

Summary of Sin and Fear
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Approximately 12,300 words
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Introduction

Jean Delumeau's work, Sin and Fear, is one of the best books of history of ideas ever written. It ranks in my judgment close to Alfred O. Lovejoy's The Great Chain of Being. In it, he undertakes a study of five centuries of writings about sin and fear in Western European thought. He studies sermons, hymnals, books, pamphlets, diaries, legal cases, poetry, and papal bulls. His research is exhaustive and his analysis keen.

Despite being an academic piece, the reading is fascinating and lively. There are, however, too many examples and too much detail for most readers, even though much of this detail is intriguing.

I summarized this book because I believe that the topic is important. Alfred Korzybski pointed out repeatedly that long after ideas fade and are no longer acceptable or believable, the institutions that arose from those ideas still remain, and the ideas continue to be protected institutionally while decried privately. One example of this is the idea of sin. The concept of sin as an action that offends God is widely held in many societies that descended from Western European societies. Despite the fact that the doctrinal foundations of the religions that gave rise to various ideas about sin are no longer viable, ideas about sin continue to be protected—even cherished.

One benefit of studying the history of an idea such as sin (and one of its consequences: fear) is that we see in its historical nature that it is not timeless. Nietzsche was fond of pointing out that when we trace an idea to its roots we gain the perspective that the idea has not always been as we now hold it, and that along the way it was transformed many different times in many different ways by many different people. The implication is that we have good reason for not allowing the actions of our lives to be dictated by unstable ideas that we thought were holy and inviolable.

I have always thought that we need a word for the awareness that an idea is not timeless and unchanging, but instead mutable and often desultory. Such a word would be important because it would highlight the fact that we tend to treat single words (such as "sin") as uniform concepts, even though the meaning of that word may change radically from generation to generation. Jonathan Edwards meant something quite different by the word "sin" than we do, yet we commonly think that we understand what he is saying when he uses that word because we have an understanding of the word "sin".

This situation is complicated by the huge and growing inertia behind pop relativism in which we acknowledge that Edwards had his meaning for "sin" and we have ours, and that they are "both right" despite being quite different. It is my hope that this summary will help clarify not only the historical concepts of "sin" and of "fear", but also, more generally, it will highlight the need for precision in discourse and nuance in understanding.

Chapter One: Contempt for the World and Mankind

Our culture has inherited a long history of contempt for mankind as sinful and corrupt, for the earth as a poor and undesirable place in comparison with heaven, and for all things embedded in time because they are merely transitory. "This world" became the object of scorn for authors from the Platonists to Paul to Augustine to the Protestant Reformers, although this same term implied a place that God would redeem.

Thanks largely to the monastic movement (and its dedication to asceticism), the idea that the world should be spurned in favor of a higher ideal became widespread. There developed a long tradition of the vanity of perishable, material things associated with living in the world. The tradition was represented by the theme of "Ubi sunt?"—"Where is he?"—in which the poet or preacher asks rhetorically, "Where is the great king" or "Where is Caesar?" with the irony intended to remind us that even the greatest die. "A link is thus established between the transitory nature of life and its sadness." An entire literature sprang up cataloging the miseries and fears of life, despising all things from birth to death, represented best by Pope Innocent III's work De Contemptu Mundi (On the Contempt of the World).

The wretchedness of this life is mirrored by the blessedness of the next; so also the body's worthlessness is mirrored by the soul's eternal value. Nowhere is this more acutely emphasized than in the long tradition of excoriation of all things sexual. Trapped in bodies that they detested, subjected to carnal temptations, and unable to flee the world, the monks of the middle ages often dwelt upon their foul spiritual condition: "Every day I sin, I err at every moment then and often, like a

dog, I lap my vomit; I surpass all creation in mortal vices and deadly sin." One cleric wrote, "Other creatures have some use: meat and bone, wool and leather; but you, stinking man, you are worse than dung."

"There can be no doubt about this essential historical fact: This woeful vision of life was first developed and refined in the monasteries, and subsequently in the convents of the mendicant orders. Later, this attitude was transmitted to the whole of society as a self-evident truth. Its three main components—hatred of the body and the world, the pervasiveness of sin, and the acute consciousness of fleeting time" were rampant in medieval culture.

A vast mystical literature thrived from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries that emphasized the absolute necessity of fleeing this world in favor of the next. This life, the mystics claimed, was misery, and the only hope for peace comes in death. The most extreme form of this lament is surprisingly common: "It would have been better to have not been born."

This doctrine of contempt for the world spread from isolated mystics to monasteries to secular sources. By the thirteenth century, we have records of merchants and public figures translating and commenting books such as the Contemptu Mundi. Thereafter famous literary figures ranging from Petrarch to Erasmus took up the theme. But it had its greatest success in The Imitation of Christ, which was read broadly, undergoing sixty different translations in French alone in a 400-year period. The work is a catechism of hatred of all earthly things, typified by the verse: "He who knows himself well, despises himself." The book inspired imitations, each increasingly vituperative.

Despite some praise of the earth's beauty and man's creation in God's likeness, Protestant preachers and theologians continued the Catholic tradition of hatred of the world, bringing that hatred to a "climax in Western Civilization." Luther, for example, taught that this world is literally controlled by the Devil such that even beautiful things are nothing more than "instruments and slavish weapons of the devil's infernal tyranny." Man's good works are meaningless, his aspirations to goodness are worthless, and his only hope is continual self-loathing: "there is no danger than man can go too far in abasing himself." Indeed self-hatred became an essential part of religious devotion and a key ingredient for salvation. Protestant literature invited its adherents to continual reflection upon their own misery and the hopelessness of escaping from that misery, except, of course, through justification by faith.

Chapter Two: From Contempt for the World to the Danse Macabre

The religious practice of contempt for the world had broad cultural effects throughout Europe manifested as contempt for mortality. Certainly this is not due entirely to doctrinal spread, since the Black Death and numerous wars of religion profoundly shaped ideas about death during this time. One manifestation of that contempt was indifference. A number of cultures show emotional immunity to the loss of loved ones, manifested by celebrations at funerals, bazaars being held in graveyards, and a general psychological acquiescence toward death as a normal stage in life.

Expectedly, "the church played a key role in the gradual erasure of a 'tame' image of death and the 'natural' way of experiencing departure from life when it

proposed meditation on death as a prime method of moral pedagogy." Sermons and literature admonished Christians to smell the stench of the grave and contemplate the horrors of death to put them on the path to repentance and righteousness. Preachers and writers harped on decomposition, using its graphic horror to inspire hatred for this life and love of the next.

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries these theological ideas with a pedagogical intent spread across Western European society. Many tombs of famous people of those centuries depict rotting corpses with messages warning the visitor that his fate will be no different. These hideous pictures and messages were combined with admonitions to prepare for the Last Judgment. There can be no doubt that the intent was to promote spiritual vigilance through fear.

"The Christian concept of life is inseparable from the idea of the ultimate goals of life." Thus the aim of life is to keep death present mentally at all times as a means of living correctly. This tradition originated in early monastic culture, but spread through the preaching of the "mendicant orders". Numerous Dominican and Franciscan documents are full of references to the need to continual contemplation on death as the best means of preparing for death. The Ars Moriendi (The Art of Dying) was widely read starting in the middle of the fifteenth century and is considered to have been "a major weapon for mass pedagogy." While editions of this work nearly died out within 100 years, they were replaced by books of similar titles that promoted methods of living a Christian life (rather than strict contemplation on the horrors of death) as a means of preparing for death.

