

Miettinen, Riikka: 'Lord, have mercy on me'. Spiritual Preparations for Suicide in Early Modern Sweden.' In *Dying Prepared in Medieval and Early Modern Northern Europe*. Eds. Anu Lahtinen & Mia Korpiola. Brill: Northern World, 2017, 160–186.

Chapter 8.

“Lord, have mercy on me:” Spiritual Preparations for Suicide in Early Modern Sweden

Riikka Miettinen

Introduction

In the night time in early June 1684, Reinholt Lorenz, a tree carrier in the Nacka ironworks in Svartlösa near Stockholm, drowned himself in a lake near his workplace. Reinholt, already an old man in his 70s, had for quite some time been low-spirited and had been kept watch over due to his previous attempts on his own life. A day before his demise, he had rushed to confess his great sins, including adultery and perjury, to the nearby chaplain who had absolved him and given him Holy Communion. Later, the chaplain recalled that Reinhold had taken to heart especially his sin of adultery that he had committed a long time ago. In his lifetime, Reinhold had been a devout churchgoer and received Communion the usual four times a year. The lower court of Svartlösa sentenced that Reinhold's corpse should be picked up from the lake by the executioner, taken to the woods and burnt there at the stake, as decreed for the sane suicides in the secular law in force at the time.¹

Later, like in the case of most felonies, the Svea Court of Appeal reviewed the case, concluding that he had not been out of his mind and had killed himself because of his great gloom and bad conscience over his sins. The Court of Appeal revised the form of punishment, following the legal praxis of the time, and ordered that Reinhold was to be buried by the executioner instead of being cremated in the forest.²

¹ Uppsala landsarkivet (ULA, Provincial Archives of Uppsala, Uppsala, Sweden), Uppsala länsstyrelsens arkiv, Landskansliet D II d:7, Svartlösa 16 June 1684.

² Ibid. and Riksarkivet (RA, National Archives of Sweden, Stockholm, Sweden), Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar, Juridica I, Becchius-Palmcrantz' juridiska samlingar, 5, pp. 3-4. Svea Court of Appeal used its discretionary powers to mitigate the letter of the law (*leuteration*) and typically revised the forms of punishment for suicide; e.g., the sane suicides were almost without exception allowed burials conducted by the executioners in the woods or other hinterlands. Visible, e.g.,

Like in most of Europe at the time,³ secular law of the Swedish Realm punished suicides by deviant burials or disposals of their corpses. Self-killing was included in the chapter on felony of the King Christopher's Law of 1442,⁴ in force until 1736.⁵ According to the law, suspected suicides were to be investigated in the local district courts where a judge and 12 lay members of the court should determine the guilt. The penalty was directed at the corpse: the executioner was to handle the cadaver, transport it to the woods and burn it there at the stake. However, if it was established that the accused had been insane, the corpse was exempted from the executioner's shameful treatment and could be interred somewhere outside the churchyard by the bereaved or others. In Sweden, unlike in many other regions,⁶ the Crown could not in any case confiscate the assets of the deceased--instead, the law specifically mentioned that the kin were allowed to keep the inheritance.⁷

Alongside the secular authorities, the Church condemned self-killing as a breach of the commandment "Thou shall not kill". A good Christian was expected to endure any worldly or spiritual troubles and anxieties patiently, trusting in God and awaiting for one's natural, God-set demise.⁸ Suicide was considered a horrid sin that was taught to destine one's soul to hell without the possibility of salvation. The Lutheran Church of Sweden had continued the Catholic traditions, denying Christian burial with its ceremonies and final resting place in the church or churchyard from at least those suicides who had been of sound mind.⁹

in the Svea Court of Appeal sentence letters concerning suicides in ULA: Kortregister över Svea Hovrätts brev till länsstyrelserna. Svea hovrätts kriminaldomar.

³ See e.g. Lieven Vandekerckhove, *On Punishment: The Confrontation of Suicide in Old-Europe*, trans. Tom Horan and Edmundo V. Guzman, (Samenleving Criminaliteit & Strafrechtspleging) 19 (Leuven, 2000) and Georges Minois, *History of Suicide: Voluntary Death in Western Culture* [orig. *Histoire du suicide: La société occidentale face à la mort volontaire*, 1995], trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Baltimore, 1999), pp. 34-36.

⁴ Konung Cristoffers Landslag, henceforth King Christopher's Law of 1442, Chapter on Felony, 4, e.g., in ed. Carl Johan Schlyter, *Corpus iuris sueo-gotorum antique--Samling af Sweriges gamla lagar* 12 (Lund, 1869) pp. 300-01.

⁵ The King Christopher's Law was in use after its promulgation in 1442, and more widely since its printing and official ratification as the universal law of the Swedish Realm in 1608, until a new law, the Code of 1734, was finalized and came into effect in 1736, Gerhard Hafström, *De svenska rättskällornas historia* (Lund, 1965), pp. 95-100 and 175.

⁶ Confiscation of the heritable properties of suicides was allowed in certain cases, e.g., in the Holy Roman Empire and Denmark, see Ole Fenger, "Selvmord i kultur- og retshistorisk belysning," in *Skrifter utgivna af Institutet för rätthistorisk forskning grundat av Gustav och Carin Olin*, ed. Stig Jägerskiöld, (Rättshistoriska Studier) 11 (Stockholm, 1985), pp. 61-65 and David Lederer, *Madness, Religion and the State in Early Modern Europe: A Bavarian Beacon* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 249. The secular laws or legal praxis allowed in certain cases confiscation or forfeiture of all or part of the suicide's possessions also, e.g., in England, parts of France, and Spain. See Alexander Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages 2: The curse on self-murder* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 63-83 and Vandekerckhove, *On Punishment*, pp. 95-120.

⁷ Schlyter, ed., King Christopher's Law of 1442, Chapter on Felony 4.

⁸ E.g. Petrus Pauli Gothus (1550-93), *Een rett Christeligh Onderwijsningh om heela Menniskiones leffnat här på jordenne: huru hon skal retteligen igenom allahanda Plåghor, Pestilentxier och Dödzaarar j Gudhi behållen warda alting döo och Gudz Rijke medh glädhie ärfhua. Petro.P.Gotho* (Stockholm, 1590).

⁹ Ecclesiastical regulations on the denial of burial for suicides in the Swedish Realm, see Olavi Rimpiläinen, *Läntisen perinteen mukainen hautauskäytäntö Suomessa ennen isoavihaa*, (SKHS:n toimituksia) 84 (Helsinki, 1971), pp. 55-57, 158-60, and 275-77. The Church Ordinance of 1571, in force until 1686, literally denied the churchyard only from

Thus, like Reinhold, many other suicidal people encountered a moral and religious dilemma. Preserved sources describing the recent behaviour and talks of those who had committed suicide show that the troubled people had genuine concerns and serious matters to consider. Alongside the practical matters related to the execution of their suicide, including finding solitude and instruments, the people had, like everyone else preparing for death in the early modern religious setting, not only the future of their relatives but also their personal afterlife to worry about. For the suicidal, the anxiety as well as the preparations were unavoidably more challenging; self-killing was in no sense an ideal death, for the soul could not be prepared for afterlife properly. The person blatantly died in the very act of sinning, renouncing God's plan, and thus passed away by default typically unrepentant and could not in his lifetime reconcile his terrible sin. According to the mainstream views,¹⁰ by killing themselves people risked their own salvation. Their choice also subjected their families and kin to public trials during which the past, personality, relationships, and mental state of the deceased was scrutinized by questioning numerous witnesses. Moreover, the punishment of a disposal or burial outside the churchyard was public and manifested the exclusion of the person from the Christian community and afterlife, which no doubt could bring on grief and shame for the bereaved.

The article examines the ways people in early modern Sweden had for preparing themselves and others for suicide, with a particular focus on the suicides' religious crises and spiritual preparations. The first part discusses the types of religious crises suicidal people faced in the context of Lutheran Orthodoxy. The views related to the salvation of suicides' souls are examined in the second part, and the third part shows what these meant for the preparations for death among the suicidal. A look into the spiritual afflictions and anxiety among the suicides and the beliefs related to the suicides' souls is important as these experiences and views manifest the religious mentality of the era and contextualize the mindsets and the preparations of those aiming to die by their own hand. In the first parts, the article also offers new information from the context of early modern Sweden for the

despaired and mentally sane. *Laurentius Petris Kyrkoordning av år 1571* (Stockholm, 1932), p. 136. The Church Law of 1686 cleared up the jurisdictional conflict between the Church and the secular judicial authorities, and stated that the secular courts were to investigate and decide in the case of suicides. Kyrkolag 1686, Cap. XVIII § XII e.g. in Johan Schmedeman, ed., *Kongliga Stadgar, Förordningar, Bref och Resolutioner ifrån Åhr 1528 intil 1701 angående Justitiae och Executions Åhrender* (Stockholm, 1706), p. 1036. In general, Protestant denial of burial and views on self-killing were founded on the earlier Christian and Catholic tradition, see, e.g., Gary B. Ferngren, "The Ethics of Suicide in the Renaissance and Reformation," in *Suicide and Euthanasia: Historical and Contemporary Themes*, ed. Baruch A. Brody (Dordrecht, 1989), pp. 162-66 and Minois, *History of Suicide*, pp. 72-74 and 127-30.

¹⁰ Lutheran view on suicide and the possibility of salvation, see e.g. Bror Rudolf Hall, *Rudbeckii Kyrkodisciplin och vissa av dess förebilder* (Lund, 1928), pp. 71-72 and Erik H.C. Midelfort, "Selbstmord im Urteil von Reformation und Gegenreformation," in *Die katholische Konfessionalisierung: Wissenschaftliches Symposium der Gesellschaft zur Herausgabe des Corpus Catholicorum und des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte 1993*, eds. Wolfgang Reinhard and Heinz Schilling, (Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte) 198 (Gütersloh, 1995), pp. 296-310.

discussions about the connections between spiritual crises, religious despair and suicide and about the beliefs on the fate of suicides in the afterlife that have been the topic of many historians of early modern suicide and religious mentality.¹¹ However, the preparations for death by the would-be suicide are the fresh aspect of this article as this has not yet been discussed or studied in the otherwise vast scholarly literature on the history of suicides. In what ways did people prepare themselves (and others) for their self-inflicted deaths? Also, did people contemplating suicide prepare for death and afterlife in a Christian manner, regardless of the persistent views on the exclusion from the Church and heaven of those who ended their lives through sin?

