Transforming the Investment in the Afterlife: Readings of the Poem *De Vita Hominis* in Pre-Reformation and Post-Reformation Denmark

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This article investigates continuity and change in the economic and spiritual investment in the afterlife in the religious contexts of Denmark before and after the Reformation. The transmission of the late medieval poem *De Vita Hominis*, first printed in 1514, and then re-edited by Anders Sørensen Vedel in 1571, provides the main material of the investigation.

In the text, the main character had to die a lonely death as a consequence of his wicked life. The intensity in the pre-Reformatory version was due to the experience of lack of intercession in the transgression to afterlife. Changed theological premises meant that the Protestant principle of security of salvation undercut the very heart of the late medieval *De Vita Hominis*. Intercession was no longer necessary as faith was what saved. This article investigates how the message of the poem was transformed according to the theological rearrangement that followed the new certainty of salvation. One important consequence was a changed notion of memory, and a new function for memorial genres, which Vedel’s 1571 edition testifies to.

Introduction

Throughout history, attitudes towards death and the dead change slowly in our western Christian culture. The Reformation in the sixteenth century was however one of those periods when the premises of both theological teachings and religious practice were not necessarily abandoned but transformed, and in which both continuity and change may be traced in attitudes towards death and the dead. The reformer Martin Luther (1483–1546) had redefined salvation as by justification by faith, and a new certainty of salvation was preached together with the denial of
purgatory. Scholars have analysed how the new arrangements for salvation led to new attitudes and practices concerning death and the dead.1

In the Reformed areas, the doctrine of predestination, in addition to the rejection of purgatory and the efficacy of good works, served to dramatically change funeral practices. To contrast the Catholic practice based on intercession for the dead, the dead in Reformed areas could now be buried in silence without signs of sorrow by their friends and relatives. It was considered improper to grieve over those who were saved.2 In Lutheran areas, a moderate show of sorrow was recommended because of the value of natural friendship. Despite redefinitions of the doctrine of salvation, scholars have however argued that the concern and care for one’s dead was not removed, but rather transformed.3

This article provides a glimpse of the culture of death in Lutheran Denmark. It compares a pre-Reformation and a post-Reformation Danish version of the poem *De Vita Hominis*, showing how the text testifies not only to new theology but also to transformations of the culture of death. The transmission of the poem offers a perspective on care for one’s dead, namely, the religious notion and practice of what can be called investment in the afterlife. What was it to invest in the afterlife according to the late medieval death preparations? And what happened to the idea and practice of investment when the premises changed in accordance with the notion of secure salvation in Protestant theology?

*De Vita Hominis* can be classified according to the *memento mori* motive that reminded man of inescapable death, and which was expressed through a variety of literal and visual genres.4 The poem existed in a late medieval version, but was re-worked by the Danish humanist Anders Sørensen Vedel (1542–1616) in 1571.5 Thus, it is a particular and concise example of how a pre-Reformation text on man and death was interpreted and transformed within the religious literature of post-Reformation Denmark. In the preface, Vedel briefly describes the history of the book he had discovered:

"I have found this booklet among some old papist books that were written by Sir Michael [Her Mickel], previous pastor of the Church of St Alban’s in Odense, at the request of the blessed Queen Christina, and printed here in Copenhagen, fifty-seven years ago. Anyone who compares the old exemplar with this one can see in this what I have improved in the rhymes and meanings".6

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2 Karant-Nunn 2010.
Vedel transmits a late medieval text printed by Pouel Ræff in 1514. Ræff, in his turn, described it as one of three texts in a manuscript composed in Danish by an old man called Sir Michael, pastor in Odense, in 1496. And, as Ræff mentions, according to Sir Michael’s autograph comment in this manuscript, this was done at the request of Queen Christina of Saxony (1461–1521). We do not know if the text had a Latin model or not.

Vedel’s contribution to the Danish language has been widely acknowledged and analysed. As one of the most influential Danish humanists and historians, Vedel is perhaps most renowned for his translation of Gesta Danorum (Den Danske Krønicke, 1575) by Saxo Grammaticus (ca. 1150–1220) and his edition of a hundred folksongs (It Hundrede vduvaalde Danske Viser, 1591). His transformation of this old text, De Vita Hominis, fits into his efforts to refine and renew the Danish language which he carried out in translations and in “improvements” of older texts. However, his edition of De Vita Hominis not only testifies to his role as transformer of language but also of religion. Moreover, his theological efforts have been less commented on than his philological contributions.

When we compare his version of De Vita Hominis from 1571 with the version from 1514, as he himself recommends us to do, it is noticeable that the changes are significant and can be analysed in terms of the theological project in his own period. As I will show, the ideas about death and the way they were presented, both in matter and form, confirmed each other.

The Pre-Reformatory De Vita Hominis

The late medieval text that was printed in 1514 originated from a milieu characterized by the religious awakening and devotion associated with the Dominican order. Sir Michael composed or translated the text of De Vita Hominis along with De Creatione Rerum, and had edited it together with his translated compilation of a text on the Rosary composed by the Dominican preacher and visionary Alanus de Rupe (1428–1475). De Rupe had worked not only in Paris, Lille and Ghent, but also in Rostock, a place that influenced the religious culture around the Baltic Sea, not least Denmark. When Vedel edited De Vita Hominis in 1571, other fragments

7 Cf. a postscriptum after Expositio pulcherrima super rosario beate Marie virginis, which was edited together with De Creatione Rerum and De Vita Hominis in 1514 (LN 175). Ræff prints these texts at the request of the Dominican Hans Bartolomeus of Copenhagen. On Sir Michael, see Paludan (1897); Dahlerup 1998, I, 526–531, Dahlerup, 2010.
9 Saxo Grammaticus was a Danish historiographer. His Gesta Danorum, in 16 volumes, was the first important work on the history of Denmark.
10 On the Rosary in late medieval Danish tradition, Alanus de Rupe and Sir Michael, see Dahlerup 2010, 347–403. The small text collection presented by Sir Michel was described by Paludan (1897) in the nineteenth century as the “swansong” of Nordic Catholicism.
of Sir Michael's texts had also been reused in Danish psalms, as in the psalm on the passion of Christ, "Nu lader oss tackle Gud" in the Psalmbook by Hans Thomissøn (1532–1573) from 1569. Vedel's transformation and reintroduction of De Vita Hominis thus builds on a specific thread of religious devotion in the Danish literary culture.