After this, literature on death "diversified". Some emphasized the moment of death as the crucial point for which Christians need be prepared. This theme

became so important that even Erasmus wrote that eternity depended entirely upon resisting temptation at that precise moment. Others emphasized the beauty of reaching that moment well prepared. By the seventeenth century we find considerable literature that praises death as a beautiful passageway to an eternal life free of cares and pain. Thus the macabre became less important in Christian discourse about death, although it did not disappear. The focus may shift on occasion to a preparation for death or to the beauty of death, but death in general never leaves the picture in this vast body of Christian literature.

One widely circulated legend recounts the story of three men who are out hunting when three cadavers confront them. Each cadaver is in a different stage of decomposition, bringing different reactions from the younger, older, and middle-aged man. The legend was depicted in frescoes, painting, miniatures, poetry, sermons, bookplates, illustrations, and on tombstones, leading to the impression that the story was widely known. In books in which the story is told, the three cadavers warn the three living men of their impending death, at which time all three repent and dedicate their lives to God in preparation for death.

There were a number of dance traditions of the Middle Ages that revolved around death. These generally involved songs whose themes were the "contempt for the world, the Last Judgment... and the decay of the body." These songs mirrored the Church's teachings in many ways. Perhaps the most important of these traditions has come to be known as the *danse macabre*. In this dance, Death (represented by a corpse) confronts people from a variety of walks of life and admonishes them to repent and prepare for their death. This theme was expressed in a variety of ways, all of which the Church appropriated for their "pedagogical

value." Even though the Church promoted the lessons of the *danse macabre*, society seems to have accepted and demanded those lessons as well, as we see from such items as cards printed with Death approaching people from various walks of life. The dance was performed through Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in a parade format in which Death leads people dancing to death. This procession always begins with the most powerful (the Pope) and ends with the poorest.

Chapter Three: Ambiguity of the Macabre

First and foremost, "the *danse macabre* was a sermon." It was first promoted widely by the Dominicans, and then later taken up by the Franciscans. Indeed we have numerous references of preaching taking place in the presence of the *danse macabre*, as well as of contemporary awareness of the instructive value of the *danse*. The *danse* would have been only one part of commonly accepted notions about visitors from the afterlife warning the living about the perils of sin and the necessity of dedicating life to God. In fact, it was part of a more general cultural representation of the relationship between God and man that included ideas and depictions of the Last Judgment, resurrection, Purgatory, and the "global history of salvation." This is why we cannot separate out the macabre as an isolated theme: it was surrounded by equally important teachings about the resurrection.

There can be no doubt that the Church was using the lessons of the *danse macabre* to attempt control what it perceived to be runaway licentiousness created by the emerging prosperity of the merchant classes. But why did this morbid emphasis on death suddenly appear at "the middle of the fourteenth century?"

The first answer is the return of the Plague in 1348, which killed one third of the population of Europe within four years. This coincided on the generational level with famines, attacks from Eastern Turks, and the Great Schism. All these things added up to an "omnipresence of violence" that contributed to a cult of death. The *danse* can be seen in part against this background as a way of dealing with unremitting death: it was at once "a form of exorcism and a manifestation of repentance," as well as being a sermon reminding all of "divine retribution, the brutality of death," and its equalizing effects.

The violence at this time was almost unimaginable. Public executions, tortures, and close-range killing in wars were common. Violent death was familiar to almost everyone. Against this background, the *danse macabre* was merely a representation of what people knew in reality: it made sense that the tortures that men inflicted upon each other should be multiplied upon evil-doers in the afterlife. The ubiquity of violence leads the scholar to surmise that perhaps not all of the iconic, sermonic, and artistic messages and representations were purely Christian. They may well have been expressions of perceptions about the nature of life. These may "converge toward a Christian message," but that does not imply that the intent was wholly Christian.

Thus what began as an ascetic ideal (*contemptu mundi*) and was translated into macabre representations whose intent was pedagogical eventually joined forces with societal and cultural forces to produce a general obsession with the macabre "for its own sake." Other interpretations became available, since one could consider the shortness of life to be an invitation to indulgence in carnal pleasure. Thus while we can see clearly the emergence and spread of the macabre throughout Europe in

the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries, we must not conclude necessarily that it was always employed by all people in the way that the Church originally intended it. It certainly gained a life of its own.

Chapter Four: A Sinful World

On a broad cultural level, the idea of *contemptu mundi* spread from the monasteries to society and combined with the ubiquitous presence of wars and famine to create an acceptance of and fascination with death. This mentality in turn inspired widespread pessimism about man's nature and the contemporary generation's corruption. This manifested itself in widespread complaints about "unprecedented calamities," and the world's loss of all goodness. In broadest terms, the themes we find repeated endlessly throughout this three hundred year period are "eschatological fears," "contempt for the world," a heightened sense of guilt, self hatred, and "a sharpened sense of the fragility of life."

This sense of despair over the state of the world led to accusations about the corruption of society and of the Church, as well as to a longing for days past in which purity reigned and people were content with the simple pleasures of life. Numerous books, poems, and sermons record complaints that the entire world is evil, that God's judgments are manifest everywhere, that men's natures have become corrupt, and many other similar laments. Protestants, Catholics, and laymen alike saw the world's state as the fulfillment of prophecy regarding the end of the world. Everyone predicted God's judgments to be at hand, and some recognized them in the Wars of Religion and the advances of the Turks. In their

most extreme form, these complaints begged God to punish the world by wiping it clean of human life and human corruption.

The Renaissance coincided with conflicting views of the theme of a Golden Age. Some writers portrayed the Golden Age as being in the past, idyllically described as a time without conflict, human cares, or strife. These utopian descriptions tell of an age of plenty in which the earth and its people were pure. Others saw the Golden Age constantly being ushered in with the advent of each new ruler. Despite the wars that surrounded them, they took hope in the renewed interest in letters and the new discoveries and explorations from all over the world. (Only one author [Jean Bodin] seems to have had the good sense to reject the myth of a perfect past, recognizing that the world has progressed in organization from savagery). These discoveries inspired wild speculation about pristine societies untouched by European corruption and promulgated the myth of the “noble savage” that many intelligent people took seriously. This, in turn provoked critiques of European society, economic prosperity, political systems, and worldly pretensions.

Renaissance thinkers also had a sense that the world was “upside down” as is expressed in their recurrent themes of the folly and perversion of mankind, and is represented in the artwork that shows Aristotle being humiliated by a prostitute or a prince trumped by a fool. Even this, however, seems to have been a conscious social release valve in which people were allowed to invert roles annually with the aim of releasing the social pressure of daily life.

Despite the apparent innocence of folly at carnival time that released social pressure, a large literature grew up that took seriously the equation between folly and sin. The inversion of the natural order of things (ignorant people seek to rule,

priests are corrupt, wise princes are despised, etc.) was evidence of sin and corruption. Sin and corruption lead to a reversal of the natural order of things where wisdom and purity are despised and decadence and ignorance are praised.

