From Madrid to Purgatory

The art and craft of dying in sixteenth-century Spain

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Contents

Acknowledgments *page* ix
Abbreviations used in footnotes xiii
Map: Principal sites mentioned in this study xiv

PROLOGUE

Death and the sun 1

BOOK ONE

Eager for heaven: Death and the testamentary discourse in Madrid, 1520–1599

1. Wills and the history of death in Madrid 19
2. Approaching the divine tribunal 62
3. Relinquishing one's body 87
4. Impressing God and neighbor 114
5. Planning for the soul's journey 168
6. Aiding the needy, aiding oneself 232
Conclusion 248

BOOK TWO

The king's dissolving body: Philip II and the royal paradigm of death

1. King Philip and his palace of death 255
2. The king's many requiems 283
3. Drawing lessons from the king's death 300
4. Defending the faith through ritual 322

5. Death, the Spanish monarchy, and the myth of sacredness 348
Conclusion 366

BOOK THREE

The saint's heavenly corpse: Teresa of Avila and the ultimate paradigm of death

1. From Alba to heaven: Death and the saint 371
2. Come sweet death, come, swift dying: The final days of Teresa of Avila 401
3. Imperishable flesh, incomparable wonder 425
4. Earthbound no longer 446
5. Saint Teresa's apparitions 472
Conclusion 502

EPILOGUE

In death as in life: From the daily rounds of hell to the vestibule of heaven 511

Bibliography 535
Index 555

I

Wills and the history of death in Madrid

Legal documents for this world and the next

At death's door in the world of Cervantes, a notary could be as indispensable as a priest and a testament as crucial as a confession. In the heat of August 1589, a Spanish nobleman clearly explained in his will, through a notary's pen, the nature and purpose of such a document:

> I, Don Martin Cortés, Marquis of the Valley of Guaxaca, residing in this city of Madrid, beset by infirmities and lacking in health, but unaffected in my intellect, fearing that since death is a certainty but its hour an uncertainty, I might be taken while I am unprepared in those things that are necessary for salvation, and wishing to make perfectly clear to my wife and children how they are to inherit my belongings, so that there will be no discord or quarreling among them, do hereby order and execute this my last will and testament in the following manner: . . .[2]

Two distinct yet inseparable functions of the will are mentioned here by the marquis. These two objectives are listed in order of importance:

[2] AHPM 1398.493. Published in Antonio Matilla Tascón, *Testamentos de 43 personajes del Madrid de los Austrias* (Madrid, 1983), p. 83. This description of the purpose of the will is by no means unique. Many other Madrid testators felt compelled to include this kind of explanation, albeit in less detail, as did one married couple in their joint will of 1594: "Deseando disponer de los bienes que su divina majestad nos tiene prestados, por su bondad y clemencia infinita, para evitar diferencias y pleitos que por ellos podria aber, y resultar, moriendo ab intestate, y deseando poner nuestras animas en carrera de salvacion, habemos y ordenamos este testamento" (AHPM 620.226).

First, the will serves as a salvific instrument, as one of "those things that are necessary for salvation"; second, it controls the distribution of his estate and lessens the possibility of "discord and quarreling" among his survivors. This particular ordering of the two functions is customary and quite deliberate. In fact, it refers specifically to the two separate sections into which every will was divided: first, the so-called pious clauses, which dealt with the spiritual estate of the deceased; second, the distributive clauses, which apportioned the material belongings.