The text printed in 1514 is presented as a booklet designed to be useful for man and for the salvation of the soul, and treats all stages of human life from birth to death and the Day of Judgement. Each paragraph is introduced by a Danish heading, a Latin strophe and a Latin heading taken from the late medieval poem of De Aetatis Hominis, and the text appears as an explanation of this poem. Various actors, not simply the man himself, but also death, the body, the corpse, and Christ, are given voices at different stages. This literary device resembles other late medieval poems, not least in its disputation between the body and the soul. This had also been edited in Danish in a little booklet printed in Copenhagen in 1510, as a frightening example of "a miserable history of a lost soul that accused the body because she was damned to the pains of hell".

De Vita Hominis describes and comments on the stages of human life. In short, this appears as a story of how a prosperous man neglects to think of God and to do good during his lifetime. He is busy with love affairs, with feasts and business, and is concerned for his body instead of his soul. Finally he arrived at old age, and is confronted with illness and death. His money cannot help him any longer, and as he has neither been honest to his friends, nor supported the poor who needed him. He had no one to take care of his soul. He is left alone in the face of death. He realizes how he has been seduced by the world and uselessly squandered his time instead of doing his Christian duties. This has consequences both at the deathbed,
“No one wants to look after me”, and also for the afterlife: “Who is going to help me when I am dead/ to give a piece of bread for my soul?” He has, in other words, invested in earthly instead of heavenly happiness. The moral is explicitly stated as an urgent request to the reader to do good while there is time. If not, one will be deceived both here and in the afterlife (cf. “Pugna Vitae et Mortis”).

The tragedy of the wealthy man is that his wealth could have ensured his eternal destiny by means of donations and alms, but he has wasted it on earthly pleasure. The horror of the consequences can be understood against the background of the late medieval practice of the “communion of saints”; “late medieval Catholicism was in large measure ‘a cult of the living in the service of the dead’.” The heavenly happiness of the dying man seems to depend on someone who intercedes for his soul, but here he is left alone without friends and intercessors. On his way through death and to the Day of Judgement, he pleads with Christ to save his soul (cf “Fractio Cordis”) and takes refuge in the Virgin Mary (cf. “Pergens ad Iudicium”). While Christ’s sentence and division between good and evil is referred to at the stage of the Day of Judgement, it is not stated in the text whether the prayers of the dying man succeeded or not. The outcome is uncertain and seems difficult to predict. This is in accord with one of the important theological premises of the late medieval death culture; the uncertainty of salvation. This uncertainty is turned into an admonition in the concluding verses in which the readers are encouraged to behave righteously during life, and to repay what they have obtained by fraud, “then you will be safe when you are dying/ and will enjoy with the angels and the Virgin Mary/ when God calls you there over”.

The function of the text is to remind the reader of his own death. This function is described as a mirror: “If you want happiness and salvation of the soul/ then often look into this mirror/ which I will now present you”. The same metaphor recurs when the burial is described in the text. The readers are invited to look at themselves in the mirror when they gaze down at the corpse, wrapped up in a shroud beneath their feet. The aim of looking into this mirror is to learn what

15 “Hwo schal mig hielpæ nar ieg er død/ giffvæ for myn sjæl eth styckæ brød”, De Vita Hominis 1514, f. Bi (Mutatio Coloris).
18 Reinis 2006; Hamm 2010.
19 “Tha bliffva i tryggha nar i schulla døø / och glades met angla och maria møø / nar gwd ether hadhen wil kalla”, De Vita Hominis 1514, Bvii.
20 “Wilt thu haffua læcka och sjælens heyl/ tha see tig offthæ i tetthæ speył/ som ieg wil tig nw sændhæ”, ibid, the introductory verse, Aii.
attitudes and deeds benefit the soul; “Then you let everyman be your equal/ Do not believe in the world, she will deceive you/ To God you should turn”. 22

The fundamental condition of the text is that death comes when one least expects it, when one is in the prime of life. It is not possible to avoid it either with silver or gold. This is also a common feature of the memento mori genres, visualized by the dance macabre where no one escapes the grip of death. 23 This is also explained in more detail by the personified death himself later in the text (“Verba Mortis”). Death proclaims how every man and woman of every estate is going to be his victim necessarily and without warning. 24 Confronted with the inevitable death of one’s own life, the moral appears to be to invest in the afterlife during one’s lifetime. The text also indicates how to do this; good deeds towards equals as well as the needy are emphasized as investment. A penitential practice or any inner disposition is not mentioned. It is reasonable to ask how this arrangement is to be explained according to a late medieval preparation for death.

