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**Funerary Culture and the Limits of Secularization in  
Denmark**

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor

aan de Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen

op gezag van de rector magnificus prof. dr. J.H.J.M. van Krieken

volgens besluit van het college van decanen

in het openbaar te verdedigen op vrijdag 17 november 2017

om 16.30 uur precies

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Denmark**

Doctoral Thesis

to obtain the degree of doctor

from Radboud University Nijmegen

on the authority of the Rector Magnificus prof. dr. J.H.J.M. van Krieken,

according to the decision of the Council of Deans

to be defended in public on Friday, November 17, 2017

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DDD10, the tenth edition of the international conference on death, dying and disposal, organised by the Centre for Thanatology, brought me to Nijmegen for the first time in 2011. In the previous year, I had also attended the annual meeting of the Nordic Network for Thanatology in Aalborg, Denmark, and a conference on death studies, co-organised by the Centre for Thanatology, in Transylvania (Alba Iulia, Romania). The positive reception of my work, especially the positive remarks by leading sociologists of death professors Tony Walter and Michael Hviid Jacobsen, greatly encouraged me to pursue a PhD.

Radboud University's Centre for Thanatology appeared to be a good address, not only due to its reputation, but also for the combination of death studies and religious studies and interest in comparing the funerary cultures of various countries in Europe. I wrote a research proposal on death and religion, seeking to investigate whether death in contemporary Denmark had become secular or was still invested with religious meaning. Funding granted by the Culture, Religion and Memory (CRM) programme in the Humanities, chaired by professors Marit Monteiro and Sible de Blaauw, made the PhD position possible. I am very grateful to CRM for accepting my proposal. I am also grateful to the board of the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies for employing me and providing additional funding. At the Centre for Thanatology, based in the aforementioned Faculty, I found colleagues who shared my interest in how people deal with death. Most importantly, with my disciplinary background in church history I found an excellent supervisor in professor Peter Nissen, who provided intellectual guidance and rigor on my research project. Dr Thomas Quartier, my other supervisor, offered very helpful guidance with regard to empirical research into death and religion, in addition. I owe you both a big thank you for all your efforts and the trust you put in me and in my Danish project.

Inspiring have also been discussions with other colleagues at the Centre for Thanatology, including Meike Heessels, Eric Venbrux, Claudia Venhorst, Brenda Mathijssen and Nienke Fortuin, and with Christoph Jedan, Justin Kroesen and other members of the NOSTER group on Death and Consolation, and with a great many scholars in Nijmegen,

Dutch and international forums, I cannot all mention by name, but I would like to single out Mirjam Klaassens, Jakob Borrits Sabra, Karen Marie Leth-Nissen and Dorthe Refslund Christensen. Exchanges with Eric Venbrux resulted in a co-authored chapter on photography. Thanks are due also to Paul van der Velde for his cheerfulness and Ria van den Brandt for her social antenna.

In Denmark I gained much from the always pleasant and educational conversations with the board and other members of the *Foreningen for Kirkegårdskultur*. I thank Dean Leif Arffmann for introducing me to the association. To Bishop Elob Westergaard, the current chairman, I am indebted for his help with securing the photo on the cover of this book. Klaus Bertelsen kindly provided me with historical information on Danish cemeteries and very helpful advice. I also want to express my heartfelt thanks to the many Danish people who over the years in various settings have told me about their views on death and their death related practices. In particular, I would like to thank Kirsten for sharing with me what she did.

I am grateful to professor Ulla Schmidt, Department of Practical Theology and Church History, Aarhus University for giving me the opportunity to be a part of the research project 'Death, Memory and Religion' established in collaboration with Centre for Pastoral Education and Research. After finishing my PhD thesis this has made it possible to continue my work on grave visiting and allowed me to be part of inspiring discussions with Kirstine Helboe Johansen, Marie Vejrup Nielsen, Henrik Reitoft Christensen and Christine Tind Johannessen-Henry who are also members of the research group.

My dearest and closest friends Vibeke Just Andersen and Inger Lyngdrup Nørgård have both been writing a PhD thesis in the same period of time as I did. Consequently, we could share the ups and downs of the experience; above all, however, I felt supported by their great friendship. My parents Ole and Else Kjærsgaard I want to thank for many good conversations spurred by my research topic and for their fantastic support in all practical matters. The same accounts for my siblings Bolette and Rasmus and their partners Kristian and Lene.

Dear Johannes, thank you for constantly reminding me that there is a life to be lived outside academia, I am so proud to be your mother.

And last but not least I want to thank you, Eric, for all your love and care.





## CHAPTER 1

### **INTRODUCTION: BELONGING WITHOUT BELIEVING?**

#### **The Problem**

This study focusing on death and religiosity in contemporary Denmark is a response to the book *Society without God* by American sociologist Phil Zuckerman, who claims on the basis of a fourteen months sojourn questioning Danes that Denmark is one of “the least religious countries in the world” (2008: 2).

Yet Denmark is a prime example of the puzzling situation that low rates of professed beliefs and church attendance go hand-in-hand with high rates of church membership and participation in ecclesiastical rites of passage, known as the Scandinavian paradox (Lüchau 2010: 181, 193). In the words of José Casanova, “Denmark presents the paradigmatic case of a European society with one of the lowest rates of religious belief and practice accompanied by one of the highest rates of confessional affiliation in the national church, the Church of Denmark” (2014: 27). Ole Riis (1994: 99), another sociologist working within the secularization paradigm, coined the phrase “belonging without believing” to describe this conundrum.

Can the riddle be solved? How could 76.9 % of the Danes in 2016 be members of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Denmark (Kirkestatistik 2016) without having the slightest religious interest? If the Danes are so “markedly irreligious” (Zuckerman 2008: 27, 28, 35, 75, 108), why did they, in 2015, in 83.7 % of the cases opt for a religious funeral with a Lutheran minister (Kirkestatistik 2015)?

Zuckerman (2008) seeks to resolve the paradox of belonging without believing by arguing that church membership and the religious performance of rites of passage (baptism, confirmation, marriage and funerals) are mere cultural tradition and have little to do with religiosity. Belonging to the state church is an expression of national identity (Zuckerman 2008: 162, 171). In this view “to be Danish, to be Lutheran, and to be secular amounts to one and the same thing” (Casanova 2014: 27). Religious studies scholar Tim Jensen (2011: 344) takes a different

view: rather than as irreligious Lutherans “the Danes could equally well be characterized as just Lutherans, maybe even religious Lutherans.” He points out that when questioned in surveys, time and again, the majority of Danes actually *do* say that they believe. Furthermore, it could be argued that in terms of contemporary Danish Lutheran-Protestant understandings their way of believing (by faith alone) and subsequent practising Christianity (no need for frequent church attendance) point at “a high degree of religiousness” (Jensen 2011: 345). Zuckerman (2008), however, in his research ventured to scrutinize the religious belief of Danes, considering the understandings of his interviewees the emperor’s new clothes. In other words, with regard to the issue of whether the Danes are religious or not, Zuckerman finds that neither belonging nor believing count in this case.

Sociologist Grace Davie readily accepts the phrase belonging without believing (a reversal of her famous phrase “believing without belonging”, cf. Davie 1990, 1994) as an accurate description of the situation in the Nordic countries in Europe. But she wants to refine it. In view of the Scandinavian paradox she developed the notion of “vicarious religion”, meaning that a minority performs official religion on behalf, and with the approval of, the majority (Davie 2007a: 141-142, 2013: 25; cf. Davie 2000). Davie sees vicarious religion as just the tip of an iceberg and calls for the need of understanding the much more interesting invisible big mass under water (2007a: 127). She asks how “is it possible to get beneath the surface of a Nordic, or indeed any other, society in order to investigate the reflexes of a population that for the most part remain under the surface?” (Davie 2007a: 141). For Davie the notion of vicarious religion “represents an increasing dissatisfaction with a way of thinking that almost by definition pulls apart the ideas of believing and belonging; it concentrates instead on the subtle and complex relationships that continue to exist between these two variables” (2007b: 22). She is looking for what it means to be religious for the people concerned. The notion of vicarious religion, however, raises the question whether their religiosity is confined to official religion or not.

With regard to the Danish context, Marie Vejrup Nielsen, a theologian working in the field of religious studies, points at indications of a transformation of religion in the other direction, namely “belonging but believing in something else” (Nielsen 2009: 67). Nielsen thus draws

attention to “non-official religion within the framework of official religion” (2009: 63). Popular religiosity, both inside and outside the church, in Scandinavia has indeed been grossly overlooked in the debate on secularization, according to church historian Erik Sidenvall (2010: 121, my emphasis): “If we do not look in the right places, we are likely to miss such popular expressions of religion and hence, in a worst-case scenario, *we may mistake a vital religious culture for a secular one.*”

The exemplary work of social historian Sarah Williams (1994) on popular religiosity in the south London borough of Southwark between 1880 and 1939 is important in this respect. The local working class people were conceived of as belonging without believing. Williams, employing oral history and autobiographical materials, however, makes clear that there was *not* “a straightforward association between infrequent church attendance and religious indifference” (1994: 216). In contrast to the views of middle-class commentators and clerics, the actors themselves considered the attendance of mass at certain points in time, such as New Year’s Eve, and undergoing the ecclesiastical rites of passage “genuine religious belief” (1994: 228). The latter even insisted on the church rituals be performed in the manner as ascribed by official religion, with which they had no quarrel (Williams 1994: 224ff). A similar attitude would explain an important finding of Zuckerman in Denmark. He (Zuckerman 2012: 171) states, “Almost no one I spoke to had any dramatic stories of their loss of faith or rejection of religion.” Furthermore, the majority of Danes stick to undergoing the ecclesiastical rites of passage (Zuckerman 2008; Jensen 2011: 345). What was deemed essential, Williams (1994) demonstrates with regard to the south Londoners, was simultaneously embedded in popular religiosity: baptism ensured an afterlife, a church wedding secured a blessed marriage, and attending mass on New Year’s Eve before it struck midnight prevented misfortune and guaranteed good luck in the coming year. She stresses, however, that taking part in these religious services was not devoid of “sincere belief” in terms of official religion (Williams 1994: 223). The idea of belonging without believing, as in the so-called Scandinavian paradox, can thus not be upheld in this case.

Rather than tossing around with the words belonging and believing (“believing in belonging” is another variant), it is perhaps better to ask in what way people are religious. Taking a broader view of religion

and religiosity can help to resolve the Scandinavian paradox and might explain why the majority continues to be a member of the Lutheran Church. Sidenvall notes:

“The continued popularity of the rites performed by the National churches opens a window through which we can perceive an alternative religious reality in Scandinavia. Such acts are a part of a much larger spiritual tapestry, a popular religious culture within which some aspects of Christianity are still integral parts” (2010: 129).

In the debate mainly framed by the secularization paradigm this “religious reality” has, as mentioned, received hardly any attention. Zuckerman’s study (2008) is a case in point. Therefore, we should attempt another approach to bring the religiosity of average Danes into view.

I am referring here to “lived religion” (McGuire 2008), that is, how religion is lived, understood and experienced by people in actual practice, instead of what it ought to be according to dogmatic, ecclesiastical teachings. In no way, however, does this exclude “those who adhere to the dominant religion” (Neitz 2011: 52), in this case the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Denmark. Davie, in response to a critique of her notion of vicarious religion (Bruce and Voas 2010), explains that what she is really after is “to reveal forms of religion that normally lie hidden” (Davie 2010: 264). She is well aware of the methodological challenge to get at these forms of religion. Davie makes two valuable suggestions.

Firstly, following C. Wright Mills, to go beyond received wisdom and standard approaches in using the sociological imagination to investigate the problem at hand afresh (Davie 2010: 265). I have taken up this suggestion and I will discuss my approach, inspired by Mills, in the section on methodology further below.

Secondly, Davie suggests “to be attentive to episodes, individual or collective, in or through which the implicit becomes explicit”; she explicitly refers to “critical moments” in the life course of common people, pointing out death as one of the most obvious events (Davie 2007a: 128). Particularly relevant, according to Davie, is “the evidence that the study of death brings to the vexed question of secularization” (2007a: 241). Indeed, there is a good reason to focus on how people are dealing with death in Denmark: If death is still invested with religious meaning this would be telling about the limits of secularization.

Another reason is that Zuckerman (2008) uses his claim that death is secularized as an important argument for what he sees as the irreligiousness of the Danes. The “common attitude toward death”, according to Zuckerman, is “that it truly is the end” (2008: 69). I am not so sure, it seems to denote a foregone conclusion, but the criterion makes sense. When death is not the end in people’s understandings, we are dealing with religiosity (cf. Chidester 2002: 3; Stringer 2008: 16). For Zuckerman the secular simply means “not religious” (2008: 95). To discern the non-secular it seems most promising to focus on death-related actions and thoughts. What does it tell us about the (ir)religiousness of Danes? Do we find religiosity that thus far has remained hidden from view? If that is the case in Denmark, supposedly one of the most secularized countries in the world, it is likely we might find the same in other, less secularized countries too. In other words, Denmark provides us with an excellent test case.

Zuckerman (2008) uses Denmark as a showcase of the sustainability of the secularization thesis. His study was translated in Danish (in 2008), Italian and Korean (in 2013). It laid the groundwork for Zuckerman’s further development as a leading scholar in the newly emerging field of secular studies (Zuckerman 2010, 2012, 2014; Zuckerman, Galen and Pasquale 2016). In his later publications, Zuckerman frequently returns to his study in Denmark, thereby turning Denmark into the paradigmatic case of a secular society. In this work I critically engage with Zuckerman’s research in Denmark (2008), a foundational study in secular studies, from the perspective of religious studies that branched off in another direction with seminal works, such as those of Meredith McGuire (2008) and Martin Stringer (2008a,b), taking a broader view on religion. Thus far these new and important approaches or schools of thought have been talking past each other. This study seeks to bring them into conversation with each other.

This study also gets into conversation with death studies, the study of how people deal with death (Jacobsen 2010; Walter 2008). On the intersection of death studies and religious studies the volume *Death and Religion in a Changing World*, edited by Kathleen Garces-Foley (2006), has been groundbreaking. It shows not only how religious traditions evolve, but also how the tension between religious prescriptions and actual practice is played out in relation to death. Yet much of the

work in death studies as far as it concerns Europe and European settler countries remains strongly influenced by the secularization thesis that implies religious decline rather than religious change. This is also the story told about death in Denmark (e.g., Jensen 2002; Kragh 2003). In his epoch-making work on the history of death, historian Philippe Ariès (1981[1977]) tells that with the rise of modernity death was taken out of the hands of the church: the doctor came to preside over the deathbed instead of the priest, cemeteries substituted for churchyards, and cremation was to replace earth burial. Sociologist Tony Walter, a leading scholar in the field of death studies, in line with the narrative of religious decline, speaks of “the modern, secular, medicalised way of death” (1996: 57). The so-called Scandinavian paradox pops up in statements such as “secular funerals in Denmark involve the church” (Walter 2015: 134), indicating that Lutheran Danes are thought not to “believe”, not even in the face of death. Does it also mean that their dealing with death is devoid of religiosity?

In this thesis I seek to answer this question. Let us first turn to a brief discussion of the two distinctive theoretical approaches that have guided Zuckerman’s research and my research, respectively.

### **Theory**

The Reformation has been hailed as bringing forth secularization (Bruce 2006: 35), but arguably this is better understood as “a different type of religiosity” (Mouzelis 2012: 21). What has been dubbed “Lutheran secularism” (Christensen and Jensen 2012: 40) has its foundation in Biblical scriptures as interpreted by Martin Luther (2006[1523]), distinguishing the secular realm from the religious one, albeit within an overarching Christian frame, known as “the two-kingdoms theory” (Witte 2014).

Recently, religious studies scholars have put into question the dichotomy between the religious and the secular. Some (Yelle 2011; De Roover 2011; Hanegraaff 2016) have argued that rather than as a binary opposition we should consider a continuation of a pre-Reformation triad. As Jakob de Roover puts it, “the secular realm is not the world that lies outside the Christian religious world and that has nothing to do with religion, but a *sanitized* realm of social practice cleansed from ‘false wor-

ship'. The religious-secular distinction is made by and within a particular form of Christian religion, in opposition to idolatry" (2011: 50). The secular outlook of graves in contemporary Lutheran churchyards, for example, could be seen in this light (see Chapter 4; cf. Sullivan 2005).

Anthropologist Talal Asad, however, resists seeing the secular as a "mask of religion", viewing it something different: "I take the secular to be a concept that brings together certain behaviors, knowledges, and sensibilities in modern life" (2003: 25). This is not necessarily in contradiction to the triadic model proposed by the scholars mentioned here above. The secular might be what is indifferent, neutral or (to use a Lutheran term) adiaphorous to religion or be opposed to religion, considering it 'false'. The dominant theories of secularization all have as their basic assumption that modernization goes hand-in-hand with religious decline (Martin 2011: 18; Casanova 2014: 25). Whether the advent of modernity, marked by the Protestant Reformation and the rationalist Enlightenment, meant a clear break with the pre-modern or not is beyond the scope of this thesis. What I am interested in are the limits of secularization in contemporary Denmark.

Zuckerman (2008) draws heavily on secularization theories to support his argument that Denmark is one of the most irreligious countries in the world. Or rather what is left of the grand theory of secularization. For the classical secularization theory, as old as the discipline of sociology, has been under severe criticism in sociology since the late 1990s, but it already emerged in the late 1960s (cf. Shiner 1967) when it became more and more difficult to explain the empirical developments in accordance with the theory. A main problem was that religion was by no means a disappearing phenomenon in the undeniably very modern U.S.A. In fact, the political power of religion was growing, having influence on curriculums in schools and even on presidential elections. But also in the rest of the world there was a religious revival, only not in Europe it seemed.

All the anomalies made it hard to sustain the theory (Stark 1999). Only Steven Bruce (2011) still seems to be a hardcore defender. A few called for the total abolishment of the theory, but most for the need of a revision. Even Peter Berger, who with his book *The Sacred Canopy* (1967) had been one of the front figures in the later development of the secularization theory, agreed that the theory had to be revised. According



to Berger (2001), it could no longer be sustained as a general theory, instead he limited it to describe the situation of Europe and those with a European mindset elsewhere in the world. The main research question ought no longer to be why someone would still adhere to religion in the modern world, but why someone would not (Berger 2001). Due to this lack of religiosity Europe became of great interest, particularly the most secularized countries, and that was what brought Zuckerman to Denmark.

However, the confinement of the secularization theory to Europe is not the only limitation of its scope. While a nuanced version of the theory expected secularization to take place on the level of society, institutions and the individual (Dobbelaere 1999), there is today disagreement about whether it has to be limited to the first two levels, and if that is the case in what way religion on the individual level must be understood. There seems to be a transatlantic divide. Those in Europe tend to favour the first two levels, but, in the words of Casanova, “American sociologists of religion tend to view things differently and practically restrict the use of the term secularization to its narrower meaning of decline of religious beliefs and practices among individuals” (2006: 16). The latter understanding will be followed here to discern limits of secularization in connection to the claims made with regard to Denmark by Zuckerman (2008), an American sociologist of religion.

Death has been used as a litmus test in some studies to argue both against secularization on the individual level and the opposite (Walter 1996: 49-68). The reason why the case of death has this central position in the discussion is that dealing with death is often seen as fundamental to religion and therefore also as its last resort. We are, so to speak, religious to cope with the problem of death— and modernization or not, death is still with us, and therefore religion too.

This understanding of a connection between religion and death is found in the position of Stark and Bainbridge (1987) and Stark and Iannaccone (1994). They and other sociologists have been criticizing the classical secularization theory for putting too much focus on how modernization has undermined the demand for religion. They have pointed out that the decline of religion also depends on the supply-side of religion. In this way they have seen a connection between low rates of professed beliefs and church attendance and the de facto monopoly of the

Nordic state churches, because the lack of competition on the religious market has made the churches lazy and not stimulating demand. But Stark and Bainbridge (1987) also see a connection with the changes in the theology of death. In their view there will always be a demand for religious promises eternal life as a compensation for the problem of death. However, most mainstream religious communities have adapted so much to modern society that they do not offer assuring transcendent promises anymore. But to Stark and Bainbridge (1987) that does not mean that religion will disappear, it only means that people will go to other suppliers of eternal hope to get assurance and therefore religious revival will take place at some point. This means that secularization is a cyclical self-limiting process, and not a linear development of decline as the classical secularization theory has it.

On another track Norris and Inglehart (2004) have shown that a sense of existential security coming from living in a society with economic and social security, an educated population, and low crime rates leads to a decrease in religiosity. In the same vein Gill and Lundsgarde (2004) have connected the decrease in religiosity with the level of welfare spending. There is no need to hope for a pie in the sky if you are already living in heaven of sorts, in a welfare state paradise. The very low levels of professed beliefs Zuckerman (2008) found in the welfare state of Denmark with its extended cradle-to-grave security to him confirmed this position. And so did the secularized relation to death, otherwise expected to be the last resort of religion. To Zuckerman the case of Denmark thus confirmed that people live perfectly well without religion, individuals do not even need religion to cope with death.

Finally, there is the issue of gender. Secularization began abruptly and much later than previously thought, according to historian Callum G. Brown (2009[2001]). Brown argues for the UK that changes in the role and self-perception of women in the 1960s meant they were no longer the upholders of religion and brought about the demise of Christianity. Referring to the particularly strong representation of women in the workforce in Denmark, Zuckerman (2008: 115-117) argues along similar lines.

Besides the secularization of death, there are for Zuckerman three major explanations for the lack of religiosity in Denmark: “a lazy church monopoly, secure societies, and working women” (2008: 117). I have

discussed the respective theories here above. There has been a proliferation of secularization theories to deal with anomalies and to make adjustments, which makes it difficult to speak of a secularization theory in the singular. The whole set of theories has become known as the secularization paradigm (Tschannen 1991; Bruce 2006). As with any paradigm how we see things is very much framed by it. This applies in this case to the way in which religion has been defined (and can be measured).

As sociologist Timothy Crippen (1988: 333) notes, “the secularization thesis is constrained by its ‘substantive’ definition, a definition which severely limits its analytical scope and theoretical utility.” Is it realistic to assume that common people to whom questionnaires are sent out fully subscribe to the official belief contents of institutional religion? Does that say anything about what they do with it? Can religiosity be equated with church attendance? What is actually happening ‘on the ground’ when people are practicing religion? What would it mean for our understanding if religion were more broadly defined?

The study of ‘lived religion’ entails a paradigmatic shift. Sociologist and anthropologist of religion Meredith McGuire uses the concept to distinguish “the actual experiences of religious persons from the prescribed religion of institutionally defined beliefs and practices” (2008: 12). Not the religious prescriptions but the actual religious practices stand central in this approach.

McGuire (2008: 15) asks “if perhaps, we are mistaken in our expectation of cognitive consistency between individuals’ religion, as institutionally framed, and a person’s actual religion, as lived.” She herself provides an answer, saying that lived religion is premised more on “religious practices than on religious beliefs or ideas, it is not necessarily logically coherent. Rather, it requires practical coherence: It needs to make sense in one’s everyday life, it needs to be effective, to ‘work’, in the sense of accomplishing some desired end” (McGuire 2008: 15). The efficacy in coping with problems in everyday life is what counts with regard to religion for anthropologist and liturgist Martin Stringer. He makes clear that depending on what works for them in a given situation people hold beliefs, that may differ or even be contradictory to those held in other situations as long as it helps them to deal with everyday problems (Stringer 2008a,b). I will look at religiosity in Denmark from the perspective of lived religion.

In order to understand the context we need to know somewhat more about the Lutheran church in Denmark and how it developed over time. The Lutheran church still provides a framework for the disposal of the dead.

### **The Setting: Lutheran Denmark**

In Dom Square (*Domplein*) in the centre of Utrecht, between the Cathedral and Utrecht University Hall, stands a runic stone. The stone, located in the heart of the Netherlands, is a copy to size from the original one in Jelling, Denmark. King Harald Bluetooth, who ruled over Norway and Denmark, declares on the stone engraved around 965 in memory of his parents that he Christianized the Danes. He succeeded where some three hundred years before the Anglo-Saxon missionary Willibrord (who went on to Christianize the Dutch and became Archbishop of Utrecht) had failed (Lausten 1987: 15-17; Ingesman 2012: 687-689). Since 1997 the image of a crucified Christ from Harald's stone has been inserted in Danish passports. The stone, with image and inscriptions, is considered the birth certificate of Denmark as a Christian nation (Jensen 2011: 341; Lodberg 2016: 126).

In the following era, known as the Catholic past (*den katolske fortid*) in post-Reformation Denmark, the solid white churches of stone that still dot the Danish landscape were built. In the mid-1520s, however, evangelical preachers got a following in a number of towns and cities in Denmark, with Viborg (in northern Jutland) being the first city won over for the Reformation in 1526. In 1530 representatives of the spontaneous and popular reformation signed an agreed Confession of Copenhagen (*Confessio Hafniensis*). King Frederick I, who had been rather permissive of the developments, died in 1533. His son, Duke Christian of Schleswig and Holstein, was an outspoken Lutheran. He had attended the Diet of Worms, where Martin Luther defended himself against the charges by the Roman Catholic Church, in 1521. Duke Christian corresponded with Luther and, in 1528, introduced the Reformation in his small fiefdom of Haderslev and Tørning in Schleswig (currently southern Jutland). The duke's convictions meant that his succession to the throne was postponed and contested. Only when he had become the undisputed

victor in a civil war, he came to the throne as Christian III in 1536 (Grell 2011).

