

*“True Faith, Christian Living,
and a Blessed Death.”*

*Sixteenth-Century Funeral Sermons as
Evangelical Proclamation*

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Because the Wittenberg Reformation emphasized the Word of God, its efficacious nature, and its continuing bestowal of salvation through the sacraments and preaching, it assigned preaching a special value and immense significance. This gradually depreciated the various medieval rites and practices designed to attain and secure God's grace and compassion for oneself and for others through performance of certain human actions within the ritual of the liturgy. Masses and the endowment of masses, especially the requiems which were to erase the un-acquitted guilt of the deceased, fell by the wayside. Instead, the reformers proclaimed, sins are forgiven and guilt is not imputed because the gift of faith is *sola gratia* and is not correlated to human performance. This fundamental evangelical conviction also influenced how death and dying were treated, as evident in Reformation funeral sermons of the sixteenth century.

No longer was the focus on the deceased's "dependence" on his or her own penance, performed at the right time and in sufficient measure, or, among other things, on the intercession by the church or its officiants, a practice that had gained ground in light of the high probability of the need for impending refinement of the sinner's soul in purgatory. Rather, the chief concern became the proper address to the deceased person's survivors, emphatically calling everyone to serious contemplation of true faith, the Christian life which such faith produced, and a blessed death. The hour of death served as a unique opportunity to remind hearers vividly of the human creature's existence before God.¹ Against this backdrop, the Word preached to the living moved to center stage—even in funeral sermons. "You know," said Martin Luther in his funeral sermon for Elector Johann the Steadfast of Saxony, "that the greatest way to serve God is in the sermon. Not only is it the greatest way to serve

him; it is also the best thing we can have in every situation, especially on such extremely sorrowful occasions . . .”²

Gradually, funeral sermons developed into a unique genre,³ gaining popularity and vitality for over two centuries,⁴ due to several factors. For one thing, in light of epidemics, wars, and the quality of medical treatment in the early modern era, the predisposition of society was certainly important, with people being confronted day after day with lingering illnesses or death at an early age. A certain type of pastoral care and evangelical proclamation was gradually evolving in early sixteenth-century funeral sermons, which demonstrated an empathy, an urgency, and sometimes a simple clarity in addressing the existential crises felt by all. This correlates with the fact that, initially, preacher and recipients were less interested in the deceased persons themselves or in the particular circumstances of death. Rather, each individual case merely gave the hearers of the sermon cause to view this situation as an example of that which had been confronting them throughout their own lives and would confront them especially in the hour of death.

In this context the preacher could deal with the broad range of related topics, including the transitory nature of human life, the unexpected deaths of pious and righteous people, the deaths of children or young people, the final victory over death, and the hope of resurrection.⁵ Therefore, it was quite possible for the deceased to slip into the background and to be overshadowed by a pastoral approach appealing to the hearer, at least in the early years of the newly-forming culture of the funeral sermon, when pastors distinguished between the sermon and the *oratio* for the deceased. Against this background, namely, with the reformers' emphasis on the sermon, on pastoral care, and also on the needs of the Evangelical clergy for guidance in exercising the pastoral office, it is no surprise that funeral sermons were already being collected and published at a very early point in time. Similar to postils, which offered preachers texts or study materials for the appointed readings of the church year, and to edifying treatises, these collections were specifically designed for pastors but also served a broad range of recipients among the lay people.

This study examines the approaches and emphases of Evangelical proclamation in sixteenth-century funeral sermons. It does not

focus on rhetorical or homiletical methods but rather on the interaction between the literary genre—funeral sermons—and the reformational content that they convey. Its goal is to identify the characteristics of the sixteenth-century funeral sermons and to outline forms or stages of their development. For this purpose it is informative to study the sources used before analyzing selected aspects of the genre.

The Sources and Their Characteristics

This study is not based on individual funeral sermons, such as were often commissioned by grieving families.⁶ Rather, three collections of funeral sermons, each published by a particular preacher under his own name, have been selected. This seems appropriate because a search for theological characteristics suggests the need to refer to the influential theologians and preachers of that particular period. Furthermore, it is also interesting historically to take a closer look at funeral sermon collections in this context because they seem to be representative of a certain slice of time or specific confessional situations. Furthermore, these collections possibly gave impetus to developments in the funeral sermon genre and to its particular characteristics. The first of these comes from the period prior to the development of specific confessional characteristics with the historical rupture caused by the Smalcald War 1546/1547 and the Augsburg Interim of 1548. The second collection contains sermons preached between 1576 and 1584, the period of the confessional consolidation of Lutheranism. The third collection also appeared at the end of the sixteenth century and is noteworthy because its background lies in the change of confessional allegiance from the medieval faith to an Evangelical-Lutheran confession promoted by governmental authorities; the traces of this transformation exhibit themselves in these sermons. The historical contexts of these sources alone provide insight into the theological characteristics of these sermons.

As early as 1545, a collection of fifteen funeral sermons from the pen of Johann Spangenberg (1484-1550) was published,⁷ sermons composed for this specific purpose. This is probably the first such

collection,⁸ for no earlier one has been found. Chronologically, this collection appeared before the time in which the publication of individual funeral sermons became popular. Spangenberg, a contemporary of Luther, had studied in Erfurt and adopted the Wittenberg reformer's teachings early on. Spangenberg made a name for himself not only as a theologian, serving as a pastor in Nordhausen (from 1524) and then as superintendent in Mansfeld (from 1546), but also through his commitment to promoting the education of children and youth.⁹ His collection of sermons with an emphasis on Old Testament passages was soon followed by three sequels with a New Testament focus, on which his son Cyriakus collaborated.¹⁰ The set was extremely popular and was released at least nine times over approximately twenty years (1545-1568).¹¹ Spangenberg expressly compiled his funeral sermons in the style of the postil, namely, by offering sample sermons that, at least *he* thought, could and should be used by preachers for other Bible passages. At the end he listed a whole selection of "themes or sayings of the Old Testament to which one could apply these funeral sermons."¹² This indicates that, in his sermon collection, Spangenberg offered what was in his time regarded to be an essential and indispensable component for funeral sermons or exemplary for the content of a funeral sermon. Preachers then had the opportunity to enhance these sermons by using their own ideas or by adding biographical references to the deceased. However, the collection itself contains neither personalized sermons nor a reference to the practice of customizing them, so that we can only assume what the sermon would have looked like when actually delivered.