The arrangement in the text becomes easier to grasp if we compare it to Berndt Hamm’s description of the late medieval art of dying. 25 Hamm defines the three uncertainties of death: first, moment of death and way of dying, second, one’s own condition of grace and third, the outcome of the Day of Judgement. 26 He also describes how one prepares for death according to a co-operatio model. While the preparation for the moment of death consisted in a perfection of the Christian virtues that achieved maximum merit in the hour of death, 27 Hamm refers to what he explains as “the protective Extra-nos-sanctity” along with this inner formation. 28 The centrality of the dying man’s imploring prayers for help, protection and compassion in the ars moriendi tradition, points to how important it was for the theologians to place the dying person within a powerful sphere of protection from outside. 29 The dying man sought refuge and wrapped himself first and foremost in the vicarious suffering of Christ. 30 But this powerful sphere also consisted of the entire earthly and heavenly “communio sanctorum”, the angels, the saints, the family and friends who surrounded the deathbed.

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22 “Tha Ladher thu huar mand waræ thin lighæ/ troo aey paa wærðhen hun wil dig swighæ/ til gud sckalt thu tig wændhæ”, ibid, the introductory verse, Aii.
23 Gertsman 2010.
24 Another text in this genre is the added text “Death [speaks] to the reader” in Luther 1538, ff. 35v–36.
26 Zeitpunkt und Art des Todes, eigenen Gnadenstand, and Ausgang des Gerichts.
27 Ibid, 127.
28 “[D]ie beschirmende Extra-nos-Heiligkeit”, ibid, 128.
30 This is not least evident in the so-called Anselmian questions, which constituted an established part of the ars moriendi tradition; cf. Rudolf 1957, 57–58.
The deathbed was a place to worry about the state of one’s soul and to ensure salvation by word and deed in the presence of family and friends.

The dying person was thus both dependent on an inner disposition of virtues, as well as of an extra-nos sanctification, and Hamm describes how these elements were aligned towards a finalization at the moment of death. Looking back to the pre-Reformation version of *De Vita Hominis*, it is easy to recognize how this text relates merely to one of these elements, which is the extra-nos sanctification. And to achieve this “protective Extra-nos-sanctity”, one has to invest in good deeds. The other element, the inner disposition of virtues, which was not least expressed through a true and sincere penitence, is not emphasized at all in this text. On the other hand, this element is central to the other texts transmitted together with *De Vita Hominis* by Sir Michel and edited by Pouel Ræff in 1514; the *Expositio pulcherrima super Rosario* and *De Creatione Rerum*. While the *Expositio* explained a devotional practice, the *De Creatione Rerum* explained the story of Adam (and Eve) as an example of penitential practice for all men. The concluding verse states: “This should all men know, That like Adam he did strong penitence and duty and made amends for his sin: so should we do also if we want to escape and avoid the pains of hell”.31

When Anders Sørensen Vedel chose *De Vita Hominis* and edited the text in 1571, he thus transmitted a partial picture of the pre-Reformation preparation for death. The transmitted elements were further rearranged according to a new religious practice as we will see in the analysis of Vedel’s reading of the text.

An overall perspective should be pointed out before we turn to Vedel’s version. The focus on the failed investment of the dying man in the pre-Reformation *De Vita Hominis* underscored a premise of the text, which was the mutual social contract between the living and the dead. One is to do well towards others so that they intercede for one’s soul when it becomes necessary. In this version, the way to heaven depends on this mutual relationship. Without the good deeds, and consequently without such intercessors, man is left friendless and alone on his deathbed, and, even worse, without intercessors when he has to face Final Judgement. As this mutual relationship between the living and the dead was such a central premise of the text of *De Vita Hominis*, the changes carried out by Vedel provide a striking example of how this pre-Reformation notion was transformed during the Reformation and was expressed in other ways.

**Anders Sørensen Vedel and the Early Modern Religious Context**

The religious context of Vedel’s edition of the text was defined by the Lutheran Reformation that had been established in Denmark in 1537. Vedel, himself born in 1542, was not among the early reformers, but belonged to a generation of educated Lutheran theologians. During studies in Wittenberg, he became inspired by the Christian view of history, not least as it was presented by Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560) and Caspar Peucer (1525–1602). After being admitted to his degree in 1562, he returned to Denmark and became part of the circle of Niels Hemmingsen (1513–1600), Melanchthon’s pupil who led Danish theology in a Reformed direction. At the time when he edited his version of *De Vita Hominis* he was court preacher at the royal castle of Copenhagen (1568–1581). Despite this important position, his inclination towards the history and language of the Danish people occupied his time as much as possible.

It is not difficult to imagine how his interest was captured by a late medieval Danish text, a poem that testified both to the development of the Danish language as well as to the continuum within the religious sources. The fact that it had been edited at the request of Queen Christina probably also motivated a reprint within the aristocratic circles where Vedel served as historian. Vedel was asked to edit the old book, but it is not known by whom.

As a humanist, Vedel sought to raise Danish literature to the level of European literature, not least in his Danish translation of *Saxo Grammaticus* in 1575. Nevertheless, there is also another direction in his works. As Marita Akhøj Nielsen comments, behind his translations the other way, from Danish into Latin, there is an immodest idea that Danish literature also has something to offer the outside world.

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33 On Vedel’s relation to the aristocracy, see Friis-Jensen 1993.
world. Characteristically, this concerns his translations of theological texts, most significantly Niels Hemmingsen’s text on the necessary principles of a Christian life, *Via Vitae*, edited in Leipzig in 1574. This little example testifies to one of the conditions of the religious culture of Anders Vedel’s time, the notion that Denmark was leading the way as an example of true evangelical religion. Denmark was a shelter for the true faith, and the Protestant King Christian III (r. 1534–1559) was its pre-eminent defender. This idea was confirmed by Melanchthon, who also portrayed the Danish nobility as an exemplar for all of Christendom, and it was inherent in the ideology of the Danish kings, who defined their role as to protect the true religion that was established in 1537.