The material has been collected from a sample of 282 suicide cases¹² that were investigated mainly in the secular lower courts of the Swedish realm during the seventeenth century. Court records and other judicial documents are in practice the only preserved sources that include information of the past lives and backgrounds of the suicides. All recorded information of the deceased and the death was based on witness statements heard in the lower court sessions of the rural district courts or town courts, the first secular judicial instances dealing with suspected suicides. As the court investigations focused on questions of guilt, also the recent behaviour and preparations of the deceased were of interest. They could serve as aggravating pieces of evidence of suicidal intent as well as proof of the mental state, central for determining the appropriate form of punishment.

However, the informational content and value vary greatly in the documents. At times, the events of the days preceding the death have been included in the protocol in detail while occasionally the scribes have recorded information only about the behaviour and events further in the past or on an undefined occasion. As finding out the true course of events was central for establishing guilt, the courts could give a great deal of attention to details and clues that could be linked with such

¹¹ Earlier works on the relationship between religious crises and despair and suicide, e.g. Jean Delumeau, *Sin and fear: The emergence of a Western Guilt Culture, Thirteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*, trans. Eric Nicholson (New York, 1990); Michael MacDonald and Terence R. Murphy, *Sleepless Souls. Suicide in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 50-69; Erik H.C. Midelfort, "Religious Melancholy and Suicide: On the Reformation Origins of a Sociological Stereotype," in *Madness, Melancholy and the Limits of the Self*, eds. Andrew D. Weiner and Leonard V. Kaplan (Wisconsin, 1996), pp. 41-56; Julius Rubin, *Religious melancholy and Protestant experience in America* (New York, 1994); Markus Schär, *Seelennöte der Untertanen: Selbstmord, Melancholia und Religion im Alten* (Zürich, 1985); Jeffrey R. Watt, *Choosing Death: Suicide and Calvinism in Early Modern Geneva* (Kirkville, 2001), pp. 254-63. Research on views and beliefs related to the afterlife of suicides, e.g. David Lederer, "The Dishonorable Dead: Perceptions of Suicide in Early Modern Germany," in *Ehrkonzepte in der Frühen Neuzeit: Identitäten und Abgrenzungen*, eds. Sibylle Backmann, Hans-Jörg Kunast, Ann B. Tlusty, and Sabine Ullmann (Berlin, 1998), pp. 247-63; Midelfort, "Selbstmord im Urteil von Reformation," pp. 296-310; Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages*, passim.

¹² At least 224 were classified as suicides by the secular courts, the bishop's courts or by other ecclesiastical actors while five are sentenced suicide attempts and the rest are cases in which suicide was suspected but for the lack of evidence or other reasons the case was acquitted. The sample has been collected from various archives and sources listed in the following footnote. The sample was collected for a PhD Thesis: Riikka Miettinen, *Suicide in Seventeenth-Century Sweden: The Crime and Legal Praxis in the Lower Courts* (Tampere, 2015).

incidents. Without eyewitnesses and medical expertise, the classification of death rested largely upon circumstantial evidence provided by the locals. The majority of the records contain second- or third-hand accounts and detailed testimonies describing the behaviour and talks of the accused that refer to some form of planning and preparing for suicide.

The religious practice of the deceased during his lifetime and prior to his death was a matter of interest in the trials, and was questioned in order to establish the character of the accused. Especially past sins, “ungodly” ways of life and negligence of religious worship were considered aggravating circumstances, for such matters manifested that there was something morally wrong in the suspect and made sense of his or her abominable act. However, interestingly, many of the suicides were instead depicted as devout and even fervent Christians. Obviously, the witness statements must be treated with caution for the bereaved and others could colour, even exaggerate, hold back, and lie in their accounts. For example, the religiosity of the accused was in some cases clearly emphasized for argumentative and rhetorical reasons, for example in an attempt to claim that the death had been accidental for such an exemplary believer and churchgoer could not have committed such a deed.¹³

Yet, it can be assumed that many pieces of information are trustworthy, for example those provided by multiple witnesses, unbiased outsiders, and local officials. Also, it was not uncommon to recollect and quote talks of the accused which offer an indirect passage into the thinking and mindsets of the suicides. Although only a small portion of the records include information about the preparations for death in particular, it can be deduced that, in general, the large sample collected from various parts of the large Swedish realm sufficiently represents the wide range of arrangements that the suicides made in preparing for their demise.¹⁴

¹³ It is likely that there was a tendency to classify the obscure and suspicious deaths of the very devout, e.g. the clergy, as accidents. Previous research has noted also that the possible suicides of the higher estates were rather acquitted or classified as accidents in many places in early modern Europe. See, e.g., Miettinen, *Suicide in Seventeenth-Century Sweden*, 296-97, 403-06, and 433; Minois, *History of Suicide*, pp. 142-47. This can explain, for example, why the drowning of pastor Peder Laurentii, discussed in Otfried Czaika, “Dying Unprepared in the Early Modern Swedish Funeral Sermons,” in this volume, was seemingly easily determined an accident.

¹⁴ Court records dealing with suicides were located mainly with the help of card-indexes: ULA: Kortregister över Svea Hovrätts brev till länsstyrelserna. Svea hovrätts kriminaldomar and Kansallisarkisto (KA, National Archives of Finland): Tuomiokirjakortisto (Card index for the engrossed lower court records, covering rural regions of Southwestern Finland, Northern Ostrobothnia, parts of Karelia and Kexholm Province in the east). Lower court records preserved in RA: Svea hovrätts arkiv (SHA): Renoverade domböcker (Collection of engrossed lower court records): Gävleborgs län, Jämtlands län, Kopparbergs län, Stockholms län, Upplands län, Uppsala län, Västmanlands län, Västernorrlands län, Örebro län and KA: Renoverade domböcker (Collection of engrossed lower court records, hereafter RT). Information of certain cases of which the lower court records have not been preserved is based on Court of Appeal decisions and sentence letters (Svea hovrätts brev) preserved in ULA: Kopparbergs länsstyrelses arkiv, Landskansliet D II; ULA: Uppsala länsstyrelses arkiv, Landskansliet D II; Västmanlands länsstyrelses arkiv D I; ULA:

Religious Crises among Suicides in an Age of Lutheran Orthodoxy

The seventeenth century was a period of expansion for the Swedish Realm. At its peak as a Great Power in the mid-century, the large kingdom covered not only mainland Sweden and Finland but also parts of Norway, Karelia, the Baltic Countries, and Pomerania. The population increased significantly in the latter half of the century, and especially after the 1680s when the nearly constant warfare overseas ceased. However, the century ended with a crisis, as famines and epidemics related to the consecutive years of devastating crop failures touched Sweden since 1695, killing great shares of the population especially in Finland, Estonia, and Livonia.¹⁵

During this era Sweden was moving from an era of confessionalization to Lutheran Orthodoxy, resulting in the enforcement of strict religious obedience and severe official attitudes towards moral and religious violations. Natural calamities, wars, epidemics, and hardships were understood, or at least portrayed by the authorities, as punishments for individuals' sins. Crimes and sins provoked God's wrath that might fall not only on the perpetrator but also on others, especially if such behaviour was not punished.¹⁶ A generally pessimistic overtone--which placed emphasis on the rejection of the world, worldly burdens and miseries of life, the dangers of sinning, and desire of the heavenly afterlife--characterized the Swedish Lutheran discourse. At the same time, the importance of personal faith and devotion, remorse over one's sins and diligent religious practice were emphasized. Pietism, slowly gaining more foothold in Sweden in the late seventeenth century, did not change this mentality.¹⁷

Örebro länsstyrelses arkiv, Landskansliet D Iqa. Cases have been also included from RA: Justitierevisionen: Åbo hovrätts arbetsberättelser 1665-67, 1669; RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar. Juridica I: Becchius-Palmcrantz' juridiska samlingar, 5; RA: SHA Huvudarkivet B III b 1:2. Kriminella resolutioner 1695, the records of the bishop's court (chapter) of Uppsala (ULA: Uppsala domkapitel I. Domkapitlets protokoll huvudserie A I:1-15) and the sporadically preserved Turku Court of Appeal archives (Turun maakunta-arkisto/Provincial Archives of Turku: Turun hovioikeuden arkisto). Also, random cases presented in literature and various works of printed source collections have been included. Thus, the material serves only as a representative sample of suicides that took place in seventeenth-century Sweden.

¹⁵ Janken Myrdal, *Det svenska jordbrukets historia 2: Jordbruket under feodalismen: 1000-1700* (Stockholm, 1999), pp. 221-23 and 258-59; Nils Erik Villstrand, *Sveriges historia 1600-1721* (Stockholm, 2011), pp. 381-82. For the great famines in Sweden between 1695 and 1697, see Mirikka Lappalainen, "Death and Disease During the Great Finnish Famine 1695-1697," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 39 (2014), pp. 425-47.

¹⁶ Mikko Juva, *Varsinais-Suomen seurakuntaelämä puhdasoppisuuden vuosisatoina (1600-1800)*, (Varsinais-Suomen Historia) 7:3-4 (Turku, 1955), pp. 74-84; Tyge Krogh, *A Lutheran Plague: Murdering to Die in the Eighteenth Century*, (Studies in Central European Histories) 55 (Leiden, 2012), pp. 100-01; Heikki Pihlajamäki, "Executor divinarum et suarum legum: Criminal Law and the Lutheran Reformation," in *Lutheran Reformation and the Law*, ed. Virpi Mäkinen, (Medieval and Reformation Traditions) 112 (Leiden, 2006), pp. 171-204; Kustaa H.J. Viikuna, "Jumala elä rankaise minua: Yksilöllisen subjektin synty," in *Siperiasta siirtoväkeen: Murrosaikoja ja käännekohtia Suomen historiassa*, ed. Heikki Roiko-Jokela (Jyväskylä, 1996), pp. 71-93.

