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ARTICLES

REVIEWS

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Editorial: Christian Funerals

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Funerals form a significant part of the liturgical life of any religious community, and the Scottish Episcopal Church is no exception. It is not so much the inevitability of death, and the challenges and opportunities of exercising Christian ministry to bereaved families and friends whose contact with the Church may otherwise be tenuous, as that what we believe and profess about death effectively defines our purpose in life. As the apostle Paul observed, without resurrection — however understood — there is no meaning at all to the gospel of Christ.

As the Liturgy Committee begins its task of renewing and expanding our provision for Christian funerals and seeks to draft rites which are both true to our Christian heritage and which speak meaningfully to the culture in which ministry is to be offered, we have taken this opportunity to reflect on the theological and pastoral issues, and on the context in which we and the mission of our Church are placed. We have drawn not only upon the experience and expertise of our own members but more widely, and offer this collection of essays to the wider Church and the global academic community, welcoming the possibility of constructive interaction with others for whom the liturgical ministry of the Church at times of death and bereavement is important, and who have insights to offer which might stimulate our discussions and enrich the liturgies we will submit to the Faith and Order Board in due course.

Professor Douglas Davies of Durham University has for several decades been the most informed observer of changing ways in which death has been experienced and interpreted in British society, and the mutations in funerary customs which cultural change has generated. We are therefore privileged to begin this collection with the distilled fruit of his insights as an anthropologist and a theologian.

The next essay reflects on the portrayal of death and funeral rites in the Bible, with reference to the burial of Jesus. Thereafter, we explore the transformation in funeral customs which accompanied the Reformation, identifying aspects both of continuity with and disruption of the accumulated tradition of medieval Catholicism which formed the Church we are today.

Reflections on our theological understanding of death, and on pastoral ministry to the bereaved follow.

There are of course other issues which might fruitfully have been explored in this collection, and we would of course welcome contributions from readers who might be minded to engage with us on these by submitting their own work to this journal. This is the start of a process which we hope will lead ultimately to the authorisation by General Synod of a collection not only of definitive rites which express the doctrine of the Church on matters of life and death, but also of a range of resources which will prove amenable to appropriate and sensitive use in a variety of pastoral circumstances amid social and cultural change during the coming years.

Funerals, Liturgy, Culture Shifts, Global Warming and Corpse Disposal

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In two interlinked parts, this paper first considers some practical and theoretical issues concerning funerals and the likely imminent practice of alkaline hydrolysis or dissolving the dead, then — second — some theoretical aspects of liturgy and ritual at large drawn from social anthropology.

Liturgy, as with ritual at large, usually expresses in word and action undergirding theological or value schemes. While time often fixes these in relatively stable forms, both slow and rapid social changes influence or challenge them, sometimes for the better but sometimes with negative dissonances. The Protestant Reformation was but one major example. Today new pressures invite change, and with broad brush strokes this essay depicts some of these, all focused on funerals and inviting an alertness to liturgical and pastoral possibilities. More questions are raised than answered, but this is as it should be because corporate thinking and a sharing of tradition and innovation is of the essence at moments of change. This essay offers only minimal references as signposts to other studies while marking a sense of urgency and a desire to prompt discussion and share practical experiences.

Vile bodies, love, and salvation

Much of what follows recognises that traditional Christian funerary liturgy is rooted in a worldview of fall and salvation where notions of death as the sting of sin circles around the dead believer who is to be resurrected by the risen Christ in God's good time; the phrase 'vile bodies' captures something of this image to which we return later. This contrasts with much current Christian attitudes where God's care of the dead overtakes the 'vile body' motif. The pastoral care of the bereaved follows suit, as does the theology of creation-fall-redemption. Concurrently, thousands of non-church funerals focus on a 'celebration of the life' of the deceased and the many positive memories of surviving kin. More recently still, the radical new grand narrative of global warming has emerged as its own form of secular-salvation ideology. This raises the issue of environmentalism and the dead, not least the Christian dead. What, then, are the internal dynamics of vile bodies, celebrated lives, and the ecological cost-benefit analyses of funerals?

Dissolving the dead: warming the world

With that in mind much of this essay concerns a practice that is likely to impact upon the British funerary trade from 2023 or so — the dissolving of human corpses rather than cremating or burying them, a process with the trademark — Resomation, a neologism simply devised apart from any classical etymology of *soma* as 'body'. This reckons to yield a much lower carbon footprint than cremation, and less land use than burial, issues that become increasingly important as churches become increasingly self-conscious of their ethical-ecological positions. When priests press a button to commit their (less than half) proportion of the 80% of Britons who choose cremation, they are — whether conscious or not — making an ethical decision regarding the atmosphere, its purity, its global warming, and its material destiny as a human habitation. What then, in liturgical terms might be the most appropriate form of words, ideas, and theology with which to express this complex interplay of disposal, identity, and the destiny of individual and planet?

Many other issues currently surrounding death and funerals will be touched on below, more as a discussion starter than as a solutions' paper. What, then, might or should be said when Christians in particular, a mixed Christian-heritage population at large, or — more specific still — when environmentally alert people mark the funerals of their dead today? What consideration needs to be given — in shorthand terms — to the carbon footprint of the dead? While international flight has its own cost-benefit analysis of travel what of our journey into death? To deal with some of these issues this paper is divided into two parts, the first deals briefly with specific forms of change in funeral behaviour and the second with aspects of ritual-symbolism, theology, and liturgy, albeit with some considerable overlap.

PART ONE

Funerary shifts

One feature of British funerary life from the 1990s is the rapid growth of a diversity of provision. This is partly associated with consumerism and a sense of personal choice, partly with that generalised form of secularisation that no longer involves ecclesiastical or clerical dominance, partly with an increasingly unchurched population and partly with a resurgent funeral sector in which the funeral director has increasingly become the gatekeeper of options. Moreover, death itself, thoughts on death, euthanasia, and assisted dying, as well as media entry into this emotive area has made 'funerals' a focus of multiple interest. Television adverts on personalised funerals mark the shift. The Co-Operative Funeral Care advert of a motorcycle with a sidecar as hearse is but one familiar example. This interest

is likely to be intensified as 2023 advances, and several specific issues are worth highlighting here, not least because each possesses trigger points for theological thought, and not least for liturgical considerations around the ritual-symbolism of the dead and their kin and social circles. The dissolving of the dead (Resomation), the role of civil celebrants, the sense of personal choice of funeral, the rise of woodland burial, and the practice of 'no ceremony' funerals stand out for comment, as does the place of sex-gender in the funeral professions.

Dissolving — resomation — 'water-cremation'

By 2023 Britain is likely to have a new and innovative addition to its funeral options of cremation, cemetery burial, and woodland-green burial. Under the trade name of 'resomation', and other descriptors of various appropriate and inappropriateness including water-cremation, this involves dissolving human corpses in a pressurised container of a light-alkaline and water solution. After two to three hours, white skeletal and highly friable bones can be dried and rendered into flour-like, powdery remains. These can be returned to relatives in much the same way as are cremated remains, the main difference being that there is a slightly greater volume of this pure white substance than of the granular grey remains of cremation. Whether or not this colour difference needs to be considered in symbolic-ritual contexts remains to be seen.

This process of decomposing a body involves the precision engineering and computerised control of the equipment needed. The Leeds and Bradford Boiler Company (LBBC, dating from 1876) produces the necessary equipment, fostering the process previously advocated by Scotland's Sandy Sullivan. The process is marketed — especially in the USA — under the description of water-cremation or even aquamation. To reiterate the earlier point, despite the obvious contradiction of 'water-cremation' and 'flame-cremation' this nomenclature is favoured as speaking to an emotional sensitivity depicting a 'gentler' process than that of 'flame-cremation', and it is precisely such emotional tones that play a deeply significant role in funeral rites, whether in theological or commercial advertising. Words trigger emotion and enter strongly into the place of values, beliefs, and identity as addressed later in the section on Narrative. This is apparent in yet other modes of dealing with corpses likely to emerge soon in the UK, involving variations of body-decomposition aligned with organic decay. Here words such as 'compost' or 'composting' are likely to be avoided despite the popular idiom of some folk reckoning to be happy to be put on the compost heap. But words are modifiable and modifiable depending on their wider cultural context, and one of the most increasingly influential lies in 'ecological-environmental and 'carbon-footprint' factors.

An historic moment

Let me now set the scene for this eventuality through a remarkable week in April 2019, that witnessed the resomation — I will retain this term here — of five Britons. One reason for doing this was to allow water authorities, along with some university scientists, to analyse the output of the overall process into the sewage system: all with a positive result. I dwell on this event because I was an invited presence at the first of these resomations, the only academic amongst the small group of funeral professionals who had organised the process. Since there was at that time — and this remains the case — no formal legislation in England authorising resomation the parties concerned made full and careful use of the existing legal certification available for death and cremation. Appropriate liaison with Government bodies as well as, inevitably for certification purposes, medical authorities had taken place. Rather as with the earliest cremations in England these resomations preceded what will, eventually, be formal legislation. While there was no ritual or liturgical behaviour at the facility the respective families had been able to hold prior funeral services as they wished. My experience of the first of these events was, however, of a certain solemnity and dignified treatment of the arrival of the body, its transmission to the resomation container, and of the outcoming remains. The scientific analyses of the ensuing materials of resomations have resulted in the permission for the liquid output to be acceptable for the sewerage system. The scientific-engineering aspects of resomation and of permission for liquid output to be acceptable to water authorities is one thing, though not the main feature of this essay whose focus is more on the personal and wider cultural and theological-liturgical dimensions framing the process in a world of global warming.

Words and ideas

Thinking in terms of liturgical formulae, how might the dissolving the dead — 'in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ' — sound to you in a ritual context? This question is framed by the familiar fact mentioned above that in Britain today some 80% of funerals follow cremation with the remaining 20% focused not only on traditional cemetery and churchyard burials but also on a growing number of variously named natural-ecological-green-woodland burials first initiated at Carlisle in the mid-1990s.[1]

Just how might the resurrection language of traditional burials and of many forms of cremation that accommodate to cremation by simply adding

[1] Douglas Davies and Hannah Rumble *Natural Burial: Traditional-Secular Spiritualities and Funeral Innovation* (London: Continuum, 2012).

a reference to the body being committed for cremation, relate to resomation? To bury, or cremate, 'in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life', as the well-known quotation from the *Book of Common Prayer* 1662 has it, has served well for some centuries. In strictly theological terms the resurrection of the dead does not depend on the 'holding' medium, whether earth, fire, or water, for divine power will achieve its goal despite all. However, the more immediate process of body disposal exists in the proximate world of the bereaved and of a kind of cause and effect underlying the human imagination that ponders it all. This raises the question of resomation as a liturgical opportunity or constraint? Certainly, it invites some theological consideration and excitement when a new form of body disposal enters the cultural scene at the moment when global warming is a dominant concern and various forms of body disposal carry their own environmental consequences, and in which resomation claims a lower carbon footprint than cremation.

Liturgical shifts are not new as forms of the Eucharist have shown, nor indeed are revised forms of Christian baptism that have sought and applied the many biblical references to water as part of a grand liturgical-theological narrative of identity within salvation-history. There are water-texts from the Genesis accounts of creation and flood, through the wilderness wanderings and deliverance of ancient Israel, to John the Baptist, and to Jesus's own use of water, and to early Christian insights into water in His own life. Might it not be good stewardship of ecclesiastical resources simply to extend this to resomation?

Historically speaking, traditional Indian forms of cremation set the practice within an extensive ideology of existence, where the entry of the life-force to the foetal person is matched by the cracking of the corpse's skull, the freeing of that force, and the placement of ashes in theologically potent rivers.[2] Christianity — at the moment — has no such theology of water, death, and destiny, but it does possess textual and theological resources for such an approach. Similarly, cremation has never had a Christian theological rationale devoted to it.

Such issues underlie this broad-ranging paper, wondering whether a note of resonance or dissonance over 'dissolving the dead' and the 'hope of the resurrection' might be occasioned in contemporary funerals. It is now some two thousand years after 1 Corinthians 15 pondered the destiny of Christians dying before the anticipated second coming of Jesus as Saviour. For, the frame of this discussion lies less with the Second Coming and a theology of eschatology than with the ecological last things in relation to an

[2] Jonathan Parry, *Death in Banaras* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

earth habitable by human beings. Christian theology, indeed, the reflection of most religious traditions, is ever subject to changing life and world circumstances, and the current global warming crisis is amongst the most serious of all. And it is precisely this crisis that adds additional motivation to resomation rites. The dead have their carbon footprints, the churches are party to them, and this prompts the question: what prayer or liturgical formula might you see as appropriate for Resomation Rites? The challenge is considerable.

Civil Celebrants

As for the personnel, clerical officiants are likely to be one resource, but so too will be civil celebrants who mark a significant change in contemporary funerals in the UK. For civil celebrants now match or outnumber ecclesiastical ritual leaders in many a crematorium. While the British Humanist Association has provided funeral ceremony leaders for decades, they come with an ideological tradition of non-religious convictions, and an attitude that some might see as contrary to religious sensibilities. The rise of civil celebrants, however, is different, and while the history of this somewhat amorphous constituency has still to be written we can say that it has been roughly over the last twenty-five years or so that women and men have come forward as individuals and either engaged in a form of informal training by evolving specialists or have simply set themselves up as ceremony leaders. Most often they have been bereaved themselves and partly because of that, and partly because the church-led funerals they experienced had not satisfied them, they now advertise their services. Some have become loosely allied with funeral directors in their region and been increasingly called upon compared with clergy because they have time to engage with the funeral director and the bereaved in ways that are more loose than with the clergy. It is not uncommon to hear some funeral directors speak of the difficulty in contacting some clergy for funeral services.

Free-market in funerals — the real 'secularisation' of action

Cultural shifts in social practice, whether of a slow continental-drift form, or in rapid breaks or volcanic eruptions, carry visible markers. Certainly, from the turn of the twenty-first century, and especially over the last ten years or so, the UK has witnessed dramatic shifts in forms of funeral, not just in ecclesial changes but most especially in the rise of non-ecclesial funeral celebrants. Whether in terms of celebrants provided by The Humanist Association or by a variety of freelance and loosely aggregated civil celebrants, funeral provision is now roughly split between them and ecclesial ministers. This is a dramatic cultural and religious change whose complexity involves shifts in churchgoing, secular identities, and the desire

for personal and family expression of ideas regarding their relationship with the dead. The lifestyle of the deceased has come increasingly to the fore as a retrospective emphasis on the character and life of the deceased assumes primacy of place in the funeral narrative. To this should be added the aptitude of funeral directors in discussion with bereaved families on the options available to them.

The growing availability of civil celebrants is of especial importance, not least amongst retired or other people for whom funerals generate a distinctive sense of life-worth through the ritual performance and engagement with bereaved people. Moreover, it is not uncommon to hear some funeral directors expressing a dislike for some clergy as unresponsive or slow in response to requests to take a funeral. This is a complex issue of its own and I simply mention it here to note that the public performance of ritual seems to confer a sense of achievement for many, and for some celebrants who have not, perhaps, experienced such social limelight this is a pleasurable experience. For clergy who have many opportunities for public appearance the attraction of the funeral may be significantly less. The issue of a psychological and economic cost-benefit analysis of the single-rite celebrant and the plural-rite cleric is one worthy of extensive research — but not in this paper.

What is significant, liturgically speaking, is the degree of freedom that may be associated with civil celebrants, allowing a bereaved family to speak, behave, and frame their deceased kin in ways they may think impossible with services provided by clergy and church. This is where ideas of 'traditional ways' of doing things can be a negative feature, especially if allied with a funeral director's advice on civil celebrants. For, in many ways and more than ever, the funeral director is the gatekeeper of the modern funeral and may have personal-professional reasons to prefer the civil option, knowing appropriate civil celebrants, and not being so much restricted by the availability of clergy. In this sense, funeral directors can both enhance or, indeed, restrict choice of ritual leader, depending on how they present options of funeral leader to bereaved families.

Personal choice

Alongside the place of commercial-led consumerism the notion of choice and individualism has been much advertised, to the point where it is taken for granted. 'Your funeral — your way' seems sensible alongside all sorts of other purchasing. For many this makes sense, even though in practice families and local tradition play an enormous role in matters of choice. This realm has fostered the role of family and friends in contributing to funeral events, with a strong aspect of the 'celebration of life', it includes the choice of music, songs, and readings relevant to the deceased. Insurance and

funeral companies encourage folk to ponder their funerals and even write a plan of it before the event. In theological terms the question is whether this contributes to a sense of control over a funeral if not over death. Death conquest takes many forms and its place in a religious and secular and mixed ideas world is complex. Though I cannot describe this fully here, I am one who questions the overemphasis upon 'the individual', preferring to think of complex personhood that acknowledges that each of us is composed of many 'others', whose influence strongly affects us.[3] Still, 'personal choice' rules as an implicit social assumption.

Woodland Burial

One significant example of personal choice began in the UK from the mid-1990s in the almost accidental practice of what came to be called woodland, natural, or green burial. I have researched this along with my former doctoral student Hannah Rumble.[4] It is a complex issue but involves people wishing to be buried, not in 'dry as dust' cemeteries but in 'natural' environments. The very rapid rise of such 'woodland' sites across the UK is witness to a popular demand. This includes folk who wish to 'give something back' to nature and who may well have been gardeners and lovers of nature throughout their lives. Such sites often rule out the use of headstones and other 'artificial' items to let plants overrun graves whose actual location is well recorded, whether in map or electronically. Any kind of funeral service is used at these sites, including the 'standard' Christian burial service, and it would be extremely rare for it to be unattended. Here personal choice is key. What is more, this 1990s inauguration already constituted a pre-adaption for the ecological-environmental interests that became increasingly dominant in the opening decades of the twenty-first century.

No ceremony — 'direct' — 'pure' cremations

From the 'no headstone' of woodland burial there is a telling side-step to the much more recent 'no ceremony' collection of the corpse and the return of its ashes. For, over the last six or so years it has become increasingly feasible, and commercially possible, to dispose of the human corpse without any formal ceremony or 'funeral service'. This innovation was considerably enhanced over the Covid-19 crisis period. There are companies and funeral directors that will simply collect the corpse from hospital or home, take it away for cremation without any formal ceremony, and return the remains to the family. The family can then do with the remains whatever they will,

[3] Douglas Davies, 'Dividual identity in grief theories, palliative and bereavement care', *Palliative Care and Social Practice*, 14 (July 2020).

[4] Davies and Rumble, *Natural Burial.*

much as in cremation at large, and this can include a memorial service, religious or secular, or mixed. One of the major companies engaged in this practice does have a fine establishment with chapel that can operate as normal, with family and friends present, but it is likely to be a hundred or more miles away from the deceased person's home and family, something that carries its own ecological tariff. Just how such 'no funeral' events affect issues of grief and the life-story of the dead amongst the living remains to be seen. It appears that issues of cost are not prime in this practice which may well be a more middle-class than working-class option.

The words used around these shifting practices by groups offering the service are interesting. For example, while the term 'direct cremation' marks a pragmatic attitude, that of 'pure cremation' touches a more emotional domain, aligning something of the technology of fire and the corpse with an aesthetic sense of ending a human life. So, too, with 'water cremation' used, especially in the USA, and likely to become a motif in the UK as well, is often reckoned by funeral professionals involved with it as engendering a gentler way of dealing with the dead than is the case with the more aggressive sense of 'fire-cremation'. One UK company that will almost certainly occupy this resomation option has recently been formed under the tradename of 'Kindly'.

As for the no-funeral option, I can say from personal research and field experience that while such 'no-funeral' options usually do not have a family presence there are staff who manage the event who treat the deceased with all due respect and dignity and may mark, in small ways, their own sense of the worth and dignity of the deceased. Indeed 'ritual' is a strange and many-shaped entity covering behaviours that mark the social relationships of the living and dead, even when the living is the staff 'processing' the deceased. A simple act of bowing as and when the coffin enters the cremator can speak volumes as to the nature of the dead, their 'disposal', and the staff overseeing the event.

In terms of the funeral itself, coffin collection and cremation devoid of any formal ceremony and with an absence of mourners has become one innovation, widely advertised on British television and elsewhere under those notions of 'Pure Cremation' and 'Direct Cremation'. Television and other advertising often delivered as free-mail in house-to-house adverts, have also spoken of a 'no-fuss' form of funeral. There is, currently, something of a cultural paradox between the idioms of the 'no-fuss' and 'celebrating the life' forms of funeral. Each of these directions of ritual travel provide grist for the theological-liturgical mill, for they each reflect something of a person's personal sense of identity and destiny and of a family or community's response. There is a sense that the 'no-fuss' option enhances the sequestration of death, or at least of the corpse as a symbolic vehicle of death, in ways that a Christian perspective might decide ignores the very

value of a human being within the Christian community, or as a creature before God.