The clearly dominant postil style is enhanced by a pedagogical approach, a result of Spangenberg's pessimistic assessment of his time. He confirmed the common view at that time of progressive moral decline in the world and German society, which would elicit God's intervention into the world with his punishment, so that there could be "no doubt that God will send his grim punishment, whether by war, exorbitant prices, pestilence, or death."¹³ With war looming on the Evangelical horizon as early as the imperial diet in Worms in the spring of 1545, and with the emperor planning military action against the Evangelical estates even before the Colloquy of

Regensburg of 1546,¹⁴ Spangenberg's analysis and the timing of the publication of his funeral sermons give this work a particular significance. In view of the capriciousness of death, which can suddenly befall people, and which God could employ—according to the views of that period—for disciplinary purposes, these sermons admonish readers to live a life that takes seriously the Christian hope of resurrection and to depart from all irresponsible and pleasure-seeking tendencies which cast to the wind belief in the hereafter.¹⁵ The sermons address the core content of the Christian faith and a life determined by it.¹⁶ These concepts were to be conveyed in such a way that thinking about death is brought into the life of the people, so to speak. Over and over, death is brought to mind as the pivotal point at which in God's view true faith is decisive. For this reason Spangenberg began his collection with a sermon on the medieval antiphon "In the midst of life we are surrounded by death," to which Luther had added verses.¹⁷ With death always lurking around the corner, this collection of funeral sermons is a kind of Reformation-era *ars vivendi* (art of living), harmonizing faith and life.

Funeral sermons in other sixteenth-century collections retain this character as proclamation as well. In them the elements of consolation and edification take on more prominence. This becomes apparent as early as the sequel on the New Testament texts published by Cyriakus Spangenberg. As he stated, his father's death (on June 13, 1550), the plague that broke out soon thereafter, plus the need to perform many funerals every day during the plague, caused him finally to publish the volume that had been announced much earlier.

Not only for this reason did I take up the funeral sermons of my dear departed father and set them forth again, but I also started with the Evangelists from the beginning. When I found a verse or story that will serve to console the troubled in the clutches of death or to give a reminder of the joyful resurrection and the life yet to come, I explained these texts in the simplest manner and as clearly and straightforwardly as possible, using the writings of Doctor Luther, Johannes Brenz, or other learned people, as best I could with my modest skills. And I compiled these same sermons (as you, Christian reader, can see) in this book.¹⁸

The collection's postil style blends well with the themes of consolation and edification in the devotional literature of the time.

The second collection of funeral sermons is that of Nikolaus Selnecker (1530–1592). Selnecker was a student of Melanchthon's, one of the framers of the Formula of Concord, and an exceptional theologian among this second generation of reformers.¹⁹ A professor in Jena and later in Leipzig, Selnecker worked alongside Duke Julius to establish the new order for ecclesiastical life in Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel in the 1570s. Banished from Leipzig from 1589 until shortly before his death, he held the position of superintendent in Hildesheim. Selnecker returned to Leipzig in 1592, deathly ill.²⁰ He had dedicated his collection of funeral sermons, published in 1591, to Hedwig, the widow of Duke Julius,²¹ one of the dukes who had steadfastly fought for a unified Protestantism under the Lutheran confession of the faith. Selnecker hoped to encourage and console Julius' widow with this collection of sermons. His pastoral focus is obvious, but the collection's postil style and its pedagogical goal are also noteworthy, as can be seen in the preface, which contains instructions on the length and outline of funeral sermons. Whereas the congregation should only be "quickly instructed and not detained for a long time or depressed,"²² he also noted the correlation, on the one hand, between the knowledge that God has set an end to human lives, and, on the other hand, true faith and confession of the faith. Thus, Selnecker, who had been forced to leave his various positions several times due to doctrinal and confessional differences, had the following desire for his collection:

O God, grant us all that we would think of our end and rather listen to funeral sermons than to entertaining comedies. . . . Whoever thinks of his death is living correctly and paying attention to his faith, his good conscience and his future accounting for himself. But whoever does not think of his death, O God, it is no wonder that he, being a vessel of wrath, would turn into a godless Epicurean, mocker, persecutor, and enemy of God and of all faithful teachers.²³

Selnecker continued, such people cannot die a blessed death, for they have not repented; they spread false teaching and foster the creation of groups and sects. They lead an Epicurean lifestyle, are uncertain in their faith and inconsistent in their confession.²⁴ Reading between the lines, Selnecker's words clearly reflect the situation which required a clear confession of the faith, the situation

in which he and his whole generation were struggling in this period of confessional consolidation, with its controversies, dismissals from office, and condemnations to exile. At the very latest, when death stares you in the face, everything hinges upon the true faith, the proper confession. The sixteenth-century funeral sermons were intended to remind and warn people of this. Taking this into account, it is understandable that Selnecker dedicated the second part of his funeral sermon collection to Hedwig's daughter-in-law, Elizabeth of Braunschweig-Lüneburg-Wolfenbüttel (who was born a Danish princess) on the occasion of her wedding. What Selnecker had in mind was not a macabre joke, but rather a genuine concern for "God's honor, knowing oneself, along with fear of God and prayer to him." This is the sole focus of the funeral sermons collected here, Selnecker noted.²⁵

However, what clearly sets Selnecker's collection apart from that of Spangenberg's and makes it more interesting is the fact that these sermons were actually delivered. The documents published are taken from notes set down by "devout instructors [of the university arts faculty] and students,"²⁶ authorized by Selnecker himself.²⁷ As with the Spangenberg collections, personal details are scarce and no special biographical section is attached to the sermon. Names, the date of the funeral, and notes on whether the sermon was reused on a different occasion are listed—usually at the beginning or at the end of the sermon.²⁸ If any personal comments are made at all—and this is certainly not always the case—Selnecker mentioned, for instance, the sanctified death of the deceased (to console and instruct the survivors) or said an intercession for the widow. Any individual talents and positions in society, which the deceased might have used for the benefit of the community, are alluded to in little more than a single sentence, if at all, in most cases.²⁹ Nonetheless, in terms of their expression of pastoral care these sermons do have a very personal approach, addressing the anguish experienced by the individual.