¹⁷ Arne Jansson, *From swords to sorrow: Homicide and suicide in early modern Stockholm*, (Stockholm Studies in Economic History) 30 (Stockholm, 1998), p. 36, 63; Arne Jarrick, "Suicide - The Most and Least Human Deed," in *Only Human: Studies in the History of Conceptions of Man*, ed. Arne Jarrick (Stockholm Studies in History) 61, pp.

It has been argued that the more individualistic and less strongly integrated nature of Protestant societies and the theological tenets typical to most Protestant confessions, including the lack of institutional channels for the relief of guilt through rituals like penance, resulted in higher suicide rates among Protestants than among Catholics.¹⁸ However, although the era's literature and accounts show a stronger perception of suicidal despair among evangelical Lutherans and some other Reformed sects,¹⁹ the statistical data for the period as yet offers no conclusive evidence that suicide was more endemic and prevalent among the Reformed in early modern Europe.²⁰

Nevertheless, it has been interpreted that in many regions of early modern Europe the austere religious atmospheres in general increased the prevalence and experiences of spiritual anxiety and crises, religiously motivated melancholy, and morbid preoccupation with one's sinfulness and salvation, which could result in mounting suicidal tendency at least among religious individuals.²¹ Preachers obsessively warned against sin, damnation, and Satanic forces. Fear of Hell and anxiety over one's salvation no doubt distressed sensitive people in all religious sects. Both the Protestant and Catholic reform movements emphasized the inner person as the location of spiritual health, perhaps increasing the internalization of spirituality and guilt over sins. It is conceivable that such tendencies indeed augmented feelings of despair, individual guilt over one's sins, and the incidence

317-20. Such themes were highlighted in numerous religious writings, sermons and songs published in Sweden, e.g. by Petrus Pauli Gothus (1550-93), Ericus Erici Sorolainen, Bishop of Turku (ep. 1583-1625), Olof Laurelius, Bishop of Västerås (ep. 1647-70), and Johannes Henrici Carlander (ca. late 1610s-1686). E.g. broadsides *Twänne Andeliga Wijsor. Then Första. Ach hwad är Menniskian* (n.d.); *Twå sköna Andelig Wijsor. Then Första. Gudh nåde tigh Werld. Then Andra. Rööpa til Gudh min Siäl med Flijt* (Enköping, 1683).

¹⁸ Emilé Durkheim, *Itsemurha: sosiologinen tutkimus* [orig. *Le Suicide, étude de sociologie*, 1897], trans. Seppo Randell (Helsinki, 1985), pp. 165-90; Henry Romille Fedden, *Suicide: a social and historical study* (Cheshire, 1938), pp. 157-58; Schär, *Seelennöte der Untertanen*, pp. 166, 222, 243, and passim; Samuel Ernest Sprott, *The English Debate on Suicide: From Donne to Hume* (Chicago, 1961), pp. 29-54. Many early modern contemporary writers envisioned higher suicide rates especially among Puritans, Calvinists, and Lutherans. Midelfort, "Religious Melancholy and Suicide," pp. 41-56. See also Angus Gowland, "The Problem of Early Modern Melancholy," *Past and Present* 191 (2006), pp. 77-120 and David Lederer, "Suicide in Early Modern Central Europe: A Historiographical Review," *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute London* 28 (2006), pp. 33-46.

¹⁹ Many early modern contemporary writers envisioned higher suicide rates especially among Puritans, Calvinists and Lutherans. Midelfort, "Religious Melancholy and Suicide," pp. 41-56; Watt, *Choosing Death*, pp. 10-11. See also Gowland, "The Problem of Early Modern Melancholy," pp. 77-120 and Lederer, "Suicide in Early Modern Central Europe," pp. 33-46. Such opinions may represent propaganda rather than reality or even belief, as the connection between suicidality and religious denomination was a "politicized" issue in Europe in an era characterized by Catholic-Protestant rivalry and rivalry between competing forms of Protestantism. See, e.g., R.A. Houston, *Punishing the Dead? Suicide, Lordship, and Community in Britain, 1500-1830* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 301-12.

²⁰ Lederer, *Madness, Religion and the State*, pp. 242-58; Lederer, "Suicide in Early Modern Central Europe," pp. 39-40; Midelfort, "Religious Melancholy and Suicide," pp. 41-46.

²¹ E.g., in the Zwinglyan canton of Zurich, see Schär, *Seelennöte der Untertanen*. Among Calvinists and Puritans, see Fedden, *Suicide*, pp. 157-58; Rubin, *Religious melancholy and Protestant experience*; Sprott, *The English Debate on Suicide*, pp. 29-54.

of religiously motivated melancholy--which all at least the contemporaries did connect with suicidality.²²

Such mental setting that accentuated the hereafter and laid guilt over hardships on one's sinning, alongside the recurring hardships of the era, could, of course, make death seem like a desired release. A number of suicides in the sample indeed appear to have endured some types of spiritual crises--connected to suicide at least in the trials but also typically explicitly by the deceased in his or her prior talks. Like Reinhold Lorenz, mentioned in the beginning of this article, at least eleven other suicides had experienced overbearing guilt over their committed or imaginary sins.²³ For example, in 1682 an old woman called Sara came to her pastor in despair and tears, telling him that she was such a great sinner that God could not forgive her, mentioning that she did not even expect Him to do so. Sara based her guilt on her youthful sexual relations with two men who were brothers, as well as claimed practice of witchcraft. After confessing she refused to take Communion and left, later strangling herself at home.²⁴ Similarly, in 1683, an elderly man called Nils had before hanging himself told many of his household members and neighbours of his bad conscience over the great sins he had committed in his youth.²⁵ Before disappearing and shooting himself in Ulvila in 1695, Sigfred Michelsson had mentioned that due to his adultery of many years, he considered himself "to be a greater sinner than anyone else", and "that he could not be forgiven".²⁶ For some, the experiences of guilt, sinfulness, worthlessness, and ineligibility to join the heavenly afterlife were clearly delusional.²⁷

²² Delumeau, *Sin and fear*, pp. 168-85 and 523-54, passim; Lederer, "The Dishonorable Dead," pp. 352-53 and Watt, *Choosing Death*, pp. 252-64. For fear of Hell or purgatory, see, e.g., Piero Camporesi, *The Fear of Hell: images of damnation and salvation in early modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1991), esp. pp. 25-28, 44-46, and 101.

²³ In chronological order: ULA: Uppsala domkapitel I. Domkapitlets protokoll huvudserie A I: 2, Norby 16 Aug. 1640; ULA: Kopparbergs läns häradsrätts arkiv (KLHA) Serie IV AI: 2 and 7^v-9, Mora 26 Aug. 1664; ULA: Uppsala domkapitel I. Domkapitlets protokoll huvudserie A I: 8, Frötuna 23 Feb. 1676; RA: SHA Västernorrlands län 3a: 164^v-167, Sollefteå 5-6 July 1682; RA: SHA Västernorrlands län 4a: 218-20, Nordingrå 12 July 1683; ULA: Uppsala länsstyrelses arkiv, Landskansliet D II d: 7, Svartlösa 16 June 1684; RA: SHA Västernorrlands län 7a: 452-52^v, Anundsjö 10 Feb. 1686; ULA: Örebro länsstyrelses arkiv, Landskansliet D I qa: 3, Örebro 22 June 1687; RA: SHA Upplands län 49b: 919^v-22^v, Nardinghundra 14 July 1689; RA: SHA Gävleborgs län 45a: 80^v-82^v, Forsa, Idenor, Hög, Rogsta, Illsbo och Tuna n.d.1695; KA: RT Vehmaa and Ala-Satakunta II KO a 7: 210-20, Ulvila 12 Sept. 1696; KA: RT Ylä-Satakunta KO a 17: 529-31^v, Huittinen 27 Mar. 1697. Many more were later interpreted to have killed themselves due to their guilty conscience although they had not, according to the records and witnesses, spoken of such feelings.

²⁴ Sara had said to the priest that she felt herself as "*een så stoor Syndare, att Gudh henne intet förlåta kan, eij heller haf:r någon förlåtelse att wäntta*". RA: SHA Västernorrlands län 3a: 164^v-67, Sollefteå 5-6 July 1682.

²⁵ RA: SHA Västernorrlands län 4a: 218-20, Nordingrå 12 July 1683.

²⁶ "[J]a wara större Syndare än någon annan", "*dhet honom intet kunde förlåtas*". KA: RT Vehmaa and Ala-Satakunta II KO a 7, p. 218, Ulvila 12 Sept. 1696.

²⁷ E.g. ULA: Kopparbergs läns häradsrätts arkiv Serie IV AI: 2, 7^v-9, Mora 26 Aug 1664; RA: SHA Gävleborgs län 45a: 80^v-82^v, Forsa, Idenor, Hög, Rogsta, Illsbo, and Tuna n.d.1695.

Thus, in their preparations for suicide some appear to have had very negative or at least mixed feelings on their eligibility for salvation, as the above cases show. It is noteworthy that it was precisely their guilt and experiences of personal sinfulness what they had been preoccupied with prior to their suicide. This also shows that they had not adopted the central ideas of the Reformation and the Lutheran *ordo salutis*, especially the doctrines of *sola fide*, *sola gratia* and *solus Christus* based on which pardon, justification and redemption were granted and accomplished through faith, God's mercy and Christ alone or the notion of faith in God and remorse over one's sins as the means of grace.²⁸

There were also other types of religious crises than suffering from guilt and questioning one's salvation. For example, Erich Andersson, a peasant who hung himself in Skedvi in 1672, had been so worried over his livelihood and the support of his family that he was unable to sleep and eat, and had complained to the pastor that no matter how much he went to church and practiced religion, God's word had no power or effect.²⁹ Quite comparably, in 1697 Erich Michellson had talked about the futility to seek cure for his gloominess and suicidal thoughts, and had said he considered himself unable to rectify or atone for in this world.³⁰ Before hanging himself, Hans Gabel had said that "because he considers himself having no luck in this world, only sheer misfortune, he has no longer the will to serve and even less to live".³¹

The cases are clear examples of people who had lost all hope. Losing hope was considered a blatant manifestation of despair, a terrible sin of mistrust in God that had for centuries been linked with the Devil and with suicides of mentally sane individuals. A despairing individual doubted God's power, benevolence and mercy, gave up all hope, and believed that his deeds were beyond all pardon. It was typically considered that Satan tempted people to despair and that a person could fall into despair over hardships in his life or due to guilt over his sins. Such moments of spiritual darkness and despair were understood to hit people from time to time but these trials were to be endured and overcome with patience and faith; giving up and killing oneself (while sane) manifested the ultimate

²⁸ See also Göran Malmstedt, *Bondetro och Kyrkoro: Religiös mentalitet i stormaktstidens Sverige* (Lund, 2002), p. 166, passim; Bertil Nilsson, "Preparing for Death: Concluding Remarks," in this volume.