As I am finding in current research on crematoria and Covid-19, some crematorium managers seek to ensure that some staff and colleagues be present, albeit minimally, at the reception of 'direct-cremation' style coffins to their premises. As in those brief but definite moments 'acknowledging' the coffin when placed into the cremator, we witness something of a long-inbuilt respect for the dead and their cremation in British crematoria irrespective of a congregation of family and friends, and quite apart from the presence of either clergy or civil celebrants. Indeed, the whole nature of a 'funeral' in the UK is much wider than often assumed. Here we encounter a multiplicity of issues over funeral provision, one pressing topic concerns the potential liturgical framing of resomation.

PART TWO

Whether in such a simple act as gently bowing while the coffin is placed into a cremator after its non-service event — an act usually described in the very pragmatic phrase of 'charging' the cremator — or in an elaborate funeral service preceding the 'committal' of the body for cremation we see some formalised behaviour of 'ritual' framing what is deemed a significant event. A significance that marks the dignity of human life in which we all share and in a death we all know we will also share. To be at a funeral is to be amidst our own sense of mortality. While all religious traditions possess their own form, ideology-theology, and sense of these moments, here I explore a wide mapping of ideas that inform and direct changes in more Christian forms of ritual action, starting with some biblical and early Christian contexts and ending with theological issues appropriate for a global warming frame of Christian life.

Christian bodies

One way of understanding the early Christian sect of Judaism is to see Christ's death on a cross, his entombment-burial, and an eager expectation of a return in glory, as framing a sense of salvation from a sinful and trial-filled world. While early Christians' faith-filled anticipation of their Saviour appearing amidst the clouds of heaven simply did not occur, they were all too directly confronted by the fact that some of their number were now dying. This was, perhaps, also contrary to their basic expectation, posing the question of how the death-conquest of Christ's resurrection might resonate with the apparent negativity of deceased devotees? In a sense, Christian corpses were a contradiction in the terms of belief and needed theological attention. One theological-pastoral response to this radically transitional

moment is retained in St Paul's idioms of burial and resurrection, earth-originated bodies and new spiritual bodies, but all in God's good time (1 Corinthians 15). And while that timing continues to expand more immediate ways of dealing with the dead needed, and continues to need, resolution. Over the ensuing two millennia Christian bodies became 'processed bodies', where the overall processing expressed the sacramental rites, variously restricted to baptism and eucharist in more Protestant traditions, but also including Confirmation, Penance, Orders, Matrimony, and Extreme Unction in Roman Catholic belief and practice. The responses of the faithful went on to frame funerals of the Christian dead that embraced various forms of disposal in catacomb, tomb, crypt, ossuary, earth as well as sea burial — all in tandem with various beliefs in an ongoing soul. Many Christians prayed for their departed kin while some, especially amongst more Protestant traditions vigorously avoided such intercessory prayer, believing that each person's destiny already lay in God's hands and omniscient will.

Fire

As for fire, its pagan associations soon had it an abhorrence for Christians, while images of fire as punishment for heretics and the like soon set up a binary opposition between interment and incineration. This did not bode well for the sanitary-driven and free-thinking innovations of modern cremation in the late nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth century. Yet, despite some early and partially enduring opposition from Christian leaders, and especially from the Orthodox to this day, mainstream Protestant and, more slowly, Roman Catholic authorities, cremation became the dominant mode of funeral in Britain and most western and northern societies of Christian culture heritage. Many of these issues are covered by a multiplicity of authors in *The Encyclopaedia of Cremation*.[5]

Despite this pragmatic shift from grave to cremator, the theological language of Christian destiny and its transitional phase of housing the dead, largely remained burial-resurrection in form. The 'earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust' idiom proved useful as funerary language, with very little theological or pastoral work dedicated to the actual processes and fact of cremation with its active destruction of the body in a short burst of flame. Despite the 'ashes to ashes' motif, the ensuing cremated remains, ashes — or 'cremains' in USA usage, provided symbolic materials that could largely be treated as a corpse and buried, indeed this has been the general ecclesiastical preference. Meanwhile, the secular or mixed values of the UK

[5] *The Encyclopaedia of Cremation*, ed. by Douglas J. Davies and Lewis H. Mates (London: Routledge, 2005).

public at large increasingly took these remains and used them for a great variety of purposes. Indeed, cremated remains generated their own opportunity for private rites and proto ceremonies that had not previously existed. In this sense, ashes became a medium of secularisation, in the sense that many people used and dealt with them quite apart from any help or assistance from ecclesial agencies. This prompted me, some thirty years ago, to consider a possible form of cremation liturgy; I will not repeat it here, despite the fact that I think there has been very little response or take-up from institutional church groups.[6] Despite, and partly because of that, I am now keen that churches should think about the process and remains of resomation alongside its innovative introduction to the UK.

Destiny revisited

Today, changes in British funerary practices invite some contemporary theological and liturgical thinking especially as issues of secular, religious, and mixed identities interplay with enormous global concerns over ecology and the environment. Of the many potential avenues of approach one worth discussing is that of the relatively unfashionable yet increasingly apposite notion of destiny. This is a feature within human meaning-making and is an established, though now seldom espoused, theological perspective of predestination or, more loosely, of the coming Kingdom of God. In present contexts, destiny-revisited will serve well as a backdrop for the much more specific funeral-related notion of the 'carbon footprint' of corpses and the pressure of global warming on ecclesiastical ethics. It so happens that forms of funeral and body disposal bring to focus several key issues that have occupied Christian churches for millennia and now reappear in theological–ecclesial-personal, and political–ecological narratives framing the near-future of the earth and human habitation.

Five scenarios exemplify these topics, glossing what has already been said and adding new topics. First is the very theme of destiny as part of human meaning-making, whether as the driver of much theological thought or increasingly of the more world-focused concern with global warming and the place of humanity amidst it. Second, the anticipated and imminent changes concerning the dissolving of human bodies in alkaline solution, and perhaps a little later, other methods of treating bodies with materials that enhance rapid decay, all related to environmental factors. Might such events and factors demand different ritual words from those used at earth-burial or cremation in a pre-global warming world? Third, the recently introduced schemes for funerals that pick up a coffined corpse, deliver it for cremation,

[6] Douglas Davies, *Cremation Today and Tomorrow* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 1990).

and return the remains without any substantial ceremony or presence of mourners pose a re-think of the social focus of funerals. Fourth, the existing fact of celebrants-at-large now overtaking Christian clergy in the performance of funerals. Fifth, the power of narrative interwoven with all these scenes, especially as Christian derived narratives are in a sense paralleled by the family narratives of secular or semi-secular funerals. These five topics, embracing personalised words celebrating the life of a person or, indeed, of absent words, not to mention the fate of the planet, all present their own scenes of ecclesial life intersecting with secular dimensions and invite responses alert to the potential benefit to be gained from theological, anthropological, sociological, cultural and cognitive psychological studies.

Formulating values, identity and destiny

Here the power of words holds high profile. The world is full of 'ideas', often nouns and the names of things acquired as life progresses, but some words also come to be associated with emotions, and when that happens a 'word' becomes a 'value' — values are emotional-laden words. However, some of these values go on to shape our sense of identity and can conveniently be designated as constituting 'beliefs'. These beliefs may have strong family, community, political, religious, or even sporting roots, and for many in contemporary British society that is sufficient for ordinary life. There is, however, a final aspect or step in this 'ideas-emotions-values-identity' formula, that of destiny.[7]

Destiny has been traditionally documented in religious traditions as part of God's knowledge of and plan for people including their afterlife identity. We may think of destiny as the summation of meaning-making in which emotional dynamics interplay with our more rational perspectives. In traditional Christian theology, then, destiny can be aligned with the divine will, not only in the doctrinal terms of predestination but also in the love-engendered sense of a time when a person's identity is fulfilled in the eternal beatific vision of God, when we no longer see dimly in a mirror 'but then face to face', knowing no longer in part but fully (1 Corinthians 13.12). That culminating sense of transformed identity is in some ways strong medicine for many today, yet the sense of believers coming to an understanding of things that mirror to some degree the way they have been fully understood by God holds an attraction for those desiring to be 'heard', seen, or recognised for what they are.

Similarly, destiny frames Paul's theology as he engages 'faith, hope, and love' in his summation of the 'higher gifts' of Christian living, while

[7] Douglas Davies, *Worldview Religious Studies* (London: Routledge, 2022), pp. 33–36.

highlighting 'love' as he moves to the core gospel themes of Christ's death and resurrection, and of God's grace (1 Corinthians 15.3–11). Moreover, his grasp of destiny embraces the integral shared identity of each believer as an individual member of the body of Christ whose sustaining elements are those of faith, hope, and especially of love (1 Corinthians 12.27). And it is that 'body' that meets for worship, for the bread and wine meal, and embraces the dead. Indeed, it seems that the very fact of the death of early members of the Corinthian Christian groups prompted Paul's extensive theological propositions on death and eschatology, fostered by his own sense of belated apostolic status.

Eschatological and retrospective fulfilments of identity

It was precisely the traditional eschatological fulfilment of identity that I once contrasted with the 'retrospective fulfilment of identity' evident in many of today's funeral and memorial services that are characterised as a celebration of life, something that has only grown in significance over time.[8] The looking back in love that tends to frame memorial services of more middle-class people that follow sometime after the actual funeral service, or that fills out the funeral service when no separate memorial event is anticipated, as in the great majority of working-class funerals, dwells upon the life that is past, and which now pervades the memory of the living. Any forward looking, destiny-like dynamic is abbreviated and, if present at all, is lodged in a generalised hope that all is well with the deceased wherever they may be. Likewise, when people take the cremated remains of their kin to places of personal significance it is because of past experiences associated with those locations. Ideas of heaven and, not least, of some associations with angels or afterlife caretakers, especially of infants and the neonatal dead, reflect a personalised emotional dynamic rather than traditional ideas of destiny. This is markedly different from the cemetery and churchyard as transitional venues of traditional Christian destiny. One notable difference in today's UK lies in Islamic notions of destiny, strongly under the divine will, and aligned with the judged outcome of a believer's ethical life of obedience to religious edicts, all aligned with burial and specially conceived grave-spaces.[9]

Secularisation

Today's question of secularisation involves the distancing of folk from such theological understandings and from the liturgical formats expressing them,

[8] Davies, *Worldview Religious Studies*, pp. 117–26.

[9] Nerina Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire: Heaven and Hell in Islamic Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

notably lengthy texts drawn from 1 Corinthians 15 traditionally read at funerals. It is the distancing of people from the church contexts and church-funeral contexts of these texts that fosters secularisation. Secularisation is often experienced as a decreasing frequency of 'religious' words used, of familiarity with them, and especially of a withdrawal of emotional attachment from them. The poetic allusion to secularised life marked by the 'long with drawing roar' of Matthew Arnold's mid-nineteenth century *Dover Beach* can, today, also be recognised in an ongoing withdrawal of emotional affinity from the language of faith and liturgy. Secularisation involves the demise of those religious values that once sustained a person and community's identity. As for the idea of a category of those who self-describe as 'spiritual but not religious', they might well be interpreted as those possessing values that sustain a sense of identity but who have no need of a sense of destiny. Theologically infused words — the emotion-pervade values that sustain a destiny-framing identity — lose those emotional affinities and become 'mere' words again.

Ecological fulfilment of identity

But this transition is far from occurring in anything like a cultural vacuum, indeed, 'ecological immortality' and the 'ecological fulfilment of identity' which I once aligned with woodland or 'natural' burial[10] has, since then, been intensified through issues of global warming and an increasing emotional dynamic to issues of environmentalism. These are new values that, at one and the same time, inform an increasing sense of personal identity and, in an unexpected way, also of the destiny of the human species. Here the traditional theological portrayals of destiny rooted in the grand narrative of nineteenth century 'salvation history' deploying doctrines of creation, salvation, sin, fall, redemption, and the last things preluding the divine new creation, are challenged by eco-environmental destiny.

Tonal resonance, liturgy and society

One issue that is, surprisingly perhaps, seldom discussed over matters of identity and destiny, and not least how these are treated in ritual and liturgy is that of tone. Tone or tonality, as the quality and nature of speech that frames a ritual act, as well as relationships preceding and following it is of radical importance not only in daily life but in the ritual-liturgical contexts that frequently intensify 'ordinariness'. Tonality and pastoral concern are issues worth a great deal of thought, it is a notion hardly ever touched upon, for example, in the sociology of religion. Yet it is a feature that the anthropologist Clifford Geertz once expressed very well indeed:

[10] Davies, *Brief History of Death*, pp. 86–88.

> A people's ethos is the tone, character, and quality of life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood: it is the underlying attitude towards themselves and their world that life reflects. Their world-view is the picture of the way things, in sheer actuality are, their concepts of nature, of self, of society.[11]

This quotation, one that I have retrieved for the study of worldviews at large,[12] can obviously also be applied to both church groups and wider segments of the general population. In theoretical terms it reflects the notion of clerical 'formation', of what is often called the *habitus,* or the way people appropriate patterns of behaviour, bodily posture, and speech. This is too large a topic to explore here and must be left for readers to consider as clerical and ecclesial habits correlate with churched and unchurched groups in contemporary society.[13] For the former there can be considerable comfort when moving into familiar ceremonial events grounded in such an ethos, with all its surrounding elements of place. For the latter, further removed form church life, it may be that only islands of a Christian and church-linked styles exist, as in singing 'The Lord's my Shepherd' to 'Crimond' the right 'traditional' tune. For increasing numbers, Christian liturgical styles and the tones undergirding them are now a real foreign country, with the choice of songs, readings, and personal reflections having moved to 'the ways things, in sheer actuality, are' for the deceased, family, and friend. When funeral companies publish lists of favourite songs and music used at crematoria they are, in effect, mapping the sacred, the secular, and the mixed domains of a country's lifestyles. Yet, while the very idiom of a song such as 'I did it my way' apparently touches more on some sense of individualism than on widely shared values it still marks a deeply conventional perspective.

In all of this there is a considerable liturgical–ceremonial challenge for the clergy, one that is not always easy to meet. One cannot assume that the acceptance of any particular vernacular form will bridge gaps between clergy and non-church people, or even with some churchgoers. Here I can simply allude to the tonal qualities of sympathy or their absence that can pervade any form of language and behaviour, not least funerals. Still, some people have a natural capacity for sympathy that can pervade any form of language, while some can use the most caring of verbal expressions and

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[11] Clifford Geertz, 'Ethos, world-view and the analysis of sacred symbols', *The Antioch Review*, 17.4 (1957), 421–37 (p. 421).

[12] Davies, *Worldview Religious Studies*, p. 121.

[13] Douglas Davies*, Anthropology and Theology* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2002).

leave the sense of not being very sympathetic at all. These are points for all to ponder as we think about shifting forms of funerals, not least under the influence of the radical theme of global warming. This is not the place to trace evidence and authorities for global warming, I take it for granted. We have already said much about resomation it simply remains to accentuate the interplay of emotion-filled values, their framing of identity, and the very notion of destiny encompassed by funerary liturgies, not least under the impact of global warming. For people to have a sense that this particular funeral has its place in the wider scheme of things might well have its part to play in their bereavement and sense of grief.

Narrative and tradition

All of this highlights the topic of narrative as old and new accounts, stories, and even advertisements, vie to tell convincing stories of the dead and what we do with them. Narrative, as such, expresses the deep-rooted nature of language as the outcome of human social relationships and of the cognitive and neural systems generating what we say and the stories we tell, something aptly and magisterially documented by Angus Fletcher in his *Wonderworks: Literary Invention and the Science of Stories*.[14]

Christianity is, itself, as narrative-rich a tradition as the very notion of gospel is replete with the proclamation of salvation. The historical narratives behind the emergence of Christian traditions are grounded in theological accounts of the life and death of Jesus springing from the faith-based testimonies of his early disciples that he had overcome death. This death-defying gospel fostered the faith of successive generations of believers in that they, too, would not be slaves to mortality. The profound power of belief that death would have no dominion lies less in any abstract notion of survival than in the person-focused centrality of Jesus and the community energised by its assertion that 'the Lord has risen', or 'Christ is risen', and behind that a sense of God as the ultimate source of all things. The well-known Greek Orthodox response — 'He is risen indeed, alleluia' — marks the intimacy of hope between devotee and community within God's embrace. The history of this perspective and practice is extensive and complex, with some key theological, liturgical, and pastoral aspects of Christian funeral rites having been clearly and judiciously discussed by Paul Sheppy and many others.[15]

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[14] Angus Fletcher, *Wonderworks: Literary Invention and the Science of Stories* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021).

[15] Paul Sheppy, *Death Liturgy and Ritual, Vol. 1*: *A Pastoral and Liturgical Theology* (London; Routledge, 2003); *Death, Liturgy and Ritual,*

Narrative and global warming

The issue of narrative leads back to the topic of global warming because of the way ecology and environmentalism have shot to prominence in political and some religious domains, not least in the 2020s. Some devastating weather events have brought the erstwhile and rather abstract notion of global warming into the most concrete and emotion-engaging lives of millions of people across many countries. Just how the science-based realities of climate change can best be rendered in narrative is one of the challenges of the day, both the youthful Swede Greta Thunberg and the much older Briton David Attenborough have served well as narrative agents of the scientific cause, and with some political effect. For the first time since The Cremation Society of Great Britain — established in 1874 — took as its motto 'Save the land for the living', environmental issues are now making an impact on the funeral world in a new way.

This has, for example, been exemplified by David Charles Sloane, an American historian, heir to a line of US funeral directors, who has addressed many of these issues in his *Is the Cemetery Dead?*, [16] which deals with the economics of funerals as well as the pressing issues of ecology and global warming. His listing of millions of feet of hardboard, a hundred thousand tonnes of steel and half a million tonnes of concrete, and eight hundred thousand gallons of embalming fluid, going into USA graves has its own shock effect. As for cremation, itself a minority practice in the USA at large, though growing rapidly, he cites each one as generating 245 kg of carbon dioxide. He commends the Englishman Ken West, the originator of woodland burial in the UK, and who was given an honorary degree by Durham University for his work for this and in the funeral world at large.[17] Sloane acknowledges the importance of cultural hybridity in different forms of funeral and body disposal at different times and places, but the drift of his concerns is clear — it is ecologically minded. One of my own doctoral students, Georgina Robinson, also expresses these concerns in her focused researches on resomation that can be consulted for appropriate data,

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Vol. 2: *A Commentary on Liturgical Texts* (London: Routledge, 2004); Douglas Davies, *Theology of Death* (London: T&T Clark, 2008); John Dunhill, *Sacrifice and the Body: Biblical Anthropology and Christian Self-Understanding* (London: Routledge, 2013); Henry Novello, *Death as Transformation: A Contemporary Theology of Death* (London: Routledge, 2016).

[16] David Charles Sloane, *Is the Cemetery Dead?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

[17] Ken West, *R. I. P. Off! Or the British Way of Death* (Leicester: Matador Press, 2013).

including some scientific analyses of issues involved.[18] Both Sloan and Robinson add to the emerging narrative of death and ecology.

Churches and change

But responses to change often take much longer, with the mainstream churches, with their long tradition of earth-burial, taking nigh on eighty years to even begin to think liturgically, let alone theologically, about cremation.[19] And now resomation presents itself. Some American Catholics have already begun to address alkaline hydrolysis with a generally negative evaluation and with an emphasis upon the dignity of the human body. One publication speaks of the process in terms of its not being 'intrinsically evil' but as 'not a prudent choice' at present.[20] The discussion is reminiscent of previous Catholic reserve over cremation, one that became more accommodating with time, albeit with strong reminders that cremated remains should certainly be buried. I anticipate that this will also be the case here, especially as the ecological argument intensifies.

Tradition and change frame our lives. Familiarity and novelty, settled states and shake-ups, mark our personal experience as we seek to make some combined emotional and rational sense of things. They also typify the ongoing life of churches, not least in their liturgies and theologies that foster faith in regular church members and sometimes challenge occasional attenders.

In this, the powerful biological drive to survive is echoed and paralleled at the cultural level of existence by the sense of hope. Hope captures human complexity, whether in encountering others, anticipating loving partners, raising families, finding occupation to sustain livelihood, or engaging in activities that stimulate imagination and play. While ever alert to perils from sickness, accident or the malice of others, hope's energising vitality often transcends dismay and despair and, when mediated through the person of Jesus and friends who understand, provides the theological basis for this present account of mortality and funerals. For some, however, hope dwindles and can be lost, not least in a culture where loneliness so easily allows individuals to turn in on themselves and perish.

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[18] Georgina Robinson, 'Dying to Go Green: The Introduction of Resomation in the United Kingdom, *Religions*, 12.2 (2021).