Two years before Vedel’s edition of *De Vita Hominis*, the “articles of religion”, written by Niels Hemmingsen, were published by Frederick II (r. 1559–1588). The intention was to secure the Lutheran confession against the rival Catholic, Calvinistic and Anabaptist confessions. The Catholic religion had been defeated, but it was still described as a threat, not least in Vedel's *Antichristus Romanus*, edited in 1571, the same year as *De Vita Hominis*. According to this and other contemporary texts, the Catholic faith was more than a political threat, it was the false religion, the spiritual Babylon, from which the Danish people had been led by the revelation of the true Gospel. Vedel described his contemporary time as the dangerous last period of history, in which God by his Word had revealed the Roman pope as the Antichrist and through his servants led his people out of Antichrist’s grip and into the kingdom of God. It is hence no less than wretchedness, pharaonic hardness and devilish blindness when people complain that they are bored with the Gospel and long to return to the ceremonies of the pope. Vedel exhibited a strong and conscious Lutheran intention in all his theological works. The same inclination can be found in his “improvement” of the meaning of *De Vita Hominis*, which he transformed according to a Lutheran religious practice.

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37 Cf. the royal announcement (*Kongens kunngjørelse*), KO 1537/39.
38 Rørdam 1886, 126–134.
39 Vedel 1571b, f. (a)iiif.
40 Ibid., f. (a) iiif.
Vedel’s Version of De Vita Hominis

In his version, Vedel organizes the booklet according to the Danish headings and Latin strophes. He also follows the late medieval text closely, but makes some significant theological changes, which are consequently followed up throughout his version. I will not comment on all the details, but rather concentrate on the most significant changes that concern the premises of the investment in the afterlife.

The fundamental conditions of the message of the pre-Reformation version of De Vita Hominis were the uncertainty of the moment of death, the uncertainty of one’s own condition of grace as well as the uncertainty of the judgement. Two of these conditions, the uncertain condition of grace and the uncertain judgement, are removed in Vedel’s version in accordance with the Lutheran theology that focused the extra-nos sanctification on Christ alone and emphasized the certainty of the eschatological justification. When Hamm describes Luther’s rearrangement of preparation for death, he points out how this meant a refusal not only of intercessors after death, but also of the co-operatio model, and the importance of the inner dispositions finalized towards the moment of death.\textsuperscript{41} The new certainty of salvation had consequences both for anthropology and religious practice. In Vedel’s version of De Vita Hominis, the new certainty and the abolition of purgatory was expressed through a distinct dualism between the wicked and the pious. It was also expressed through a transformation of the relation between the living and the dead, as well as of a transformation of memory.

Transformed According to a Dualistic Worldview

The thorough transformations of the text were reflected in the changed title of the booklet. The pre-Reformation version was introduced as “an instruction and teaching to the advantage of men and to the salvation of the soul”\textsuperscript{42}; it had one and the same message for all men. Vedel’s version is however introduced with different intentions according to two kinds of men; as consolation for the pious and as terror to the impious.\textsuperscript{43} This distinction, and hence the dualistic address of the text, depended on the fundamental Lutheran notion of the certainty of salvation.

In contrast to the pre-Reformation version, the separation of man into wicked and pious is continued throughout Vedel’s version and expressed most explicitly in the face of the approaching Day of Judgement. The trumpet sounds, the skin again clothes the naked bones and the buried man is to rise from his grave and

\textsuperscript{41} Hamm 2010.

\textsuperscript{42} “Met stoer wnderwiissningh och lærdom: til mennisckens nyttha. Och sjælsæns saligheed”, De Vita Hominis 1514, f. A.

\textsuperscript{43} The title-page reads: “VITA HOMINIS. Undervisning Om Menniskens leffned [...] gantske trøstelig for de Gudfryctige / oc saare gruelig for alle Ugudelige” (“VITA HOMINIS. A teaching on the life of man […] consoling to the pious / and quite horrible to all the impious”), Vedel 1571a, f. Ai.
walk towards his Judge. In the pre-Reformation version his trembling is expressed as a universal terror; “every heart should bleed because of this”.\textsuperscript{44} This is however changed in Vedel’s reading: it is now not any longer every heart that bleeds, but only the hearts of the wicked; “The evil hearts must bleed”.\textsuperscript{45} The same change occurs before the Judge. In the pre-Reformation version, the dead man prays; “God save me from this danger”, and presents himself among the trembling crowd of people ready to receive the Judge: “how difficult is it to see this day / when everyone cries and no one can laugh/ everyone carries a great danger to himself/ of all those that stand before the Judgement/ no one knows how to escape hell/ because God then will not spare anyone.”\textsuperscript{46}

In Vedel’s version, this shared trembling of all men was replaced by a characteristic of the evil: “For the wicked ones, this day is gruesome to see/ They all cry and no one laughs/ everyone carries a great danger to himself: Of all those who stand in front of this one/ The wicked ones/ could not escape the pain/ Because God will not spare them”.\textsuperscript{47} And similarly, to distinguish himself from this group, the dead man counted himself among the other group: “God save us from this danger”.\textsuperscript{48} Vedel’s version has thus distinguished between the good and the bad even before the Judge has pronounced. In the version by Sir Michael, the distinction between the good and the wicked appears first in the declaration of Christ following the gathering before the Judge, when Christ judges the good into his community in heaven and the bad to hell.\textsuperscript{49}

The dual address in Vedel’s version corresponds with a rearrangement of the hereafter. The removal of purgatory was a consequence of the notion of righteousness and salvation by faith alone. When salvation was secured outside man’s conditions, there was no need of suffering to amend and hence no need of purgatory as a means of preparing for heaven.

