is joined in with the whole of the world. Stoic practices focus primarily on exercising the mind to prepare for a virtuous life, which includes dying in accord to the virtues cultivated throughout life.

A Johannine *Ars Moriendi* seeks to apply a Johannine theology of death for Christians emphasizing eternal life, death preparation, the victory of Jesus over death, and the death of death. A Johannine *Ars Moriendi* is applied through grieving, Christlike imitation, and liturgical practices. Christians are to reject the temptation to allow other spiritual traditions to influence the death and dying process, as religious syncretism can lead Christians away from what it means to die a good death. A Johannine *Ars Moriendi* teaches Christians how to look at death and dying with an eternal perspective, rooted in Scripture, centered on the life and work of Jesus Christ as the victor over death, and intentionally focused on their hope in eternal life.

CHAPTER 5

A JOHANNINE *ARS MORIENDI* AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE GLOBAL CHURCH

This thesis highlighted the need for a contemporary Christians *Ars Moriendi* from a distinctly biblical view by first reviewing relevant literature and then developing a theology of death from the Johannine literature. Chapter 4 surveyed four historical and contemporary spiritual traditions to show how various communities have approached dying a good death. A Johannine *Ars Moriendi* was presented as a distinct and preferable approach to the art of dying a good death as a Christian.

A Johannine *Ars Moriendi* recenters death and dying with an eternal perspective, drawing on the beliefs and practices of the Christian tradition to help Christians die well. While humans are impacted by their own contexts and cultures, the intent of this research was to describe how Christians can root their understanding of the death and dying process in the historical truths of Jesus's death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. When Christians encounter conflicting cultural or spiritual traditions, the presumption is that Christians would seek fidelity to Christian truth above all other cultural preferences. Individuals can apply a Johannine *Ars Moriendi*, but its application should not remain at the individual level. The global church, as the collective witness to the gospel truth and as ambassadors of the kingdom of Christ, is also called to live and die faithfully.

Five Implications of a Johannine *Ars Moriendi*

This chapter focuses on describing five implications for the global church to consider in order to face death and dying faithfully: (1) the church must care for the dying; (2) the church must reclaim the sacredness of death and dying; (3) the church must

remember the ritualistic nature of death and dying; (4) the church must maintain a theology of the body; and (5) the church must claim a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* as an embodied apologetical tool for spiritual retention and formation and as a witness of the saints who have lived and died well.

The Church Must Care for the Dying

Christians are called to imitate Christ by loving one another, which is a crucial part of assisting the Christians in the church to die well. One of the many blessings of medical and technological advances is that humans are provided with greater opportunity and time to die well with intentionality.[1] This means Christians, individually and as a church, often have the opportunity to engage in and support death preparation. In past generations, Christians may have embraced an *Ars Moriendi* because death could come at any moment. It would not have been a shock to the community to see people die from all sorts of conditions from which, with modern medicine and technology, people now commonly recover. With an increased life expectancy, Christians now can embrace an *Ars Moriendi* with greater intentionality. This is an opportunity for the church to ensure that Christians receive the spiritual care they need by facilitating preparation for the family and loved ones beyond death, opportunities for charitable giving, and even opportunities to seek forgiveness and restoration.

As the church cares for those who are dying, this will often mean caring for the sick populations around us. The church will need to discover what it means to provide spiritual care for those with cancer or dementia, cardiac issues, and chronic depression. Whatever the illness that has fallen upon the saints, the church needs to be prepared to care well for the dying through pastoral care and counseling and through the service of deacons. The call to care for the dying is part of the call to bear one another's burdens

[1] Rob Moll, *The Art of Dying: Living Fully into the Life to Come*, exp. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 29–30.

and allows Christians within the church to have a support system that is like an extension of their family. The saints that are present and the saints that have gone before us all make up the family of God. The dead are not forgotten but held in the memory of the saints.[2] Christians must attend to the dying because as the people of God, love and care are tied to who they are as imitators of Christ and as a family.