In this preamble, the marquis tells us much about the way in which the function of wills was perceived in Madrid and most of Western Europe during the sixteenth century. In Roman antiquity, as in our own day, the will was simply a private legal document that sought to regulate the transmission of property from the dead to the living. It is no accident that this practical function, which would seem to be the primary reason for writing such a document, is ranked second in importance by the marquis. When the written will reappeared as a common practice in the twelfth century, as a Christianized version of an ancient Roman procedure that had not been totally forgotten but had generally fallen into disuse for half a millennium, its primary function was no longer strictly the regulation of property.[3]

In the late medieval and early modern period, when the sacred was yet inextricably joined to the profane, wills could be imbued with a transcendent religious purpose. The Roman Catholic Church required a will from each of its members, from the richest to the poorest – at least in principle if not in actual practice. In Spain, as in most of Western Europe, those who died without wills faced special difficulties. Hence the urgency of Don Quixote's request for a priest *and* a notary: Dying without a testament would be as risky as dying without confession and the last rites. Consider, for instance, the rule laid down by the Synod of Zaragoza in 1357 forbidding the burial of anyone who died without a will, *ab intestato.* The only way such a person could obtain a proper Christian burial in consecrated ground was for his natural heirs to contribute part of the inheritance to the church for the establishment of pious bequests on his behalf "according to the quality and quantity of his belongings."[4]

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[3] For a more detailed history of the rebirth of wills in twelfth-century Europe, consult Chiffoleau, *Comptabilité,* pp. 35 ff. For a brief summary of the history of wills see Marion Reder Gadow, *Morir en Málaga: Testamentos Malageños del siglo xviii* (Málaga, 1986), pp. 5–13. An outdated but somewhat useful history of wills in Spain, supplemented by an ample bibliography, can be found in *Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada Europeo-Americana* (Madrid, 1928), vol. 61, pp. 101–50.

The significance that this decree placed on the writing of a will was immense. By denying burial to anyone who died *ab intestato,* the church was making it clear that without a will there could be no salvation. The denial of a proper Christian burial was normally reserved for excommunicates, heretics, and hardened criminals. To rank an intestate Christian alongside with the most obviously damned was to place a nearly sacramental value on the will, or at least on that part of it that made provisions for certain postmortem devotions.[5]

Yet, wills could not be demanded of *all* Christians. Naturally, wills were of greater concern for those who had some property to redistribute; those of lesser means, who in our period were a substantial part of the population, normally dispensed with such formalities. Estimates from Spanish cities where the total number of deaths can be compared to the total number of testaments show that in the early modern period only about one-quarter to one-half of the population wrote wills; the figures are lower for rural areas.[6] Since burial could not thus be denied outright to all who died intestate, it was denied conditionally until certain obligations had been met. Those who lacked property could make a formal declaration of poverty as a substitute for a will and provide for a few alms and pious bequests. What really mattered was not so much the will itself, then, but something it was supposed to contain: the ordering of alms and pious bequests. Once these were arranged for by surviving relatives, burial was possible. In Madrid, almost all declarations of poverty contained some minimal provisions for pious bequests. We also know that the parish clergy who buried these poor people in Madrid as acts of charity would often sell their meager belongings and use the proceeds for masses.[7] The primary function of the will, therefore, from a theological and pastoral perspective, was to provide the faithful with the opportunity to request suffrages for their passage to the hereafter. As far as the church was concerned, no one could harbor hopes for a Christian burial – or for salvation – without at least a requiem mass and alms for the ecclesiastical coffers.

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[4] Federico Rafael Aznar Gil, *Concilios provinciales y sinodos de Zaragoza de 1215 a 1563* (Zaragoza, 1982), p. 155, also points out that this decree was no local idiosyncrasy but very much in keeping with similar statutes enforced in other Spanish dioceses.

[5] Along with intestates, the Council of Madrid in 1473 forbade church burials to all thieves and those who died in duels and also ordered that the corpses of known thieves already buried in consecrated ground be unceremoniously exhumed and discarded (Tejada, 5, pp. 25–6). For more on this subject, see A. Orlandis, "Sobre la elección de sepultura en la España medieval," *Anuario de Historia del Derecho Español* (1950), pp. 5–49; and A. Bernard, *La sepulture en droit canonique du Décret de Gratien au Concile de Trente* (Paris, 1933).

[6] The estimate on Oviedo and Gijón at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries ranges between 25 and 48 percent. Roberto J. Lopez Lopez, *Comportamientos religiosos en Asturias durante el Antiguo Régimen* (Gijón, 1989), pp. 38 and 41, claims that these figures are similar to those found throughout the Iberian peninsula and cites studies of localities in Catalonia, Galicia, Andalusia, and León.