King Christian III brought about “another, Wittenberg inspired, general reformation, introduced by royal decree and controlled and run from the centre” (Grell 2011: 34). The new king abolished the Roman Catholic Church in Denmark, confiscated its property, and imprisoned the Catholic bishops. In this princely Reformation (in accordance with the model of German, Protestant principalities) Christian III rearranged the relationship between state and church. The church was expelled from direct political influence and brought fully under the king’s control, including finances, ecclesiastical legislation and discipline. All clergy had to make an oath of obligation to the king, the main earthly Christian authority. The king’s role was to promote the true Christian worship and a just society. Christian III thus effectively installed a modern territorial monarchy with a Lutheran state church (Lausten 1995: 31-35). In the terminology of a Danish church historian (Lausten 1999), “the Pope’s Church” (*Pavekirke*) had turned into “the King’s Church” (*Kongekirke*).

This meant that the newly appointed Lutheran bishops (called “superintendents”) became paid employees of the crown. Their task was to preach the gospel, to re-educate the clergy and to supervise ministers and congregations (Lausten 1995: 36-37). In addition, they were to “serve as the king’s theological advisors and supervise the new system of education and social welfare” (Lausten 1995: 37). The church, in other words, had become an arm of the state. At its head was the king, a convinced Lutheran who occasionally preached himself, actively suppressed heresies, and refused to appoint a superintendent-general or archbishop (Lausten 1995: 39). Following Luther’s two-kingdoms theory (Witte 2014; cf. Luther 2006[1523]), the concern of the church was the heavenly, spiritual and eternal kingdom, whereas the earthly, secular and temporal kingdom ought to be subjected to the Christian ruler.

In view of the dual kingdom of Denmark-Norway, it must be mentioned that King Christian III imposed the Reformation on Norway in 1537, but its implementation ran less smoothly than in Denmark. Wars with Sweden put Denmark into shackles during the rule of King Frederick III, who after having besieged the Swedes with help of the Dutch, introduced an absolute monarchy in 1660. The throne became hereditary and the monarch ruled by divine right. The Lutheran church not only

legitimized the king's absolute power by God's mandate, but on the local level Lutheran ministers also performed administrative and other tasks in the service of the sovereign (Petersen and Petersen 2013: 910). According to the constitutional King's Law (*Kongeloven*) of 1665, the king was "the supreme head of the church", but as the Augsburg Confession accounted for all Lutherans "soon his authority over the clergy was interpreted as the highest in external ecclesiastical matters only, and not in internal doctrinal matters" (Lyby and Grell 1995: 143). Nevertheless, the Lutheranism of the population was strongly enforced by the state ruler. Pietism, and subsequently Enlightenment ideas, were encapsulated by the state church. Denmark's siding with Napoleon Bonaparte led to the cessation of Norway from the kingdom in 1814. With the death of King Christian VIII, in 1848, the era of the absolutist monarchy came to an end.

In the wake of revolutionary upheaval elsewhere in Europe, and the internal demand of citizens' rights, Denmark became a parliamentary democracy under a constitutional monarchy. On 5 June 1849, the new constitution (*Grundloven*) was ratified by King Frederick VII. It declared the Evangelical Lutheran Church the church of the Danish people (*den danske Folkekirke*) and supported by the state as such (Lausten 1999: 82). Still today, the continued involvement of the state and the privileged position of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as an established church means that:

"The reigning monarch must be a member of this church (...), authorizes new rituals, Bibles and hymn books. Most of the clergy are public employees. Prior to the opening of the Parliament each year in October, members of Parliament attend a church service in the palace church at Christiansborg. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark, *Folkekirken*, is managed by a politically appointed Minister of Church Affairs, and all legislation concerning the church takes place in the non-confessional Parliament. The state collects taxes for the church" (Lausten 2013: 18)

Formally, the citizens were also granted religious freedom, but at that point in time almost the total population was Lutheran (Lodberg 2016: 126-127). The democratic constitution marked the transition from "the King's Church" (*Kongekirke*) to "the People's Church" (*Folkekirke*) (Lausten 1999).

The term *folke* (folk, people) remains ambiguous, as theologian Peter Lodberg points out, who refers to a poem by Grundtvig “that everything must come from the people and by the people, including power in church and society” (2016: 127). In the nineteenth century, the theologian N.F.S. Grundtvig became a major influence in the wedding of Lutheranism with romantic nationalism. Inspired by German romanticism, Danish intellectuals and artists gave shape to a national consciousness and identity in the first half of the century. The emphasis on national character and history must also be seen in the light of a shrinking Danish realm. The constitution came into being during a three years’ war over Schleswig. Norway and South Sweden had already been lost (Lodberg 2016: 130). As a national church, however, the Danish *Folkekirke* harbours less unity than one might expect: the Grundtvigean movement represents the more liberal wing, whereas the revivalist Homeland Mission (*Indre Mission*, founded in 1861) can be found on the other side of the spectrum, with only a small group (*Kirkeligt Centrum*, founded in 1904) in between (Lausten 1987: 248-268). The Church itself has neither a synod nor an archbishop and thus lacks a central authority; therefore, it can be aptly characterized as “an umbrella organization” (Petersen and Petersen 2013: 911).

In the mid-nineteenth century industrialization took off in Denmark, followed by a steep increase in urbanization and an emerging class of workers. The social-democratic party (*Socialdemokratiet*), founded in 1871, represented them and fought for workers’ rights. The Social Democrats dominated Danish politics for most of the twentieth century and were a driving force behind the creation of the welfare state that developed in earnest after the World War II. It is still heavily debated to what extent Lutheran convictions and values contributed to the emergence of the Scandinavian model of the welfare state. An editorial in the Danish newspaper *BT* puts it as follows: “It can be argued that the particular Danish welfare state is an expression of Christianity, having permeated every corner of society, daily life and social life. We are Christians without saying we are Christians—and almost without going to church” (14 April 2006, cited in Pedersen and Pedersen 2013: 904). This argument is often used as well as that the social democrats are actually a secularized Lutheran movement. Furthermore, the required trust in fellow citizens and popular support of the state are mentioned in relation to the national

church, whose ministers perform a dual role as civil servants and preachers. The welfare state would also reflect the Lutheran idea of God's free grace, begetting "something for nothing" when in need. However, voices pro and con the welfare state have been aired by prominent Lutherans in Denmark (Lodberg 2016: 129-131; cf. Pedersen and Pedersen 2013). The church itself cannot directly interfere in politics, lacks a central authority, and is often too divided on issues to take a stance.

On the conservative front within the church, a movement named after a theological journal, *Tidehverv* ("epoch", founded in 1926), emerged in the 1920s. The movement opposed pietism, liberal theology and the church establishment. In recent years, it launched a critique on the welfare state and promoted national chauvinism (*danskhed*), resisting foreign influences, resulting from globalisation, feared by them (Lausten 2013: 19). Members of *Indre Mission* and Lutheran Mission, another revivalist movement, have resisted the ordination of female clergy, same-sex marriages and remarrying divorcees. Ministers can decide for themselves whether they want to be involved in this or not. Female ministers have been ordained in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark since 1948 (Schjørring 2012: 706-708); female bishops have been instituted from 1995 onwards.

A constitutional amendment in 1953 made it possible for women to inherit the throne. Consequently, since Queen Margrethe II's coronation in 1972, the Church has had a female head (Thorsen 2010; Nielsen and Kühle 2011: 178). Ministers are obliged to mention the queen in the common prayer following the sermon. The service has three Bible readings, during which people stand, while they sit when singing hymns. The hymns are not only sung in church (accompanied by an organist), but also in schools, at association meetings, and at home, especially around the Christmas tree.

As the People's church (*Folkekirken*) the Lutheran church in Denmark is also perceived as organized from bottom up. Congregations elect self-governing local parish councils, boards that also have a say over the churchyards. The councils select their own ministers in consultation with the bishop. Furthermore, since 1922 bishops have been elected by the local councils (Nielsen and Kühle 2011: 179). The Lutheran church holds a privileged position in comparison to other (minority) religions in Denmark (see Nielsen and Kühle 2011; Jensen 2011). Currently,



in 2016, the Folkekirke had 4.387.571 members (Kirkestatistik 2016), approximately 77 % of the population but “not more than 2% of the members of the Lutheran Church in Denmark attend church services on a given Sunday” (Lodberg 2016: 131).

One becomes a member of the church by being baptized, mostly this happens as infant. The other sacrament in the Lutheran church is the Eucharist, and the other ecclesiastical rites of passage are confirmation, wedding and funeral. Anthropologist Cecilie Rubow made an ethnographic study of funerals in Denmark in the early 1990s. This study (Rubow 1993) is still apt. For this reason and because, as Walter (1994: 21) suggests, the things that the bereaved do afterwards, including maintaining the grave, they find particularly helpful, I will concentrate more on what happens in the churchyard than in the church.

It is also important to note that the Lutheran church is “the burial authority for all”, having a near monopoly on the country’s places of burial (Nielsen and Kühle 2011: 177). As I will discuss further in the following chapters, the church has also a big stake in the crematoriums. Davies considers cremation rates “an index of secularization” (2015: 374). With 82.3 % in 2015 (Danske Krematoriers Landsforening), Denmark has a very high cremation rate. As we have seen, even slightly more opt for a religious funeral. In the city of Horsens, Jutland, that is known as a social-democratic bulwark, I went to the archives to find out to what extent cremation in its early days implied a secular funeral. Counting all cases in the church books for the period 1917-1938, I found that 84.3 % of the cremated had a funeral conducted by a Lutheran minister, as explicitly stated; in 7.1 % of the cases this was unclear, and only in 8.6 % it was explicitly stated that the cremated had a funeral without a minister. In the cases of traditional burial a funeral without a minister was explicitly stated for only 0.2 % and with a minister explicitly stated for 98.3 % (Landsarkivet for Nørrejylland, Church books C414A and C414B). From this example it follows that the Lutheran church was well involved in people’s sent offs, also in case of cremation.

### **Methodology**

Following Davie’s advice, I have been inspired by sociologist C. Wright Mills (2000[1959]) to make use of what he calls the sociological

imagination. Mills suggests we “abandon the conventional script” (Davie 2010: 265). What I take from Mills is the use of one’s imagination and all available sources in research.

Zuckerman (2008: 24) admits that the conventional surveys focusing on ‘believing’ do not yield the best results. Likewise, his direct questioning of people met with reluctance and proved to be not so productive either (Zuckerman 2008). Furthermore, Zuckerman (2009: 65) leaves open the possibility that people might be religious in “less obvious” ways. In probing people’s religiosity, or at least get some insight into it, I thus decided for another approach. I also try to change the perspective from looking at religious decline to what one can possibly find in terms of religiosity.

My first strategic choice was to look at death-related behaviour in the expectation, also noted by Davie (2007a: 128), that it is an area in which religiosity that lies hidden from view can be found. Another one was to look at areas of conflict or the extraordinary when that helped to make normally implicit understandings explicit. Also, the combination of methods, such as Internet (re)search or “netnography” (Kozinets 2010) and in-depth interview in a case study, enabled me to make manifest religious practices that usually would not come to the surface.

In short, I tried to think out of the box. Rather than one standard method, such as the survey that has been common fare in most of the research on secularization, I used whatever method that would best improve my insight in the research problem at hand. For Mills the sociological imagination “sets off the social scientist from the mere technician”: “Since one can only be *trained* in what is already known, training sometimes incapacitates one from learning new ways” (Mills 2000: 221, 212). I greatly respect the use of time-proven robust methods, but I also believe that Mills has a point that for finding out things that are beyond their scope and new one has to be imaginative in one’s approach. I have, for example, been trying to find religion in unexpected places, such as in deathbed-decisions concerning organ donation in hospital by interpreting statistics or by looking in the churchyard rather than in the church.

I have used a wide range of sources, such as newspaper clippings, direct observations, literature, archival materials, the Internet, interviews, statistics, visual materials and material objects. Mills (2000: 215) also

deems it important to get a “comparative grip” on the material, which I have done to the best of my abilities for the sake of teasing out information or getting at more reliable findings. Thus far there has been far too little comparison in death studies, according to Walter (2008: 327). In my research, I have tried to take as little for granted as possible and the comparative method has been very helpful in this respect, shedding light on matters that otherwise might have remained hidden from view.

### **Outline of the thesis**

Chapter 2, ‘Deathbed decisions: religion and organ donation’ demonstrates that statistical evidence indicate that religious culture is an important factor in decisions on organ donation. It makes clear how religion is easily overlooked due to the hegemonic paradigm of secularization. This is further explored and argued in chapter 3, ‘The state of religion in Denmark: done?’ that critically engages with Zuckerman’s study. Chapter 4, ‘Grave matters: materializing the immaterial’, draws attention to the churchyards as places in which the bereaved find consolation. I further argue that their outlook might seem secular, but that it actually expresses Lutheran norms, seeking to prevent communication between the living and the dead. Chapter 5, ‘Grave visiting rituals as lived religion’, presents a detailed case study of the religious practices and understandings in a widow’s relationship with her deceased husband, as well as that of some other family members with him, over time. In chapter 6, ‘Still in the picture: photographs, graves and social time’, the uses of the technology of photography in staving off the social death of the deceased is probed from a comparative perspective. Finally, in the last chapter, follows a general conclusion.

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## CHAPTER 2

### DEATHBED DECISIONS: RELIGION AND ORGAN DONATION\*

#### Introduction

Transplantation technology has been celebrated as one of the great triumphs of medical science in the twentieth century due to its extraordinary capacity of transcending mortality and to extend the lives of people with fatally failing vital organs. The first successful organ transplantation with long-term functionality took place in the Nordic countries almost fifty years ago (Bundegaard 1999:17; Lötjönen et al. 2011:171 note 1). However, the ‘harvesting’ of the needed donor organs can—given the demand—hardly be seen as a successful endeavour (see Scheper-Hughes and Wacquant 2002). The Nordic countries, in particular, have relatively low organ donation rates compared to other West-European countries (see below). The resulting organ shortage means that people, despite of the availability of a well-developed medical technology, are still dying due to failing organs. For example, in 2012, in the Nordic countries 112 people died while waiting for an organ transplantation according to the Nordic organ exchange organization Scandia Transplant (Scandiatransplant n.d.). The organ donation rate is particularly low in Denmark and to resolve this problem especially two solutions have received attention. Both are followed in the other Nordic countries as well as in most other Western countries (Gelder et al. 2008), but in this chapter I will show that none of them are the panacea that they are often thought to be.

The first solution is to secure a bigger pool of potential donors by changing the legislation from informed consent to presumed consent, so all people automatically are agreed organ donors unless they have actively opted out. This change of legislation was, however, dismissed by the Danish Council of Ethics in 2008 (Danish Council of Ethics 2008).

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\* With minor changes this chapter has earlier appeared as: Kjærsgaard Markussen, Anne (2013). *Over the Limit: Religious Culture as a Hidden Factor in Negative Decisions on Organ Donation in the Protestant Nordic Countries*. In M. Hviid Jacobsen (ed.), *Deconstructing Death: Changing Culture of Death, Dying, Bereavement and Care in the Nordic Countries* (pp. 131-148). Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark.

The fact that it was discussed at all, and only rejected by a small majority, nevertheless indicates that it might be close to introduction in the Danish context also (Lötjönen et al. 2011). The second solution is to secure that the already existing pool of potential donors in intensive care units to a larger degree are detected and turned into actual donors by changes within the organization of the health care system and of the attitudes of the medical professionals. This is the path that has been followed thus far in Denmark with the establishment of the Danish Centre for Organ Donation in 2007, aiming “to optimize the use of the existing organ potential” (Dansk Center for Organ Donation 2009).

The problems of optimizing the system have become more than evident to the Danes due to a recent TV-documentary that I will further discuss in the next section. It showed how optimizing of the system can put not only the concept of informed consent at risk but even the dead-donor-rule. The broadcasting of the documentary resulted in intense public debate, where a lot of people claimed that they had lost their trust in the organ transplantation system. It is therefore feared that the organ donation rate will be affected negatively, and in this situation, it seems that the suggested change of legislation from informed consent to presumed consent could better have been adopted. This organ donation policy will therefore be my main focus in this chapter, but I will argue that this policy might not improve the Danish organ donation rates, as it has not done in the other Nordic Countries either. I will demonstrate in this chapter that what is keeping the rates down might very well be about much more profound things than legislation, namely about religion.

The data I have collated for fourteen West-European countries is highly indicative that difference in religious cultural background is a far more important factor with regard to the variation in organ donation rates than the different legislation systems. I thus show that countries with a Protestant background have lower organ donation rates than countries with a Catholic background. While research into organ donation has neglected the role of religion, this is not the case for research dealing with cremation that in more ways is comparable with organ donation. But as I will show the rates of cremation and organ donation surprisingly turn out to be inverse in relation to Protestant and Catholic background. Making use of this case I will move on to discuss the impact that different religious cultures actually have with regard to the choice for organ donation.

I argue that what holds back organ donation in Denmark and the other Nordic countries is their protestant legacy where death is understood as an absolute limit between the living and the dead that cannot be crossed. By arguing this, I am breaking new ground, as the influence of religion tends not to be considered at all and when finally considered, the focus has been on the fact that the religious experts and authorities within most religious groups today allow for organ donation. Religious resistance to organ donation is mainly seen as a problem in relation to some Jewish and Muslim groups rather than mainstream Christianity (e.g. Oliver et al. 2011; Randhwa et al. 2012). In the lived life of people things might, however, look very different from what they do when religious leaders and scholars reflect on it behind their desk. When sitting at the deathbed abstract reflections on for instance religious concepts of altruism might be of little importance. I suggest, that when decisions on organ donation in actual practice have to be made by relatives, the basic religious and culturally ingrained understandings of what death entails for the relation between the living and the dead, is of importance.

### **Optimizing the system or killing the donor**

Since 2007 Dansk Center for Organ Donation has worked for optimizing the system by seeking to increase the number of organ donors. The centre was established politically, having as its task to detect and agree a greater percentage of people qualifying as organ donors. In the beginning of 2011 national goals in the area were established by the Parliament, saying that it is not acceptable if Intensive Care Units in more than 5% of the cases overlook that a patient irreversible on the way to brain death. It was further stated as a goal that 80% of next of kin accept organ donation when asked for permission (Folketinget 2011). Dansk Center for Organ Donation monitors these goals. The unintended consequences of this policy of optimizing came to the fore in the mentioned recent documentary *Pigen der ikke ville dø* (*The Girl Who Would Not Die*) directed by Jacob Kragelund, produced by Danish national television (DR) and broadcasted in October 2012. However, the documentary itself does not link the story of the girl with the policy of optimizing organ donation.

The television audience witnessed how a couple was asked to agree with their 19-year old daughter Carina, the victim of a car accident,

being an organ donor. The next of kin had to be asked because Carina happened not to be registered in the donor register and the law in Denmark requires organ donation by informed consent. The doctor informed Carina's parents that she considered their daughter irreversibly on the way to the state of brain death. Hence, there was no hope that Carina would survive. She would inevitably die or be in a vegetative state at best. Furthermore, the family was told that the respirator would be turned off in case Carina would not become a donor. After they had considered the request, the camera recorded the parents giving the doctor the wanted affirmative answer. But when life-prolonging treatment was stopped, and Carina was only kept alive by artificial respiration to become an organ donor, things took an unexpected turn. She did not enter the state of brain death but rather survived in spite of the lack of supportive medical care. The viewers of the documentary see how she regains control over her body to an amazing degree. Thereafter, in due time, Carina is even able to live a relatively normal life again.

It is of course a history with a happy ending for Carina, but the documentary further investigates how the doctor could be so mistaken. A medical colleague criticizes the doctor for diagnosing the girl as irreversible on her way to brain death, taking into account only the signs that supported this prognosis to the neglect of all other signs. As a consequence of this Carina did not get the most optimal treatment and could possibly have been in an even better state today otherwise. Or to put it more explicit than the documentary does, the misdiagnosis means that Carina was treated as a donor although still alive and her treatment seems therefore to have been in conflict with the dead-donor rule, that says that only a dead person can become a donor.

The misdiagnosis is further explained in the documentary as an effect of the doctor being caught up in tunnel vision, but it is not investigated why it is the signs that points at brain death the doctor becomes too fixed upon and not the opposite signs. The presence of a camera waiting for an organ donation case to film could have affected her, it has been suggested in defence of the doctor. But this begs the question why the camera was allowed to be there in the first place, and here the answer is that it was expected to help turning more potential donors into actual donors. Why the tunnel vision pointed at brain death can also be related to the policy of optimizing in other ways not mentioned by the documen-

tary. The doctor is under influence of the goal of detecting more donors and of the constant monitoring of whether the goal is reached or not – that is exactly why the monitoring takes place. More over, detecting more potential donors in part means detecting them earlier and this raises the risk of misdiagnosis, because those who seem to be on their way to irreversible brain death do not necessarily reach the state.

Following upon the course of events Carina's parents stated that their trust in the doctors and in the transplantation system had been deeply shaken. They felt very bad afterwards about having given their consent to organ donation, and it seemed to them that they had been asked too early. And clearly, they had not been fully informed due to the early and therefore wrong diagnosis. But the documentary also showed that the concept of free and informed consent was not alone violated by lacking information but also by the indirect pressure that was put on the family. The doctor was in no way neutral in her dialog with the family about organ donation, instead she was trying to convince them in favour of it. After having described the prospects of the life that would expect Carina if she should survive very negatively, she delivers the moral judgement that "no one could wish such a life for her". The doctor in other words puts a moral pressure on the parents: they would be very bad parents if they would want the treatment to be continued, they would only give their daughter an unworthy life. This violation might again be related to that the doctor is under influence of the national goals of organ donation, namely to turn next of kin to saying yes.

The documentary was broadcasted on prime time national TV and was watched by no less than 1.4 million out of 5,6 million. An intense public debate followed the broadcasting and it made it clear that the shocking pictures had made many people lose their trust in the transplantation system. This led to a big fear of losing donors, but it is still much too early to say anything about the consequences over a longer term. But a backlash seems to be likely, as trust is easy to lose, but difficult to gain. The documentary suddenly did not serve the purpose of gaining more donors.

A lot of critique has been directed against the doctor in the public arena, but like in the documentary it has not been related to the optimizing of organ donation. It has not been asked why a doctor well versed in ethics (Dahlerup 1992) would go over the limit in this way. Instead she

has been made the scapegoat of a policy that stimulates and demands eagerness for organ donation and made it possible for the doctor to be caught up in a tunnel vision. In this way, it has been overlooked in the public debate that the Danish Parliament has sanctioned this policy of optimizing, that puts the dead-donor rule and the concept of informed consent under pressure.

Organ donation demands incredible high ethical standards of the medical professionals. Organ donation scandals like this have therefore been seen before, also in Denmark. In connection with the first organ donations in Denmark the nurses refused to take part in the work for a period because they experienced cases like Carina's (Bundegaard 1999). The dead-donor rule was meant to make this impossible, and in Denmark informed consent was also established by the influence of the protesting nurses as a handbrake in the system due to the bad experiences (Bundegaard 1999). The goals put up in the 2011 legislation has de facto abolished these handbrakes. The pressure of these goals puts the doctors in a very difficult situation and clearly the donors and their families too. And when the pressure results in scandal-cases like Carina's, it does not make things better for those in need of a new organ either like intended.

Would it then not have been better to formally have changed the legislation from informed consent to presumed consent as suggested, it would be reasonable to ask in this situation. This would not alone make more potential donors, it would seemingly also mean that the difficult situation that doctors and next of kin are put in now would disappear. Instead each individual would have to take responsibility and make the choice oneself and opt-out of the system if not wanting to become a donor. But as I will show now, this is also no quick-fix solution, the Protestant religious culture is in the way of it. To understand this, we will compare organ donation with cremation, but first it is necessary to understand what makes a comparison between cremation and organ donation relevant.

### **Post mortem body disposal practices and religion**

Both cremation and organ donation are relatively new post mortem body disposal practices and both came to be of real importance around the same point in time. Modern cremation emerged as a disposal practice in

the 1870s and 1880s but the cremation rates remained very low for a long period of time. It was not before 1968 that the United Kingdom became the first country in which 50% of the funerals were cremations. Next this cremation rate was also reached in two Nordic countries: Denmark, in 1976, and Sweden, in 1979 (Davies and Mates 2005). It was also in the late-1970s that organ transplantation grew to maturity as it altered from a research surgery to a life-saving treatment. This was mainly due to the advent of new immunosuppressive drugs that effectively hindered the rejection of the new organ. Pioneering work in the surgical technique of transplantation had already been done in the early 1900s, when also the problem of rejection had been identified. But while the operative skills were developed early, it still took a long time before the necessities for post-operative survival were understood and the problems resolved. Since that was finally achieved in the late 1970s, the main impediment to organ transplantation has been the lack of organ donors (Stiller et al. 2004).

