



*Shaping the
Religious Emotions
in Early Modern Germany*

THE
REFORMATION
OF FEELING

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To Fred

He Knows Why

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The Reformation of Feeling

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Introduction

The *Chronicle of Higher Education* declared in February 2003 that scholars in many disciplines were currently carrying out research on the emotions.¹ As in naming a child, one likes to think that one is somehow original, or at least distinctive, in one's choices. Yet Emily and Jason turn out to be leading choices of all parents; and the emotions (along with memory) are an intellectual mode. In Germany, I noticed a glossy magazine called *Emotion: Persönlichkeit, Partnerschaft, Psychologie* for sale on an airport newsstand.² Emotion sells to the public, as books and cinema also demonstrate. We academics, too, who pride ourselves on our independent thought and even cultivate idiosyncrasy, are embedded in our culture. As Bob Scribner used to say, light bulbs go off simultaneously in a number of heads.³ Having had to postpone writing, I note that others have published treatments of the Reformations and emotionality.⁴ Unapologetically, then, and aware of my context, this book is about the ways in which Catholic, Lutheran, and Calvinist ecclesiastical leaders in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Germany tried to shape the religious feelings of those in their charge. It is about clerical agendas. We are already well aware that governors tried to dampen people's volatility in social settings—a current label for this attempt is, à la Gerhard Oestreich, “social disciplining.”⁵ This study, however, while in the end it will relate spirituality and society, concentrates on efforts to alter religious experience.⁶

The very popularity of the emotions as a focus of investigation ensured that this topic would impinge on my awareness, perhaps first by means of Barbara Rosenwein's book on medieval anger.⁷ Rosenwein's new book, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*, serves as a vehicle of contribution to my conceptual framework of "communities of emotion."⁸ Although she was working on a more remote and less documentable period than I, and thus occasionally having to *dare* in asserting the existence of a community of outlook, I am persuaded that Rosenwein is right in noting the modes of expression that take hold of and cement groups such as the high-ranking clergymen whose writings she has studied. She detects a rapid shift from one generation of Merovingian courtiers to the next, from verbally passionate epistolary exchanges to restraint as measured by the frequency and variability of the men's sentimental vocabulary. It is highly probable that shared norms framed the commonalities to be found in the works I have used by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century preachers.

Practically every historian takes notice of Norbert Elias's assertions concerning the "civilizing process" in medieval Europe, and these have implications for feeling. In fact, Elias appears to have added remarks on the emotions to the English translation of one of his works that evidently do not appear in the German original.⁹ In order to be "civilized," medieval people had at least to submit themselves to a moderating of the impulse-driven expression of their coarser, more violent feelings. Albert Hirschman's *The Passions and the Interests* (1977) anticipated a wider discussion of Elias.¹⁰ Hirschman explores an alleged connection between the state's effort to suppress effusion and the service of emerging capitalism. Did the new economic system require categorical self-discipline in the working class upon whose labors its success depended? In reality, not all emotions needed to be eliminated, only those that were destructive. These could be transformed (neutralized) into constructive inclinations. Hirschmann adduces the thought of early-modern thinkers, and these are the focus of his book. He finds that during the eighteenth century, the passions undergo rehabilitation as potentially creative forces.¹¹

William Reddy, a historian likewise of Enlightenment and Revolutionary France, dares to go further than Hirschman in identifying astonishingly rapid transformations in the emotional styles of those participants who have left their textual traces. He finds that up till 1794, French citizens were expected to *feel* their commitment to the principles underlying radical governmental change. Thereafter, feeling became suspect, and political stances were to be the result of rational consideration; emotion and thought were, as predominately in the Middle Ages, antipodes again.¹² Reddy's quest for emotional *liberty*

significantly shapes his work—and personal liberty was hardly a goal of early modern Christianity, as Martin Luther stressed in lambasting the German peasants for their revolt. Reddy attributes to the historical and the presently existing human being a high degree of awareness and of agency, and a common desire for liberty that hardly rings true for most settings. This historian does contribute to my thinking two important concepts: *emotives* and *navigation*. Emotives are not feelings as such so much as they are possibilities-through-process of changing self and others.¹³ Reddy, of course, has a very different setting in mind as he offers his definition. The idea of navigation informs us of the complexity and dynamism—as opposed to the purity and separateness—of emotions in practice. The human being receives cues from myriad sources as translator (translation is the principal activity of cognition, he says) and then, in relation to this ever-changing panoply of goals as well as personal needs, finds his integrative way among them.¹⁴ Reddy's framework will assist me in assessing contextual and aspirational change over the roughly two centuries under discussion. I accept his precept that culture conditions emotions—although I would not declare this in absolutizing terms.

Having encountered works such as these, I began to realize that the Reformation had implicit emotional dimensions. I concentrated first of all on Lutheranism. I perceived that the removal of nearly all depictions of women—whose association with feelings and, and as men insisted, the accompanying irrationality meant that they had to be kept under men's control¹⁵—and the theretofore ubiquitous scenes of grisly martyrdom all by themselves lowered the emotive tone of sanctuaries.¹⁶ The chapter I wrote was but a beginning, a spur to further thought. I quickly realized that I had drawn two poles, emotion versus little or no emotion, and that such a scheme was inaccurate because it was grossly oversimplified. The task at hand involves depicting types and degrees of feeling, for indeed Protestants retained religious sentiment. I doubt whether the detachment that the early-modern admirers of ancient Stoicism (or Buddhists through the ages) strove for can exist.

If German Lutheran worship during the sixteenth century both possessed and advocated an altered mood in comparison with the Catholic devotion that preceded and surrounded it within the Holy Roman Empire, then did not Catholic piety itself demand direct attention? The answer was yes, although the style of the revisions advocated by the Wittenberg Reformer was no mere counterpoise to Catholicism. As the Catholic Church in Germany assessed the challenges to its exclusive authority, it came, of course, to a number of explicit decisions, many of them embodied in the encompassing decrees of the Council of Trent. If we examine the arousing qualities of preaching and effervescent

church decoration in the incipient baroque era, we may detect as well tacit features that bear messages concerning inner sensation to the devout. Will these be of my invention? Some may say so.¹⁷ At any rate, the ongoing contrast between Catholic and Lutheran style is laden with references to the feelings as well as to theological and ceremonial rectitude. Clearly, the ideal Christian in this age of dynamic creedal revision, no matter in which allegiance, is to experience spiritual movement of specified types. Specification came in every media form; it permeated the respective sacral spaces and ritual acts of both Catholic and evangelical persuasions. In preparing this study, I have included many modes of communication.