This is made evident by other decrees of the Synod of Zaragoza (1357). One stipulated that even those who had written a will and arranged for their pious bequests could not be buried until the funds needed to carry out these bequests had been turned over to the curate. Another ordered the heirs to inform the corresponding ecclesiastical authorities about all the clauses that referred to the church or to pious bequests. In addition, all pastors were required to keep a very careful record of their parishioners' wills.[8]

Undoubtedly, what made the writing of a will so important in the eyes of the church and invested it with a quasi-sacramental quality was its function in the arrangement of those liturgical rites that helped ensure salvation. But there was much more to writing a will than the listing of pious bequests. Other factors also contributed to the way in which the testamentary act came to be endowed with salvific qualities. The writing of a will was considered a penitential act and a rehearsal for death, an exercise that could help the faithful accept death and detach themselves from the things of this world. Expert advice had it that it was much better to write a will while in good health rather than at the final moment, for to let go of one's possessions and to contribute to charity without the threat of imminent death was an act that could lessen one's time in purgatory. Expert advice also had it that a constant periodic reading of one's own testament was a highly meritorious form of devotion, not only as a preparation for death but also as a means of enhancing the efficacy of the will's pious bequests, for if one renewed one's assent to the will over and over again, it could increase one's charitable disposition. A full charitable assent to one's will counted much more in the afterlife than a troubled or grudging acceptance. These periodic reviews were considered even more meritorious if done in a state of grace, immediately after confession, without the stain of mortal sin.[9] Moreover, because the will was ostensibly the final public statement of every person, it assumed a confessional quality. At the end of one's life, even after one had departed from this world, when others read the will – or, more likely, had it read to them – one could confess one's faith, acknowledge one's sins, and attempt to redeem them by making certain statements and arranging for certain liturgies and public gestures. The church reciprocated all this by granting forgiveness to the sinner and allowing for a burial in consecrated ground.

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[7] M. F. Carbajo Isla, *La población de la villa de Madrid desde finales del siglo XVI hasta mediados del siglo XIX* (Madrid, 1987), pp. 12–14; *Madrid en el Archivo Histórico de Protocolos*, ed. Ana Duplá del Moral (Madrid, 1990), pp. 151–2.

[8] Aznar Gil, *Concilios provinciales*, pp. 114, 155. Philippe Ariès, drawing primarily upon his acquaintance with French funerary practices, claims that throughout medieval Europe wills were drafted and preserved by the curate as well as the notary and that it was not until the sixteenth century that they became the exclusive responsibility of the notary. *The Hour of Our Death* (New York, 1981), p. 189.

The writing of a will thus came to be viewed as a spiritual exercise that was not only a sober meditation on death but also on the whole of one's life and on one's hopes for the hereafter. As the stock phrase repeated by many testators put it, writing a will was a way of placing one's soul on the road to salvation – *en carrera de salvación.* At century's end Luis de Rebolledo warned that "writing a testament is called putting one's soul in order; wretched is the soul that is not well ordered at that hour."[10] This is why the pious clauses in the first part of every will occur in a nearly unchanging, almost ritualistic order, and why Ariès was probably correct in suggesting that the religious portion of the will must have developed as part of a long oral tradition before it became fixed in written form.[11]

The religious function of the testament can perhaps be more fully appreciated when one considers its place in the death ritual itself, for the majority of wills were written by ailing people from their deathbeds and the remainder by people who were prudently contemplating their own demise. If one understands how most wills were written – or at least how it was thought that they should be ideally drafted – and how most people were advised to confront that awful moment, one may more easily comprehend their transcendent significance for many dying Madrileños of the sixteenth century.