Clearly, there are many differences between cremation and organ donation as two forms of post mortem body disposal. One of the most essential ones is that in the case of cremation, post mortem means cardiac death while in the case of organ donation, post mortem usually means brain death. In some cases, it is technically possible to use a cardiac-dead donor but it is normally avoided, as this kind of transplantation has much inferior outcomes than with a brain-dead donor (Stiller et al. 2004:1944). In fact, the cultural construction of brain death as a new death-criterion in the fluid limit between life and dead was deeply influenced by the need for heart-beating organ donors (Lock 2002a: 78-100) and is rather arbitrary (Birnbacher 2012).

However, in spite of the differences between cremation and organ donation there are also many important similarities that makes a comparison highly relevant, not least in trying to understand the relation between religion and the choice of different forms of bodily disposal. Both cremation and organ donation have been promoted by utilitarian arguments and often in a medical discourse in an area that has traditionally been shaped by a religious discourse, and as such the increase of cremation and organ donation can be seen as another chapter in the history of the secularization of death. Both can also be described as abrupt, mutilating and rapidly destroying forms of bodily disposal that have been criticised for



treating the body as a disposable thing or even as a commodity. This reification of the dead body can be seen as being in conflict with traditional Christian ideas about death, and this similarity between cremation and organ donation is what I will concentrate on here.

Offering the hope of eternal life beyond the grave, death is a central theme in the Christian religion of salvation. This hope builds upon early Christian testimonies about Jesus being raised from the dead and appearing physically to his disciples (Luke 24:39-40). From early on, it was expected that those who believed in him would also be bodily raised, because Christ was believed to be “the first-fruits of a whole harvest of the dead” (1 Corinthians 15:20). So in a traditional Christian understanding, the belief in resurrection came to mean that the body will return to life after death by God’s intervention. Consequently, the dead body is clearly not just a disposable thing among other things but of central importance for the transcendent personal identity, although Paul’s metaphor in 1 Corinthians 15 of the dead body that is sown as a seed, carries ideas of both continuity and change, as the corpse will raise again as a ‘spiritual body’.

The understanding of the ‘self’ as a psychosomatic unity that we find in the writings of the Jew Paul was challenged by the Hellenistic view of the body as distinct from or inferior to the soul. Therefore, the Christian resurrection-hope was from early on, in varying ways, combined with a belief in the immortality of the soul, but the central importance of the body remained unaltered. Consequently, Christians have from early on preferred not to annihilate the dead body by cremation. Instead, they have favoured earth burial, trying to preserve and protect the body while anticipating the resurrection. Therefore, the widespread use of cremation was increasingly abandoned after the establishment of Christian religion in the Roman Empire in the fifth century. Earth burial came to symbolize the burial of Christ and the final resurrection of the body (Jupp 2005; Love 2005). But the intactness of the dead body and earth burial was not seen as a necessary condition for salvation, though the spreading of the remains of dead bodies and the lack of burial contested the validity of the resurrection hope, as witnessed, for example, by discussions in primitive Christianity about what would happen to drowned people who were eaten by the fish of the ocean (Davis 2008).

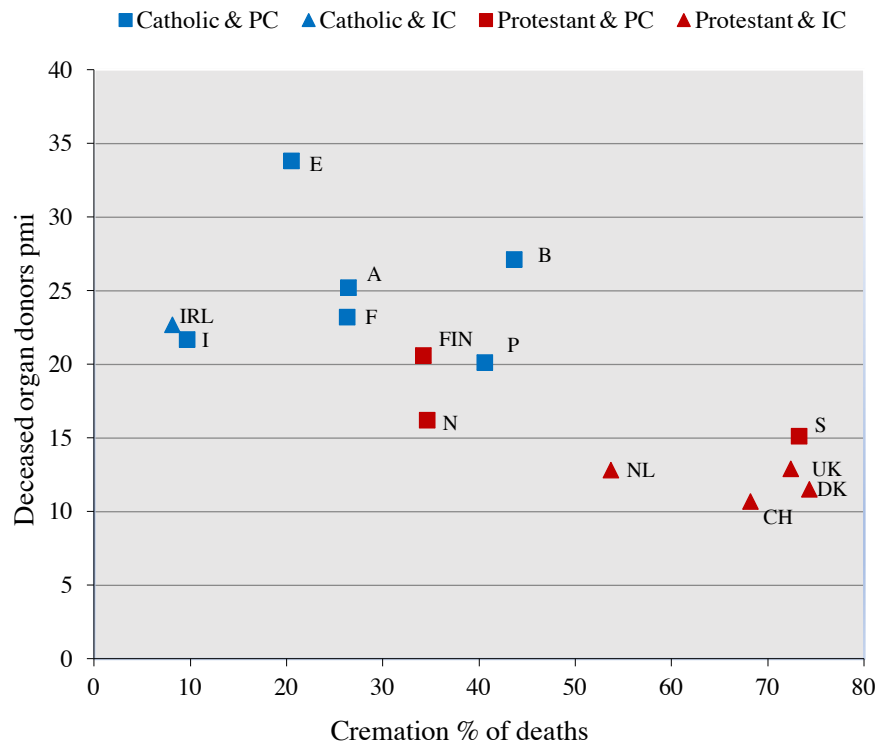
So there exists a close relationship between religious beliefs and the choice of different forms of bodily disposal. Attesting to this is also, that Jews and Muslims who share the belief in bodily resurrection with Christians, use earth burial too. Buddhists and Hindus on the other hand mostly prefer cremation as a funeral rite, subscribing to very different ideas about the dead body. Believing that the soul is finally released from the old body at the time of death and thereafter reincarnated anew, the 'self' is not linked to the body (Walter 1996: 109; Davies 2005: xviii-xix). Because of this close relation between religious beliefs and the choice of different forms of bodily disposal, it would be expected that the very same religious scruples or enthusiasm would be connected with cremation and organ donation as a consequence of their similar abrupt, mutilating and rapidly destroying form of bodily disposal. And this is also what Tony Walter has argued, saying that "if participation in the ritual of cremation resonates with certain beliefs and not with others, organ and body donation resonates with exactly the same beliefs" (Walter 1996: 115).

### **Cremation and religion**

Notwithstanding the traditionally strong connection between Christian beliefs and burial, modern cremation slowly started to spread again in Europe from the 1870s and 1880s onwards. But cremation has had a very different degree of prevalence from country to country. As research dealing with the shift from burial to cremation has often pointed out, Western European countries with a Protestant background are generally having the highest rates and Catholic countries the lowest (Davies 2005: xxi; Walter 1996: 106-109; Worpole 2003: 161-163). This pattern is clearly confirmed by Figure 1 showing cremation rates in relation to organ donation rates per million inhabitants (pmi) for fourteen Western European countries in 2006, and also stipulates whether a country remained predominantly Catholic after the Reformation or became predominantly Protestant (see Knippenberg 2007), and what type of organ donation legislation a country has (Abadie and Gay 2006: 617-619). The countries chosen for the sample are all Western European, while European countries under former communist rule are left out, because the role of religion is expected to be blurred as a result of the atheist agenda of com-

munism.<sup>1</sup> The year 2006 is the last year for which these data were available for all fourteen selected countries at the time of research.

*Figure 1. Organ donation and cremation rates in relation to type of organ donation legislation and dominant religion 2006*



*Abbreviations:*

IC: informed consent, PC: presumed consent.

A: Austria, B: Belgium, CH: Switzerland, DK: Denmark, E: Spain, F: France, FIN: Finland, I: Italy, IRL: Ireland, N: Norway, NL: The Netherlands, P: Portugal, S: Sweden, UK: United Kingdom.

*Sources:*

Cremation Society of Great Britain (2007), *Newsletter Transplant* (2007), Abadie and Gay (2006: 617-619).

Concentrating only on the cremation rates for now, Figure 1 shows the absolute highest cremation rates for Denmark, Sweden, United Kingdom and Switzerland followed by the Netherlands that all have a predominantly Protestant background respectively. And from the other end of the scale we find Catholic Ireland and Italy with the absolute lowest rates followed by also Catholic Spain, France and Austria. Though there are some exceptions from the general pattern in the middle range, as Protestant Norway and Finland have lower rates than Catholic Belgium and Portugal, it seems that cremation in general resonates well with Protestant belief, but not so well with Catholic beliefs.<sup>2</sup>

What in a decisive way has paved the way for cremation in Protestant countries, despite the traditional strong connection between Christian beliefs and burial, can be summed up as the Protestant split between the living and dead, and between body and soul. The first split was a consequence of the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone – no one else could intercede with God for a human being, whether living or dead. This was against the theology of death developed mainly since the High Middle Ages in the Roman Catholic Church. It was based upon the doctrine of Purgatory as a transitional state, a phase the deceased could be helped through by mass, prayers and indulgences, offered by the Church. But in the new Protestant theology, the dead were placed beyond the prayers of the living; it was God alone who dealt with the soul of the departed. This new theology of death brought about profound changes in death culture from the sixteenth century onwards in the Protestant countries, and as has often been pointed out this led to a spiritual separation of the living from the dead. Funeral rituals also reflected this new theology. Whereas previously the main function of the funeral had been to pray for the deceased, now its purpose was to instruct the living in the gospel and to refer to the honour the deceased had brought to their family. So while death in the Catholic context was a process the deceased could be helped through by the Church and the bereaved, it became a final split between the living and the dead in the Protestant context (Kosolofsky 2000), a limit that could not be crossed. Douglas J. Davies has seen this split as leading the way for cremation as an abrupt and rapidly destroying form of bodily disposal as it “provided a pre-adaption for the kind of sharp division between possessing a bond with the buried relative and having that removed by cremation” (Davies 2005: xxi).

What did not change with the Reformation was the belief in bodily resurrection. But with the advent of modern science and the Enlightenment the belief in resurrection was challenged, and during the nineteenth and twentieth century it became increasingly common for Protestant Christians to ‘spiritualize’ their belief in the resurrection of the body. Belief in the immortality of the soul now played a much more prominent role, and increasingly only the soul was seen as of fundamental importance for the ‘self’ to survive bodily death. And with this split between body and soul, dead bodies lost their importance. Moreover, increasing importance was given by liberal theologians on the eternal life as something here and now, and not as something on the other side of the grave (Rubow and Johannesen-Henry 2010: 140-141). In other words, the dead body became more like a disposable thing in the Protestant context, and as such it could be cremated. The total annihilation of the body through cremation no longer posed a threat, but might indeed be seen as clarifying the view that the immortal soul has been released to a new life, or that death might be the end (Badham 2005: 375-376; Walter 1996: 109-115).

The Catholic Church, on the other hand, forbid cremation, holding on to the traditional literal understanding of resurrection (Phan 2008). In 1886 a ban was placed upon cremation that deprived Catholics of a funeral with Christian rites if they wanted to be cremated and also forbade them the last sacraments. The ban lasted until 1963 when more liberal attitudes surfaced in the Catholic Church at the time of the Second Vatican Council, but still it was explicated that burial was most preferable (Jupp 2006: 70-71, 165-167; Morris 1992: 35-36).

### **Organ donation, legislation and religion**

Following Tony Walter’s line of argument (1996: 115), it could be expected that the very same religious scruples or enthusiasm would be connected with both cremation and organ donation as a consequence of their similar abrupt, mutilating and rapidly destroying form of bodily disposal. But clearly, this is not confirmed in Figure 1. Instead of an identical pattern, with both high rates of cremation and organ donation in Protestant countries, and both low rates of cremation and organ donation rates in Catholic countries, what is surprisingly found is an inverse pattern. Actu-

ally, the five Protestant countries that have the *highest* cremation rates also have the *lowest* organ donation rates, although in a bit different order. As Figure 1 shows, the lowest organ donation rates are to be found in Switzerland, Denmark, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Sweden, but this time sharply followed by Norway. Finland again differs from the general picture of the Protestant countries, as it is the only Protestant country with an organ donation rate higher than 20 per million inhabitants (pmi). Held up against this, all Catholic countries in the sample have an organ donation rate over 20 pmi. Here we find Catholic Spain at the very highest end of the scale with its spectacular 33,8 pmi, followed by a large group of Catholic countries with organ donation rates in the twenties: Belgium, Austria, France, Ireland, Italy and Portugal.

Taken separately the rates for cremation and organ donation both strongly indicate that there is a connection between religion and the two distinct forms of body disposal. But because the rates turn out to be inverse instead of identical when compared, it seems hard to maintain that these “resonate[s] with exactly the same beliefs”, as Tony Walter (1996:115) argues. This raises the question: Did we get it wrong? Could it be that the rates that seem to be highly dependent on the difference in religious background are reflecting other factors than religion? In the case of organ donation there are in fact good reasons indeed to consider the role of legislation.

Basically, there are two kinds of legislative systems regulating consent for organ donation. One is the *informed consent system* (IC) (or explicit consent system) in which only those who have ‘opted-in’ themselves can become donors. And the other is the *presumed consent system* (PC) in which everybody is a potential donor, because no consent is required from the donor. But the rights concerning the body are not excluded from this system either for it remains possible to ‘opt-out’ (Copen et al. 2008). If we take a look once again at the organ donation rates and compare them with the two kinds of legislation system mentioned, it becomes very clear that the countries with the highest rates generally have presumed consent, while countries with the lowest rates generally have informed consent. All the countries in the sample with an organ donation rate higher than 20 pmi have PC-legislation, except for Ireland; and all countries with organ donation lower than 20 pmi have IC-legislation, except for Norway and Sweden.

That presumed consent leads to higher donation rates is also exactly what several studies have claimed to prove (Abadie and Gay 2006; Gimpel et al. 2003; Kittur et al. 1991). This finding has received much positive attention in the public debate in countries with IC-legislation and low organ donation rates, such as Denmark (Danish Council of Ethics 2008). But the contention is actually debated in the literature, and here I want to draw attention to two points. First of all, it has been pointed out that the difference between the two forms of legislation is not as big as it seems at first sight. This is not in the least due to the role of the next of kin in case no decision of the deceased as regards organ donation has been recorded, which is most often the case in all countries. In an IC-system the next of kin *must* be asked for consent in this situation, but generally the next of kin will also be consulted in a PC-system in this situation (Gevers, Janssen and Friele 2004). Clearly, it is nowhere acceptable to force an organ donation through against the wishes of the surviving relatives. So in effect there is in most cases no real difference between the two legislative systems. They are both highly dependent on the attitudes towards organ donation of the next of kin. Secondly, it has been argued that what a low organ donation rate might reflect more than anything else is an effective traffic policy and hospital policy making the pool of potential donors smaller than in countries with less effective policies in these areas (Cameron and Forsythe 2001: 71). Therefore, using the number of donors pmi does not produce a valid comparison. In a study by Remco Coppen et al. (2008) this is solved by comparing the conversion of people who have died from a traffic accident or a Cerebral Vascular Accident (CVA) into effectuated donors, as 80% of all donors come from this group. And in this more valid comparison between organ donation efficiency rates they are “finding no evidence that presumed consent systems performed any better than explicit consent systems” (Coppen et al. 2008: 235).

What I also find very noteworthy in the study of Coppen et al. (2008) is a finding to which they give no attention themselves. Exactly the same pattern in relation to religion is visible in this more valid comparison between organ donation efficiency rates as the one I found when doing the cruder comparison between the numbers of organ donations in pmi on the basis of the data in Figure 1. In both comparisons, the Protestant countries tend to have the lowest rates and the Catholic ones

the highest rates. Unfortunately, only a sample of eight countries in Western Europe is used in the study of Coppen et al. (2008), but these limited data seem to strongly indicate that the factor religion in some way influences organ donation.

The Protestant countries in the sample of Coppen et al. (2008) are Sweden, United Kingdom, Switzerland and the Netherlands, and here Sweden is a particularly interesting case, because Sweden changed from IC- to PC-legislation in 1996. But Coppen et al. (2008) find that the introduction of a new consent system in Sweden (and in three other countries in their sample) have been “without (visible) long-term effects” (Coppen et al. 2008: 235; see also Bäckman et al. 2002: 2560). The low number of organ donation pmi for Sweden in Figure 1 also gives a crude indication of this. But as already mentioned, Sweden is not the only country with PC-legislation but low organ donation rates in Figure 1. This is also the case for Norway that just like Sweden is also characterized by being Protestant. Catholic Ireland on the other hand has IC-legislation, but nevertheless Figure 1 shows a relatively high organ donation rate. Consequently, it seems that it is not due to IC-legislation that countries have low organ donation rates, but rather that it has to do with their Protestant cultural background. And it seems that it is not due to PC-legislation that countries have high organ donation rates, but that it has to do instead with their Catholic background. Again, the data, though crude, seem to strongly indicate that the factor religion in some way influences organ donation rates.

But if the differences in organ donation rates are better related to religion than to legislation, we are back to where we started. We still have to explain why cremation is so easily chosen in Protestant countries while organ donation is not – although they are both abrupt, mutilating and rapidly destroying form of bodily disposal, which reveals the body as a disposable thing, and why we find exactly the inverse paradox in the Catholic countries. In other words, we have to explain why the *inverse* rates and not the identical rates of cremation and organ donation “resonate[s] with exactly the same beliefs” (Walter 1996: 115).

On these questions there is not much help to be found in the literature discussing the reasons for the varying organ donation rates, as the role of different religious cultures in Europe is not much debated. It seems as if the question is left out because most religions do not formally



forbid organ donation (Bruzzone 2008: 1664-1667). As such, it is symptomatic when, for example, Stuart Cameron and John Forsythe stated that “donation (...) is a complex act involving both medical, social, cultural, ethical and legal issues” (Cameron and Forsythe 2001: 69) leaving out religion. And though Cameron here points out that different organ donation rates must be understood and explained in a broad context, the literature in general tends to concentrate on the role of legislation. This focus might be more convenient for policy makers who wish to improve organ donation rates, as legislation is much easier to change than social, cultural, ethical or religious issues.

In discussing the reason for the existence of two different legislation systems, a possible relation to religion has been pointed out, though. As PC-legislation is most common in Catholic countries, it has been related to a traditionally stronger Catholic emphasis on the citizens’ duty to the state, and as IC-legislation is most common in Protestant countries, it has been related to a stronger Protestant emphasis on individual rights (Cohen and Wight 1999: 985-990). This can possibly explain why PC-legislation is without effect in Protestant countries like Sweden and Norway and why IC-legislation does not affect the organ donation rate in Ireland: The choice of organ donation is framed by different religiously based values about the relation between the individual and society, that are much more fundamental than legislation and therefore determine the efficiency of legislation.

However, it seems to me that the differing organ donation rates could also be related to religion in another way and more specifically to the different religious cultural understandings of death as spelled out in the cremation case. Therefore, it can be argued that what promotes cremation in a Protestant context is exactly what hinders organ donation, and vice versa in a Catholic context, and thereby explained how the *inverse* rates of cremation and organ donation “resonate[s] with exactly the same beliefs”.

Two factors in relation to organ donation that I have already drawn attention to now become important. First of all, no matter what kind of legislation a country has, next of kin generally have a vital role for the organ donation decision. But as the cremation-case showed, the understanding of death that frames this decision might very well be completely different for a family living in Spain, with a cultural understand-

ing of death based upon a Catholic tradition, than it will be for a family living in Denmark due to its national culture's Protestant legacy.

Here it seems that the split between body and soul would ease a decision about donation in Protestant Denmark, so that the body post mortem could be disposed of and recycled like a thing in an abrupt and destroying way. But that is where the second factor becomes of importance. When the families have to make their decision about organ donation post mortem, their beloved one is (in general) brain-dead, but not cardiac-dead. And in this condition the family often experiences their family member as still being alive, while medically declared dead, as anthropological studies by Margaret Lock (2002a, 2002b) have shown. The body is not experienced as a thing among other things.<sup>3</sup> And this is even often the case for many nurses and doctors, who have received their professional training on the basis of the Cartesian split between body and mind (Lock 2002a). So in this way the families, who have to make the very difficult decision, are clearly placed in a very difficult and unbearable situation – whether having a Protestant cultural background or not.

But the different Catholic and Protestant understandings of death might very well be of importance with regard to the situation in another way. In Catholic culture death is seen as a process, therefore a good-bye before turning off the respirator is not the last thing one can do for the dead. In Protestant culture, on the other hand, death entails a definitive and final split between the living and dead: there is nothing more to be said to or done for the dead. Therefore, turning off the respirator is most likely a choice that is emotionally much harder to make in this situation, as the abrupt and rapid destruction of the body implicated in organ donation seems to emphasize the harsh finality of death in Protestant culture. So saying yes to organ donation might not at all be the same thing for families in these two different contexts. Due to the cultural understanding of death based on a Catholic tradition a family in Spain seems to have tools to cope with and accept organ donation that Danes like myself do not due to our culture's Protestant legacy with its hard finality of death.<sup>4</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Taking the factor of religious culture into account in this chapter I have shown that the rates for cremation and for organ donation are inverse.

That is to say, Protestant countries in Western Europe have the highest cremation rates but the lowest organ donation rates, while the opposite is also true for the Catholic countries. This is not what was to be expected as cremation and organ donation can both be seen as abrupt, mutilating and rapidly destroying forms of bodily disposal with the same religious implications. I suggested that the high Protestant cremation rates should be understood in relation to the Protestant split between the living and dead, and between body and soul. Furthermore, I considered whether the low organ donation rates in Protestant countries could be connected with the widespread informed-consent legislation, and whether the higher organ donation rates in Catholic countries could be connected with the widespread presumed-consent legislation in these countries. Criticising the views attributing the difference to legislation I made clear that the data are highly indicative that organ donation rates happen to be influenced by a difference in religious culture instead. The quantitative data used, however, are limited and somewhat crude, so further studies would be needed to establish this point with greater certainty.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, I have suggested how the different impact of religious cultural background on organ donation rates can be explained: A Protestant cultural understanding of death as a definite break between the living and the dead most likely influences decisions by the next of kin negatively, while a Catholic cultural understanding of death allowing for a continuing relationship most likely eases the choice for organ donation. In a further investigation of this it could be considered whether a positive Catholic coping with organ donation could also be connected with a theological tradition that enables to transform a meaningless loss into a sacrifice of religious significance. But most of all qualitative data is needed to demonstrate that families at the deathbed of potential donors in respectively Protestant and Catholic contexts actually do think and feel as hypothesised.

As mentioned, presumed consent does in actual practice generally not mean the avoidance of getting the consent from the family as a prerequisite for donation. It is therefore immensely important that the dialogue with the family is truly open and that they feel their decision can be made in a free and informed way, so that the trust in the medical system is kept intact. To ascertain this, the main focus has hitherto been on making people understand and accept the medical definition of brain

death. This was also how the Danish medical world responded in trying to control the damage after the broadcasting of the documentary on Carina. The medical world, however, must also understand and accept that the understanding of death by average people has been shaped by religious culture. Such cultural understandings are deeply ingrained, no matter whether people are still practising their religion or not, and it might have to be accepted that there are no quick-fix solutions to the shortage of organ donors.

To accept the role of religion might be difficult in a medical system based on the secularized worldview of modern science. It could also be argued that religion is a disappearing phenomenon to the patients and their next of kin in alignment with those who claim Europe to be the most secularized part of the world. But religious worldviews do in fact still play an important role in people's understandings. For example, when Carina's father is told by the doctor that his daughter is irreversibly dying, he asks: "Is there not the slightest little hope for a miracle?" In the Nordic countries, the way we attribute meaning to – and cope more or less well with – the hard fact of death is based on Protestantism. This cultural legacy colours our understandings and affects our emotions, even if people do not attend church or explicitly subscribe to the traditional teachings of Lutheranism any longer.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, Germany comprising the former communist DDR is also left out of the sample. Furthermore, the West-European countries Iceland and Luxemburg are not included due to their very small populations.

<sup>2</sup>Ian Morris writes that in a special non-Catholic cemetery in Rome used by foreign Protestants "inhumation is still overwhelmingly dominant" like in the rest of Catholic Italy. These non-Catholics "continue to assimilate themselves to the local tradition, as do the Catholics in cremating countries" (Morris 1992:36). It thus seems to matter if a country has a predominantly Protestant or Catholic tradition, and such countries can be indicated as a 'Protestant' and a 'Catholic' country respectively.

<sup>3</sup>"The possibility that the deceased body continues to experience something is common cross-culturally whether it is a vague and uneasy feeling or an accepted certainty", according to Bilinda Straight (2006:103). Frequently, people behave in that way towards the newly dead, because they are still in a limbo between the living and the dead, not yet being defined as being dead in a social sense. Hence, their bodies are handled

and they are spoken to as if they were still alive or at least are undead (see Straight 2006).

<sup>4</sup>The Protestant problem of the harsh finality of dead can also be witnessed in reiterated bans on intercession in Protestant countries after the Reformation. In Denmark, for example, Peder Palladius, a first generation bishop after the Reformation, underlines in his visitation book that people should not visit the churchyard to pray for their dead parents but do so to remember that they shall die themselves (Lausten 2003).

<sup>5</sup>Krill (2014) confirms my finding for the years 2006-2012.