My mind turned inevitably to Zwinglian and Calvinist interiors and services. The contrast between these and their forebears in the late-medieval Holy Mother Church was the starkest of all. If I had initially expected that the differences between Lutheran and Reformed programs for the spiritual emotions would not be great, further reading disabused me. Although we know about the thoroughgoing eradication of “idolatrous” images from the Reformed churches, the messages conveyed to congregations homiletically were less certain because less available in published form. Sixteenth-century Calvinist divines in particular were less ready than either Lutheran pastors or Catholic priests to see their sermons into print. Both Andrew Pettegree and Larissa Taylor, experts on religious books and preaching, have confirmed this.¹⁸ I shall speculate below on why this was the case. Other aspects of the Reformed agenda, however, render possible a defensible description of its emotional aspirations.

Sermons are a major source of information on the new churches’ intentions toward their adherents. In the pulpit, clergymen, however learned they might be, were confronted with the faces of their lay charges, and in those faces their neighbors. It lay upon the clergy to communicate precisely, in simple yet unmistakable terms, what the godly person should believe and how he should behave. Preachers said what they most urgently wanted the common resident to hear.¹⁹ This was even so when, in some lands, a pericopal schedule was set for all pastors to follow. Individual excursus on the same scriptural text could be quite original. High-flown theological treatments were categorically out of place, except when the audience itself was made up of clerics. When it was, sermons were delivered in Latin. But before lay hearers, astute preachers sifted out the essence of otherwise complicated teachings, striving, in the early generations, to persuade, to sow the seeds of conviction deep, to mold behavior, and, as I am arguing, to generate those feelings that would undergird faith as well as sustain all aspects of the aspired-to Christian life-in-the-community. Apart from the Latin/vernacular question, the problem of correspondence between sermons-as-given and sermons-as-printed remains.²⁰ It is in most cases insoluble.

It would have been impossible to read tens of thousands of the extant sermons on all themes.²¹ I finally decided upon two core subgenres: Passion sermons and those about dying and death.²² Neither of these could overlook feeling—although surprises await in connection with Reformed expositions. In addition, I have used vernacular treatises containing material on the Passion or on death that were clearly intended to mold lay feelings. I found evidence, then, in those places where I judged that it could not be lacking.

Theoretical Literature

I have been fascinated to become aware of the antiquity, frequency, and variety with which prominent thinkers through the ages have addressed the problem of human (and animal) emotion. Because of the sheer mass of such work, ranging from ancient Greek philosophy to modern North American and European physiological studies of cognition in the primate brain,²³ I have specifically sought out theories that are relevant because they influenced the men who formed the late-medieval and early-modern churches; or because they provided useful stimuli in evaluating how early-modern feeling functioned in the larger confessionalizing framework.²⁴ Among these, to select but a few examples, are works by John Corrigan, specialist on emotion and religion, and Nico H. Frijda, psychologist of emotion and its relation to belief.²⁵ I have also found useful the experiential context and interpersonal nature of emotion that is put forward by Axel Hübler.²⁶

But in the late Middle Ages, every educated man was familiar with the corpus of Aristotle. He was the paragon and epitome of brilliance. The numerous admonitory depictions of “Phyllis Riding Aristotle” wielded their persuasive power through the juxtaposition of the voluptuous beauty Phyllis, Alexander’s mythical mistress, and the world’s smartest man, the legendary philosopher Aristotle.²⁷ Not even he was immune to her, and by extension to all feminine, wiles. These fictive portrayals, however, entertained as they warned. What the ancient Greek actually had to say on topics ranging from poetic theory to cosmology was deadly serious, even if, during the sixteenth and seventeenth century, its truths were undergoing challenge. The twentieth-century dismissal of Aristotle has meant that the value of his insights has evaded modern researchers.²⁸ Mainly in *Rhetoric* but also in *De Anima* and *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle saw essential linkages rather than oppositions between mind and body. Here he drew apart from the Platonic principle of the emotions’ threat to human beings’ rationality.²⁹ He believed that emotions could have positive effects, and that certain feelings should be cultivated as reinforcing virtuous behavior. In

the *Rhetoric*, he found a relationship between the emotions and moral belief as borne out in behavior. Apart from these more principled dimensions of his thought, the Philosopher noted that the effective public speaker must engage his listeners' affect in order to persuade.

Sixteenth-century teachers of rhetoric, including Philipp Melanchthon, accepted this as a basic truism.³⁰ Melanchthon writes of the orator's "carrying hearts away with him."³¹ Early-modern humanist students of rhetoric, whose favored Hellenized Roman textbooks—Cicero's *On the Orator* and Quintilian's *The Formation of the Orator*—drew upon both Aristotle and Plato, did not doubt that in leading their audiences' opinions whither they wished, they must appeal to their feelings as well as to their rational faculties.³² Thus, touching the hearts of congregations was a conscious goal of those preachers who had even an advanced grammar-school preparation. Surviving sermons will not be from the pens of the less well educated, however.

Medieval thought concerning the emotions was mixed. If specialists in the trivial (pertaining to the trivium) component of rhetoric during the high and late Middle Ages propagated the need to play to their listeners' sentiments, they nevertheless continued to regard emotion ambivalently. As far as pastoral advice was concerned, at least five of the seven deadly sins (sloth, gluttony, lust, anger, envy, covetousness, and pride) were essentially wrong feelings, upon which one might or might not act.³³ Even without a consequent deed, the sensations themselves, like thoughts not acted upon, were sinful and had to be confessed.