²⁹ Erich Andersson's worries were probably related to poor crops or other shortages, though such was not mentioned in the court records. Still, it is possible that his crop had failed as the decade, and the whole century, was characterized by recurrent crop failures. ULA: KLHA Serie III A I: 15, 105-05^v, Skedvi 25 Sept. 1672. Also, e.g., in Semminghundra in 1684, Charles Alexander de Chattillon had before shooting himself stated that all his devotion had merely been hypocrisy. The Court of Appeal considered it a clear sign of sanity, sentencing him for the executioner's treatment. ULA: Uppsala länsstyrelsens arkiv, Landskansliet, D II d: 7, Semminghundra 17 Sept. 1684.

³⁰ KA: RT Ylä-Satakunta KO a 17: 529-31^v, Huittinen 27 Mar. 1697.

³¹ Translated quote from KA: RT Kexholm KO a 4: 357-59, Rautu 31 July 1682.

moral-religious failure.³² Certainly, the condition of despair was a familiar concept and notion in seventeenth-century Sweden,³³ and repeatedly mentioned and referred to in the judicial documents.³⁴

However, it must be pointed out that the same spiritual afflictions were not necessarily perceived as (the sin of) despair but could also be understood as products of insanity and/or demonic forces. In the suicide trials the very same feelings and expressions could be regarded as manifestations of a mental illness, melancholia, if the accused had been otherwise a devout Christian but had been acting in ways that were considered insane and/or his or her lament and worries were considered groundless or unnaturally prolonged.³⁵ This illness could manifest itself in religious form, as religious melancholy, characterized by excessive and delusional guilt over one's sins, doubts about one's salvation or even perverted and excessive obsession with spiritual matters and religious practice.³⁶ Unlike the "despaired" suicides, they were interpreted to have still kept their faith in God but having acted while of unsound mind.

Also, what could be classed as spiritual crises, some of the suicides had told they had been suffering from the devil's temptations and trickery or even infestation of demons or other evil spirits. For example, in 1682 in Vendel, Elin Mattsdotter had mentioned that she was "unable to eat because the devil bound her so tight".³⁷ In 1697, Erich Michellsson had told in his confession to the pastor that

³² Niels Hemmingsen, *Antidotum. Thet är: En saligh läkedom och tröst, emoot then farligha och förgifftigha siälennes siukdom, som är misströst, eller förtwiflan om Gudz nådhe och syndernas förlåtelse* (Stockholm, 1608); Ferngren, "The Ethics of Suicide," pp. 163-66; Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages*, pp. 369-95; Susan Snyder, "The Left Hand of God: Despair in Medieval and Renaissance Tradition," *Studies in the Renaissance* 12 (1965), pp. 18-59. For despair, the Devil, and suicides in Martin Luther's (1483-1546) view, see Luther's Large Catechism, e.g., seventeenth-century translation into Swedish *D. Martini Lutheri Catechismus 1667* [1529], pp. 204-05.

³³ Familiar, e.g., via the works of Martin Luther, Enoch Haqvini Cringelius (1559-1632), E.H. Cringelius, *Een lithen tröstsententia, til allom them, som j thenne sijdste och ytherste werldennes tijdh, sorgfulle och bedröffuadhe ähre, / författat och schriffu. Aff. Enoch Haqvini* (Stockholm, 1604) and Niels Hemmingsen (1513-1600) (Hemmingsen, *Antidotum*). Also directly connected to suicide e.g. in the paragraph on the denial of Christian burial in The Church Ordinance of 1571, in *Laurentius Petris Kyrkoordning av år 1571* (Stockholm, 1932), p. 136.

³⁴ E.g. KA: RT Turku rr RO z 34: 119-23, Turku 7 Apr. 1666; RA: SHA Västernorrlands län 3a: 164^v-67, Sollefteå 5-6 July 1682; KA: RT Kexholm KO a 4: 357-59, Rautu 31 July 1682; ULA: Uppsala länsstyrelsens arkiv, Landskansliet D II d:7, Svartlösa 16 June 1684; ULA: KLHA Serie V, A I: 1, 309-16, Garpenberg 20 Dec. 1690; KA: RT Vehmaa and Ala-Satakunta II KO a 7: 210-20, Ulvila 12 Sept. 1696; RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar Juridika I: BP, 5, pp. 2-3 (Erich Andersson), 5-6 (Petter Wellamson), 7 (Johannes Ornelius), and 17-18 (Mattis de Näff). See also Miettinen, *Suicide in Seventeenth-Century Sweden*, pp. 319-23.

³⁵ Miettinen, *Suicide in Seventeenth-Century Sweden*, pp. 316-23. See also, e.g., Lederer, *Madness, Religion and the State*, pp. 169-72.

³⁶ E.g. Gowland, "The Problem of Early Modern Melancholy," pp. 77-120; Rubin, *Religious melancholy and Protestant experience*, pp. 3-12.

³⁷ "[H]ar hon swarat att hinhåle så hårdt förbindit henne att hon intet kunna få äta någon Maat". ULA: Uppsala länsstyrelsens arkiv, Landskansliet D II d: 2, Vendel 24 May 1682.

he was affected by and had fallen into Satan's temptations.³⁸ A few others even mentioned that a devil had, in fact, wounded them or instigated the suicidal act.³⁹ Like elsewhere in early modern Europe,⁴⁰ experiences of the personal influence of the devil and views of Satanic forces related to suicides were not uncommon,⁴¹ and understandable in the religious discourse of the era characterized by the demonization of the world.⁴² Already Luther had emphasized the role of the Devil, considering that suicides were overwhelmed by the power of the Devil, who tempted people to fall into despair and kill themselves.⁴³

All in all, these experiences of religious crises indicate that religiously motivated anxieties could be connected to suicidal urges in seventeenth-century Sweden. However, their relatively small number and share in the sample suggests that, like for example in early modern Geneva,⁴⁴ personal religious conflicts and anxiety were not a significant cause of suicide; instead, other factors, including mental and physical illnesses and disabilities, poverty and economic troubles, were clearly more often connected with suicidal behaviour.⁴⁵ In general, there is no evidence of how widespread or prevalent religious crises and afflictions were.⁴⁶ It is noteworthy that the throes of guilt and turmoil over salvation preoccupied in particular the individuals who appear to have been perhaps more devout and immersed in spiritual matters than the average, suggesting that an inclination for religious devotion in general predisposed one to spiritual crises and to this type of suicidal

³⁸ KA: RT Ylä-Satakunta KO a 17: 529-31^v, Huittinen 27 Mar. 1697.

³⁹ KA: RT Northern Ostrobothnia KO a 7: 478-79, Ii 9-10 Apr. 1652; RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar Juridika I: BP, 5, p. 19 (Anders Larsson).

⁴⁰ See e.g. Lederer, "The Dishonorable Dead," pp. 351-52; Lederer, *Madness, Religion and the State*, pp. 151-53; MacDonald and Murphy, *Sleepless Souls*, pp. 34, 42-43, and 49-56; Minois, *History of Suicide*, pp. 72-74 and 132-34, and Watt, *Choosing Death*, pp. 254-58.

⁴¹ The devil linked with suicidal acts and/or thoughts, e.g., the sermons by Ericus Erii Sorolainen. E. E. Sorolainen, *Postilla, Vol. 1* [1621], Facsimile, ed. Martti Parvio (Helsinki, 1988), pp. 488 and 714; KA: RT Savo KO a 2, 740-45, Rantasalmi 17 June 1648; KA: RT Jääski, Lappee, Ranta, and Äyräpää KO a 11: 8-16, Vyborg 28-29 Jan. 1670; RA: SHA Stockholms län 4b: 599-601^v, Öregrund 18 June 1686; RA: SHA Gävleborgs län 36a: 350-356, Ovensjö 4 May 1689; RA: SHA Stockholms län 5: 177^v-78^v, Färentuna 3 Oct. 1695; KA: RT Northern Ostrobothnia KO a 21: 1077-84, Liminka 12 June 1700. For an interpretation that the devil could in its immaterial form infiltrate a person in his sleep and plant despaired and suicidal thoughts and delusions, see KA: RT Northern Ostrobothnia KO a I: 586-97, Kemi 12-15 July 1681.

⁴² On the "Demonisation" of the world in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries, see also Erik H.C. Midelfort, *A History of Madness in Sixteenth-Century Germany* (Stanford, 1999), pp. 51-58 and 376-81; Soili-Maria Olli, "Paholainen on minun veljeni: Kirkon ja kansan paholaiskuva uuden ajan alussa," in *Paholainen, noituus ja magia: kristinuskon kääntöpuoli: pahuuden kuvasto vanhassa maailmassa*, eds. Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Raisa Maria Toivo (Helsinki, 2004), pp. 116-35, and Watt, *Choosing Death*, pp. 254-56.

⁴³ Luther's Large Catechism, e.g., a seventeenth-century translation into Swedish *D. Martini Lutheri Catechismus 1667* [1529], pp. 204-05; Alexander Kästner, *Tödliche Geschichte(n): Selbsttötungen und Suizidversuche in Kursachsen 1547-1815* (Dresden, 2010), pp. 94-108.

⁴⁴ Watt, *Choosing Death*, pp. 258-63.

⁴⁵ Miettinen, *Suicide in Seventeenth-Century Sweden*, pp. 387-94.