The removal of purgatory is both explicit and implicit in the text. The last verse of Vedel’s version refers to a future time when hell will be closed and the power of the devil will be destroyed, while the same verse refers to the time when purgatory will be laid waste in the late medieval version. Whereas the dead in this version stands before the Judge to mend what he has offended – referring to the purgatory

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\item \textsuperscript{44} “[H]werth hiarthæ maa ther foræ blædhæ”; De Vita Hominis 1514, f. Bv (Tuba Celestis).
\item \textsuperscript{45} “De onde hjerter maa blæde”; Vedel 1571a, f. Diii (Tuba Archangeli).
\item \textsuperscript{46} “[G]ud frælsæ mi gaff thennæ waadhæ. Hwar swærth er thennæ dag at see/ som alæ grædhæ och inghen kan lee/ hwer bær for sig stœr fare/ Aff alæ the paa dommen staa/ wedh inghen hwo hælwedha kan undgaar/ gud wil tha inghen sparæ”; De Vita Hominis 1514, f. Bvii (Dies Iudicii)
\item \textsuperscript{47} “De onde er denne dag grum at see/ De græde alle/ ingen aft dem lee/ huer bærer for sig stor fare: aff alle de som for dennem staa/ De wgelilige/ kunde ey pinen undgaar/ Thi Gud vil dem ey spare”; Vedel 1571a, f. E (Dies Iudicii). “We” is also replaced by “the wicked” in the last verse of Vedel’s poem, f. Eii. “Det samme Legeme de onde her bære/ Met Sielen skal det tilsammen være/ Öc brendei helfuedis giøde”.
\item \textsuperscript{48} “Gud frelse oss fra denne vaade”, Vedel 1571a, f. E.
\item \textsuperscript{49} Cf “Verba Christus iudicis”. While the late medieval text says that Christ “judges” the good to heaven and the bad to hell, Vedel’s version states that he “calls” the good to heaven and “judges” the bad to hell, Vedel 1571a, f. Ev.
\end{itemize}
to come, in Vedel’s version, the dead *listens* to how he has sinned against God. Since purgatory as a place and opportunity after death is thus removed in the text and, the question of being pious or not is much more crucial than it was earlier.

This dual address in Vedel’s version also accords with a redesign of the *communio sanctorum* in the Protestant theology. It is no longer achieved by a *co-operatio* of inner dispositions and external intercession, but coincides with the community of the followers of the true faith. This went along with the dualistic worldview that sustained the Lutheran religion from the introduction of the Reformation. The Reformation king, Christian III, had established the Danish church firmly on Christ’s side in the fight against Satan and the Antichrist, and proclaimed that the Danish people were among the true children of God. The dualism was established both as theological ideology and as royal politics with sociological implications, as in the “foreign articles” edited in 1569. But while the definitions here primarily concerned doctrinal threats, Vedel addresses impious behaviour and inclination. To address the impious with warnings was not something new; it belonged rather to classical religious rhetoric, and resembled such things as the message in the dispute between the body and the soul from 1514. What is however characteristic of the new approach as expressed by Vedel is the proclamation of a distinction between men even before the Last Judgement.

Picture 2. The Last Judgement loomed in the mind of medieval and early modern people. Christ the Judge sentences all souls either to heaven or hell depending on their merits and/or faith.

50 *De Vita Hominis* 1514, f. Bvii–Bviii; Vedel 1571a, f. E.

According to the Lutheran theologians, salvation counted on faith alone at the hour of death as well as in life. This was however explained differently according to theological direction. The emphasis on good deeds in the pre-Reformationalum De Vita Hominis is transformed not according to a pure notion of faith alone, but according to a notion of deeds as the visible fruits of faith. The old text emphasizing the deeds was thus easily adapted within the Danish theological context of Vedel’s time. This context was largely defined by Niels Hemmingsen, who emphasized how faith was recognized by penitence and good deeds, and was expressed by a good conscience, which was most important in the hour of death.\footnote{Cf. Hemmingsen 1577, and N. Palladius, 1558: “Thi it menniskis døds stun der hans Domme Dag/ oc met huulde hiertelu hand dør/ met det same kommer hand for Dom/ Thi endog Legemet leggis ned til huile udi Graffuen/ Dog farer sielen ud aff Legemet heden til den sted/ udi huulken Gud haffuer beskicket/ en skal bliifue udi til domme Dagen/ oc tager met sig enton en ond/ eller en god samuitigheid/ Enten en viss forhohfning til den euige salighed/ eller en viss fryct for den euige fordømmelse” (“Because Man’s hour of death is his Judgement day/ and with what kind of heart he dies / with the same kind he stands before the Judgement/ Because even if the body is put down to rest in the tomb/ the soul however travels out of the body to a place/ where God has ordained/ it to be until Judgement Day/ and it takes with it either an evil/ or a good consciousness/ Either a certain hope of eternal salvation/ or the certain terror of eternal damnation”) (f. Aiiii v).}

In Vedel’s version of De Vita Hominis, the principle of a certain salvation was ensured by the proclaimed dualism in the address, as well as with a few inserts that emphasise obedience to the word of God as well as penitence as the secure path. The evil consequences accrue to those who have rejected the word of God, and the final message is summarized in the message: repent in time.\footnote{Vedel 1571a, f. Eii–Eiii.}

A Transformed Relation between the Living and the Dead

The security of salvation undercuts the very heart of the pre-Reformationalum De Vita Hominis. This crux was the experience of lack of intercession when the dying man, as a consequence of his wicked life, had to die a lonely death. According to the Lutheran theology, however, man was always alone in the face of death, as Luther himself out it: “\textit{Wir sind alle zum tode gefoddert und wird keiner fur den andern sterben}”.\footnote{WA 10/3,1,15f and 2,1f.: followed by: “So muss ein Jederman selber die hauptstück, so einen Christen belangen, wol wissen und gerüst sein”.