[19] Peter Jupp, *From Dust to Ashes: Cremation and the British Way of Death* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2005). See also Stephen Prothero, *Purified by Fire: A History of Cremation in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

[20] Peter Fonseca, 'Alkaline Hydrolysis: imprudent in its current context', *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* (30 September 2019).

It is not surprising, then, to find 'hope' partnered by 'faith' and 'love' at the core of Paul's prime Christian values as he helped forge the worldview of the early Christian sect of Judaism (1 Corinthians 13.13). The message of salvation became embodied in this growing community of the saved that — quite remarkably — conceived of itself in the Pauline idiom of the 'body of Christ' (Romans 12.5). This very phrase has almost assumed the status of a creed when affirmed today in liturgical settings: 'we are the body of Christ'. Indeed, there is a very real sense in which stating it makes it so, and this is part of the force of liturgy within personal piety.

Cognitive science and liturgy

The 'personal' dynamics that drive human existence are not only shaped by socialisation but by the pre-existing capacity to respond to 'persons', and here the emerging significance of cognitive and brain science has much to contribute to our understanding of life. As Todd Tremlin describes it, 'one of the most basic and powerful activities of the brain involves the capacity to quickly detect other agents in the environment'; some cognitive psychologists describe this complex process as the 'Agency Detection Device, or ADD'.[21] This human perception of agency in the world around us is a fact of deep significance for ongoing theological consideration of God, let alone the community-focused behaviour typified as liturgy. Still, the cognitive science of liturgy has yet to be developed, seminal ideas are already evident in cognitive anthropology and psychology that draw us into the attractive appeal of narratives of people and their lives.

The grand narratives of Jesus, the disciples, apostles, and believers galore down the years, furnish the trajectories of regional and local variants depicted in more accessible forms whose appropriation by individuals is catalysed by inevitable life experiences, not least that of grief. Death ever energises and draws the grand narrative of faith down into the particular accounts of your life and mine where liturgies of all kinds find their force. Indeed, the co-incidence of those narrative dimensions strongly underlies the attractiveness of faith and the emotional flow of theological ideas. Theologies succeed when there is a strong affinity between life experience and doctrinal formulations, they fail when elite-style theologising finds little or no traction with ordinary believers or people at large.

Here the notions of 'force', 'energy', 'dynamism', and the like, are important for the study of liturgy, and not least for funeral liturgies whose context is one where a wide spectrum of emotion reaches from the deep negativity of despair to a profound positivity of hope. It would, in fact, be

[21] Todd Tremlin, *Minds and Gods: The Cognitive Foundations of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 76–77.

easy to subtitle Liturgical Studies as the emotion-studies of the faithful, something that benefits from seeing the success of liturgy as depending upon the interplay of what the historian of religion Wilfred Cantwell Smith once called 'cumulative tradition' and 'personal faith', terms he wished to use to replace the notion of 'religion'.[22] One way of thinking of contemporary secularisation is to see something of that 'personal faith' separating from established 'cumulative traditions', especially for those who self-describe as being 'spiritual but not religious'.

Secularisation, Liturgy, and Society

This distinction is worth re-asserting today, and especially in funerary contexts, to emphasise the importance of an individual's personal appropriation of doctrine within contexts of practice, something that many in previous generations experienced in day and Sunday schools. While the bond between tradition and faith typically plays its part in liturgy's ritual-symbolic experience of longstanding members of a church, it can become a barrier for those now distanced from and unfamiliar with ecclesial practices. Their very infrequent church attendance — not least at funerals — prompts uncertainty when faced by forms of service, not least funerary forms, that leave them uncertain of what to do or say next, one factor that probably makes bespoke funerals and civil celebrants appealing as we see in a moment, but for now it is worth considering how processes of secularisation within British societies involve the separation of personal and group beliefs from those of established religious traditions: secularisation witnesses the growing gap between cumulative tradition and personal faith. From somewhere later in the twentieth century the continental drift separating churches and large UK populations became increasingly obvious. Bridges sustained in baptism and marriage began to be lost before the early twenty-first century witnessed something similar for funerals.

Liturgy and ritual

While this present section could easily have been placed at the very start of this essay it has been retained for this later inclusion due to its more theoretical nature. In what might well be regarded as the fullest more recent study of ritual the anthropologist Roy Rappaport (1926 to 1997) provided an extended account of the subject in *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*.[23] Though published posthumously it includes a 'Preface' by

[22] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1963).

[23] Roy Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Rappaport where he tells us of his terminal lung cancer, thanks those caring for him, and marks his 'ever-growing sense of the need for closure' in getting the book 'done'.[24] Thankfully it was published, assisted by his colleagues and friends, not least by Keith Hart whose brief but insightful Foreword speaks of and to us as 'individuals trapped in a sort of private busy-ness' while also being alert to 'larger forces whose origin we do not know' but with which 'we would like to establish a connection'.[25] Even more than that he alludes to Rappaport's concern with ecology, damage done to the environment, and a sense of human life as being 'inside rather than outside life on this planet', to the way he draws from the work of 'theologians, psychologists, ethologists, and philosophers', and to Kant's coining of 'anthropology' as a frame for 'community and common sense […] generated through interaction'.[26]

Ultimate sacred postulates

One of Rappaport's seminal ideas is that of the 'ultimate sacred postulate', by which he refers to utterances embedded in ritual, such as the Jewish *Shema*, 'Hear O Israel the Lord Our God the Lord is One', and which when uttered in a liturgical context become 'not merely unfalsifiable but undeniable'.[27] The undeniable feature lies in his concern with aspects of religious experience that pervade such ritual, or liturgical, utterances, and not in logical propriety. This brings him to what he calls a 'remarkable spectacle', viz.

> The unfalsifiable supported by the undeniable yields the unquestionable, which transforms the dubious, the arbitrary, and the conventional into the correct, the necessary, and the natural.[28]

It is seldom difficult to pinpoint such postulates in liturgical contexts. 'This is the Body of Christ', marks one such in the Eucharist, or 'I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit', at baptism. The words of the Creeds function similarly.

And what of funerals? This key question has pervaded the preceding discussion. For this paper the ultimate sacred postulate is, in one sense, most easily identified given that many funerals begin with some biblical sentence, notably one of the Johannine 'I am sayings' — 'I am the resurrection and the life says the Lord […]'. (John 11.25). For liturgical thinkers at large such an

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[24] Rappaport, 'Preface', *Ritual and Religion*.

[25] Keith Hart, 'Foreword', in Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*, p. xv.

[26] Hart, in Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*, pp. xvi–xvii.

[27] Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*, pp. 277, 405.

[28] Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*, p. 405.

utterance, as also in the later familiar formula already discussed, when the minister commits the body to the earth, 'earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust: in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ'. The ritual-symbolic balance between the Lord as the resurrection and the life, and the committal of the body 'in sure and certain hope of the resurrection' sets the funeral event under the sacred canopy of resurrection.

But here we encounter a key feature that some will raise in terms of many a contemporary funeral, and which pinpoints the issue of belief. Some will say that most people do not 'believe' in resurrection, and even if they believe that Jesus rose from the dead and made possible eternal life for others, those others will not be 'resurrected', but their souls will 'pass' to be with God.[29] While part of the problem here lies in the mixed beliefs of modern life, even within Christian churches, an even greater issue lies in the very notion of 'belief' itself as some kind of propositional statement.

One response to this, and it is expansively discussed by Rappaport, lies in the nature of an ultimate sacred postulate set within ritual. We might say that it is as though the very nature of 'belief' shifts from being a logical proposition to being one that carries existential desire. One criticism of such a suggestion would be that words lose their meaning, and doctrine dissolves in emotionality, and in terms of systematic theology that is a weighty point. But, to what extent is systematic theology like liturgical language and action? Systematic theology does not throw soil into a grave, priests and people do.

CONCLUSION

What then of what we might call Resomation Rites? Throughout this paper I have resolutely avoided proposing liturgical formulae for such rites, seeing this piece as a call to collaborate not only in recognising current social changes surrounding death rites, but also to see them framed by the environmental factors of global warming. For here, uniquely, we find a strong intersection of two existential fields —mortality and ecology; two domains that rightfully invite theological reflection and liturgical implementation.

The nineteenth century created conditions for a new worldview in which evolutionary theories reframed human self-understanding. It fostered modern cremation as a 'green' option of the day. The twentieth and twenty-first centuries substantiated new knowledge through genetic knowledge, and now through evolutionary and cognitive sciences. Cremation that was once deemed environmentally beneficial now has its own questions over

[29] Davies, *Theology of Death*.

cremation products. Theology, too, has its own accounts of the world and of human and other beings within it. Theology and liturgy, together, have their own interactive contributions to make towards mortality. So, how might Resomation Rites commence: that is the question?

The Burial of Jesus and Christian Funerals

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Death is reported quite frequently in the Bible, and burial[1] mentioned as a significant event rather than an incidental detail in the case of persons of importance. While details of the rituals performed or even of the practicalities involved are sparce, the fact of funeral rites having been completed is not merely a statement that cultural proprieties have been observed. The failure to discharge funeral rites, or deviation from those culturally prescribed, is sufficiently noteworthy to report in an otherwise brief record of the person's death.[2] Our concern here is not with the details of the rituals performed, or with the historicity of particular occasions reported, but with the cultural significance attributed to the rites, and the cultic objective in the correct and decorous discharge of funereal obligations.[3] Against this background, the burial of Jesus can be considered, and the significance as much in the anomalies as in the observances recorded or implied in the Gospel narratives, reconstructed. Just as the Gospel accounts of the baptism of Jesus by John shed indirect but significant

[1] Throughout this study, by 'bury, burial' I refer to a comprehensive range of funereal rites which accompany and follow death in any cultural context. This is the sense in which 'The Burial of the Dead' in the Book of Common Prayer, whether English or Scottish, is to be understood. Use of the word specifically to refer to interment in a vertical shaft grave, and covering the corpse with earth, is anachronistic, and idiomatic usage of covering any object with matter is derivative, and not definitive. Cf. N. H. Taylor, 'Dying with Christ in Baptism: Issues in the Translation and Interpretation of Romans 6.3–4', *The Bible Translator* 59.1 (2008), 39–49.

[2] The most conspicuous example is that of Jezebel. After her defenestration at the conclusion of a military coup, Jehu orders that she be accorded the burial rites proper to royalty, only to find that her body had been eaten by dogs (2 Kings 9.30–37).

[3] For discussion of funereal customs in the Graeco-Roman world of the New Testament period and earlier, see my 'Baptism, Death, and Funeral Rites', *Scottish Episcopal Institute Journal* 2.3 (2018), 3–30, and references to archaeological, anthropological, and historical scholarship on Greek and Roman, as well as Jewish, customs.

light on early Christian baptism, so the accounts of the burial of Jesus shed light on the early Christian understanding of death and resurrection, and the proper role of funerals in Christian life and liturgical observance. This is not to suggest that the customs which accompanied death and burial at any stage in the history of ancient Israel could or should be replicated, but rather that we need to enquire what light these shed on the faith we have inherited, and to explore how these might inform the liturgies of our Church.

The first funeral recorded in the biblical narrative is that of Sarah (Genesis 23). This is not to suggest that the authors of Genesis and its component sources did not regard funerals as significant, but rather that Sarah's death poses a particular predicament for Abraham, in that, as an alien and a nomad living among settled cities and pasturing his herds and flocks in their agricultural hinterland, he owned no land; furthermore, having migrated from Mesopotamia, he was separated by a very considerable distance from his family and the funereal site at which their dead would have been buried. Hence his negotiations to acquire a burial plot, and purchase of a field at Machpelah,[4] to the east of Mamre where Abraham had previously experienced the theophany which preceded the birth of Isaac (Genesis 18). Having acquired the field, Abraham buried Sarah in a cave on that property, wherein he was himself later buried by his sons Ishmael and Isaac (Genesis 25.7–10). Isaac was in due course buried in the same tomb by his sons Esau and Jacob (Genesis 35.27–29).

Somewhat unusual in the patriarchal narratives is Rachel's burial, after death giving birth to Benjamin, by the roadside near Ephrath (Genesis 35.16–20). This is almost certainly to be understood as a place no longer identifiable, but situated to the north of Jerusalem, in the area inhabited by the tribe of Benjamin.[5] This is located in the narrative at a point when Jacob has returned to Canaan from exile in northern Mesopotamia, but not yet reached his father Isaac at Mamre. Notwithstanding that a servant had died

[4] The identification of this site with that subsequently enclosed by the 'Tomb of the Patriarchs' in Hebron is no earlier than Herod, who developed the location and associated cult to unite Israelite and Idumaean traditions around their common mythical ancestor. Cf. L. Niesiolowski-Spano, *Origin Myths and Holy Places in the Old Testament* (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 115–39.

[5] The location is uncertain. The shrine known as Rachel's Tomb on the northern outskirts of Bethlehem, encircled today by the Separation Wall, is not attested before the early Christian era, cf. F. Strickert, *Rachel Weeping* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2007). 1 Samuel 10.2 refers to the tomb in an area of Benjamin, north of Jerusalem. Similarly, Jeremiah 31.5 suggests a location near Ramah in Benjamin.

and been buried at Bethel (Genesis 35.8), Rachel's burial is nonetheless anomalous.[6] Jacob's household was on a journey, had recently engaged in lethal combat with a settled population in the land, which had involved deception on their part, and was likely to incur revenge (Genesis 34). He was perhaps uncertain of finding Isaac alive, and his encounter with Esau had been not without tension (Genesis 33). The story of an unceremonious and perhaps hasty burial by the roadside accommodates a pre-Israelite tradition and associated landmark; the matriarch Rachel died giving birth to the son from whom the eponymous tribe claimed descent, and her grave is located in Benjamin rather than incorporated into the later national mythology associated with Mamre and Hebron.

The function of the closing chapters of Genesis in forging national identity, and the relative status and power of component groups, is articulated in Jacob's farewell discourse from his deathbed (Genesis 49.1–27), and in his giving instructions for his burial: Jacob directs his sons to take his body from Egypt to the Cave of Machpelah, and mentions that Rebekah and Leah had been interred there, as well as Sarah, Abraham, and Isaac (Genesis 49.28–33); there follows a funeral procession by the family and their escort to Canaan, following a route through Transjordan, presumably reflecting that which would be taken by their descendants in Exodus (Genesis 50.4–14). Joseph, not dissimilarly, directs that his body be embalmed in anticipation of burial in Canaan when his descendants left Egypt (Genesis 50.24–26). Moses is reported to have taken with him the bones of Joseph at the Exodus (Exodus 13.9). These are subsequently interred at Shechem, in the territory of Ephraim, one of the tribes claiming descent from Joseph, and that to which Joshua belonged (Joshua 24.32).

Aaron's death on Mount Hor is reported several times (Numbers 33.38–39; Deuteronomy 32.50), but his burial only once, at the conclusion of a ritual in which the priestly office is transmitted to his son Eleazar (Numbers 20.22–29; cf. Deuteronomy 10.6 at Moserah). Moses's death on Mount Nebo, following his farewell discourse, is similarly at a time and a location chosen by God, in judgement; he is buried by God in an unknown grave in Moab (Deuteronomy 34.1–8). Both deaths, towards the end of the period of desert wandering, are acts of divine judgement, but their location on mountain tops, and their eminence in Israelite tradition, are suggestive also of ascent. The traditions attested at a much later period of Moses's

[6] While anthropological and archaeological studies in other contexts have identified evidence that women who died in childbirth were not accorded normal funeral rites, particularly if the baby also died, there is no evidence that this was the case in ancient Israel.

assumption into heaven reflect this, in the context of an evolving cosmology.[7] Similar traditions developed surrounding the death of Enoch,[8] Abraham,[9] Elijah,[10] and Isaiah,[11] among others. The later custom of adorning and honouring the (attributed) tombs of prophets, reflected in the Gospels (Matthew 23.29; Luke 11.47–48), reflects a somewhat different but important trajectory in the tradition.[12]

It is not necessary either to continue itemising particular accounts, or to argue that any or all the stories is historical, to recognise that burial of the dead was a culturally significant rite of passage in the societies which formed ancient Israel.[13] Whatever the details of the customs mentioned or alluded to, and the significance attributed to each ritual, the reverent disposal of the

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[7] As in the first-century CE *Assumption of Moses*. See J. Tromp, *The Assumption of Moses: A Critical Edition with Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

[8] Genesis 5.21–24; cf. Sirach 44.16; Hebrews 11.5; Jude 1.14–15. For pseudepigraphical traditions, G. W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress, 2012); B. A. Asale and L. T. Stuckenbruck, *1 Enoch as Christian Scripture* (Eugene OR: Pickwick, 2020); A. A. Orlov, *The Enoch-Metatron Tradition* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020).

[9] A. Paulsen-Reed, *The Apocalypse of Abraham in Its Ancient and Medieval Contexts* (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

[10] 2 Kings 2.3–9; cf. Malachi 4.5–6; Matthew 11.14; 17.10–13; Luke 1.16–17. For treatment of the Apocalypse of Elijah, A. Pietersma and others, *The Apocalypse of Elijah* (Missoula MO: Scholars, 1981); D. Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998).

[11] J. N. Bremmer and others, *The Ascension of Isaiah* (Leuven: Peeters, 2016); J. M. Knight, *Ascension of Isaiah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); E. Norelli, *Ascensio Isaiae* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995).

[12] Cf. A. Kloner and B. Zissu, *The Necropolis of Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007).

[13] *Death and the Regeneration of Life*, ed. by M. Bloch and J. Parry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); *On the Meaning of Death*, ed. by S. Cedderoth and others (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1988); D. S. Chidester, *Patterns of Transcendence* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1990); J. Fisch, *Tödliche Rituale* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1998); A. van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960); R. L. Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1990); R. Grainger, *The Social Symbolism of Grief and Mourning* (London: Kingsley, 1998); P. Metcalf & R. Huntingdon, *Celebrations of Death* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); V. W. Turner, *The Ritual Process* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1969).

bodies of the dead is a recognised social and cultural obligation, which would normally fall to surviving family members, or, in case of death in war, to fellow-combatants. In the case of at least some executed criminals, the obligation would appear to fall to those responsible for the execution (Deuteronomy 21.22–23). The book of Tobit reflects a righteousness ascribed to those who bury strangers, including victims of judicial execution (1.17–18; 2.3–4,7–9).

The cross-cultural significance of funeral rites is illustrated in the *Iliad*. Hector and Achilles, preliminary to their mortal combat, vow that the victor would confer decent burial upon the vanquished. Whereas excessive grief, which modern psychology might term denial, had caused Achilles's persistent refusal to attend to Patrocles's funeral, his violation of his promise to Hector is intended not merely as insult and offence, but as further violence against the shade of Hector.[14] Priam's intervention and petition resolves the situation, when Achilles surrenders Hector's body to his father for burial, and proceeds to arrange extravagant funeral rites for Patrocles (18.20–24).

In the Hebrew Bible the dead are commonly described as having been gathered to their kin, נעסף אל עמיו,[15] or to their ancestors, אבתיו,[16] or as sleeping with their forebears, שכב עם אבתיו.[17] It is clear that family bonds were understood to endure beyond death, which does not necessarily imply any conception of resurrection,[18] but rather that continuity in the family over successive generations was significant, and that common ancestry (real or

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[14] Cf. the violation of the bodies of Saul and his sons by the Philistines who had killed them in battle, and their rescue and burial, 1 Samuel 31.8–13; 2 Samuel 21.10–14.

[15] Genesis 25.8; 35.29; 49.29,33; Numbers 20.24,26; 27.13; 31.2; Deuteronomy 32.50; 2 Kings 22.20; 2 Chronicles 34.28; cf. Jeremiah 8.2; 25.33. Cf. P. S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol* (Downers Grove: IVP-Apollos, 2002), p. 33; K. Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1986); N. J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Netherworld in the Old Testament* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), p. 168.

[16] Judges 2.10; 2 Kings 22.20.

[17] Deuteronomy 31.16; 2 Samuel 7.12; 1 Kings 1.21; 2.10; 11.21,43; 14.20,31; 15.8,24; 16.6,28; 22.40,50; 2 Kings 8.24;10.35; 13.9,13; 14.16,22,29; 15.7,22,38; 16.20; 20.21; 21.18; 24.6; 2 Chronicles 9.31; 12.16; 14.1; 16.13; 21.1; 26.2,23; 27.9; 28.27; 32.33; 33.20. Cf. Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, p. 240; Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions*, pp. 169–71.

[18] G. W. E. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism and Early Christianity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

ascribed) bonded extended families and wider clan networks. The custom of interment in family tombs undoubtedly gave this notion cultic expression,[19] as well as providing a physical symbol of common identity and linking families to particular places. Nevertheless, burial in a family tomb was not understood as essential to this aspect of death: Abraham, Aaron, and Moses are so described, but were not interred in the graves of their forebears.[20] This will be important in considering the Gospel accounts of the burial of Jesus.