In an age of overly medicalized dying philosophies, the practices of a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* can be adopted by church members to reshape the way they approach death and dying. From its inception, the global church has been at the forefront of caring for the sick, the broken, and the dying. As medical advances continue, the number of elderly saints increase, requiring churches to consider and perhaps reclaim the ways in which elderly people are cared for in their last days. Certainly, the blessings of medical professionals are necessary and appreciated, but the church cannot expect medical facilities to be able to provide the help that elderly saints need to die well.[3] The church alone is the community from which Christians can learn to die well in because the church is where Christians learn to die as Christians. The church cannot afford to outsource spiritual practices and expect that Christians will know how to die well.

The church in the past has done this. Timothy Paul Jones points out how, in the second century, Aristides notes that there were "*four types of people in the world—barbarians, Greeks, Jews, or Christians*" and sought to see "*what manner of life does the worship of each type of people produce*" in order to argue that Christians demonstrated the presence of God among them in part by caring for the dying.[4] In the early church,

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[2] Glennys Howarth, *Death and Dying: A Sociological Introduction* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007), 189.

[3] Allen Verhey*, The Christian Art of Dying: Learning from Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 64–65. While the resources for hospice have been underutilized, Verhey points out that a generic spirituality has begun to take precedence over the roots of the commitment to the Christian faith.

[4] Aristides, *The Apology of Aristides on Behalf of the Christians from a Syriac Ms. Preserved on Mount Sinai*, ed. J. Rendel Harris and J. Armitage Robinson, 2nd ed., Texts and Studies: Contributions to Biblical and Patristic Literature, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893), chap. 2 (p. 36), quoted in Timothy Paul Jones, "'Something Divine Mingled among Them': Care for the Parentless and the

Christians tended to the dying among them. Aristides writes, "Whenever one of their poor passes from the world, each one according to his ability pays attention and carefully sees to his burial."[5] In the Roman Empire, dying came with a cost, as it does in all societies. As a result, there arose funerary societies; one could join, pay dues, and receive a proper burial. When one could not afford membership in one of these societies, a deceased loved one would be discarded into a "mass burial pit."[6] By supporting the burial of their dead, Christians showed the importance of the body and testified to ethos of Christian love; this burial practice also prevented their being buried in gravesites devoted to pagan gods.[7] Jones writes, "Among Christians, the human body was sacred even in death, and the bodies of the poor were no less sacred than the flesh of the wealthy."[8]

Churches often used to have burial plots on their premises, highlighting a theology of future resurrection and solidarity with the saints and showing how the church cares for its own. However, the church can be tempted to lose the theological benefit of being buried among the saints when it concedes that burial must take place in faraway, distant places. In this way, the church has participated in the privatization and professionalization of death, and the church takes responsibility for restoring the dying process to its religious roots.

Whether it is palliative care, hospice,[9] providing basic home care, shopping, cleaning, assisting in transportation to medical appointments or church, or even if it is

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Poor as Ecclesial Apologetic in the Second Century," in *Rich in Good Deeds: A Biblical Response to Poverty by the Church and by Society*, ed. Robert L. Plummer (Dallas: Fontes Press, 2022), 163 (italics original).

[5] Aristides, *Apology* 5 (p. 49), quoted in Jones, "'Something Divine Mingled among Them'," 163.

[6] Ian Morris, *Death-Ritual and Social Structure in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 42, quoted in Jones, "'Something Divine Mingled among Them'," 164.

[7] Jones, "'Something Divine Mingled among Them'," 165.

[8] Jones, "'Something Divine Mingled among Them'," 165.

[9] Verhey*, The Christian Art of Dying*, 59–67. Verhey points out how the hospice movement began through the desire of a devout Christian, Cicely Saunders, to care for the sick. Hospice and palliative

providing friendship, the Christian church has been blessed with the opportunity to have the saints longer than in past generations. Given the wisdom of the older saints within the church, this is to be perceived as a blessing (Job 12:12). Elderly Christians often will note that they feel lonely; the church must be the place where these older individuals feel their lives are valuable.[10] The younger and the older generations are called to love and serve one another. The church has the opportunity to step in and fill the gap with ministries for the elderly, death education for all ages, and opportunities to serve one another.