Religious Feeling before the Reformation

In a classic statement, Johan Huizinga characterized the late Middle Ages as smelling of blood and of roses. Either of these symbols connotes feeling—the one of anger and revenge; the other of pleasure, perhaps involving erotic love or spiritual devotion to the Virgin. He said that the era was "override," its day of inventive energy past, and it now relied on the repetition and overembroidery of its core ideas.³⁴ This could well apply to aspects of early-sixteenth-century religiosity. Leopold von Ranke regarded true Christianity in the fifteenth century to lie concealed beneath thick layers of superstition, doctrines, and regulations.³⁵ More recently, Bernd Moeller has sounded a similarly critical note. I disagree with Moeller, Steven Ozment, and others who regard Catholicism as psychologically overburdensome at this time: I myself do not doubt the enthusiasm of many laity for the confraternities and an annual enumeration of their sins.³⁶ We cannot see into the souls of the individuals who all together constituted

early-modern society, but the widespread founding of endowments, the manufacture and purchase of relics, the undertaking of pilgrimage (long or short depending on one's means), the proliferation of shrines, the participation in processions, the conferral of patronage, seeking the priest's blessing on candles and bread—these willing, socially reinforced activities and many more suggest a higher degree of consent than Protestant historians have sometimes been inclined to see. The societal binding power of confraternities and processions, intertwined with an imagined practice of “sheer” religion, cannot be separated out, weighed, and measured. Religious activities lent additional structure to communal existence, and their termination in the Reformation at the very least forced people to cast about for other abutments to their way of life. Inner and outer forms of culture cannot exist apart from one another. Feeling and expression are inseparable.

Most directly relevant to my enterprise is Jean Delumeau's controversial book, *Sin and Fear: The Emergence of a Western Guilt Culture, 13th–18th Centuries*.³⁷ Guilt and fear are definitely emotions. As Delumeau delineates them over half a millennium, these sprang from the self-condemnatory, ascetic impulses of medieval monasticism, early spread into the secular *cura animarum*, and persisted in the spiritual ideals of both ongoing Catholicism and the emerging Protestant denominations. In sign language (art, ritual), sermon, and the expanding range of devotional literature of the early-modern period, clerics continued to enjoin upon their charges attitudes of fear of divine judgment and of self-abnegation as a deliberate, meritorious (Catholicism) or reactive (Protestantism) effort to palliate God's righteous wrath over sin. My own response to this thesis has been generally positive if differentiated. I find Lutheranism and Calvinism to espouse monastic elements and to attempt to ingrain them in the populace. This book is about *clerical* mentalities and pastoral programs. Despite their rejection of monastic lives as literal withdrawal from the world and a strictly ordered, overseen regimen, not even Protestant preachers could bring themselves to eliminate conventual metaphors from their preaching, most especially in relation to domestic life and husbands' and wives' respective roles within it.³⁸ Women and girls were ever to cultivate poverty, chastity, obedience, and stability; men as “abbots” were to enforce this lifestyle.

Aspects of medieval religious culture persisted within Protestantism. I will nevertheless assert for Lutheranism a greater departure from Delumeau's generalizations than that author realized in his own treatment. Further, the sensitive kernel of this departure itself derives from traditional Catholicism. Perhaps the main flaw in *Sin and Fear* is that it fails to appreciate the range of emotional tones within the inherited cult. Not all of them were deprecatory and apprehensive, even if these qualities as models were widespread.

A fundamental feature of the Catholicism that in some regions would be cast aside was its flexibility. The lap of Holy Mother Church was commodious—provided that no dissenter attracted too much attention and potential emulation. In the realm of emotion, Christians could be nonchalant and inattentive without crippling penalty; or they could devote their very lives, as in certain monastic houses, to the adoration of the crucified Christ or the Virgin. The range of expression that the observer can encounter is immense. Probably every parish contained representatives of each end of the broad sentimental spectrum. Too, over the course of life, individuals might shift from one category to another, becoming more intensely solicitous of saintly favor in times of emergency. One crisis to which each person ultimately came was death itself. Handbook (*ars moriendi*), homily, and viaticum attempted to guide the faithful toward and through that vicissitude. The transactions of dying could not be devoid of feeling, for the decedent, attendants, and perhaps even for the jaded clergy.

We ought not to generalize to all of society, then, the intense devotional condition of the saints whose fame for self-deprivation, even ecstasy, has come down to us. They were exceptional; they were the wonderment and puzzlement of their own houses. The Church itself regarded them mistrustfully and appointed confessors to keep track of their visions or emissaries to examine them. Across Europe, the Church looked askance at any—whether Angela of Foligno, Margery Kempe, or Ignatius of Loyola—who far surpassed its norms of piety, including its emotional norms.³⁹ One of the qualities of the beguines that post-Reformation magistrates would object to was their religious “enthusiasm.” The sisters in Zwickau were allowed to continue living together and taking in mending for their mutual support, provided they gave up their habits and their exuberant household devotions (*schwirmerij*).⁴⁰ But Catholic suspicion was not outright condemnation. The more tolerant late-medieval Church made its peace with those religious who were attracted to mystical forms of expression, who protested their obedience to the institution, and who did not object to ecclesiastical oversight. As a result, monks as well as nuns could continue to weep over the suffering Lord and his increasingly agonized mother.⁴¹

In its early years, their model of affective piety was not enjoined upon the laity.⁴² Gradually it became more available to society at large. One vehicle of its perpetration were the sweeps through Germany of penitential and anti-heresy preachers. The swath cut through German-speaking lands by John of Capistrano (1385–1456) in the fifteenth century aroused a sizeable populace to feel sorrow for sin as well as to murder numerous Jews. Earlier efforts in the north at such coalescence against the “outsider” had not been successful. Within John’s trajectory, the trigger of emotion was less the crucified Christ than the sense of

threat posed by heretics, Jews, and, toward the end of Capistrano's career as Constantinople fell, the Turks. Another exception was the treatment of the Passion, which was indeed meant to stimulate deep and if possible abiding feeling; and this was set off by images of the crucified Christ. The imprint of the Passion was to be retained throughout the year.