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[9] Alexo Venegas, *Agonía del tránsito de la muerte. Con avisos y consuelos que cerca della son provechosos* (1536). I have used the 1565 Alcalá edition, reprinted in *Escritores Místicos Españoles,* ed. Miguel Mir, vol. I, which is vol. XVI of the *Nueva Biblioteca de Autores Españoles* (Madrid, 1911), pp. 129–33.

[10] Luis de Rebolledo, *Primera parte de cien oraciones fúnebres en que se considera la vida, y sus miserias: la muerte y sus provechos* (Madrid, 1600), fol 318v.

[11] Ariès, *Hour,* p. 189.

The art of dying in early modern Spain

When a notary came to prepare someone's testament at the bedside anywhere in sixteenth-century Spain, he would be drawn into an intimate ritual, both as participant and spectator, for most people died at home then, in their own beds, and had their bodies prepared for burial by their relatives. Moreover, the process of dying was itself marked by many conventions and expectations to which the writing of the will was inextricably linked. To try to understand the mentality of these documents, one must first contemplate the death ritual itself, or at least some idealized portrayal of it.

In the sixteenth century it was taken for granted by most Catholics that one should prepare for death throughout one's life, so that when the inevitable moment arrived, one would know how to act. Crossing over into the afterlife, to a timeless state in which one faced existence in purgatory, hell, or heaven, was far too important a moment to approach unprepared. This was the assumption made by the genre of *Ars Moriendi* literature. After all, to promote the act of dying as an "art" in which one should become skilled was to assume that, as in any other art, success would be impossible without the proper training.

Ars Moriendi texts were a genre of practical, devotional literature aimed at the laity that first appeared in the early fifteenth century. Though often mentioned in the same breath with the *danse macabre* and other aspects of late medieval interest in funereal realism, the *Ars Moriendi* did not share in the grotesque spirit of dancing skeletons and rotting corpses. The tenor of most of these texts was one of comfort: The *moriens,* or dying person, was seen as a Christian who needed to be prepared for the experience beyond the grave by the assurances of a loving God. On the whole, this literature emphasized the doctrines of grace and forgiveness over those of punishment and damnation but insisted that these benefits could be gained only through deliberate effort and preparation.[12]

These were detailed instruction booklets. The more traditional texts were divided into six sections: (1) a collection of questions on death from Christian authorities; (2) advice to the dying person on ways of resisting the five sins of faithlessness, despair, impatience, pride, and worldliness; (3) catechetical questions that had to be answered correctly in order to gain salvation; (4) prayers and rules to assist in the imitation of the dying Christ; (5) advice to those who were present around the deathbed; (6) prayers to be said by those who were present at the moment of death.[13]

The basic structure and content of these texts remained largely unchanged until the sixteenth century, when the forces of humanism and the Catholic Reformation gave rise to some innovations. The key assumption of the earlier literature had been that one's eternal fate was decided at the moment of death: As the Latin adage put it, *Salus hominis in fine consistit.* The purpose of the manual was to allow the dying to escape hell, or even purgatory, by helping them to repent as deeply and thoroughly as possible. Although retaining the central assumption of *salus hominis in fine consistit,* the Renaissance added an extra dimension: The art of dying should not only open the gates of heaven at the moment of death but also show one how to live a good Christian life. The *Ars Moriendi,* then, was transformed into an art of living, or *Ars Vivendi,* and became a manual to be read not just at the moment of death but throughout the course of one's life. This theme assumed great importance in Erasmus of Rotterdam's *De praeparatione ad mortem* (1534) and in a popular book written by a Spanish Erasmian from Toledo, Alejo de Venegas, *The Agony of Crossing Over at Death* (1537): "Let him who still has time today take advantage of the present moment, and not wait until tomorrow," he advised. "The greatest folly any man could commit, we must therefore conclude, is to live in a state in which he does not want to die; and the remedy for such madness is none other than a good, constant preparation for death."[14]

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[12] For an overview of this genre of literature, see my article, "Ars Moriendi," in the *Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (London/Philadelphia, 1984), pp. 21–2. For more detailed information consult the following: Roger Chartier, "Les Arts de Mourir, 1450–1600," *Annales, E.S.C.,* 31: 51–76 (1976); Sister M. C. O'Connor, *The Art of Dying Well: The Development of the Ars Moriendi* (New York, 1942); N. L. Beaty, *The Craft of Dying: A Study in the Literary Tradition of the* Ars Moriendi *in England* (New Haven, 1970); and A. Tenenti, *Il Senso della morte e l'amore della vita nel Rinascimento (Francia e Italia)* (Turin, 1957).

