

Piety in the Pestilence VI

In ancient times, and throughout the Middle Ages, Christians produced a kind of literature which modern people classify as the genre of *Ars Moriendi*, that is, 'the art of dying.'

In these dangerous times, I do not bring this up to be morbid, I bring it up to dispel fear and conquer death, for such shall Our Lord do on Easter Sunday. Christians wrote of the 'art of dying' not because they were dour and gloomy, but because they were joyful and strong. Every novel comes to its end, and every great novel finds its greatest delight when it is completed. In the same way, we, who live in joy, look to the end of our life not with anxiety, but with a smile, for even as Christ said, '*I have overcome the world,*' so too have we, in Him, overcome the fear of sin, death, and the devil, looking only to that new life in beatitude which awaits us in the everlasting wedding feast of the Father.

The great theologian Johann Gerhard writes concerning the heavenly vision:

"And if God shall be all in all, then surely He will grant us fullness of knowledge, the perfection of peace, and the continuing powers of memory through all eternity. God the Son will satisfy our intellects with the fullest knowledge; God the Holy Ghost will satisfy our wills with the holiest love; and God the Father will charge our memories with the unfailing remembrance of both. Thou, O God, art the Light; 'in Thy light shall we see light,' see Thee, that is, in Thyself, in the glory of Thy countenance, when we see Thee face to face. Nor shall we see Thee only, but we shall also live with Thee; and not only that, but we shall praise Thee; and not only so, but we shall be partakers of Thy joy; and more than that, we shall be as the angels of God, eye, like God Himself, who is blessed forevermore."

These words were written by a man whose extended family was almost entirely wiped out by the plague during His time, the Lutheran hymnist Paul Gerhard being one of the few beside him who survived. He is not a man unacquainted with sickness and death. What he is, is a man acquainted with Christ and eternity. May

we all look upon these days, and sing forth such songs of joy.

Pastor Fields

Image Credit: Christopher Powers (Full of Eyes)