Reclaim the Sacredness of Death and Dying

The way a culture views death will impact the way people view death. Christians need not dismiss ways in which their approaches to death and dying have been impacted by culture insofar as these beliefs and attitudes do not contradict a view that is distinctly Christian. Christians must reclaim the sacredness of death and dying primarily by recognizing that death is not merely a biological or medical matter but, first and foremost, a religious matter. Death and dying is both a sacred process and event. The church ought to play a role in helping its members recognize that this process is not merely about the prolongation of life, nor is it about speedily moving toward the moment of death; rather, death is a result of sin in the world and all people are subject to it. Dialogue concerning end-of-life care often focuses on quality and quantity of life; both discussions miss the point of dying well. For a Christian, to die well is to die faithfully, in continuity with the Christian beliefs and practices derived from the biblical witness.

Many people tend to shy away from talking about death and dying, either because they fear dying or feel isolated. Christians are not immune from these feelings.

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care have both provided alternatives during the death and dying process that permit Christians to approach the process through a theological lens, focusing on eternal matters rather than the exclusive prolongation of life sought by a medicalized approach.

[10] Charles A. Corr, Donna M. Corr, Kenneth J. Doka, *Death and Dying, Life and Living*, 8th ed. (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2018), 432–33.

One way that the church can assist Christians is through pastoral care and counseling. As Kenneth Doka states, "In exploring someone's interpretation of diseases, it is essential to be sensitive to these religious or spiritual dimensions. Often because religious or spiritual explanations are not socially validated, individuals may be reluctant to share them or even be fully aware of them."[11] Reclaiming the sacredness of the death and dying process includes being willing to have open and honest dialogue about emotions people are experiencing and the questions they are asking of God. Christians facing terminal diagnoses may be unsure how to respond for a variety of reasons. They may see tragic accidents occur in their families and be uncertain as to how they ought to face those realities from a distinctly Christian perspective. While Christian bioethics has been a helpful resource throughout church history, often what Christians need is empathic listening from fellow Christians who are patient and willing to hear their struggles.[12] Death and dying are times of life that allow Christians to step back and understand that these moments are spiritually formative if they are given space to allow them to be.

The church must also reclaim the sacredness of death and dying in telling the stories of Christians past and present. For example, children are often exposed to death and dying through death-related themes in cinema or through nursery rhymes, songs, humor, and fairy tales.[13] The church ought to be a place where Christians, young and old, are exposed to death and dying and see it as part of the spiritual formation process. Part of reclaiming the sacredness of death and dying is understanding that within Christianity, no one ultimately dies alone, and no one's story is truly isolated. Each Christian is part of

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[11] Kenneth J. Doka, "The Spiritual Needs of the Dying," in *Death and Spirituality*, ed. Kenneth J. Doka with John D. Morgan, Death, Value and Meaning Series (Amityville, NY: Baywood, 1993), 144.

[12] Timothy Keller, *On Death*, How to Find God Series 3 (London: Penguin Books, 2020). See also R. C. Sproul, *Surprised by Suffering: The Role of Pain and Death in the Christian Life*, rev. and exp. ed. (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2010). Keller and Sproul both offer pastoral insight on how Christians can face death as Christians.

[13] Corr, Corr, and Doka, *Death and Dying, Life and Living*, 336–37. See also chap. 5 in Howarth, *Death and Dying*. Howarth demonstrates how visual media, including movies, shows, and documentaries, have all been used to describe societal approaches to death and dying.

the family of God, and their story is caught up in the story of the people of God. The late Tim Keller wrote,

> Christianity is different. It doesn't leave you to face death on your own, by holding up your life record and hoping it will suffice. Instead it gives you a champion who has defeated death, who pardons you and covers you with his love. You face death "in him" and with *his* perfect record (Philippians 3:9). To the degree we believe, know, and embrace that, we are released from the power of death.[14]

Keller knew that death was something the church needed to face head on by centering its members in the gospel and pointing them to Christ. Christians die tied to the person and work of Jesus, and that should change the way they approach death. The power of death does not have a hold on Christians when they reclaim the sacredness of death and dying; they do not face death in the cold loneliness of a purely naturalistic or hopeless worldview. As Nathan Kollar states, "Every life's story has a plot. In the telling of our story, we tie our life together."[15] Christians die in Christ and in the presence of the cloud of witnesses (Heb 12:1). When Christians reclaim the sacredness of death and dying, they join their story to the grander story that God is telling.

