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Introduction : Preparing for a Good Death in Medieval and Early Modern Northern Europe

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1. Introduction: Preparing for a Good Death in Medieval and Early Modern Northern Europe¹

Evolving Theory and Practice of Preparing for Death: Pagan to Catholic, Catholic to Reformed

In the medieval and early modern period, when many Northern European communities embraced new religious ideas and practices, their attitudes and practices dealing with death and afterlife went through several profound changes. Firstly, Christianisation introduced a new doctrine of a good life, afterlife, and salvation. Secondly, in the Reformation period, this doctrine went through important changes as regards the significance of grace versus works. Both processes had their impact on the way people and their relatives would prepare for their departure from worldly life.

Throughout the period, regardless of their religious convictions, people were very much aware of the fact that while death was certain, its hour was uncertain. Through sermons, legal documents, and everyday communications, everyone was informed that after death, there would be a reckoning and they would have to account for their actions. Christians were thought that sins would be punished and good deeds--or at least faith--rewarded. Souls were destined either to heaven or hell, depending on how individuals had behaved during their lives.

Advised both by local custom and learned doctrines, when people realised that the end was near, they would do their very best to be reconciled with God and also with their relatives, friends, and enemies alike. Confession of one's sins, contrition, and making amends were part of the penitential process. Because of this, it was generally presupposed, also in law, that a

¹ The editors of the volume would like to cordially thank the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies and the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, which enabled the organizing of the conference "Preparing for Death in Medieval and Early Modern Europe" that formed the general basis for this volume. We would also wish to extend our thanks to Marcella Mulder from Brill and the anonymous reader of the volume.

person facing death would speak the absolute truth, as otherwise, his soul risked eternal damnation. In addition to confession, praying for the dying and extreme unction belonged to the religious deathbed rituals. There were also many mundane affairs to be considered, such as questions of inheritance and the well-being of those left behind. The last will of a person, oral or written, the *ultima voluntas*, was given much emphasis.²

While the Christian values and teachings were adopted and came to be shared by most of the people living in medieval and early modern Europe, local traditions, living conditions, and individual circumstances had an effect on the implementation of the common teachings. The conversion of Europe was a slow process. Scandinavia in the north and the Finno-Ugric and Slavonic peoples of Eastern and North-Eastern Europe were the last regions to be Christianized in the High Middle Ages, while the Grand Duchy of Lithuania officially adopted the Catholic faith only in 1387. Certainly, Christian influences related to Northern cultures of death and dying can be observed even earlier, for example in burial practices. However, because of the tardive Christianisation, older belief systems, such as importance given to the veneration of ancestral spirits, had their impact on local practices long after nominal conversion had taken place.³ As for preparations for death, these could be inspired by seeing a small light that resembled a will o' the wisp could that was believed to forebode death in Nordic folklore until the modern times. Seeing a white or pale horse, connected to the Norse death goddess Hel, could also indicate impending pestilence and death.⁴ The Christian doctrine and customs mixing with local beliefs resulted in local variations.

² In general, see, e.g., Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York, 1981); Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (London, 1996).

³ Marika Mägi, *At the Crossroads of Space and Time: Graves, Changing Society and Ideology on Saaremaa (Õsel), 9th-13th centuries AD*, (Culture Clash or Compromise Papers) 6 (Tallinn, 2002), pp. 150-57; Nancy Caciola, "Spirits Seeking Bodies: Death, Possession and Communal Memory in the Middle Ages," in *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (Cambridge, New York, and Melbourne, 2000), pp. 66-86, here pp. 67-68; Lauri Harvilahti, "Ethnocultural Knowledge and Mythical Models: The Making of St Olaf, The God of Thunder, and St Elijah During the First Centuries of the Christian Era in the Scandinavian and Baltic Regions," in *The Performance of Christian and Pagan Storyworlds: Non-Canonical Chapters of the History of Nordic Medieval Literature*, eds. Lars Boje Mortensen, Tuomas M.S. Lehtonen, and Alexandra Bergholm, (Medieval Identities: Socio-Cultural Spaces) 3 (Turnhout, 2013), pp. 199-219; Beata Wojciechowska, "The Remembrance of the Deceased in the Traditional Polish Culture of the Middle Ages," in *Cultures of Death and Dying in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Mia Korpiola and Anu Lahtinen, *COLLeGIUM: Studies Across Disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences* 18 (2015), pp. 32-48.

⁴ Louise Hagberg, *När döden gästar: Svenska folkseder och svensk folktro i samband med död och begravning* (Stockholm, [1937] repr. 2015), pp. 32-34 and 38-39.