The third collection of funeral sermons under consideration presents a conspicuous polar opposite to Spangenberg's early funeral sermon postil and to Selnecker's compilation published some forty-five years later. Due to its unusual historical context this third

collection should be viewed simply for purposes of contrast and not as exemplary in every respect. This is the collection entitled *Funeral Sermons of Some Members of the Cathedral Chapter of the Archdiocesan Chapter at Magdeburg, Also of Several Prominent and Noble Matrons and Virgins, and Finally Also of Citizens of the City*, published about the same time as Selnecker's work and written by the first Evangelical preacher of the cathedral chapter, Siegfried Sack (1527-1596).³⁰ As opposed to the city of Magdeburg, the Reformation was not implemented in the whole archdiocese of Magdeburg until 1567,³¹ then by the archbishop at the time, Joachim Friedrich of Brandenburg (who later became elector). Because of this circumstance, the deceased treated in these funeral sermons had probably been pressured by the authorities to convert from the Roman Catholic to the Evangelical faith. One can presume that Sack, coming from Evangelical Nordhausen, had quite a few problems with his originally Roman Catholic congregation. His main concern was not to give exemplary sermons or to write treatises of consolation or encouragement. Rather, his key interest, as he points out in his preface, was simply to respond to the wishes of the public. This he did masterfully, even though he sometimes did not mince words when giving illustrations from the lives of the deceased. Sack usually began his funeral sermons with an interpretation of a particular Bible passage or verse, selected to tie in with the deceased in some way. But his exegesis sometimes took a backseat to his description of the deceased person's life. Sack's comment that in their sermons preachers "sometimes" talk about "baptismal names, the honorable pedigree, birth, marital status, and Christian departure"³² of the deceased indicates that exegesis and evangelical proclamation were not the only components in funeral sermons of the time. For instance, in interpreting his sermon text, Luke 15:1-7, Sack minutely described the life of a cathedral canon, Albrecht Kracht, including his turning away from the papacy. Sack then concluded the sermon with a comment that one could see in this "what the stumbling block was that kept Albrecht Kracht from the faith. And how Kracht came to the correct insight by simple Christian instruction, ending his life in a sanctified state."³³

On the other hand, and this was most certainly unusual for a funeral sermon, Sack exposed the canon's weaknesses and vices. Yet, in conclusion, the preacher laid all these vices to rest, in the canon's Evangelical faith. Taking the historical context of this funeral sermon collection into account, it seems that this genre was explicitly used for polemical purposes, namely to demonstrate the truth of the Evangelical faith, while exposing the seductive errors of the Roman Catholic faith. However, this would only have made sense in light of the concept that true faith, Christian living, and a blessed death flow in this order, each from its predecessor, and that only faith can produce the truly Christian life and lead to a blessed death.³⁴ Some cathedral canons came to mind who evidently had the wrong faith and thus were prime examples of the inversion of this order. That could result in various vices, primarily addiction to drink. For instance, Sack's funeral sermon on the cathedral canon Joachim von Britzken revealed: "He harmed himself particularly by habitual drinking, as do many fine men, who would be able to serve well their principality and people. In addition, drink deprives many an upright woman of her knight and children of their father, which is lamentable."³⁵ Even though the canon, according to Sack, eventually experienced a good death without fear and passed away peacefully, his polemical observation comes through, and it provides a pedagogical-disciplinary nudge for later readers when the historical context of the funeral sermon has faded away or is forgotten.

When compared, these three funeral sermon collections already show the various ways this genre was approached in the sixteenth century; the historical context or the goal of the collection decisively influenced its form.

Aspects of Evangelical Proclamation in Funeral Sermons

1. On Outline and Structure

It is exceedingly difficult to press the structure of evangelical funeral sermons into a general schema. Comparison of the three sermon collections described here plus individual funeral sermons shows that they vary greatly. Whereas Siegfried Sack's and all subsequent funeral sermons in general applied the particular Bible

passage to the deceased person and the characteristics of his or her life,³⁶ the funeral sermon postils of Johann and Cyriakus Spangenberg do not mention this practice with a single word. In their models, as in regular sermons, the Bible passage itself sets the standard for the outline of the sermon. The Spangenbergs based their model sermons not only on the Old Testament but also on the four gospels. Their development of the content of the text is based on a *dispositio*, which is presented initially and builds on what the particular verse says. Here Selnecker's approach is basically not different from that of these predecessors. His concept is based on a stereotypical, and thus characteristic, sermon structure of "teaching and consolation," *doctrina et consolatio*. This distinctly adopts Martin Luther's definition of the preaching office in his Advent postil of 1522: it embraces "*doctrina et exhortatio*, teaching and exhortation," drawn from Romans 12:7-8.³⁷ Indeed, in this context exhortation turns into consolation. Luther provides models for this as well.³⁸ Selnecker sometimes even mentions both components—*doctrina et consolatio*—explicitly, such as when he begins a funeral sermon on 1 Thessalonians 4:14 with the following introduction: "This word of the sainted Apostle Paul we receive for our teaching and consolation, so we can together observe these two things together . . ." ³⁹

In Johann Spangenberg's funeral sermons this structure is also clearly present even when not apparent at first glance. For instance, his comments on Job 14:1-3, 5 (that "man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble. He comes out like a flower and withers; he flees like a shadow and continues not") are, according to his *dispositio*, only a teaching about human misery in birth, life, and death. "Birth is miserable, life is dangerous, death is terrible: this is what we need to see."⁴⁰ These three steps lead to the reminder for the listeners that Jesus Christ removed terror from these three phases of life through baptism, the proclamation of law and gospel, and the promise of eternal life. This is because baptism, says Spangenberg, establishes the status of being God's child. Preaching leads people to love God and their neighbor, creating assurance and consolation in times of temptation, suffering, and persecution. The consoling promise of eternal life, onto which the dying person is to hold, grasping God's Word, creates assurance.⁴¹ In preaching, *doctrina* and

consolatio fit together as mirror images, just as preaching the law is a mirror image of preaching the gospel. Both components, teaching and consolation, can also be woven into one another.