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## CHAPTER 3

### **THE STATE OF RELIGION IN DENMARK: DONE?\***

#### **Belonging without believing?**

Denmark is considered one of the most secularized countries in the world, but at the same time the majority of the population happens to be a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. What is more, most Danes opt for a religious funeral and their ashes or corpses are buried in graveyards that are owned and maintained by the church. The case of Denmark exemplifies the Scandinavian paradox (Lüchau 2010: 181,193): the puzzling situation that low rates of church attendance and professed beliefs go hand-in-hand with high rates of church membership and ecclesiastical rites of passage. Riis (1994) has termed this situation as “belonging without believing”, contrasting it with Davie’s (1994) description of the situation in Britain as “believing without belonging”. However, it is hard to understand why 79% of the Danish population would keep adhering to organized denominational religion (Kirkestatistik 2013) when they have lost their faith. So is it really the case that the Danes are “belonging without believing” or is something else going on?

The answer to this question depends on how religion is defined. In his recent study of the state of religiosity in Denmark, *Society without God*, American sociologist Phil Zuckerman (2008) concludes that the many Danes he interviewed do not believe in God, an afterlife, and so forth. One of his informants, however, makes the point that he uses “a very traditional concept of what religion is” (Zuckerman 2008: 142). The question is if people’s religiosity is captured by a literal belief of what is written in the Bible. Stringer (2008a, 2008b) has challenged the traditional definitions of religion on the basis of ethnographic research into religious practices in England. Also McGuire (2008) considers the scholarly understandings of religion inadequate because these follow the ten-

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\* This chapter has earlier appeared as: Kjærsgaard Markussen, Anne (2013). Death and the state of religion in Denmark: Believing, belonging and doing. In: E. Venbrux, T. Quartier, C. Venhorst and B. Mathijssen (eds), *Changing European Death Ways* (Death Studies. Nijmegen Studies in Thanatology, Bd. 1) (pp. 165-187). Münster: LIT Verlag.

ets of institutional religion and fail to come to grasp with how religion is lived in people's everyday lives. Zuckerman states that the answers he got from Danes and Swedes who called themselves Christians "were almost never theologically based" (2008: 157). The theology Zuckerman is referring to concerns the literal reading of the Bible by certain conservative American Christians. Therefore, one wonders if it is fair to use these notions as the yardstick for the (ir)religiousness of Danes. Some of the replies of his informants, as I will show, are perfectly in line with contemporary Lutheran theology. And as Bruce—one of the strongest defenders of secularization theory—has noted, it is also the case that "Western Europe's Protestant churches [. . .] have become markedly more liberal" (2011: 13). In this chapter I will contrast the approach by Zuckerman with the one by Stringer in considering the paradox mentioned above.

To unravel what is going on in terms of people's religiosity in the state of Denmark a mere definition of religion will not suffice. "Our problem," as Geertz (1968: 1) puts it, "is not to define religion but to find it." There are too many definitions of religion already; more pressing has become the issue where religion is located. It might be inside as well as outside the churches. Theorists of religion have since long emphasized the close connection between death and religion. Our inability to accept our own mortality would be the main source of religion (Malinowski 1925: 49; May 1972). Zuckerman, however, maintains that "millions of Danes and Swedes [. . .] are able to live their lives perfectly well without any great fear of, or worry about, the Grim Reaper" (2008: 4). When actually confronted with death, I contend, the situation might be different. Moreover, it is likely that notions of religiosity can be detected in their mortuary behaviour (Stringer 2008b). Zuckerman (2008) confines himself to what people said about their beliefs and he fails to consider their actual practices in dealing with death.

There is no greater threat to existential security than death; this in spite of all the security the welfare state is offering the Danes. One of the explanations for the low level of religiosity, cited by Zuckerman (2008: 113-115), has to do with the high degree of security (see Norris and Inglehart 2004). Yet in the face of death, people may still feel the need to transcend death in one way or another. And how does this, or the lack of religiosity in Zuckerman's view for that matter, relate to the squarely

“religious model” of funerals (Walter 2005) in Denmark? The disposal of the dead is firmly in the hands of the Lutheran Church. The frameworks of the national church and the welfare state thus have to be taken into account in understanding what is going on. First, however, we need to take a critical look at secularization theory. Does modernity indeed sound the death-knell of religion?

### **Secularization of death**

The more modern a society becomes, the less religious it will be - that is the main message of the secularization theory. The idea that the processes of modernization inevitably lead to a disenchantment of the world was formulated by the founding fathers of sociology in the late nineteenth century (Casanova 1994: 17). Its influence is still strongly felt in the way stories about modernity are told. To be modern is equated with not being religious, according to Casanova (1994), to the extent that people deny having anything to do with religion in order to pass as modern. Ironically, to tell the story of the decline of religion death metaphors are most prevalent in secularization theories (Dutton 2008). In these theories the “death” of religion extends to the secularization of death. Modern death becomes secularized death. Likewise, the general outline of narratives on the history of death highlight a development from traditional to modern death in which the church gradually loses control (Ariès 1981).

This script concerning the secularization of death is followed whether this development is celebrated or deplored. The idea of secularization is now taken so much for granted that it is common to speak about a “post-secularized” death rather than a secularized death. In other words, a phase of secularization is implicitly accepted as a fact even by authors who oppose secularization theory. Religion is almost automatically considered something of the distant past in late- or post-modernity. However, the secularization theory has been exposed to such a fierce criticism since the late 1990s that even Peter Berger, one of the leading scholars, has agreed that the empirical findings do not fit with the theory (1999). On the basis of this critique I would argue that the understanding of modern death has to be re-evaluated. The point is that the secularization of death is not a necessary concomitant to moderniza-

tion in Europe for religion often still plays a very important but overseen role in relation to death.

One of the main results of the fierce debates over secularization theory has been that hardly any sociologist stakes out the claim of a secularizing U.S.A. any longer. From a general applicable theory secularization theory has been revised to a theory that predominantly deals with Europe only. For other scholars this does not go far enough. They are in favour of a more severe revision of the theory, one that leaves room for a much broader definition of religiosity. The first group of sociologists holds that religion is in decline in Europe, while the second group argues that it is not in decline but changing its form, becoming more individualized and less institutional (see Chapter 1). At stake in the continuing debate on the theory of secularization is, therefore, actually the nature of religion in Europe. Claiming that death is not secularized in Europe thus happens not only to be controversial with regard to the conventional history of death but also in terms of the ongoing debate over secularization theory.

Most of the sociologists who hold that secularization theory still accurately conveys the state of affairs in Europe consider Denmark one of its most secularized countries. In *Society without God* the aforementioned Zuckerman introduces Denmark and Sweden “as probably the least religious countries in the world, and possibly in the history of the world” (2008: 2). What makes his book (with the telling title *Society without God*) particularly of interest here is that Zuckerman seeks to demonstrate the exceptional level of secularization in these countries by providing evidence that death is understood in a secular way. Further below I deal with the question of whether his interpretation of the evidence is accurate or not. At issue is also if statements of informants, often reluctantly given, provide adequate evidence and suffice to make his point. My main point of critique is that Zuckerman omits obviously religious elements from his description. He focuses on the seemingly secularized attitudes and beliefs in relation to death and does hardly pay any attention to the religious practices that surround it. Nowhere in his ethnography are observations of religious practices or indications that Zuckerman attended religious services, baptisms, confirmations, weddings or funerals. He neither mentions having visited churches or graveyards. Had he done so, his findings might have contradicted his argu-

ment. Zuckerman focuses on convictions or beliefs, where we should focus on practices or 'lived religion'.

As a matter of fact the common Danish practices of bodily disposal are intimately linked to institutional religion. The involvement of the church in the business of cremation—owning two thirds of the crematoria—is a case in point. One would expect the secular welfare state to provide care for its citizens from the cradle to the grave. But in allegedly secular Denmark the grave *is* in the religious domain. The country has predominantly what Walter (2005) calls a religious model of funeral organization rather than a (non-religious) municipal or private one. The bodies or ashes of the deceased by law have to be put in church-run graveyards, they are “effectively owned by the cemetery” (Walter 2005: 181): the dead, in effect, happen to be property of the church. The welfare state has relegated the task of taking care of the funerals and the graves of the Danes to organized religion.

Zuckerman, as mentioned, says that Denmark and Sweden are most likely “the least religious countries in the world, and possibly in world history.” Yet if Denmark is a champion of secularization, why is it that the great majority of Danes – 87% (Kirkestatistik 2012) opt for a religious funeral? It can hardly be maintained that secularized death is a reality in Denmark. Perhaps we could even better talk about a sacralization of death when we look at the funeral in historical perspective. Hölscher (2004) has shown how religious funerals did often not take place in Protestant Germany until the middle of the nineteenth century and how this situation had radically changed by the middle of the next century where almost all had a religious funeral. In Denmark the funerals in the same period moved from the churchyard into the church, until then that had only been a practice for the privileged and prosperous (Kragh 2003).

In arguing for a secularized death Zuckerman, however, examines people's beliefs, that is, their answers to particular questions he puts to them. When contemporary Lutheran theology is taken into account some of these answers are not as telling about secularization as Zuckerman believes. I will make this point further below. Zuckerman also cites the results from international comparative surveys to support his position “that when it comes to the acceptance of various religious beliefs, as well as church attendance, the nations of Denmark and Sweden are among the

least religious in the world” (2008: 25). Again, it is a matter of interpretation. One might question “the acceptance of various religious beliefs”: whose beliefs actually? And also the use of “church attendance” as an indicator of religiosity, which in the Danish case is misleading: church attendance is admittedly very low but within a Lutheran understanding it is the inner conviction that is of primary importance, not outer deeds. This is expressed in the Danish saying that “it is better to sit in the inn and think of God, than to sit in the church and think of beer” (Lindhardt 2004: 76).

Although with regard to beliefs an “internal secularization” (Bruce 2011: 13) might have taken place in institutional religion, religious beliefs and practices need not necessarily to be confined to the normative Lutheran creed and Church practice. Stringer (2008a), for instance, suggests for the U.K. that talking to the dead (at the graveside or in domestic spaces) is a fairly widespread practice amongst common members of the church as well as the religiously unaffiliated. He argues it is part and parcel of a fundamental layer of religion that must have been always there, irrespective of people’s adherence to institutional religion, but is more clearly revealed as a result of present de-institutionalization of religion. This layer, according to Stringer, contains the following elements: “the situational, unsystematic nature of belief; an intimate association with the non-empirical; and an attempt to respond to pragmatic questions concerned with daily life and coping with everyday problems” (2008a: 108).

Stringer’s perspective differs considerably from the one of Zuckerman (who sticks to the idea of theologically defined concepts), but actually describes the situation Zuckerman (2008: 150-151) encountered in Denmark better. Drawing on Stringer (2008a,b) I will side with those in the secularization debate who argue for the need of a broader understanding of religion. A practice such as talking to the (non-empirical) dead may be included, but it would mean that the supposed secularization of death would have to be re-evaluated. When death is not secularized in Denmark, there is good reason to question the issue of secularization in general. It is an excellent test case, because many sociologists (including Zuckerman) consider Denmark one of the most secularized countries in the world.

**Religious trappings: Beliefs and practices**

During his fourteen months' sojourn in Denmark Zuckerman (2008: 185-187) conducted 110 formal interviews with Danes and 39 with Swedes. He relies on traditional concepts of Christian beliefs, fitting with the often and publicly professed creed of American Christians, to make his assessment of religiosity in Denmark. Zuckerman writes, "nearly all the people I interviewed in Denmark and Sweden answered 'yes' when I asked them if they were a Christian. And yet, when I asked what that meant to them, the answers were almost never theologically based" (Zuckerman 2008: 157). That is to say, "the redeeming blood of Jesus, the Virgin Birth, or heaven and hell, or 'justification by faith', or the Book of Revelation—these things are marginal if not downright absent from their subjective experience of what it means to be Christian" (Zuckerman 2008: 151). And it means that they do not believe in the "literal, punishing, vengeful, merciful, or forgiving God of the Bible" (Zuckerman 2008: 7), take the Bible literally, and unambiguously believe in an afterlife (Zuckerman 2008: *passim*). In this way, so it seems, Zuckerman can demonstrate to conservative American Christians (who would endorse these notions) that the Danes are not religious. A major goal of his book namely is to make clear that a godless society is not necessarily "a hell on earth" (Zuckerman 2008: 4) as they claim, but can be something quite to the contrary.

So far so good, but it would also mean that the predominantly Lutheran Danes would have to be more pious than the Pope. As Bruce (2011: 14) notes, "Across almost all strands of Christianity there has been a significant decline in doctrinal orthodoxy, a shift in focus from the next world to this one, and a weakening of the ties of obedience." He has the following to say with regard to Protestantism:

Few Protestants now believe that the Bible is the revealed Word of God, that Christ really was the Son of God, that God created the world in six days, that the Bible miracles really happened, that there is an actual heaven and hell, and so on. Rather, the basic Christian ideas have been internalized and psychologized. Evil and sin have been turned into alienation and unhappiness. The vengeful God has been replaced by Christ the Big-brother or Christ the therapist. The purpose of religion is no longer to glorify God: it is to help find peace of mind and personal satisfaction (Bruce 2011: 13).



Admittedly, Bruce considers it a watering down of religion, but Zuckerman claims that what his informants told him was “almost never theologically based”. In the particular case of Denmark, we would have to consider contemporary Lutheran theology to see if that claim holds water. Bruce and Zuckerman take Orthodox Protestantism as their normative standard or reference point. By doing so they overlook the type of liberal Protestantism one finds in Denmark. (The development of this liberal, unorthodox type of belief is very much comparable to what happened among Dutch Catholics, see Nissen 2012).

Important to note is the Protestant conviction that, as one of Zuckerman’s informants puts it, “it’s not about the human being trying to reach God, it’s about God reaching down to the human being” (Zuckerman 2008: 131). In other words, God decides to accord his grace to people, reach out to them. And if God does so, they are blessed, they themselves will do good, out of love. Or as Luther (1520) put it “good works do not make a man good, but a good man does good work”. Contrary to Calvinism that emphasizes the majesty of God and therefore fear of God, Lutheranism is characterized by a strong confidence in the love of God. This might also explain why Danes have much confidence in each other as well as their ongoing support of their universal welfare state.

Due to the Reformation believing came to be understood as an inward conviction (Ruel 2002), a matter of the individual’s conscience, rather than the outward show and collective slogans Zuckerman is erroneously looking for when he for instance focuses on church attendance. Instead the relationship with, and understanding of, God is a very personal and private matter. Consequently, Johanne, another of Zuckerman’s informants, replies to the question “Do you believe in God?": “It’s none of your business” (Zuckerman 2008: 142). Zuckerman frequently was met with reluctance, people did not want to speak about these matters with him. He jumps to the conclusion that they do not believe in God, while people’s relationship with God might be one that is more intricate and sacred than the simple, literal view that Zuckerman wants to hear. The phrase “believe in God”, Stringer (2008a: 42, referring to Southwald) makes clear, has a different meaning than to “believe that God exists”: it means “to put one’s trust in God, to have faith in God, not to make any special reference to God’s existence or the nature of that existence. To believe in God is to take God as an assumption, a starting point,

and move forward from that point.” No wonder that Zuckerman (2008), who is looking for definitive answers, ends up with the idea of a “society without God”, as he titled his book.

Likewise, Zuckerman’s informants make clear they can say little about life after death. Because for Lutherans the fate after death is exclusively a matter of the personal relationship with God of the person in question, theologically speaking it cannot be influenced by the survivors, as is the case for Roman Catholics (cf. Chapter 1). Hence, questioned about general statements it is understandable that Zuckerman’s informants stated they knew not about the afterlife or failed to give a clear-cut answer. Their yet unknown destiny namely is considered to be in the hands of God. And what is more, during the twentieth century the dogma about eternal life was radically rethought by influential liberal theologians such as P. Tillich, W. Pannenberg and G. Vattimo and no longer understood as a futurist category - as a life after death, but (primary) as a category of the present (Rubow 2010).

In Denmark theologian and university professor P.G. Lindhardt in similar manner put all speculations about life after death to rest in his famous Askov-speech about eternal life held in 1952. It resulted in a lot of scandalous newspaper headlines and furious public debate, but at the time it was in fact a well-known and accepted viewpoint amongst most Danish theologians (Lindhardt 1953). Contrary to what Zuckerman assumes, not to believe in a life after death is therefore in fact theologically based in Denmark today. In their preaches, ministers, however, keep the eternal life open to be interpreted as both a this-worldly and a next-worldly category and avoid causing similar offence as Lindhardt did. Rubow (2001) has led attention to the paradox that Danish people expect ministers to represent a traditional theology despite the fact that they do not share it themselves and how the ministers therefore tend to downplay more liberal theological viewpoints.

Finally, the ministers within the Lutheran Church are the keepers of theological knowledge. That is why they can be “poring over books of philosophy and theology” and be “more of a thoughtful bookworm” (Zuckerman 2008: 172). What is “theologically based” is not so much the concern of lay people, so it is a bit puzzling Zuckerman expects them to know: he seems to be confusing their role with the one of the minister. It

underscores the point made by Martin (2011: 60) that in defining religion “the social sciences have been and remain covertly theological”.

Zuckerman acknowledges “the fact that most Danes and Swedes consider religion to be a personal, private matter” (2008: 100). In the final analysis, however, he denies them to be truly religious (Zuckerman 2008: 102). Zuckerman writes, “I think there is something else at play, some additional underlying cultural factor: bald secularity” (2008: 103). Questioned about their beliefs informants state that “there are no words for it” or that they “have no language for it” (Zuckerman 2008: 101). Rather than accepting that “religion is a very personal, private thing” (Zuckerman 2008: 100), Zuckerman thinks that his informants’ beliefs have no substance, and, therefore, that they are not religious at all. He admits that “many elements of the Lutheran religion definitely continue to permeate Danish and Swedish culture” (Zuckerman 2008: 8). Nevertheless, in Zuckerman’s view (2008: 10) “the popular Lutheran components of most Scandinavians’ lives are best understood as simply secular traditions with religious trappings”. For Zuckerman (2008: 9) their membership of the church and engagement in overtly religious rites of passage is just something that occurs “out of a sense of cultural tradition”, not out of belief.

Besides, he fails to consider the liberal development within Lutheran theology. Zuckerman reduces religion to a merely intellectual pursuit. But if that was all there was to religion, it would be difficult to understand Hinduism as a (world) religion. Hinduism is much more about practice than about a well-developed, dogmatic system of belief. As Bellah et al. (1985) have shown, religion consists not only of knowing but also of doing and feeling. And Gundelach, Iversen and Warburg (2008), who take to heart this broader understanding of religion, even suggest that religion in Denmark has to be characterized mainly by doing.

Zuckerman (2008) looks at what people tell him verbally about certain beliefs in accordance with a literal reading of the Bible that he asks them about. That his informants consider these childish or something of their childhood (Zuckerman 2008: 92-94) does not necessarily imply they have lost their faith, as Zuckerman suggests. The great majority did confirmation and may have developed more intricate understandings or a more personal, inner conviction inspired by Lutheranism. In the

history of Christianity, the term “belief” has had different meanings (Ruel 2002), and even today Christian belief can be understood in manifold ways. Belief, in theory, can also be expressed by non-verbal means, such as in people’s deeds.

Actually, that is what Zuckerman comes across time and again, particularly in the unrelenting support for the welfare state: their desire to do good in line with “the fundamental values and moral imperatives” of their religion (2008: 30). He writes, “these traditional religious values are most successfully established, institutionalized, and put into practice at the societal level” (Zuckerman 2008: 30). Zuckerman’s informants also express it in statements, such as “we are Lutherans in our souls” (2008: 41) and “all my values are based on religion” (2008: 84). It might be more important for a true Christian what you do rather than what you say, as words can be cheap.

Zuckerman does not take this into account. The average member of the Church is not a theologian and clearly does not want to make authoritative statements on matters of belief. What is more, as can be read between the lines in Zuckerman’s account, his informants adopt a more modest attitude. They also make clear that their religious beliefs are a private and intimate matter (Zuckerman 2008: *passim*). If “it’s about God reaching down to the human being,” the recipient will act accordingly. God’s ways are indecipherable, hence there is less a need to put inner beliefs into words. While his Lutheran informants normally are under a dictum like gays in the American army—“don’t ask, don’t tell,” Zuckerman wants them to come out: “For something to be ‘religious,’ there must be an element of supernatural, otherworldly, or spiritual belief” (2008: 154). He does not reflect much upon the difference between what people say and what they do. Only certain belief statements count, and he does not accord much significance to other dimensions of religion.

This intellectualist approach privileges the reproduction of the tenets of Christian belief of yesterday, and their acceptance as being literally true, for people to qualify as religious. Imaginable is an understanding in a less literal or more poetic way, but that would designate the persons in question being secular, simply because they “don’t accept the supernatural claims of religion as literally true” (Zuckerman 2008: 183). Being secular for Zuckerman means “nonreligious” (2008: 95). But what

about a broader definition of religion? Zuckerman talks about “people participating in something ostensibly religious, without actually believing its supernatural elements” (2008: 155). Zuckerman’s imposed definition of religion does not give the same weight to the “ostensibly religious” practices. These are mere custom, part of culture.

And “millions of Danes and Swedes,” according to Zuckerman, do not “turn to religion for comfort or some sort of psychological balm in the face of death” (2008: 4). Confronted with death, however, most Danes *do* turn to religion: in fact, 87% of the funerals are religious ones performed by the Lutheran Church. And they do so despite of having other options. Celebrants from The Humanist Society and the like are admittedly few, but most undertakers are happy to take on the role and lead a nonreligious ceremony and it can take place in both chapels and crematoriums (but not churches) as well as elsewhere. Apart from that only few private entrepreneurs have specialised in nonreligious rituals, probably due to the low demand. Zuckerman did not speak with people who had to deal with death in actual practice, so his claim that religion in these circumstances is without substance is presumptuous. He only has a statement of a nurse that Christians (the ones believing in an afterlife) would have a fear of dying (Zuckerman 2008: 46). Zuckerman resorts to Demerath’s idea of “cultural religion”, meaning a state of religion in decline in which people lost the supernatural beliefs but not yet the practices (Demerath 2000). Their participation and membership of the national church is just a matter of identity (Zuckerman 2008: 150-166). In short, people are “belonging without believing” (Riis cited in Zuckerman 2008: 150). Is it, or is something else going on?

Analysing recent developments in American funerary culture, Garces-Foley and Holcomb (2006) argue that the changes taking place are erroneously seen in terms of secularization and decline of religion. Quite to the contrary, they “can be interpreted as a sign of religious renewal or, at the very least, a continuation of religious sensibilities in new forms” (Garces-Foley and Holcomb 2006: 208). They also point out that most people “still choose to mark death within a religious framework, a point that is often overlooked by those who have a narrow definition of what qualifies as religious” (Garces-Foley and Holcomb 2006: 224). Also in Denmark people stick to the religious framework, in this case provided by the (national) Lutheran Church.

To grasp what is going we have to take a closer look at the actual practices and the framework of a religious funeral model within the welfare state.

### **The welfare state and a religious funeral model**

When a person dies in Denmark, one must report it to the parish church. Next the funeral ceremony will take place, as mentioned usually conducted by the local minister. After that, the corpse must either be immediately buried at the consecrated churchyard or the ashes must be interred there after the cremation (see further Rubow 1993). Non-consecrated cemeteries are non-existent (though legal to establish for municipalities), but it is possible to spread the ashes over the sea, a permission must however be granted by the local church authorities in accordance with certain regulations. Funerals in Denmark are in this way virtually a church monopoly - this even goes for cremation. Whereas elsewhere cremation is frequently seen as a mode of bodily disposal that contributed to the secularization of death—because it happened to be promoted by non-religious or anti-religious people and associated with modernity, the Lutheran Church of Denmark appropriated the funerary business of cremation and brought it within the religious framework.

When cremation was legalized in 1896 it was considered a heathen practice in Denmark like in most places. Cremation was looked upon as breaking with traditional Christian earth burial that mimes the burial of Jesus and symbolically points at a belief in a bodily resurrection. But the position of the church radically changed within the short time span of a year. This development is visible in the changing geography of the early crematoria. As far back as 1908 Bispebjerg Krematorium, successor to the country's first crematorium, was located just outside a churchyard. When the next crematorium was built by the municipality of Aarhus in 1923 it was located in a cemetery. Since the mid-1920s the Lutheran Church has been involved. The church started to build and own crematoria from that point onwards. At the outbreak of World War II the church already ran sixteen crematoriums. Currently two thirds of the crematoriums in Denmark are in the hands of the Lutheran Church (Markussen 2011). There has also been a steep rise in the number of cremations, with a present rate as high as 77%. Cremations are

predominantly religious funerals and in Denmark, as well as in Sweden, a far cry from a secularized practice.

Although a great many Danes might not believe in heaven and hell, they want a religious funeral. Being a member of the church might in many cases be motivated by ascertaining the final rites of passage (Højsgaard 2011: 99). Strikingly, the religiously unaffiliated are most strongly represented in the larger cities where church and graveyard are separated. Church membership seems much higher in those places where burial in a graveyard adjoining the church is possible. This suggests that attachment to graveyards may be an important factor in the continued high rate of church membership. In other words, that it is not so much about church attendance (that is very low indeed) but about the performance of rites of passage, especially the last one, and the desired inclusion in a graveyard community. The intimate link between death and religion is widely acknowledged. Here, however, institutionalized religion provides the framework and the emphasis might be more on doing than on believing. Or does actual care for the dead relate to people “believing something else” (Nielsen 2009: 67)? In any event, their ongoing belonging should not be taken for granted.