Regardless of the exact doctrine that people were supposed to follow they were anxious about the moment they would have to go to meet their Maker. Sudden or violent death, not to talk about suicide, was perceived as a threat because the soul could not be prepared for the afterlife, nor could the dying person properly bid farewell from relatives and friends. The fear of dying unprepared could haunt people like it did the protagonists of Hamlet. Consequently, during the Middle Ages, various strategies for coping with the death and its unpredictable nature were developed over time. There were guidelines and handbooks advising the priests how to approach a person on his sickbed and how to console her or him according to the situation at hand. A whole genre of *ars moriendi* literature developed, teaching people about the way of dying piously and properly. Guidelines were famously formulated in 1408 in *De arte moriendi* by Jean Gerson (1363-1429), and the service books and devotional literature offered even lay people guidelines about how to make proper preparations for the afterlife.⁵

According to the Catholic doctrine, pious works and intercessions were an important way to salvation, and purgatory would cleanse people from minor faults after they had died. By contrast, in the Reformation period, the Protestants focused on faith and Divine Grace in accordance with the “*sola fide, sola gratia, solus Christus*” principle.⁶ Consequently, the Reformation literature erased intercessions and purgatory and put emphasis on preparations made during one’s lifetime. Lutheran obituaries or funeral biographies put emphasis on individual examples of pious death. The theology of Reformation transferred the late medieval *ars moriendi* to the sixteenth century and enhanced this heritage with new cultural phenomena, especially funeral sermons, which became an important place to exemplify and

⁵ About *ars moriendi* and its devolution over time see, for example, Austra Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying: The ars moriendi in the German Reformation (1519–1528)* (Aldershot, 2007); Tarald Rasmussen and Jon Øygarden Flaeten, eds., *Preparing for Death, Remembering the Dead*, (Refo500 Academic Studies) 22 (Göttingen, 2015). About *ars moriendi* and *mors beata* in a Swedish context, for example, Urbanus Rhegius, *Sielennes tröst och läkedom*, trans. N.N. (Stockholm, 1548); Matti Parvio, ed., *Manuale seu exequiale Aboense 1522*, (Suomen kirkkohistoriallisen seuran toimituksia) 115 (Helsinki, 1980), pp. 22-50 and 146-52; Göran Stenberg, *Döden dikterar: En studie av likpredikningar och gravtal från 1600- och 1700-talen* (Stockholm, 1998); Stina Fallberg Sundmark, *Sjukbesök och dödsberedelse: Sockenbudet i svensk medeltida och reformatorisk tradition*, (Bibliotheca Theologiae Practicae) 84 (Uppsala 2008), pp. 131-65; Markus Hagberg, ed., *Jean Gersons Ars moriendi: Om konsten att dö*, (Skara stiftshistoriska sällskaps skriftserie) 45 (Skara, 2009); Kaisa Häkkinen, ed., *Codex Westh: Westthin koodeksin teksti*, (Wanhon suomen arkisto) 5, (Turku, 2012), pp. 110-18; Eivor Andersen Oftestad, “Transforming the Investment in the Afterlife: Readings of the Poem De Vita Hominis in Pre-Reformation and Post-Reformation Denmark,” in *Cultures of Death and Dying in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Mia Korpiola and Anu Lahtinen, *COLLeGIUM: Studies Across Disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences* 18 (2015), pp. 106-28; Otfried Czaika’s chapter in this volume.

⁶ E.g., Oftestad, “Transforming the Investment in the Afterlife” pp. 120-26.

communicate the doctrine. With the reception of the *ars moriendi* followed a special notion of the prepared death, in particular the idea of a calm and “good” death that reflected that the deceased was able to partake in God’s grace and salvation. Still, much of the *mors beata* ideal remained the same over time.⁷

Although moralists lamented the frivolousness of people who immersed in worldly matters postponed the necessary preparations for death and neglected the salvation of their souls,⁸ most people had some forewarning of their demise. Few people actually died quite without any warning, abruptly mowed down in their prime by the Grim Reaper, as a completely sudden and unexpected death was an exceptional occurrence. Yet, death literally by a thunderbolt from heaven could take place.⁹ Therefore, most people had at least some possibilities to attempt to stage their preparations for death in accordance to the dominant cultural expectations and perceptions of a Good Death. Also the afterworld was ready to construe and interpret the last stages or moments of the lives of their beloved or respected departed ones in the light of the pious *ars moriendi* script.

So much for the ideal death, the aims of which are shared in many other times and places, too. However, despite the general ideal of a peaceful death, people of the past were well aware of the fact that in many cases the experienced reality was much messier and more violent. Priests had to be prepared to comfort people who were about to die in circumstances that were far from ideal. In search for solace, many dogmas were evaded or re-interpreted for consolation; either the explanations and arrangements were suggested by the learned clergy or by ordinary people themselves. How, then, did they cope with their preparations for death, given the doctrines from above and the unpredictable moment they had to deal with?