⁴⁶ See also MacDonald and Murphy, *Sleepless Souls*, pp. 65-66; Miettinen, *Suicide in Seventeenth-Century Sweden*, pp. 203-04, and Watt, *Choosing Death*, 262-63.

anxiety.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, the cases manifest the pervasiveness of faith and preoccupation with one's sinfulness and salvation in the mentality of many people, if not even more generally in the early modern experience.

Unsurprisingly, the treatment and sought cure for such crises and suicidal thoughts was religious practice. Considered as products of a guilty conscience over a sin or some form of madness, despaired, melancholic, and suicidal thoughts were best diluted by prayer, reading and singing Psalms, or conducting other religious practices. Numerous people attempted to find solace in prayer, were visited by clergy for spiritual consolation, and were even interceded for by their kin and fellows or at Church.⁴⁸ To give an example, a mentally disturbed woman, Anna, had for months before drowning herself been obsessed with prayer and kept going on about God to help her and give her faith. The pastor had also organized prayers on her behalf in the Church.⁴⁹ In general, prayer and other devotions were considered suitable cures for various mental and physical conditions.⁵⁰ This can in part explain why so many were mentioned to have gone to Church or visited pastors and chaplains very recently.

Hell or Heaven? The Consequences of Breaching Norms Surrounding Dying

Despite, as we have seen, some of the suicides had endured religiously motivated emotional turmoil, it can be presumed that the greatest spiritual crisis was ultimately to make the decision to

⁴⁷ As suggested by the cases presented above, as well as cases presented in research literature, incl. MacDonald & Murphy, *Sleepless Souls*, pp. 65-66; Midelfort, *A History of Madness*, pp. 310-12; Rubin, *Religious melancholy and Protestant experience*; Jeremy Schmidt, *Melancholy and the care of the soul: religion, moral philosophy and madness in early modern England* (Aldershot, 2007), pp. 64-75, passim; Schär, *Seelennöte der Untertanen*; Watt, *Choosing Death*, pp. 255-63.

⁴⁸ E.g. KA: RT Turku rr RO z 34: 119-23, Turku 7 Apr. 1666; KA: RT Kymenkartano län KO a 2: 360v-61, Vehkalahti 25 Nov. 1672; KA: RT Jääski, Lappee, Ranta ja Äyräpää KO a 17:235-37, Lappee 30 Sept. 1680; ULA: Uppsala länsstyrelsens arkiv, Landskansliet D II: 2, Svartlösa 6 Dec. 1682; RA: SHA Västernorrlands län 4a: 218-20, Nordingrå 12 July 1683; ULA: Örebro länsstyrelsens arkiv, Landskansliet. D I qa: 3, Glanshammar 17 July 1686; RA: SHA Kopparbergs län 23b: 892-99, Husby 14 Feb. 1687; KA: RT Northern Ostrobothnia KO a 13: 91-94, Sotkamo 10 Aug 1692; RA: SHA Kopparberg 30a: 560-62, Sundborn 22 May 1694; ULA: KLHA Serie X, A I: 5, 81-83, Vika 3 Apr. 1695; RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar Juridika I: BP, 5, pp. 46-47; RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar Juridika I: BP, Vol 5, p. 53. The guidebooks specifically prescribed devout religious practice, including prayer, reading the Psalms and singing hymns for the troubled. E.g. Cringelius, *Een lithen tröstsententia*. The clergy was instructed to carefully keep an eye on, console, and tutor the melancholic and the despaired. E.g. Hemmingsen, *Antidotum*; Johannes Gezelius, *Perbreves Commonitiones* (1673), Cap. VIII.

⁴⁹ RA: SHA Gävleborgs län 45a: 80^v-82^v, Forsa, Idenor, Hög, Rogsta, Illsbo, and Tuna, no date [hereafter n.d.] 1695. Similarly, another mentally disturbed woman, Karin Joensdotter, experiencing great restlessness, melancholia, insomnia, a heavy heart and suicidal thoughts, kept fervently praying for God and was prayed for in the parish but, failing to find solace, hung herself in Husby in 1687. RA: SHA Kopparbergs län 23b: 892-99, Husby 14 Feb. 1687.

⁵⁰ Lederer, *Madness, State and Religion*, pp. 1-21 and 59-71, passim; Andrew Wear, "Early Modern Europe, 1500-1700," in *The Western Medical Tradition 800 BC to AD 1800*, eds. Lawrence I. Conrad, Michael Neve, Vivian Nutton, Roy Porter, and Andrew Wear (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 240-41.

end one's life. As also seen in the examples above, many suicidal individuals were extremely concerned with their salvation and the idea of life after death.⁵¹ At least for religious people who accepted the traditional and mainstream theological views on the sinfulness of the act, taking one's own life was not a logical choice.

Most importantly, it was still considered that dying in the very act of sinning and unrepentant could preclude one's salvation. Receiving the care of the Church at the deathbed remained pivotal after the Reformation, and dying well, i.e., a holy death, required careful spiritual preparations. Interpretations of a dramatic shift in the rituals, beliefs and attitudes related to death and burials due to the Reformation⁵² have more recently been challenged. Although death without preparation was certainly a complex theological issue for the Protestants who emphasized the importance of faith alone and rejected intercession, necessity to perform penitential deeds and many other rites, the deathbed practices and the ideas of a good death were characterized by continuity.⁵³

In general, the popular masses had not adopted many of the ideas of the Reformation and Lutheranism, like the continuation and syncretism of many Catholic beliefs and rituals in popular religion and religious practice in seventeenth-century Sweden manifests.⁵⁴ Also the hour of death, and the precepts of a good death, retained many traditions and old features in post-Reformation Sweden. Turning to God and confessing one's sins, followed by receiving God's forgiveness through the pastor and partaking Communion were integral parts of the *mors bona*. Alongside the personal faith and trust in God and God's mercy, in practice the mentioned rituals as well as true repentance over one's sins and overcoming doubt, disbelief, despair, and evil in one's last moments were considered important. This meant that all types of sudden deaths were feared, though obviously deaths associated with sin were the worst.⁵⁵

⁵¹ See also Krogh, *A Lutheran Plague*, p. 114.

⁵² E.g. Philippe Ariés, *The Hour of our Death: The Classic History of Western Attitudes toward Death over the last one thousand years* [orig. *L'homme devant la mort*, 1977], trans. Helen Weaver (New York, 2008), pp. 297-352, passim; Craig M. Koslofsky, *The Reformation of the Dead: Death and Ritual in Early Modern Germany, 1450-1700* (Basingstoke, 2000).

⁵³ E.g. Volker Leppin, "Preparing for Death: From the Late Medieval *ars moriendi* to the Lutheran Funeral Sermon," in *Preparing for Death, Remembering the Dead*, eds. Tarald Rasmussen and Jon Øygaard, (Refo500 Academic Studies) 27 (Göttingen, 2015), pp. 9-23; Peter Marshall, "After Purgatory: Death and Remembrance in the Reformation World," in *ibid.*, pp. 25-43; Claudia Resch, "Reforming Late Medieval *Ars Moriendi*: Changes and Compromises in Early Reformation Manuals for use at the Deathbed," in *ibid.*, pp. 153-72. See also Austra Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying: The Ars Moriendi in the German Reformation (1519-1528)* (Aldershot, 2007).

⁵⁴ Malmstedt, *Bondetro och Kyrkoro*; Raisa Maria Toivo, *Faith and Magic in Early Modern Finland* (Basingstoke, 2016); Miia Kuha, *Pyhäpäivien vietto varhaismodernin ajan Savossa (vuoteen 1710)*, Ph.D. Thesis (Jyväskylä, 2016).

⁵⁵ Hall, *Rudbeckii Kyrkodisciplin*, pp. 71-72; Juva, *Varsinais-Suomen seurakuntaelämä*, p. 66; Krogh, *A Lutheran Plague*, p. 114; Stina Fallberg Sundmark, *Sjukbesök och dödsberedelse: sockenbudet i svensk medeltida och reformatorisk tradition*, (Bibliotheca Theologiae Practicae) 84 (Skellefteå, 2008), pp. 127-230. On preparatory rituals

It must be pointed out that even if the funeral sermons and *personalia* of the elite, discussed in the articles by Anu Lahtinen and Otfried Czaika in this volume, presented the piety during one's lifetime sufficient as the means of grace even in cases of sudden deaths,⁵⁶ in practice the last moments and the manner or way of death also mattered. This can be seen, for example, in the various treatises and other texts discussing the horridness of dying in sin and/or unrepentant,⁵⁷ and in the emphasis given on the confession, Communion and pastoral care of the sick and dying in the legislation. The pastor was to do his best to prevent people dying in sin by encouraging confession and repentance. In fact, it was even punishable if the pastor neglected these duties, or to not call for the pastor in time to the deathbed.⁵⁸ The practice of denying burial in the church or churchyard and the usual funerary process from persons who had died unrepentant while sinning similarly manifests the importance of one's last moments.⁵⁹ After all, the locus of burial and ceremonies were still of the essence, and the denial of Christian burial locations and rites for certain groups was an ecclesiastical penalty that reflected the separation of their souls from the Christian community and salvation.⁶⁰

Suicide was certainly not a "good death", as the person killing oneself not only died breaching the God's commandments and plan but also, if considered sane, had died in despair, turning his or her back on God. Most importantly, upon death the person was (typically) unable to express remorse over these last sins. The mainstream view was, like Enoch Haqvini Cringelius, a vicar and dean in southern Sweden put it in 1604, that the act of suicide--as a clear manifestation of despair--

for death in the age of Lutheran Orthodoxy, see e.g. *HandBok Ther uti är författat huruledes Gudztiensten med Christelige Ceremonier och kyrckioseder uti våra Swenska Församlingar skal blifwa hällen och förhandlad. Förbättrad och förmehrad i Stockholm åhr 1599. Öfwersedd åhr 1608. Och numehra efter nyja kyrckio-ordningen inrättad åhr 1693* (Stockholm, 1693), pp. 135-56 and 185; *Een Lijten Lustigh Wijsa Om Dödzens art och Menniskiornas Lijffz ostadigheet och Lefwernes kortheet och owissheet* (broadside) (Stockholm, 1648).