Virtually every aspect of the programs for spiritual apprehension that were held out to the pious by the respective subdivisions within post-Reformation European Christianity could be found in late-medieval Catholicism. To repeat, neither Lutheranism, Calvinism, nor a newly fortified Catholicism invented ideals of religious feeling that had not existed earlier. Rather, each selected from among the elements already available "in Holy Mother's lap" and elevated its choices to an unprecedented exclusivity. Indeed, this may be said concerning the entire Reformation movement, including the Catholic. Only emphases, combinations, and firm exclusions were novel.⁴³

Vocabulary

Social scientists since their inception as a group have generally modified the inherited categories of emotion: according to Aristotle, anger, fear, pleasure, grief, but with significant qualification.⁴⁴ In fact, each culture wields its own conceptual cookie-cutters and lays them down upon a dough containing a range of sentiments, strong and weak, that are almost infinitely varied. A society's cutting of the dough represents the formulation of vocabulary designating types of feeling. The major flaw in this baker's metaphor is that it does not convey the evolutionary qualities of language—constantly changing in its nuances, continually responding to alterations in its existential milieu. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are a long period, one within which the late-medieval Gothic conceptual universe of the preachers gives way to the disorientation of Mannerism and rulers' more concerted self-aggrandizement, which in turn yields, during the baroque age, to the celebration of the literate elites' certainty of divine favor. Yet theologians and the priestly and pastoral castes, reliant upon their definitions, all exerted conservative influence, striving to hold onto an imagined doctrinal purity embodied in their respective designated founding fathers. How, then, can the historian of early-modern Germany even venture to *name* emotions?⁴⁵

I have adhered to two principles in this study. The first is to listen to the labels of preachers themselves, as these have come down to us in printed form. Insofar as possible, their templates rather than ours must provide the vocabulary of sentiment. Their patterns of naming interior sensation became apparent

as I read. The preachers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries shared root metaphors, which, however, drew apart after the Reformation. Catholics' meanings of *heart* will become different from those of Protestants, for example. These reveal not only contemporary esthetics of speech but may lead us deeper into an understanding of religious and moral culture in general. Although, as said earlier, one cannot assume that the clergymen's outlook translates into that of their fellow citizens, this work presupposes that it is valuable to penetrate the divines' social and ethical value systems and their "sensitive" cosmology. Second, I shall compare those names with the verbal messages of liturgy and lyric, and with the nonverbal signage of the decoration of sanctuaries.⁴⁶ Jeffrey Chipps Smith has called the baroque interiors of Jesuit churches "sensuous."⁴⁷ I agree with his learned opinion; others might find the word *sensuous* to be laden with unsuitable erotic connotation. I do not, for I see the recombinant Catholic Church as aggressively enlisting the body and even its pleasant sensations in seeking to inform the spirit. For the present purpose, then, I am inevitably the interpreter of meaning and mood. Other experienced researchers must judge whether their interpretations would coincide with mine. I share the view of Alun Munslow that "history is not simply an observational and reconstructive activity, the function of which is to locate empirical (sometimes called synthetic) and/or analytical truth. Writing history is a mind- and discourse-dependent performative literary act."⁴⁸

Methodological Problems

The most obvious problem confronting the scholar who attempts to draw conclusions about patterns in both acts and moods of reformation from piecemeal evidence is whether this is possible. It might be better to "camp out" at one or two selected sites and exhaust the pertinent archives. At the beginning of a career, this would definitely be the better choice, for the person striving to enter a profession is strategically obliged to demonstrate detailed research skills along with an integrative capacity. The late stage of my own career and my fascination with materials located in various parts of the German-speaking lands led me to seize the liberty of a broader, shallower search. Visitation protocols, ecclesiastical ordinances, liturgical rubrics, catechisms, sermons, and devotional tracts revealed very similar patterns throughout Lutheranism, throughout Catholicism, and throughout Calvinism—I repeat the preposition to emphasize the resemblances within each creed but differences that set each tradition apart from its rivals. Their emotional goals are astonishingly distinct. This fact stands out when one examines three categories of expression: the

adornment of sacred spaces, the central meanings of ritual life and the deliberate reflection of theology in ritual, and sermons delivered to and edifying treatises written for the public by the clergy.

The question arises persistently of correspondence between published homilies and those that may have actually been given. For the most part, the inability to show that printed sermons were identical to those given must simply be endured. Authors did wish to ensure that a text fixed in print could withstand the cold stare of the touchstone theologians, or, in the Catholic instance, of inquisitors. Too, they may have wished to show themselves as the best possible orators. Further, texts written in Latin were almost certainly given in the vernacular to general lay audiences that included the artisan classes and women of any rank. Only when a respected preacher addressed his fellow clerics or another audience of learned men may we imagine that he actually used Latin. With regard to John Calvin, whose sermons I shall examine even though they were not in German because they provided a model for Reformed preachers in Germany, too, we are fortunate: For eleven years, from 1549 until he died in about 1560, Denis Raguenier or another of his corps of secretaries attended Calvin's sermons and took down in shorthand what the Reformer said. Their author allegedly gave them extemporaneously without written notes (but with preparation), and he did not wish to have them printed. Through happenstance they survived in manuscript form into the twentieth century, when a number of them were rescued and edited.

By means of the analysis of Passion sermons, which could hardly avoid touching on the feelings, it is possible to peer into the founding fathers' mentalities and decipher the clues they left us to their ideals of religious sentiment.