This book focuses on the very core of the situation pictured above. The chapters of the volume discuss how people in the North prepared for death, applying common teachings in

⁷ Oftestad, “Transforming the Investment in the Afterlife,” pp. 119-26; Volker Leppin, “Preparing for Death: From the Late Medieval *ars moriendi* to the Lutheran Funeral Sermon,” in *Preparing for Death, Remembering the Dead*, eds. Tarald Rasmussen and Jon Øygarden Flaeten (Refo500 Academic Studies) 22 (Göttingen, 2015), pp. 9-23.

⁸ Jeffrey Campbell, *The Ars Moriendi: An examination, translation and collation of the manuscripts of the shorter Latin version*. Unpublished thesis, School of Graduate Studies, University of Ottawa, 1995, pp. 18 and 21, available online, <https://www.ruor.uottawa.ca/bitstream/10393/10313/1/MM07840.PDF>, accessed on 25 Nov. 2016.

⁹ E.g. Janet Shirley, trans. and ed., *A Parisian Journal 1405–1449: Translated from the anonymous Journal d’un Bourgeois de Paris* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 50-51.

local circumstances. The articles cover a time span reaching from the Middle Ages to the early modern period, which allows an analysis over centuries of religious change that are too often artificially separated in historical studies and publications. The focus is on the time period when the Northern societies had already been Christianised. However, in many cases, one can also observe pre-Christian influence or local practices that were alien to actual Christian doctrine and dictated by local circumstances. The volume brings new light on how medieval and early modern people in Northern Europe coped with their own mortality and the mortality of people close to them. From medieval Icelanders, still connected to many pre-Christian ideas concerning death and dying, to early modern Swedes listening to Protestant sermons, these people were searching for guidance on how to best prepare for their departure or to cope with the fact that they were going to lose someone near and dear.

The volume proceeds chronologically, starting with the early tardive transition from pagan beliefs to Christianity, presented in Kirsi Kanerva's analysis of dying well in medieval Iceland. Kanerva investigates how Icelanders in the sagas discussed ways of preparing for a death that would not result in posthumous restlessness of the corpse. Cindy Wood focuses on one person, William Wykeham, bishop of Winchester (ep. 1366-1404), and his long-lasting preparations, including a variety of intercessory options for the benefit of his soul. Mia Korpiola, in turn, analyses deathbed confessions in the context of the Northern medieval and early modern legal system. Dominika Burdzy discusses the concern for salvation in Lesser Poland scrutinising particularly the Catholic traditions of the early modern period. The next three chapters focus on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Protestant culture as Anu Lahtinen discusses deathbed accounts and Otfried Czaika analyses the problem of dying unprepared in the light of early modern funeral sermons. Finally, Riikka Miettinen brings forward the problem of suicide, and the chances of suicidal persons to somehow prepare and atone for a death that was considered a horrid act, a serious sin, and a punishable felony.

The chapters of the volume discuss and comment on the Northern cultural adaptations of the Christian teachings on death, informed as they are of the general process of cultural interaction, which Robert Bartlett famously called "the Europeanization of Europe".¹⁰ In the medieval period, the Northern societies adopted new ways of organizing their culture. Along

¹⁰ Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change* (London, 1993).

with the Christian faith arrived, little by little, Church organisations, canon law, new ways of using arts and crafts to serve the Church, a new kind of alphabet, literacy, and the use of Latin as the European *lingua franca*. Preparations for death must be analysed in the context of the aforementioned lengthy, partly incomplete process of Europeanisation that had a different pace and forms in, say, Iceland, Poland or Sweden (the Swedish Realm included the area of the present-day Finland, thus, when Sweden is mentioned in general in this volume, it refers to the area of both Finland and Sweden). Then again, as far as the Reformation period is concerned, it must be born in mind how the competing teachings of the Catholic and Protestant Churches created new meanings and boundaries.

This book will deal with the consequences that Christianisation and, later, the Reformation had in regard to how people understood death and how they wanted to prepare for their departure. Thanks to the common ecclesiastic organization and its emphasis on certain documentation, there are sources such as last wills and funeral sermons that can be used for comparison over time and space. Then again, some sources and phenomena, such as the saga descriptions or court documents focusing on deathbed confessions, reflected local characteristics special for one society.