[13] M. C. O'Connor, *Art of Dying,* p. 157.

By the late sixteenth century, Counter-Reformation writers were producing a type of *Ars Moriendi* that combined the Renaissance focus on the *Ars Vivendi* with a Tridentine reinterpretation of the traditional motifs of the art of dying. Using the old themes and dramatic forms (and liberally citing classical authors alongside the Church Fathers), these newer treatises placed greater emphasis on the freedom of the will, the power of the sacraments, and the intercessory role of the church and the saints.[15]

Although books on the art of dying had never been as popular in Spain throughout the fifteenth and early sixteenth century as they had been elsewhere in Western Europe,[16] Spanish interest in this type of literature slowly began to increase in the late 1530s and built up considerable momentum after midcentury. The renowned Erasmus was the first to appear in print in 1535, with two speedy Castilian translations of his *De pareparatione ad mortem,* which he had sent to Cristobal Mexia of Seville less than a month after its publication in Basel.[17] Though this quickly became an immensely popular book throughout Europe (twenty Latin editions 1534–40, plus translations into French, German, Dutch, and English), it did not fare as well in Spain, for it appeared at a time when anti-Erasmianism was in full swing.[18] Of the two translations, the one published at Burgos seems to have enjoyed a wider circulation, but this stemmed from the fact that it was a sanitized version that left out much of the original text. The reception of Erasmus's treatise might be more accurately judged from the fate of the unexpurgated translation published in Valencia, which was totally obliterated after being listed in the 1559 *Index of Forbidden Books.*[19]

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[14] Venegas, *Agonía,* pp. 125, 127. Venegas chose a most appropriate title for his work. The Spanish word *agonía* can refer specifically to the throes of death but in a general way also express a deep, unfulfilled yearning.

[15] For a more detailed bibliography on this subject, consult my article, "Ars Moriendi," p. 22.

[16] Roger Chartier, "Les Arts de Mourir," *Annales* 31: 51–76 (1976).

[17] Erasmus, *De pareparatione ad mortem* (Basel, 1534); *Libro del aparejo que se deve hazer para bien morir* (Burgos, 1535); *Aparejo de bien morir* (Valencia, 1535). The Latin text can be found in *Opera Omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami* (Amsterdam/Oxford, 1969), Ordinis V, vol. I, pp. 321–92.

[18] On the persecution of the Spanish Erasmians, see Marcel Bataillon, *Erasme et l'Espagne* (Paris, 1937), 3rd ed. 3 vols. (Geneva, 1991), vol. 1, pp. 467–532.

Yet, some of Erasmus's influence survived in Spain. As mentioned, he had a follower in Alejo Venegas, author of *The Agony of Crossing Over.* Venegas embraced his Christocentrism and also emphasized the *Ars Moriendi/Ars Vivendi* dialectic but without Erasmus's disdain for external forms of piety.[20] Overall, the tone of the two works is quite different. In fact, publication of *The Agony* signaled quite clearly the rejection of Erasmian piety. Whereas Erasmus had declared that true charity and faith in Christ were more important than Catholic death rituals – going as far as to say that the sacramental last rites were no guarantee against the flames of hell – Venegas emphasized the traditional significance of these rituals with a reverent vengeance.[21] Venegas's *The Agony* went through ten editions before losing popularity in the latter part of the century when other treatises apparently took its place.[22]