For instance, Selnecker explains the passage mentioned above, 1 Thessalonians 4:14, as follows: “For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in the same way, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.” Selnecker presented a two-part *dispositio*, which initially does not seem to have anything to do with the text. He stated that, first, “our LORD God wants us to grieve for our friends and fellow Christians whom God has called to himself from this life,” and, second, “we should grieve in the appropriate way. . .”⁴² At first glance, the fact that the preceding Bible passage is accessed via a theme and not by the words of the text itself may seem surprising. It is probably modeled after Luther’s funeral sermons for Frederick the Wise and John the Steadfast, where the reformer treated this text in a similar way.⁴³ On the other hand, it was also fair to assume that this *dispositio* was meant to focus on the personal anguish of the survivors, for whom Selnecker customized his sermon. Using biblical and everyday examples, he addresses the legitimization of grief and the “right to grieve” in such a caring way that *doctrina* and *consolatio* can no longer be separated from one another.⁴⁴ Such grieving is balanced by moderation in times of grief because Christians can draw on the hope promised to every believer, that human life is in God’s hands, just as that person’s death is tied to Christ’s death and resurrection. This returns then to the sermon text, moving from *consolatio* back to *doctrina*. Selnecker did this in his typical “we style,” as is customary in pastoral texts. Not only did he identify with the hearer but also made his proclamation applicable to a general audience. By inserting questions, answers, and prayers that are recited together,⁴⁵ Selnecker’s sermons even take on the character of catechesis. What the hearers of the sermon “learn” in this way was drawn together in a concluding summary, so that in a particularly penetrating way the instruction conveys comfort.⁴⁶ Therefore, regardless of how the preacher handles these goals in each particular case, *doctrina* and *consolatio* go hand in hand. In a funeral sermon, and basically at the death of each individual listener as well, *doctrina* and *consolatio* communicate what it means for living

persons to have true faith, to live in a Christian way, and to die a blessed death.⁴⁷ In this way this triad can be viewed as a stereotypical, elucidating, content-driven *leitmotif* of these sermons.

2. Pedagogical-Disciplinary Characteristics

The Reformation always emphasized the correlation between faith and the fruits of faith. As early as his 1520 treatise *On the Freedom of the Christian*,⁴⁸ Luther noted that the relationship of individuals to God should also influence their relationship to their neighbors and thus how they lead their lives. Melancthon further developed this concept with the *tertius usus legis*, the third, that is, pedagogical, use of the law,⁴⁹ which gives Christians guidelines for their lives. Sixteenth-century funeral sermons adopted this pedagogical-disciplinary approach. Whereas one could detect traces of the late medieval *ars moriendi* culture in these admonitions, the emphasis on true, Christ-focused faith, as the absolutely necessary prerequisite for a good life, seems to introduce a decisive change in accent. The Reformation preachers' strategy of incorporating death into the Christian reality of daily life always presumed the coherence of faith, living, and dying. Thus, retaining true faith in the context of Christian behavior, or, as Luther's first theses on indulgences asserts, the attitude of repentance that embraces all of life, is what prepares for and guarantees a good, blessed death. This three-fold combination is addressed in very different ways, sometimes with explicit clarity. For instance, in his sermon on Job 14 Johann Spangenberg informed his listeners that their lives, which he had previously described as being driven by fear and hope, like balls knocked back and forth between the forces of temptation and sin,⁵⁰ were kept on the right track through sermons on law and gospel. However, law and gospel are not seen in their functions of convicting people or awakening faith, but rather as a formula for the command to love God and neighbor and the Golden Rule. Human life is to take place within the framework defined by these norms.

He [God] gives us the form and manner of our life through the preaching of law and gospel, how we are to act toward God and our neighbor, saying, "Love God your LORD with your whole heart, and love your neighbor as yourself.

What you want people to do to you, that do to them as well; this is the whole law and all the prophets.⁵¹

These or similar observations for disciplining life can be shown in a great variety of ways. For instance, Selnecker used the funeral of a young girl and the particular verses he selected (Wisdom 4:7-14: “But though the righteous die at an early age, yet shall he be in rest. For not by its length will life be honorable, nor measured by the number of years . . .”) to preach first on the proper esteem and value of old age. In sharp contrast to this, he then stated that young people leading a devout life are much more pleasing to God than people in their old age who feel secure and smug. He presented to his listeners a real catalogue of sins and vices, showing that old people who do not improve their lives are despicable, as opposed to the young people who are loved by God and who are called to him.

For when old people, whether man or woman, are not devout, and do not love his Word and holy sacrament, live in sins, cause offense by blaspheming, gorge themselves with food, drink excessively, are mockers, rash, usurers, revelers, braggarts, fornicators, etc., they would be better off if they had never grown old; rather, they should have drowned in their first bath and should have died in their cribs soon after baptism.”⁵²

Even when the warning to improve their lives is not explicitly stated, still, when one reads between the lines, the appeal is very clear. In another place Selnecker wove in a deterring example, warning against a misguided life. He reported on the widely rumored wretched death of a certain individual named Hoffman, who would not turn from his “Epicurean” life.⁵³ According to this story, which supposedly occurred in 1561 in Dresden, on his deathbed Hoffman was lifted high by a black dog, apparently the devil. Afterwards, the dog was said to have jumped out of the window and disappeared.⁵⁴ In this sermon as well, all the negative examples are clearly listed in a catalog of vices: perversity, impudence, pride, cockiness, security in sin, arrogance. These expose a life as unchristian and leading to disaster, not only while that person is alive but most certainly when he or she dies.⁵⁵

In contrast to Selnecker, Sack inserted negative examples into detailed descriptions of life, which help hearers to distinguish between an unchristian and a proper Christian way of living. "Some drink themselves to death. Excessive drinking is a bad habit, which was very common even in the days of Saint Ambrose. As Augustine says, 'They do not blush to drink to their capacity, without measure.' . . . It is impossible that this should not be harmful, even if a person wants to remain strong."⁵⁶ It was said that Joachim von Britzken indulged in habitual drunkenness to such an extent that this led to many illnesses. Britzken had apparently been a living or, more precisely, an already deceased example that a life full of vices is already punished in the here and now, causing Sack to warn in his funeral sermon: "Joachim von Britzken also experienced this, for he was simultaneously plagued by dropsy, swelling of the joints, tuberculosis, and I will not mention his other ailments. He would have liked to live longer and was treated by doctors and especially by Dr. Emmeran Bulderkar, who provided intensive care, even consulting other doctors."⁵⁷ But it all came too late.