While some previous monographs have discussed related topics, their geographic range is narrower and their attention has often been on the theory of *ars moriendi* or the time after a person's death (for example, burials or funeral sermons). Moreover, the studies have often had a more limited scope, as for example on medieval and post-medieval burials, and many of them have been directed to local audiences and written in Scandinavian languages or in Finnish.¹¹ This volume, however, focuses on preparations and how practical problems and economic issues got intertwined and sometimes overshadowed the ideals of *ars moriendi*. Its chapters analyse the complicated everyday level, using a variety of written sources, and give new insights on the everyday solutions people had to adopt.

¹¹ Bertil Nilsson, *Kvinnor, män och barn på medeltida begravningsplatser*, (Projektet Sveriges kristnande) 3 (Uppsala 1994); Tuija Tuhkanen, "*In memoriam sui et suorum posuit:*" *Lahjoittajien muistokuvat Suomen kirkoissa 1400-luvulta 1700-luvun lopulle* (Turku, 2005); Fallberg Sundmark, *Sjukbesök och dödsförberedelse*; Stenberg, *Döden diktarar*; Kristina Jonsson, *Practices for the living and the dead: Medieval and post-Reformation burials in Scandinavia* (Stockholm, 2009); Maria Kallio, "Lupaus lahjasta, toivo täyttymyksestä" - keskiaikaiset testamentit Turun hiippakunnassa, Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Turku, 2011. Some Nordic cases are also discussed in *Cultures of Death and Dying in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Mia Korpiola and Anu Lahtinen, a special issue of *COLLeGIUM: Studies Across Disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences* 18 (2015); Rasmussen and Flaeten, eds., *Preparing for Death, Remembering the Dead*.

Changing Relations between the Living and the Dead

One important change brought over time was the change in the relations between the living and the dead--or the loosening of the relation between them. For medieval Icelanders, the consequences of death were not quite the same as what was taught by the Catholic Church. The dead were mainly just deceased members of the society resting peacefully in their graves awaiting the Day of Judgement. However, sometimes the dead could become either a threat or an asset to the living--especially if the corpses became posthumously restless after their burial. Not only spirits, but also the bodies could thus return to interact with the living. Kanerva examines saga texts that were written in the thirteenth and in the early fourteenth century. She reads the sagas intertextually in order to discover how medieval Icelanders thought it was best to prepare for death, both from the perspective of the dying and from the perspective of the living, in order to prevent the appearance of the malevolent restless dead.

As Kanerva points out, preparations do not necessarily always refer to certain rituals but also include the attitudes, actions, and behaviour of both the dying person and of those she would be leaving behind. Because of differences in the concepts of the mind and the soul, of which the latter was adopted by Christianity whereas the former was a more indigenous one, the preparations for death without posthumous activity--a "Good Death" especially from the perspective of the living--sometimes necessitated proper actions and behaviour after the death, as well. Both "normal" dying people, who were not expected to and did not express any posthumous activity, and those who became restless after their deaths are discussed in order to compare the differences in what kind of preparations were successful and what could go wrong.

The medieval Catholic doctrine did not see the dead quite as active members of the society as the Icelanders and many other traditional societies had done. Nevertheless, death did not cut all interaction between the living and the dead. The religious doctrine of individual responsibility of sin and the preparations of the soul for afterlife influenced many areas of medieval life and death in a profound way. The ideal religious preparations for death were thus very much focused on whether the dying had atoned her or his sins. Thus, a Good Death

required proper valedictory rituals, confession, absolution, and extreme unction, in the presence of family and friends.

Because salvation was partly based on deeds and donations, a person could prepare for afterlife making donations and bequeathing property to the Church. Even after the death, the living could help their dead relatives with prayers and donations, lessening their torments in purgatory. As Cindy Wood observes in this volume, “purgatory was widely understood and expected, thus there was an imperative during life to respect the wishes of the dead and to plan for their own demise as far as financial resources allowed”.¹² In the words of Georges Duby, whose comment describes the French medieval society but is applicable also elsewhere, “everything possible was done to see that their souls did not suffer, so that they would not trouble the living”.¹³

The chapters written by Cindy Wood and Dominika Burdzy revolve around the concern for salvation. Cindy Wood analyses these preparations and how they reflected the belief in the power of prayers--especially the mass--in relieving the trials of the cleansing fire in purgatory, the space between death and the day of Final Judgement. This case study concentrates on William Wykeham, one of the richest late medieval bishops in northern Europe, and Wood depicts how he made the most of it--for the benefit of the community as well as for his own salvation.

As Wood shows, Wykeham prepared for his death and the necessary intercession to relieve some of his suffering in purgatory during his lifetime as a long-term project, not as a deathbed imperative. Prayers for the dead were an important feature of late medieval life and were available to the population in a variety of ways. Chantries were the most common religious foundation at the time of Wykeham. These endowed masses benefited the souls of the founders after death. While asking friends and religious institutions for prayers in return for gifts of money, he was not reliant on these only, as his career as bishop involved a program of intercessory foundations with a focus on education--especially for paupers. What was special here was the scale, enabled by his large income from his role as bishop of Winchester. The

¹² Cindy Wood in this volume.