Remember the Ritualistic Nature of Death and Dying

Religion is more than mere belief; it is organized belief and practices. Doka writes that rituals "can be a powerful tool for facilitating bereavement."[16] The church does not need to be reluctant to step into the lives of Christians and remind them that Christianity has rituals that can help them process their grief and loss.[17] Rather than

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[14] Keller, *On Death*, 31 (italics original).

[15] Nathan R. Kollar, "Spiritualities of Suffering and Grief," in Doka and Morgan, *Death and Spirituality*, 152.

[16] Kenneth J. Doka, "The Spiritual Crisis of Bereavement," in Doka and Morgan, *Death and Spirituality*, 186.

[17] See Frederick S. Paxton, *Christianizing Death: The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1996). Paxton notes that while Christianity developed a unique theology of death, they do not depart from the ritual practices that characterized facing death and dying (21).

intervening at the very end of life to offer a last sacrament, the church ought to be a part of what precedes the death event. Prayer, offering the sacraments, giving, singing, and serving are rituals that help Christians refocus their hopes on the gift of eternal life promised in the future resurrection.

The church can play a valuable role in the present and coming generations by prioritizing teaching a Johannine *Ars Moriendi.* End of life care has become a hindrance for some Christians, as the "commercialization of death" has emphasized practices that can be financially burdensome. For example, Christians have long placed emphasis on burial, recognizing the importance of the body in a Christian theology of the body based on the hope of future resurrection. To bury their loved ones in a way that honors their religious traditions, Christians should not have to feel financially compromised or emotionally constricted.[18] This is one area in which the church can assist Christians who are not as financially blessed or stable. Churches can advocate for affordable burial plots, coffins, transportation costs, and other items. The church also ought to recognize that Christians do give lavishly and see burial as a time to honor their beloved. Therefore, the church should not discourage Christians who are able to spend liberally on their loved one's end-of-life rituals.

The church has a prominent place in remembering the ritualistic nature of death and dying, as seen in the communal witness of dying Christians. Hospital beds surrounded by family and clergy, funeral services, and even graveside memorials are opportunities for mourners to visibly and communally display the sting of death.[19] For the Christian, however, the liturgy of the church proclaims victory over death. One day all tears will cease, and death will die. The church needs to be a place where grieving occurs,

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[18] Corr, Corr, and Doka, *Death and Dying, Life and Living*, 299. See also Howarth, *Death and Dying*, 240–42, 246.

[19] This is also visibly seen in the Ash Wednesday practice of some liturgical Christian traditions. The ashes are placed in the shape of a black cross on the forehead, pointing to the Christian's recognition of the reality of death and their need for repentance.

faith is strengthened, and grieving members of the church community can be reintroduced to a sense of normalcy. Jones writes that for the church, "in some sense, care for the vulnerable is a dress rehearsal for dying well. It is a miniature martyrdom, a liturgy of letting go what is temporary for the sake of what is eternal."[20] The church, in remembering the ritualistic nature of death and dying, can approach end of life care with intentionality and not passivity.

Maintaining a Theology of the Body

To die well, Christians must wrestle with the significance of the body. The church has a long doctrinal history reiterating the creational goodness of the body. When one considers that ancient Greek philosophy often saw the body as a hindrance to the things of the mind, it is significant to remember that New Testament writers, including John, emphasized the importance of the body and physical reality. This is seen in John's depiction of eternal life with the symbols of physical needs such as hunger and thirst. In recent years, the church has been challenged to better develop and communicate a theology of the body concerning identity, trauma, and body image concerns (among a host of other contemporary issues). The church must lead Christians who are benefiting from advances in modern technology and medicine in a way that maintains an appropriate theology of the body. As it does so, the church must be rooted in the biblical text.[21] The body matters, and how Christians treat their bodies matters. In maintaining a theology of the body, the church is able to approach death and dying on theological terms rather than those dictated by alternative approaches.