The obligation of the family to attend to the funeral, particularly of a parent, is reflected in Jesus's countercultural call to a prospective disciple not to await the death of his father before following him (Matthew 8.21–22; Luke 9.59–60). Whatever the precise circumstances behind this pericope,[21] it attests to the continuing observance of a cultural obligation deeply rooted in the Hebrew tradition (cf. 1 Kings 19.20–21).

Jesus, in the Gospel narratives, makes mention of the cultic significance accorded to the tombs of the prophets, precisely by the religious leaders whose forebears and predecessors had persecuted them (Matthew 23.29; Luke 11.47–48). This indicates more than reverence after the event or hypocritical gestures to conceal their contempt, but rather that belated reverence for the prophets at their attributed places of burial would confer honour upon them in the afterlife in which some Jews had, by that date, come to believe.[22]

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[19] Judges 8.32; 16.31; 2 Samuel 2.32; 17.23; 19.37–38; 21.14. Cf. E. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs About the Dead* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992); B. R. McCane, *Roll Back the Stone* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003).

[20] Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, pp. 240–41; Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions*, p. 169.

[21] This pericope, set after the commencement of Jesus's final journey to Jerusalem in Luke, is less eschatologically charged in Jesus's Galilean ministry in Matthew, but the urgency of the call is nonetheless implicit in Jesus's claim to prior commitment. In both contexts, the contrast between the social norm of embeddedness in the family and household and the itinerant nature of Jesus's lifestyle, and therefore of his calling to discipleship, is crucial. K. E. Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), pp. 22–32; U. Luz, *Matthew 8–20* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), pp. 18–20; J. T. Carroll, *Luke* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), pp. 230–31.

[22] U. Luz, *Matthew 21–28* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), pp. 131–38; Carroll, *Luke*, pp. 258–62; N. H. Taylor, 'Luke-Acts and the Temple', in *The Unity of Luke-Acts* ed. by J. Verheyden (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), pp. 709–21

The burial described in greatest detail in Scripture is that of Jesus (Matthew 27.57–61; Mark 15.42–47; Luke 23.50–56; John 19.38–42). A great deal of critical debate has surrounded the historicity of this episode, and of details recorded in the various accounts, in the light of what is known or surmised of Roman practice, Jewish sensibilities, and whether or not these would have been applied on this particular occasion.[23] While it would be impossible to resolve the complex and inextricable issues of historical plausibility and tradition history here, it is unambiguously the case that all four canonical Gospels conclude their Passion Narrative with an account of Jesus's dead body, through the intervention of a Jewish patrician with the Roman authorities, removed from the cross and conveyed to a place of interment, witnessed by a number of women of Jesus's following. It may be worth observing that there is no suggestion that either Roman troops or temple police violently attacked those carrying the body of Jesus, notwithstanding what is liable to occur in Jerusalem today, at the funerals of public figures killed by Israeli forces.[24]

Notwithstanding that it is often understood as a somewhat perfunctory act of an otherwise unknown sympathiser, bringing the Passion Narrative to its pathetic conclusion, this is something of a misrepresentation of the burial of Jesus.[25] While the impression of haste, with consequent perfunctoriness, is undoubtedly conveyed, this may be attributed, at least in part, to haste on account of dusk and the impending commencement of the Sabbath; purity considerations at a time of festival may also have been relevant. Whether or not Joseph of Arimathea intended to complete funeral rites after the Sabbath, or to enable the women disciples to do so, or they took upon themselves to complete the outstanding rituals, most particularly anointing the body with spices (Matthew 28.1–2; Mark 16.1–3; Luke 23.55–24.3), is of course uncertain. What is clear is that, in accordance with contemporary funereal customs, they intended to accord greater honour to the body of Jesus than had been possible on the day of his death. Preparation of the body for burial was a culturally ascribed role of women, which would

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[23] For review of arguments, D. C. Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2021), pp. 94–115; R. E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah. II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 1201–313.

[24] https://www.middleeasteye.net/topics/shireen-abu-akleh-killing.

[25] Brown, *Death of the Messiah. II*; K. E. Corley, *Maranatha* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress, 2010); J. D. Crossan and J. L. Reed, *Excavating Jesus* (San Francisco CA: Harper San Francisco, 2001); R. E. deMaris, *The New Testament in Its Ritual World* (London: Routledge, 2008); McCane, *Roll Back the Stone*.

normally have taken place at the home rather than in the grave.[26] However the principle of culturally ascribed gender roles may be regarded today, this is crucial to understanding the intention of the women, and the significance of their intended action, as well as the intention of the evangelist in recounting this episode.

It is precisely in recognising the significance of the Gospel accounts of Jesus's burial, considered important enough for explicit mention by the apostle Paul in an otherwise very concise creedal digest of the Passion (1 Corinthians 15.4), that we gain some insight not only to ways in which the death of Jesus was understood by those bereft by it, but also into the early Christian understanding of the purpose of burying the dead. Any honour withheld from the body of Jesus by those who carried it to the tomb, whether intentionally on account of the circumstances of his death or simply because of constraints of time,[27] was not simply an abstract concept, and did not simply concern the regard in which he was held by his contemporaries. The funeral rites, and the honour accorded the corpse, were understood as integral to the process of conveying the deceased from life in the present world to that which followed.

In ensuring that Jesus received as decent and honourable a funeral as circumstances permitted, notwithstanding his ignominious death, Joseph of Arimathea and the women disciples were not merely giving practical expression to their grief or exhibiting what has been labelled 'denial' in modern cultures; in performing funeral rites they were conferring honour on the deceased and participating in his transition to the life that awaited him beyond the grave — the gate of death. Jesus had spoken to his disciples about his impending death,[28] by which is to be understood not just the violence of his trial and crucifixion, with the consequent cessation in the functioning of his vital organs, resulting in what moderns would term 'clinical' death. Death includes transition, assisted by funeral rites, of the person to that life which continues, in whatever form, beyond the grave.[29] This cannot be construed to mean simply that Jesus would rest in *Sheol* with his forebears, as traditionally conceived, and which, as we have noted, burial

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[26] See especially Corley, *Maranatha*; McCane, *Roll back the Stone*; B. Taylor, *Outrageous Women* (University of Cape Town thesis, 2004).

[27] Cf. McCane, *Roll back the Stone*, pp. 89–108.

[28] Matthew 16.21–28; 17.22–23; 20.17–19; 26.1–2; Mark 8.31–33; 9.30–32; 10.32–34; Luke 9.21–22,43–45; 18.31–34. For discussion, D. C. Allison, *Constructing Jesus* (London: SPCK, 2010), pp. 387–433; P. M. Casey, *Jesus of Nazareth* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), pp. 401–08.

[29] J. Clark-Soles, *Death and Afterlife in the New Testament* (London: T&T Clark, 2006); McCane, *Roll Back the Stone*.

in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea rather than that of Joseph of Nazareth, would not preclude. It concerned also the fulfilment of the mission of which Jesus had spoken, for which he had recruited his disciples, which would not be complete without his death, burial, and resurrection. However neglected in scholarship and in the doctrinal and liturgical traditions of the Church, and however discordant with the scenes of grief and bewilderment depicted in the Gospel accounts of the empty tomb (Matthew 28.2–8; Mark 16.3–8; Luke 24.4–11; John 20.2–18), or with the fear and disbelief attributed to the male disciples (Matthew 28.17; Luke 24.37–40; John 20.19–29),[30] this cannot be excluded from the consciousness and intentions of Joseph and the women disciples. The episode commonly known as the *descensus ad inferos* and 'harrowing of hell',[31] and Jesus's eschatological return,[32] are contingent upon his death and burial.

A number of observations may usefully be made as we begin the process of revising and expanding the provision for Christian funerals within the ordered liturgies of the Scottish Episcopal Church.

There is no extant evidence of a distinctive Christian liturgy of burial from the earliest centuries.[33] The absence of directions from such documents as the *Didache, Apostolic Tradition*, and related texts, or of any explanation of distinctive customs by apologists such as Justin Martyr, suggests continuity with prevailing traditions,[34] with some indications that the Jewish abhorrence of cremation may have contributed to a tendency away from cremation and towards inhumation during the early Christian centuries; a trend which cannot be attributed solely to conversions to

[30] Cf. Allison, *Resurrection*, and earlier scholarship copiously reviewed.

[31] Taylor, 'Baptism, Death, and Funeral Rites'; cf. Allison, *Resurrection of Jesus*; Brown, *Death of the Messiah*.

[32] N. H. Taylor, 'Palestinian Christianity and the Caligula Crisis', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 61 (1996), 101–24; 62 (1996), 13–41.

[33] It has been suggested that the obscure rite of baptism ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν alluded to in 1 Corinthians 15.29 may have been a funeral rite, R. E. deMaris, 'Corinthian Religion and Baptism for the Dead', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114 (1995), 661-82; R. A. Horsley, *I Corinthians* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), p. 207. Contra, M. F. Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead* (Atlanta: Scholars, 2005); N. H. Taylor, 'Baptism for the Dead?', *Neotestamentica* 36 (2002), 121–30; J. R. White, 'Baptized on Account of the Dead', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116 (1997), 287–99. See further, D. G. Rowell, *The Liturgy of Christian Burial* (London: SPCK, 1977).

[34] The earliest reference to a Christian rite is Tertullian, *De Anima* 51, which provides no details or prescriptions.

Judaism and Christianity, given the scale of archaeological evidence.[35] Nevertheless, there is no indication that martyrs such as Polycarp[36] and Lawrence,[37] who died by fire, were particularly disadvantaged by this, even if the legendary accretions to the account of Polycarp's death (that the fire surrounded but did not burn him, and he was eventually speared to death, and subsequently cremated) suggest that this was a problem. Lawrence in due course became the patron saint of chefs. Notwithstanding the Christian preference for inhumation until quite recently, cremation has become an accepted Christian burial custom,[38] in no way compromising Christian belief in the resurrection of the dead. Our provision must therefore continue to include rites to accompany committal of the body for cremation, and appropriate deposition of the ashes, or for alternative methods of causing the body to disintegrate into compact residue which may be deemed environmentally more appropriate.[39]

The biblical tradition reflects, over a considerable period, the attachment of some value to family tombs. Nevertheless, the conceptualisation of death as gathering to or resting with one's forebears does not depend upon interment in a family grave. The importance of the family, its honour and regeneration,[40] is deeply patriarchal, in most traditional societies including ancient Israel. However diverse family structures and relationships have become in the modern and post-modern world, and notwithstanding the diminished emphasis on procreation, family and other relationships remain important, and an area of sensitivity at a time of death. Liturgical texts cannot be a substitute for pastoral care but need to be available to clergy and lay people delivering such care, giving unequivocal expression to the doctrine of the Church without judging either the relationships of the deceased, and brokenness therein, or lack thereof.

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[35] R. Garland, *The Greek Way of Death* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); V. M. Hope, *The Roman Way of Death* (London: Continuum, 2009); I. Morris, *Death-Ritual and Social Structure in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[36] *Martyrdom of Polycarp*.

[37] Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum* 2.28; Aurelius Clemens, *Peristephanon* 2.

[38] D. J. Davies, *Death, Ritual, and Belief* (London: Continuum, 2002).

[39] As was widely reported, Archbishop Desmond Tutu's body was treated to alkaline hydrolysis, or aquamation. Promession, disintegration of freeze-dried remains by vibration, is of less certain viability.

[40] R. K. Fenn, *The Death of Herod* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

A related issue, that traditionally the same burial space would be used for successive generations in a particular family, is perhaps worth considering further. The introduction of coffins and gravestones to churchyard burials, limiting the number who could be interred in a particular space, has generated an incremental demand for burial space, with the consequence that church graveyards have become full and secular cemeteries required to expand to accommodate increasing need. Whether this is a practice which is sustainable, and environmentally responsible, whatever plant and animal life might flourish in (neglected) cemeteries, needs to be carefully considered, and the teaching of the Church, and the provision of our liturgies, adjusted accordingly.

Respect for the deceased, or lack thereof, is inevitably reflected in the ways in which the body is treated at each stage in the funeral process. The use of funeral rites to ascribe honour, and not least to compensate for honour withheld or violated in life, is most clearly reflected in the Gospel accounts of the burial of Jesus. This raises significant issues for the conduct of Christian funerals today. Most significantly, the Church does not teach, and must not be understood to teach, that its rituals or the costs expended upon them, in any way affect God's love for the deceased or the nature of the salvation which awaits. This represents a conspicuous departure from the religiosity of ancient cultures and may not be altogether absent from some contemporary societies, particularly at times when human sensitivities may be particularly vulnerable to manipulation. Respect cannot be translated into expense, and it is not the responsibility of the Church to allow its funeral rites to give expression to the status and power of the family of the deceased. It is important that the liturgy, and the ornaments and furnishings used, give expression to the essential unity and equality of all Christians before God. The use of a pall to cover the coffin during the service in church, as well as emphasising the baptismal allusions in the entry rite,[41] serves to conceal the coffin from view without concealing the reality of death and may serve as a disincentive to the purchase of unnecessarily elaborate and expensive caskets when simple ones may be just as dignified.[42]

The unity and equality of Christians relates directly to our baptism, in which we are united with Christ in his death and burial (Romans 6.3–4). It is therefore appropriate that, at the time of physical death and burial, the symbolism of Christian baptism should be evoked, in words and in the use of water and the lighted Paschal Candle. Covering the coffin with a pall

[41] This depends on the pall being (liturgical) white rather than black or purple. These issues are considered in another article.

[42] Archbishop Desmond Tutu recently set an excellent example in this regard.

reflects clothing after baptism, and the common identity of Christians, appropriately concealing any signifiers of wealth and status reflected in the quality of the coffin.

As Joseph of Arimathea and the women disciples conveyed the body of the crucified Jesus to the tomb, acknowledging the honour which had been violated in his trial and death, so also, they conveyed him to the place from which God's work would continue: Christ, buried in the tomb, overcame evil, destroyed death, and opened the way to resurrection. In Christian funerals, those who have in baptism been united with Christ in his death and burial, are surrendered to God, their bodies reverently disposed, so that the mysteries of God's saving work may continue, and they be united with Christ in his resurrection.

The Funeral in the Reformation with Particular Reference to Scotland

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The Church of England

The elaborate late medieval rite for the burial of the dead in the West is described at length by Francis Proctor and W. H. Frere in their classic *History of the Book of Common Prayer* (revised edition, 1901). It still bears quoting in full.

> The tender care which the primitive and medieval Church bestowed upon the departed is a natural sequel of its care for the sick and dying. A continuous round of prayer was maintained. During the last agony psalms and litanies were said, ending with a solemn farewell in the name of the Blessed Trinity, the orders of angels and the company of saints, and a solemn series of petitions to God to deliver the soul of his servant from all dangers. After death came the service of Commendation, consisting of Psalms with their antiphons, and collects at intervals; and during it the body was prepared for burial. Psalmody again accompanied carrying of the corpse to the church. Then began the services connected with the Burial; for the office of the dead (Evensong, Mattins and Lauds), then the Requiem Mass, then a short form of Commendation and the censing and sprinkling with holy water of the body, and lastly the actual Burial Service. After the funeral Memorial Services were said, both the office of Dead and Requiem Mass, especially during the month following, and on the anniversary.[1]

Proctor and Frere are here drawing largely upon the late medieval Manuals of the York and Sarum rites. Archbishop Cranmer's 1549 Book of Common Prayer saw a radical change — and diminution in this liturgy. Not only were the medieval practices greatly simplified, but prayers for the departed were almost eliminated, and entirely so in the Prayer Book of 1552, and all

[1] Francis Proctor and Walter Howard Frere, *A New History of the Book of Common Prayer* (London: Macmillan, 1949), pp. 630–31.

reference to the purgatorial state were omitted, the fate of the deceased being determined fully and finally at the moment of death.[2]

At the same time, there was much traditional pre-Reformation material kept in the 1549 'Order for the Burial of the Dead'. It maintained the fourfold medieval scheme: the procession to the church or grave; the burial; an office of the dead; and a eucharist. The initial two sentences are drawn from the medieval offices of the dead (Mattins and Lauds), and a third being added (a combination of 1 Timothy 6.7 and Job 1.21). The prayer beginning 'In the myddest of lyfe we be in death' (*Media vita*) originated in the eleventh century and is a feature also of Lutheran burial services.[3] Bishop John Dowden suggested that Cranmer derived his version of this medieval anthem from Miles Coverdale's English translation, in his *Goostly Psalms and Spirituall Songes* (published sometime before 1539), of Martin Luther's German translation of the *Media vita*, the hymn *Mitten wir im leben sind*.[4] Cranmer was also probably drawing on the reformer Hermann of Wied's (1477 to 1552) *Simple and Religious Consultation* (English trans. 1547). The priest then commends the soul to God, 'castynge earth upon the Corps'.[5] After the prayers of the commendation, there is a short office of the dead, comprising psalms largely drawn from the Sarum Use, a reading from 1 Corinthians 15.20–58 followed by the Kyries, the Lord's Prayer and medieval suffrages, concluding with the prayer 'O Lorde, with whome dooe lyve the spirites of them that be dead' — draw mainly from prayers in the Sarum Use. The fourth section of the 1549 service is a celebration of Holy Communion. This rite was considerably simplified in the second Edwardine Prayer Book of 1552. The psalms and the Holy Communion disappear entirely as does the commendation. The lesson is read not in church but at the graveside (as in Hermann and many other Lutheran orders), and all suggestion of prayers for the dead are eliminated. In this last point, Martin Bucer (1491 to 1551) had written critically of the 1549 rite:

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[2] See further, R. C. D. Jasper and Paul F. Bradshaw, *A Companion to the Alternative Service Book* (London: SPCK, 1986), p. 393.

[3] Geoffrey Rowell, *The Liturgy of Christian Burial*. Alcuin Club (London: SPCK, 1977), p. 79.

[4] John Dowden, *The Workmanship of the Prayer Book* (London: Methuen, 1899), pp. 161–63.

[5] The text of 1549 is taken from *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, ed. by Brian Cummings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 82–90.

> I know that this custom of praying for the pious dead is most ancient (*pervestutam*) but, as it is our duty to prefer the divine to all human authority and since Scripture nowhere teaches us by word or example to pray for the departed […] I wish that this commendation of the dead and prayer for them be omitted.[6]

It was the 1552 service that was essentially restored by Elizabeth in her Prayer Book of 1559, though in practice a number of the elements of 1549 found their way back into practice in the Church of England.

The Lutheran Orders

Luther vigorously attacked medieval masses for the dead, vigils, funeral pomp and purgatory as 'popish abominations' that were contrary to Scripture and in particular as their help was called upon to influence the fate of the dead.[7] In the many varieties of early Lutheran orders there is a common emphasis on the preaching of the Word of God, vernacular prayer and the avoidance of all mention of purgatorial doctrine. Luther regarded the primary purpose of the funeral as the proclamation of the resurrection of the dead. Bells and processions were retained, and great emphasis given to the singing of hymns to comfort the mourners with the promise of forgiveness and the hope of resurrection. Sermons tended to be restricted to the nobility and there was a wide distinction between funerals in different classes.

Some elements of the medieval tradition persist in the Lutheran orders of burial such as, as we have seen, Luther's translation of the sequence *Media vita*. Nevertheless, prayers 'are much more concerned with admonishing and exhorting the living than with the commendation of the dead'[8] and of the paschal imagery of the earlier funeral rites there is very little evidence.

The Reformed tradition

In the tradition of Calvin, the rejection of traditional burial liturgies was so emphatic that at times the church had nothing to do with funerals at all, simply leaving them to family and guilds. Calvin himself did not go so far,

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[6] Martin Bucer, *Scripta Anglicana* (Basle: [n. pub], 1577), p. 467.

[7] See A. Niebergall and Gordon Lathrop, 'Lutheran Burial' in *A New Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, ed. by J. G. Davies (London: SCM, 1986), pp. 124–27. Philip H. Pfatteicher, 'Lutheran Funerals' in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, ed. by Paul Bradshaw (Louisville: WJK Press, 2002), pp. 222–23.