¹³ Georges Duby, “Communal Living,” in *A History of Private Life 2: Revelations of the Medieval World*, ed. Georges Duby, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1988) [orig. *Histoire de la vie privée, 2: De l'Europe féodale à la Renaissance*, 1985], pp. 35-85, here p. 83.

case of Wykeham illustrates the powerful and, at least for some, also problematic relation between wealth, donations, and salvation.

In “The Concern for the Salvation in the Cities of Lesser Poland in the Sixteenth Century”, Dominika Burdzy uses wills as her main source. Burdzy discusses how the fear of death, expected or sudden, influenced people’s attitudes and behaviour as they wanted to secure peace and salvation for the soul as well as remembrance after death. Writing one’s last will was very often part of preparing for a good death and securing the afterlife. Wills were instruments for “settling the soul” as well as instruments for “settling the estate”. Before death, people wanted to make sure they had done everything for the salvation of their souls. Through their last will, people were able to demonstrate their faith before their death and pave their way to an eternal life.¹⁴

Burdzy focuses on wills in which testators left records *ad pia opera* and instructions for the executors of the will on how to fulfil their last wishes. If the obligations were not fulfilled, the executors were subject to legal responsibility. According to their financial capability, the townspeople, as well as the urban clergy and nobility, tried to ensure commemoration and prayers after death by bequeathing money for anniversary masses and foundations of Church institutions which were obliged to celebrate masses in the name of the founder.

Chapels, altars, tombs and graves, epitaphs, various liturgical vestments, and paraments donated to temples in exchange for prayers are the visible traces of the care for remembrance. The foundations of various institutions, such as altars in churches, were equally important, as the beneficiaries were obliged to celebrate a certain number of Masses for the benefactors and their heirs. Some of the altars were linked to so-called “predicatories” (*predykatury*), i.e. benefices that obliged the priest to preach on specific dates. This way, the testators also assured regular preaching and teaching of the catechism for urban communities. Interestingly, Burdzy points out a local custom that while altars and chapels had patron saints, they were commonly named after their founders.

¹⁴ Jacques Chiffolleau, *La comptabilité de l’au-delà: Les hommes, la mort et la religion dans la région d’Avignon à la fin du Moyen Age (vers 1320 – vers 1480)*, (Collection de l’École Française de Rome) 47 (Rome, 1980), esp. pp. 212-29, 389-425, and 434-35; Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (London, 1996), p. 33; Samuel K. Cohn, Jr., *Death and Property in Siena, 1205-1800: Strategies for the Afterlife* (The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Sciences) 106:2 (Baltimore and London, 1988), p. 247.

As is shown in the cases studied by Burdzy, preparing for death also meant preparations for an afterlife in the memories of the community. These kinds of multiple purposes can be considered representative for the afterlife strategies in the medieval and early modern period, both in the Catholic and Reformation context. Already before the Reformation, the importance of having one's figure and name immortalized or at least perpetuated could be seen in the masses and in the portraits of the donors, as Tuija Tuhkanen has previously shown in the context of the Swedish realm.¹⁵ Many needs and projects could also be intertwined. When the noble couple Lucia Olofsdotter Skälge and her husband Henrik Klasson Djäkn donated and bequeathed their property to the new Brigittine convent of Naantali (Swe. Nådendal, Lat. *Vallis gratiae*) in the mid-fifteenth-century, they were possibly trying to find help for their childlessness as well as help their own souls and that of the deceased parents of Henrik whose father had allegedly been guilty of murdering his wife. In addition, the donations and bought masses worked as a public demonstration of the pious aims of the couple.¹⁶

Preparing for death was not only a matter regulated by the Church but could also involve the law. This aspect is analysed by Mia Korpiola in her article "'At Death's Door': Deathbed Confessions and the Law in Medieval and Early Modern Sweden". Deathbed confessions were considered to have special credibility and weight in legal practice despite some criticism levelled at the practice. When a person was at death's door and confessed to claims and debts in the presence of witnesses, this had special weight, and the witnesses later appeared in court to testify of the words of the dying. Similarly, deathbed confessions were used for establishing the cause of death and guilt for homicide. The confessions of criminals who were to be executed were also used as evidence of acquitting possible accomplices of suspicion.

Mia Korpiola points out that, legally, the deathbed confessions became especially important in Swedish legislation because of the backwardness of the country. In the north, there was only partial reception of the learned doctrine of evidence, and using a deathbed confession

¹⁵ Tuhkanen, *"In memoriam sui et suorum posuit"*.