The importance of the ritual practice of burial within Christianity reflects a lived-out theology of the body that awaits resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus is

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[20] Jones, "'Something Divine Mingled among Them'," 174.

[21] Candida R. Moss, *Divine Bodies: Resurrecting Perfection in the New Testament and Early Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019). Moss explores assumptions concerning resurrected bodies in dialogue with the biblical text, historical theology, and contemporary issues.

central to the historicity of the Christian faith.[22] Since Christians await resurrection, they practice respect for the body through a theological lens, not through pragmatic, cultural, or economic alternatives. Glennys Howarth writes that a "significant development in many Western societies during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was the turn to cremation as a method of human disposal."[23] Christians employing a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* need to reclaim and maintain a theology of the body that looks forward to the resurrection and eternal life. One implication of holding a proper theology of the body is to cease from cultural trends toward cremation and to practice the long-standing Christian burial ritual. The church ought to lead the way in assisting its members to develop this theology as well as assisting with funds when necessary.[24]

Johannine *Ars Moriendi* as an Embodied Apologetic

When Christians face death and dying, they often face doubt and despair through loneliness and great sadness.[25] At the heart of apologetics is the desire to provide a defense for the truth, and a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* apologetic is one that serves dying and grieving Christians by assuaging their doubts, fears, and objections regarding death

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[22] N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003). See also Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010). Both Wright and Licona offer insights into the significance and necessity for Jesus's bodily resurrection.

[23] Howarth, *Death and Dying*, 226.

[24] See Jones, "'Something Divine Mingled among Them'," 164. Jones argues that, according to the Aristides's early *Apology*, "the presence of the divine was demonstrated when Christians cared for widows, redeemed orphans, gave to those in need, and buried deceased believers whose families could not afford a funeral" (164). The church ought to strive to ensure Christians among them receive a proper burial even if it means bearing financial burdens.

[25] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987). Wolterstorff reflects on what it means to lament as he describes wrestling with grief and sadness over the death of his son. See also C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994) and C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain: How Human Suffering Raises Almost Intolerable Intellectual Problems* (New York: Macmillan, 1962). Lewis provides the Christian church with an example of someone processing and wrestling with his faith as he grieves the death of his wife. Lewis famously wrote *The Problem of Pain* as a rational theodicy rooted in his theological beliefs before later writing *A Grief Observed*, which serves as a more emotive and existential dialogue with faith and theodicy. For helpful analysis on Lewis's development from the former work to the latter, see Michael L. Peterson, *C. S. Lewis and the Christian Worldview* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020) 118–24.

through the truths of the gospel. Therefore, the final implication for a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* for the global church is helping its members to apply the Johannine *Ars Moriendi* as an embodied apologetic.[26] This is worked out epistemically through the rhythms and practices of the Christian art of dying. Christians facing the dying process can continue to grow stronger in their faith and practices so they can die well, rooted in the Christian worldview. They can know that God hears their lament and desires to grow them through their grief. Anglican priest Tish Harrison Warren wrote that "Christians believe that a place of eternal joy not only exists, but is more real than the diminished place of sorrow and pain we now know."[27] When the church faces death and employs Christian practices pointing toward hope, they do so because they believe that God sees and hears their laments and because they know their eternal peace is secure in Jesus.

Warren acknowledges with the rest of the church that "theodicy is not merely a cold philosophical conundrum. It is the engine of our grimmest doubts. It can sometimes wither belief altogether."[28] Christians need a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* because the problem of suffering and death can take Christians to their most existential depths of being, sometimes destroying their faith. This withering of faith is a crucial reason why formulating a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* is more than a mere philosophical and theological discussion. It is a necessary apologetic discussion in which spiritual health is at stake. Rather than viewing dying as an event that occurs after a terminal diagnosis or tragic accident, Christians should view dying as a lifelong process. The practices of the church

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[26] Jones argues that the second-century church used an embodied approach to apologetics, which he refers to as an ecclesial apologetic. Jones writes, "Christian ethics provided a common ground in the sense that even non-Christians could not deny that this was how Christians lived. This argument did not require agreement on the terms of a rational common ground: it required the common recognition of a particular pattern of life." He adds, "For the Christians who articulated this apologetic, the life of the church was not merely *a context for the practice of Christian faith but a primary evidence for the truth of Christian faith*." Jones, "'Something Divine Mingled among Them'," 160 (italics original).

