

# SIN IS A MADE UP MARKETING SCHEME

BY CAITLIN JOHNSTONE



**WHY WE LIKE IT:** *Sure, we were ecstatic to learn the origin of the sinister market-crafted halitosis scare that spread like a plague and had everybody in the 1920's running for Listerine. But when the author then analogously employed that discovery to scald and skin the whole sorry dualistic concept of sin as manufactured propaganda by a money grubbing institution for the spiritually oppressed, it like, well, you know, blew us away. This ever radical and tireless defender of the anti-Matrix from the land of Oz always takes up big pile causes with a big stick. But unlike some social zealots, our favourite shit disturber proves her mettle as a writer of conscience by releasing all copyrights to her work so that Alt-minded dudes like FOTD can pick 'em up and republish 'em. Lucid and feisty!*

The word “halitosis” is a household term which everyone knows means bad breath. But did you know that the word has been around for less than a hundred years, and was invented not by the medical field, [but by advertisers?](#)

Back in the 1920s, people didn't worry about body odor as much as they do now. They didn't bathe nearly as often, they didn't wear deodorant, and some bodily smells weren't necessarily considered socially catastrophic. A family antiseptic company called Listerine was able to increase its revenue from [\\$115,000 to \\$8 million](#) over the course of seven years by helping to change that.

Listerine had been around since the 1880s, marketed as a household cleaner, a medical antiseptic, and a treatment for gonorrhea, among many other uses. Forty years later, the company's owner and his son came up with the brilliant idea to look up a fancy latin word for bad breath that sounds like a medical condition and then market it as though it's an actual diagnosable disease that is crippling everyone's social life. They [ran advertisements](#) telling wives that their halitosis was making them unappealing to their husbands, telling husbands that their halitosis was making their wives not want to kiss them, telling young women that they'd remain unmarried and unwanted forever if they didn't cure their "unexcusable" condition with Listerine, even [telling mothers](#) that their breath may be grossing out their own children.

And it worked. People began throwing their money at this company, suddenly desperate to cure a horrible medical condition that they'd only just found out was a thing. By manufacturing demand for their product using artificially instilled shame and fear, Listerine made a of advertisement is now commonplace, because it works. Mothers are told that they may be endangering their children by not using X cleaning product. Fathers are made to feel as though they're not protecting their family because they don't own home security system Y. Wives and girlfriends are made to feel self-conscious about how their lady parts might smell if they don't use feminine hygiene product Z. Screens, billboards and magazine ads blare constantly, "Did you know that you are deeply flawed? You are! But don't worry, Panaceavox can fix you!" In America they're allowed to straight up say "Hey, have you ever felt kind of emotionally not okay? Well there's a diagnosis for that. Ask your doctor if Thorazac is right for you." People are manipulated into fretting about a problem they didn't know they had til two seconds ago, then sold the solution.

What people think of as "sin" is a lot like Listerine's halitosis marketing ploy, except unlike bad breath, sin doesn't actually exist. And, for those who profit from religion, it's also been exponentially more lucrative.

Sin is completely made up; we're all a bunch of large-brained primates moving around in the world and experiencing the consequences of those movements, no more, no less. As a Catholic, I was told that all babies were born sinners, with tiny little blackened souls that would go straight to hell if the priest didn't get to them first and dunk their deceptively pretty little demon heads in magic water tout suite. It didn't stop there either. You had to celebrate an ancient Nazarene zombie who came back from the dead because somehow that made our sins go away for a little while, just as long as you turned up each week to drink zombie blood and eat zombie body in some kind of pretend cannibal ritual. The weirdest thing about it was that I thought it was perfectly normal. That's how you avoided being a sinner.

When you unplug those stories from the power of belief, it's a laughably transparent marketing scheme.

“Guess what? You know how you feel like you're basically fine? Well you're not! You're infected with Sin, and only this One True Religion™ can rescue you from it! That's right, it slices, it dices, it protects your soul from eternal hellfire, it's the One True Religion™! Follow the One True Religion™ and you will be freed from the burden of Sin, and you'll go the the best place you can possibly imagine (\*cough\* when you're dead). Refuse to follow the One True Religion™, and all that sin will cause literally the worst thing you can possibly imagine to happen to you (after you're dead, we can't show it to you here). Act now, supplies are running out, here comes the tithe basket, buy your way into the One True Religion™ today!”