¹⁶ On Lucia and her donations, see Elina Räsänen, "Agency of two Ladies: Wellborne qvinna Lucia Olofsdotter and Veneration of Saint Anne in the Turku Diocese," in *Les élites nordiques et l'Europe occidentale (XIIe-XVe siècle)*, eds. Tuomas M.S. Lehtonen and Élisabeth Mornet (Paris, 2007), pp. 245-61. On the fate of the parents of Henrik Djäkn, see Kustavi Grotenfelt, ed., *Jaakko Teitin valitusluettelo Suomen aatelista vastaan v. 1555-1556* (Helsinki, 1894), p. 24.

was one of the strategies used for resolving difficult court cases in default of any decisive evidence. Even though the witnesses had not been present at the actual event, they could at least witness what the dying person had claimed. The role of deathbed confession in Swedish law and practice also goes to show how important preparations for death were for medieval and early modern people. This applied to debt, ownership, and possession of property at large as well as to guilt for homicide and other crimes. Ecclesiastical doctrine and deathbed practices came to shape the actions of people to the extent that they also became written down and codified in law. At the same time, the deathbed confession also served as a way for the dying person to settle their accounts with the community and God, smoothing the way to salvation. Thus, again we find the material, economic, and the religious aspects of preparations intertwined.

One of the important changes brought by the Reformation was that most of the Northern societies abandoned the idea of intercession. The previous close connection between the dead and the living was cut. Now, the focus was more on showing off one's piety for the afterworld. For some persons, like the Swedish nobleman Henrik Fleming (of the Manor of Lehtis, 1584-1650), the preparations for death evolved into an almost kingdom-wide project of financing church buildings and interiors, from Stockholm, the capital of the kingdom, to less known rural areas. In addition, for Henrik Fleming, the preparations also included an explanation of how his funeral was expected to take place.¹⁷

Theological perceptions related to death had also altered because of the Reformation. The Protestants Reformers not only denounced as unbiblical the doctrine of purgatory, but also the limbo of infants (*limbus infantium*), the place where the souls of small unbaptised children resided. These infants were tainted by the original sin although they were too young and innocent to have committed sins of their own.¹⁸ By doing this, the Protestant Reformers altered "the geography of afterlife" (*géographie de l'au-delà*) in the words of Jacques Le Goff.¹⁹ But even more importantly for our topic, it altered attitudes towards the death and salvation of small children--accordingly also the spiritual preparations for their death. As

¹⁷ Tuija Tuhkanen, *Kirkon kaunistukseksi ja lahjoittajan kunniaksi: Henrik Flemingin lahjoitukset Suomen kirkoissa*, (Historiallisia tutkimuksia) 238 (Helsinki, 2008).

¹⁸ Peter Marshall, "'The Map of God's Word': Geographies of the Afterlife in Tudor and Early Stuart England," in *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 110-30, here pp. 112-16.

¹⁹ Jacques Le Goff, *La naissance du purgatoire* (Paris, 1981), p. 10.

Otfried Czaika concludes in his article in this volume, the turning from man to God, but also from the individual to the collective, as the focal point of justification, changed the perception of dying children. Being part of the community of all believers for the entirety of one's life was more important than any special preparations on the deathbed. Thus, not even small children or unborn infants were considered to have died unprepared. In practice, the original sin was downplayed and small children increasingly seen as innocents. This is also reflected in funeral customs. New archaeological evidence shows that at least in some regions of the Swedish realm, it became customary to bury small infants, regardless of sex, with flower wreaths on their heads to symbolise their purity.²⁰

The same is also reflected by visual evidence. The posthumous portrait of little Hannibal Wrangel (1641-43) lying on his *lit-de-parade*, commissioned by his distraught aristocratic parents, shows the infant, dead at the age of one year and 16 weeks old, in brilliantly white clothes and a wreath on his head. Hannibal Wrangel had been taken to the house of the renowned physician Johann Eler, doctor of philosophy and medicine, probably to receive best possible medical attention. Hannibal's parents struggled to save his life, and whether they undertook any preparations for his potential death is unknown. The demise of the little boy in the physician's house in Lüneburg was described as placid. The certainty of their infant's salvation--as observed by Czaika in his analysis of funeral sermons--must have comforted the bereaved parents regardless of any preparations they may or may not have undertaken. They surely consoled themselves with the thought, expressed also in the painting of their dead son, that at his death he had been transported by angels to heaven.²¹

Achieving a Good Death, Despite Everything?