[8] Rowell, *Liturgy of Christian Burial*, p. 80.

commending a 'ceremony' that, if it might be 'unprofitable', nevertheless had a purpose as a witness to the resurrection and against its pagan deniers. He wrote in the *Institutes*:

> But in order that this gross ignorance might not excuse anyone, by an unbelievable prompting of nature men always had before their eyes an image of the resurrection. Why the sacred and inviolable custom of burial but as an earnest of new life? And no one can claim that this arose out of error, for burial services were always kept up among the holy patriarchs; and God willed that the same custom remain among the Gentiles so that an image of the resurrection set before them might shake off their drowsiness. Now although that ceremony was unprofitable, it is useful to us if we wisely look to its purpose. For it is a weighty refutation of unbelief that all together professed what no one believed.[9]

Although Calvin did not oppose the giving of an 'appropriate sermon' in the churchyard,[10] the status of burials in the Reformed tradition is summed up in some words from the Genevan *Ordonnances Ecclesiastiques* (1541):

> The dead are to be buried decently in the place appointed. The attendance and company are left to each man's discretion. It will be good that the carriers be warned by us to discourage all superstitions contrary to the Word of God.[11]

Scotland

John Knox's *Genevan Service Book* of 1556 stated simply that:

> The corps is reuerently brought to the graue, accompanied with the congregation withe owte any further ceremonies, which beyng buriede the minister goethe to the church, if it be not farre off, and maketh some comfortable exhortation to the people, touching deathe and resurrection.[12]

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[9] John Calvin, *Institutes* (1536)4*,* III, xxv.5.

[10] John Calvin, *Letter to Farel* (1543).

[11] Quoted in Barkley, 'Reformed Burial', in *New Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, ed. by Davies, p. 129.

[12] W. D. Maxwell, *John Knox's Genevan Service Book of 1556* (Edinburgh: [n. pub], 1931), pp. 161, 163–64.

In Scotland, as amongst the Puritans in England, there may often have been only a sermon or singing of a psalm, and no funeral service at all. According to the *Scottish Book of Common Order* of 1564 there was no requirement for a minister to be present ('if he be present and required'), and in the *Book of Discipline* (1560) it is stated that it is:

> Most expedient that the dead be conveyed to the place of burial with some honest company of the church, without either singing or reading, yea without all kind of ceremony heretofore used, other than that the dead be committed to the grave with such gravity and sobriety as those that be present may seem to fear the judgments of God, and to hate sin which is the cause of death.[13]

There is here little pastoral sympathy or any sense of the passage of the soul from this world to the next. However, Knox certainly allows a degree of flexibility in some kirks, though only inasmuch 'as they will answer to God and the Assembly of the Universal Kirk, gathered within the realm'.[14] Funerals were largely discouraged, not least because they were regarded as tending to class distinction, and sermons at burials were finally forbidden by an act of the General Assembly of 1638.

The Scottish *Directory* of 1664 (a translation of a sixteenth century book of discipline by the English Puritan Walter Travers) baldly states 'Concerning Burial of the Dead':

> When any person departeth this life, let the dead body, upon the day of burial, be decently attended from the house to the place appointed for public burial and there immediately interred, without any ceremony.[15]

Any 'Superstition' such as kneeling or praying 'by or towards' the corpse are to be 'laid aside' as are reading and singing at the grave inasmuch as they are 'no way beneficial to the dead, and have proved many ways hurtful to the living'. The minister may or may not be present, though due 'civic respects' according to rank are admitted.

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[13] Quoted in Rowell, *Liturgy of Christian Burial*, p. 82.

[14] W. McMillan, *The Worship of the Scottish Reformed Church, 1550–1638* (Dunfermline: [n. pub], 1931), p. 283.

[15] P. Hall, *Reliquiae Liturgicae* (Bath: [n. pub], 1847), III, p. 72.

In short, burials in Reformation Scotland were effectively secular occasions, particularly excluding any lingering pre-Reformation customs such as the vigil involving praying by the body.[16] As late as 1867 it was written that in Scotland:

> The religious Service at funerals […] is, as a general rule, confined to the house of mourning, except on the occasion of the death of ministers, and of others who have filled positions of special prominence, when sometimes a Service is held at the Church or the place of interment.[17]

George Sprott summarised matters in his *Worship and Offices of the Church of Scotland* (1882), suggesting that 'among all the Reformed Churches there was at first a feeling against religious services at Funerals, because of the old practice of praying and offering masses for the dead'.[18] The eminent Scottish minister and theologian Alexander Henderson (*c*. 1583 to 1646), sometimes considered the second founder of the Reformed Church in Scotland, remarked that in 1641 there was no religious service at all at funerals, and even in the later nineteenth century. Sprott says that 'this continued to be the case till a generation ago'.[19] Sprott adds, however, that 'there are traces […] of devotional exercises of what was considered the superstitious order in the house of mourning during the interval betwixt death and burial'. These might include readings or singing or asking the minister to be present at the 'coffining of the dead' — apparently a relic of the Lykewake service.[20]

Almost four centuries after the Reformation in Scotland, Sprott sums up the spirit of the Reformed tradition of burial in Scotland in a consideration of the prayers said at society funerals which give thanks for the excellence of the deceased:

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[16] The Scottish word 'dregy' is derived from the *Dirige* — or prayers said over a corpse. William Dunbar's (born *c*.1549) comic poem *The Dregy of Dunbar* (sometimes known as *Dumbaris Dirige to the King*) is a parody of the Office of the Dead. See further below, note 20, on the Lykewake service.

[17] *Euchologion* (1867), quoted in Barkley, 'Reformed Burial', in *New Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, ed. by Davies, p.130.

[18] George W. Sprott, *The Worship and Offices of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: [n. pub], 1882), p. 162.

[19] Sprott, *Worship and Offices of the Church*, p. 165.

[20] 'Lyke' is an obsolete word meaning 'corpse'. The Lykewake Dirge originates in the *Dirige* said over the body before burial.

> Better no funeral service at all than such eulogiums, at a time when we are brought face to face with the fearful wages of sin, and where all should be humbled in the dust before God [...]. I have often been struck by the want of thanksgiving for the Lord's victory over death, and for the great hope of the resurrection of the dead.[21]

[21] Sprott, *Worship and Offices of the Church*, p. 174.

Developments in Grief Theories: Their Relevance to the Contemporary Christian Funeral and Pastoral Care of the Bereaved

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Bereavement is arguably one of the most difficult human experiences. It has been the focus of a considerable amount of research. During recent years there have been significant developments in understanding grief and bereavement, and it will be argued that these should be taken account of when planning contemporary funerals. My own experience of bereavement and work with the bereaved in psychotherapy and church ministry has led to a belief that an understanding of the processes involved in grief and bereavement is important when planning and conducting a funeral. Along with evaluating some of the relevant research literature on bereavement, this article will include excerpts from research interviews conducted during my current PhD studies in Scotland within the field of practical theology on contemporary funerals. This involved interviews about what makes a good funeral with ten funeral officiants including clergy, humanist and civil officiants and ten bereaved people who had arranged a funeral within the last two years.[1] These excerpts will be used to illustrate points made in the evaluation of the literature. My expectation is that those conducting funerals may have an understanding of older, traditional theories of grief but may not have been able to update this knowledge by learning about more recent developments in bereavement research. The aim of this article is to present an overview of older, traditional theories of grief and more up to date theories on bereavement that may be useful for those officiating at funerals. Theological reflection on bereavement theories has been included in recognition of the theological context of Christian funerals.

First theories of grief examined

Bereavement is the situation of a person who has lost someone significant through death. Grief is the emotional or affective response to the loss. Mourning are the acts of expressing the grief, influenced by culture and

[1] All names of interviewees are pseudonyms.

society.[2] The first theory of grief was devised by Freud.[3] At the heart of this was the concept of 'grief work', the process of acknowledging and expressing painful emotions such as guilt and anger. This was believed to lead to the bereaved being freed from bondage to the deceased, being able to adjust to life without the deceased and build new relationships. Freud maintained that failure to complete grief work would result in a complicated grief process with risk of mental and physical illness and an inability to return to normal functioning.

Grief work is defined as a 'cognitive process of coming to terms with a loss through confronting the loss and restructuring thoughts about the deceased, the events of the loss and the world as it is without the deceased'.[4] The cultural and philosophical influences underlying this concept have been deconstructed in recent years. In addition, the idea that those who have worked through the emotions associated with bereavement, known as 'grief work' are better placed to achieve a good outcome compared with those who have not done so, has not been evidenced by research studies.[5] It can be helpful for those offering pastoral care to bereaved people to appreciate that working through difficult feelings of loss may not be necessary for all who are bereaved. For instance, one recently bereaved person saw death as relief from suffering for the deceased who had experienced years of pain and loss:

> I felt she was at peace and out of pain.
> (Ivy, Niece of the deceased)

In the work of Bowlby that followed Freud's theories, the goal of bereavement continued to be to sever links with the dead.[6] The stages of mourning Bowlby identified are protest, searching, disorganisation and

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[2] Wolfgang Stroebe and Margaret Stroebe, *Bereavement and Health — The Psychological and Physical Consequences of Partner Loss* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 7.

[3] Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, xx vols, ed. and trans. by J. Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), XIV, pp.152–70.

[4] Margaret Stroebe and others, 'Broken Hearts or Broken Bonds', in *Continuing Bonds — New understandings of Grief*, ed. by Dennis Klass, Phyllis Silverman and Steven Nickman (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 52.

[5] W. Stroebe and M. S. Stroebe, 'Health Outcomes of Bereavement, *The Lancet,* 370 (2007), 1960–73.

[6] John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss:* Vol. 3*. Loss* (London: Hogarth, 1980).

reorganisation. Parkes developed grief theory further.[7] His description of the stages is numbness when the situation seems unreal, yearning and searching when the bereaved tries to recover the lost person, disorganisation and despair when difficult feelings are experienced such as anxiety and desolation, and reorganisation when a new identity is forged that involves a level of acceptance of the loss.

Some funeral officiants may still view bereavement as a process involving a series of stages as a recent research interview suggests:

> People say, 'I'm dreading the funeral'. I often say, 'Well you might find it helps you just to move onto some kind of next stage.'
> (James, chaplain)

However, the idea of there being stages of bereavement has, claims Cleiren, been found to be untenable.[8] He suggests that it has more validity to argue that grief involves a large variety of emotional states. A 'component' rather than 'stage' model appears more valid. Parkes has adjusted his view of the process of bereavement to a more 'component' view, rather than stages or phases.[9] Kubler-Ross theorised that anger was one stage of bereavement however it is now thought that anger may be a component within an individual's process of bereavement rather than a stage as such.[10] This change from viewing bereavement as a series of stages which bereaved people move through in a linear fashion to a highly individualised process that may include some common components is a large shift and has implications for pastoral care of bereaved people. Officiants may unintentionally mislead bereaved people if they suggest their grief process is likely to involve a series of stages they need to work through, creating false expectations of a process which moves through a clearly defined number of stages. For many, adjusting to the loss of a loved one can be extremely demanding and confusion or disillusionment may result from misleading comments on the process of bereavement. Those who are bereaved might

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[7] Colin Murray Parkes, *Bereavement: Studies of Grief in Adult Life* (London: Penguin, 1986), p. 84.

[8] Marc Cleiren, *Bereavement and Adaptation: A Comparative Study of the Aftermath of Death* (Washington: Hemisphere Publishing Company, 1992).

[9] C. M. Parkes, *Love and Loss — the Roots of Grief and its Complications* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2009).

[10] Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (London: Tavistock, 1970).

not anticipate a possible need for support with their loss many months after the death if they expect a linear process. It can be helpful for officiants and those offering pastoral care to highlight that bereavement is a highly individualised process that may involve surprising aspects and a need for support at unexpected times. Additionally, officiants may encourage the congregation at the funeral ceremony to offer support to those who are bereaved in the months after the funeral which typically may be the time when support stops being offered.

Within the life of Jesus, the experience of a person being distressed at the death of someone they love is given expression and validity through the response of Jesus to the death of Lazarus — 'Jesus wept' (John 11.35). This detailing of grief is unusual in an ancient text. Jesus's own experiences of bereavement along with his suffering through crucifixion can offer a theological context to the suffering of the bereaved revealing that within Christianity, God knows what it is to suffer and to be bereaved. This context is relevant to a traditional or an updated understanding of grief theories.

Grief as a dual process

Stroebe and Schut theorise that grief is a dual process involving the bereaved being both loss orientated, and restoration orientated. [11] Being loss orientated can include the intrusion of grief, a denial or avoidance of changes and breaking bonds with the deceased, whilst being restoration orientated, can include distraction from grief, meeting day to day needs, completing everyday tasks and developing new roles, identities and relationships. The suggestion is that bereaved people oscillate between both of these, back and forwards. There is a dual process happening rather than a staged process going in one direction. The strength of this theory is that it comes closer to encompassing the complexity of experiences the bereaved may have rather than giving the impression that a linear series of stages are being moved through. It may resonate with some bereaved individuals who experience being suddenly ambushed by grief in the midst of getting on with their life. This theory may help funeral officiants and those providing pastoral care for bereaved people to not make assumptions about how the bereaved person is feeling at any given time. They may have periods of appearing to manage the loss they are experiencing without significant difficulty whilst at other times feel overwhelmed by it. For some bereaved people it may be extremely difficult to be experiencing grief when not expecting it, whilst for others it can be understood as a reminder of the significance of the loss and lead to

[11] Margaret Stroebe and Henk Schut, 'The dual process model of coping with bereavement: rationale and description', *Death Studies*, 23.3, April–May (1999), 197–224 (p. 197).

helpful memories of the relationship with the deceased. As Rosenblatt remarks 'there is more to grief than sorrow'.[12] The creation of memory boxes containing items associated with the deceased by bereaved children for instance may evoke happy memories of past shared activities which confirms for the child the significance of the deceased in their earlier life. In a recent interview about the Christian funeral ceremony planned by a family they related that although the deceased had not planned the detail of the funeral, they had sense of the kind of event he wanted and used this when planning the funeral:

> He thought it should be like a big party.
> (Beatrice, wife of the deceased)

As Rosenblatt highlights grief can recur over a lifetime.[13] A death may set in motion a sequence of losses, a sense of one's own mortality, and various losses in family relationships. A loss can reawaken grief from previous losses.

Through the Eucharist, Christianity arguably faces the reality of death at very regular intervals and that this includes the theology of death being overcome by resurrection can offer a hopeful framework to the bereaved. This is not to diminish the pain of bereavement, particularly for those most difficult of all deaths, the death of a child or death by suicide. Belief in the resurrection does not detract from bereavement being a loss that the bereaved will need to learn to live with rather than recover from as such. It must be acknowledged that in situations where some family members are believers and some are not, difficult questions about the afterlife may be raised which need to be handled with great sensitivity by officiants and those providing pastoral care, appreciating that bereavement makes individuals very vulnerable. For officiants and those providing pastoral care to the bereaved, offering compassionate care to those who are suffering may reflect the compassion of God for those who suffer (Psalm 86.15; James 5.11).

Styles of grieving

[12] Paul Rosenblatt, 'Grief that does not end', in *Continuing Bonds — New understandings of Grief*, ed. by D. Klass, P. Silverman and R. Nickman (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 55.

[13] Rosenblatt, 'Grief', in *Continuing Bonds*, ed. by Klass and others, p. 50.

Martin and Doka [14] suggest that there are different styles of grieving including those who grieve in an intuitive way by expressing deep feeling and those who grieve in an instrumental way by expressing grief in physical, cognitive, or behavioural ways. This finding suggests the importance of appreciating individuals will grieve in a variety of ways. One funeral officiant spoke of conducting funerals for those unfamiliar with attending church and described the liturgy as a 'foreign country' for many in the congregation at funerals. Officiants need to, in some sense, fulfil the role of guide within this unknown land. However, within a ritual context, it is not the words alone that communicate, but also the building or outdoor environment, the ritual actions, the atmosphere, music and stories that are told about the bereaved. There can be value in funeral officiants bearing in mind that different aspects of a ceremony will be helpful for different individuals with different styles of grieving. For some people, involvement in a ritual act may be more significant than reading words of liturgy.

Grief and biography

In his paper 'A new model of grief: bereavement and biography', Walter argues that forming a biography of the deceased is an important aspect of grieving and that speaking with others who knew the deceased can be more helpful in resolving bereavement than sessions with a grief counsellor.[15] To Walter, the purpose of grief, rather than working through painful emotions or breaking bonds with the deceased is rather, 'the construction of a durable biography that enables the living to integrate the memory of the dead into their lives'. [16] The desire to talk with other people about the deceased, especially with those who knew the deceased personally is present for many bereaved people, however, some bereavements can be particularly difficult to speak about such as a loss through suicide and other bereavements in which the death involves stigma. In those instances, bereavement counselling may be particularly helpful.

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[14] Kenneth Doka and Terry Martin, 'How We Grieve: Culture, Class and Gender', in *Disenfranchised grief: New Directions, Challenges, and Strategies for Practice*, ed. by K. Doka (Champaign: Research Press, 2002).

[15] Tony Walter, 'Facing Death without Tradition', in *Contemporary Issues in the Sociology of Death, Dying and Disposal*, ed. by Glennys Howarth and Peter Jupp (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1996).

[16] Freud, 'Mourning', in C*omplete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. by Strachey, XIV, pp. 152–170; Freud, 'Mourning', in C*omplete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. by Strachey, XIV, pp. 152–170; Walter, 'Facing Death', in *Contemporary Issues in the Sociology of Death,* ed. by Howarth and Jupp.

Walter's work suggests that telling the life story of the deceased within the funeral and the bereaved being able to speak about their loved one with others who knew them is important. Many contemporary funerals do include telling the life story of the deceased and the work of Walter affirms the importance of this. Bereaved people may report dread at the prospect of the funeral, and it may benefit them if officiants support the view that the opportunity to speak about the deceased with others who cared about them may be helpful to them in their loss and can be an opportunity to learn something new about their loved one from those who knew them in a different context. Such a perspective reflects the theological premise of God bringing new life in the midst of death.

Personalisation

Recent research into mourners' experience of funerals has strongly suggested that it is effective personalisation that mourners find satisfactory in a funeral.[17] This includes elements of choice for those planning the funeral, customising the funeral so that it appears unique and includes accurate symbolic representation of the deceased person.[18] Many bereaved people seeking a Christian ceremony may hold an expectation of a personalised funeral. There is skill in offering the Christian hope within a personalised ceremony, one that combines meeting the family's expectations for the deceased to be recognisable through the service, with the belief in the centrality of Jesus Christ, the one who is the source of the hope within a Christian service. Creating a ceremony that has integrity for the family, the deceased and the officiant is important. Kelly describes this as a creative process of co-construction.[19] Interviews with ten officiants, including clergy, humanist and civil officiants and ten family members who had recently organised a funeral, revealed that personalisation within the funeral was a central element in its construction. Clergy, humanist and civil officiants all related creating bespoke funerals:

> I try not to come to hymns and readings until we've got something of the story because I think that what we sing and read needs to be consonant with what we're saying about the person's story and their values.
> (Margaret, rector)

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[17] Glenys Caswell, 'Personalisation in Scottish funerals: Individualised ritual or relational process?', *Mortality*, 16.3 (2011), 242–58; and Tara Bailey and Tony Walter, 'Funerals against death', *Mortality*, 21.2 (2016), 149–66.

[18] Bailey and Walter, 'Funerals against death', 149–66,

[19] Ewan Kelly, *Meaningful Funerals* (London: Mowbray, 2008).

It may be argued that personalising funerals involves attending to the humanity of the deceased in all their uniqueness. Theologically, this may reflect the humanity of Jesus in all his uniqueness. Grounding funerals in the life the deceased lived, so that a strong sense of the deceased is evident in the funeral can be supported theologically by appreciating the incarnational nature of the Christian faith in which Jesus took on human form and lived a particular human life. The Christian funeral can reflect both the divinity and humanity of Jesus through including a personal focus on the life of the deceased within the wider framework of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. There can be a significant theological coherence to both aspects of Jesus being represented within the ceremony.

The continuing bonds theory

Klass and Steffen argue for a concept of continuing bonds in bereavement theory. The development of the concept of continuing bonds between the deceased and bereaved marked a significant new development in grief theory and opened new avenues of understanding of the ongoing place the deceased may have in the lives of the bereaved.[20] They suggest that none of the main grief theories accept the idea that grief may involve a changed bond with the dead person, rather than the severing of bonds.

The main premise of the continuing bonds perspective is that the bereaved keep the deceased in loving memory for a long time after their death, often for the rest of their lives and hold an inner representation of the deceased. This is regarded as typical rather than pathological behaviour. The term 'paradox' fits well here.[21] The deceased is not alive, and yet they are present in the life of the mourner and in their social world. For many, there is an inner system that is still centred on the deceased. There may be an interactive quality to the relationship with the deceased as it now stands such as the bereaved taking the deceased into account in decisions they make. This is not to say that the mourner or survivor is unhealthily focused on the past, rather, they may have a sense that the deceased wants them to forge new relationships and enjoy life. It should not be assumed that all forms of continuing bonds are adaptive, rather, the form the continuing bond takes is crucial. If a bond is such that the bereaved person continues to seek physical proximity to the deceased, operating as if the deceased has needs and are still in some way physically present, it is an indication that the grief

[20] Dennis Klass and Edith Steffen, *Continuing Bonds in Bereavement: New Directions for Research and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2018).