[27] Tish Harrison Warren, *Prayer in the Night: For Those Who Work or Watch or Weep*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 52.

[28] Warren, *Prayer in the Night*, 23.

assist Christians in spiritual retention because Christian rituals are crucial for spiritual formation.

The church does not have to live in fear of death, and it does not need to befriend death or merely perceive it as the natural inevitability of this present life. A Christian approach to death and dying acknowledges God's sovereignty and accepts death when it comes. God can perform the miraculous, life-giving healing that is seen within the Gospels, but church history testifies that often the healing God brings is in the form of spiritual sanctification until the saint's dying breath. Philosopher and apologist Peter Kreeft argues that death can be our teacher, providing a pathway for the church to help Christians envision death differently. Kreeft writes, "Death becomes our birth canal, our passageway to life. What philosophers argue for, and theologians believe, visionaries see."[29] As a teacher helps the student to recognize and accept a truth, so too can the church help Christians accept death and learn how to recenter death on the promise of resurrected life rather than on merely extending this life at all costs.

Francis A. Schaeffer wrote, "I am to face the cross of Christ in every part of my life and with my whole man."[30] A Johannine *Ars Moriendi* is an embodied apologetic in that it is a *practiced defense*, an *embodied apologetic*, not just an argument.[31] Schaeffer remarked that the centrality of death is an important place to start in Christian practice since we were united to Christ in his death. Loving one another, praying for one another, and participating in the sacraments of the church are all spiritually formative practices the church embodies during the lifelong process of becoming like Christ. Taking up one's

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[29] Peter Kreeft, *Making Sense Out of Suffering* (Cincinnati: Servant Books, 1986), 103.

[30] Francis A. Schaeffer, *True Spirituality* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1972), 30.

[31] Timothy Paul Jones, "'Something Divine Mingled among Them'": Care for the Parentless and the Poor as Ecclesial Apologetic in the Second Century" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Ft. Worth, TX, November 16, 2021), 4, https://www.timothypauljones.com/TJonesCareforPoorOrphanEcclesialApologeticETSPaper2021.This article was required reading for doctoral seminar on apologetics. Timothy Paul Jones argues for an ecclesial apologetic rooted in the embodied practices of the church.

cross daily is a matter of faithful Christian obedience that prepares one for dying well.

A Johannine *Ars Moriendi* inspires the church to reflect on its history and the apologetic of what it means to daily die in union with Christ. Christians should be encouraged by the numerous examples of those who have died daily and sacrificially for the sake of the gospel. Christians today are not alone; they are caught up in a community, past and present, of mourners and conquerors. In his letter to the Romans, Ignatius demonstrates how even in the early church, Christians saw dying as an opportunity to live faithfully, knowing death would bring them to God through eternal life.[32] Rather than hate this present world, Christians should appropriately view death through an eternal lens.[33]

Finally, as an embodied apologetic for the church, a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* is a call to the church to lead the way for Christians in the discussion on death and dying and what it means to die well. However, the church must also be Christ's ambassador to an unbelieving world, to those who struggle in the face of death and dying, those who ask why God lets disaster and pain happen. N. T. Wright remarks,

> God *does* send thunderbolts—human ones. He sends the poor in Spirit, the meek, the mourners, the peacemakers, the hungry-for-justice people. They are the way God wants to act in his world. They are more effective than any lightning flashes or actual thunderbolts. They will use their initiative; they will see where the real needs are, and go to meet them. They will weep at the tombs of their friends. At the tombs of their enemies. Some of them will get hurt. Some may be killed. That is the story of Acts, all through. There will be problems, punishments, setbacks, shipwrecks, but God's purpose will come through. These people, prayerful, humble, faithful, will be the answer not to the question Why? But to the question What? What needs to be done here? Who is most at risk? How can we help? Who shall we send? God works in all things *with and through* those who love him.[34]

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[32] Ignatius, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, ed. and trans. Michael W. Thomas, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 227–31. Ignatius insists throughout the letter that he is afraid that the love of the saints will hinder him from his course of death.