Considering the comprehensiveness of the Nordic welfare state model, the dominance of a religious funeral model in Denmark (and Sweden) appears quite astonishing and paradoxical. Given the welfare state’s provision of care to the citizens from birth onwards, one would have expected that the state would have stepped in this area surrounding their demise as it has done in almost all other areas of life. The state has done indeed so in many less comprehensive welfare states, but not so in Denmark. Why not? This can only be understood in the light of the historical relationship between the church and the state.

Broadly speaking, as Walter (2005) makes clear, three types of funeral model developed in the modern West. These models are ideal types. According to Walter, the three different funeral models resulted from the burial crisis in the nineteenth century. Rapidly growing numbers of dead bodies in the cities in the wake of industrialization led to a process of rationalization and specialization with regard to funerals. New cemeteries were established outside the cities. A rational re-use of graves and tasks performed by a new category of professionals became en vogue. The responsible state officials in the Western countries worried

about the health risks allegedly caused by the countless decaying corpses in the ever more densely populated cities. Although modernization led to similar problems with bodily disposal in all these countries, the funeral systems of the modern West did not converge as would have been expected. State-granted control over the citizens' dead bodies ranged from private businessmen, municipal officials to modernized church bureaucracy.

This variation in funeral models had to do with divergent historical and religious developments, not least among these being the relationship between the state and the church. A conflictive relationship would typically lead to a municipal model, removing this area from the hands of the church. A positive relation would lead to a continued religious model, as in the Nordic countries, where since the Reformation the churches had become handmaidens of the state. Where relations between state and church were positive but there were many different congregations rather than a monopolist church, space was cleared for private business (Walter 2005).

In recent years there have been a number of studies of the relation between institutionalized religion and the formation of different types of welfare state (Kersbergen and Manow 2009). These studies build on Lipset and Rokkan's seminal article 'Cleavage structures, party systems and voter alignment' (1990). New cleavage structures came into being after nineteenth century national revolutions. State and church struggled over the say over education. This conflict between state and church, centering on dominance over education, played a tremendously important role in shaping the various welfare state models (Lipset and Rokkan 1990). It also had, as was recently argued, an impact on gender politics (Morgan 2006). In addition, the say over funerals was another important source of conflict between state and church during the process of nation building. The outcome of this cleavage was also decisive in the way the one or the other welfare state developed. Consequently, the three different types of funeral organization distinguished by Walter (2005) are in perfect accord with the three different welfare state types as we know them: the religious funeral model is associated with the comprehensive Nordic welfare state model, the municipal funeral model with the conservative European welfare state model, and the private one with the liberal Anglo-American welfare state model.



The religious funeral model and the Nordic welfare state are intimately linked as a result of historical developments in the process of state formation. Control over funerals has remained in the hands of the national Lutheran churches. We are dealing here with a specific trajectory of modernization, one in which the secularization of death is exempted. Nevertheless, the existential security and high level of education provided by the welfare state has eroded people's religiosity, according to sociologists Norris and Inglehart (2004). Denmark did become one of the most secularized countries, first and foremost because the welfare state took over the function of religion in reducing insecurity. According to Norris and Inglehart (2004), the measure of religiosity increases with (existential) insecurity, and, conversely, decreases with greater security. The high welfare spending in an expanded welfare state like Denmark thus correlates with low religiosity. Over time, if we follow this reasoning, the secular state has outstripped the national church as an unintended consequence of the success of the Nordic welfare state model.

The relationship between church and state becomes even more complex and intricate when we realise that religious values have significantly contributed to the support for the welfare state. They played a role in the way the welfare state took shape, and having become interwoven with the rationale of this structure of the state, they continue to do so. Simultaneously the church tax, ministers being public servants, and the status of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark as the national church indicate that the state lends its support to the church. Sociologists Stark and Ianaconne (1994) stress that a monopolist position of the church makes it lazy when it comes to marketing; the resultant lack of effort to recruit (potential) adherents, they argue, in its turn contributes to increased secularization. The secularization paradigm (Tschannen 2001) once again privileges official religion at the expense of other forms of religiosity.

The survival to date of the traditional religious funeral model in the expansive Danish welfare state of the Nordic type seemingly hinges on the fact that the majority of Danes still belong to the Lutheran church. This belonging is not enforced but a matter of free choice. But continued membership of the church is a prerequisite of having certain life-cycle rituals performed. These (associated with tradition and national identity by secularization theorists such as Zuckerman), I would like to suggest,

take preference. To put it slightly differently, church membership (belonging) continues because people cherish the religious funeral model (and preceding rites of passage) rather than the other way round. The church, controlling the graveyards, provides a framework for what people do in their dealing with death and the dead.

To grasp what is going on, and to resolve the puzzling Scandinavian paradox, a broader understanding of religion as lived is required. As McGuire (2008: 44) points out, “people still practice, as integral parts of their religion, some of the aspects of religion that, in early modern times, were defined out as no longer properly ‘religious’.” This is very much the case when it comes to death (cf. May 1972). The work of Stringer (2008a,b), referring to the English context, clearly shows the value of this perspective. Stringer offers important observations on how people engage in what Davie (1994: 75ff) calls “common religion” in their relations with the dead.

According to Stringer, “we miss what is really going on, we do not see the ‘religious’ because of what we have inadvertently labelled as ‘religion’” (2008a: 4). This labelling results from a historical struggle in which powerful elites managed to officially define “genuine” religion to their liking, privileging belief to the detriment of religious practices held by the common folk. Following McGuire, the assertion of “church-authorized belief and knowledge” in Europe occurred from the mid-nineteenth century onwards—hence, I would like to add, at a time when the relationship between church and state in the various countries, including Denmark, was to be settled. This elitist, intellectualist definition of religion was taken up in the emerging social sciences (McGuire 2008: 38-41). Consequently, as Stringer puts it, contemporary definitions of religion in the social sciences consider religion “a unified object”, “associated with the transcendent” and “fundamentally transformative for the individual and/or society” (2008a: 5). The ethnographic research of Stringer and his collaborators produced results that contradicted that this is the case amongst average people in real life.

Interestingly, chatting with the dead turned out to be the most recurring as well as most widespread practice (Stringer 2008b: 35): “Over and over again, from a wide range of circumstances, whether the people studied were members of Christian congregations or outside of official religious discourses, some kind of interaction with the dead was

discovered” (Stringer 2008a: 66). People did so at the graveside or in domestic spaces such as the kitchen. Stringer notes, “The dead were too close, too immediate, too normal for supernatural language” (2008a: 60). “The graveyard was by far the most common place to come and chat to the dead,” according to Stringer (2008a: 74). The practice served to deal with problems in everyday life, understood by Stringer as a coping strategy: it provided “security, support and hope – a means to get through another day” (2008a: 82).

The common religion studied by Stringer and his associates was of an unsystematic nature and did not represent a coherent system of beliefs. More important happened to be what “worked” in a particular situation. Stringer, therefore, speaks of “situational belief”. It entails a pragmatic approach—purpose-oriented, so an individual “will state any belief, official or popular, that is of value to them at any particular moment and in any particular situation” (Stringer 2008a: 51). What is important is “the situation within which the belief is held” not the beliefs as such; therefore, “the same person can hold contradictory beliefs in different situations, each relevant and true in the situation for which it is held” (Stringer 2008a: 65). To define religion as people go about it in real life, for Stringer, it has to be “rooted in people’s unsystematic use of belief statements, their intimate relationships with the non-empirical other, and their need to cope pragmatically with everyday problems” (2008a: 113-114).

Bruce recasts Stringer’s findings in the secularization paradigm by reducing them to the following statement: “members of religious organizations can differ in their appreciation, acceptance and conformity to the teachings of those organizations” (Bruce 2011b: 113). That is certainly true but misses the point. Concerning official religions, Stringer (2008a: 114) namely suggests “that these forms of religion are aberrations, the form of religion accepted only by a small minority, even when they form the basis of the dominant religious discourse in society”. What took Stringer and his co-researchers by surprise was the general prevalence and “importance for so many ordinary people of conversations with the dead,” a common practice found across society (Stringer 2008b: 35). The resistance to secularization by people when dealing with the dead clearly indicates its limits.

The death-related practice belongs to “the form of religion to which human beings revert when all other forms collapse,” according to Stringer (2008a: 101). He conceives of it as an ever-present layer of religiosity that has become more visible and surfaced as a result of secularization (Stringer 2008a: 110). The emphasis, I would say, is more on doing than believing (cf. McGuire 2008), and that element of practice has been ill researched in Zuckerman’s ethnographic study of (ir)religiosity in Denmark.

It brings us back to the crux of the Scandinavian paradox (Lüchau 2010): how should we understand belonging without believing? Denmark is characterized by a considerable religious and political homogeneity: both the welfare state and the national church get the unswerving support of the population. Indeed, “political culture and religious culture mirror each other” (Martin 2011: 154) and share basic values. The welfare state provides the Danes with existential security from the cradle to the grave, while Lutheran ministers—a special category of public servants—conduct their life-cycle rituals. The religious institutional framework, supported by the state, remains intact, including the religious funeral model. The low levels of official belief (as Zuckerman attests), however, make it hard to understand why the Danes keep up their membership and strong support for the church. Why on earth do they opt for church funerals while not believing in heaven, hell, or eternal life?

There is more to it, I contend, because the religious funeral is followed by the burial of the human remains in a graveyard belonging to the church. In general the graveyards are extremely well maintained. So far what happens in graveyards in Denmark, especially practices deriving from the aforementioned broader understanding of religion, has been hardly studied. This, however, would be a worthwhile endeavour (see Chapter 5). Graveyards seem to be locations of lived religion. And the significance of the related practices might explain the puzzling high rates of church membership (in spite of extremely low church attendance) and religious funerals.

There are indications that indeed what is going on at graveyards might be a hidden motivation for continued church membership. Membership has dropped considerably in the larger cities, where church and graveyard (actually called churchyard, *kirkegårde*) are disconnected. There the human remains are buried in distant burial grounds outside of

the city, still consecrated ground but maintained by the municipality. They are called municipal churchyard (*kommunale kirkegårde*), so in name they are no longer solely associated with the church. Furthermore, the cemeteries in question are funded by the municipality not the church. Being part of such a graveyard community, people in the big cities seem to experience the payment of church tax (one percent of one's income) superfluous. Membership rates of the churches concerned rapidly dropped. The main case in point is the nation's capital, Copenhagen, where at the time of writing sixteen churches can no longer be maintained and have to be closed. The diocese of Copenhagen only has a membership rate of 61% against 79% on the national level. Continued church membership is strongest in places where church and graveyard still form a unity, most likely because the church tax is seen as an attribution to being a member of the graveyard community.

In Sweden, unlike in Denmark, the state and the church split (due to increased religious pluralism) in 2000. However, the graveyards remained the responsibility of the Lutheran church. As the graveyards received their funding by means of the church tax, since the split non-members have been required to pay a special tax for the churchyard. In this way it became possible to relinquish church membership and still be a member of the graveyard community. Interestingly enough, here also the membership rates of the churches have dropped. One of the reasons might well be that being involved in a graveyard community seems to take prevalence over being a member of the church

Obviously, something is going on in graveyards. Whether or not conversations with the dead are a practice as widespread as in England can only be established by empirical research. In a study specifically devoted to cemetery visits that was conducted in London, Francis, Kellehar and Neophytou (2005: 141-178) give accounts of the frequent conversations with the dead taking place. One informant tellingly remarked, "I do my worship here, instead of going to church" (Francis et al. 2005: 164). Warner (1959: 282), in his classic study of an American cemetery, notes that "maintenance of the identity of the dead is partly dependent on placing them in living time and space".

The way in which graveyards in Denmark are looked after suggests that they are deemed important. Although they are in the hands of the Lutheran church, it is striking that in graveyards contemporary graves

and gravestones bear hardly any references to formal religion. What is readily observed are the traces of visits to graves. The practice of placing the bridal bouquet of flowers on the grave of a deceased parent or grandparent is an indication of an ongoing connection with the dead, or non-empirical other(s) in Stringer's parlance. It also happens that people bring flowers to the grave on the dead person's birthday. Furthermore, special attention to the graves is paid with decorations in the month of Christmas, at Easter and on All Souls' Day. Aagedal (2010) writes that folk-church religiosity in Norway can be best understood by looking at the burning of candles on graves. What people precisely say and do when visiting graves should be examined to establish whether the graveyard communities are indeed the rationale for continued church membership. If so, the Scandinavian paradox most likely can be explained; and the situation would be one of "belonging but believing in something else" or of doing rather than believing. The institutional framework of official religion, in other words, would have allowed people to be religious in a different way.

### **Conclusion**

Denmark has been portrayed as a secularized country *par excellence*, "one of the least religious societies on earth" (Zuckerman 2008: 3). This "markedly irreligious society" (Zuckerman 2008: 35), however, has not abandoned official religion despite an extremely low rate of church attendance (as far as Sunday services are concerned). In what Zuckerman calls a society without God there is a high rate of church membership, people adhere to the performance of major rites of passage in church, and the great majority opts for a religious funeral. The understanding of religiosity is not only shaped by the secularization paradigm, but also based on interview statements on beliefs that would have to accord with literal readings of the Bible to qualify as religious. Both contemporary Lutheran theology and people's actual religious practices are ignored. The analysis shows that a broader understanding of religion as lived is needed to resolve the Scandinavian paradox. The religious funeral model that is maintained in Denmark can be linked to the comprehensive Nordic welfare state model. The great majority's continued religious affiliation to the national church, I tried to demonstrate, is most likely con-

nected with what takes place in graveyards. Hence the institutional framework should not to be seen in the context of belonging without believing but of belonging and believing something else. Following the perspective offered by Stringer and McGuire, the actual religious practices in dealing with death can be unraveled. In people's understanding they cross the border between life and death, and death not being the end, the practices and related beliefs can be understood in terms of religiosity.

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## CHAPTER 4

### GRAVE MATTERS: MATERIALIZING THE IMMATERIAL\*

#### Introduction

To many visitors, Danish churchyards appear highly secularized, but in this chapter I will argue that they in fact materialize religious Protestant norms, especially norms about how to find consolation in the face of death.<sup>1</sup> Due to the character of Protestant material culture, however, we tend to overlook the Protestant norms of consolation that these graveyards embody. The appearance of the churchyards thus does not result from a lack of religion, but rather from a particular form of religion with a particular understanding of material culture and consolation. In this chapter, I will describe how this understanding came about at the time of the Reformation and how it was implemented in different ways in churchyards in Lutheran Denmark. I will further show that the advent of cremation and the changes in the structural design of Danish churchyards this brought about – though normally seen as features of secularization – strengthened Protestant norms. I thus argue that instead of a withdrawal of official religion, we find that the Lutheran Church has actually increased its grip on the graveyard.

Conflicts concerning the appearance of churchyards are regularly understood within a framework of aesthetics but should instead be considered as religiously based. Because the Protestant norms that the graveyards embody are overlooked, it is not fully recognized how they repress non-prescribed forms of religion and with them connected understandings of consolation. This repression can give rise to conflicts about the material culture. The Evangelical Lutheran Church has a near-monopoly on burial grounds in Denmark and therefore almost all Danes end up on a Lutheran churchyard,<sup>2</sup> whether they are members of the church or not. It is to be expected that the regulation of material culture

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\* With minor changes this chapter has earlier appeared as: Kjærsgaard Markussen, Anne (2014). Finding Consolation on Churchyards in Lutheran Denmark. *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift*, (special double issue on ‘Death and Consolation’), 68(1-2), 101-119.

and its implicit Protestant norms can make it difficult to find consolation for the 21 per cent of the population that are non-members. However, the same is also the case for many members of the Lutheran Church, as I will show in the last part of this chapter. As I will describe below, they find consolation in ways that testify to a discrepancy between what official religion prescribes and how they actually live their religion. This state of affairs raises also an important, practical question with regard to the future planning of churchyards: for whom will they be landscapes of consolation? I will address this question towards the end of the chapter, but first we need to understand how the material side of Protestant religion is manifest in Danish graveyards.

### **The seemingly secularized look of Danish churchyards**

Religious practices at burial grounds in contemporary Europe have been under-researched. This is surprising since death is seen as fundamental to religion in several classical studies on religion and burial grounds therefore seem to be an obvious place to look for religion (see Berger 1967). One of the reasons for this neglect is probably the common expectation that with modernization a secularization of all burial grounds has taken place in Europe.<sup>3</sup> There have, however, been different routes to modernization, and the modernization of burial grounds in the last two centuries did not always imply institutional secularization. Denmark is a case in point. As I shall describe in more detail later, the Lutheran Church played an active role in the modernization of the outlay of graveyards and even embraced cremation. What is more, the Church not only controls the great majority of burial places but also most crematoria. Tony Walter has thus differentiated between a municipal, a commercial and a religious funeral model and places the Nordic countries, including Denmark, in the last category. But although not formally secularized on the institutional level, Walter (2005) nevertheless considers the Nordic churchyards to be *de facto* secularized.

Broadly speaking the churchyards in Denmark have indeed been subject to a great deal of change in the twentieth century. The change in terms of material culture, admittedly, seems to suggest a process of secularization. Cremation did become very popular, and turned out to be a significant development affecting the structural design of the graveyards.



*Figure 2. Askov Kirkegård, 2014. A typical Danish churchyard with traditional graveplots surrounded by hedges and a new lawn section for urns. Photo by Anne Kjærsgaard.*

One of the most prominent changes resulting from the increase of cremations has been that almost all Danish churchyards have been extended with new lawn sections with urn graves on which only small, flat grave-stones of a uniform size are allowed (Sørensen 2010). The stones have no religious inscriptions or symbols but only names and dates of birth and death. Furthermore, the fact that coffins have been replaced by urns implies an annihilation of the religious symbolism of the inhumed body facing east, awaiting the second coming of Christ (Jupp 2005).

These aspects of ‘secularization’, however, cannot be taken at face value, due to the way Protestantism relates to material culture. In order to fully understand this, we first have to look at how a new Protestant view on material culture emerged at the time of the Reformation, in opposition to the common practices of Catholics, which had become suspect.

### **The reformation of material culture**

Protestantism distanced itself at the outset from the material side of religion and contested Roman Catholic material culture. Violent iconoclasm, and intense theological debates about the sacrament of the Holy Communion, all centred on the view that the only thing that could make God present was the word of God. This was the only contact point between humans and God, and the only way for humans to reach this point was through spiritual belief; no aspect of the material world could be used as intermediary. Yet this stance is hard to sustain, because in actual practice material expressions of religiosity are indispensable. As Arweck and Keenan point out, “The idea of religion is largely unintelligible outside its incarnation in material expressions” (2006: 2-3). An absent God must somehow be made present and accessible in this world, and material culture plays a vital role in this connection.

In other words, we are dealing with Protestant material religion after all. In addition, the conflicts about material culture, dating back to the Reformation, demonstrate that the Protestants, despite their professed split between matter and spirit, in fact attributed considerable importance to material stuff: how could Roman Catholic material culture be dangerous and misleading if it did not mean anything? To put it slightly differently, we need to make a distinction between Protestant self-representations that downplay the role of materiality on the one hand, and actual religious practices that cannot escape some kind of material expression on the other (Meyer and Houtman 2012: 12). Even the most orthodox Protestants attribute considerable importance to material stuff. A case in point is the ways in which orthodox Protestants handle their Bible.

The downplaying of the role of material religion – or “Protestantism’s dematerializing inclination” as Meyer and Houtman (2012: 15) call it – tends to render the material side of Protestantism almost invisible, even though it is still present, as I have pointed out above. Scholars of religion have privileged belief over ritual, and inward conviction over ‘mere’ outward action, by taking Protestant understandings for granted. Thus, we have been erroneously led to believe that Protestant ‘dematerialization’ of religion would be a sign of secularization. The related view, that the appearance of Danish churchyards would be solely a

matter of aesthetics, having nothing to do with religion, is equally mistaken.

### **The displacement of consolation**

Before the Reformation, the grave was a source of consolation. On this side of the grave, the living could interfere in what happened on the other side of the grave, and on the other side, the dead (saints) could interfere in what happened on this side. According to Roman Catholic theology the dead were still present in the sense that the bonds between the dead and the living continued. The living could acquire indulgences, light candles, pray and have masses said for the souls of the dead to shorten their time in purgatory. Some venerated dead, the saints, could also interfere in the world of the living and help them out. Material objects, especially relics, played an important role in creating these bonds and in giving the absent dead a presence. Together with the shrines of saints they formed important contact points between the living and the dead.

With the Reformation, the world became much smaller, because the Protestant world only consisted of the living. The reformers not only contested the way in which the Roman Catholic Church made the absent God present in this world by means of mediators and material objects as was the case, for instance, in the conflict about the Holy Communion and the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. The presence of the dead was also an important issue in this religious conflict. As a matter of fact, discussions about the teachings concerning the purgatory triggered the conflict between Martin Luther and the Roman Catholic Church, leading to his excommunication in 1521. As a consequence of the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone, it was God alone who dealt with the souls of the departed and no one else could intercede. To be dead meant to be sleeping in the hands of God until Judgment Day, no living person could reach out to the dead and vice versa (cf. Kroesen 2014).

So while death in the Catholic context was a process in which the fate of the souls of the dead could be influenced by the Church and the bereaved, the living and the dead became fully separated in the Protestant context. In other words, death was a boundary that could not be crossed (Koslofsky 2000; Gordon and Marshall 2000). The relationship between



the living and the dead henceforth remained confined to the memory of past lives and the eschatological hope of salvation. Consolation had to be found in the belief in the word of God and His mercy. This meant that there was no longer any positive theological interest in the place of the dead in itself. Instead, the prime theological interest concerning graveyards was to keep them free from any ‘Catholic’ bonds between the living and the dead.

### **Regulating consolation in Lutheran Denmark**

While the bonds between the living and the dead had been theologically severed at the time of the Reformation, it subsequently had to be ascertained that they were broken in practice as well. No communication between the living and the dead was to take place anymore. The graves were only to be places of memory and eschatological hope – consolation had to be found in the right way.

One way to ascertain this, found within the ranks of more radical reformers inspired by Calvin and Zwingli, was simply to destroy the material culture that could manifest continued bonds between the living and the dead. Thus, gravestones and bone-houses were smashed, graves were levelled, and candles placed on the graves were also removed (Sörries 2011: 118). Reciprocity between the living and the dead was out of bounds. Marcel Mauss’ essay on the gift illuminates the underlying law of reciprocity. When someone gives a gift, the receiver is obliged to donate something in return – just as a question expects an answer in reply (Mauss 1954). In the same way, placing things on graves can be seen as gift-giving to the dead. And since they are the postulated recipients, agency is attributed to the dead, based on the understanding that they might return the favour. The dead are somehow conceived of as partners in this exchange and dialogue with the bereaved donors. The grave with the deceased’s remains happens to be a site for communication with the dead par excellence; the placing of things on the grave and/or talking to the dead makes it possible for the living to maintain continued bonds with the dead. These practices accord a presence to the absent dead (All Souls’ Day being a prime example of this in the Catholic liturgical calendar). This sort of communication would of course be in conflict with Protestant beliefs, and it was in order to prevent this, that some radical

reformers found the solution described above, in simply making the graves and/or the things placed on them disappear.

Luther's stance was more complex. He did not consider things in themselves a problem; they were soteriologically indifferent (*adiaphora*). For him the problem was instead the way in which people related to things, this was what had to be changed. It also applied to churchyards (Sörries 2011: 101; Illi 1992: 111). Following Luther's theology, warnings about how to visit the grave properly were issued early on in Denmark. Peder Palladius, the first bishop on Zealand after the Danish Reformation in 1536, describes how he inspected his diocese in the 1540s and warned people that they were not to visit the graves in order to pray for the dead, but only to remember that they themselves would die one day and that they would be judged too (Lausten 2003: 31-32). The Lutheran way of ascertaining that communication between the living and the dead would not take place was thus less opposed to material culture than the stance of reformed Protestants. If material things were used to manifest memories or eschatological hope, they were acceptable.



*Figure 3. The Moravian graveyard 'God's Acre' in Christiansfeld, a UNESCO heritage site since 2015. The equality of humans in the eyes of God is manifested by the similarity of the graves. Photo by Anne Kjærsgaard.*

More radical views on the material culture of the churchyard, however, became present in Denmark at a later stage. Having visited Moravians in the Dutch city of Zeist, the Danish king Christian VII allowed the Moravians in 1772 to build their own town in Denmark. It was to be named Christiansfeld and right from the start a churchyard, ‘the God’s Acre’, was established (Bøytler and Jessen 2005: 24-27, 177-189). It became a true copy of the one of the mother colony in Herrnhut, in Saxony, that in turn looked very much the same as typical churchyards of reformed Protestants in Germany (Sörries 2011: 119, 124-126). All graves on the God’s acre in Christiansfeld are placed in regular rows with a fixed distance to each other, and the graves are marked with identical flat stones, engraved with only a number, name, place and dates of birth and death, aiming to symbolize the equality of all humans in the eyes of God. And, very importantly: there was to be no other decoration. Today, restrictions have been eased a bit, and it is now allowed to plant flowers, but only one-season flowers that will disappear quickly (Bøytler 2001: 29-34). Clearly, clear-cut restrictions were placed on the material culture of this churchyard, to prevent it from materializing continuing bonds between the living and the dead – again, consolation was instead to be found in the word of God.