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I

The Emotions in Early-Modern Catholicism

Affective piety as an ideal was widely accepted, and widely characteristic of late-medieval and early-modern Catholic Christianity. Although it is by no means certain that a majority of Western Christians engaged in its forms, some did. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux concentrated and publicized this tradition, which doubtless preceded him, particularly within monastic orders. His example, however, gradually spread beyond the Cistercian movement, as the population expanded and the brothers were less able to maintain their sought-after isolation from the general lay population. They did not as readily take up preaching to the laity or even assuming the cure of souls as their predecessors in the reforming of Benedictine monasticism, the Cluniacs, had. Yet crises such as the spread of the Catharist heresy in southern France called Cistercian abbots out of their preferred stability and onto the byways in an effort to stanch the flow of souls into latter-day Manichaeism. As de facto preachers, Saint Dominic and his bishop found heretics everywhere, and they recognized that the clerical orders as then defined, whether regular or secular, offered no ministerial remedy to the challenge at hand. The establishment of mendicant orders, by ascetic lifestyle and persuasive preaching, specifically served the purpose of preventing further conversions to heresy within the ranks of Holy Mother Church. This preaching, as carrot, along with the newly formed inquisition, as stick, was secondarily to convince Catharists (or Waldensians) of the error of their allegiance and win them back into the Catholic

fold. This wave of innovation enabled the Cistercian abbots to return to their monasteries. Donna Trembinski has noted the role of the Dominican friars in focusing on the severity of Christ's physical suffering, a theme they doubtless carried with them in their homilies to the faithful.¹

Historians of the Reformation have tended to underestimate the extent and vigor of preaching within the high and late Middle Ages. The literature on the medieval sermon is vast, and it is astonishing how many homiletic texts themselves have survived for our perusal. The preachers fit in several categories. So-called hedge-preachers were a dynamic but elusive lot who, if they were not hermits who confined themselves to one place, spoke whenever they could gather an audience. Francis of Assisi began his preaching career in this way. Authorities before as after the Reformation lamented the ubiquity of such types and strove to eliminate them. Their preference was for duly appointed and overseen clergy, whose utterances and behavior they could keep track of. This was an ideal, and the practical supervision often fell to the orders of which they were members or to diocesan chapters. Such condoned preachers held forth mainly in population centers and were attached to friaries, cathedrals, universities, or other churches. In the late Middle Ages, Europe saw penitential preachers, sometimes self-appointed, sweep across its expanses or its locales, calling their avid hearers to sorrow for sin and reform of life, well before the End of Time. These were short-term events, and the preaching was ephemeral unless the preachers were figures of repute. Simultaneously, however, donors or larger cities saw to the creation of formal preacherships in order that the citizens could have dependable, ongoing access to the Word of God. The record of each of these types is sufficient, and the scholarly literature vast.²

The great diversity of personalities and spiritual strains within the Church makes it virtually impossible to characterize late-medieval Catholicism as a whole. Indeed, its very incorporative nature, recalling perhaps its earlier syncretic devices, sets it apart from the Protestant offshoots that were to follow in the sixteenth century. Each of these was more intent on uniformity than the Church had been. But in this quality, the Church of the Catholic Reform would imitate its disobedient offspring as well as reflect the disciplinary nature of the age. It, too, would struggle to impose conformity on all those remaining within its fold. The Council of Trent, and especially its decrees, is rightly thought of as a watershed event, even though many of those decrees, in the face of the Protestant apostasy, simply reiterated the doctrinal status quo. Others, together with ancillary legislation, insisted on adherence to nearly identical rules for all Catholic people and practices. This effort to provide a single theology, a single or at least uniform catechism as a means of teaching doctrine, a single liturgical rubric (the Roman missal), and virtually a single form of monastic life

(enclosed) for women marked off the early-modern Church from its medieval antecedents.

In high- and late-medieval devotion, multiplicity prevailed. Mysticism was by no means anathema. Saint Brigitta of Sweden's own visions of the Crucifixion and the details she provided in her record were a source of the elaboration that subsequent preachers would draw upon. A Latin version of her *Revelationes* was published in Lubeck in 1492.³ The Church had always shown its worry that direct, personal communication with the Divinity entailed at least the possibility of nonconformity, and certainly a bypassing of clerical and sacramental structures. Somehow Bernard of Clairvaux's prominent engagement in the world, his avid defense of Catholic theology in the face of Abelard's innovation, his promotion of exterior crusade, reassured the Church, if it cared, that his own visions fell within acceptable boundaries. Other visionaries met with close scrutiny, including the assignment of trustworthy confessors. The Rhenish mystics caused unease, not least because of their attractiveness to throngs of listeners who wished to imitate them. Ironically, a sign of Christianity's triumph in the West was just this enthusiastic engagement with the faith. People's allegiance was not of the compulsory sort of Clovis's army or Charlemagne's Saxons. Rather, from the twelfth century on, most of the populace, to judge by its engagement in orders, confraternities, processions, pilgrimages, and endowments, believed in the Christian faith as it was defined for them. Still, it was hardly defined in an orderly, evenly distributed way. Population centers naturally possessed the most sacred buildings—churches, chapels, shrines, convents, friaries—together with their inhabitants. The rural masses were likely to be neglected, unless they lived in proximity to a religious house that found it incumbent on itself to minister to society's humblest. To this extent, Protestant scholars are correct about an increase of preaching: Within a century, rural Christians, too, felt the preachers' breath in their faces. This was true, however, on every side of the newly drawn creedal lines. The Catholic Church took up the evangelical challenge of taking its own enunciation of the Word of God to even more of its humble masses. As it had earlier made use of the friars for similar purposes, now it promoted, once again even in the face of diocesan resistance, Jesuit and Capuchin fathers as assistants in the enterprise of better informing and securing the fidelity of the laity.

In every Catholic venue, icons of the crucified Christ were likely to be on display, and in their affective aspects were likely to be a signal of traditional devotion. Every reader who has visited museums and historic churches will be aware of the change in the appearance of these crucifixes from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries. Regions had their own stylistic features, but devotion to the crucifix was evidently universal.⁴ At first quite rigid and horizontal,

Romanesque images seldom give a convincing impression of the suffering of Christ. Rather, his body is arranged on two planes: horizontal and vertical. His face is serious, but rather to be interpreted as regally judgmental rather than as painfully aggrieved. Needless to say, each artist's rendering was different, and there are notable exceptions to this generalization.⁵ Devotion to the graphically crucified Christ along with his Virgin Mother was as much an affirmation of the Catholic faith as it was a boundary between Catholic orthodoxy and perceived apostasy.