Beginning in the late fifteenth century, a number of books appeared that treated monstrous natural beings that reflected this general inversion of Nature. These books were popular until the early seventeenth century. Their popularity can be explained at least in part by a widely accepted correlation between the increased prevalence of sin and these strange phenomena. Intelligent people everywhere accepted the reality of such strange occurrences as babies being born with three heads, humans giving birth to donkeys, infants prophesying, and an increase of monsters, and claimed that these things demonstrated an immanent end to the world and God's displeasure with that world. Widespread acceptance of mankind's inherent sinfulness and wickedness intermingled with these interpretations of wonders as evidence of sin.

Chapter Five: Fragile Humanity

Despite the huge intellectual efforts and monumental discoveries of the Renaissance, many of its greatest thinkers despaired of the value of reason. Conjoined to this despair is a serious evaluation of mankind's freedom, often expressed by the intelligentsia of the age in religious terms of predestination and fate. Like many intellectual debates, that encompassing fate was dichotomized by a comparison with and a rebuttal of its opposite: Fortune (chance). Fortune affronted the serious mind because it implied that God was not in control of things at the

moment in which Fortune intervened. Since this defied "reason", it made sense that there was no such thing as Fortune.

This syllogism, however, hardly slowed the impression that the goddess Fortuna made in popular literature. She is often portrayed as holding sway over temporal affairs such as prosperity. Still there seems to exist an awareness among the literate that Fortune is a mere poetic device. In fact, it may be that Fortuna was a "name to designate the mysterious cause of numerous events for which no coherent explanation can be found." Thousands of editions of books during this time depict Fortuna as a goddess, but we have no way of knowing to what degree the popular imagination actually saw Fortuna as a goddess in the way that they might have seen Mary as a saint.

Fortune was associated with the humbling effects of life that lead to reversals in prosperity and to death. Because of her association with death, Fortune reached its literary apogee synchronously with the *danse macabre*. She is depicted repeatedly in art and iconography as holding blessings in one hand and curses in another; in strewing gold coins with the right hand and taking life with the left. Her inconstancy provided fodder for philosophical reflection, as she came to be the Christian's challenge and call to stoicism in times of trial. Equally optimistic, some literature claimed that Fortune was subject to the human will, and that the ill effects of Fortune only showed an individual's lack of mental resources in overcoming vicissitude. This same literature converted Fortune into man's servant, favoring the daring and rewarding the prepared and decisive. Even so, statements such as these that emphasize man's ability to overcome Fortune need to be understood against the backdrop of an intellectual milieu that accepted astrology as

a science. These diverse themes show the irregular and dissonant mental attitudes that Renaissance thinkers took toward Fortune. The preponderance of images and statements about Fortune are negative, contrasted with few that depict Fortune as a force to be overcome, or as the tool of the circumspect and assiduous.

Another topic of tremendous importance to this age is "melancholy": "an entire epoch thus devoted an inquiry to the nature and consequences of sorrow." Indeed an entire science grew up around the bodily fluids that, in their various amounts, created "humours" ("moods" or "dispositions"). This science aligned with astrology as well, as various planets were seen to control different humours, thereby inclining those born at certain times to certain dispositions. These elaborations spawned a literature of melancholy whose most famous work was Robert Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy, which went through dozens of editions in his lifetime. The literature reflected a general fascination with melancholy, which included elaborate praises that claimed that melancholy is a by-product of genius. The fascination was so widespread that "An entire book would not suffice to assemble all the citations that reveal the Renaissance elite's penchant for sadness."

While there were many praises of melancholy because of its association with genius and the creative or reflective spirit, there existed "a much older and deeper rejection of [this] undesirable temperament." Many manuals warn that melancholy ruins a happy life. Some even claimed that it was a punishment from God. As such, it was naturally associated with the sin of idleness, a connection with which contemporary science concurred. "Thus the epoch frequently linked sloth and melancholy: As a result, the moralists were able to add the latter to the traditional

list of deadly sin. Vice and malady therefore became entangled in a global instilling of guilt.”

The eventual conflation of melancholy and guilt inspired elaborate descriptions of the ways in which the Devil used melancholy to lead nuns into temptation, to distract the industrious to idleness and witchcraft, to inspire false visions, and to generally entice humans to “stray from eternal salvation.” The most extreme temptation was suicide, which was the ultimate act of despair. Renaissance thinkers reasoned that anyone could progress from sloth to melancholy to despair to suicide. But one can reason equally well in the opposite direction: from sin to despair.

Chapter Six: Focusing the Examination of Conscience

The preceding five chapters have treated the general pessimism of elite culture of Early Modern Europe. The following will treat more specifically “the central tenets of the doctrine of sin.”

The concept of sin as an offense against a deity did not exist in the Greco-Roman world. In fact the word for sinner in early Latin (“peccator”) did not exist in Classical Latin. Conversely, Hebrew religious writings and Greek mystery cults are rife with ideas about sin which Jesus’ biographers and Paul amplify and intensify. The fourth century brought a mild schism in the Church in which some denied that man could be redeemed of sin, spawning the need for writings about the need for repentance and the reality of sin.

“The science of sin took on a new dimension with Saint Augustine, who would henceforth reign as the master of this immense field. Christian theology would later

adopt his famous definition: 'sin is all action, word, or deed opposed to the eternal law.' The archbishop of Hippo represents moral failing now as an attack on the Creator's work, now as an injustice that violates God's sovereignty over man and the world." While the Church Fathers never ceased to harp on sin, Thomas Aquinas extended the scrutiny to new levels. His elaborate treatment of sin in the important Summa Theologica adds an important dimension to sin: negligence. From the Middle Ages onward sin is any act or failure to act that the Church defines as violating God's will in any way, no matter how minor.

While the early Church made careful distinctions about various kinds of sins, these eventually were reduced to only two lists: mortal and venial sins, and the seven Deadly sins. These lists underwent considerable refinement throughout the first thousand years of the Church's existence, with the seven Deadly sins solidifying with Aquinas. Of course lists of punishments appropriate to the sin accompanied the seven Deadly sins.

Perhaps the most important distinction even made regarding sin was regarding mortal and venial sins. Despite the lack of any scriptural reference to these two categories, Augustine insisted the venial sins could be cured through the common steps of prayer, fasting, and alms. Mortal sins, on the other hand, could only be forgiven through the Church's intervention "by virtue of the keys given to Saint Peter." The latter deserved damnation, while the former did not. This distinction paved the way for the logic that if one committed a mortal sin, one's only hope to avoid eternal damnation lay with doing whatever the Church required to offer its pardon. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 decreed that all mortal sins

needed to be confessed. "From then on it became necessary to decided in each case whether each sin was mortal or venial."

For many centuries, the Church developed elaborate rituals of penitence that involved confession, prayer, fasting, and alms. Because of the severity of the penalties (which could reach eleven years of fasting), a new system naturally developed called "penance by tariff" in which the guilty might substitute certain punishments for others, such as accepting lashings or paying fines instead of prolonged fasting.

During the eleventh century man's relationship to his own sins took a turn. Writings and manuals began to appear that emphasized "tears" as an essential element in repentance, a step that required that the sinner examine his own conscience. This new means of repentance eliminated the need of harsh punishments to be meted out on a case-by-case basis, and allowed confession in itself to permit remission of sins. Thus the Fourth Lateran Council mandated yearly confession to ensure that Christians appropriately examined their conscience and cleansed them through confession.