Ridiculous, manipulative hogwash.

Fear isn't the only thing factoring into people's belief in sin, of course. It can be egoically gratifying to believe that the real assholes in our world will spend eternity writhing in a state of eternal torture for their transgressions. Also, more significantly, it can feel very comforting to have a set of prescribed “do”s and “don't”s in a world that is otherwise a completely boundless and open-ended improvisation exercise, with no ultimate rules or guidelines of any kind. It can feel very comforting to have a set of guidelines to live by for which you have no responsibility, which were handed to you from On High by a flawless omniscient and omnipotent deity underlying the fundamental ground of reality.

But that's just it: you *are* responsible. It absolutely is your responsibility to figure out how best to move around in this wide open universe, and you don't get to abdicate that responsibility to some douchebag in a funny hat or some imaginary zombie carpenter. Sin and sanctity are made-up bullshit concepts, which means that the only understanding of how to behave in this world that has any relevance to you at all is your own understanding.

This responsibility can be daunting, but taking it seriously is the first step to becoming the kind of human being that can overcome the [huge challenges](#) that our species is facing in the near future.

To act with responsibility in life, you don't get to rely on anyone else's rules. You've got to get really clear on what you value, what kind of world you want to live in, what kind of life you're trying to craft for yourself, and begin taking actions toward making those assessments a reality. There is no ultimate right and wrong inscribed on the fabric of reality; you've got to make it up for yourself, based on your own clarity of vision and your own will for your surroundings.

People say, “Well if we didn't believe in absolute right and wrong behavior, we'd all just be a bunch of hedonistic criminals!” Rubbish. If you had the ability to make a movie and have the movie contain anything you want to see, it wouldn't be full of rape and murder and destruction; you'd try your best to create a thing of beauty. Our lives are the same

way. We're all trying on some level to craft beautiful lives and help create an enjoyable world, which never entails going around hurting people and destroying things. And the clearer our seeing becomes, the more skillful we become in doing so.

The only exception to this would perhaps be sociopaths and psychopaths and people with other severe personality disorders, but their type has never truly believed in sin anyway. Sin is a construct of social manipulation, and manipulators recognize manipulation. A sociopath only cares about the concept of sin to the extent that they can use it to get what they want. Only emotionally and empathetically normal people are impacted by the concept of sin.



The popular acceptance of the concept of sin is a consequence of the way we are psychologically hardwired and the way that that wiring has been manipulated, and you see that same wiring fiddled with in similar ways in many other areas. The way centrists browbeat leftists for not falling in line with Hillary Clinton in the lead-up to the 2016 US elections, for example, often looked barely distinguishable from a gaggle of church ladies abusing one of their sisters for wanting to leave the church or get a divorce. Instead of the promise of hell it was the promise of Donald Trump ending the world, and instead of sin being disobedience to God it was disobedience to the mainstream liberal orthodoxy. But the same kind of shaming, manipulation and groupthink herd bullying was present in both cases. The notion of personal sovereign responsibility was violently rejected as anathema by the Church of the Blue Donkey.



Sin is a tool of social manipulation just like advertising, and just like propaganda. Religion, advertising and propaganda all pull the same psychological strings. Since as far back as recorded history stretches, those with wealth and power have been using whatever tools they have at their disposal to control the ways people think and behave. When religion held more psychological weight, they used that to justify book burnings, heretic burnings, and the destruction of anything that challenged the ruling order. Now that humanity is vomiting up the plague of religion from its DNA, propaganda and advertising are taking its place.

But it's the same kind of manipulation in each case, the same disease, and the cure for that disease is the same too. By insisting on your own sovereign perspective, all attempts to manipulate you out of that perspective begin to stand out like a black fly on a white page. By standing firmly in what you know to be true, what kind of life you know you're trying to live, and what kind of world you know you're trying to help create, you give yourself a clear picture of the path that you are on. With that clear picture, any attempts to manipulate you off of that path in any way are easily seen for the unwelcome intrusions that they are, whether they take the form of "You are sinful and you need Jesus," "You are flawed and you need this product," or "Trust Big Brother to do what's right for you." And you can shrug off the manipulators and stride toward the bright consequences you wish to generate with your actions.

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