James H. Marrow, Thomas H. Bestul, and others have proved how central, if not the exclusive theme, the Passion was in high and late medieval religion.⁶ Bernard of Clairvaux's and Bonaventura's own early advocacy of meditation on the suffering Lord targeted chiefly other religious, but the trend after his time was to make it, first, a hallmark of the dedicated life, whether undertaken by men or women; and second, culminating in the fifteenth century, a sign of lay devotion, too. The medieval Church through its various organs promoted a widening of the contemplative net, calling more and more of its children to participation in the compelling experience of Jesus' suffering.⁷ Beginning not later than the fifteenth century, the Reformation quite aside, Catholicism was marked by intensification rather than innovation.⁸ Indeed, one effect of the coming of Lutheranism and other forms of dissent was to heighten the resolve and the drive of the Mother Church to teach its members more effectively and to inform their doctrinal allegiance with feelings of identity. The subscription to doctrinal precepts, events had shown, was hardly enough to secure loyalty. In response to their teachers' incitement in the pulpit or on a dais in the marketplace, the faithful had to respond with their hearts. Rhetorical description of the Passion in all its horror was a salient implement of persuasion.⁹ In retaining and developing outward demonstration as a feature of the faith, Catholicism did not invent a new form; rather, it selected emotionality from among several late-medieval alternatives of spirituality. In contrast to Marrow, who regards the Low Countries and the Rhineland as the center of Passion contemplation, I have gained a strong impression in preparing this study that Jesus' ordeal moved into prominence virtually throughout Western Christendom.

It is important to note, too, that drama was a salient medium for the presentation of Passion themes to the populace.¹⁰ All manner of mystery plays set these before viewers' eyes, initially within sacred spaces, the sanctuaries, and later tending to expand outward.¹¹ Although the preparation may have been more festive and physically flexible than that of a formal clerical disquisition, the plays' ideological content was designed both to inform and to move. The clergy guided the shaping of the content of these pieces, and they often acted in them.

The Fifteenth Century

Numerous accounts of pre-Reformation Passion preaching in German-speaking lands have survived. I have selected not the familiar Geiler von Kaysersberg (1445–1510)¹² but a lesser-known figure (although he was well reputed in his own day), Paul Wann (1420/25–1489), who left in manuscript form a series of Latin Holy Week sermons that he preached in 1460 in the cathedral in Passau.¹³ His sentiments strike me as representative of the intensifying clerical culture of that day; he is a suitable example.

Wann was a member of a baker's family in Wunsiedel, near the Bohemian border, who took the doctorate in canon law in Vienna, and evidently also the doctorate in theology, upon which he lectured. By 1475, he joined the diocesan chapter in Passau. He was a regular preacher there already, as his Passion sermons bear witness.¹⁴ Both other canons and a broad laity made up his audience. Most likely, then, these sermons were actually presented in German. Although the series was not published until 1928, others of Wann's year-round homilies issued from the press during the pre-Reformation era. These fell within the category of aids to his less experienced clerical colleagues, as well as possibly also that of edifying literature for the literate citizen.¹⁵ They probably helped Wann's less well-prepared fellows, too, in the formation of their homiletic style, which is to say in determining the content, the rhetorical style, and the emotional tone of their own sermons. The reading of such books constituted an important dimension of training for the priesthood in the late Middle Ages. It was also a reflection of the drive toward moral and ecclesiastical reform in which Wann took part.

Wann's *Passionale* is divided into nine segments, presumably for preaching between Palm Sunday and Easter Saturday. Nine sections do not fit the days, even if two were held on Good Friday. The Resurrection is omitted here, which hints at his cessation on the day before Easter. The author himself states in his first sermon that he has divided the remaining ones into eight parts in imitation of the canonical hours—of which, however, there were, by tradition, only seven. He will, he explains, repeat “compline” in order to make an eighth, which will be devoted to the agony of the Virgin Mary.¹⁶ His choice of this structure is surely evidence of the presence of the canons in his audience.

Wann's modern editor describes the sermons as permeated by warmth and “the fire of the mystical love of God.”¹⁷ In his introductory homily, Wann tries to break down his hearers' emotional resistance to the effects of Christ's experience:

Saint Gregory the Great . . . begins a sermon on the repentance of Mary Magdalene with the words: "When I think about speaking on the repentance of the Magdalene, I would rather cry than speak. For who could have a heart so stone-hard that it did not soften at the sight of her tears?" These words are even more suited to a sermon on the bitter Passion and death of Christ. It would be better to weep about it than to speak at length. Oh, if only I had tears for my crucified Redeemer! We would have to be people of stone if we were not moved by the tears of Christ, who poured them not only from his eyes but also in the form of drops of blood out of the thousand wounds [that covered] his holy body.¹⁸

In this hortatory prologue, the preacher establishes the predominant tone of what is to follow. He incites his fellow Christians to feel Jesus' suffering in all its specificity and to break down. He urges this "softening of the heart" upon men as well as women and laity as well as clergy. He continues that such softening is essential during Holy Week:

For a Christian it cannot be enough simply to look upon the suffering Savior. . . . The Christian must, at least during Holy Week, be inwardly moved to sympathy [and] must sink himself in the torment of that most holy body and all its members. The prophet [Jeremiah 1: 12] . . . wants to say, "Do not look upon me only superficially but observe me closely; try to experience along with me the burning glow of my pain!"¹⁹

According to Wann, there would not be enough time to describe everything that Jesus went through. In his Passion, he sums up, lies the total of all perfection.²⁰ He ends this sermon with further encouragement to grieve:

Look with humble, contrite hearts into the countenance of the Redeemer . . . as though you watched him die before your eyes! . . . Then you would have to be moved to tears. But if you cannot cry because you have a frosty disposition, you can nonetheless fruitfully contemplate the Passion of Jesus—only in that case, you must commit yourself into the lenient [*mild*] hands of divine grace. Do not cease to demand, to knock, and to seek until you receive this grace!