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Man could only be saved by the knowledge of faith. The necessary dependence on intercession that caused the tragedy in the pre-Reformation version of the text is hence made irrelevant, and it is consequently rejected in Vedel’s version. While one was exhorted to pray for the deceased in the late medieval text, this was no longer relevant. The dead were no longer dependent on the living, and the mutual relationship was broken.

What can be seen, however, is that the concern for the salvation of one’s departed is not just removed, but rather transformed into other material ways of concern. A central point in Peter Marshall’s “Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England” is that this concern was most resistant to being wiped out by the Reformation.
Consequently, it was actually not removed, but rather expressed in other ways. Vedel’s changes in the text show exactly this. Where the medieval text spoke about concern for the suffering soul of a deceased person, the revised post-Reformation text points out consolation of the dying man, concern for the funeral and for the memory of the deceased. I will explain this through the most relevant paragraphs of the text.

The transformation of the concern for the dead is already evident in the description of the first stage of life; “When you are born” ("Nascens"). In this paragraph, the relation with the mother illustrates human life as a mutual dependency on others, a dependency that should be repaid when it is needed, which means in death. The relation and obligations towards the mother are described in two verses; to honour her, please her, give her gifts and help her. Vedel follows the late medieval version closely, except when it comes to her death. The old version insists that one should not let one’s mother suffer long in purgatory, regardless of the troubles it takes: “help her, is what you should let stand firm/ not only in life, but also after her death/ let her not endure much the pains of purgatory/ if you ride with a hundred horses”.

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Picture 3. In this woodcut from *Der Seelen-Wurzgarten* (1483), each deadly sin has its parallel torment in purgatory.

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In Vedel’s version, however, the concern for the dead mother is expressed in the arrangement of an honest funeral: “Turn everything to the best for her / the time she lives in all her needs /With honest funeral after her Death/ even if you ride with a hundred horses”.

The concern for the dead soul is replaced here by the obligation to arrange a proper funeral. And in the contemporary funeral sermons this obligation is explained as one of the deeds proper for the dead.

Another change in Vedel’s text expresses the transformation of concern for the soul into pastoral consolation at deathbed. In the pre-Reformation version, the dying man is afraid, expressing this in the fear that nobody will care for his soul after death: “Who will help me when I am dead/ give a piece of bread for my soul?” In Vedel’s version, active concern for the soul is no longer demanded, but is replaced with a rhetorical question: “Who will help me when I am dead/ who can comfort me in such a need?” The implied answer is that nothing worldly, not even your own family or friends can provide you proper consolation. This is also the premise of the next stanza (“When life and death struggles”/ “Pugna vitae et mortis”), where Vedel proclaims faith alone as the only secure ground for a dying man.

In the pre-Reformation version, the premise of the stanza on the fight between life and death is set by the previous stages, the dying man having conducted his life in such a way that no one cared for him or interceded for his soul. All they cared for was to take charge of his property. The pitiful prospect is that his wife and his friends will quarrel over what he has left in the hour when he is carried to the grave. The dying man lamented the grave consequences: “A Pater Noster I will never receive/ more than the time I stand dead on the floor/ of this you must all take notice/ It has to be a pain of the heart/ I have no friends when I am dead/ besides monks and priest and clerks”. He can trust neither his friends nor his small children as “they let me burn in pain”. The lesson was clear and was proclaimed as follows: “I ask all of you now to look around/ Do good for yourselves while you have time”. The text concluded with a warning: “If not you will be deceived both here and there/ This I tell you/ this comes true/ this everyone surely should know”.

57 “[V]end hende allting til bæste/ Den stund hun leffuer i all hendis nød/ Met enlig Jordeferd effter hendis Død/ Rider du end met hundrede hæste”, Vedel 1571a, f. B.

58 For example, in the sermon addressed to the widow of Anders Bing, cf. Lauridsen 1593, f. Cv.

59 Cf. note 22.

60 “[H]vo skal mig hielpe naar ieg er død/ hvo kand mig trøste i saadan nød”, Vedel 1571a, f. Cii.


62 “[I] pinae ladhæ the mig brændhæ”, ibid.

63 “Jeg bedher nw allæ i see ether om/ gører goth for ether mædhen i haffuæ rom/ ther mwæ i siellflueæ paa lidhæÆ Ellers i bliffua swighenæ baadhæ hær oc hist/thet sigher ieg nw : thet bliffuer alt wist/ thet schal huær wissælighen widhæ”, ibid.
In Vedel's version, the premise of intercession was no longer relevant and the example of the dying man received another meaning. While the point in the first version was that the man had caused this miserable lonely occasion himself, the point in the changed version is that the material world has nothing to offer when the hour of death arrives. The complaint about no *Pater Noster* is replaced by "Nothing more I then receive from the world/ when I stand dead on the floor". The sentence that refers to the prayers of the clergy is replaced by an affirmation of the pain caused by being left alone in death: "I have no friends when I am dead/ it makes my heart suffer", and the sentence that referred to him being left in purgatory is replaced by an affirmation that his friends and children could do nothing. “No help

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64 “*Intet mere ieg da aff Verden faar/ Naar ieg døder paa gulffuet staar*”, Vedel 1571a, f. Ciii.

65 “*Jeg haffuer ey venner naar ieg er død/ Det giør mit hierte at vercke*”, ibid.
they could give me”.66 The final lesson was also transformed. While the readers are still exhorted to do good while there is still time, this was nevertheless explained not according to investing in intercession, but as a consequence of faith: “I ask all of you to look around/ Do good while you have time/ This you can trust: / if not you will be deceived both here and there/ if you don’t believe in Jesus Christ/ this everyone surely should know”.