⁵⁶ Anu Lahtinen, "Death with an Agenda," and Otfried Czaika, "Dying Unprepared in the Early Modern Swedish Funeral Sermons," in this volume. As discussed by Lahtinen, the representations of the aristocrats' preparations for death, pious lives, and last moments served many ideological and political purposes.

⁵⁷ E.g. Johannes Æpinus, *En liten Tractaat Om Ogudhachtigha och Keterska menniskior begraffning. D. Iohannis Epini firdom Superintendentis Hamburgensis Förwenskat Aff Samuele Olai comministro Arosiense* [Original work published in German in 1547], trans. Samuel Olaus (Wästerås, 1624), pp. D iii-D iiiiv, passim; Cringelius, *Een lithen tröstsententia*, pp. 43v-44; Olof Laurelius, *Gudz klagan öfwer then stora Otacksamheeten, Säkra och onskofulla Lefwernet. Så och Skrymtachtiga Gudztiensten som nu allestädes uti Werldenne spörtes och i vårt Fädernesland öfwerhanden tagher* (Wästerås, 1662), pp. E vii-F iiiv, G i^v-Gv^v; Cap. V, and in numerous broadsides, e.g. *Synda-ånger Uthbrustin När dhen ynkelige Förskräckeliga och allom Menniskiom Fassliga Misfödzel sigh* (n.p., 1691).

⁵⁸ Kyrkolag 1686, Cap. XVII § I-VII; Negligence to call for a pastor was punishable for those hosting the sick and dying according to a resolution passed in 1697, in Anders Anton von Stiernman, *Alla riksdags och mötens besluth, samt arfföreningar, regements-former, försäkringar och bewillningar, som på allemann riksdagar och möter ifrån år 1521 intil år 1727 giorde stadgade och bewiljade är*. Vol. III (Stockholm, 1733), p. 2134.

⁵⁹ Including the excommunicated, unrepentant blasphemers, those who suddenly died while committing vices, murdered unbaptized children and suicides. The Church Ordinance of 1571, in *Laurentius Petris Kyrkoordning av år 1571* (Stockholm, 1932), pp. 136-37; Rimpiläinen, *Läntisen perinteen mukainen hautauskäytäntö*, p. 158.

⁶⁰ Koslofsky, *The Reformation of the Dead*, passim; Miettinen, *Suicide in Seventeenth-Century Sweden*, p. 100, 132 and 138. See also Rimpiläinen, *Läntisen perinteen mukainen hautauskäytäntö*. The importance of burial locations and funerary ceremonies also pointed out in Dominika Burdzy, "The Concern for Salvation in the Cities of Lesser Poland in the Sixteenth Century," in this volume.

condemned one to Hell for eternity.⁶¹ In fact, these lines of thinking inspired suicidal but religious individuals to commit and confess or falsely confess even murders, bestiality, and other capital offences in the hope of receiving the death penalty. They believed their souls could thereby be saved for they, unlike suicides, could die as penitents, make the abovementioned spiritual preparations and receive most of the rituals before their execution.⁶²

However, regardless of this official discourse, there were ambivalent and dissident views. It must be pointed out that Luther had made no definite pronouncements on the fate of suicides in the afterlife, portraying them as Satan's victims and even considering, in private, that God could forgive at least some suicides who could still be saved by the grace of God.⁶³ At times the Svea Court of Appeal jurists, serving in the Swedish Realm's most important judicial instance, considered and wrote down in their case summaries that some who had committed their suicidal act in madness and had had time to repent and receive Communion before passing away had undergone a holy death.⁶⁴ Thus, for some it seemed that at least an insane suicide might still receive God's mercy and join the heavenly afterlife. For example, the pastor of Järvsjö pondered the question in the trial of Joen Anunsson's suicide in 1679, and the pastor of Maria Andersdotter, a pitiful wife who had lost her senses due her husband's violence, considered in her trial in Lagunda in 1691 that although she had hanged herself, God would be merciful for she had been so insane.⁶⁵

The court records of suicides indicate that in general the suicides of those considered "insane", for example, due to melancholia, furor, or other recognized mental illness, or due to dotage, minority,

⁶¹ Cringelius, *Een lithen tröstsententia*, pp. 43^v-44. Also, e.g. the view of Claudius Kloot (ca. 1612-90), a renowned Swedish jurist. Claudius Kloot, *Then Swenska lagfarenheetz spegel: Uthi fyra böcker fördeelt och beskrefwen aff Claudio Kloot* (Gothenburg, 1676), pp. 56-57.

⁶² Jansson, *From swords to sorrow*, pp. 63-64; Krogh, *A Lutheran Plague*, pp. 79-81, 132, and passim. Many confessed crimes of bestiality very likely had suicidal motives. See Jonas Liliequist, *Brott, synd och straff: tidelagsbrottet i Sverige under 1600- och 1700-talet* (Umeå, 1991), pp. 107-17. There are also indications that some of the infanticides were similarly motivated. For such examples in eighteenth-century Finland, see Mona Rautelin, *En förutbestämd sanning: Barnamord och delaktighet i 1700-talets Finland belysta genom kön, kropp och social kontroll* (Helsinki, 2009), pp. 92-94.

⁶³ Kästner, *Tödliche Geschichte(n)*, pp. 94-108; Midelfort, "Selbstmord im Urteil von Reformation," pp. 300-01.

⁶⁴ Their holy death or pardoning explicitly mentioned e.g. RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar Juridika I: Becchius-Palmcrantz' samlingar, 5, pp. 23-25. Also e.g. ULA: Uppsala länsstyrelsens arkiv, Landskansliet D II: 2, Svartlösa 6 Dec. 1682. Cf. there were ambivalent views on the fate of the sane suicides who had had the time to repent and/or even receive absolution and Communion before passing away. RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar Juridika I: Becchius-Palmcrantz' samlingar, 5, pp. 17-18 (Mattis de Näff); RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar Juridika I: Becchius-Palmcrantz' samlingar, 5, p. 19 (Anders Larsson); RA: SHA Uppsala län, 48a: 437^v-42^v, Ulleråkers 17 May 1688.

⁶⁵ RA: SHA, Gävleborgs län 27a: 430^v-36, Järvsjö 6 June 1679; RA: SHA Upplands län, 53b: 556^v-61^v, Lagunda 20 Nov. 1691. See also RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar Juridika I: Becchius-Palmcrantz' samlingar, 5, p. 57. Cf. Also Robert Burton, in his massive work on melancholia published in 1621, considered that the suicides who had acted in madness or melancholia would get to Heaven. The paragraph in which he discusses the possible salvation of suicides presented e.g. in Lederer, "The Dishonorable Dead," p. 352.

or some other form of mental weakness were viewed more accidental and less intentional, and thus, less condemnable. Even the more lenient form of criminal punishment reserved for the insane suicides in Sweden, burial somewhere outside the churchyard as opposed to burning and disposing the remains in the woods, manifests this idea. In early modern Europe, in many laws and among the jurists at least, there were long traditions of not holding the insane responsible for their criminal actions as they could not act deliberately or in full awareness of their actions due to their disturbed minds.⁶⁶

In the minds of the contemporaries, the mental state of the suicide mattered in regard to the eligibility or possibility for salvation. The praxis of allowing silent burials “inside” the churchyards for some of the “insane” suicides who had been religious and devout in their lifetime,⁶⁷ and jurists’ suggestions of exempting the insane from legal punishments entirely⁶⁸ can be interpreted as manifestations of the views that not all suicides were to be expelled from the Christian community, and thus neither from resurrection. At times, several members of the local community pleaded for a burial inside the churchyard. To give an example, in 1679 the lower court in Järvsjö refused to pass a sentence for a respected former scribe and their fellow jury member, Pär Olofsson, who had stabbed himself. Witnesses invoked his melancholia and religious and good reputation, and even the members of the court pleaded for a burial in the churchyard. Later the Court of Appeal indeed allowed his corpse to be interred in the cemetery, though in silence and in its northern, inferior

⁶⁶ Miettinen, *Suicide in Seventeenth-Century Sweden*, pp. 126-29; Minois, *History of Suicide*, pp. 133-40.

⁶⁷ E.g. RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar Juridika I: Becchius-Palmcrantz’ samlingar, 5, pp. 21-25, 29-36, and 53-60; ULA: Uppsala domkapitel I. Domkapitlets protokoll huvudserie A I:3, Frösthult 7 Jan. 1654; RA: SHA Kopparbergs län 23b: 892-99, Husby 14 Feb. 1687; ULA: KLHA Serie X, A I:1, 16-17, Tuna 19 Apr. 1687; ULA: KLHA Serie X, A I:1, 109-09^v, Tuna 23 Sept. 1689; ULA: KLHA Serie X, A I:2, 74-76^v, Torsång 16 July 1691; ULA: Kopparbergs länsstyrelses arkiv, Landskansliet D II:18, Sundborn 26 May 1694; ULA: Faluns rådhusrätts arkiv (Falun rr och mag.) A Ia: 18, n.p. Falun 14/15 Apr. 1697; ULA: KLHA Serie XXVI A I: 1, n.p., Lima 6 Dec. 1698. Also, the Svea Court of Appeal in general revised the sentences for the “insane” suicides, including those suffering from mental illnesses or mental weakness because of dotage or fevers, so that they were allowed silent burials, i.e., burials inside the churchyard in its inferior, outlying spots without ceremonies. ULA: Kortregister över Svea Hovrätts brev till länsstyrelserna. Svea hovrätts kriminaldomar. Also, in the 1690s, the Svea Court of Appeal gave precedents according to which even mentally sane minors should be allowed silent burials inside the churchyard. RA: SHA B III b 1:2, 260-61, Kriminella resolutioner 27 Aug. 1695; ULA: Västmanlands länsstyrelses arkiv, Landskansliet D I:32, Skinnskatteberg 24 Oct. 1696; ULA: Uppsala länsstyrelses arkiv, Landskansliet D Iid:51, Håbo 23 Oct. 1700. Moreover, as mentioned, the Church Ordinance in force between 1571 and 1686 only denied burial in the churchyard from despaired and sane suicides--pastors, deans and bishops at times allowed interments in the cemetery especially for the suicides who were deemed having been insane. E.g. ULA: Uppsala domkapitel I. Domkapitlets protokoll huvudserie A I:2, Norby 16 Aug. 1640; ULA: Uppsala domkapitel I. Domkapitlets protokoll huvudserie A I:4, Frösthult 7 Jan. 1654; ULA: Uppsala domkapitel I. Domkapitlets protokoll huvudserie A I:8, Wahlby 5 Sept. 1677; see also Rimpiläinen, *Läntisen perinteen mukainen hautauskäytäntö*, pp. 276-78.