As I will show, it was the churchyard in Christiansfeld, with its specific Protestant norms of consolation, which was to become one of the main inspirations for the design of churchyards in Denmark in the twentieth century. But because the development of churchyards in this period was highly influenced by the advent of cremation, we will first have closer a look at this development and see how Protestant material religion played a role here and how the Lutheran Church joined forces with what was regarded as progress and modernization.

### **Cremation and the protestant heritage**

Modern cremation became technically possible as late as the second half of the 1870s, but already in 1881 the first cremation society was founded in Denmark. By 1886, it had built the first Danish crematorium in Copenhagen and the first cremation was conducted. This placed Denmark among the very first countries to make use of this new technology of bodily disposal.<sup>4</sup>The authorities, however, reacted strongly against it:

a police ban was issued against the use of the crematorium. It was upheld by two court decisions until 1892, when cremation was finally legalized by the government (Larsen 1996). There were also strong reactions against cremation from the public, especially some currents within the church fiercely opposed it. But the church was divided and never formed a united opposition (Møller 2007). It turned out to be difficult to find substantial theological arguments against cremation from a Lutheran point of view, and over time the part of the church that had no problem with cremation got the upper hand.

In the same year when the first cremation took place in Denmark, cremation was banned by the Roman Catholic Church. The ban was ended in 1963, as part of larger reforms at the time of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). What made cremation more easily acceptable for (many) Protestants than for Roman Catholics was the previously described Reformation split between matter and spirit. This split had become even more accentuated within Protestantism with the rise of natural science and the materialist critique of religion; it made Protestant theology retreat even more from the material world to the inner world of the spirit (Meyer and Houtman 2012: 6). The challenges to the belief in a bodily resurrection offered by the natural sciences made it increasingly attractive and common for Protestants to ‘spiritualize’ their afterlife beliefs in the nineteenth century. Belief in the immortality of the soul came to have a much more prominent role, at the expense of the belief in a bodily resurrection (Badham 2005). With this, the dead body lost its religious importance more and more and the symbolic placing of the body facing east, awaiting the second coming of Christ became empty. The dead body became more like a disposable thing and as such it could be cremated (cf. Chapter 2). Whether burial or cremation was chosen was considered religiously indifferent, since for Lutherans salvation did not depend on outer forms (Rald 1936).

The transformation of the dead into ashes made it possible to place the remains of the dead in new ways without causing hygienic problems. The ashes could be placed above the earth as well as be interred; the ashes did not have to be placed in a churchyard but could just as well be placed somewhere else; and finally cremation also made it possible to divide or spread the ashes. In the earliest history of cremation in Denmark, however, ashes were disposed of in only one way: ashes

were put into urns, and the urns in columbaria (Andersen 1972). This was also mainly the case in e.g. England and Germany – an interesting feature of the early development of modern cremation (Grainger 2005; Fisher 2009): cremationists saw themselves as modernizers who put reason above tradition. In this vein, typical arguments in favour of cremation were that it was hygienic and efficient, in the sense that cremation freed space that the living could make better use of. However, at the same time the cremationists clearly re-invented the old Roman tradition of the columbarium to legitimize the new disposal technique. The same re-invention of old Roman tradition is also visible in the use of a classical style in many of the early crematoria (Jensen 2002: 173-179; Kragh 2003: 224).

However, the crematoria built in Denmark from 1926 onwards had a new appearance and came to look like small chapels. And in fact they were. While the early crematoria had initially been built by the Cremation Society and later on by local municipalities, the Church now began to get involved. The new involvement of the church resulted in a genuine building boom. While only three crematoria had been built between 1886 and 1925, sixteen so-called chapel-crematoria were built in the next fifteen years (Markussen 2011). This was a very visible sign that the Lutheran Church in many places by now not only accepted cremation but embraced it. Full equality of burials and cremations, however, was only reached as late as 1975. Previously, individual priests could refuse to take part in a funeral service that would be followed by cremation if it would be against their conscience (Kragh 2003: 224).

In the process that led to the rapid increase in the building of crematoria, the cremationists also changed signals. An anti-clerical wing did exist within the cremation society that united members of both bourgeois and social democratic background. This wing had strong connections with the Labour movement and had its origins in the fight that led to the legalization of civil funerals back in 1907 (Kragh 2003: 222-223). But there were other goals for them to consider than just fighting the church. A certain number of cremations was needed to keep the crematoria in operation, since otherwise cremations would remain very costly, and this clearly went against the Social Democratic ambition of making cremation available to all citizens. The cremation society, therefore, had to recruit more members, and with a near-monopoly of the Lutheran

church, this was only possible by recruiting church members (Rald 1936).

In consequence, the cremation society ended up being careful not to take an atheist-materialist stance that could offend Christians and underlined instead that cremation was religiously neutral (Secher 1956: 76). It was merely an outer form and it did not in any way exclude or affect a religious understanding of death. With overlapping views on materiality as *adiaphora*, church and cremation society could join forces. In Denmark, it was henceforth possible to feel both modern-cum-rational and Christian, while these stances became opposites in many other countries. Today the Lutheran Church thus owns two thirds of Danish crematoria, whereas crematoria are seen as features of secularization elsewhere. The Danish development therewith exemplifies that modernization did not always exclude the church.

The incorporation of the new cremation technology into the Christian tradition was visible in the disposal of ashes, even earlier than in the style of the crematoria. Whereas ashes were placed in columbaria in the early history of cremation, in 1910 it became legal to inter ashes in churchyards, and over time various ways of disposal were developed that became much more popular than the columbarium (Andersen 1972). During the twentieth century, these new forms changed the material culture and appearance of Danish churchyards dramatically, because cremation in Denmark not only became legal and possible but, as mentioned above, also very popular. Denmark was the first Western European country after the United Kingdom to reach a cremation rate of 50% in 1976 (Davies and Mates 2005), and according to the latest cremation statistics from 2015, Denmark today has a staggering cremation rate of 82.3 per cent.<sup>5</sup> Rather than seeing this growth in the number of cremations as being caused by secularization and religious norms becoming less influential, it must be understood as the opposite: as a result of the Protestant split between matter and spirit resting on a denial of the significance of the material world to get into contact with God. Seen from that angle it comes as no surprise that modernization and cremation were embraced in Denmark, a society so much imbued with Protestantism.

### **The new old deathscape and the strengthened Church**

One of the most important changes that followed in the wake of the rapid growth of cremation, was that most Danish churchyards have now been extended with lawn-sections with urn-graves, as described in the beginning of this chapter. And it is especially on these lawn-sections that the influence from the Moravian churchyard in Christiansfeld is most visible. The identical flat gravestones placed in rows, with the same distance to each other and engraved with only name and dates mirrors the Moravian churchyards strikingly. And that is no coincidence. When such a lawn section was designed for the first time, in 1945–1950, by G.N Brandt on the famous Mariebjerg Kirkegård in Gentofte, it was in fact done with explicit inspiration from Christiansfeld (Sommer 2003: 240-241). What looks like a secularized churchyard to Tony Walter thus turns out to bring along a heavy Protestant heritage. So does another new feature that developed in twentieth-century churchyards in Denmark: regulations of what – or rather what not – to place on the graves. This feature we have also already met on the Moravian churchyard in Christiansfeld. And again, it was the architect G.N. Brandt who introduced it. Already in 1922, he had argued for an extended use of statutes and put his views into practice when he began developing Mariebjerg Kirkegård from 1925 onwards. He considered the use of statutes necessary to be able to strike an aesthetic balance between individual and collective interests (Falmer-Nielsen 2002).

G.N. Brandt together with his colleague J. Exner became key figures in churchyard-landscaping in Denmark in the twentieth century. J. Exner also saw the churchyard in Christiansfeld as the ideal and echoed Brandt's view on the need to introduce statutes for aesthetic reasons (Exner 1961: 35-43, 56b). The God's Acre's theological accent on equality was of course also politically attractive in the context of a Social Democratic welfare state. As a result, Danish churchyards today, besides having a widespread use of lawn sections, are extremely regulated. Different areas of the churchyards have different rules about what one is allowed to place there. In newer sections people are often formally forbidden to place things on the graves, with the exception of fresh-cut flowers. Sometimes the statutes can even be very specific in mentioning things that are forbidden to be put on the graves: figurines of animals, gnomes and santas, benches, electric light and sometimes even candles.

On the traditional grave plots people are normally still relatively free to place what they want within the boundaries of not disturbing the order and peace of the churchyard, but what is deemed befitting in this respect is up to the local parish council to decide.<sup>6</sup>

The fact that the rules are stricter on the newer parts of the churchyards than on the older parts shows that over time the Lutheran Church has assumed much more control over the appearance of the graves. This has happened at the expense of the family. That the family has lost control over the dead forms part of a general process of the professionalization in dealing with death, meaning that doctors came to take care of the dying, undertakers of the funeral, and new professionals employed on the churchyards for digging and maintaining the graves instead of family, friends and neighbours (Walter 1996). Because the secularization of churchyards in modern times is taken for granted, it has been generally overlooked that this modernization process could also include the church, namely in countries with a religious funeral model. Due to the Lutheran Church's increased control of the graves it in fact seems more apt to talk about a sacralisation than a secularization of Danish churchyards in the twentieth century.

The Lutheran Church got a particularly strong grip on disposal due to its near-monopoly on burial grounds. This near-monopoly could easily have been broken with the advance of cremation. As mentioned, the ashes could be placed anywhere without causing hygienic problems. But as in Germany, the ashes still have to be disposed of in churchyards. It can be imagined that the grief-theory prevailing in the twentieth century, focusing on the need for detachment between the living and the dead, might have been important to keep up what Germans call *Friedhofszwang*. The only exception from this duty is that it is possible to spread the ashes. But this can only be done in open sea, and previous to a revision of the burial legislation in 2008, official permission from the Church Ministry was required. Today a written statement from the deceased will do.

### **Contesting protestant norms of consolation**

Just as radical Protestant reformers made unwanted things disappear from the graves in the sixteenth century, so have the formal statutes



introduced on the Danish churchyards during the twentieth century, and efficiently implemented by the new churchyard-professionals, been capable of making religiously unwanted things disappear. What is considered to be the 'right' aesthetical balance between collective and individual interests is far from religiously neutral. The present material culture of the Danish churchyards is very uniform and there are not many material items to be found on the graves compared with other countries. Admittedly, this has been achieved in a less violent way than at the time of the Reformation, but at stake, I argue, is still the same distinctive Protestant notion of consolation. Along with this comes a strong suppression of material culture of non-prescribed forms of religiosity and consolation, although covered up in aesthetic arguments resulting from the Protestant downplaying of the material side of religion. It is this overlooked repression to which I will turn in the remaining part of this chapter.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century there has been a rise in conflicts about what items of material culture are to be considered proper in churchyards – one of the latest conflicts was about a figurine of a digging dog that a local parish council did not find acceptable as a grave decoration (D. Pinnerup, Viborg Diocese, personal communication). Fully in line with G.N. Brandt and J. Exner these conflicts are mainly understood in terms of individual taste versus interests of the collective. Underneath the varnish these conflicts are, however, about much more than different views on aesthetics. They are fundamentally triggered by different theologies of death and express other views on consolation than the official Lutheran standpoint does. It is the silencing of these other views that is the real kernel of the conflicts, as the following case makes clear.

The archetypical conflict dates back to 2001 and ushered in a series of similar conflicts. The conflict began when, around Christmas time, a mother placed a cross, decorated with fir branches and an electric light chain, on the grave of her recently deceased teenage daughter. This act, however, soon turned into a conflict with the local parish council in Grenaa, which did not find electric light to be appropriate in the churchyard. The council ordered the mother to remove the electric light chain and stated that if she were not willing to do so, the council would have it removed. The mother complained about the decision of the parish council, and the conflict was addressed on both the level of diocese and

government and received a lot public attention before it was settled in 2005. The mother was given a dispensation by the parish council to have a light chain on the grave, but only between the 23th and the 30th of December, solely on one cross and with a maximum height of 40 cm (instead of 150 cm).<sup>7</sup>

When the parish council forbade the mother to place an electric light chain on the grave of her daughter, it motivated the decision with aesthetic reasons. In a letter from the parish council to the diocese, the council explicitly declared that they considered this decoration to be inappropriate and further explained that they were afraid it would turn the churchyard into a “Tivoli” (referring to the famous amusement park and pleasure garden in Copenhagen) and would distress other visitors on the churchyard because it was not part of tradition of the material culture on Danish churchyards. But that there was something more at stake than aesthetics became clear from the parish council’s letter seeking to explain why electric lights on graves were problematic, while candles were not: the council wrote that candles suited the remembrance of a dead person and that the same was not the case for electric light. It thus seems that the real problem behind the rhetoric of aesthetics was that the mother did not relate to the electric light chain in the right way. When visiting the grave, she apparently was doing something other than just remembering her dead daughter.

That the heart of the matter was about how one should relate to grave decorations and about the right religious way of finding consolation, becomes clear when looking at the explanations the mother gave in the media about why it was so important for her to have this electric light on the grave: “I can buy toys and clothes to my other children. But the only thing I can give my daughter is a light in the darkness” (*BT*, 28 September 2002). To this mother her dead daughter obviously was not a memory of the past as prescribed by Lutheran theology. On the contrary, the deceased daughter was someone with whom the mother could still interact and to whom she could give things. The mother’s continuing bonds with her daughter were made manifest in a material way by placing a Christmas decoration with electric lights on the grave.

### **Official religion versus lived religion**

Despite the rising number of public conflicts and contestations of the Protestant norms of consolation permeating the Danish churchyards, they are still relatively rare. However, publicized conflicts are only the tip of the iceberg. Most conflicts are managed on local churchyards without attracting attention. When statutes explicitly mention specific objects like the figurines of animals, gnomes and santas, benches and electric lights, it testifies to the fact that the placement of such objects has caused conflicts. But the practice of maintaining continuing bonds with the dead, I would argue, might be even more widespread than indicated by these regulations. A silent subaltern existence is another solution to repression, instead of open conflict. In this respect, it is remarkable that the head of the churchyard committee of the parish council in Grenaa gave the following comment to a newspaper: “Why not just do it at home [putting up an electric light chain]. It does not have to be demonstrated that publicly” (*BT*, 28 September 2002). The comment suggests that this key member of the Grenaa parish council knows full well that interactions between the living and the dead are a fact of Danish culture, but prefers them to take place outside the churchyards, in a non-public setting.

That this is in fact the case is demonstrated by the Danish Internet memorial *mindet.dk*. Text messages left on its pages testify to an ongoing communication with the dead, since people not only write about their memories of the dead person in question but also directly address the dead person. This is also known from other research (see e.g., Roberts 2004; Kasket 2012). However, it is overlooked that Internet memorials also describe practices on churchyards. Users upload pictures that document the grave in its various stages, freshly made and covered with flowers, the headstone and ornaments placed, and so forth. They also document grave visits and often write about their visits and their practices at the grave. There are many photos of grave visits on special days, such as the dead person’s birthday, the wedding anniversary, Christmas and Easter. These are the days when the whole family normally would meet if the dead person would still have been alive, and they still do meet, but now in the churchyard. A good example shows the scene of a typical Danish birthday celebration, complete with the Danish flag, coffee and the favourite cake of the birthday-‘child’, only that this celebration takes place at the graveside and is photographed by the widow. The caption

reads: “Some of your children, children-in-law and your grandchild congratulate you [with your birthday]”. Clearly, the dead person is addressed (mindet.dk, posting on 8 November 2008). The mother from the Grenaa-case is certainly not alone in maintaining continuing bonds with a dead loved one manifested through things placed on the grave. Mindet.dk in this way gives clear evidence that non-public interaction between the living and the dead is not something that solely takes place outside churchyards, as the remark from the head of the Grenaa parish council seemed to suggest. It also regularly takes place in the churchyards.

That the grave site is an important source of consolation, at odds with Protestant theology, is thus a widespread phenomenon, also for Lutherans. For instance, the mother in the Grenaa-case was a member of the Lutheran Church. And since mindet.dk is owned by the only Christian newspaper in Denmark, it must also be assumed that most of the people contributing to the website are affiliated with the Lutheran Church. To explain the discrepancy between the theologically prescribed relations between the living and the dead on the one hand, and what is practised on the other hand, an apparently attractive conclusion would be that the Lutheran Church has lost authority. People maintaining continuing bonds with the dead cannot be counted as ‘genuine’ Lutherans, even though formally being members of the Lutheran Church. This conclusion would be in line with researchers such as sociologist Phil Zuckerman (2008). In his book *Society without God* he describes Denmark as one of the most secularized countries in the world, while attributing a membership rate of the Church as high as seventy-nine per cent to mere tradition.

That this seemingly attractive conclusion is inadequate, is exemplified by the Grenaa-case. The mother in question considered herself to be a good Christian in spite of having a relationship with her dead daughter, at odds with Lutheran theology. And as she later was elected as a member of the parish council, it is clear that others also considered her a good Lutheran (*Kristeligt Dagblad*, 11 November 2004). We have to be aware that religion is always lived and different from what is prescribed, even when it comes to committed Christians (Stringer 2008: viii). Textbook religion does not exist in real life. Religiously highly committed Lutherans might well find consolation in what must be described as decidedly non-standard ways, when interpreted against the background of a textbook of Lutheran dogmatic. With this in mind the rising level of

conflict between what is theologically prescribed and how things actually take place is better explained as a result of how the Church has expanded its grip on the churchyard and left less space for family-members to find consolation in divergent ways.

Conflicts about what one is allowed to place on graves are not just about aesthetics, they are also about people fighting to practise their religion within the framework of the Church, in ways that make sense with regard to their own life and that offer consolation. What is meaningful to people might not be so much dogmas and beliefs, as one is led to believe by Protestantism, but the rituals and practices (McGuire 2008: 19-44). In this connection, it is interesting that photos depicting baptism are repeatedly found amongst the photos uploaded on *mindet.dk*. It seems that to these people the shared ritual of baptism is what establishes the possibility of having continuing bonds with the dead. So while the Protestant theological rejection of continuing bonds between the living and the dead is deemed not to be religiously meaningful, the ritual of baptism clearly is.

### **Planning for future consolation**

It is to be expected that the regulation of material graveyard culture and its implicit Protestant norms can make it difficult to find consolation for non-members of the Lutheran Church. This group has been growing, mainly due to immigrants and refugees coming to Denmark. Before the 1960s, Denmark was a more or less mono-cultural and mono-confessional country. Therefore, discussions, legislation and planning of churchyards have mainly focused on how to include atheists and people with other religious backgrounds. The Church Ministry, for instance, published a new guideline, entitled *Kirkegården – begravelsesplads for alle* (The churchyard – burial ground for everyone), in 1996, urging parish councils to show a special openness and responsiveness to these groups, given the near-monopoly of the Lutheran Church on burial grounds.

That the churchyards' immanent Protestant norms of consolation can be problematic is thus recognized. However, it has not been problematized that Lutherans can also have problems with finding consolation in the prescribed way, as I have shown here. If the church-

yards are to be for everyone, should they then also be places where everyone can find consolation, including Lutherans who find consolation in non-dogmatic ways? Would it be appropriate if discussions, legislation and planning of future churchyards took into account the needs of these church members too?

Many people – also Lutherans – find consolation in maintaining continuing bonds with their dead by placing things on the grave. Not only for aesthetic but also for normative religious reasons, graveyard regulations appear to present obstacles. The statutes are often violated and based on this experience parish councils have been urged to explicitly inform about statutes when families are choosing graves to avoid future conflicts about grave decorations (Falmer-Nielsen 2002). If these conflicts were just about aesthetics, more information might be a good answer. But as I have shown here the conflicts are also about different theologies of death and consolation. A planning based on what is practised would give less reason for conflict and would result in churchyards being more satisfying places to find consolation for Lutherans and non-Lutherans alike, no matter how they live their religion.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>I use the words ‘churchyard’ and ‘graveyard’ interchangeably for the Danish word *kirkegård*. I avoid using the word ‘cemetery’ because no equivalent word exists in the Danish language (for a further explanation of this see below, note 2). The terms ‘burial grounds’ and ‘burial place’ are used as broader terms.

<sup>2</sup>The Lutheran Church possesses a little over 2100 churchyards or about 99% of all burial grounds in Denmark. In a number of the biggest cities the municipality (*kommune*) run the burial grounds, but with only one exception they have all been consecrated. They are therefore termed *kommunale kirkegårde*. Apart from this a few burial grounds belong to other religious groups (Christian, Jewish and Islamic). This explains why there is no close equivalent for the word ‘cemetery’ in the Danish language. In English the word ‘cemetery’ tends to refer to secular burial grounds owned by the municipality or private business. Such cemeteries do hardly exist in Denmark. One regularly finds a more liberal attitude towards an ‘aberrant’ material culture in the burial grounds run by Danish municipalities.

<sup>3</sup>Another reason for the lack of interest in burials grounds as sites for religion could very well be that Protestant Churches since the time of the Reformation have tried to prevent any religious – meaning Catholic – practices to take place there, as I shall return to. This might indirectly have led religious scholars to the erroneous understanding that no religious practices were to be found at burial grounds.

<sup>4</sup>Until then modern cremation had only taken place in crematoria in Italy (since 1876), Germany (since 1878) and the United Kingdom (since 1885). Cf. Davies and Mates 2005.

<sup>5</sup>The homepage of Danske Krematoriers Landsforening:

<http://www.dkl.dk/Info/statistik.php>.

<sup>6</sup>Kirkegårdsvedtægter: en vejledning for menighedsråd, kirkegårdsbestyrelser og provstiudvalg, Kirkeministeriet 1996.

<sup>7</sup>I have been given access to the case files of Aarhus Diocese (placed under the date 21 October 2002) and my description in this section is based on these documents and related newspaper articles.

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**GRAVE VISITING RITUALS AS LIVED RELIGION\***

**Stone dead or alive**

Almost a lifetime after their hearts stopped beating, Ditsel and Jensine Sørensen hit the news. The couple made headlines in the *Aarhus Stiftstidende*, a newspaper in the Aarhus region of Denmark, in the early spring of 2014. Or rather, their gravestone did. Although it was almost impossible to tell from the way people responded to the news.

The gravestone was found in a pile of boulders near the old harbour in Aarhus. The rocks were to be used in the construction of a new city district. The pile, in front of student housing, would have gone unnoticed, had the stone not appeared “in an almost macabre way” (*Aarhus Stiftstidende*, 20 March 2014). Some of Ditsel’s relatives recognized the gravestone from the photograph accompanying the newspaper article on the remarkable find (*Aarhus Stiftstidende*, 14 March 2014). A journalist then arranged to interview these relatives for a follow-up story. In the resulting article, the reporter’s description of the gravestone made it sound as if the corpses of the couple had been found near the harbour, rather than a stone on which their names and dates of birth and death engraved. A female relative told the journalist: “We were enjoying our morning coffee and reading the newspaper - and we got rather a surprise. We hadn’t exactly expected my husband Ove’s uncle to turn up in that way again” (*Aarhus Stiftstidende*, 20 March 2014). In speaking further about the uncle, the woman reveals a close identification of the stone with a person they have known. The uncle and the object bearing his name appear to be interchangeable. As long as the gravestone was intact, the uncle (and his wife) did not seem to be really dead. In this unusual case, he even ‘turned up’ amongst the living. The find in Aarhus, however, is not an isolated occurrence. Now and then, gravestones with the names of the deceased still on them accidentally appear amongst boulders

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\* Minor parts of this Chapter have earlier appeared in: Kjærsgaard, A. and E. Venbrux (2016). “Grave-visiting rituals, (dis)continuing bonds and religiosity”, *Yearbook for Ritual and Liturgical Studies/ Jaarboek voor liturgie-onderzoek*, 32, 9-21.

being used to strengthen sea defences. Their discovery always provokes strong reactions (e.g., *Ekstra Bladet*, 11 February 2014; *Fyens Stiftstidende*, 16 August 2012). If the Danes are indeed as indifferent to death as Zuckerman (2008) argues, how can such reactions be explained? Why is it that the boundary between life and death is blurred in people's perception of the gravestones?

In this chapter, I explore the limits of secularization by looking at gravestones and the practices surrounding them. By means of a case study, I will expand on the religious practices and understandings that are an integral part of grave visiting. I will describe grave visiting as a ritual, and compare it with other rituals used to connect the living and the dead. The study reveals a religiosity in the churchyard that normally remains hidden from public view.

### **The gravestone index**

Inscriptions and images on gravestones are considered valuable historical sources, because they can be seen as “an archive fashioned in stone and bronze” (Hamscher 2003: 40). Zelinsky (2007) provides a good example of what can be gained from treating gravestones in this way. He gathered and analyzed gravestone inscriptions and iconography dating from the 1850s to 2005, from cemeteries in the United States, Canada and Great Britain. Zelinsky uses these representations on the stones as a measurement of personal religiosity. He designed what he terms a “gravestone index”, with the intention of compensating for the shortcomings of other quantitative methods such as measuring affiliation with a congregation, church attendance and responses to opinion polls.