Venegas had tapped a deep well: Interest in treatises on death and the art of dying grew steadily in the second half of the sixteenth century. In 1555 Pedro de Medina, the well-known author of a manual of navigation, further popularized Venegas by borrowing heavily from him for his *Book of Truth.* Though not a manual on dying *per se,* Medina's work contained a lengthy discussion of death and the afterlife and attracted a large reading public.[23] Another treatise that was not as complete a manual as *The Agony* but overtook it in popularity was Alonso de Orozco's *Victory of Death.*[24] Orozco's work proved to be influential not only for its own merits but also because of its author's reputation. An ascetic Augustinian who had refused several bishoprics, including the primal see of Toledo, Orozco had earned a reputation as a living saint and had become a chaplain to King Philip II, who revered him and credited him with having cured some members of his household.[25] Less well-known authors also fed the growing appetite for this sort of literature: Jaime Montañes, Hector Pintor, and Juan Raulin.[26]

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[19] Bataillon, *Erasme et l'Espagne,* vol. I, p. 604. See also the bibliography, vol. II, p. 406, where Bataillon lists some later editions of the expurgated translation of Erasmus (Seville, 1551; Antwerp, 1549 and 1555).

[20] See vol. I. Adeva Martín, *El maestro Alejo Venegas de Busto, su vida y sus obras* (Toledo, 1987). See also "Los Artes de Bien Morir en España antes del Maestro Venegas," *Scripta Teologica* (1984); 405–16, where Adeva Martín summarizes how Venegas's *Agonía* differs from that of Erasmus. See also Bataillon, *Erasme et l'Espagne,* vol. I, pp. 608–613.

[21] "Equidem arbitror multos nec absolutos a sacerdote, nec percepta eucharistia, nec unctos, nec ecclesiastico ritu sepultos demigrare in requiem, quum alii ceremoniis omnibus solemniter peractis atque etiam in templo iuxta summum altare sepulti, rapiantur ad inferos." Erasmus, *Opera Omnia,* vol. I, p. 377.

[22] Martín, *Alejo Venegas,* p. 186, indicates that after 1583 there were no further editions of the *Agony* for another hundred years.

The founder of the Jesuits, Ignatius Loyola, was among the first to emphasize innovative kinds of meditations on death and the afterlife in his *Spiritual Exercises* (1548). Before long other Jesuits followed – many of them Spanish – and with such vigor that by the seventeenth century they came to dominate the genre, producing a veritable flood of *Ars Moriendi* texts.[27] At the end of the sixteenth century in Spain, however, the Jesuits were not yet at the forefront of the art of dying. One of their company, Juan Polanco, had written a manual to be used by priests, *Rule*

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[23] Pedro de Medina, *Libro de la Verdad* (Valladolid, 1555), went through thirteen editions, 1563–1626. Modern edition by Angel Gonzalez Palencia, *Obras de Pedro de Medina, Clasicos Españoles,* vol. I (Madrid, 1944). Medina's other works were *El Arte de navegar* (1545), which was translated into every major European language, and *El Libro de grandezas y cosas memorables de España* (1548).

[24] Alonso de Orozco, *Victoria de la Muerte* (Burgos, 1583). Modern editions by Gil Blas (Madrid, 1921 and 1975).

[25] Orozco was known as "el santo" at court. He was beatified in 1881. See Tomás Camara y Castro, *Vida y escritos del Beato Alonso de Orozco* (Valladolid, 1882). Trans. W. A. Jones (Philadelphia, 1895).

[26] Hector Pintor, *Imagen de la vida Cristiana, ordenada por dialogos* (Madrid, 1573), which contained an entire dialogue on the "memoria de la muerte"; Jaime Montañés, *Libro intitulado espejo de buen vivir. Con otro tratado para ayudar a buen morir, en el incierto dia y hora de la muerte* (Madrid, 1573); Juan Raulin, *Libro de la muerte temporal y eterna* (Madrid, 1596), translated from the Latin.