⁶⁸ Miettinen, *Suicide in Seventeenth-Century Sweden*, pp. 79-90. Law drafts and records of the discussions in the preparation for a new law, in “Lagförslag af 1643 års andra lagberedning, afgifvet den 8 Augusti 1643,” in C.J. Wahlberg, ed., *Åtgärder för Lagförbättring 1633–1665* (Uppsala, 1878), p. 164; “Rosengrenska lagförslaget,” in *Handlingar rörande Sveriges historia: Andra serien, 1: Lagförslag i Karl den Niondes tid* (Stockholm, 1864), p. 476; “Lagkommissionens protokoll 1694–1711,” in Wilhelm Sjögren, ed., *Föreläggna till Sveriges Rikes Lag 1686–1736 2* (Uppsala, 1901), pp. 42 and 149.

part.⁶⁹ So again, in the case of suicides, piety during lifetime alone was not enough to serve as the means of grace;⁷⁰ the person committing suicide had to also be classified as insane.⁷¹ Based on all this, it appears that at least some considered that committing the sin of suicide did not preclude the insane from salvation. This was also the view of Petrus Laurbecchius (1628-1705), professor of theology at the University of Turku, who in a dissertation published in 1680 concluded that while suicide could not be justified or permitted under any circumstances, the insane could be excused and might be saved if they had lived well.⁷²

Still, unorthodox interpretations of the gravity of the deed and salvation of also the mentally sane suicides did exist. For example, Johan Munster (d. 1714), professor of philosophy at the University of Turku, mentioned in 1696 that some of his contemporaries held the idea that suicides committed because of disgrace, imprisonment, slavery, hunger, old age, or other such hardships might be justified. Though Munster himself considered this view entirely faulty and wrong,⁷³ this already suggests that a suicide could be commiserated with and even considered an understandable resolution, depending on the situation.

It appears that some considered that God could be merciful also for the sane suicides. A good example of this is the only case in the material in which the person had left a suicide note. Johan, a crofter living near Stockholm wrote his last words on a piece of paper under great pains caused by his severe illness in 1697. Addressed to no one in particular, he stated that (paraphrased by the scribe) “no one should think that he has any great sins on his conscience, for God has forgiven him, and therefore he knows that his soul is with God, and Jesus Christ his saviour and redeemer will be merciful to him”⁷⁴ and “that the great pains, that endured him night and day, forced him into this”⁷⁵.

⁶⁹ RA: SHA, Gävleborgs län 27a: 436-41, Järvsjö 21 Jul. 1679; RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar Juridika I: BP, 5, 31. Also, e.g. KA: RT Savo KO a 2, 740-746^v, Rantasalmi 17 June 1648; KA: RT Kexholm KO a 10: 7^v, Rautu, Sakkola & Pyhäjärvi 22-26 Jan. 1689.

⁷⁰ Cf. the interpretation in Otfried Czaika, “Dying Unprepared in the Early Modern Swedish Funeral Sermons,” in this volume that based on the early modern Swedish funeral sermons the view was that everyone was prepared for death and that Christian life was considered sufficient as the means of grace and salvation.

⁷¹ Miettinen, *Suicide in Seventeenth-Century Sweden*, pp. 358-59, 433, and 442-43.

⁷² Petrus Laurbecchius, *Discursus philosophicus miscellaneas aliquot exhibens quaestiones quas cum suffragio and consensu amplissimae facultatis philosophicae in Regiâ Academiâ Aboensi [...]*, Diss. Turku (Holmiae, 1680), p. B. Similarly, for example, in 1685 Svea Court of Appeal regarded that Jöran Bark, who had in his severe insanity killed himself by first lighting his bed and clothes on fire and then jumping out from the high building, could be forgiven and saved, for he had not only lived a God-fearing life but apparently also prayed before jumping. Thus, he was allowed an honourable, Christian burial. RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar Juridika I: Becchius-Palmcrantz’ samlingar, 5, p. 57.

⁷³ See Munster’s dissertation presented and discussed in Kauko Kouvalainen and Veli-Matti Rissanen, “Terveestä itsetunnosta väiteltiin sivistysyliopistossa 1696,” *Hiidenkivi* 2012:3 (2012), pp. 8-10.

⁷⁴ “[A]tt ingen det skulle tänckia att han någre stora synder hade på sig: Ty Gud hade gifwit honom hans synder till, och derföre weet, att hans Siäl är hos Gud och Jesus Christus hans frälsare och återlösare woro honom nådelig”. ULA: Uppsala länsstyrelses arkiv D IId: 43, 22 Feb. 1697 Danderyd.

He had arranged to be at home alone, sending his son outside while his wife was at Church. Before shooting himself he had obviously done some spiritual thinking and had made his peace with God according to his quite unorthodox interpretation. Altogether, as already the previous examples have shown, many of the suicides had been devout believers⁷⁶--the fact that they regardless of their religiosity ended up taking their own lives alone suggests that there were ambivalent views on the salvation of suicides' souls.

Preparations for an “Unholy” Death

As mentioned, many of the would-be suicides appear to have been to Church recently and involved in fervent religious practice, seeking cure for their suicidal thoughts, emotional turmoil, mental or other illnesses or other misfortunes. Yet, not all such behaviour was connected to finding solace and aid. Like Johan and Reinhold, mentioned above, some of the people who were contemplating suicide made clear religious preparations for their self-inflicted demise.

As mentioned, confession and repentance, followed by receiving forgiveness through the pastor and Holy Communion, were vital parts of the *mors bona* in early modern Sweden. Some of the suicides felt important to follow these standards of *ars moriendi* to at least redeem themselves from their past sins and manifest their faith in God even if they chose to die “in sin”.⁷⁷ In Kokkola in 1671, it was even interpreted that Per Jönsson Karfwanen, imprisoned for rape, had faked an illness before strangling himself so that he could confess his sins, make atonement, and receive Communion

⁷⁵ “[A]tt den stora wärcken twingade honom der till, som han lijdit natt och dag”. ULA: Uppsala länsstyrelses arkiv D IId:43, 22 Feb. 1697 Danderyd.

⁷⁶ E.g. RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar Juridika I: BP, 5, Causa VI, pp. 29-36 and 57-60; ULA: Uppsala domkapitels arkiv, protokoll A I:2, Norby 16 Aug. 1640; ULA: Kopparbergs läns häradsrätts arkiv (KLHA) Serie IV AI:2, 7^v-9, Mora 26 Aug. 1664; RA: SHA Västernorrlands län 3a: 164^v-67, Sollefteå 5-6 July 1682; RA: SHA Kopparbergs län 23b: 892-99, Husby 14 Feb. 1687; RA: SHA Kopparberg 23a: 314^v-23, Hedemora rr 18-20 July 1687; ULA: KLHA Serie X, A I: 1, 109-09^v, Tuna 23 Sept. 1689; RA: SHA Upplands län, 53b: 556^v-61^v, Lagunda 20 Nov. 1691; RA: SHA Kopparberg 30a: 560-62, Sundborn 22 May 1694; RA: SHA Gävleborgs län 45a: 80^v-82^v, Forsa, Idenor, Hög, Rogsta, Illsbo och Tuna n.d.1695; ULA: KLHA Serie X, A I:5, 70-70^v, Skedvi 4 July 1695.

⁷⁷ Visits to church or pastors, confessions, and communions right before killing themselves: ULA: Uppsala domkapitels arkiv, protokoll A I: 3, Långtora 4th June 1644; ULA: Uppsala länsstyrelsens arkiv, Landskansliet D II d:7, Svartlösa 16 June 1684; RA: SHA Kopparberg 23a: 314^v-23, Hedemora rr 18-20 July 1687. Other very recently received communions: KA: RT Jääski, Lappee, Ranta, and Äyräpää: KO a 13: 363-73, Vyborg 22 May 1673; RA: SHA, Västernorrlands län 7a: 445-46^v, Gudmundrå 30 Jan 1686; KA: RT Northern Ostrobothnia KO a 13: 91-94, Sotkamo 10 Aug. 1692; ULA: KLHA Serie X, A I:5, 70-70^v, Skedvi 4 July 1695; KA: RT Kymenkartano and Lappee KO a 10: 406-10, Kymi 23 July 1696. Also, as mentioned in Sollefteå in 1682, Sara had, before strangling herself, gone to confess her past sins to the pastor but had refused to take communion because she felt that God could not forgive her, RA: SHA Västernorrlands län 3a: 164^v-67, Sollefteå 5-6 July 1682.

before killing himself.⁷⁸ The preferences and reasoning of some to commit suicide indirectly, by proxy by committing and confessing capital offences rather than killing themselves directly, similarly manifests the importance of receiving the last rites.⁷⁹ Like Johan Fleming felt, as presented in Anu Lahtinen's article in this volume, it was important to confess and receive Communion, "the true passport [...] to the hereafter".⁸⁰ Moreover, obvious attempts were made by pastors to save the souls of those who had wounded themselves but were still barely alive by trying to make them confess, repent, and even take Communion,⁸¹ which similarly demonstrates the significance of repentance and atonement before death in the early modern Lutheran culture.

Also, some of the would-be suicides turned to God in private and immersed themselves in rigorous personal prayer in their preparations.⁸² For example, in the suicide trial of Karin Olofzdotter in Åkerbo in 1695 it was considered as aggravating evidence and preparations for suicide that in her last days before drowning herself she had read the Scripture and her prayers significantly more often than before.⁸³ These behaviours and the type of resignation from the world and focus on religion can also be interpreted as preparations for death and the afterlife.