Those who do not come immediately to weeping should remember that not even nature is soft all year round. Eventually the melting of springtime arrives. With God's grace, these souls too may overcome their spiritual desiccation.²¹

The following day, Wann takes up the biblical story, beginning with the Last Supper. Compared with some of his contemporaries, who prepared dozens

if not hundreds of Passion sermons, the Bavarian must economize on detail. He combines description and moral lessons. He conveys the Lord's discomfort in facing the fact that Judas, his own disciple, will betray him. The atmosphere is heavy with suspense. Yet Christ, "the Savior, the Creator of the universe, the dreadful Judge of the human race," bends his knee and washes the feet of his very betrayer. "The Redeemer had exhausted on Judas all of his shepherdly effort."²² Wann attempts to move his hearers by conveying the immensity of Jesus' concern for this lost sheep, along with the magnitude of Judas's treachery. The foretelling of Peter's denial adds to the tension.²³ The other brethren are suspicious, incredulous over these predictions. The chosen three who accompany Jesus to Gethsemane can nevertheless not watch and pray with their Lord. With their lack of motivation, they betray him, too; they deny him the sustenance that he sought among his closest friends.

Wann focuses on Christ's inner ordeal, but this has its anticipated corporeal manifestation, bloody sweat:

His human nature is horrified in the face of his suffering [to come] and the shameful death. As a result, his heart beats loudly, and his soul convulses. Such a powerful struggle rages within him that sweat mixed with blood presses out of every pore and runs in fat drops onto the ground. Saint Bernard [sermon on the Passion] says that this bloody sweat flowed so freely that not only the Savior's clothing but even the ground was covered. The whole world should see that Christ, as though from his eyes, poured out tears from his whole body, in order to wash all members of the church.²⁴

As earlier, Wann ends with a call to feeling. "If I were to chastise myself for a thousand years in the strictest monastery, I could not adequately compensate him for the smallest drop of blood that he shed for me. Oh, I, a wretched sinner! Where are my tears? . . . I beg you, sweetest Jesus, grant me that by your bloody sweat, I hold before my eyes with inner pain the many sins that I have committed!"²⁵

The third sermon contains the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecies. He is betrayed, captured, mistreated by the Jews, abandoned by the disciples but not his mother, led first to Annas and then before Caiaphas, severely abused in both places, and denied by Peter. Christ is bound, struck in the face with fists, thrown to the ground, kicked while he is down, and led on to Pilate. Wann interjects to his listeners, "Hear how they scream, insult, and mock!"²⁶ "Let us observe with weeping eyes how the Savior is led from Annas to Caiaphas, what he did there, and what he endured!"²⁷ Christ's tormentors spat upon him. "Devout souls, you cannot think about this without feeling grief and pain. Watch, but also allow each shameful act to move your heart to ardent compassion

toward your Redeemer!”²⁸ “We should be shaken in our souls and, if we are not of [too] stiff a temperament, pour forth tears.”²⁹ This is a lengthy, detailed excursus, and the incitement to imagine, to sympathize, and to break down forms an insistent refrain.

As nearly always, the preacher remarks extensively on the Jews, a subject to which I shall return later. Their alleged blindness and brutality are ever the objects of excoriation. Attention to the Virgin, which I shall also take up in a later chapter, and to the Jews in the confrontation before Pilate takes up much of the fourth sermon. The Jews’ depicted joy at their opponent’s suffering contrasts with Jesus’ affliction. In their sensibilities, they are their “king’s” diametric opposite. Herod himself is here portrayed as “greatly pleased” (*hoherfreut*) to see the famous Jesus of Nazareth before him. He inquires whether he really can change water into wine and multiply loaves of bread. But when Jesus remains silent, which Herod takes as an expression of contempt, he becomes furious. For their part, Mary and John, who observe in the background, are disappointed by the Lord’s failure, as they see it, to defend himself.³⁰

In his fifth sermon, Wann retells the scriptural tale of Pilate’s liberation of Barabbas, which was followed by the most severe beating of Jesus yet, “by the coarsest thugs,” “with rods and knotted cords and straps with spikes.” No part of his body remains uninjured. Pieces of his flesh stick to the column to which he has been tied. “Pilate, how could you permit and command such a gruesome act?” the preacher asks.³¹ Then the Lord is crowned with thorns, and the points penetrate his brain. His torturers have “bestial hearts.”³² In contrast to some of those present in the church, “the stones may mourn and weep over this shocking drama!”³³ But what about us? “Does it not grip us in the heart? Do not our tears flow?” Here Jesus fulfills the Psalmist’s image of the creature who is a worm and no man.³⁴ At this point, Wann brings up Judas’s suicide; his intestines gushed forth: “It must have been a horrific death. Perhaps at the last moment Judas wanted to free himself from the rope. He swung and strained on the cord. This broke, and his body fell as heavy as lead into the depths and—oh, horror!—burst apart so that his intestines pressed out. All this Satan had desired and brought about.”³⁵ Catholic preaching will continue to feature this “dishonorable” death, whereas Protestants will gradually eliminate it. The suicide itself will absorb Lutheran attention.³⁶

Reluctant as he was to credit a woman, whose sex had brought about the Fall, Wann noted that Pilate’s wife was indeed prescient. “A heavy pressure burdened her heart, and she perceived the uncanny threat”—her husband would lose his position if he allowed this “righteous and holy person” to be killed.³⁷ Wann ends this sermon on a positive note, affirming Christ’s deep love for humanity:

We should not dwell too long on the evil of the Jews and on the bloody wounds that they inflicted on the Lord; rather let us look at length deep into his heart, where an unending love for us burned! Let us consider attentively the outcome of his suffering, [which is] the inexhaustible wealth of our redemption! We must ever again be amazed by the boundless redemptive love of our Lord. In order to save us and to give us back the life of the soul, he wanted to die.³⁸

Wann concludes each sermon in a major key.

Moving forward, Wann describes Christ's death sentence, his bearing of the cross, his confrontation with the women of Jerusalem, his exhaustion, the shame of his nakedness, his crucifixion and further mocking, and his mother's state of mind. The preacher enjoins his listeners to use their imaginations as Jesus, who is drained of blood and strength, struggles to bear his cross. "Faithful souls, step closer to him and ask him in prayerful love, 'Best Savior, where are you going?'" Ask him if you may accompany him. Help him to carry this burden.