In the case of Liborius von Bredow, cathedral canon, treasurer and senior of the archdiocese, the preacher exhibited pastoral discretion, keeping secret the man's two vices, which were also harmful to his health.⁵⁸ However, in his description of the process of dying, Sack provided many details of all the illnesses that plagued Liborius before he died at the age of only forty-two. In contrast to Selnecker's and also Spangenberg's funeral sermons, the pedagogical-disciplinary thrust was no longer aimed mainly at the spiritual but rather at the secular, civic sphere of everyday life. Instead of stressing positively or negatively an existence that would try to please God by virtuous living or by turning towards one's neighbor, the sermons' themes focused on the personal consequences of a life that had gone bad due to incorrect faith, which became evident in sickness and disease. Furthermore, by personalizing these sermons, their general nature—that is, the instructional or appellative character of the negative or positive example—was at the same time basically narrowed down to specifics.⁵⁹ The preacher's interest in the individual person and in his correct or incorrect behavior shifted from everyone's struggles in life to the individual case.

The Art of Dying as the Art of Living—a Summary

The correlation of “true faith, Christian living, and a blessed death,”⁶⁰ which Selnecker mentioned in the preface to his collection of funeral sermons, already makes it clear that sixteenth-century funeral sermons emphasized mastering life lived in the true faith more than mastering death. This accent on true faith—demonstrated by looking to Jesus in life and death since through his death and resurrection he had already attained the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, and he bestows this *sola gratia*—differentiated Evangelical funeral sermons from the late medieval “*ars moriendi* (art of dying) culture,” which was fixated on repentance, *imitatio Christi*, and studious preparation for one’s death. The key point, Spangenberg stated, was to “keep one eye on death while yet alive,” so it does not “become an immortal, eternal tyrant,” that is, lead the way to damnation.⁶¹ That took place in the communication of the content of the Evangelical faith in these funeral sermons.

So that now, if not all, at least many people can be torn from the jaws of the devil, deterred from their godless ways, and will want to abandon their Epicurean and piggish lives, and finally become pious . . .⁶²

For Selnecker, living in the second half of the sixteenth century, it was already apparent that this “art of living” ensuring a proper and good death could only be based on the teaching of Martin Luther—and on no other. According to Selnecker, Calvinism and Zwinglianism (which Selnecker and his contemporaries viewed as being essentially one and the same since the 1549 *Consensus Tigurinus* between Calvin and the theologians from Zurich) led to a false, fatalistic, and Epicurean way of living due to the doctrine of double predestination. When people presume that they have been rejected by God, this inevitably results in desperation, which leads to a miserable death and eternal damnation.⁶³ This is at least what Selnecker declared in the preface to his collection of funeral sermons:

And it is most certainly true that a pious Christian who takes to heart the pure teaching which God has given us through his tool Luther, and who does not want to be a ‘Christian in name only’ (*Maulchrist*) or a hypocrite, can at all times by God’s grace have and retain peace and happiness, consolation and life,

and in disaster and death can commend and give himself up to God. While the others, who stray from this same path and who are intrigued by new, strange teachings—whether they are called Zwinglian, Calvinist, or whatever names they might have, and who just live from day to day without fearing or thinking of God, who are only used to luxury, violence, money, and goods, lust and high living, who cannot stand the cross—, these people do not have genuine consolation. When it is their time to die, some of them strangle or stab themselves, drink themselves to death or hang themselves . . . Some fall rashly into public sin without any repentance and conversion to GOD and must be eternally lost.⁶⁴

Therefore Selnecker referred to Luther's Small Catechism and the Book of Concord as a recognized, familiar summary of biblical truth. Other statements "contain neither teaching nor consolation . . . and one cannot die in them."⁶⁵ Thus, his funeral sermons embraced the salvific blend of *doctrina* and *consolatio*, which he believed was guaranteed by Luther's teaching. *Doctrina* and *consolatio* serve as a foundation for dying in a blessed state and are intended to instruct Christians on how to die full of hope regarding the Last Day.⁶⁶ Selnecker occasionally inserted references on the process of dying which correspond to this view into his funeral sermon collection. For instance, in the conclusion to a sermon for the funeral of Barbara Seeman, Selnecker included a testimony printed by her husband on the blessed departure of his wife. Here the husband expressed her unshakable reformational faith, which she had set forth in the form of a confession, and which could serve as an example to the living.⁶⁷ In the funeral sermon for the Leipzig councilman Hieronymus Rauscher, Selnecker mentioned how the deceased had received the body and blood of Christ and had confidently recited the Lord's Prayer before passing away peacefully. This served as comforting proof of how Rauscher had ended his life in a Christian way. The comforting and exemplary elements permeating the funeral sermon contain an appeal to those still living to live in such a way that they could also experience a blessed death, he stated. Against this backdrop it is clear that the preacher cannot *a priori* be interested in rekindling a recollection of the normal weaknesses of the deceased. "For talking about tribulations is not part of the task of preaching. GOD knows all things."⁶⁸

Spangenberg never, and Selnecker only seldom, offered concrete details of the idea that a blessed departure presumed true, comforting

faith, but Siegfried Sack used this technique in a variety of examples in compelling fashion. In real-life, individual examples Sack clearly established how incorrect, in this case, Roman Catholic, teaching inevitably led to ruin, whereas true faith expressed itself in successful living and dying, as Sack reported, referring to the canons quite often as well. His sermons, which increasingly concentrated on individual stories of living and dying, continued to give examples of instruction in “the art of living.” At the same time, he blended this approach with classic eulogizing *topoi* to honor a deceased person, as was sometimes common in the eulogies for princes.⁶⁹ This combination is very apparent in Sack’s funeral sermon for Johann von Randaw, which he prefaced with the thought that it is not possible to say very many good things about godless people, but even less so when they pass away in a state of distress and intransigence. But when pious and blessed people, like Canon von Randaw, pass away, expressing their confession in a fine Christian manner and fitting themselves for their last journey with the Lord’s Supper, according to the command of Jesus Christ, then it is only proper and right that they would be given a Christian and honest testimonial,⁷⁰ “to honor the deceased and to be a good instruction and good example to the living.”⁷¹ Even though in these contexts traditional interpretation of the biblical text, focusing on *doctrina* and *consolatio*, is most certainly retained, overall this individual focus can be viewed as an art of living although it deals with the art of dying.