Although a comparable systematic investigation of what is engraved on gravestones has not been made for the Danish situation, Zelinsky's gravestone index would undoubtedly point to a high degree of secularization in Denmark. Whereas gravestones with traditional Christian iconography and inscriptions were once the norm on Danish cemeteries, such gravestones are now becoming very rare, as both my own and other Danish researchers' observations attest (Kragh 2003: 241; Jürgensen 2011: 283). To take a walk through a Danish churchyard and study the few surviving old gravestones with explicit Christian references is, therefore, always a fascinating history lesson. In particular, abbrevi-

ated references to the Bible remind the observer of a former familiarity with the Christian scriptures that is hard to find amongst average Danes today. On some of the older stones, we also find quotes from Christian hymns. These tell of the importance given to singing in Lutheranism that, with the Reformation, became the state religion in Denmark. A great many hymns used to be learned by heart and, to numerous people, were at least as important a source of knowledge in their religious life as the Bible.

Although 83.7 % (Kirkestatistik 2015) of Danish funerals still take place in the Lutheran Church, Christian beliefs in the afterlife do not leave many traces on the gravestones of today. The images and inscriptions say barely anything about it, not unlike the Danes who were reluctant to speak about afterlife beliefs with American sociologist Phil Zuckerman during his fieldwork in Denmark (and Sweden). In his book, *Society without God*, Zuckerman reports that “The overwhelming majority of people that I interviewed – when asked what they think happens after we die – basically said, ‘nothing’” (Zuckerman 2008: 59). In fact, one of the key factors behind the evaluation evident in his poignant title is what Zuckerman considers to be the Danes’ (and Swedes’) secularized view on death.

If we want to know more about the religiosity of Danes, we need to take a closer look at practices, such as talking to gravestones and other activities surrounding the graves, that blur the line between life and death, subject and object. These include the reactions to the incident with the inscribed gravestone in the harbour in Aarhus. Looking solely at verbalized afterlife beliefs, as Zuckerman (2008) did, we fail to get the full picture. He met with people’s reluctance to discuss such matters. This raises the question, formulated by Lodberg (2016: 133), of “How to study faith, if faith is a deep personal feeling, which you don’t speak about?” But why single out belief and disregard practices in the first place?

It is true that average church attendance on Sundays is very low in Denmark, but the opposite is the case for ecclesiastical rites of passage. Zuckerman (2008) does not mention having taken part in, or having observed any religious practices, in or outside of the Church. Furthermore, he equates the lack of subscription to certain beliefs of fundamentalist American Protestantism with non-religiosity (Kjærsgaard

Markussen 2014). Martin's point that, in defining religion, "the social sciences have been, and remain covertly theological" (2011: 60; cf. Chapter 3) seems to apply to Zuckerman's study. In an apt phrase, Sullivan (2005: 8) puts it as follows: "Religion— 'true' religion some would say—on this modern protestant reading, came to be understood as being private, voluntary, individual, textual, and believed." Lived religion, however, as McGuire (2008) makes clear, is based more on religious practices than on religious ideas and beliefs.

We should look for religious beliefs and practices that "for the most part remain under the surface" (Davie 2007: 141). Particularly relevant, according to Davie, is "the evidence that the study of death brings to the vexed question of secularization" (2007: 241). Religiosity is at play when in people's practices and/or understandings, implicit or explicit, death is not considered to be the end (cf. Chapter 1). Instead of only looking at what gravestones and people tell about afterlife beliefs, I suggest we take a closer look at what people say to gravestones, and how they relate to graves in every sense of the word.

This chapter investigates grave visiting as a religious ritual and gives examples of a discrepancy between a seemingly lack of afterlife beliefs amongst Danes, and actual practices in the churchyard. While the inscriptions and iconography on the gravestones of the departed might leave no trace of any afterlife beliefs, the case study in this chapter shows how, with help of ritual techniques, people act as if the dead are somehow still present, and that it is still possible to have a reciprocal relationship with them. "Religion in everyday life is abundantly intersubjective and relational," according to Orsi (2012: 156-157) and, as we will see, this is borne out by the Danish case study.

For the purposes of this study, I define religion as practiced or 'lived'. One in which, as McGuire (2008: 15) points out, practical coherence and efficacy in dealing with problems of everyday life supersedes logical consistency. The religious practices concerned are not necessarily confined to the bounds of institutional religion. Maintaining ongoing bonds with the dead, implied by some practices at gravesides in Denmark, for example, does not sit well with the Lutheran doctrine (cf. Chapter 4).

### **Revisiting grave visiting**

Ariès (1981: 524) relates how, in the nineteenth century, the public cemetery became “the focus of all the piety for the dead” and he suggests considering it as “a religious institution.” Goody and Poppi, who looked at Anglo-American and Italian cemeteries, confirm that grave visiting “continues to be a prominent feature of an otherwise heavily secularised society” (1994: 150). Bailey (2006: 234-238) even deems the churchyard to hold greater significance for people’s religiosity than the church. He considers grave visiting to be a “ritual”, as well as “a self-perpetuating religious practice” (Bailey 2006: 234; cf. Ariès 1981: 549). In spite of these observations, which point to cemeteries as being fertile grounds for religiosity in what otherwise are deemed to be secularized countries, grave visits have hitherto been overlooked by students of religion, except for the mentioned important study by Bailey (2006). This may be the result of a Protestant bias towards privileging belief, to the detriment of ritual and practice.

At the same time, research on grave visits, carried out by scholars from other fields of study, though informative, has paid only minor attention to the religiosity involved and, instead, focused mainly on sociological and psychological aspects (e.g., Francis et al. 2005; Bachelor 2004). The current, dominant paradigm when theorizing bereavement holds that the bereaved maintain ‘continuing bonds’ with the deceased. Over the last two decades, the understanding has increased in strength “that the purpose of grief is not to sever bonds with the dead, but to rework the bond in a way that the deceased can remain part of the survivor’s inner and social world” (Goss and Klass 2005: 9). Grave visiting practices can be seen as a means for the bereaved to maintain a relationship or bond with the deceased, transcending death. I assert that these practices imply some form of religiosity and can, therefore, best be understood as a religious ritual.

Turner defines ritual as “a stereotypical sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors’ goals and interests” (1973: 1100). This definition, I contend, applies to grave visiting. Cemeteries, surrounded by hedges, fences or walls, are places set apart for the dead (Schmied 2002: 57-58; Rugg 2000: 261-261). The presence of the dead demands appropriate and



respectful behaviour from any visitors to these sequestered areas (Wartmann 1986: 39). The graves are marked, and also have boundaries (Schmied 2002: 113-116). A tendency exists to treat them as private spaces, reminiscent of a home and/or garden (Hallam and Hockey 2001: 96, 147; Worpole 2003: 93). They happen to be loci for the exchange between the living and the deceased (Francis et al. 2005: 144). Gestures made, words uttered or inscribed, and objects given and/or placed, are part and parcel of the ritual of visiting the grave. The deceased may be considered to be lending an ear and offering companionship, guidance or help (Francis et al. 2000: 43; Bailey 2006: 236).

### **The study of grave visiting**

In recent years, more research has been done into how relations between the living and the dead unfold on the Internet, especially on Internet memorials (e.g., Maddrell 2012; Kasket 2012; Jakoby and Reiser 2014). It has, however, gone unnoticed that the same readily accessible material can also help us gain further insight into the practices taking place in cemeteries. Many users of the Danish Internet memorial portal, *mindet.dk*, for instance also write (to the dead) about their grave visits. Amongst the photos the holders place on the Internet memorials, there are often also photos - many with comments - of the grave, directly after the burial (with the floral tributes), and from later visits. Using Internet memorials as a source makes it possible to gain new insight into how the same grave is visited and related to over time, sometimes even by different people. One such memorial is the one erected on *mindet.dk* by the widow, Kirsten, for her deceased husband, Claus. Kirsten and her daughter, Sanne, have written extensively here, but others have also lit a digital candle and put a note next to it, or left longer messages in the Guestbook that tell us more about grave visiting practices.

In this analysis of grave visiting as a ritual, I shall focus on the grave visits of Kirsten and her family, but will also refer to other examples. Following Kozinets (2010: 65ff), I combine digital ethnography ('netnography') with an in-depth interview in person. I chose Kirsten for this purpose, as she is the widow of Claus and holder of both his grave and his Internet memorial. On 19 January 2015, I spent a full day with Kirsten in her home, conducting an in-depth interview (4 hours 12

minutes recorded; recording and transcript are in the possession of the author). I also conducted two telephone interviews with her; a brief one shortly before the face-to-face interview (on 12 January 2015), and longer one after I had produced the first draft of this chapter (on 14 September 2016). From this material, this chapter draws mainly on the information given in the in-depth interview about the visiting of the grave and the process of designing it, Kirsten's religiosity and her thoughts on death. I also asked her about the death of Claus, viewing his dead body, his funeral and the burial. Furthermore, the in-depth interview delved into memorial practices taking place in her home and garden, including the use of the Internet memorial.

The combination of interview and netnography had several advantages. The Internet memorial of Claus is a very rich source, with 36 photos (26 of which are of the grave) and 337 messages (219 in the Guestbook and 118 at a Candle). Several different people have been posting messages relating to the grave. Although only one of the visitors to the grave has been interviewed, these messages have given access to the voices of others. While each one has visited the same grave, their comments show how they differ in how they relate to the same deceased person. Although the in-depth interview with Kirsten was carried out six years and seven months after the death of Claus, most of the messages concerning the grave were posted immediately before or after a grave visit. Consequently, these accounts are not dependent on what the writer remembers to the same extent as the interview carried out much later. On the other hand, the interview generated considerable new information, not found on the Internet memorial. Kirsten was very aware that there were things she did not want to share on the Internet. As holder of the Internet memorial, she also has the opportunity to write on the memorial in private mode, and in the interview, she told me that she chose to do so when writing about things she found particularly difficult, or private. In line with this, I assume that those writing on the Internet memorial in general are aware that it is open for anyone to read, and that this restricts the information shared. The information available on the Internet memorial did, however, provide considerable pre-knowledge that helped prepare for the interview with Kirsten.

At the time of the interview, Kirsten had had to move a long way from the churchyard where Claus is buried, and it was not possible to

visit the grave together with her and carry out a direct observation. This study is, therefore, based solely on what has been written and said about grave visiting practices in the sources mentioned, and what I have been able to observe in the photos on the memorial. It has, however, been enhanced by other personal observations and informal conversations with people visiting other graves in churchyards in various parts of the country, which have improved my understanding of the subject, and alerted me to a number of aspects of the phenomenon of grave visiting. The analysis also relies on messages left by only some of the visitors to the grave. There are others, who remain unheard, as they have not written about their visits on the Internet memorial site. The focus, however, is on the way in which the widow of the deceased, their children and grandchild relate to the grave. With this study I bring forth in great detail the practices and understandings concerning one single grave in Denmark. An extended case study does so to unravel more general patterns (Van Velsen 1967), it provides insight, but I hasten to say that we should be wary to make generalizations on the basis of this case study. I am sure a number of the practices are widespread, but the study does not allow for saying what in general is happening concerning grave visits in Danish cemeteries. My modest aim is to falsify Zuckerman's (2008), in my view, far too general contention that death is secularized in Denmark. This case study, therefore, focuses on demonstrating what a changed perspective on where and how to find religiosity can bring about.

Although I do not claim that the grave visiting in this case is representative of what is going on at all graves in Danish churchyards, the appearance of Claus' grave is representative of a growing tendency to put increasing numbers of items on graves. This has been going on since the 1990s (Kragh 2003: 264-266), sometimes causing conflicts with the cemetery's regulations (cf. Chapter 4). This is particularly the case on the graves of children and adolescents, but is in no way limited to these groups. In a churchyard in Jutland it was recently decided to make a section of graves with more freedom for individual choice than would usually be the case. The staff refer to it as "the section for the young widows' graves" because it was the requests and uncompromising attitude of this particular group that gave rise to the need for it (as explained to me by the manager of the churchyard during a discussion on 6 June 2016). Kirsten too demonstrates the same attitude. The groups mentioned are all

characterized by an untimely death. In such cases, the need to make use of means with which to maintain connections with the deceased may, therefore, be greater for the bereaved.

Claus died unexpectedly, aged 63 years. Because he died while working abroad, Kirsten and most of the family did not view his body until three weeks after his death, when his remains body were brought back to Denmark. Claus was, like his family and most other Danes, a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Accordingly, his funeral service took place in the church. (For further information on Danish Lutheran funerals, see Rubow 1993.) Following the funeral service, the body was transported to a crematorium and cremated. Normally, a funeral would take place within a week after the death, but in this case, it took place about four weeks later. Kirsten tells me that she hardly ever attends church. As is the case for most church members in Denmark, her attendance is limited to baptisms, confirmations, weddings and funerals. Neither the inscription nor the icon on Claus's gravestone expresses any beliefs in an afterlife. Apart from his name, the stone also bears the inscription "loved and missed" and an image depicting a truck, referring to his job as a truck driver.

Analyzing Kirsten's grave visiting as a ritual, I first investigate the way the grave is a place set apart, and how Kirsten has designed it to facilitate the grave visiting ritual. I then turn to the actual grave visiting ritual and, after having compared it with other ritual practices, I finally discuss what the changed perspective of this study and its findings tells us about afterlife beliefs and religiosity amongst seemingly secularized Danes.

### **A place set apart (for an imagined reciprocal relationship)**

Claus's ashes are interred in a grave in a churchyard in the Danish countryside and, like most other such churchyards, this one surrounds a church belonging to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark. The churchyard is owned by the local church and managed by the local parish council. The churchyard statutes mark it as a religious space, stating that "The churchyard is a consecrated place where there must be order and peace" (Ordensbestemmelser §30, stk. 2). At the same time, however, it is also to be perceived of as public space: everyone has the right to enter

the churchyard and visit it and, according to Danish law, any person living in the parish has the right to be buried there, irrespective of whether they are a member of the church, or not. This is due to the fact that the church is “the general burial authority” (Nielsen and Kühle 2011: 177) and has a near monopoly on burial space in Denmark.

The churchyard is physically separated from the surrounding area by a stone dike, and is only accessible through a gate. The statutes rule that the dike is “not to be broken down” (Ordensbestemmelser §30, stk. 6) and the gate “must be kept closed” (Ordensbestemmelser §30, stk. 7). To maintain what is deemed to be “order and peace”, the statutes put restrictions on the behaviour of the visitors to the cemetery. For example, “Traffic is not allowed outside the paths” (Ordensbestemmelser §30, stk. 8), the living are, in other words, not to walk where the dead are buried (unless they are visiting a specific grave). The churchyard is divided into different sections, each with different types of graves. These are separated by the paths and plants and shrubs. With the exception of the anonymous graves, where all the dead are interred in the same lawned area, without any form of marking for individual graves, the graves in the churchyard are marked with gravestones and, mostly, there is some kind of boundary separating one grave plot from the other. This means that not only the churchyard, but also the grave itself is a place set apart.

When Claus died, Kirsten knew what type of burial he had wanted. They had talked about it once, prompted by a TV commercial about *My Last Will*. This is a form developed by the undertakers, Danske Bedemænd, on which people can record their wishes for their funeral and burial (cf. Politiken 2007). The commercial had caused Kirsten to suggest that they should fill in such a form, in case anything happened to either of them. Claus had stated that he wanted to be cremated and be put in the anonymous grave. Everything else was up to Kirsten. At the time, Kirsten too had opted for the same. (She filled in the form, but Claus did not). This was the only time they had ever discussed the subject. They had not discussed the reasons each of them had for wanting this option, for as Kirsten explains, “We just didn’t talk about things like that.”

When Claus died, however, Kirsten partly chose differently to Claus’s own wishes. She needed a place set aside specially for him, as she explains:

“Claus also wanted to be interred in the anonymous grave. I said, ‘he’s not going to be there’. Because I can’t handle that. I need to have a place to go to and say he’s here, and this is my place. So, in this aspect I really went against his wishes a lot. But, on the other hand, he was cremated, because that’s what he wanted, and he should have his way in that. But he wasn’t allowed to be put in the anonymous grave. I really couldn’t do that. I really had a need to have a place to come to and sit, and be really, really sad and miss him really much.”

The photos on Claus’s Internet memorial show that his urn is placed in a grave plot to be found in a section of the churchyard where hedges separate each grave off on all four sides, except for a small opening, opposite which the upright gravestone is placed. The plot is big enough for two coffins side-by-side (in most cases, this would be for a couple). But, if urns are interred there, there is room for more (in most cases, family members). This type of grave plot, with very clear and strong boundaries has long been the traditional grave type in Danish churchyards. It was only when cremation started to become more common that new types of grave were developed. (Sørensen 2009: 118).

One such new type of grave, which has become widespread, is the lawn with a small flat stone as the only marker (cf. Chapter 4). But a grave marked only with a stone was not enough for Kirsten: “I just said straight away, I want a grave that I can come and stay by. Because I really couldn’t handle just having a lawn, where there’s maybe just a tiny little stone or something.” So, to Kirsten, it is not just about being able to *find* the exact place of the grave by way of a stone marker (“he is here”), what is important to her is also being able to come and *stay* by the grave, *sit* by it (as she mentioned earlier), in other words to dwell there (“this is my place”).

When Kirsten talks about the day she went to see the churchyard and chose the grave plot, the importance she puts on a bench already being there alongside the path next to the grave tells us even more about what this act of sitting entails for her:

“It was such a fine little corner plot. Admittedly, a plot with room for two coffins even though he is interred in an urn, but there has to be room for me as well. And it was ideal because there’s a bench just opposite his grave plot. So, I could sit and talk with him. I already knew that I wanted to have a bench placed up there [on Claus’s own

grave plot], but I didn't know when we would get it done. And then I could sit and talk with him anyway."

Visiting the grave and sitting there has a specific purpose for Kirsten: it is about talking to her deceased husband, Claus. The grave is a place set aside for Claus. But, more than that, it is place set aside for Kirsten to *re-late* to Claus, and already when she was choosing the grave, Kirsten was anticipating and planning this.

From the above quote, it is also clear that Kirsten thinks of herself in relation to the grave in different time perspectives: both as a visitor in the present, and as being interred (and visited) there some time in the future. Commenting further on the size of the grave she calls it "wonderfully big", and explains that the wonderful part is, that there is enough room for both her and (because, like Claus, she too will be cremated) also for the children, if they want to join their parents. The grave is a place where she imagines that the family can continue to be together over time, whether alive or dead. While the individual's life span has come to an end, the social time of the family will continue at this place (cf. Chapter 6). Somehow they still have a life together.

Remarkably, Kirsten took the perspective of her dead husband in definitely choosing for a grave with a view on the high way:

"When I went up and talked with the churchyard caretaker, I had only one prerequisite, he [Claus] has to be able to look down on the road where he always drove; he has to be able to keep an eye on it. So now he's lying at the top of a hill, with a view right down on the road."

*AK: But why is that road so important?*

"First of all, to keep an eye on the trucks when his mates drive by. He also had to be able to see us when we drove by and greeted him. We didn't always go in there, even though we were there really often."

Kirsten describes the deceased Claus as someone who is able to *see* and *keep an eye on* friends and family. The grave is, in other words, not only a place for Kirsten and the family to relate to Claus, it is also perceived of as a place where Claus *relates* to them. In a similar vein (in the previous quotation) she also literally speaks of talking *with* Claus at the grave, not talking *to* him. To Kirsten, the relationship with Claus continues to be reciprocal in some form, also after death, and it is on the basis of this

understanding she chose the grave. As we have seen earlier in this chapter, Turner's definition of religious ritual claims that rituals are based on a perceived reciprocal relationship between human and "preternatural entities". We can, therefore, say that Kirsten prepared for the grave to be a place for grave visiting rituals. In other words, she is in the process of designing a ritual place.

It is in relation to the view from the grave that Kirsten shows the mentioned uncompromising attitude. When asked if other things were also important in her choice of grave, she says "No. He just had to be able to look down on the road. That was very important. Otherwise he wouldn't have been allowed to lie there; I would have found another place where he could lie and look down on his road." I.e. she would have found a grave in another churchyard (the road she is talking about is a highway).

Although Kirsten places the emphasis on the view *from* the grave, it is worth noting that also the view *to* the grave also matters to her and her family. Many churches in Denmark are situated on hilltops, making them highly visible in the landscape. This is also the case for the churchyards surrounding them, as the quote from Kirsten reminds us. The greetings and thoughts from afar ensure that Claus and the grave are continuously made a part of the life of the family. In spite of the fact that the grave is a place set apart for them to relate to Claus, they do not only relate to him and the grave when actually visiting the grave. The importance to Kirsten of her late-husband's grave and its location is, therefore, evident in much more than simply the frequency of her visits to it.

### **Designing the grave**

On the Internet memorial for Claus, Kirsten has posted a total of 26 photos taken during visits to the grave during the first two years and four months after the funeral in 2008. They enable us to follow what the grave looks like in different stages, from just after the funeral, when it is covered with flowers and memorial wreaths, up to when the process of designing the grave came to an end. Kirsten indicates this point in time has been reached, by adding a comment to one of the photos: "Then we really had it laid out." This is about a year after the funeral.



At that point the grave plot is covered with gravel, and there are three steppingstones leading from the entrance to the memorial stone, putting it as the centre of attention. The path curves slightly to the right, as the gravestone is placed somewhat closer to that corner and is slightly turned so that it faces a granite bench placed at the left-hand side of the entrance. A flowerbed edged with cobblestones has been created in each of the two other corners of the grave plot. One of them is round, with a small bonsai-like tree in the middle between the flowers; the other is shaped like a heart. Next to the gravestone there is a lamp with a large candle in it, and in front of the gravestone are two vases, for fresh flowers. These are the fixed elements on the grave that stay there all year round. There are other objects, but these vary from time to time, as the photos show.

The way Kirsten refers to the grave shows that she very much perceives it as being private (family) space. In addition to “my place”, Kirsten also calls the grave “our place” (meaning Claus *and* Kirsten). But, first and foremost, she talks and writes about it as “Claus’s garden.” The hedge, together with the size of the grave plot do indeed have the look and feel of a small private garden. But, according to the churchyard statutes, it is in fact possible for the managers of the churchyard to veto the planting and the memorials used on the grave. With regard to the latter, the statutes state that the local parish council is responsible for ensuring that no memorials are placed “that in size or shape may blemish the church or churchyard, or whose inscription and fittings may be regarded as inappropriate” (Vedtægter §16, stk. 2). An example of what may be deemed to be ‘inappropriate’ is also given, namely “coloured toys or inorganic objects” (Vedtægter §16, stk. 2). The rules also stipulate that, “Benches are only allowed to be put up with the consent of the churchwarden” (Ordensbestemmelser §30, stk.15). Kirsten is, therefore, not completely free to design the grave as she wishes.

When Kirsten and (some of) the children chose the memorial stone for Claus, they imagined incorporating a small electric light in an existing hole in the stone. This was to light up the image of a truck (“Claus’s truck,” as Kirsten calls it) placed over his name. It was only later that they were surprised to discover that they were not allowed to place any electrical lighting in the churchyard (see Chapter 4 on a similar case). Kirsten tried to convince the caretaker otherwise, arguing that “it’s

just a tiny one, one of those that charge by themselves, like a lamp in the garden.” But her efforts were in vain. Kirsten had to accept this restriction. However, there is light on the grave, as “they can burn all the candles they want”. This way, Kirsten found an alternative way of putting light on the grave, namely the lamp with the big candle next to the gravestone. This solution, however, sometimes puts Kirsten in what she describes as a “terrible” situation. Because, unlike a self-charging electric light that uses solar-panel technology, candles have to be replaced in order to keep the light burning:

“I have a lamp there that’s always got a candle in it. It’s been burning since he died.”

*AK: Is it a replacement for the fact that you couldn’t install an electric light in the gravestone?*

“Yes. He should then have a lamp instead. Because there’s got to be light for him. He has to be able to see, you know. So, it’s terrible when none of us can visit. I haven’t been to the churchyard now for a long time, because I’m sick and have no means of transport. And I can’t use public transport. So then it’s my daughter who does it. Then she drives up there. We always have some long candles up there. We usually have 2-3 of them there, for whichever one of us goes up there. There’s then a big bag behind [the stone] and there’s also a lighter in it. So that the person who comes to the grave can always put a new candle in [the lamp].”