[21] Klass and Steffen, *Continuing Bonds in Bereavement*, p. 351.

is unresolved and there is a lack of acceptance of the reality of the change that death brings to relationships. If, however, there are clear indications that the bereaved has formed an inner representation of the deceased that is important to them in the midst of seeking to go forward in their life, the theory views this as healthy. The theory of continuing bonds has been very valuable in making sense of how many bereaved people understand the process of grief as coming to terms with the loss rather than a getting over the loss. Understanding that the bereaved may have a continuing bond with the deceased may be helpful within the context of the funeral and in offering pastoral care after this. For those providing pastoral care to appreciate that a continuing bond can be healthy and a more realistic way forward than a perceived severing of the bond, may enable them to support the bereaved with the feelings and the challenges they face in adjusting to their loss.

Within the Christian faith, the concept of the deceased continuing in a form of community is part of the belief in the afterlife. The doctrine of the communion of saints involves a community of believers which spans heaven and earth. Through this, the believer is offered a sense of the deceased's continuing existence after death and of continuing bonds between the living and the dead.[22] The Apostles Creed, the old baptismal creed of the Church of Rome, which is seen as essential within the vast majority of Christian denominations today, proclaims the doctrine of the communion of saints (*sanctorum communio*), 'that ultimate fellowship with holy persons of all ages, as well as with the whole company of heaven, which is anticipated and partly realized in the fellowship of the Catholic Church on earth'. [23] The General Introduction to the Roman Catholic Order of Christian Funerals encapsulates the belief that 'death is not the end nor does it break the bonds forged in life'.[24] Within a Christian funeral, the belief that the deceased has joined the heavenly community and that this community is somehow united with believers on earth can provide a framework for a continuing bond between the deceased and the bereaved:

> We can affirm, that post the funeral, post the death, our loved ones are held in God's love and in that sense we're not separated from them and that we can still remember them with love […]

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[22] E. Kelly, *Meaningful Funerals* (London: Mowbray, 2008), p. 141.

[23] John Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 2nd edn (London: Longmans, Green, 1960), p. 391.

[24] Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales, *Order of Christian Funerals Full Rite* (Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales, 2006).

> doing it (praying for the deceased) at the Eucharist when we are united with everyone in heaven on earth is quite appropriate. (James, rector)

The belief in the uniting of people on earth and in heaven is reinforced during regular celebrations of the Eucharist with prayers that proclaim the prayers of the Church on earth are joined with the prayers of 'angels and archangels and [...] all the company of heaven'.[25] For those within the faith community who have regularly attended celebrations of the Eucharist, arguably, they have been offered an understanding of death as the gateway to heaven and to a continuance of life within a community that spans heaven and earth.

It may be argued that the links between the ancient theology of the communion of saints and current secular grief theories of continuing bonds are an example of ancient theological concepts and practices being rediscovered in secular contexts. The bereaved still need to say goodbye for the deceased will not be part of their lives as they once were. They still need to grieve for the loss they have experienced, and this may undoubtably involve considerable emotional pain and psychological adjustment, especially when the death has led to a particularly difficult bereavement. The element of Christian hope asserts that death is not the ultimate end but a transition to future life, however this does not mean that a bereavement is any less painful for someone who believes this than for someone who does not. For some bereaved family members with a Christian faith saying goodbye to a loved one who did not have a faith can be particularly hard as unanswerable questions may arise about whether the deceased is now in heaven. Sensitivity is needed in responding to the bereaved who raise such issues with officiants as they are already very vulnerable due to their bereavement.

Disenfranchised grief

Doka argues convincingly that if an individual is not afforded the right to grieve then the grief experience has been disenfranchised. If this happens the grief is not openly acknowledged, socially validated or publicly observed.[26] The reasons can include the way the person grieves, the nature of the loss, the nature of the relationship, that the grieving person is in prison or that others do not think the person capable of grief for instance, a young

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[25] Scottish Episcopal Church, *Scottish Liturgy with Alternative Eucharistic Prayers* (Edinburgh: Scottish Episcopal Church, 1982).

[26] *Disenfranchised Grief: New Directions, Challenges, and Strategies for Practice*, ed. by K. Doka (Champaign: Research Press, 2002), p. 5.

child or person with learning disabilities. Social expectations inform the public grieving process. Valentine et al. draw on several studies of bereavement following substance use to illustrate that social stigma related to substance use and suicide can lead to disenfranchised grief for bereaved families.[27] This involves their grief being devalued and therefore them being denied forms of social support that may assist in grief resolution.[28]

Funeral officiants can challenge situations in which bereaved people are being disenfranchised. The quotation below which refers to how children were denied the chance to attend their grandparent's funeral demonstrates that children who have been bereaved continue to be disenfranchised within some communities:

> And I was talking to the, well she was the nanny, she's now the housekeeper and she said, 'Well you know, they [the children] weren't allowed to grieve.'
> (Beatrice, wife of the deceased)

Funeral officiants can be well placed to ensure grievers are not disenfranchised as illustrated in a research interview in which a chaplain spoke of challenging the funeral director's view that siblings of the deceased should not be permitted to view the body or attend the funeral of a child:

> Sometimes a funeral director who doesn't have much experience working with the death of a child because thankfully it's rare, might think it's not appropriate and sometimes I have said, 'Actually this is what the family has chosen and it's important it happens' because children need to say goodbye, they know something's happened.
> (Lydia, chaplain)

For funeral officiants to express compassion for all those who are grieving is important. Compassion and empowerment of the poor was evident in Jesus's treatment of marginalised and suffering people throughout the Gospels (Matthew 14.14, Mark 1.41, Mark 6.34, Luke 7.13, John 6.5). Compassion and justice for the oppressed reflect the values of the

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[27] Christine Valentine, Linda Bauld and Tony Walter, 'Bereavement following substance misuse: a disenfranchised grief', *Journal of Death and Dying*, 72.4 (2016).

[28] *Disenfranchised Grief: Recognising Hidden Sorrow*, ed. by K. Doka (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1989).

kingdom of God (Matthew 5.1–12). Through marginalised people experiencing compassion, the acknowledgement of their grief and being included in funeral ceremonies, the bereaved may be afforded support to grieve in their own way and not further disenfranchised.

Concluding thoughts

For those officiating at funerals and providing pastoral care to the bereaved today it can be helpful to appreciate recent developments in understanding grief and bereavement. Freud's work, on bereavement theory, including the concept of 'grief work' has held an important place in western thinking since its publication and his work continues to be widely respected, however his concept of 'grief work' has not been found to be essential to successfully resolving grief. [29] Viewing bereavement as a staged process which the bereaved move through in a linear fashion as espoused by Bowlby, Parkes and Kubler-Ross has also been strongly critiqued. [30] Rather than a series of stages, bereavement is viewed more as an individualised process that may involve components of these theories such as anger. These developments indicate that suggesting to bereaved people that they will experience a series of stages sequentially within bereavement is misleading and may lead to distress and confusion when this does not occur.

Biblical texts describing Jesus experiencing the pain of bereavement and the death of Jesus provide a theological backdrop to the experience of bereavement which validates experiences of grief and affirms that the Christian view of God is of one who knows the pain of loss and who has suffered immense pain through undergoing a brutal death. Through the Eucharist, the Christian faith is one which regularly faces the reality of death offering hope of an afterlife through belief in the Resurrection. Belief in an afterlife does not mean the bereaved do not still experience the pain of loss. Great sensitivity is needed when officiants may be faced with difficult questions about the afterlife from bereaved individuals such as from within families where some are believers and some are not. Offering compassionate care may involve supporting those who are bereaved to live with difficult questions rather than trying to provide answers.

Compassionate care of the highest quality is needed when officiants and those offering pastoral care meet with those who have experienced the

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[29] Freud, 'Mourning', in C*omplete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. by Strachey, XIV, pp. 152–170.

[30] Cynthia Drenovsky, 'Anger and the Desire for Retribution among Bereaved Parents', *Journal of Death and Dying,* 26.4 (1994), 303–12; C. M. Parkes, *Bereavement: Studies of Grief in Adult Life* (London: Penguin, 1986); E. Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*.

hardest forms of bereavements, the death of a child or death through suicide. Belief in the Christian hope of an afterlife may not lessen the life-long pain that individuals who undergo these forms of bereavement may experience. For Christian officiants, seeking to reflect the compassion of God may involve being alongside the bereaved offering empathy and kindness to those made extremely vulnerable through these forms of losses. Their presence may represent hope in what can seem a hopeless situation.

The importance of the bereaved being able to speak about the deceased and hear stories about their life strengthens the case for personalised funerals that are co-constructed with the bereaved. It is important that when ceremonies are being planned care is taken to ensure they have integrity for the bereaved, the deceased and the officiant. A focus on the humanity of the deceased within a Christian funeral can be supported theologically by a ceremony that reflects the humanity and divinity of Jesus.

Bereavement has been found to be a highly individualised process and a strong case has been made that in the process of effectively resolving their grief many bereaved adopt a continuing bonds perspective. A Christian funeral can be one which affirms the continuing bond between the bereaved and the deceased through the doctrine of the communion of saints, the community of believers in heaven and on earth joined within the love of God. That some may become disenfranchised by their grief not being recognised and afforded public acknowledgement, is important for those conducting funerals and providing pastoral care to be aware of.[31] Funeral officiants may play an important role in ensuring that those who are bereaved and at risk of being disenfranchised are supported to grieve through being included in processes and rituals which surround the death of their loved one. This approach emphasises the importance of the marginalised and reflects the values of the kingdom of God.

Whilst this article has sought to evaluate older and more recent theories of grief in light of the tasks of the funeral officiant, it has not been possible in a piece of this length to attend to all developments in bereavement research that may be relevant. It is hoped that those areas which have been considered have been helpful and may stimulate further reflection on practice amongst those who conduct funerals and offer pastoral care to the bereaved.

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[31] Doka, *Disenfranchised Grief*, p. 5

Evocation of Baptism in Funeral Rites: Pastoral and Liturgical Consideration

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The Western custom of asperging the coffin at a funeral is a conscious evocation of baptism, as the allusion to Romans 6.4 in many of the customary formularies confirms. While among the practices suppressed at the Reformation, the value of the custom has increasingly been recognised during the course of liturgical renewal during the past century, in several parts of the Anglican Communion and also in some Lutheran traditions. In proposing here that this custom be introduced to the new order of Funeral Rites in the Scottish Episcopal Church, I wish to suggest also that the liturgical tradition of the church is both richer and broader than is often appreciated; appropriation of a wider range of the Christian heritage may bring to prominence not merely interesting intertextual motifs and scriptural resonances, but may illuminate the interconnectedness in sacred time of distinct moments in salvation history, giving expression to doctrine in ways which may prove particularly fecund for pastoral ministry at times of grief.

Before commencing this task, it would be helpful to document provision in neighbouring churches. In the Church of England, *Common Worship* provides for 'sprinkling' the coffin (presumably unopened), at Receiving the Body (into the church building before or at the commencement of the Funeral), before a pall is placed over it or other symbols laid on it. A rubric provides for this rite to take place instead at the Commendation or the Committal. Two forms of words are provided:

> With this water we call to mind N's baptism. As Christ went through the deep waters of death for us, so may he bring us to the fullness of resurrection life with N and all the redeemed.
>
> *Or*
>
> Grant, Lord, that we who are baptized into the death of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ may continually put to death our evil desires and be buried with him; and that through the grave and

> gate of death we may pass to our joyful resurrection; through his merits, who died and was buried and rose again for us, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

The *Order of Christian Funerals*, decreed by the Roman Catholic Episcopal Conferences of England and Wales and of Scotland, provides for asperging at various points in the rites. The rubrics explain this:

> The church is the place where Christian life is begotten in baptism, nourished in the eucharist, and where the community gathers […]. The church is at once a symbol of the community and of the heavenly liturgy […]. Through the use of various baptismal symbols the community shows the reverence due to the body, the temple of the Spirit, and in this way prepares for the funeral liturgy in which it asks for a share in the heavenly banquet promised to the deceased and to all who have been washed in the waters of rebirth and marked with the sign of faith.

At a Gathering in the Presence of the Body, before or after preparation for burial, three forms of words are provided to accompany the asperging of the, by implication, partially uncovered, body:

> The Lord is our shepherd, and leads us to streams of living water.[1]
> Let this water call to mind our baptism into Christ, who by his death and resurrection has redeemed us.
> The Lord God lives in his holy temple and yet abides in our midst.
> Since in baptism N. has become God's temple and the Spirit of God lived [sic] in him/her, with reverence we bless his/her mortal body.

At the Reception at the church, preceding the Vigil for the Deceased, the coffin is asperged, before a pall or other symbols are laid on it, with the following words:

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[1] The use and interpretation of Psalm 23 in baptismal contexts in the Syrian tradition, and the association of water both with baptism and with death, will be discussed below. See S. P. Brock, *Fire from Heaven* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); *The Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition* (Piscataway: Gorgias, 2008).

> In the waters of baptism, N. died with Christ and rose with him to new life. May *he/she* now share with him eternal glory.

When the coffin is brought to the church at the commencement of the Funeral liturgy, any of the above four forms of words may be used to accompany aspersion. The rite is administered at the entrance to the church building, any national or other symbols or regalia having been removed from the coffin. A pall and other Christian symbols may be placed on the coffin after the procession. There is provision for the aspersion to be repeated at the conclusion of the rite. While the Eucharist is the normative context for the funeral, there is provision for a Funeral Liturgy outside Mass, with asperging the coffin by the presiding minister, drawing from the same selection of accompanying words, at the commencement and at the conclusion of the rite.

When Committal takes place in unconsecrated ground, one of the prayers provided makes a brief reference to baptism:

> […]. When we were caught in the snares of death, you set us free through baptism[.]

The Prayer of Committal to the sea draws on a somewhat wider range of biblical allusions, none of which is directly connected to baptism, though the sacrament is mentioned in the concluding clause:

> Lord God, by the power of your Word you stilled the chaos of the primeval seas, you made the raging waters of the Flood subside, and calmed the storm on the sea of Galilee. As we commit the body of our brother/sister N. to the deep, grant him/her peace and tranquillity until that day when he/she and all who believe in you will be raised to the glory of new life promised in the waters of baptism.

There is provision also for the place of interment to be asperged at the conclusion of the rite of Burial of Ashes. No words are ordered to accompany this, but this is described as 'a sign or gesture of leave-taking' in the rubric. This is not an obvious valedictory act in any known culture and would seem to be clearly distinct from any blessing of unconsecrated ground before interment.

The use of the pall, particularly where white has superseded the black and purple cloths of previous liturgical aesthetics, reinforces the baptismal overtones. These usages, and lighting the paschal candle, emphasise the symbolism of death and resurrection in the baptism rites. While this is

clearly appropriate to funerals, where the reality of death is unavoidably confronted, the symbolism associated with the baptismal waters in Christian tradition is very much broader and much richer and may perhaps have further theological insights and liturgical and pastoral resources to contribute to Christian pastoral ministry at times of death and bereavement in the world of today.

The symbolic resonances of asperging the grave in unconsecrated ground are less clear, and likely to prove somewhat insipid as increases in rainfall in Scotland denude water of the symbolic value it immediately evokes in more parched climates.[2]

It would be worth noting that, in the wider Anglican Communion, water has found ritual use in funereal contexts, in the authorised liturgies of the church, but in quite different ways. The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia provides, in keeping with Maori custom, a rite including asperging the home of the deceased after the funeral. The words at the asperging are exorcistic in tone:

> We sprinkle this place to wash away the effects of all evil, whether of people, or of spiritual powers, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

While these words are apotropaic, if not exorcistic, the water is sanctified with words with explicit baptismal overtones:

> Almighty and everliving God, in baptism you give water a holy use to wash away sin: sanctify this water as a sign of cleansing from all the powers of evil; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who triumphed over evil on the cross, and now lives and reigns with you for ever. Amen.

It is worth noting that it is not a human being, living or departed, who is asperged, but his/her former dwelling. This is suggestive of Graeco-Roman funeral rites whose objective was, if not actually to expel the spirit of the

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[2] The author has known a custom of asperging graves in the churchyard on All Souls' Day, an occasion for which the community gathered in significant numbers and considerable quantities of water were expended. When heavy rain fell on 2 November, this seemed somewhat superfluous, and an Act of Remembrance took place in the church instead. The liturgy was probably a missionary initiative, and possibly a response to indigenous beliefs about the dead, but any teaching as to what is symbolised had been lost during the intervening decades.

deceased, to ensure that the said spirit would not return and haunt its former earthly dwelling.[3]

Aspersion of the body, within or without a coffin, is not attested in the liturgies of the Eastern or Oriental Orthodox Churches, save the Ukrainian. However, washing the body, in the presence of a priest, by members of the family remains customary, in preparation for burial. The casket may be asperged before the body is placed in it. The coffin is open for the duration of the funeral, so that the body is seen and may be touched during the rite. In the Greek rite, the priest anoints the body with oil and earth before the coffin is closed.

The recurring motif of dying and rising to new life in the Orthodox liturgies is apparent in baptism and the Divine Liturgy (Eucharist),[4] as well as in funeral rites, but given ritual expression in different ways to those which have evolved in the West. An example worth citing is from that of the Malankara Syrian Orthodox rite, which evokes the imagery of, but does not cite, Romans 6.4,[5] and is not accompanied by asperging the body:

> Christ our God, who joined the dead in order to raise them up; Who, in Sheol, preached true life and the resurrection, Grant rest and joy to Your servants who have passed from this life. Console them with your promise of life in the resurrection.

I wish to suggest that, by exploring the Orthodox tradition further, with attention not so much to the baptism or funeral liturgies, but to the significance attached to the waters of Christ's baptism, that we may discover motifs with the potential to recover or enrich our heritage, and to empower

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[3] R. Garland, *The Greek Way of Death* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); V. M. Hope, *Roman Death* (London: Continuum, 2009); I. Morris, *Death-Ritual and Social Structure in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). For impact on early Christianity, J. K.-M. Chow, *Patronage and Power* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), pp. 160–63.

[4] Cf. N. Denysenko, 'Death and Dying in Orthodox Liturgy', *Religions*, 8.2 (2017), 25:
https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/8/2/25/htm [accessed 12 July 2022].

[5] That Romons 6.4 reflects such motifs is often overlooked in anglophone-Protestant scholarship, but should be recognised in the Greek text, and is more apparent in Bible translations into languages other than English; cf. N. H. Taylor, 'Dying with Christ in Baptism', *The Bible Translator*, 59.1 (2008), 38–49.

our rites both to express the Christian doctrine of death and resurrection unequivocally and to offer pastoral comfort to those who grieve. Nevertheless, it is important first to take account of ancient Christian use of water and baptismal language in funerary contexts.

It has been suggested that the otherwise unknown rite of baptism ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν ('on behalf of the dead') alluded to in 1 Corinthians 15.29 might have been a funeral rite intended to expedite the passage of deceased Christians to whatever form life would take beyond earthly existence.[6] If this were the case, the liturgical use of water associated with baptism in Christian funerals would be very ancient indeed, notwithstanding the isolated and obscure reference in a single New Testament document, and the lack of evidence that this rite was continued or understood by subsequent writers.[7] However, this interpretation of a particularly enigmatic text has received limited support, and considerable criticism,[8] and will accordingly not form the basis for any argument here. Nevertheless, the Corinthian ritual arose in the same cultural context as Paul's close association of baptism with death, and specifically the death of Jesus and his descent to Hades, as fundamental both to resurrection and to Christian morality in the present (Romans 6.3–5); while interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures clearly formed Paul's thinking, he and other early Christians inhabited a world in which such ideas were rooted, and understood the Gospel accordingly.[9]

That Jesus of Nazareth underwent baptism in the river Jordan administered by John the Baptist (Matthew 3.13–17; Mark 1.9–11; Luke 3.21–22; cf. John 1.31–34) during the course of the renewal movement the latter had initiated,[10] and before the commencement of his own public ministry, is generally accepted as one of the historically more certain events

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[6] R. E. deMaris, 'Corinthian Religion and Baptism for the Dead', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 114 (1995), 661–82.

[7] N. H. Taylor, 'Baptism for the Dead?', *Neotestamentica* 36 (2002), 121–30.

[8] R. A. Horsley, *I Corinthians* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), p. 207. Contra, M. F. Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead* (Atlanta: Scholars, 2005); Taylor, 'Baptism for the Dead?'; J. R. White, 'Baptized on Account of the Dead', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 116 (1997), 287-99.