Despite the development manifested in the funeral sermon genre, some consistent elements are evident. Within the context of Reformation-era preaching, sixteenth-century Evangelical funeral sermons addressed living human beings. The Word of God took form in *doctrina* and *consolatio*. Its efficacy, which all reformers took for granted, was demonstrated in the life-defining triad of true faith, Christian living, and a blessed death. However, after their visitations of congregations recently reformed, the reformers very soon recognized that proper faith does not automatically produce human responsibility. For this reason, the pedagogical-disciplinary character of some funeral sermons took shape as an appeal to examine one’s own life on the basis of that proper faith, and, on this basis, to become a connoisseur in the art of both living and dying.

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NOTES

1. See Rudolf Mohr, “Ars moriendi II,” in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* [henceforth TRE], ed. Gerhard Müller (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1979), 4:149.
2. “Zwo Predigt uber der Leiche des Kurfürsten Hertzog Johans zu Sachsen, 18.8.1532,” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883-1993 [henceforth WA]), 36:237.29-32.
3. See Rudolf Lenz, “Leichenpredigt,” in TRE 20:665-669, esp. 666.
4. According to Lenz, this period was most productive from 1550 to 1750, i.e., until the beginning of the Age of Enlightenment; see “Leichenpredigt,” 666.
5. Johann Spangenberg addressed these topics in his funeral sermons, which were published in a collection. See the list in the index at the end of the volume of the *Leichpredigten Welche man bey dem Begrebnuß der verstorbenen/ in Christlicher Gemein thun mag/ vnd sonst in allerley anligen nu[e]tzlich zu gebrauchen. XV. Auß dem alten Testament/ Daneben mehr den[n] LX. Themata oder Spru[e]ch/ auß dem Alten Testament/ auff welche man diese Leichpredigten applicieren mo[e]cht. XXVIII. Auß dem Euangelisten Mattheo vnd March. XXXIII. Auß dem Euangelisten Luca.* (Nuremberg, 1582), 31b.
6. See Rudolf Mohr, *Protestantische Theologie und Frömmigkeit im Angesicht des Todes während des Barockzeitalters, hauptsächlich auf Grund hessischer Leichenpredigten*, theological dissertation (Marburg, 1964), 36-54.
7. *Funffzehn Leichpredigt/ So man bey dem Begrebnis der verstorbnen/ jnn Christlicher Gemein thun mag. Darneben mehr denn LX. Themata odder Spru[e]che/ aus dem alten Testament/ Auff welche man diese Leichpredigt appliciren mo[e]cht* (Wittenberg: Georg Rhaw, 1545). The preface is dated September 29, 1545. A description of the book can be found in Eberhard Winkler, *Die Leichenpredigt im deutschen Luthertum bis Spener* (Munich: Kaiser, 1967), 50-52. At an earlier point and in a different literary genre, namely in a book of consolation, Spangenberg had already dealt with the topics of death and dying. See: *Ain new Trostbuchlin/ Mit ainer Christlichen vnderrichtung/ Wie sich ein Mensch berayten soll/ zu[o] ainem seligen sterben/ inn Fragstück ver/ fasset . . .* (Augsburg: Valentin Othmar, 1542). See the English translation of the 1548 edition of this work: Robert Kolb, *A Booklet of Comfort for the Sick, and On the Christian Knight By Johann Spangenberg* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2007).
8. See also Winkler, *Leichenpredigt*, 50 (on page 12 the year of publishing is erroneously given as 1544); and Craig M. Koslofsky, *The Reformation of the Dead. Death and Ritual in Early Modern Germany, 1450-1700* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000), 109.
9. Gustav Kawerau, “Spangenberg, Johann u. Cyriacus,” in *Realenzyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, 3ed., Albert Hauck (Leipzig: Hinrich, 1906), 18:563-572.
10. *Acht vnd zwentzig Leichpredigten zum Begrebnis der verstorbenen/ vmd sunst in allerley anligen aus dermassen nu[e]tzlich zugebrauchen/ aus den heiligen Euangelisten. MATTHAEO,*

MARCO . . . (Magdeburg: Michael Lotther; 1553). Other editions: 1554, 1555, 1557, 1559, 1567. *Fuße[n]ff vnd Fuße[n]ffizig Leichpredigten/ aus dem Euangelisten IOANNE. Voller scho[n]er Lere: vnd hertzliches Christliches Trosts/ So nicht allein bey den Begrebnissen/ deren in Christo seelig Verstorbenen/ dienlich: Sondern auch bey betru[e]bten vnd krancken Leuten zu lesen/ nu[n]ftz-lich* (Ursel: Nikolaus Heinrich, 1586). In addition, Cyriakus Spangenberg published 34 funeral sermons on Luke, which he already announced in the prologue of his *Acht vnd zwentzig Leichpredigten* (A3b). They are available under the names of his father and himself: *Vier und dreissig Leichpredigten/ Aus dem heiligen Euangelisten LVCA.* (Wittenberg: heirs of Georg Rhau, 1554). Other editions: 1556, 1559, 1567, 1568.

11. According to *Verzeichnis der im deutschen Sprachbereich erschienenen Drucke des XVI. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in München and the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel, 1. Abt. (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1983–2000), these were as follows: 1548, 1550, 1553, 1558 Latin, 1559, 1560, 1563, 1564 Latin, 1568. All the funeral sermons published in the several volumes by the Spangenberg were issued together in the edition of Nuremberg 1582. This edition is also used here (note 5).