"This evolution toward a culture of guilt intersected with another that tended, during the same period, to fix the theology of the sacraments and... to aggrandize the powers of the clergy." Specifically, the sacrament of confession empowered the clergy with absolute control over absolution of sin, and thereby of the spiritual lives of all Catholics. This does not imply that the clergy welcomed this power. On the contrary, many resisted the mandatory interrogations, which resistance inspired the need for confessional manuals. This key point in history (at the start of the 13th century), saw the rise of the Dominicans and the Franciscans, who preached

everywhere the need to repent. Indeed, they wrote these manuals for the clergy, which explains their emphasis on the practice of eliciting a complete confession and the insistence on an appropriate judgment for each crime confessed.

While the Great Schism put an end to the publication of these elaborate manuals, they began to be published again after 1500. Luther attacked the Church most vehemently because of the practice of confession inspired by these manuals, which attack in turn inspired the Church to turn from strict equations of sins with punishments and to consider "a moral law inscribed in the individual conscience." This increased awareness of the importance of the individual conscience in preparing for confession (and in the general process of salvation) was reflected in a broad variety of vernacular literature that strove to catalogue and rank every conceivable sin, thereby demonstrating to clergy and layperson alike what the appropriate degree of remorse was for each crime. These manuals assisted the clergy in educating the common people about varieties of sins of which they never would have thought had they not been enumerated. Again, this is where Luther attacked, decrying the Church's efforts to propagandize the public in a ridiculous hierarchy of sins.

It is important to understand that these catalogues of sin were not mere lists that individuals reviewed in an effort to confess properly. They represented the Church's best effort to make sure that each and every individual felt appropriate guilt and made atonement for each and every possible sin in his life, because not doing so would incur God's wrath for neglect of even the smallest sin. Many manuals taught their readers that the Devil sought constantly to win mankind's soul through every possible temptation, which in turn were enumerated and reflected in

the aforementioned catalogue of sins. The only hope was constant self-introspection.

We find editions of confessional and penitential manuals at times running into the hundreds in dozens of languages, demonstrating how widespread was the concern with sin, conscience, guilt, confession, and salvation. Indeed there grew up a science of sin that can only be compared to biological works that catalogue the hierarchical relationship between and among species. One such manual (printed “continually” for over three centuries) catalogued 783 sins in the format of a tree whose pinnacle was the illustration of a dead body being hung by the neck.

The clergy did not have a monopoly on the literature of sins. Hundreds of secular works detailed sins, encouraged readers to confess and make attrition, and to do battle continually against the temptations of their own bodies. Indeed, the great epic poem of the age (Dante’s Inferno) was an essay on sin that “shows that from the fourteenth century on, even among laypeople, the formation of a guilt consciousness had become the main preoccupation of the ruling culture.” Indeed the most popular book written in the early modern era (Ship of Fools) was a continual meditation on sin and an exhortation to repentance.

Chapter Seven: The Realm of the Confessor.

Before approximately 1350 the word “envy” rarely if ever appears in literature or penitential manuals. After that time it begins to appear hundreds of times within single works. The same is true of paintings and iconography. By 1500 elaborate poems, stories, and manuals work out the precise punishments for those

guilty of envy, and confessors are instructed to inquire directly into an individual's sins of envy.

At this same time lust began to gain importance and force in the catalogues of sin. It was ranked at times as a graver crime than murder. Manuals repeatedly condemned even sexual thoughts between married people. Likewise the Church condemned all sexual positions except one, and restricted many times of year, hours of the day, and places where lovers might commit this terrible act.

Nonetheless, there were voices of reason throughout this age that declared that marital sex was without sin, although they were in the minority. This tension over what was sin and what was not (typified by some who claimed that every thought was as delectable as murder and some who claimed that there was no sin in the marital act) caused real problems for the confessor who would not have known precisely what was sin and what was not. This confusion did not stop confessors from inquiring into the details of sexual habits of their parishioners. We may, in fact, safely describe this emphasis on sexual behavior as an attempt to develop a science of sex wherein confession is the rubric of measurement. The result was an inordinate "investigation of sexuality" across Western European civilization.

This investigation was equaled perhaps only in matters of economics. "During a time of economic expansion and the rise of commercial capitalism, Christian civilization conducted an intense self-inquiry regarding the propriety of mercantile and banking transactions." One council went so far as to declare lending money for profit "heretical". Some sinners were even assigned the penance of accusing usurers. Nonetheless, in practice the Church had no choice but to abide the

hypocrisy of usury because of its own necessities and because of the complexities in tracking transactions in early modern capitalism.

Taken together, casuist investigations into human sexuality, usury, or any other sin emerged as a widespread campaign to instill guilt and make each individual indebted to the Church for means to escape perdition. Iconography was one of the most effective methodologies of reaching the popular mind with the contrast between goodness and sin, represented best by myriad paintings of Vice and Virtue, or the Seven Deadly Sins. These sins were quickly related to the Beast of the Apocalypse and to figures of humans tempted in seven different ways. This iconography is often oddly obsessed with torture. Saints undergo unspeakable terrors; sinners are punished with unimaginable pain, etc. For the better part of three centuries, Western Europe was inundated by a conscious effort to instill guilt through preaching, iconography, teaching, literature, and lecture.

Chapter Eight: Original Sin

In order to understand the emergence of a Western guilt culture, it is essential to locate the original sin and its consequences firmly as “a catastrophe initiating all history.” Original sin was not always an essential part of Christian doctrine. In fact, we find no importance attached to it for the first two centuries. Only then do Church Fathers such as Origen and Tertullian begin elaborate explanations of original sin that Augustine would later adopt. By 418 the doctrine of original sin had gained such theological efficacy that the Council of Carthage affirmed the eternal condemnation of children who died without baptism. This

doctrine's force and darkness were strongest, however, from 1400 to 1700: the period of the emergence of a Western guilt culture.

One contemporary writer noted that all the doctrinal battles of these centuries (and often their wars) were fought over the single point of whether people needed baptism to overcome original sin. The drama of the fall of Adam was played out myriad times in mystery plays, iconography, sermons, stained glass, tapestries, songs, carols, vases, and paintings. Hundreds of works appeared in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that portrayed the fall and discussed its existential consequences. Every Catholic child began his catechism answering questions about Adam's sin and its consequences for mankind. Indeed, it is difficult to underestimate the doctrine's impact on all levels of society during this age.

Since God could not have been the origin of evil, people believed that evil entered the world through mankind's actions; in particular Adam's disobedience. This disobedience cost humanity eternal bliss in the Garden of Eden, which was extravagantly and repeatedly described throughout the period in question. In the process of understanding the historical roots of sin and guilt, it is important to remember that virtually everyone in Western Europe believed in the reality of Eden, and hence in the sin that brought the punishment that banished mankind from it. In this way Eden reinforced ideas about sin.

Two things made this sin and all others inexcusable: first, that all mankind inherited it; second, that mankind's natural inclinations towards evil would always lead him back to sin. These tenets imply that ignorance is no excuse for sin, as Augustine taught: "Ignorance does not excuse any man to the point of preventing his burning in the eternal fire, even if the cause for his ignorance is his not having

fully understood that which he must believe..." In citing Augustine, we should remember the huge influence he had over Renaissance thinkers, his authority ranking on the order of the Bible itself.