[27] Numbers of *Ars Moriendi* titles written by Jesuits: 1540–1620: 20; 1621–1700: 139; 1701–1800: 101. See listings in A. De Backer and C. Sommervogel, *Bibliographie de la compagnie de Jesus,* 12 vols. (Brussels, 1890–1960), vol. X, cols. 510–19. Also O'Connor, *Art of Dying,* and Tenenti, *Il senso della morte,* pp. 80 ff. For a thorough statistical analysis of the impact of this literature in France, consult D. Roche, "La Mémoire de la Mort. Recherche sur la place des arts de mourir dans la Librairie et la lecture en France aux xvii et xviii siècles," *Annales, E.S.C.* 31 (1976): 76–119.

and Order for Helping Those Who Are Departing from This Life to Die Well (1578), in Latin and in Castilian Spanish, which, though not aimed at the laity, was at least accessible to them in the vernacular.[28]

But what, exactly, did these treatises have to say about dying well? The step-by-step instructions were clear and detailed, the advice easy to comprehend. Because dying was considered to be a social process, the advice was aimed not just at the dying person but at family and neighbors as well. Piecing together the advice given in this literature and information gathered from other sources, the following picture emerges about the process of dying well in sixteenth-century Spain.

Once someone's illness or injury was determined to be serious enough to threaten death, a notary and a priest would be sent for, a will would be drawn up, and preparations for the death watch would begin. But this was no passive vigil. Helping one's relatives and neighbors to die well was considered a serious obligation, for the temptations that the dying person faced were considered to be the most awful and terrifying of all, and it was generally believed that one could aid the dying to resist them. To assist the dying, in fact, was considered a highly meritorious act of charity: It was better than offering suffrages for those who were already dead.[29] Friends and relatives would arrive. Some would begin to assist the dying person in the recitation of prayers; others would read devotional literature, possibly from an *Ars Moriendi* book. Confraternities might be summoned to pray for the soul of the *moriens*, or dying person. If he or she belonged to a confraternity, their fellow members were obliged to come and remain throughout the ordeal; if not, the confraternity could be paid to come. Their procession and arrival were often underscored in the streets with the tolling of bells and the chanting of hymns.[30] The priest, too, would often make a ceremonial approach and entrance, carrying the consecrated host through the streets, as in a small-scale Corpus Christi procession, causing bystanders to drop to their knees and sometimes even drawing out people from the churches.

The priest administered to the dying three indispensable sacraments

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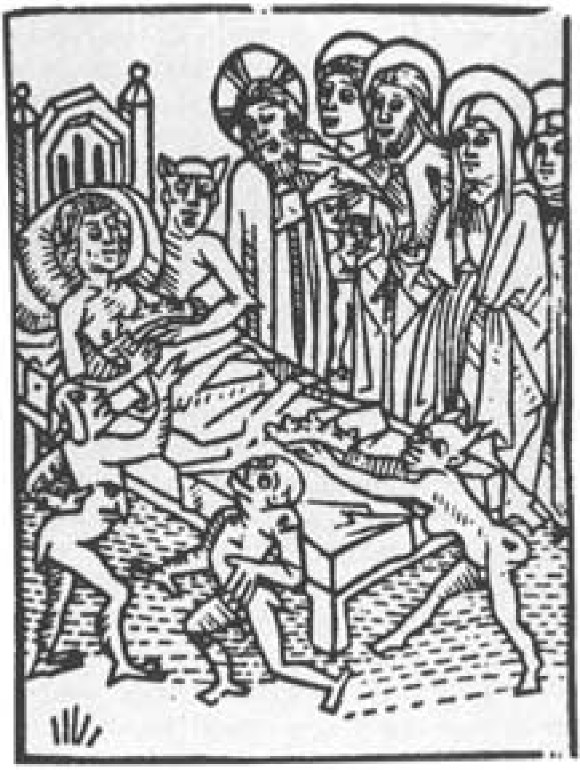
[28] Juan Polanco, S. J., *Methodus ad eos adiuvandos, qui moriuntur* (Burgos, 1578); *Regla y orden para ayudar a bien morir a los que se parten de esta vida* (Zaragoza, 1578).