### Transformation of Memory

In Vedel’s version of the next stanza (“Pugna vitae et mortis”), faith alone is what counts, and the lack of intercession or concern seems hence to constitute no problem other than an emotional reaction of sad loneliness. However, it is relevant to ask what such loneliness implied in a Protestant context. Perhaps the text gives a clue in the “Mutatio coloris” stanza, where the pre-Reformation version reads: “Quite little I have sent ahead of me/ The time I have been alive/ Hence as I come I am unknown/ and I will forever be”.

A deceased person who does not receive his friends’ prayers is described as “unknown”. The investment in friends and good deeds, which in the face of death brought about intercession, is presented as an investment in the future life and described according to the notion of “memory” in the pre-Reformation version of the text.

In Vedel’s version of the same paragraph, he inserted a short explanation. He had “sent little ahead”, because he was “like the rich glutton/ with injustice, violence and deceit”. His evil and less memorable deeds were what caused him to be unknown by men and will forever be.

In the pre-Reformation version, to be unknown implied that the dying person left this world without intercessors. To be remembered was a liturgical category that implied being prayed for before God, as the Good Thief had begged Christ; “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom” (Luke 23:42). In Vedel’s version, to be unknown meant that no one found a reason to uphold the memory of the deceased, which has to be understood in accordance with the early modern memorial culture. To be remembered meant to shine forth in his good deeds as an example to the living. Such a rememberance was just what the preachers aimed at in constructing in the contemporary funeral works, which was also the context of Vedel’s edition of De Vita Hominis.

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66 “Ingen hielp kunde de mig giøre”, ibid.

67 “Jeg beder eder alle i see eder om/ Gierer gaat den stund i haffue rom/ Der kunde i noget paa lide: /Ellers vorder i svenge her og hist/ Om i tro icke paa Jesum Christ/ Det skal huer visselig vide”, ibid.

68 “Fuld lideth haffuer ieg foræ mig sænt/ mædhen ieg haffuer wæreth i liffuæ/ Thiid som ieg kommer er ieg ukænt/ och ieg schal ewigh bliffue”, De Vita Hominis 1514, f. Bi.

Vedel’s *De Vita Hominis* in the Protestant Memorial Culture

In his introduction, Vedel dedicated the booklet to the Danish nobleman and overlord Christoffer Valkendorf (1525–1601). Vedel had several benefactors among the Danish nobility. Some were mentioned in the preface to his edition of *Saxo Grammaticus* in 1575, Christoffer Valkendorf being one of them. One of Vedel’s services in return to these noblemen was to preach at their friends’ funerals, or as in this case, to raise their memory. The occasion seems to be somehow related to Valkendorf being appointed royal administrator in Gotland in that year, 1571. Vedel, however, places the poem within the context of the memory of Valkendorf’s brother, Axel, who had died six years before. This context, consisting both of a testimony of Axel Valkendorf’s life and death, as well as an added epitaph both in Danish and Latin, makes Anders Vedel’s edition of *De Vita Hominis* an example of memorial literature with the same function as the published funeral works.

The genre of published funeral works, which generally appeared with a sermon and a funeral biography, arose at the princely houses in Saxony-Anhalt in the 1550s, and was continued by other dynasties associated with the Wittenberg Reformation. Because of the close connections between the king, the nobility and the Lutheran priesthood of Denmark-Norway on the one hand, and the Wittenberg reformers on the other, it comes as no surprise that funeral works were published for the Danish nobility from as early as 1565. This was also the year in which Axel Valkendorf had died. The text relates not only how the Danish reformers transformed the concept of death, but also how the deceased, at least the nobility, were remembered within the Danish Lutheran culture.

Vedel addressed Christoffer Valkendorf, reminding him of a gathering that had once taken place in the home of Lady Karine, the second wife of Bjørn Andersøn, the palace steward in Copenhagen. Their hospitable home often housed the powerful men of the time and was also open to the young historian Vedel. There Vedel heard accounts of the heroic deeds of noblemen, those of Axel Valkendorf

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70 Christoffer Valkendorf was an important man in the administration of the kingdom of Denmark-Norway. He was appointed royal administrator – in different periods – to Bergenhus, Iceland, Gotland and Stavanger, he was member of the Council of State (*riksrådet*) from 1576, and, was appointed *Stattholder* in Copenhagen, second only to the king in power, from 1579.

71 Axel Valkendorf was killed at the Falkenberg heaths during the Nordic Seven Years’ War (1563–1578) on 20 October 1565.

72 Moore 2006, 100.

73 The terminology refers to Moore 2006, 19. Niels Hemmingsen’s sermon for Herluf Trolle (1565) is often referred to as the first funeral sermon printed in Denmark, Billeskov Jansen 1990. The early origin of the printed Danish funeral works distinguishes the Danish tradition from that in Sweden, where the first printed funeral work occurs in 1598. It is more relevant to compare the Danish tradition with the Lutheran heartlands in Saxony and Württemberg. The printed Danish funeral sermons (ca. 40 registered works) from the period 1565–1600 had been composed for the funerals of the higher nobility; see Oftestad 2015.

74 Cf. Wegener 1851, 59.
Lady Karine had related how the sisters of Valkendorf had asked their brother Axel why he spent so much more time than other people in his prayer chamber. To this, he had answered that one could never pray enough. Moreover, if the only thing to pray for was a Christian and blissful departure, then this alone would be enough to pray for as long as we lived on earth. What happens next is not only an example of the central position of the moment of death in this religious culture, but also of how a preacher, sensitive to good testimonies of the deceased, collected the elements to construct an edifying memory. Vedel refers how he was astonished by Axel's pious answer and had followed up by asking about his last hours. Christoffer Valkendorf had then talked about his brother's death, which was caused by a shot during the siege of Falkenberg in 1565. Hearing this, Vedel immediately wrote an epitaph in Latin, and at the request of Christoffer Valkendorf, also a translation in Danish.