Nowhere is the importance of original sin upon the collective mentality of Western Europe more visible than in the contemporary "sanctuaries of resuscitation." People took their recently deceased, un-baptized children to these buildings or areas in order to perform masses or other rites that would bring the child back to life long enough to administer the sacrament of baptism. We have records of hundreds of these sanctuaries throughout Western Europe, whose locations align themselves well with monasteries, indicating that the monastic orders were complicit in promoting both the possibility and the necessity of temporary resuscitation for the sake of baptism.

Even those who did not use these sanctuaries (they were not everywhere, after all) worried greatly about expediently baptizing their children so that they might escape eternal condemnation. Preachers were interrupted in the middle of sermons to baptize sick children, and parents converted to Catholicism from Protestantism if priests would agree to bring a child back to life to administer baptism. Indeed, the doctrine of original sin was so strong at this time that Protestant preachers had little success in convincing their parishioners that children were innocent and that they need not fear for a child's salvation. Parents routinely preferred the Catholic Church at these moments because the Church possessed a rite that would guarantee passage into Heaven, rather than a doctrine that did so.

Chapter Nine: The Mass of Perdition and the System of Sin

Up until Augustine, it was fairly common to find writings that emphasized the widespread salvation of mankind. After Augustine (and consequently during the period in question) we find a broad pessimism about mankind's hope for salvation. Augustine taught that only a tiny fraction of Christians would be saved, and this doctrine was taken up time and time again from the 13th until the 18th centuries. The doctrine was occasionally softened by the idea that man could not know God's judgments, but rarely by the view that salvation would reach the majority of people.

This pessimism toward the availability of salvation was sustained by a widespread belief in mankind's evil nature. We have ample lamentations that man's sins are so great that God is justified punishing any and all before they sin because he knows that all will sin gravely, since to do so is in man's nature. "Inevitably, the perpetual stress on sin tended to enlarge the terrifying image of God as Judge." God is portrayed as the most terrible judge, seeking out sinners at every opportunity, hunting them down like worthless beasts, and punishing them with unimaginable torments. Some authors even noted that God was so cruel that he abandoned his own son to immeasurable pains and temptations.

All these ideas about sin and guilt added up to a collective guilt complex across Western European civilization. This manifested itself as a "pathological deviance... that focuses... on the evocation of sin and which narrows its aim to the fight against sinning." In such mental circumstances the individual subjects himself to internal torments that parallel those he imagines await him in an effort to free himself of pain of future punishments through his own expiatory efforts. Thus God,

self-hatred, and punishment become linked. Likewise individual sinners within communities run the risk of infecting the community and bringing punishment upon all, thereby justifying the harsh treatment of heretics, witches, and the like. The terrible calamities that beset the European populace from 1350 until 1650 inspired further links between sin and punishment, since no other explanation sufficed to allay the fears of contemporary mentalities. The monastic movements within Catholicism guided these large mental movements against a background of wars, plague, and emerging economies, with the aim of collectivizing guilt and inspiring universal asceticism.

Chapter Ten: Religious "Uneasiness"

Throughout this age people of both high and low culture reflected endlessly upon their pain of being unrelenting sinners. The pangs of conscience inspired by their self-loathing brought on desires for self-castigation which, when read in detail, can only be called horrific. Nonetheless, their examples of self-inflicted torments were embellished, praised, and imitated. Some did so out of sheer self-hatred, others out of a desire to pay the price of sin now in order to avoid it later. Whatever the reason for the self-torture, they would all be described now as manifestations of mental illness, while at the time they were the highest actions of noble minds bent on pleasing God. Indeed, "one becomes overwhelmed by perplexity and vertigo in looking at these examples of shocking mortifications extracted from the long annals of Christian sanctity."

The need to inflict pain arose from continual self-introspection and condemnation. While the act of self-scrutiny and the resultant guilt may seem

natural enough, we find no such activities in the Eastern Church, nor do we find widespread mention of them in the Latin Church before the age in question, leading one to conclude that this malady was culturally circumscribed. (Even Aquinas did not pay much attention to conscience and scruples.)

In its most extreme form, self-examination equated temptation with sin, such that even idle thoughts made the sinner think of yet more means of repenting. The never-ending ritual of conscience leads to yet another sin: despair. Unable to control every mental image and repent quickly enough of it, the sinner despairs of his own ability to make good to God. In this light, every small matter seems great, leading many to confuse venial with deadly sins, thereby further necessitating ever more confession and repentance.

This never-ending process of self-scrutiny and repentance manifests itself in obsessive behavior that never tires of repeating holy ritual with the fear that some one thing has been done incorrectly. Records indicate these measures were not entirely self-inspired, but rather often instigated and sustained by the clergy. The clergy often insisted upon elaborate confessions and penitential processes, and then cross-examined those who did not know better as to whether there was not some small sin left un-confessed. People subjected to such mental convolutions inspired others, inventing a "collective... obsessional neurosis." The process of inspiring scrupulous behavior worked too well, for we have many records of advice about how to avoid over-scrupulous behavior and obsessive introspection.

Chapter Eleven: The Diffusion of a Religious Doctrine

The first ten chapters stressed ideas about sin and fear in high culture in Western European culture. They also suggested how these ideas might have spread to lower orders of literate society. The following chapters will explain how ideas and doctrines about sin and fear were transmitted to the majority of Christian society, regardless of social rank.

Preaching was the most common method for disseminating and instilling fear in the common people. Typical of the sermons of the day, one preacher invited his parishioners to anticipate Hell in every way: "Descend with your minds into this abyss.... Go down there in advance. What will you find? Sacrilegious people like you, blasphemers like you, voluptuaries like you, misers like you, slandering and vindictive people like you, in a word, sinners like you." People of the day were subjected constantly to accusations of being sinners, the aim being to convert through fear. One preacher filled his congregation with the promise to show the people the Devil in flesh and blood, and then told them to look around at each other, for they were all the Devil incarnate.

Preachers commonly adorned their sermons with props such as skulls, sometimes adorned with beautiful wigs. They also staged elaborate productions involving dialogues between the living and the dead, illuminated moving skulls and crucifixes, and used processions of flagellants and penitents imitating the Passion. These productions commonly motivated the people into orgies of self-flagellation and penitence. Some of these productions inspired thousands of people to wear crowns of thorns, carry crosses, flay themselves, and walk with chains while crying and screaming.

Sermons were supplemented by "tableau": visual representations of scenes ranging from the crucifixion to the danse macabre. The most popular during the seventeenth century seem to have been depictions of hearts (usually capped by a head) representing various object lessons. They commonly told a story, such as a sinner being converted, attempting repentance, failing, dying and falling prey to the Devil, and the blissful eternity that awaited him if he had remained holy.

The setting for these sermons was equally important. Often, "they took place in cemeteries, beside and open grave." They preached at night in dim torchlight and commonly provoked highly emotional reactions from the crowd. The preachers orchestrated responses through song-like repetitions of phrases in which the congregation repeated key phrases at moments designed to terrify. This commonly caused mass hysteria within the crowd as everyone wailed, cried, and rolled on the ground.