[9] S. Agersnap, *Baptism and the New Life* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1999); S. Sabou, *Between Horror and Hope* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005); N. H. Taylor, 'Baptism, Death, and Funeral Rites', *Scottish Episcopal Institute Journal*, 2.3 (2018), 3–30.

[10] Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.5.2. Cf. E. F. Lupieri, *Giovanni Battista fra storia e leggenda* (Brescia: Paideia, 1988); R. L. Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991).

recorded in the gospels, perhaps second only to the Crucifixion.[11] As well as the canonical gospels, this episode is related, as one might expect, in several of the gospels now labelled pseudepigraphical, especially those written and read in churches which continued to live within the Jewish cultural matrix and observe aspects of the ritual law.[12] These texts survive only in citations by later Christian authors, almost all of whom wrote from within the church defined by the Constantinian settlement and its increasingly state-sponsored church order and orthodoxy. Nevertheless, they bear important testimony to the historical reality of the very much more diverse phenomenon that was early Christianity. For the present purpose, they are particularly significant in indicating something of the nature of Christianity in the lands in which Syriac Christianity emerged, and from which much of Oriental Christianity evolved. Most importantly, they identify some of the ways in which the traditions included in the gospels were received and transmitted in Aramaic Christianity and informed the liturgical traditions of not only the Syrian but also of the Armenian, Coptic, and other Oriental Orthodox Churches.

The most important extra-canonical gospel text for the present purpose is that conventionally identified as Fragment 6 of the *Gospel according to the Hebrews*. This is preserved only in Jerome's *Commentary on Isaiah*:

> DESCENDET SUPER EUM OMNIS FONS SPIRITUS SANCTI. DOMINUS AUTEM SPIRITUS EST, ET UBI SPIRITUS DOMINI, IBI LIBERTAS […]. FACTUM EST AUTEM CUM ASCENDISSET DOMINUS DE AQUA, DESCENDIT FONS OMNIS SPIRITUS SANCTI, ET REQUIEUIT SUPER EUM, ET DIXIT ILLI: FILI MI, IN OMNIBUS PROPHETIS EXPECTABAM TE, UT UENERIS ET REQUIESCEREM IN TE. TU ENIM ES REQUIRES MEA, TU ES FILIUS MEUS PRIMOGENITUS, QUI REGNAS IN SEMPITERNUM.

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[11] D. C. Allison, *Constructing Jesus* (London: SPCK, 2010), pp. 53–55; P. M. Casey, *Jesus of Nazareth* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), pp. 173–77; J. D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper SanFrancisco, 1991), pp. 232–34; J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 371–77; J. P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 100–77; A. Puig I Tàrrech, *Jesus* (Waco TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), pp. 210–13; E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 1995), pp. 93–96; G. Theissen and A. Merz, *The Historical Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), pp. 196–208.

[12] For texts and translations, B. D. Ehrman and Z. Pleše, *The Apocryphal Gospels* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

> The entire fountain of the Holy Spirit will descend on him. The Lord is Spirit, and where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty […]. Then, when the Lord rose from the water, the entire fountain of the Holy Spirit descended and rested on him, and it said to him: My Son, in all the prophets I have been expecting you to come, that I might rest on you. For you are my rest, you are my firstborn Son, who rules for ever.[13]

This both places Jesus in continuity with the Hebrew prophets and sets him apart as uniquely endowed with God's Spirit. The passage undoubtedly evokes the scene in 2 Kings 2, in which Elijah and Elisha cross the Jordan, the former having parted the waters in a scene reminiscent of Moses (Exodus 14) and Joshua (Joshua 3). Elisha aspired to inherit the spirit of Elijah, meaning the divine endowment to prophesy, over and beyond that which might inhabit other members of the prophetic company. Elisha fulfils the requirements imposed by Elijah, and, following the dramatic ascent of Elijah, depicted in imagery which was to inform apocalypticism and Merkabah mysticism in later centuries, Elisha crosses the Jordan, having himself parted the waters in emulation of Elijah. He is thereupon acknowledged by the prophetic company as Elijah's successor and their leader.

Another passage, generally understood to be from the same *Gospel of the Hebrews*, is preserved and cited by Origen in his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*:

> Just now my mother, the holy Spirit, took me by one of my hairs and carried me up to the great mountain Tabor.[14]

This is generally understood as referring to the sequel to the baptism of Jesus, notwithstanding that Mount Tabor is associated by later tradition with the transfiguration, as an alternative location to Mount Hermon, with its ancient associations with the Enoch tradition as a place of holiness and divine encounter.[15] The role of the Spirit of God which had descended upon Jesus at his baptism, and immediately thereafter transported him into the wilderness to confront temptation (Matthew 4.1–11; Mark 1.12–13; Luke 4.1–13), suggests a common tradition with that/those preserved in the

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[13] Jerome, *In Isaiam* 11.1–3.

[14] Origen, *In Ioannem* 2.12.

[15] G. W. E. Nickelsburg, 'Enoch, Levi and Peter', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 100 (1981), 575–600; *A Commentary on I Enoch Chapters 1–36, 81–108* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress, 2001). Cf. S. V. Freyne, *The Jesus Movement and its Expansion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).

synoptic gospels. What is significant is the evident sapiential overtones to the role of the Spirit, identified as the mother of Jesus. This is directly relevant to the interpretation of this event in the Orthodox liturgical traditions, to which we now turn.

It would be all but superfluous to mention that in Eastern and Oriental Christianity generally Epiphany is the more significant festival than Christmas, and that the defining episode is the baptism of Jesus by John rather than the visit of the magi to Bethlehem. Liturgical commemoration of this event is central to Epiphany celebrations.[16] The practice of entering waters rather cooler than those of the Jordan, cutting an often cruciform hole in the ice if necessary, and sometimes retrieving a crucifix cast into the water by a priest as an added incentive, arouses sufficient interest in the secular media to have become quite familiar. That the public performance of this ritual in commemoration of Christ's baptism, and in renewal of baptismal promises, has not deterred President Putin from invading a neighbouring state of Orthodox Christian heritage may raise rather more profound theological questions than those with which we are presently concerned. It is, however, to the blessing of the waters of the font, as opposed to the 'living' river and sea water of these spectacles, in the liturgical heritage of Syrian and Armenian Orthodoxy in particular that we turn for insights into the Epiphany traditions which may be relevant to our funeral rites today.

The invocations over the baptismal waters in the various Orthodox liturgical traditions employ a variety of types from Scripture to express the significance attributed to the action of the Spirit upon the waters, linking the font with the primeval waters (Genesis 1.2), the flood (Genesis 7), the waters of rest (Psalm 23.2), the Jordan in which Christ was baptised (Matthew 3.13–17; Mark 1.9–12; Luke 3.21–22), the spiritual womb of rebirth (John 3.4), the healing waters of Bethesda (John 5), the water flowing from the side of the crucified Christ (John 19.34), and the death and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6.3–5). The waters of Christian baptism are united, through the action of the Holy Spirit, with significant events in sacred time and interpreted in the light of symbolism attached to water in various passages of Scripture.[17]

We may perhaps appreciate this more fully if we recognise the ambivalent symbolism associated with water in ancient cultures. One of the

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[16] N. Denysenko, *The Blessing of the Waters and the Epiphany* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012).

[17] For more detailed discussion, Brock, *Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, pp. 85–114.

fundamental elements of the created world, alongside earth, air, and fire,[18] water was both an essential and at times scarce resource upon which human life and agriculture depended, and an immensely dangerous substance whose destructive qualities invited associations with death and Hades. Mwht, the chaotic and threatening primordial ocean, was also associated with the world of the dead.[19]

While Romans 6.3–5 is not influential in baptismal theology in the Syrian tradition, it is cited by Theodore of Mopsuestia, but with little more exposition than paraphrase.[20] Jacob of Serug[21] and Narsai[22] also employ funereal imagery of baptism. Therefore, while the interpretation of the Pauline text may not be as prominent in the East as in the West, the cosmology presupposed, and the conceptualisation of Christ's death and resurrection, are common to ancient Eastern and Western Christianity alike.

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[18] Empedocles, *De Natura*; Plato, *Timaeus* 48b; cf. Aristotle, *De Generatione et Corruptione*; Philo, *De Opificio Mundi*. Cf. B. A. W. Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1991).

[19] The cosmology reflected in the creation myth in Genesis 1, with the separation of the waters from dry land crucial to the formation of the environment in which human life could flourish, and the conceptualisation of water beneath the earth (cf. Exodus 20.4; Deuteronomy 4.18; Job 26.5–6; Psalm 24.2), are suggestive of such notions. The drowning of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea (Exodus 15) and Jonah's adventure (Jonah 2) reflect conceptions of death more vivid than the clinical consequences of submersion and inability to breathe (cf. also Ezekiel 26.19–20). P. S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol* (Downers Grove IL: IVP Academic, 2002), pp. 114–24; N. J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), pp. 59–60. Cf. also 2 Samuel 18.17; Lamentations 3; Jonah 4.6; Josephus, *De Bello Iudaico* 3.423,525; 4.137; Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium* 3.18; *Quod Deterius* 176; *De Migratione Abrahami* 204.

[20] *Liber ad Baptizandos* 2.2;3;4, A. Mignana, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Lord's Prayer and on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist* (Cambridge: Heffer, 1933).

[21] *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis. VI*, ed. by P. Bedjan (Paris: Harrassowitz, 1905), rev. by S. P. Brock (Piscataway NJ: Gorgias, 2006).

[22] *Narsai Doctoris Syri Homiliae et Carmina*, ed. by A. Mingana (Mosul, 1905); *The Liturgical Homilies of Narsai*, ed. by R. H. Connolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1909: https://archive.org/details/liturgicalhomili00narsuoft/page/32/mode/2up [accessed 2 August 2022].

In the Syrian Orthodox (Severus) and Melkite (Basil) traditions, the waters of the font and of the Jordan are understood to be united in the rite of Christian baptism, and this is expressed in the epiclesis over the water.[23] As early as Ignatius of Antioch is attested the conviction that Christ purified the waters of the Jordan through undergoing baptism therein.[24] Hymns traditionally attributed to Ephrem speak of the baptised as having been washed in water purified through Christ's baptism.[25] It is not necessary to cite further examples, but it should be noted that, as the doctrine of the Trinity came to be definitively expounded, the connection and the distinction between the action of Christ and that of the Spirit, and their respective effects, became a theological issue, and a potentially divisive one; but not one that needs to be resolved here.[26]

The imagery of rebirth by water and the Spirit in John 3 may seem to be not immediately relevant to mortuary rituals, however forcefully it has been appropriated to impugn the baptism undergone by most Christians in their infancy, in those traditions which imagine that Jesus's words to Nicodemus about being 'born again' are relevant to the spiritual and liturgical formation of Christians. Nevertheless, the association of water with the Holy Spirit draws attention to a related tradition, neglected in the West but dominant in Eastern Christian theologies of baptism, and, correctly understood, no less relevant to times of death. This is first attested in Ephrem's hymn on the Crucifixion,[27] and is found also in Narsai,[28] Jacob of Serug, and Theodore of Mopsuestia.[29] It is articulated in the blessing of the water in the Syrian Orthodox, East Syriac, and Maronite baptismal rites. To appreciate this, we need to recognise that the Incarnation and the Passion of Christ are understood as a single moment in sacred time, however separated they may be in the narrative accounts of the life of Jesus as preserved in the

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[23] Brock, *Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, pp. 91–96.

[24] *Ephesians* 18.2.

[25] *De Epiphania* 13.2; *De Virginitate* 15.3.

[26] The Gospel narrative of the baptism of Christ precedes these debates, and the adoptionist interpretation thereof, popular in at least some traditions of Jewish Christianity, is at least as consistent with the account in Mark 1.9–11 as are more 'orthodox' interpretations. Cf. R. N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970); P. Luomanen, *Recovering Jewish-Christian Sects and Gospels* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); *Jewish Believers in Jesus* ed. by O. Skarsaune and R. Hvalvik (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 2007).

[27] *De Crucifixione* 3.7.4.

[28] *Homiliae*, XXI.

[29] *Homiliae* 14.9.

Christian gospels.[30] The cross is directly linked to the waters of rebirth, with the maternal, uterine, image explicit:

> Christ came and opened up baptism on his cross so that it might be a mother of life in place of Eve.[31]

The healing waters of Bethesda (John 5) are linked to baptism in both Western[32] and Eastern traditions, Jacob of Serug being a notable exemplar of the latter, employing uterine imagery in the same text:

> The Son of God has descended and stirred the baptismal water, that it might give healing birth […] a new creation has begun […] a new world which does not become corrupted.[33]

The account in John 19.34 of water and blood flowing from the side of Christ, merged with the tradition that Jesus was crucified over the site of Adam's grave, as alluded to in the traditional depiction of a skull at the foot of the cross, especially in Orthodox iconography but also in Western Christian art. In Syriac tradition, as exemplified in the *Caverna Thesaurorum* attributed to Ephrem but generally dated several centuries later, motifs from the Genesis creation and fall narratives are interwoven with episodes in the life and passion of Christ, so that the water flowing from the side of Christ falls over Adam's skull, thereby baptising him in Sheol,[34] whither Christ descends to rescue him and other righteous of the Old Testament, so that they rise from the dead with him.[35] This is reflected also in the undisputed hymns of

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[30] This is articulated with particular clarity by Brock, *Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*.

[31] Jacob of Serug, *Homiliae*, *I*, cited in Brock, *Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, p. 103.

[32] Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 5.5; Ambrose, *De Mysteriis* 4.22.

[33] *Homiliae IV*, cited by Brock, *Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, p. 107.

[34] Cf. *Oraculum Sibyllinum* 8.310–17; *Epistula Apostolorum* 27; *Apocalypsis Petri* 14; *Oda Solomonis* 42.20.

[35] E. A. T. W. Budge, *The Book of the Cave of Treasures* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1927; London: Aziloth, 2018); S. Minov, 'The Cave of Treasures and Formation of Syriac Christian identity in Late Antique Mesopotamia', in *Between Personal and Institutional Religion*, ed. by B. Bitton-Ashkelony and L. Perrone (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 155–94; *Memory and Identity in the Syriac Cave of Treasures* (Leiden: Brill, 2020); A.

Ephrem,[36] and can therefore be attested during his lifetime. Also relevant to our understanding of ways in which this text has influenced the liturgical traditions of the ancient Church relate to its interpretation as fulfilment of the promise in John 7.37–38:

> Let whoever thirsts come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scriptures says, from his belly[37] shall flow rivers of living water.

There are complex exegetical issues relating to this verse, which cannot be treated in detail here.[38] Its context, at the feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem, would not have been irrelevant to its interpretation in communities which remained conscious of their Jewish heritage. In targumic tradition, and in *Midrash Rabbah*, contemporary with the early Church if not with the ministry of Jesus, the account of Moses striking the rock in the wilderness, from which water gushed out (Numbers 20.2–13), was embellished to recount Moses striking the rock twice, blood emerging on the first occasion, and water the second. If this tradition were known at the time the gospel was written, it could account for the order in which blood and water are mentioned in John 19.34; an author not influenced by such a tradition would more likely have mentioned the water first, reflecting the order in which the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist were experienced in the life of the Christian. The identification of Christ with the rock from which Israel drank in the wilderness is attested in the Pauline tradition at 1 Corinthians 10.4, and is therefore ancient, and found in a context in which types of the Christian sacraments are seen in the exodus and wilderness experience of

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Toepel, 'The Cave of Treasures', in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures, I*, ed. by R. J. Bauckham and others (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2013), pp. 531–84

[36] *Carmina Nisibena* 39.7.

[37] Koilia designates the internal cavity of the body, including all the organs contained therein, stomach, intestines, and bowels as well as heart and lungs. Rendering as 'heart' in English translations, for which kardia would have been available, is euphemistic to the point of being misleading.

[38] R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John (I-XII)* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), pp. 320–29; G. M. Burge, *The Anointed Community* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1987), pp. 93–95; B. F. C. Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 296–302; J. R. Michaels, *John* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1989), pp. 137–40; F. J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical, 1998), pp. 251–57.

ancient Israel.[39] The water, which eschatological traditions associated with the feast of Tabernacles (Ezekiel 47.1–12; Zechariah 13.1; 14.8), flows not from the temple but from the body of Jesus. In the liturgical tradition of ancient Syriac Christianity, the water from the rock in the desert finds its eschatological fulfilment in that flowing from the body of the crucified Christ, is united with that of the Jordan, and by the power of the same Spirit of God, flows in the font of Christian baptism. Ephrem associates the lance with which Christ's body was pierced with the sword of the angel barring access to Paradise (Genesis 3.24), so that the same weapon, through penetrating Christ's body, opens the way to the Tree of Life, a type of the Eucharist.[40]

The interpretation of Psalm 23 in baptismal terms is first attested in Origen, and, in the Syriac tradition from Jacob of Serug onwards, joined with the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25.31–46).[41] Pastoral language is widespread in Syriac baptismal liturgies, inviting interpretations of this psalm in terms of the Christian journey of initiation: as well as the imagery of water in verses 2 and 4, the oil of anointing in verse 5 evokes chrismation, and the table and the overflowing cup the Eucharist. That the waters of rest (still waters) are not separated from the valley of the shadow of death in the Christian journey, associates baptism with death, the grave, and Sheol, is emphasised more in the west Syrian (hellenophone) tradition associated with Theodore of Mopsuestia.[42] The east Syrians Jacob of Serug[43] and Narsai[44] both associate the baptismal water with the grave.[45]

Tradition as ancient as Justin has the Jordan set ablaze by Jesus's descent therein at his baptism.[46] This may reflect a common tradition with the *Gospel of the Ebionites*, which mentions a fwj mega, which illuminates the

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[39] Cf. N. H. Taylor, *Paul on Baptism* (London: SCM, 2016), pp. 42–46.

[40] *De Nativitate* 8.4.

[41] S. P. Brock, *Fire from Heaven* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 183–218.

[42] *Liber ad Baptizandos* 2.3.

[43] *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis. VI*, ed. by P. Bedjan (Paris: Harrassowitz, 1905), rev. by S. P. Brock (Piscataway NJ: Gorgias, 2006).

[44] *De Mysteriis Ecclesiae et Baptismo*, *Narsai Doctoris Syri Homiliae et Carmina*, ed A. Mingana (Mosul, 1905); *The Liturgical Homilies of Narsai*, ed. by R. H. Connolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1909), p. 21: https://archive.org/details/liturgicalhomili00narsuoft/page/32/mode/2up [accessed 2 August 2022].

[45] Cf. K. McDonnell, *The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996).

[46] *Dialogus cum Tryphone* 88.

setting rather than igniting the water.[47] For Justin, the fire reflects the power of Christ, manifest in his conflict with death and evil in the Jordan.[48] This implies his descent to Hades, the waters of the Jordan being identified with the underworld.[49] The *descensus ad inferos* is implicit in the baptismal teaching of Paul (Romans 6.3–4),[50] as well as in 1 Peter 4.6,[51] and explicit in Christian writings from, at the latest, early in the second century.[52] Cyril of Jerusalem connects this event, and the defeat of Satan, with the baptism of Jesus.[53] While the illuminating power of Christ (cf. John 1.4–9) was to inform Epiphany traditions, this is not without the overcoming of darkness which made illumination possible. These are themes developed more fully, not only in the apocalyptic traditions of early Christianity but also in apologetic and exegetical texts, than they are expounded in extant liturgies and homilies.[54] Nevertheless, the attestation of these conceptualisations of Christ's descent to Hades and its connection with his baptism by John as well as with his death and resurrection, in a variety of early Christian geographical and cultural contexts as well as literary genres, suggests not merely a liturgical but also a doctrinal and pastoral significance to be recovered.

The waters of Christian baptism are associated with the primordial waters of Genesis 1.2 by the Syriac writers Ephrem,[55] Aphrahat,[56] and Narsai.[57] This is reflected also in the Maronite liturgy, the activity of the Holy

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[47] Cited by Epiphanius, *Panarion* 30.13.

[48] Justin also refers to baptism as illumination, *Apologia I.* 61. Cf. also Clement of Alexandria, *Didascalos*.

[49] Cf. Jonah 2; Matthew 12.39–40; Luke 8.31–33. See further, Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*; Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament*.

[50] Taylor, 'Dying with Christ in Baptism' in *Bible Translator*; 'Baptism, Death, and Funeral Rites' in *Scottish Episcopal Institute Journal*.

[51] J. B. Green, *1 Peter* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2007), pp. 118–38; D. G. Horrell, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude* (London: Epworth, 1998), pp. 74–80. Contra, D. P. Senior, *1 Peter* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical, 2008), pp. 115–16.

[52] Ignatius, *Magnesians* 9.2; *Trallians* 9.1; Hermas, *Similitudines* 9.16.6-7; Polycarp, *Philippians* 1.2; Justin, *Dialogus cum Tryphone* 72; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromatis* 6.6; Origen, *In Ioannem* 6.35.