²⁰ Henripekka Kallio, "Röntgentekniikka paljasti, miten lapset alettiin nähdä Suomessa viattomina 400 vuotta sitten," *Kaleva*, 31 Oct. 2016, online at <http://www.kaleva.fi/uutiset/kotimaa/rontgentekniikka-paljasti-miten-lapset-alettiin-nahda-suomessa-viattomina-400-vuotta-sitten/742045/>, accessed 26 Nov. 2016

²¹ Hannibal Gustav Wrangel af Salmis was the firstborn of the Swedish Count Carl Gustaf Wrangel af Salmis and Anna Margareta von Haugwitz. The posthumous portrait was in all likelihood painted in Germany. The portrait belongs to the collection of Skokloster Castle, and it as well as information related to it can be accessed online through Wikimedia Commons at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Porträtt_av_Hannibal_Wrangel_på_lit_de_parade_-_Skoklosters_slott_-_13736.tif, accessed 26 Nov. 2016. On Johann(es) Eler, see G. Matthiä, "Schluß des Entwurfs einer Geschichte der Arzneykunst in den Braunschweig-Lüneburgischen Landen," *Hannoversches Magazin* 57, 15 July 1768, cols. 897-910, here col. 900.

Several chapters in this volume deal with sudden and violent deaths and the ways people were trying to make the best out of these deaths, whether resulting from an unexpected fit, a cruel homicidal assault, the executioner's blade or even suicide. As can be seen, however, even in many extreme cases, people did not completely give up their hope of salvation; they still strove to follow at least some rules of the Good Death available to them.

It is natural that when thinking of preparations for death, one will naturally first and foremost think of the very moment of death and its imminent presence. However, as was shown by Wood's analysis on Wykeham and as is emphasized by Otfried Czaika in this volume, preparing for death could actually be seen a life-long process. In the early modern period, preparations for death were habitually described in the *personalia* parts of funeral sermons and followed a quite narrow narrative. The *personalia* most often presented the life course of the deceased, putting emphasis on the pious life, family life, good guidance, and the example given by the deceased person, ending with a deathbed scene. For his analysis, Czaika has selected Swedish funeral sermons from the seventeenth century that have been held on the occasion in which someone had died an unprepared death. In his contribution, Czaika takes a fresh look at how the authors of Swedish funeral sermons dealt with these seemingly unexpected deaths and how the argumentation of sermons reflected the *vera doctrina* of Lutheranism.

Studying the topic of dying unprepared in early modern Swedish funeral sermons, Czaika draws some unexpected yet convincing conclusions. While a sudden, unexpected death was, in theory, often considered as a sign of perdition, the preachers discussing an unexpected death did not, after all, see a theological problem in the lack of deathbed preparations. Instead, preparations for death were presented as a sum of the Christian life. As the whole life should have been lived as a preparation for death, this last preparation can be considered as a facultative moment. This reflects the doctrinal aspects of Lutheranism, which does not regard human activity as important for salvation. God's grace was present during the entire life of a person and not only in special moments of life like the deathbed.

Anu Lahtinen draws partly similar conclusions in her analysis on a number of accounts of men and women of high nobility preparing for their deaths in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Sweden. Using deathbed descriptions and similar reports, Lahtinen's chapter sheds light on both peaceful and violent departures. Lahtinen shows how the dying

person was often presented as excelling in *ars moriendi* by accepting her or his death, turning to the afterlife supported by pious prayers, bidding her or his fellow Christians farewell, and finally departing in God's grace. This was in accordance with the traditional ideal. Attention was also paid to the preparations of an honourable burial, an essential part of a good death.²²

In her contribution, Lahtinen presents many cases in which the death was not, after all, a successful process but a sudden, violent event. However, even these descriptions depict the dying person aspiring for as good a death as was possible in the circumstances. People could, for instance, be presented as following the lines analysed by Otfried Czaika. They did not die unprepared as such, as they had been living their lives in a pious way, which was itself a preparation, having for example led a good life and having listened to a pastor's sermon before their sudden death. Even people facing a politically motivated execution were doing their best to prepare themselves--both spiritually and socially--by meeting the priest, trying to make sure that they would get an honourable funeral, and taking final leave of their families.

Anu Lahtinen also pays special attention to the social aspects of preparing for one's death. Dying was not simply a personal matter between a noble person, God, and the closest family members. A noble death and the accounts of it had political, economic, and social consequences, most strikingly during the times of political turmoil that hit Sweden in the turn of the seventeenth century. Even in more peaceful times, economic or tactical issues were at stake, and they could also be referred to in deathbed accounts. Lahtinen also discusses the afterlife of the descriptions of these preparations, pointing out how the family members were active in constructing, maintaining, and distributing the descriptions.