Preachers commonly used and abused the Bible to create within the crowd the impression and emotion that they desired. Virtually any scripture could be used metaphorically to return some lesson, such as when Jesus instructs one of his disciples to loosen a colt and an ass and bring them to him: the preacher claimed that in the same way, the priest loosens the people from sin and brings them to Christ.

The aim throughout the centuries was conversion. Preachers saw themselves as engaged in a war in which they much rouse and shake the sleepy adherents of Christianity to action and repentance. "The clergy believed they were pursuing in Europe a task comparable to that which overseas missionaries were attempting among the pagans." Still, it appears that despite the hysteria, their message was

often greeted with indifference, as witnessed by a journal entry of the sixteen year old Laurence Balzac: "Today is Sunday... The preacher preached to us on the last judgment, and on the vicissitudes of the grandeurs of this world; after the sermon there was no individual who would not have thought himself burnt, damned. As for me, my legs were so cold that I perceived I was not yet in hell; thus you see me disposed to recommence my deadly crimes, going to the theater, to balls, concerts, in all these worldly and depraved places."

Chapter Twelve: Think on It Well

"Among its terrifying themes, the evangelism of fear obviously includes death" as one of its major components. While the age in question produced many works preoccupied with death, the publications emphasizing a preparation for death reached their apogee in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. These works emphasized the necessity of meditating on death in order to receive it free of sin. Some recommended keeping skulls nearby, exposing children to dying people, or digging up graves. People were admonished to both fear death and welcome it; it was at once the great equalizer of all mankind and the great opportunity for anyone to pass the ultimate test and receive Heaven. But whether an author chose to emphasize the horrors or the opportunities of death, he dwelt upon the macabre.

Likewise the sermons and hymns of these centuries are replete with intense images of death and severe admonitions toward pondering the consequences of sin as they pertain to death. We find the same contradictory themes of the horrors of death and the desirability of the grave as the passageway to Heaven. Evangelical sermons tend to emphasize more harshly the terrors of death, while Sunday

sermons hold out more hope for the glories of Heaven after a life well lived. But both recommend that the Christian think constantly on death as the only means to assuredly combat temptation. These images of death were almost always filled with horrific pain. Preachers describe sinners feeling such acute pain that burning coals on their skin would seem a relief by comparison.

Preachers also found useful the theme of the suddenness of death, which they claimed came upon the sinner with greater frequency than the saintly. God, it seems, waits on the sinner to take him at the moment that he least expects and robs him of the chance to repent. Of course the sinner is destined to be overtaken by the horrors of a guilty conscience when there is no hope for expiation because death is at hand. In these sermons God is often made to laugh at the deathbed repentant.

Chapter Thirteen: The Tortures of the Afterlife

There can be no doubt that one of the principle aims of preaching during the age in question was to create "a traumatized mass conviction" through shocking and horrific images of the pains of the damned. Both the Old and the New Testaments are full of such images. Of course preachers dramatized Biblical passages greatly, painting verbal pictures of unending torment for the sinner. A lengthy theological discourse grew up to support logically the justice of infinite tortures for finite sins.

Fire was the favorite image. Preachers detailed the myriad ways that the sinner would be subject to eternal flames, claiming that the flames would heat the sinners' bodies the way that steel is heated: glowing red hot without being

consumed. A typical example is: "Fire, fire: such is the reward for your perversity, you stubborn sinners. Fire, fire, the fire of hell. Fire in your eyes, fire in your mouth, fire in your bowels, fire in your throat, fire in your nostrils, fire within, fire without; fire below, fire above, fire all about. Ah wretches, you will be like burning embers in the middle of this fire." In thousands of like passages there seems to be no end to the creativity employed in describing the sadistic tortures that await he who fails to repent of even one small sin.

Gradually throughout the course of the Middle Ages the concept of Purgatory (with all its attendant rites, rituals, beliefs, and indulgences) entered popular mental reality. Different theologians and preachers emphasized different aspects of Purgatory, some claiming that its punishments and tortures equaled those of Hell, while others claimed that souls there were blessed with the comfort of knowing that their pain would soon end and they would enter Paradise. Those preachers who were offended by the opportunities for repentance that Purgatory logically offered portrayed Purgatory as just another Hell and claimed that humans were stupid to think that its pains were bearable; the only reasonable thing to do would be to avoid sin or repent of it in this life.

In an effort to escape the inviting hopefulness of a soul's finite time in Purgatory, preachers emphasized its horrific tortures and their seeming endlessness. While they admitted that Purgatory's tortures might end in expiation, they counted each millennium as a grain of sand in a million earths made of sand. By this hyperbole they sought to instill the desirable option of confession, repentance, absolution, and hopefully, a saintly life of absolute negation of all pleasure. To prove their point about the incomprehensibility of the duration of these

tortures, they cited the Pope's 74,000-year indulgence to a certain group of holy men; the preacher intended the congregation to extend the logic to the actual length of their trials if they were forgiven 74,000 years of torment through an indulgence.

Finally, the Church linked the fate of the souls in Purgatory to the living by performing elaborate theater sermons in which the dead cried out for help and pleaded with the living to "celebrate masses, visit churches, acquire indulgences, give alms, and take communion." In doing so they preyed upon the delicate and naïve mentalities of people who believed in their role in freeing the damned from Purgatory only because they were told to believe so, and only to alleviate them of what little money they had.

Chapter Fourteen: A Lynx-Eyed God

A lengthy and careful examination of contemporary sermons indicates a never-ending fascination with the final judgment. Preachers invented ridiculously elaborate scenes of carnage and punishment in which God rains down blood, calls beasts of every kind to attack men, causes the oceans to drown humanity, and myriad other terrible punishments. At this moment of the end of the earth, when the most terrible disasters befall all of mankind, God's mercy ends. He will instantly become pitiless, vengeful, rancorous, and vindictive, repaying every sin of every kind at once with physical punishments on those who happen to be alive.

These sermons were used to induce both fear and shame. One of the essential themes of this eschatological preaching was the announcement of sinners'

sins. Preachers claimed that every hidden thought and every small sin would be announced to everyone... to the sinners' unimaginable shame.

On the other hand, the last judgment would also serve to put everything right in the world. Those who flouted God's laws would be punished, while those who were faithful would receive rewards. The poor would be more powerful than kings, and the noble would be humiliated. At last there would be justice in the world. This would also serve as the time when the poor and the faithful could mock the rich and the sinful and rejoice in their punishments. Indeed, the Church intended this as a powerful incentive toward obedience among the poor.

There should be no mistake, however, that the actual number of those saved in God's Kingdom would be very, very few. While few sermons were preached consistently on this topic (evidently because of its disheartening premise), they were nonetheless important. Preachers used this shocking message to inspire repentance, to remind Christians that salvation was within their own power, and to clarify how little it took to condemn oneself to Hell. Sermons harped on the point that one single un-confessed idle thought automatically condemned even the most righteous man to an eternity of punishment: proof of how few would go to Heaven, and proof of God's justice being more powerful and more important than his mercy.