12. “Themata. Oder sprüche[n] aus dem alten Testament/ auff welche man dise Leichpredigten applicieren mag.” *Leychpredigten* (1582), 28a–31a. It would be worthwhile to examine whether the exegetical-biblical part of later funeral sermons actually draws on this very common postil. I regard this as very probable.

13. Spangenberg, *Leychpredigten* (1582), A2a.

14. See Irene Dingel, “Georg Majors Rolle auf dem Regensburger Religionsgespräch von 1546,” in *Georg Major (1502-1574). Ein Theologe der Wittenberger Reformation*, ed. Günther Wartenberg and Irene Dingel (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2005), 189–206.

15. See the preface, A2b, with the quotation given at note 62, and the following comment on the volume itself: “I have taken so much time and have compiled funeral sermons from Christian ideas and from passages of the Old Testament in a booklet, listing the main concepts, and have dedicated it to you, my gracious Christian lords and friends . . .,” Spangenberg, *Leychpredigten*, A2b.

16. Winkler’s interpretation that, in this context, “characteristic features of medieval preaching” can be seen in Spangenberg’s sermons needs to be critically assessed (*Leichenpredigten*, 57).

17. See Spangenberg, *Leychpredigten*, 3b–9a.

18. Spangenberg, *Leychpredigten*, 33b.

19. Nikolaus Selnecker, *Christliche Leychpredigten So vom Jar 1576. bis fast an das 1590. Jar zu Leipzig/ Durch D. Nicolaum Selneccerum der zeit Superintendenten vnd Professorem alda/ geschehen vnd aufgezeichnet worden sind/ nu[n]ftzlich vnd trojstlich zu diesen elenden zeiten/ vnd auff ensig anhalten vieler Christen/ die sie haben auff schreiben lassen/ zusamgebracht/ vnd in Druck verfertigt. Erster Theil Von Anno 1576 bis auff das Jahr 1584* (Magdeburg: Ambrosius Kirchner, 1591). For a description, see Winkler, *Leichenpredigten*, 90–92.

20. For more on Selnecker’s biography, see Ernst Koch, “Nikolaus Selnecker,” in *TRE* 31: 105–108.

21. See the dedicatory preface to Duchess Hedwig von Braunschweig-Lüneburg from October 17, 1589 (Leipzig), in: Selnecker, *Christliche Leychpredigten*, 1:(:):2a–4a. Duke Julius died on May 3, 1589.

22. Selnecker based this conclusion on the fact that sermons are preached and heard every day anyway. He continued: “But in this case there is no standard. The Word, the Spirit, reverence, love, and the time, place, circumstances, and opportunity of people all must point

to the proper form and manner; brevity or length of the sermons. They should not leave a bad taste in anyone's mouth but should be beneficial and fruitful, and move hearts, which is not a human work but rather God's gift and power." *Christliche Leychpredigten*, 1:(:) 2a-b.

23. *Christliche Leychpredigten*, 1:3a.

24. *Christliche Leychpredigten*, 1:3b.

25. *Christliche Leychpredigten*, 2:3a.

26. *Christliche Leychpredigten*, 1:2a.

27. One can only surmise, however, whether these notes reflect the whole text or sometimes give only an outline of the sermon.

28. Selnecker used a synopsis of the sermon for Hieronymus Rauscher, a councilman from Leipzig, exactly six months later for the death of the councilman's son (see Selnecker's comment at the end of the sermon, *Christliche Leychpredigten*, 1:31a). This is no individual case. Some entire sermons were used several times.

29. For example, in Selnecker's eighth funeral sermon (for Mayor Hieronymus Rauscher, Leipzig, December 12, 1576). Compare Selnecker, *Christliche Leychpredigten*, 1:30a-31a, and other places. Winkler's generalization, *Leichenpredigten*, 91, that every sermon mentions the deceased at the end is not accurate. Later he mentions, rather qualified and more accurately, that this is true in "many funeral sermons of Selnecker," 101. Selnecker's comments were so general for the most part that no specific personal characteristics emerge.

30. *Leychpredigten Etlicher Herrn des Hoch vnd Ehrwürdigen Thumbcapittels/ des Primat vnd Ertzstiftis Magdeburgk/ auch etlicher fu[er]nemen Adelichen Matronen vnd Junckfrauen/ vnd letztlich auch etlicher Bu[er]gerlichen Personen/ welche nach geschעהner Christlichen Reformation/ in diesen fu[er]nff vnd zwantzig Jahren/ von Anno 1567. an/ biß auff diß 1592. Jahr seliglich im HErn entschlafen . . .* (Magdeburg: Paul Donat, 1598) An earlier printing from 1592 exists but could not be used for this study.

31. Amsdorf came to Magdeburg as its reformer in 1524. Compare Hans Stille, *Nikolaus von Amsdorf. Sein Leben bis zu seiner Einweisung als Bischof von Naumburg (1483-1542)* (Zeulenroda: Sporn, 1937), 52-70.

32. Sack, *Leychpredigten*, 331a.

33. Sack, *Leychpredigten*, 47b. A cathedral canon and Senior in the cathedral chapter, Kracht died on February 5, 1569. This first funeral sermon in the collection is preceded by various writings sent to the deceased for instructional purposes, of which Sack wrote at least one.

34. See Sack's comments in the prologue of the third funeral sermon printed in his collection, regarding Johann von Randaw, who died on October 31, 1572. See Sack's comments at note 70.

35. Sack, *Leychpredigten*,) (2b [his sixteenth funeral sermon]. Joachim von Britzken, who died July 1, 1592, served as cathedral canon and treasurer of the archbishop's primatial church.

36. See, for instance, the funeral sermon for Dorothea Susanna of Sachsen-Weimar. Gregor Strigenitz, the preacher delivering her funeral sermon, selected Judith 16 as text, in order to show her as an exemplary wife. Cf. *Gedechtnis vnd Leichpredigt/ Aus dem Sechzehenden Capitel des Bu[er]chleins IVDITH. Nach dem To[e]dlichen Abgang vnd Begrabe[n]is/ Weyland der Durchlauchtigen/ Hochgebornen Fu[er]stin vnnnd Frauen DOROTHEA SVSANNA. Geborner Pfaltzgrafe[lin] bey Rein/ etc. Hertzogin zu Sachsen/ . . . Zu Orlamufende den 16. Aprilis/ am Sontage Iubilate, Anno 1592. gethan vnd gehalten*, (Leipzig: Frantz Schnelboltz, 1600).