Riikka Miettinen, again, takes the analysis of a violent death one more step further in her analysis "'Lord, have mercy on me': Spiritual Preparations for Suicide in Early Modern Sweden". As elsewhere in Europe of the time, suicide was considered a horrid act that was both a serious sin and a punishable felony in the early modern Swedish Realm. This was especially so in seventeenth-century Sweden, an era characterized by Lutheran Orthodoxy, confessionalisation, and severe official and popular attitudes towards moral and religious violations. The authorities taught that killing oneself inevitably destined one's soul to hell

²² See also Anu Lahtinen, "A Nobleman's Death. Power Struggle and Resistance in Accounts of a Political Execution in Early Modern Sweden," in *Rebellion and Resistance*, ed. Henrik Jensen (Pisa, 2009), pp. 33-49.

without the possibility of salvation. Furthermore, suspicious deaths were investigated in public trials and the corpses of classified suicides could be punished and even desecrated with deviant burials.²³ On the other hand, people committing suicide were very concretely preparing for their deaths, too--and as Miettinen's analysis shows, they were not totally devoid of the hope of receiving some divine mercy.

The chapter discusses the ways early modern Swedish and Finnish people had for preparing themselves and others for suicide, with a particular focus on religious crises and spiritual preparations related to the suicides. Did the people contemplating suicide prepare for death and the afterlife in the Christian manners, despite the fact that they had been taught that by ending their lives through sin they would be excluded from the Church and heaven? In what religious ways did these people, typically in unbearable situations and life conditions, prepare themselves for their self-inflicted deaths? In general, the sample collected mainly from the rural regions of the Swedish Realm represents the wide range of arrangements that would-be suicides made in preparing for death.

Riikka Miettinen points out that at least some of the would-be suicides did showed considerable concern about spiritual matters. Several had already suffered from feelings of despair, doubts over their personal salvation, and religious melancholy that had led them to either call upon priests and piety or to turn their backs on God. Based on their expressed worries over salvation and feelings of the unbearable weight of a guilty conscience as well as frequent church attendance and personal prayer, many were clearly troubled in the face of their desire to end their earthly existence. Devout individuals encountered a serious religious and moral dilemma which some of them attempted to solve by unorthodox interpretations of God's word and mercy.

Interestingly, a large number of the suicides were described as having been to Church or to a priest, confessed their sins, and received Communion very recently or on the day of their death. Some also clearly made private spiritual preparations. Thus, Miettinen shows that regardless of the mainstream Lutheran theological views on the destiny of a suicide's soul, some of the would-be suicides attempted to follow the Christian tradition and at least some of

²³ On suicide as a cultural phenomenon and as a crime, see Riikka Miettinen, *Suicide in Seventeenth-Century Sweden: The Crime and Legal Praxis in the Lower Courts* (Tampere, 2015).

the precepts of the ideal *ars moriendi*. Furthermore, research on indirect forms of suicide, namely suicidal murders and crimes of bestiality that were either committed or falsely confessed solely in order to receive a death sentence, shows that fretting over salvation was prevalent among suicidal but devout Christians. As convicted criminals, they could die as penitents and receive most of the rituals before their execution--unlike suicides, which was clearly a crucial issue for them.²⁴

The spiritual preparations among would-be suicides indicate a continuity of the great significance of Christian practices and procedures related to a Good Death and “dying well” in early modern Sweden. Moreover, the spiritual crises and preparations manifest the diverse religious views and early Pietistic influences in an era characterized by official religious uniformity. Alongside the would-be suicides’ religious crises, the occurrence of the peculiar and indirect forms of suicide suggest not only that religious understandings were heterogeneous but also that spiritual anxieties and guilt characterized the lives of many seventeenth-century Swedes. Even the suicides did not die spiritually unprepared; though some possibly ignored the issue, most probably pondered their fate in the afterlife and either made their peace with God or accepted the official views on their act and destiny.

Studying different aspects of preparations for death, the authors of this volume can be seen to question any too simplistic interpretations of the cultures in the past. When the focus is not on major literary or theological authorities, more nuances and variations can be seen in the individual and local responses to the inevitability of death and the uncertainty of the time of death. Among the most important observations, then, are how unexpected situations were, all in all, placed under the umbrella of aspiring for a good death. Another important observation is the social dimension of the preparations for death as reported by eyewitnesses, the family, and the local community. As Mia Korpiola points out in her analysis, while the individual acts were left to the dying person to do her- or himself, the priest and the community acted as prompters and witnesses on the way to heaven

²⁴ E.g., Tyge Krogh, *A Lutheran Plague: Murdering to Die in the Eighteenth Century*, (Studies in Central European Histories) 55 (Leiden, 2012).