Chapter Fifteen: Sin and Sins

"The absolute definition of sin, the result of studied theological conceptualizing, was translated for the general public by an evangelical campaign that spoke in sensational phrases and striking analogies." To better understand how sensational and how striking these images of sin were, consider the following from

a Spanish sermon: "If all the calamities, disasters, and evils that ever visited the earth since its creation, and will visit to the end of time, as well as all the tortures of hell, were all put together in one scale, and but one single deadly sin in the other, the latter would weigh more heavily." Preachers extended this logic to minor sins, claiming that even a thoughtless glance could so offend God as to discharge the sinner to Hell for all eternity. In its most extreme (and ludicrous) form, this logic claimed that one should not commit even the smallest sin to save the entire world.

The obvious pedagogical intent of this discourse is to inspire guilt and fear. This is why sermons constantly harped on the necessity of examining one's conscience in the minutest detail. This led to examples of people who pleaded with God for punishment for their sins; highlighting the irony that as punishment was the consequence of sin, it was also the only means of expiation and escape.

This obsession with sin led naturally to detailed catalogues of sin that ranked each according to severity and importance. But the frequency of occurrence of sins within the context of sermons tells us more about what was actually taught than the catalogues tell us. Preachers in fact "dwelt on three sins above all others: the love of money, lust, and envy." Of these, money and lust certainly occupied the majority of evangelical attention.

The problem of lust naturally inspired a hatred of the human body. Christians throughout this period were admonished to avoid nudity, glances at any bare skin, and to treat one's own body "as a sworn enemy." Those who belonged to monastic orders never bathed for fear of nudity (except for medicinal purposes). Likewise dancing, which involved bodily movements and touching was condemned. Even

wrong belief (heresy) was believed to have been rooted in lasciviousness. In this regard, a carnal thought is compared to murder, both lasting only seconds yet condemning the soul equally to hell. Even marriage was considered "dangerous" because it allowed physical contact between the sexes.

Of course there were endless varieties of sexual concupiscence that preachers and priest railed against. They abhorred contact between fiancée and fiancé, masturbation, flirting among teenagers, wet dreams, kissing, and virtually any activity that involved pleasure leading to arousal, arousal itself, or the sexual act in any of its varieties. After a long rant against human sexuality, one preacher cried out, "My God! Did you not create a hell in the center of the earth? And why have you not ordered it to open and swallow up so many wicked and low-minded" people?

Chapter Sixteen: The Ascetic Model

This chapter argues that "preachers presented the *contemptus mundi* to the masses as Gospel truth and that they most frequently identified the world we live in as the realm of Satan." This began with the doctrine of original sin, which provided for a discourse that "devalued human life." This discourse entailed primarily an attack on the human body and its miserable inclinations towards the pleasures of the flesh, such as eating, drinking, dancing, and sexuality. The only answer to these temptations was to be found in their opposites; examples of these were to be found in ascetic practice.

Writers of the age praised monastics and the early Church Fathers who lived lives of unrelenting self-denial. They praised sailors, who lived on meager rations,

spoke little to others, and subjected their bodies to the tortures of midnight watches on empty horizons. Repeatedly "saintliness equals asceticism." This asceticism encompassed not merely self-denial, but self-affliction: "One must afflict the body to strengthen the spirit." The prescription was penance in the form of self-torment. While this advice seems odd to modern ears, it was as serious as most popular psychology is today. People listened to it in Church every Sunday, allowed their consciences to be guided by it, and many took it to heart.

A second recommendation came in the form of an admonition to reject all kinds of amusements and seek out solitude amidst nature. This required a rejection of all happy things. Laughter should be avoided, parents should teach their children to be solemn at all times, and all frivolity should be shunned as the Devil's game. Preachers everywhere taught that any time spent on a matter that did not enhance the possibility of salvation was a waste of time.

The Church anticipated the objection that most people worked so hard for six days of the week that they earned one day of relaxation from cares: What better way to relax than doing penance for sins, praying, conversing on godly topics, and taking one's mind far from the cares of the world? In this matter the poor had an advantage of which they were constantly reminded: that without the means to indulge in physical pleasures, they had ample opportunities to indulge in the rewards of the spirit. The poor were told repeatedly that they should not complain of their poverty because it was God's gift to them. Some sermons go so far as to say that the poor should rejoice that they are skin and bones because when the rich die they will be more food for worms, while the poor will be so skinny that the worms will reject their bodies.

While this last example is extreme, the message of asceticism throughout this period was not seen to be extreme. It was, in fact, the ideal to which all Christians were admonished to strive.

Chapter Seventeen: The Difficulty of Obligatory Confession

At the same time that the Catholic Church was becoming increasingly obsessed with confession, the laity was becoming increasingly resistant to it. No doubt part of the Reformation's appeal lay in freeing the common man from the necessity of confession to the local priest in order to be forgiven. Church writers seemed aware of the fact that most people avoided a complete (or truthful) confession. This led naturally to "an extraordinary fight against the stubborn silence of the people." Recognizing that the people hid their sins and habits from local priests who knew them, visiting preachers took advantage of the anonymity and heard confessions for hours on end with their eyes hidden to minimize the shame that people might experience.

Preachers developed a detailed and aggressive logic to coerce sinners to confess. They asked why one should be ashamed to admit what one was not ashamed to do; they asked if they would prefer to wait until the Final Judgment to confess their sins to God rather than a priest; they asked if a pregnant young woman thought that the sin that created her new child could be hidden along with her confession.

But the Church wanted more than confession: it wanted shame. Its preachers admonished the guilty that their confession without heartfelt pangs of conscience was worthless. This very shame that it sought to inspire was also the

sticking point in confession: very often people neglected to confess sins out of shame. This caused a huge practical problem because the Church maintained that even a single un-confessed sin would damn the sinner to hell for all eternity. Thousands upon thousands of printed references are available that make it clear that the Church insisted upon this point directly, metaphorically, and allegorically. When those did not work, scare tactics were in order: preaching that claimed that God himself would publicly reveal in the most humiliating fashion each and every sin that was not confessed. "The obsession with 'exact' confession was one of the main and most definite causes for the Roman church's use of an evangelism of fear."

Indeed the Church's primary aim of this evangelism was to inspire confession: "the primary motive for the foundation of missionary congregations was the desire to overcome the obstacles to complete confession." These missionaries were so completely convinced of the exigencies of confession that they spoke and wrote in military terms, decrying the "slaughter of souls" due to failed confession. They called weak confession "the greatest plague" of their world. This conviction inspired them to preach in the most horrific terms of the terrors that awaited the damned who failed in even the smallest point to make a complete and sincere confession of all sins. This strategy worked well; we have records of numerous lay people coming to confess after terrible nightmares in which they see themselves damned for the very infractions preached in the missionary sermons.

The clergy reserved an especially harsh treatment for those who took communion without proper confession and repentance. "Preachers repeatedly asserted that anyone who receives communion shamefully is a deicide, a new

Judas...” They consistently ranked communion without proper repentance as the gravest sin in Christianity. Priests asked those who were about to take first communion if they were prepared to kill God and trample his body under their feet, i.e., take communion without proper confession.

Chapter Eighteen: The Catholic Doctrinal Campaign: An Attempt at Quantification

Printed books throughout the period in question touching on the topic of preparation for death amounted to approximately 2%-7% of those printed in France. Sermons, however, show a different picture, partially because the theme of “preparation for death” in itself was only one means of instilling guilt and fear. A very broad statistical analysis of sermons indicates that 38.3% were “predominantly guilt-instilling or disturbing,” while 34.8% were “predominantly reassuring,” and 26.9% were a mixture of the two.