The epitaph had so pleased Christoffer Valkendorf that because of this, Vedel claimed to have dedicated the booklet, including De Vita Hominis, to him as a reminder "that everyone in his days of prosperity, should behave himself such that he with a Christian departure/ could walk as an heir into the reign of heaven and the eternal life". Axel Valkendorf's pious life and Christian departure thus shine forth as an example of one who had followed the central message of De Vita Hominis, and consequently as a blessed opposition to the wicked man described in the text.

Vedel did not dedicate the booklet to Valkendorf as consolation as was frequently done in similar introductions, but rather as a remembrance of Axel Valkendorf. Perhaps the long time that had passed since Axel's death made consolation for the brother less urgent than ordinarily. But perhaps the lack of a published funeral work for this important royal military man made the promotion of Christoffer Valkendorf to royal administrator at Gotland just a suitable occasion to raise his brother's memory. The late Axel Valkendorf thus became a paragon of virtue for the benefit of his brother Christoffer Valkendorf about to commence his administrative and religious duties at Gotland.

It is reasonable to emphasize the Protestant memorial culture as the opposite of the miserable fortune of the dying man in De Vita Hominis. The genre of printed funeral works and dedicated booklets, like Vedel's edition of De Vita Hominis, became an important element in this culture in which the memory of the deceased was upheld and preserved.


76 Cf. Wegener 1851, 59–60. Vedel wrote three epitaphs on the occasion of Axel Valkendorf's death; one Latin prose, one Latin poem as well as a Danish version of the poem, all printed at the end of the edition of De Vita Hominis, 1571.


78 Oftestad forthcoming 2015.
Conclusion

Anders Sørensens Vedel’s edition of *De Vita Hominis* is a concise little example of the transformation of the religious culture of Denmark in the aftermath of the Reformation. Vedel’s education and career and his reputable theological and historical works mean that his revision can be considered an important example of how the early Danish Protestant theologians interpreted and transformed the pre-Reformation literature on death.

When Vedel revised *De Vita Hominis*, he re-arranged the elements of an anonymous late medieval text and transformed it according to an established Lutheran faith. Thus, his revision neither represents a continuous use of a source nor the negation of the late medieval heritage, but rather a conscious establishment of continuity between the religious practice of his own days and the previous generations. What the Lutheran faith defined as foreign elements were abolished and replaced by the new religious practice.

The pre-Reformation version of *De Vita Hominis* was intended to remind the reader of his own death and urge him or her to invest in good deeds and a just life to secure intercession when death arrived. This constituted a central element in the pre-Reformation preparation for death, and was completed by a focus on the formation of inner dispositions as it appeared in the texts that had been transmitted together with *De Vita Hominis*. The premise of the message in *De Vita Hominis* was a community of living and dead, expressed in the duty to intercede for the souls of the deceased. As a contrast to this community, the edifying text depicts the horror of dying alone, without friends or intercessors. The miserable man appears as a warning to the readers: invest in the afterlife while you live!

When the text was edited anew by Vedel in 1571, the experience of dying alone was still used as a warning. It had, however, a different function in Vedel’s religious context. The miserable situation confirmed another message: when it came to death, this world had nothing to offer. The only thing that was counted was faith. While the theology of the Reformation abolished the uncertainty of salvation, one of the fundamental conditions was still the same since the hour of the inescapable death remained always unknown.

The booklet was presented in a way that confirmed Vedel’s changes to the message. While the late medieval text was a general warning, a *memento mori* presented to all men, among general devotional literature, Vedel’s edition is presented in connection with a particular person, to raise the memory of Axel Valkendorf. Both the introduction as well as the added epitaphs in Latin and Danish point to Valkendorf’s exemplary life and death. In this respect, *De Vita Hominis* functions as an antitype that sets off Valkendorf’s pious life and Christian death as a glorious example to the living. He is remembered through these texts. He is remembered not by his sisters’ intercession for his soul, which there is no need for as he already is counted among the blessed ones, but by the exhibition of his faith.
In the epitaph that concludes the book, Valkendorf was praised for his glorious deeds, giving his life for the fatherland. However, these deeds were not the reason for true honour and joy which can only be achieved by a Christian death. The final verse proclaimed the moral: “Then everyone should skillfully learn this art/ while he is alive/ the one who wants to die well/ he has to behave well/ this only can be given by God”. What then was Valkendorf’s good behaviour? It was clearly underlined in the introduction. He had always prayed for a Christian death. He invested in his afterlife, not by alms, donations or glorious deeds that brought about intercessors, but by prayers that reinforced his own faith and strengthened his dependence on Christ alone. Consequently, after his death, he depended neither on his brother Christoffer nor on his sisters. He had taken care of his own Christian departure alone.

A reading of Vedel’s corrections of the late medieval De Vita Hominis displays that the notion of investment in the afterlife was a continuum through the religious transformations which was brought about by the Reformation. What the investment consisted in was however described according to different religious premises. While the pre-Reformation version emphasized that one should invest in intercession, the post-Reformation version emphasized faith and prayer during life. When Christoffer Valkendorf raised the memory of his brother Axel, he presented him as an example of faith, and invested in his brother’s immortality through printed letters. While donations and alms were a way to secure remembrance before God in the late medieval version, money still secured a memorial in the early Protestant culture. According to the new religious premises, however, it could only secure this memorial in the human world left behind.

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79 “Saa lære sig huer den konst met skel/ Den stund hand er i lifflue/ huo vil vel da/ hand leffue sig vel/ Det kand Gud eniste giffue”, Vedel 1571a, f. Eiiiii"


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