The preparations not only show that some attempted to follow the Christian tradition and at least some of the precepts of the ideal *ars moriendi*, but also suggest that, regardless of the mainstream Lutheran theological views on the destiny of a suicide's soul, some did kindle a hope that they might still receive God's mercy. Perhaps due to the existing lenient views on the salvation of those who acted while out of their minds, some believed that God could be merciful even for the sane who lived in unbearable situations and thus considered it best to make spiritual preparations. They probably reasoned and felt that they kept their faith and trust in God and his mercy, thus in fact following the central Lutheran doctrine, even if their suicide was considered and taught to manifest the ultimate despair in that they had not trusted in and served under God's word and plan by

⁷⁸ KA: RT Northern Ostrobothnia KO a 12: esp. 720^v-21, Kokkola 8 July 1671; KA: RT Northern Ostrobothnia KO a 12, esp. 726^v, Kokkola 15-17 Aug. 1671.

⁷⁹ Jansson, *From swords to sorrow*, pp. 63-64; Krogh, *A Lutheran Plague*, pp. 79-81, 132, and passim. Krogh has suggested that the Lutheran Church not only enabled the suicidal to receive the last rituals considered significant for salvation but also provided the most optimistic message to persons about to be executed.

⁸⁰ Case presented in Lahtinen, "Death with an Agenda," in this volume.

⁸¹ E.g. KA: RT Ala-Satakunta II KO a 1: 131-34, Eura 19 July 1682; RA: SHA Uppsala län 42: 604^v, Svartlösa 17 Nov. 1682; RA: SHA Uppsala län, 48a: 437^v-42^v, Ulleråkers 17 May 1688; ULA: Uppsala länsstyrelsens arkiv, Landskansliet, D II d: 36, Frötuna 8 Mar. 1695; RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar Juridika I: Becchius-Palmcrantz' samlingar, 5, pp. 17-18 (Mattis de Näff); RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar Juridika I: Becchius-Palmcrantz' samlingar, 5, p. 19 (Anders Larsson); RA: Riksarkivets ämnesamlingar Juridika I: Becchius-Palmcrantz' samlingar, 5, pp. 23-25.

⁸² E.g. ULA: KLHA Serie X, A I:5, 70-70^v, Skedvi 4 July 1695 ULA: VMLL D I:31, Åkerbo 1 Aug. 1695; ULA: Uppsala länsstyrelsens arkiv D IId:43, 22 Feb. 1697 Danderyd.

⁸³ ULA: VMLL D I:31, Åkerbo 1 Aug. 1695.

accepting their God-set course of life and hour of death patiently. Even if they were unable to confess and repent their last sin to a pastor, they could at least repent and turn to God in their last breath. For example, it was claimed that Erich Nilsson, a highly devout man, was found having drowned himself floating in the water “with his hands folded like he had in his last moment prayed to God”.⁸⁴

However, it must be pointed out that preparations of this type of spiritual nature were in no way the most common recognized preparations among the suicides. Any signs or interpretations of preparations for the suicide or death in general were of interest and considered aggravating pieces of evidence in the suicide trials. Practical preparations, i.e., finding privacy and a suited suicide method and location, were obviously vital. This was not necessarily an easy task in the relatively small and well-knit village or town communities of early modern Sweden. Choosing a method and instrument from the rather limited selection that was accessible--in an era where drugs and firearms were not available to most people--and finding a private location and a good occasion were matters that typically required some planning.⁸⁵

Also, forewarning one’s family and friends was not uncommon,⁸⁶ and even arrangements for one’s temporal matters were made. For example, in the town of Sala in 1687 an ironworker, Jacob Månsson, had before stabbing himself given advice to his small children not to worry too much and to remember to read their prayers, go to Church and be obedient to her mother. He was even interpreted having rationed his eating and for some days refused to take provisions to work so that his family would have something to eat.⁸⁷ However, there are no mentions of wills having been made. Also, unlike those preparing to die in the usual manners, the would-be suicides did not, for obvious reasons, make funerary arrangements, nor could even ensure that their remains would be treated with some dignity.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ “[M]ed ihoopknippade händer, likkasåsom att hafwa i sitt ytterste åkallat Gudh”. ULA: KLHA Serie X, A I: 5, 70-70^v, Skedvi 4 July 1695.

⁸⁵ Miettinen, *Suicide in Seventeenth-Century Sweden*, pp. 165-67, 267-74, and 294-95.

⁸⁶ E.g., KA: RT Jääski, Lappee, Ranta, and Äyräpää, KO a 13: 363-73, Vyborg 22 May 1673; KA: RT Kymenkartano and Lappee KO a 1: 10-11, Kymi and Vehkalahti 12-14 Feb. 1681; KA: RT Kexholm KO a 4: 357-59, Rautu 31 July 1682; KA: RT Northern Ostrobothnia KO a 10: 232-35, Kemi 19-21 Feb. 1690; ULA: KLHA Serie X, A I: 2, 74-76^v, Torsång 16 July 1691; RA: SHA, Västernorrlands län 14: 240-44, Nätra 5 Sept. 1694; KA: RT Ylä-Satakunta KO a 17: 529-31^v, Huittinen 27 Mar. 1697.

⁸⁷ RA: SHA Västerås 3: 695-96, Sala 14 May 1687. The lower court also considered noteworthy that over a week before dying by self-inflicted sword wounds a soldier, Erich Ålli, had borrowed some money that he had given for the sustenance of his wife and six children living on support of others in another locality. KA: RT Vehmaa and Ala-Satakunta II KO a 14: 384-406, Vehmaa and Lokalahti 12-13 Mar. 1700.

⁸⁸ Cf. the careful arrangements of funerals and gravestones by the nobility in Lahtinen, “Death with an Agenda,” in this volume.

Thus, preparations of all sorts were made but they could not be made too conspicuously in order to avoid interruptions or becoming guarded and kept under suicide watch. After all, no doubt the suicidal people themselves knew what they were planning was categorically condemned by the society. This in part explains why only sporadic information has been preserved and recorded of the preparations: people contemplating suicide had to prepare for death in secret. Even the bereaved had an interest to not to share information of preparations, and thus premeditation, in the trials if they were hoping for an acquittal or at least the more lenient form of punishment reserved for the insane suicides. On the other hand, it is also possible that the scarcity of mentions of spiritual preparations for death among the suicidal in the sources simply manifests that the vast majority accepted the mainstream view on their lot in the afterlife or did not care of the matter.

Conclusion

As we have seen, some of the would-be suicides in seventeenth-century Sweden had endured various types of spiritual crises, including worries over one's salvation, overbearing compunctions over sins and experiences of God turning his back on them. No doubt, devout individuals have always suffered from and endured anxiety related to religion and soul-searching.

However, such crises were relatively rarely mentioned in the suicide trials which suggests that religious anxiety and suicidal despair were not as prevalent in the Lutheran confessional culture as suggested earlier. Instead, for the religious, the greatest spiritual crisis was surely to reconcile their planned sinful act with their beliefs of eternal afterlife and hopes of salvation and receiving God's mercy. Although there existed nuanced views on the eligibility of the insane suicides for salvation, committing suicide while of sound mind and joining the heavenly afterlife were considered incompatible at least in the mainstream views. Based on the general religious discourse and strict mentality of the era promulgating the terribleness of self-killing and the expressed worries over salvation, feelings of unbearable weights of guilty conscience, frequent church attendance and personal religious practice, some of the suicidal were clearly troubled in the face of their desire to end their earthly existence.

The beliefs of the grim destiny of a sane suicide's soul as well as the inability to repent the ultimate sin, to follow the usual *ars moriendi* with its last rituals and to receive a proper burial when killing oneself could lead into turning to extraordinary measures, i.e., committing indirect suicide by

indulging in or falsely confessing capital crimes. Execution allowed the necessary preceding rituals, including visitations by pastor, confession, penance, and partaking Communion, that were, after all, thought to enable going through a holy, Christian death.⁸⁹

Still, the authorities' teaching and mainstream Lutheran understanding of the exclusion of sane suicides from the Christian community and salvation did not stop people from making unorthodox interpretations of their personal salvation. Spiritual preparations were made for their self-inflicted demise that could be followed--like some plausibly believed--with future resurrection. The would-be suicides that regardless of their choice followed the precepts of the *ars moriendi* did not feel that they died spiritually unprepared; their behaviour of confessions and other religious practice prior to their planned demise suggests that they had made their peace with God placing their faith and trust in God's mercy. In general, it can be assumed that although some of the would-be suicides possibly ignored the issue, most very likely at least pondered their fate in the hereafter and either hoped for the best or accepted the official views on their act and gruesome destiny in the afterlife.

The sporadic mentions of the spiritual preparations among the suicides, including prayers, rushed confessions, and partaking Communion prior to their act, represent the great significance of these practices and procedures related to a good death and dying well in early modern Sweden. Alongside these cases, many texts describing dying well and bad deaths published in seventeenth-century Sweden, the burial practices of many groups that had died unrepentant while sinning and the behaviours and logic expressed by the suicidal who committed capital offences in order to be executed manifest the importance of spiritual preparations, especially confession, repentance and receiving Communion, in the last moments of one's life.

Thus, faith alone, nor a devout, Christian life was ultimately not enough even in post-Reformation Sweden--one also had to die well, at least not via sin like premeditated suicide and without confession and repentance. The results of this article support the interpretations made about the continuation of many beliefs and rituals related to death and dying from the Catholic times even long after the Reformation.⁹⁰ In general, the spiritual crises and preparations manifest the diverse religious views, continuation of Catholic and syncretic beliefs and practices and the heterogeneous,

⁸⁹ Being executed allowed adequate time to make good preparations, as shown, for example, in the case of Johan Fleming described in Lahtinen, "Death with an Agenda," in this volume.

⁹⁰ E.g. Leppin, "Preparing for Death"; Malmstedt, *Bondetro och Kyrkoro*; Marshall, "After Purgatory"; Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying*.

ambiguous and even contradictory opinions of suicide and the salvation of suicides' souls in an era characterized by official religious uniformity.