The Church undertook numerous missions to preach and convert Catholics to repentance. Extensive research indicates that both individuals and communities undertook thousands of preaching missions whose primary focus (by their own confession) was fear. One diarist records the following revealing summary of his town’s common experience with preachers: “Usually the ardent and voluble preacher, knowing the level of his audience’s intelligence and understanding, and seeking to prove them guilty beyond the shadow of a doubt, almost every Sunday would demonstrate, in a simplistic way, that everyone there had violated many commandments and prescriptions. As these violations were serious sins, they would be punished not only on earth but would undoubtedly lead to hell. Thus the poor

people would see themselves in that place, and would tremble at its description. This exaggeration would transport a great many of the more sensitive listeners into a nearly pathological trance... The women were particularly prone to sobbing, and lose heart, not only during the sermon but for the rest of the week.”

Many other researchers in the topic concur that the Church’s primary means of controlling the actions of its adherents was the exaggerated instillation of fear.

Chapter Nineteen: “You Are a Terrifying Word, Eternity”

Despite a firm theological foundation in Protestant culture that insisted on salvation by grace that freed the Christian from the psychological torments of hellish preoccupation, Protestant sermons nonetheless mirrored their Catholic counterparts in their conscious juxtaposition of fear and hope. Manuals defining preaching methodologies admonish the Protestant preacher to address “the love of God and the hatred of sin, the fear of chastisement and the trust in the Savior.”

Still, the doctrine of original sin was extremely important in the Protestant world. Protestants were encouraged to meditate on and draw conclusions from the extensively corrupting nature of original sin, and to leverage the fear that this recognition inspired into self-delivery to God in hopes of his mercy. Indeed in Protestant culture there were no works of expiation available to the sinner to rid himself of the guilt and hopelessness brought on by his permanent state of sin.

Despite the doctrine of grace and perhaps because of the harsh insistence on original sin, and again in spite of reliance upon God’s mercy, Protestant preachers consistently and consciously used horrifying sermons with the express intent of converting sinners to God.

Chapter Twenty: Shared Aspects of Protestant and Catholic Doctrinal Programs

There exist a surprising number of doctrinal and practical coincidences between the Protestant and Catholics worlds regarding sin and fear. Protestants preached the value of contemplating death, and their inexpensive (and therefore widely available) literature consistently portrays Death iconographically. Manuals on the preparation for death dominated seventeenth English publishing.

Not uncommonly the theme of God's judgment dominated Protestant sermons, with grave emphasis on its unmerciful nature. They stressed (as did Catholics) the horrors that awaited sinners in this life and in the next. This rhetoric was aimed naturally at inspiring conversion and regulating Christian conduct. These themes were especially profligate in America and Puritan England, although they can be found in Swedish and German countries as well. Indeed, all of the major themes surrounding fear in Catholic preaching and dogma can be found in Protestant discourse.

Chapter Twenty-one: Eschatology and Predestination

Protestant eschatology of the age in question occasionally entered extreme realms, leading some preachers to proclaim not only the end of the world, but the necessity of destroying all those who stood in their way of cleansing it from sin before it ended. The majority, however, were content to preach the end of the world without the need for violence. Luther, among others, saw himself in a direct personal battle with Satan, who used the world's sinfulness and the struggles within

Christianity to lure as many souls as possible to his side before the end. He therefore preached the necessity for conversion because the end was near. The corrupt state of the world (represented by the Pope and his followers) was the surest sign of the end. Protestantism became the true Christianity, surrounded on all sides by papists and Turks, trying to defend itself against Satan's onslaughts until the end, which was at hand.

While there is considerable evidence that many people did not take seriously predictions about the end of the world, preferring to laugh at preachers who constantly predicted things that did not happen, eschatology nonetheless increased and influenced a considerable number of people. Throughout the seventeenth century we have numerous detailed "prophecies" about the events that would precede the end of the world: the unification of Christendom, the conversion of France, the defeat of the Turks, the destruction of Rome, etc. Indeed, England took this eschatology very seriously, as we find a huge body of literature associating the successes of the Reformation in England with the pending end of the world.

It is surprising to the modern mind (but certainly not to the contemporary one) the degree to which all major historical events were interpreted in terms of a religious framework, much of which consisted of signs of the end of the world. Those who considered God to have been on their side (which of course was everyone) saw hope in the end since their deliverance would be final. Every year was marked by terrible or propitious events portending the final judgment: alternately a cause for celebration or despair.

Amidst this highly charged atmosphere of pending judgment, the world seemed divided cleanly into two camps. Protestants everywhere labeled all things

Catholic as part of the kingdom of the Antichrist. "Christians" were urged to take up arms against "the Beast". These members of Antichrist's kingdom had been "tolerated for too long." We see an alarming amount of militarism pervading contemporary discourse that sought to explain the evils of the world and combat them with force. Indeed Protestants were encouraged to have recourse to the sword in combating anything that could be labeled "Antichrist" and therefore be in league with Satan.

Returning more closely to the topics of sin and fear, the questions of predetermination and election by grace form an important frame around discussions of psychological impact of sin and fear in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Mankind may be free to choose within the quotidian affairs of life, but in matters of salvation, he is in no way free. Protestants were nearly completely united in the idea that God determined the end of man's soul. Yet while they were able to agree that God controlled the soul's destination, they could not agree on the endless doctrines that arose from this idea. Nonetheless, their discourse did react unilaterally to Catholic preaching that emphasized man's sinful state and his lack of hope for salvation. Protestant sermons tended to be more hopeful, encouraging believers to trust that salvation awaited them.

The question of predestination naturally gave rise to fears and speculations about those who were damned from all eternity. Protestant preachers often sought to soften popular anxiety on this theme, while others preached the necessity of fear on the path to true conversion. This tension between the individual's conversion and God's role in salvation led naturally to an anxiety that could never be alleviated: "Thus the elect are in theory certain of their salvation, though in practice

they continue to go through fits of anxiety.” A detailed analysis of sermons of the age reveals tremendous confusion regarding the relationship between dogma and psychology. They more consistently demonstrate a love of rhetorical device than dogmatic (or even scriptural) coherence. They are most often a morass of contradictions that admonish people to repent, convert, and do good, while taking comfort in the contradictory fact that God has predetermined each individual’s salvation or damnation without allowing himself to be swayed by their repentance, conversion, or good works.

“The areas of research that the previous three chapters have explored converge toward the same conclusion: The evangelism of fear undeniably existed in the Protestant world, despite the positive aspect that the Reformers sought to impart to the doctrine of justification by faith.”

This study has shown “the religious discourse’s slide from the moderate to the excessive, as well as its astonishing misuse of biblical quotations.... The discourse of fear most often leaned on garbled references or misunderstood texts.” Why? Because out of this misunderstanding and abuse arose a consistent rhetoric of the necessity of fear and the inevitability of sin that were used to control the minds and actions of the masses. The historical context of the dissemination of learning through the Franciscan and Dominican orders coinciding with the huge natural and social calamities of the age (the Black Plague, the Thirty Years War, the Reformation, the Counterreformation, etc.) goes far to explain the age’s extremism. What cannot be so easily explained is the perseverance of these ideas centuries after the calamities subsided, their explanations became vacuous, and we recognized the utter confusion of their foundation.