[53] *Catacheses* 3.11.

[54] Cf. Brock, *Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*; McDonnell, *Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan*.

[55] *De Epiphania* 8.15.

[56] *Demonstrationes* 6.14.

[57] *De Mysteriis Ecclesiae et Baptismo.*

Spirit hovering over the waters with creative and salvific purpose. While these issues are not reflected directly in the ancient texts, the contemporary context of creation violated and threated by human sinfulness invites some reflection both on the place of sin and salvation in the created order, and on death as integral to the regeneration of creation. Rather than a dichotomy between physical and spiritual, the one Spirit can be envisaged as invigorating and sanctifying creation as a whole, including the life cycle to which death is integral.

We have seen that a broad range of images, derived from the biblical tradition and in particular from the Gospel accounts of the life and death of Christ, have informed the significance attached to the waters of Christian baptism in Eastern Christianity, and that the symbolism drawn from episodes in the ministry of Jesus are linked to his death and resurrection, perhaps more imaginatively than modern Western sensibilities would approve, but nonetheless holding together in a single liturgical moment the entirety of the creating work of God and the saving work of Christ. In drawing upon this aspect of our Christian heritage to inform the renewal of our funeral rites, there are a number of points to be made.

The connection between asperging the coffin and the baptism of the deceased is to be maintained. Therefore, the rite should be administered only once during the entire funeral rite. This should precede the celebration of the Eucharist, and therefore accompany the reception of the body into the church. Depending on the architecture of the building, as the procession passes, the font might be the most appropriate point for this rite in the liturgy.

The accompanying words need to give full expression to the Christian faith, as well as reflecting the Christian life of the deceased. God's creation is the context in which human life is set, and death finds purpose within the creative work of God. The ambiguous symbolism attached to water is transformed in creation, so that its life-giving qualities reflect Christ's overcoming death and evil, anticipated in his baptism in the Jordan, achieved in his death on the cross, and realised in the life of the Christian.

A trinitarian structure would be appropriate, with the creative work of God reflected in the words used at aspersion from the foot of the coffin, the saving work of Christ from one side, and the protection of the Holy Spirit from the other:

> God our creator, whose Spirit moved over the waters and formed us in your image, complete the work begun in the earthly life of this your child N.

> Lord Jesus Christ, from whose body flowed life-giving water, may N. who died with you in baptism rise now to eternal life with you.
> Holy Spirit of God, who entered N. at baptism and guided *him/her* through this world, carry *him/her* now to God's eternal presence.

If aspersion is followed by covering the coffin with a pall, appropriate words might be used:

> N., once clothed with Christ in baptism, will rise in Christ to glory.

While aspersion of the coffin is a particular point in the liturgy at which reflection on Christian baptism and its symbolism would be appropriate, this does not exclude allusion to baptism at other points in the liturgy, most particularly the Commendation and the Committal or Interment. Aspersion should not be repeated, but the significance of baptism may nonetheless appropriately give emphasis to the integral connection of life, death, and resurrection within God's creative and salvific purposes.

The introduction of such a rite to the funeral liturgy requires that appropriate provision be made for occasions on which the ministry of the church is sought for one who has died unbaptised. There are a variety of possible circumstances in which such a request could arise, it may not always be appropriate to accede, but there will be occasions when not only pastoral compassion, but theological integrity require that this ministry be extended, without compromise to the Christian faith upon which the liturgies of the church are founded, and to which they give expression. I have discussed these previously, and suggested ways in which the liturgy might be adapted, or new rites created, to serve this pastoral need.[58] Without rehearsing the details, it is important to recognise that appropriate provision will be necessary.

Just as Christian life is rooted in baptism, so death in Christ brings to completion earthly life and transition to God's eternal blessings. The liturgies of our church must reflect this as theological teaching, offering pastoral comfort, and calling those who remain to renewal for the remainder of their earthly pilgrimage.

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[58] N. H. Taylor, 'Baptism and Death: Pastoral Liturgy at the Death of an Unbaptised Person', *Anaphora* 1.1 (2007), 55–80. The immediate context at the time was the Church of England, but previous experience in other parts of the Anglican Communion is reflected, and the principles are applicable to the Scottish Episcopal Church.

REVIEWS

Avigail Abarbanel, *Therapy Without a Therapist: DIY Good Mental Health & Growth*, Fully Human Tools for Life Series 5 (Independently published, Fully Human Psychotherapy/Amazon, 2021). 123 pp. ISBN 979-851379981 (Paperback). £8.50 (Paperback), £6.50 (Kindle).

Avigail Abarbanel is a psychotherapist practising in Scotland. Her objective in the series of which this is the fifth is to demystify her profession, not to encourage amateurs to assume the role and pretend the competence of a psychologist, nor to offer accessible books as an alternative to clinical treatment for those who need it. Rather, she aims to enable those considering embarking on therapy to appreciate what they can and cannot expect, and to assess whether or not this is the treatment for them, and to discern ways in which they can maximise the benefits should they decide to see a psychotherapist.

A major priority is to understand how the brain is structured, what is meant by its 'wiring', and how different parts, products of different stages in human evolution, operate and relate to each other. Within this context human emotions and responses can be understood, and individuals be empowered to manage their emotions more effectively. Assertion of the executive functions of which the human brain is capable, and managing the instincts essential to animal survival, is key both to mental health and to sound relationships — integration.

Another priority is to understand human beings in relationship and within their environment. This involves recognising that humans live within an ecology on which they are dependent, and which they have demonstrated very effectively a capacity to destroy. Human flourishing depends upon managing individualism and limbic survival instincts and responses ethically, balancing individual needs with those of the planet and the organisms on which life ultimately depends.

The author quite appropriately does not disclose her religious beliefs but is appreciative of the role spirituality and religious observance and fellowship play in many people's lives, and also of the perils of unhealthy and abusive relationships which may arise in religious and other contexts and relationships. This book, and the series of which it is a part, are a useful and balanced resource for anyone considering undergoing psychotherapy, and for clergy and others whose advice they might seek.

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Brad Karelius, *Desert Spirituality for Men* (Eugene: Resource Publications, 2022). xvi, 164 pp. ISBN. 978-1666733150. £18.00 (Paperback).

Brad Karelius and I have never met, though we have corresponded for many years. We have much in common, being of much the same age, ordained Anglican priests for some forty-five years, college teachers and parish priests, married with children. We also share a common love for desert places and the role they have played in the long history of Christian spirituality.

Do not let the title of this book lure you into misunderstanding. It is very much about men and women; it is dedicated to the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Orange, the Foreword is by Eileen McNerney, CSJ, Karelius's first spiritual director was Jeanne Fallon, CSJ, and his wife Janice is present in almost every chapter. But it is a book about 'male spirituality', and the journeys into desert places — mainly in California — with chapters on prayer set against reminiscences of six men who have particularly influenced the author, from football coaches to priests and from as far apart as a still divided Germany to contemporary California.

In some ways, then, this is an autobiographical exercise, Karelius examining his life through various stages in California, Germany — through wayward youth to the highs and lows of family and professional life. And through it all is the desert as both a place and an ideal — but neither place nor ideal is to be romanticized for they are both and at once beautiful and alluringly dangerous. The desert, whether in the USA, the Middle East, Africa or Asia, is to be respected in its physical harshness — but as in the Bible and as in the lives and witness of the early Christian desert mothers and fathers, it is also a place where God is to be found, or where God finds us. Thus, though relatively brief, this book works subtly on a number of different levels — physical, spiritual, intellectual, personal, ecclesial.

Like any spiritual journey this book is also about both time and space, looking back to the unexpected ways in which God appears in our lives, and looking forward always in hope. At the same time, it is very much about the present and the importance of living in the present — Brad being reminded by his son Erik that 'home is right here' in the experience of the immediate instant held within God's eternity. It is something which I became aware of

myself when I was working towards my own 'desert' book — *The Sacred Desert* (2004) — for the wisdom of the desert reminds us continually that if we forget the present then we are in peril. And for the moment, where we are will do as home, to be enjoyed or endured as such.

This is a remarkable, and very readable book that does not wear its considerable learning on its sleeve. It is full of encounters, friendships, unexpected moments of revelation and spiritual wisdom. Three chapters (11, 12, 13) explore 'ways of prayer for men' — but they are clearly not just for men! They are brief but profound engagements with how we may use the wisdom of the liturgy of the hours, the examination (*examen*) of conscience, and contemplative prayer. But the book begins and ends in the desert, the place of heat, sand and rock — its advice real and practical. 'there are things to be done and thought about before you set out. 'Desert hiking books share detailed advice for your preparations. I would emphasize lots of water, good hiking boots and service your car before a desert trip' (p. 149). This is just sensible — but now translate this practical good sense into the spiritual journey which is also not to be undertaken lightly and without due preparation. Karelius knows the wisdom of the great teachers, St Ignatius Loyola, St John of the Cross, St Teresa of Avila. They know, too, that it will be tough, but with stout boots and a firm spirit, the rewards are great.

David Jasper
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Colin Chapman, *Christian Zionism and the Restoration of Israel: How Should We Interpret the Scriptures?* (Eugene OR: Cascade, 2021). xii, 214 pp. ISBN 978-1-7252-9734-0 (Hardcover), 978-1-7252-9733-3 (Paperback), 978-1-7252-9735-7 (E-book).

Colin Chapman is an Anglican priest, ordained in the Diocese of Edinburgh to a curacy at St James, Leith. He subsequently served in the Middle East, and subsequently became Principal of Crowther Hall, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) training College in Birmingham. He also taught at the ecumenical Near East School of Theology in Beirut, where he did much to nurture Evangelical biblical scholarship in that region.

Chapman writes from a consciously conservative evangelical perspective, which gives him some common ground with the Christian Zionist and Messianic Jewish authors with whom he seeks to engage in dialogue. A measure of his success is that commendations printed in the

front pages include these constituencies. This is not to suggest that Chapman has compromised his principles, but rather that he recognises that interpretation of Scripture, premised upon acknowledgement of the authority ascribed thereto by evangelical Christians, and in conformity with the methods of interpretation they recognise, is a prerequisite to constructive dialogue.

The book is divided into three parts. The first identifies and addresses twelve 'key issues' which divide Christian Zionist and Messianic Jewish interpreters from other scholars, including other evangelicals. These issues include different understandings of the history of the region, and different sets of political views. Divided opinions as to the relationship between Israel of the (Christian) Old Testament period and the modern state of Israel, and the legitimacy of the claim the latter makes to territory in the Levant, are crucial. A consequent difference concerns whether or not the dispossession of the Palestinians has been a legitimate exercise in proprietary rights and fulfilment of prophecies contained in the Hebrew Bible/Christian Old Testament. Chapman differs quite fundamentally with those who claim the violence with which the Palestinians have been expelled or killed has been legitimate and proportionate, and the indigenous population of the land are at most collateral damage in the realisation of divine promises of the restoration of Israel.

The second and third parts deal with the interpretation of prophecies of restoration in Ezekiel and Zechariah. Chapman compares ways in which these texts are interpreted in the New Testament (Gospel accounts of Jesus's teaching, and of apostles' teaching and preaching in Acts, as well as letters of Paul, Hebrews, and Revelation) and by Christian Zionist and Messianic Jewish writers. He notes in particular the selectivity with which these writers interpret prophetic and apocalyptic texts literally or symbolically, appropriating for the modern state of Israel prophecies which the New Testament documents consistently apply to Jesus. Their willingness to ignore the prophetic imperative for justice and the universal scope of God's saving work in Christ, while manipulating Scripture in the service of the Zionist project and the modern state of Israel, is noted, but in ways which seek to challenge Chapman's interlocutors to reconsider their political commitments and to be more consistent in their interpretation of Scripture.

There is of course much with which readers might disagree, even if in sympathy with Chapman's aims in this book. Whether a clear distinction between prophecy and apocalyptic can be sustained, rather than a continuum between these literary and rhetorical modes of expression, I would find doubtful. Symbolism is employed in both, even if tending to be more graphic in the latter, but neither can be historicised and applied to the

present day without violence to the texts and the experiences of God which they reflect.

It is to be hoped that Chapman's interlocutors will engage with this book, and reconsider their positions, rediscovering the divine imperative for justice emphasised in the prophetic corpus and embracing the universality of God's saving work in Christ. This book remains a useful resource for Christians seeking to remain faithful to the Gospel, and to respect Scripture, and who are conscious both of the history of anti-Semitism in western Christianity and of the incremental dispossession of the Palestinians by the Zionist state. They will find the issues clarified, and relevant texts explored in ways which are helpful to the non-specialist while informed by sound scholarship.

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Stewart Rapley, *Autistic Thinking in the Life of the Church* (London: SCM Press, 2021). 192 pp. ISBN 978-0334060871 (Paperback), £16.99; (Kindle) and £17.18 (Kindle).

Until recently, writing about autistic people and the Church has overwhelmingly been the preserve of those who are not themselves autistic and has focused primarily on the needs of children and their parents, as though autistic children somehow do not grow into autistic adults with continuing distinctive needs. However, a growing number of autistic scholars are undertaking research into faith and autism. Their work is making important contributions to our understanding of how the condition affects a person's spiritual life and how the Church can and should react.

Stewart Rapley is one such scholar. His work is based firmly in the understanding that autism is a difference in neurology rather than a disorder, as the diagnostic manuals continue to call it. As such, autism requires not healing or treatment but acceptance and understanding.

Autistic Thinking in the Life of the Church is split into two parts. The first addresses the impact of autism on faith and the second concerns a way in which individual church communities can respond. As its title implies, the book's focus is on how autistic Christians might think about their faith in distinctly autistic ways and what issues this can lead to as they seek to live out their beliefs, rather than on the more widely recognised social and sensory challenges.

An introductory chapter sketches Rapley's understanding and personal experience of autism. Drawing heavily on Grant Macaskill's recent book, *Autism and the Church*, the chapter outlines an approach that rejects the idea of 'inclusion' in favour of 'belonging' and emphasises that autistic Christians are full members of the Body of Christ. That this latter point still needs to be made illustrates how far the Church in general has to go in its understanding of autism and highlights the necessity of work such as Rapley's and Macaskill's. Although the theology of autism is a very new field, broader disability theology is firmly established and it felt to me as though this chapter, and the book in general, could have benefitted from engaging further with this.

The following four chapters present the findings from Rapley's Masters research with a small group of autistic believers. These chapters probe the ways in which, and the degree to which, the research participants' views of God, how they read the Bible, their prayer lives and the ways that they relate to what Rapley terms 'supporting texts' (i.e., liturgy, creeds and hymnody) differ from the perceptions of the neurotypical (i.e., non-autistic) believers in the churches they attend. The author is conscious of the limits of this work, primarily the small sample size. This is an unsurprising limitation, as it is difficult to find adult believers who will readily identify themselves as autistic for the purposes of such studies, but it clearly demonstrates the need for further, more robust research.

Although an autistic person's questions might not differ markedly from those of a neurotypical believer, Rapley's findings indicate that the distress that those questions cause is significantly greater and leads to a higher risk of disengagement from church if they are not satisfactorily answered. Notably, the engagement space for the participants — i.e., the degree to which they overlapped significantly with the theology, practice or understanding of the particular church and therefore felt comfortable engaging — is shown to be narrower than for neurotypical congregants in each of the areas investigated.

These chapters feel slightly different in tone to other chunks of the book, and it is hard to know exactly who they are aimed at. The level of detail on the research might be more than most church leaders will require, although it does help to build a compelling case that church communities must do something 'to improve 'belonging' for autistic worshippers'.

This vital aim, which is the heart of Rapley's enterprise, is addressed by means of an 'engagement model', which the author has been trialling in real life with a further group of, largely, autistic Christians. The model is not a step-by-step guide to solving an autistic believer's faith conundrums but a framework for tackling the issues. Rapley is correct to pinpoint the first of these as the education needs of churches in relation to autism. It is essential

that a solid, up-to-date understanding be fostered among leaders and congregations in general before they attempt to address the needs of autistic Christians. These needs are addressed by means of Bible interpretation workshops and discussions that use a set of 'mindsets' to help autistic believers to access tools and habits of mind that neurotypical believers use more instinctively. The framework approach enables users to adapt the model to their contexts and is backed up by considerable resources at the website. Rapley includes vital pointers and questions to explore in preparing to run the model and in evaluating its impact and is quick to point out the need to involve autistic people in the planning of implementation.

Having been involved briefly with the pilot of the model, I can attest to the richness of the conversations that it has produced. Although only time and use will tell its ultimate effectiveness, it has certainly broadened and deepened the perspectives of its participants. Therefore, I commend Rapley's book to church leaders interested in making their churches more welcoming communities for autistic individuals. It is still early days for the implementation of this approach and no doubt the model will continue to be adapted and refined as experience teaches users what works well or poorly. Nonetheless, anyone who wants to ensure that autistic members of their church are able to engage as fruitfully as possible should get their hands on the book. And any leaders who do not think that they need to do any work on the belonging of autistic believers should read it even more closely.

Amy Jo Philip
Independent Scholar

Michael Dumper, Power, Piety, and People: The Politics of Holy cities in the Twenty-First Century (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020). xvi, 367 pp. ISBN 978-0231184762 (Hardback), 978-0231184779 (Paperback), 978-0231545662 (E-book). £108.00 (Hardback), £28.00 (Paperback & E-book).

Michael Dumper is Professor of Middle Eastern Politics in the University of Exeter. He has for decades been an acknowledged authority on the intricacies of ethnic, religious, and ideological divisions, the political and economic factors with which they are inextricably linked, and the contested histories which continue to enflame conflict, in Jerusalem in particular. His extensive academic research and embedded experience in local communities have led to consultation by governments and NGOs and his

enlistment as facilitator in negotiations between parties. This book represents a broadening of his research to include cities with religious sites of contested and conflicted heritage in other parts of the world, exploring ways in which his experience in Jerusalem may illuminate the issues being experienced in Cordoba (Spain), Banaras/Verenasi (India), Lhasa (Tibet), and George Town (Malaysia).

The five cities are the subject of successive chapters, but issues in one are also revisited in the light of insights and observations gathered at another. In the case of Cordoba, Dumper shows that the complex history of a mosque, built over a church, and converted into a cathedral with changing political fortunes and demographic shifts, has become not so much a matter of provision for the spiritual needs of the local Muslim community as of the balance of power between the regional and central governments, and between the Roman Catholic Church and secular liberal interests. In Banaras, competing myths as to which shrine occupied which site first, and who destroyed what, are unsustained by archaeological evidence, and neither are entrenched positions influenced by objective historical evidence. Modes of coexistence between local Hindu and Muslim communities are threatened by changes in the global economy as well as by increasingly polarised Hindutva and Islamist movements; while the former are politically and demographically dominant, and control the police and armed forces, at the time of writing the dispersal of Islamic State forces from the Middle East was perceived as a potential factor in raising tensions, and bringing reprisals for the destruction of mosques in Ayodhya and other parts of India. In Lhasa, the issue is the demographic as well as political, military, and economic domination of Tibet, and the accompanying cultural genocide visited on people inhabiting the peripheries of China. Whether the secularisation of indigenous Tibetan society has been successful remains uncertain, and the future direction of its distinctive Buddhist tradition will be contingent upon ways in which succession to the current Dalai Llama is managed. George Town is distinct from the other examples in that its religious sites are not of global historical or cultural significance, but the, hitherto celebrated but carefully managed, coexistence of Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Christian communities of Chinese, Indian, and Malay origin, and accordingly of complex cultural identity, is threatened by the Islamist policies of the central government.

In none of the cases studied are the issues simple or the fault-lines clear and immutable. In all cases, patterns of urban development, and actions by local authorities to ensure public safety and the delivery of services are complicated by the legacy of contested community memories and by the often remote but heavy-handed power dynamics of central government, regardless of local sensitivities — or in wilful violation thereof.

Dumper illustrates the importance of not over-simplifying the issues and cautions against haste in attributing all conflict to religious factors. It is only with appreciation of the religious and cultural sensibilities, however, that competing interests can be managed in ever-mutating socio-economic circumstances in which global developments may bring unforeseen consequences to local communities.

There are a number of infelicities to annoy pedants. Wenceslas Square is in Prague, not Bucharest; the terms centrifugal and centripetal are confused in places; Cordoba must have existed when Seneca was born there, not founded a century after his death. These are indicators, perhaps, of hurried writing, but also of less than rigorous editing and proofreading. They should not, however, detract from the insights conveyed, the value of comparative studies illustrated, or the example of careful attention to the diverse and competing factors which may disrupt cosmopolitan communities anywhere, but which pose a more serious threat in cities with a long history and with sites of cultic significance for global religious movements.

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