Let us follow him in spirit step by step, and let us observe with holy wonderment how he, as God who bears heaven and earth and the entire cosmos, is pressed to the ground by the cross! What will we do when we see how he, gasping under the heavy load, threatens to collapse at any moment; when we see how his wounds from the lashing and the crown of thorns bleed further, and each imprint of his feet is red with blood?³⁹

Like his priestly forebears, he invents specific affronts to Christ in the process of his crucifixion. He repeatedly sounds the clarion call to identification. "Faithful souls, was that not an attack by all of hell upon the most innocent of all human beings? Can you not feel what is thereby experienced in the heart of this innocent one?"⁴⁰

Yes, observe ever anew this inhuman, gruesome war game [*Kriegsspiel*] and speak to your Savior: "O my divine Redeemer! I am the cause of all your martyrdom; but I, the most impoverished of all sinners, have such a stone-hard heart that I cannot feel even a proper pity; so that I cannot cry. I beg you, Queen of Heaven, give me those tears that you poured out during the Passion of your Son."⁴¹

Without warning, the preacher discusses the variability in people's capacity for grief. Some very pious people cannot weep easily, and others who are not as devout shed copious tears, "each one according to his disposition." Perhaps

Wann wished to reassure those among his hearers who, despite their genuine devotion, could not provide the outer demonstration that he demands from them. God, he declares, is all good and merciful, and he turns away from no one who is faithful to him. To all those who make an honest effort, the heavenly Father gives his warming, cheering love.⁴² To these he will lend his consolation (*Trost*) whether they weep or not, and, the clergyman adds, we should not cry ourselves blind, an exaggerated piety.⁴³ He then reverts to the customary embroidery of the spare scriptural account. The nail pounded into Christ's hand was dull. "As a consequence, it crushed . . . his skin and flesh and some of the bones of his hand; it frightened the blood back into the chamber of his heart and shocked all the nerves in his body. The heart of the Redeemer is almost pulverized by the pain."⁴⁴ He describes in detail the torturous effects of Christ's being stretched out upon the cross.

One of the developments within the Passion devotion of the high and late Middle Ages is the assumption of separate status for Christ's individual wounds. They become near-saints in their own right—and to them prayers will be directed. Even this, however, is not without precedent in Catholic devotion. Paul Wann cites Saint Augustine in a way that hints at this Church Father as one of the contributors to this pattern. Wann cites Augustine's treatise on the Gospel of John:

"When a bad thought oppresses me, I take refuge in the Passion of the Lord; when fatigue weighs upon me, I arouse in myself the memory of the wounds of my Savior; when the devil pursues me, I flee into the open heart of my divine Friend, and he grants me abatement; when the glow of passion flares up in my members, it is put out by a glance at the crucified One. In all my struggles and unpleasantness, I find no remedy as effective as contemplating the wounds of Christ."⁴⁵

When closely scrutinized, however, this passage does not indicate a separate devotion to the wounds. Instead, for Augustine *wounds* is a rhetorical device that comprehends all of Christ's path to his death and all of his agony.

Wann expatiates upon human sin as the cause of Christ's execution. He has relatively neglected this topic until now. "How miserable and worthy of contempt am I, for not once, even in the face of his pain on the cross, did I stop sinning—as though his suffering had been a pleasure!" The preacher urges his listeners' repentance by means of the consideration of Jesus' agonized body: "See, his head is inclined in order to kiss you; his heart is ready to love you; his arms are spread out to embrace us; his entire body is stretched out and torn apart as a redeeming sacrifice for us."⁴⁶ Our physical as well as psychic sense of

identity with this unique fellow mortal will lead us toward remorse. Bodily sensation contributes toward our ultimate spiritual salvation; it enables us to avail ourselves, through inner and outer reform, of Christ's atoning grace. He turns his attention to the Mother under the cross.⁴⁷

The clergyman then remarks upon the psychological dimensions of the Passion. Wann's interpretation of Jesus' despair as he cries out, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" is different from that of later Protestant preachers. The fifteenth-century homiletician declares that the Son of God remained, as eternally, one with the Father. The power of divinity lay ever at his disposal, and he could have, had he wished, tapped it for purposes of diminishing or extinguishing his suffering. But Christ chose to deny himself this relief "so that his soul could dip into the entire ocean of suffering. A dark night filled with sinister horror dominated the Savior's soul, and this spiritual pain was probably the greatest part of his ordeal."⁴⁸ The nobility of a person conditions his experience of pain. As the most noble human being, Jesus' sensitivity was unrivaled; the degree of his torment was unequaled.⁴⁹ Jesus wept upon the cross as he gave up his spirit.⁵⁰ Some of us cannot cry, but he weeps for us! "O blind human souls! Let yourselves be moved at least by the tears of your dying Redeemer!" With his death, "the greatest work of the history of the world was completed."⁵¹ He explains the atonement. Christ calls out to each person individually, "'Soul, return to me! I am the one who made you so distinguished and who has so freely and richly prepared eternal blessedness for you. Reverse your course, dear soul! The saints await you with yearning in heaven.'"⁵² He urges those who are present to feel with the holy Mother at the foot of the cross.⁵³

The last two sermons in this series deal extensively with Mary's imagined torment. In addition, one describes Longinus's spear-thrust, not just into the side of the Lord but deeper, into his heart. "So that every doubt [of Jesus' death] is excluded, he swings his sharp lance and drives it deep into the side of the Redeemer and into his heart. Another crime against the best Savior! Not even in death did he avoid persecution!" Nothing is holier than the blood and water that issued from that wound! Mary could not stop crying.⁵⁴ When his corpse is taken down, she bathes her Son's wounds with her tears.⁵⁵ Wann concludes hopefully:

If in spirit we enter this circle of mourning, we will well not be able to keep from weeping, which is better suited to us sinners than to these holy women. . . . Christ suffered solely on account of us. Therefore, it is fitting that we suffer along with him and also mourn and cry. All those who were not among his enemies also wept at his Passion. His mother wept, as did her companions and many other