[33] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Shape of Death: Life, Death, and Immortality in the Early Fathers* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1961), 45.

[34] N. T. Wright, *God and the Pandemic: A Christian Reflection on the Coronavirus and Its Aftermath* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 34 (italics original).

The church must embrace an apologetic that takes seriously the pains of sin, suffering, and death while simultaneously picking up the cross in a daily-dying practice that recenters death and dying with an eternal perspective. The church leads the way for Christians struggling in the face of death not only through producing theological treatises on death and dying but by tending to the dying with Christian love.

Conclusion

This thesis argued that a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* recenters death and dying with an eternal perspective, drawing on the beliefs and practices of the Christian tradition to help Christians die well. The church needs to face death and dying from a distinctly Christian worldview rooted in the biblical text. The Johannine literature, especially the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation, provides the church with a rich place to develop an art of dying that will help Christians to die well.

John's description of the life of Jesus is the foundation for building his insights into death and dying. Jesus is the exemplar for Christians on how to die well. John's Gospel helps Christians observe how others in the faith community have approached death and dying with wisdom. Christians follow beliefs and practices rooted in the sacred Scripture that calls them to die well by picking up their cross and following Jesus on the path to glory. The Book of Revelation shows suffering Christians Jesus's victory over death and the guarantee of the death of death. John addresses death, dying, and grief, ultimately encouraging Christians with the hope of new creation. There will come a day when Jesus returns; on that day, all things will be made new, and sin, suffering, and death will be no more. As a community of kingdom ambassadors, the church has the honor and privilege of pointing people to not only this healthy *Ars Moriendi* but to the one who defeated death for them.

A comparison of alternative contemporary and historical traditions demonstrates that a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* is preferable in offering a source of comfort

and peace to Christians. A Johannine *Ars Moriendi* helps Christians center death and dying within an eternal perspective and refocus on resurrection hope. This thesis concluded with a call to implement a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* by (1) caring for the dying, (2) reclaiming the sacredness of death and dying, (3) remembering the ritualistic nature of death and dying, (4) maintaining a theology of the body, (5) and employing a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* as an embodied apologetic.

Christians do not live in isolation; they are spiritually located and centered in the family of God. The implications of this research call on the church to be faithful to Jesus by ensuring that Christians do not die alone. As people are living longer than ever before, the church can see to it that Christians use the life God has given them to live out the Christian practices of dying as Christians. The focus on eternal life in a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* reminds the church that dying well is rooted in having lived well, and both are rooted in faithfulness to Jesus. Churches can assist Christians in their ability to face their doubts and fear amid death and dying with tools that help them build confidence in their faith, having recentered death within an eternal perspective. Death will die, and Christians will only find eternal life in following Jesus, the keyholder of death and Hades.

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ABSTRACT

DEATH WILL DIE: FINDING ETERNAL LIFE FROM A JOHANNINE *ARS MORIENDI*

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This thesis argues that Christians should develop an *Ars Moriendi* from the Johannine literature, which recenters death and dying with an eternal perspective, drawing on the beliefs and practices of the Christian tradition to help Christians die well. Chapter 1 describes the *Ars Moriendi* tradition and reviews relevant literature on the subject. Chapters 2 and 3 exposit the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation to develop a Johannine theology of death. Chapter 4 surveys the alternative *Ars Moriendi* traditions from Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and Stoicism and argues that Christians should implement a Johannine *Ars Moriendi*. Chapter 5 concludes with five implications of the research and calls on the global church to implement a Johannine Ars *Moriendi* by (1) caring for the dying, (2) reclaiming the sacredness of death and dying, (3) remembering the ritualistic nature of death and dying, (4) maintaining a theology of the body, (5) and employing a Johannine *Ars Moriendi* as an embodied apologetic.

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