[29] Venegas, *Agonía*, p. 137, argued that the souls in purgatory were already saved but that every dying person faced the possibility of eternal damnation.

[30] Francisco J. Lorenzo Pinar, *Actitudes religiosas ante la muerte en Zamora en el siglo xvi: Un estudio de mentalidades* (Zamora, 1989), p. 28.



Deathbed Temptation. From *Arte de Bien Morir* (Zaragoza, 1484). Reproduced in *Estampas: Cinco siglos de imagen impresa* (Madrid: Minesterio de Cultura, 1982), plate 146.

This *Ars Moriendi* illustration depicts the dying man being tempted by demons. The crowns being offered to him represent the sin of vainglory. Christ and the saints offer him assistance, forming a phalanx against the tempters from hell. In this instance, the powers of heaven have enabled the *moriens* to resist, for Christ shelters the man's soul (depicted as a small naked figure) within his robes.

known as the last rites and served other functions as well.[31] First, he heard their final confession and granted them absolution, allowing them to face death with a clean soul: This was supposed to be the most thorough and most contrite confession of one's whole life. For many people it was not only their last confession but the first one they had made in years, and it could take a considerable amount of time to do it well. Next, the priest gave them communion, their last one on earth, known as the *viaticum*, literally the "take-it-with-you," which fortified them for the final death struggle and helped ensure a safe passage into the hereafter. Many apparently believed that the bringing of the *viaticum* to the dying was more important and meritorious than the celebration of the mass itself.[32] Foreign visitors to Spain were often surprised by the devotion shown to the *viaticum* in the streets, which seemed unusually intense to some of them.[33] This fervor extended to the royal family: Emperor Charles V and King Philip II routinely humbled themselves in the presence of these eucharistic processions, even to the point of kneeling in muddy puddles.[34] Popular belief in the holiness supposedly needed to receive the *viaticum* apparently ran deep, for condemned prisoners in Spain were routinely denied this sacrament before being executed, even if they had confessed. Reform after Trent was slow. St. John of Avila complained in his advice to the 1566 Council of Toledo, "It is truly reprehensible that, at the time of greatest need, a Christian should be denied his strongest remedy." Only after Pope Pius V's nuncio in Spain instructed King Philip II to discontinue this abuse did it gradually begin to disappear in the latter part of the sixteenth century.[35] Finally, at the very last possible moment, just before death but while the

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[31] Evidence from Cuenca's parish registers indicates that reception of the last rites was nearly universal and that the few exceptions were always carefully explained by the clergy. Sara T. Nalle, *God in La Mancha* (Baltimore, 1992), p. 182. The same

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evidence has been gleaned from Madrid's few surviving parish records: M. F. Carbajo Isla, *La población de la villa de Madrid*, p. 11, n. 30.

[32] José Luis Gonzalez Novalín, "Religiosidad y Reforma del Pueblo Cristiano," in *Historia de la Iglesia en España*, ed. Ricardo García-Villoslada (Madrid, 1980), vol. III.1, p. 361. This form of popular devotion gradually diminished after the reforms of the Council of Trent were implemented in Spain.

[33] José Garcia Mercadal, *Viajes de extranjeros por España y Portugal*, 3 vols. (Madrid, 1952–62), vol. I, p. 469. In 1501 the Burgundian Antoine de Lalaing was surprised by the crowds that followed the viaticum and by the way in which even kings and nobles would dismount and kneel before it.

[34] Juan de Salazar, *Politica Española* (1619), p. 70; Jerónimo de Sepulveda, *Documentos para la historia del monasterio de San Lorenzo del Escorial* (Madrid, 1924, 1964–65), vol. 4, p. 183; Javier Varela, *La muerte del rey: El ceremonial funerario de la monarquía Española, 1500–1885* (Madrid, 1990), p. 75.

[35] Juan de Avila, *Obras*, 6.303; Garcia-Villoslada, "Religiosidad," *Historia de la Iglesia en España*, III.1, pp. 359–61.