37. "For Saint Paul divides the task of preaching into two components, Romans 12: *doctrina et exhortatio*, teaching and exhortation. Teaching is when one preaches what is unknown and the people become knowledgeable or come to understand. Exhortation is when one arouses them and elucidates things they probably already know very well. Both components are necessary for a preacher, which is why Saint Paul practices them both." WA 10,1,2:1,18-2;3. See also Winkler, *Leichenpredigten*, 36-40, and Ulrich Nembach, *Predigt des Evangeliums. Luther als Prediger, Pädagoge und Rhetor* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1972), 25-59. Mohr's claim (*Protestantische Theologie*, 54) that "lamentation and consolation were indispensable components of every funeral sermon" is not supportable.

38. For Luther, as well, teaching, consolation, and exhortation are inseparable, Winkler, *Leichenpredigten*, 40.

39. Selnecker, *Christliche Leychpredigten*, 1:27a; the sermon text, 26b.

40. The continuation of this text is: "And you open your eyes upon such as these. He has his certain time; the number of his moons is known only to you; you have set an end; you will not overstep it." Spangenberg, *Leychpredigten*, 11a, also the location of the citation in the text.

41. See Spangenberg, *Leychpredigten*, 12a.

42. Selnecker, *Christliche Leychpredigten*, 1:27a

43. See Winkler, *Leichenpredigten*, 26-29, esp. 28.

44. Discussing seventeenth century funeral sermons, Mohr speaks of the "right and duty to grieve," and thus overlooks the pastoral components; see *Protestantische Theologie*, 54-58.

45. Selnecker, *Christliche Leychpredigten*, e.g. 1:29a.

46. Selnecker, *Christliche Leychpredigten*, esp. 1:27b-30b.

47. Selnecker's prologue to his *Christliche Leychpredigten*, 1:3a.

48. See Martin Luther, *On the Freedom of a Christian*, WA 7:20-38; LW 31:327-377.

49. Regarding Melancthon's concept of the *tertius usus legis* and its development, see Timothy J. Wengert, *Law and Gospel. Philip Melancthon's Debate with John Agricola of Eisleben over Poenitentia* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 177-210.

50. See Spangenberg, *Christliche Leychpredigten*, 11b. Spangenberg clearly picks up on a passage from Luther's prologue on the Psalms and places it in a new context; cf. WA DB 10,1:101,34-38.

51. Spangenberg, *Christliche Leychpredigten*, 12a.

52. Selnecker, *Christliche Leychpredigten*, 1:21b. This is the sixth funeral sermon in the collection, for the funeral of Anna Schwallenberger, the daughter of Dr. Autor Schwallenberger, on September 17, 1576.

53. Selnecker, *Christliche Leychpredigten*, 1:40a (eleventh funeral sermon, for the funeral of the wife of Leipzig councilman Dr. Preiser, on March 19, 1577). Selnecker spoke about "that Hoffman" as if he could assume that the collection's listeners or readers are familiar with him.

54. Selnecker, *Christliche Leychpredigten*, 1:40a.

55. Selnecker, *Christliche Leychpredigten*, 1:40b-41a: "They became degenerate and are blinded by their own meanness, impudence, pride, cockiness, security in sin, and arrogance. They do not know God, who judges in secret. Today or tomorrow they will have to be disgraced before God and the whole world, probably yet in this life, just as we have in only a few years seen many examples at the courts of the important lords."

56. Sack, *Leychpredigten*, 2b. Since 1543 Augustine's sermons which focused on drinking had been available in German; Sack was most certainly familiar with them. They were published under the title: *Von Zusauffen vnd Trunckenheit/ samt jren scho[e]nen Fru[e]chten Drey Christliche Predige S. Aurelij Augustini verteuscht*, translated by Melchior Ambach (Frankfurt/M: Hermann Güllfferich, 1543).

57. Sack, *Leychpredigten*, 2b-3a.

58. Sack, *Leychpredigten*, 50a-b: "He also had weaknesses, especially two, which were very harmful to his health. But at the end he recognized these weaknesses and heartily grieved over them, and what he grieved over especially does not belong in this place. . . But there is no one who would have wanted his weaknesses, which he otherwise did not openly share with everyone, to be disclosed in the funeral sermon once he had left this world. And the saying goes: 'Say nothing about the dead if it is not the good,' and this too is our goal, that the sermon should mainly be preached about his Christian departure."

59. However, when reaching such conclusions, we should not forget that the context in which this sermon collection was put together probably led to a polemical approach that could influence one's impression.

60. See footnote 47.

61. Spangenberg, *Leychpredigten*, A2b.

62. See Spangenberg, *Leychpredigten*, A2b, and footnote 15.

63. This theological background for Selnecker's confessional critique is mirrored in his pamphlet *De praedestinatione*, written in 1565. See Robert Kolb, "Seelsorge und Lehre in der Spätreformation am Beispiel von Nikolaus Selneckers Abhandlung zur Prädestinationslehre," *Lutherische Theologie und Kirche* 25 (2001):14-34.

64. Selnecker, *Christliche Leychpredigten*, 1:(:) 2b-3a [second printed sheet].

65. Selnecker, *Christliche Leychpredigten*, 1:(:) 3a.

66. Selnecker, *Christliche Leychpredigten*, 1:(:) 3b.

67. That is, as a confession from the lips of the deceased expressing the popular Lutheran understanding of baptism, among other things, Selnecker, *Christliche Leychpredigten*, 1:122a-124b.

68. Selnecker, *Christliche Leychpredigten*, 1:30b.

69. For instance, see the sermon for the funeral of Christoph von Möllendorf, who died on October 21, 1575, in which Sack states that this cathedral canon 'was a vessel of the mercy of God' during his lifetime. Sack, *Leychpredigten*, 111a-112b.

70. Sack, *Leychpredigten*, 60a-b.

71. Sack, *Leychpredigten*, 60b.