What is perceived as appropriate to put on graves and what is not, is often seen as a question of good or bad taste. However, judgement on the matter may also reflect particular religious understandings of how relationships between the living and the dead are – or are not – to be played out (cf. Chapter 4). For Kirsten, placing a light on the grave is surely not an aesthetical question concerning grave decoration, it is about taking care of Claus, whom she perceives to be comparable to a living person: only able to see if he has light with which to do so. The ban on placing an electric light restricts Kirsten’s way of relating to Claus in this caring way. Fully aware of the discrepancy between the nature of death and what she is saying, in the same vein Kirsten also talks about Claus as someone who, like a living person, has to be kept warm:

“Of course, I know that he can’t read or anything, but there just has to be light with him always, you know. It’s just something maybe, also a little warmth. It’s cold lying up there, you know. Even though I know he can’t freeze. For me, it’s that he’s not to lie where it’s dark and cold. It has to be *hyggeligt* (warm and cosy). For me, candles give this sense of *hygge*, and we always used to light a lot of candles and just sit and *hygge* (have a cosy time) together. And then it’s just like, there just has to be [candles].”

Claus is interred in a landscape imbued with Lutheran theology that does not sit well with the continued relationship with the dead expressed in this case. Kirsten is, however, capable of readjusting her need to take care of Claus to these limited possibilities, and letting the candle convey this other way of continuing her relationship with Claus. Because, for Kirsten, the candles create an atmosphere of *hygge*, the same warm atmosphere of cosy togetherness the family used to enjoy together. This togetherness is now continued at the grave.

While electric light is deemed inappropriate on the grave, candles are, on the other hand, accepted. But that has not always been the case. With the Reformation, the Catholic tradition of placing candles on graves as an intercession easing the way through Purgatory was banned, as was All Souls Day with its prayers for the souls of the dead. It was only after World War I that candles on graves began to return on Protestant graves in Europe. In Denmark, candles on graves were mainly introduced in connection with graves of resistance fighters in World War II and from here, the custom slowly spread to other graves. Initially, the Lutheran church did not support this development, and many ministers looked upon it as a Catholic way of relating to the dead. It was only in the 1990s that the candles on the graves became fully accepted and today, lighting candles on graves is in many places an integrated part of the church service on All Saints’ Day (Kragh 2003: 266-270). From being a day of martyrs, All Saints’ Day is now reinterpreted as a day “in memory of the dead, both those we have lost ourselves, and all the people who have carried the Christian faith on through the generations” (Folkekirken n.d.). Within the Lutheran church, candles on graves have been reinterpreted from being a problematic means of intercession for the dead, to an unproblematic means of commemorating them. To Kirsten, however, candles are clearly much more than a means of commemoration, they are

important for her continued taking care of Claus and her relationship with him.

Whether objects on the graves are seen as appropriate or not is constantly under negotiation locally. This discussion gives an interesting glance at the intersection between institutional religion and lived religion, and how adjustment and reinterpretation takes place on both sides. The type of grave that Kirsten has chosen is the type with the fewest restrictions attached to it. On many of the newer types of graves the restrictions are more severe (cf. Chapter 4). But in the end, rules are only rules if they are implemented and, though the statutes see “coloured toys or inorganic objects” and “benches” as being problematic objects, Kirsten can place colourful *nisser* (elves) on the grave every year at Christmas, and she also placed the bench on the grave without receiving any protests. When Kirsten placed a bench on the grave, it was the only one in the churchyard. In a personal discussion (14 September 2016), the caretaker, who is fully aware of what the statutes stipulate regarding benches, tells me that there are now three of them. All of them have been placed there by younger people, one of whom is a widower who often sits there. None of the benches have been put there with permission from the churchwarden. He has simply never been asked, and has also never protested. The statutes do not, therefore, always reflect what is practiced.

It is, however, not just what is placed *on* the grave that the authorities seek to control with regulations in formal statutes, but there are also rules governing the bodily remains in the grave. If interred in a coffin, the statutes state that “the church’s tradition of placing the coffin in an east-west direction must be maintained and, if possible, a woman (meaning a wife) should be buried at the man’s (meaning a husband’s) right-hand side” (Vedtægter §4). This placing of the remains in the grave is firstly a symbolic reference to the Christian expectation of the second coming of Christ at the end of time and the traditional belief that, on that day, the dead will sit up in their graves and face him coming from the east. Secondly, it refers to the ritual of marriage, where the bride traditionally enters the church on the left-hand side of her father and leaves on the right-hand side of her husband. The bodies of those who are buried in this way are marked with this religious symbolism, whether they subscribe to it or not. With cremation of the body, this symbolism disappears; the ashes cannot face east and do not have a left- or right-

hand side. In the case of Claus, however, Kirsten chose to let the symbolism be partially restored, because it is important to her. After the cremation, the undertaker placed Claus's wedding ring and a toy truck in the urn. The ring in the interment is a clear, although different, reference to the ritual of marriage. Kirsten explains that she had always wanted a church wedding, and she describes their wedding day as "the most perfect day in my life." In reference to the ring, she explains that "we were still married, so he had to have his ring with him." A couple taking the marital vow says to be husband and wife "till death do us part". To Kirsten, however, this point has not been reached. She still regards Claus and herself as being husband and wife.

As demonstrated, Kirsten is not free in her decisions regarding the design of the grave, but she manages to adjust to rules, or even break them, with the goal of making the grave into a place where she can relate to Claus. Located in a churchyard with public access, it is in principle possible for everyone to relate to Claus at the grave. But, remarkably, Kirsten has decided to design the grave in such a way that she can relate to Claus in a way nobody else can, not even his children. For when the interment of the urn took place, about three weeks after the funeral, Kirsten did this by herself. Therefore, only Kirsten (and the caretaker of the churchyard, who had to make the hole for the urn beforehand, in accordance with Kirsten's wishes) knows where Claus is interred in the grave plot. The gravestone does not mark the exact spot. Kirsten stresses that this secret knowledge is very important to her "it's like it's him and me. It's something we have together." This way she manages to ensure that the marital relationship continues to be a special, intimate relationship, in which things can be shared that not even the children know. Kirsten's control of the urn gives her special access to Claus.

### **The grave visiting ritual**

Grave visiting rituals have a number of features in common. The most extensive research to date on grave visiting has been conducted by Francis, Kellehar and Neophytou in London cemeteries. They write: "[W]e learned that men, women and children of all ages, religions, ethnicities and income levels visit cemeteries, at frequencies ranging from daily to once a year" (Francis, Kellehar and Neophytou 2005: 20). What is more,

“the data suggest a relatively similar range of activities across the different religious and cultural groups at the graveside” (Francis, Kellehar and Neophytou 2000: 43). These activities also come to the fore in the studies of grave visiting by Schmied (2002) in Germany, and by Bachelor (2004) in Australia.

Bachelor ranks placing flowers, maintaining the grave and talking to the deceased as the top three activities (2004: 107-115; cf. Schmied 2002: 153-157, 85-95, 37-44; Francis et al. 2005). The lighting of candles should also be mentioned as well (Schmied 2002: 144-147). All these aspects are also included in Kirsten’s visits to the grave. These visits are further characterized by being bracketed by ritualized greetings on her arrival and departure. As Kirsten puts it: “It’s simply a habit. We’ve [the family] done it from the first day we visited the grave. The first thing we do is to go and stroke the headstone and say ‘hello’. And the last thing we do before we go is to kiss it, and touch it again.” She describes the average visit to Claus’s grave as follows:

“I park the car, and then I go through the gate, and walk up to him. When I’m entering, I’m already thinking of him. And just before I reach the grave, I say: ‘Hi, love.’”

*AK: Do you say this aloud, or to yourself?*

“No, I say it aloud. I also sit and talk to him out loud. Then I tell him what’s been happening, and what his grandson can do these days. Then I tell him off; why is he not here, why has he left me? We have to discuss this occasionally. But, otherwise, I just sit and tell him that I miss him, how things are going in my life, and how sorry I feel for myself that he’s not here with all the health problems I’m having. Yeah, you know, just everyday stuff. And then I tidy up a bit if there’s something needs doing. But, generally, the caretaker looks after things. We make sure he looks after things, just to be on the safe side, so that it’s always nice. Then I change the candle, and just stand and chat with him for a little while. And then, when it’s time to go, I give the gravestone a few strokes and a kiss. And then I look over at him, to where he’s buried, and say: ‘Bye, love. Take care. Till next time’.”

Although Kirsten laments Claus’s absence, she feels and acts as though she is in touch with him at his graveside. Her visits are a way for their everyday conversations to continue, and so also a form of an everyday life together.

The notion that the deceased is somehow present and registers the utterances and actions of the visitors appears to be quite common. You can almost physically be in touch by tending the grave or caressing the stone, as well as communicate with the deceased (Francis et al. 2000: 43-44; Bailey 2006: 236). The messages on *mindet.dk* show that Kirsten is not alone in talking with Claus at the grave. Sanne, their daughter, for example writes, "I'll drive up to you today and put some flowers, and talk with you" (Candle, 7 October 2008). Like Kirsten, Sanne also talks with Claus at the grave, and she too is trying to come to terms with his sudden death. On *mindet.dk* she writes "I went up to you yesterday and shouted at you (not in a bad way) but because you'd been in my dreams in the night, and there you were at home" (Guestbook, 19 March 2009). But it is not only family members (or women) who continue talking with Claus at the grave, so does Torben, an old friend and colleague of Claus. He has left a message on *mindet.dk* saying "I want to come down soon [from another part of the country] and see where you're lying, and then we'll have a chat. [I] [h]ope that this time you'll listen to what I have to say" (Guestbook, 1 April 2010). Other messages on *mindet.dk* tell about gifts that have been left on the grave. A daughter-in-law, for instance, writes around Christmas time "[I] [h]ave just been up and put a deer made of fir branches. [I] [t]hink it looks really cute." (Candle, 16 December 2008). The messages address Claus, but also inform others reading them on the Internet memorial, maintaining - via the deceased - relationships between his nearest and dearest as well.

The grave visiting ritual centres on the gravestone, and not only when touching and kissing it at the beginning and the end of the visit. The objects and flowers brought to the grave are placed at the stone. Sanne writes "I'll come up before Christmas Eve. [I] [h]ave made something for the stone" (Guestbook, 13 December 2009). In Denmark, Christmas gifts are opened on Christmas Eve. What Sanne, therefore, wants to bring is a Christmas gift, so that Claus can have it in time. Also, the talking is directed at the stone. Kirsten, for instance, writes "We went up to you yesterday and placed some really nice flowers. But, as Sanne says - it's a bit strange to have to talk with a stone instead of talking with you" (Candle, 28 October 2008). About the same visit Sanne writes "I can't do without you and it feels so wrong to go up into the churchyard and sit and talk with a 'stone'. It's not the same as if you'd been sitting

on the bench out in the yard. You know, as usual, when you were having your coffee or your Swiss roll” (Guestbook, 28 October 2008). Sanne, like Kirsten, also strives to continue the everyday life together with Claus at the grave, by doing what they usually do. Although, at times, she experiences difficulties in trying to bridge the gap between life and death in this way, the gravestone clearly plays an important role during her visits.

In this family, food, drink and cigarettes are also brought to the grave, as a means of continuing life together as it used to be. Kirsten tells me that she often brings coffee in a thermos flask when she visits the grave, and specifies that Claus always has sugar and milk in his coffee. The coffee is made especially for Claus. Kirsten herself does not even drink coffee. While she is sitting on the bench and chatting with Claus, she instead drinks cola, while they “smoke a cigarette together.” Later in the interview she also tells me that, when it is very cold outside, they sometimes drive up to the churchyard and give him a tiny bottle of rum “to get warm again.” These practices tell in very clear language that the deceased Claus is seen as someone who has to be nurtured like a living person, and as someone who is still included in the community of the living and can share (food) with them.

It is not just everyday life that is kept up at the grave, so are family celebrations. The grave is visited on the occasions of Christmas, Father’s Day and Claus’s birthday, which coincides with the wedding anniversary of him and Kirsten. Also, in these cases, the grave visiting ritual may be extended to eating together. Kirsten writes about the birthday/wedding anniversary

“Congratulations Dearest...Today it’s ‘our’ day and your birthday. So at 9.30 some of your children and I met up in your pretty garden to congratulate you. Henrik [Claus’s son] and Pia [Claus’s daughter-in-law] had brought along coffee and *brunkager* (a type of Danish Christmas cookies) for you. You used to eat all of them before the rest of us got to have any” (Candle, 8 November 2009).

Another special occasion for the family to visit the grave together is the baptism of Claus and Kirsten’s grandson, Mikkel, Sanne’s son, who was born a week before Claus died. In fact, the grave visit turns out to have been a key issue in the planning of the baptism, Kirsten writes:



“The only good thing right now is that our little grandson is to be baptised in the same church as you had your funeral service. We could do with some joy now, so Sanne has promised that it will be in your church, so that afterwards we can go together to you and put some flowers, and so that you can see Mikkel, I’ll do everything to make sure that he gets to know you.” (Guestbook, 01 August 2008)

Another reason for them to visit the grave after the baptism is also for “little Mikkel to greet his grandfather,” Kirsten writes in a later message (Candle, 5 November 2008). The baptism is arranged so that Claus can also take part, and grandson and grandfather can start to build their relationship, just like little Mikkel is to do with his living grandparents. The social act of photographing a grandchild and grandparent together is a part of building up this social relationship. Only, in this case, a gravestone is photographed in place of Claus (cf. Chapter 6). Sanne writes (with added emojis) “Going to visit you Sunday, when Mikkel is baptised. Because we’re going to take photos at your stone :D Mikkel is to have a memorial of grandfather :D” (Candle, 20 November 2008).

Being talked to, receiving gifts, being photographed, kissed and caressed; the stone is, in many ways, treated like a human subject and a strong association between the stone and Claus is created. Several of the photos from the grave that Kirsten has posted on the Internet memorial, and the text commenting on them, recount this. One of the photos shows Morten, Claus and Kirsten’s son, kneeling next to the gravestone with his hand resting on it while he looks at the photographer. The commenting text reads “17/4.09 Morten sitting with you” (instead of “Morten sitting at Claus’s gravestone”). This turns the photo into a portrait of Morten and Claus and the hand on the stone into a hand on the shoulder, so to speak. The same association between the gravestone and Claus is made in the case of a photo of Sanne in the same position as her brother, except that she has her arm around the gravestone, which makes the suggestion of bodily interaction even stronger. Here, the text reads “19/5.09 11 months after your day of death (*dødsdag*). Sanne and I sat and talked with you”. This text transforms the photo, taken by a mother, into a portrait of a daughter embracing her father during a conversation between the three of them. The association between the gravestone and the deceased seems to become almost an identification between the two. Similarly, Francis et al. (2005: 124) in their study also find that, for many be-

reaved, “the memorial *is* the departed.” They add that “the marker gains this attribution only through the proximity to the bodily remains” (2005: 124). The fact that Kirsten, as described in an earlier quote, always looks over to where Claus is buried when she touches the stone and says goodbye, is fully in line with this.

As Frazer (1922) notes with regards to magic, there exists a tendency to hold associations for real connections. He distinguishes two assumptions in sympathetic magic. The one is that “things which resemble each other are the same” and the other that “things which have once been in contact with each other will always be in contact” (Frazer 1922: 11). These imagined relationships imply that the other part of the equation can be acted upon as were it the target person. The two respective associations, according to Frazer, comply with two principles or laws. In what Frazer calls the law of similarity “like produces like, or (...) an effect resembles its cause” (1922: 11). Scratching out the eyes in a photographic portrait, for example, would affect the depicted person’s sight. In Frazer’s law of contact or contagion “things that have been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed” (1922: 11). This law is in operation when a relic that was once a part of the whole - for instance the finger of a saint - now stands for the whole, *pars pro toto*, and is venerated as if it was the saint. It is equally in operation when we are dealing with contact relics: the habit of a saint or whatever else has been in touch with the saint becomes associated with the saint and is related to as if it was the saint. Francis et al. (2005: 124), as we have seen, allude to this law by stating that the stone is seen as the dead person because of “the proximity to the bodily remains”.

This is indeed one form of contact or contagion, but is not the only way the marker can gain the attribution of being the departed as Francis et al. claim. Following Frazer, the association between a stone and the deceased can also have been established by a contact that occurred in the past, when the person was still alive. This comes to the fore in an example, given by Petersson and Wingren (2011: 60), of a mother who wanted to mark her son’s grave with a stone he often used to sit on. In similar vein, the widow, Inge, with whom Kirsten comes in touch with via [mindet.dk](http://mindet.dk), and whom she experiences as an important support after the death of Claus, writes about her choice of a stone for her husband’s

grave: “Jens’s gravestone comes from our back garden. We found it years ago, and he had been jostling with it himself. So, for me, that couldn’t have been more right” (Memorial for Jens on [mindet.dk](http://mindet.dk), undated).

Any resemblance of the deceased as a living person to the gravestone in the eyes of the bereaved may actually do. The strong association between the gravestone and Claus was already at play when the stone was first selected in the stonemason’s showroom, long before it was placed on the grave, and without Claus having ever been in physical contact with it. About choosing the gravestone Kirsten explains:

“We were simply completely convinced that this was just him, this one. It was entirely in his spirit. He would have been laughing out loud, if he’d seen it and he would have said, that’s just me. We just knew, because he was so special.”

For the family, what really made Claus stand out as “special” was his sense of humour that challenged all conventions. For example, gender conventions, when he didn’t care whether the trousers he wore were men’s or women’s. The family believes the gravestone, which Kirsten also describes with the words “unconventional” and “special”, also expressed the same sense of humour. It was this likeness that made the gravestone “just him.” The close association of Claus with the stone, and subsequently the stone being acted upon as if it were Claus himself, is in accordance with Frazer’s law of similarity.

Only after they had chosen the stone did the family discover why it looked different; it was actually intended as a fountain and not as a gravestone. The mentioned hole in the stone was meant for the water, not for an electric light as Kirsten and the children imagined when they chose it. Although it was mass-produced, to Kirsten and her family the ‘fountain stone’ was individualized and one of a kind (cf. Rugg 2013). What fundamentally always ‘singularizes’ (Kopytoff 1986) or sets apart a gravestone is, however, the inscription of the name. Names do not only refer to a person, they also stand for the whole person, *pars pro toto*. As Runia points out, “names are the metonymies *par excellence*. By providing the names of the dead, absent lives are made present in the here and now. A name is a cenotaph for the person who once bore it, an abyss in which we may gaze into the fullness of a life that is no more” (2006:

309-10). We are here dealing with another instance in which Frazer's law of contact or contagion is applicable.

The importance of the name is underlined by the fact that a gravestone does not cease to be a gravestone simply because it is removed from the grave: the name must first be removed. Hence, the names on gravestones that have been taken from the grave are usually covered before they leave the churchyard. The names are then removed before the stones are reused in public construction works, such as sea defences or harbours. When a gravestone from which the name has not been removed accidentally turns up, this provokes strong reactions and, as we have seen in the introduction, and it might even be regarded as if being the person who bore that name.

The gravestone can be seen, touched and dealt with in ways that the bodily remains beneath the earth cannot. The gravestone becomes a tangible substitute for the body. The grave visiting centres on the stone, but Kirsten is, however, constantly aware of the presence - though invisible - of the bodily remains, and also acts in relation to them. We have already seen how Kirsten focuses on Claus's remains when she leaves the grave, and when Claus is 'drinking', the coffee Kirsten prepares is actually poured out and absorbed by the earth on the spot where the urn is interred. Kirsten also tells me that she always avoids walking on the spot where the urn is buried: "I would never step on his head," she says. And, if other visitors place any objects on that secret spot she moves them to somewhere else. The spot "has to be free. Nothing will be put on him and be a burden" or "weigh him down," Kirsten explains. Even though Claus is dead and cremated, Kirsten acts as though he has a vulnerable body that she has to protect. The visible, unprotected substitute body on the grave's surface is in contrast made of indestructible stone.

To Kirsten it is, however, neither the gravestone nor the remains themselves that makes her feel close to Claus, but rather the ritual practices:

AK: The place you're closest to him up there, is that the gravestone, or where?

"No, it's just sitting up there. I know he's not there, but somehow when I sit up there then I feel I'm close to him. When I am sitting on the bench and talking with him, and drinking a cola and smoking a cigarette with him, and he's then sometimes having a cup of coffee."

In the examples above we have seen that an association is understood as a real connection. This understanding is characteristic of magical practices. Frazer (1922: 11) formulated his laws of similarity and contact or contagion as the two basic principles of magic. We have also seen that there are many different associations between the gravestone and Claus that all reinforce the idea that kissing, caressing and talking with the stone *is* kissing, caressing and talking with Claus (cf. Yelle 2013: 29-30). In religion-as-lived, practical coherence and efficacy in dealing with problems of everyday life supersedes logical consistency, it needs to 'work' and bring about what is lacking or incomplete, says McGuire (2008: 15). We may add that in the case of death it needs to bring about what is lost, and that magico-religious practices at the grave lend support to this.

### **Between heaven and earth**

Ritual practices and ritual objects relating the dead and the living are not confined to the churchyard. Kirsten says about visiting the grave "I knew that I had taken him along with me. So, I knew very well that when I was in the churchyard, he was too." On the other hand, this also means that Claus can be 'taken along' with her to other places. Apart from being "in the churchyard" or "lying 'down there' in the cold earth", as Sanne writes on one occasion when she cannot come to terms with her loss (Candle, 8 November 2008), on [mindet.dk](http://mindet.dk) Claus is described by both Kirsten and Sanne as being very close "in my heart" and "always with me." At other times, the more unspecified "everywhere", "somewhere" or "there where you are" is used, but most used is "up there" or "in heaven." As a liminal being, Claus is betwixt and between. He is, neither 'here' nor 'there' and, at the same time, both 'here' and 'there', as well as 'nowhere' and 'everywhere'.

Talking to the dead appears to be widespread, irrespective of religious affiliation or non-affiliation. It can take place in the kitchen as well as at the grave, according to Stringer (2008a,b), who considers it a basic form of religiosity as it entails communication with non-empirical others. For Kirsten, making an Internet memorial was a way of "being sure that I had a place to enter and talk with him, and write to him" and, compared with the churchyard, she found it an advantage that she could "visit at

any time” (interview, 14 September 2016). What made her interested in *mindet.dk* in the first place, however, was the possibility of lighting digital candles for Claus.

Kirsten also talks with Claus in her home, while looking at a photo of him. And in the evening, she places a candle “at him”, meaning at the photo. Both are placed on the windowsill next to the computer where she often sits. When she goes upstairs to sleep, she takes the photo with her, and she puts it in her suitcase when she goes away. During the interview, Kirsten also showed me two photo albums with photographs from their wedding and their last summer holiday together, respectively. They are normally placed upstairs, in her bedroom. These photos are also used in relation to her conversations with Claus. The photo albums are—Kirsten also comments—marked by having been in her hands over and over again. This reminds us that photos are not just looked at, they are also tangible objects that mourners can interact with by means of touch, just like gravestones (cf. Chapter 6).

Outside the churchyard, food is also an important means of relating to Claus. Kirsten tells me that Claus used to grow tomatoes in a glasshouse in the garden with great passion. Since Claus’s death, these tomatoes have been cultivated and eaten continuously by Kirsten and the children, who all got a plant from Claus’s stock. They dry the seeds, so the same tomato can be replanted every season and, if they move house, the tomato plant moves with them. Using food as a means of relating can also mean abstaining from food, as Sanne makes clear:

“I’ve seen baby [tiny] Swiss Rolls in Netto [a supermarket], and I bought one the other day, sat and looked at the package for ages, but didn’t want to eat it, because I was thinking of you. You’re the one who eats Swiss Rolls and, without you, I won’t eat Swiss roll.”  
(Guestbook, 28 October 2008)

The grandchild, Mikkel, is also involved in ritual practices relating to Claus outside the churchyard, as Kirsten explains: “We talk a lot to him about the fact that granddad is sitting up on a star, watching out for him, and we wave up towards him in the evening, and things like that.” Mikkel is also told “that granddad is driving a truck in heaven now.”

While both the ritual practices at home and in the churchyard are important to Kirsten, her son Morten, in contrast to herself and her daugh-

ter, Sanne, hardly ever visits the grave, according to Kirsten. He has also only posted one message on the Internet memorial. Kirsten further explains that Morten uses other types of objects as a means of relating to Claus to those she and Sanne use, namely the tools and work clothes he inherited from his father:

“He has him in his thoughts when he’s wearing the work clothes, or is working on repairing a car. That’s something his dad taught him, and things like that. He has a greater sense of having him with him then, whereas we have a different connection. With us, we have that more with the grave, or when we’re looking at photos, or happen to talk about something.”

The act of repairing a car turns out to have a deeper meaning. It is not just about fixing the car. (See for another example of such use of inherited tools, Rondsted and Thomsen 2014.) Just as the ritual practices on the grave for Kirsten and Sanne, described earlier, focus on continuing everyday life together with Claus, so does the car-repairing ritual for son, Morten.

The examples above show that the way in which Claus’s widow, children and grandchild relate to him is by no means restricted to the grave. Yet the churchyard is extremely important to Kirsten in this respect. She says “you can’t touch him, right? But it’s like when you get up there, he’s there, and you know where he is.” To Kirsten, the grave is the place where she feels sure of Claus’s presence. It is also the place where she felt the most at peace after her loss (interview, 14 September 2016). Claus’s remains are, of course, literally “down there”, but the materiality of the gravestone compared with the materiality of other ritual objects might also help explain the special importance of visiting the grave. The materiality of a photo of the deceased person, for instance, means that it can be taken upstairs and abroad, and so can the deceased person, to the extent that there is an identification made between the two, as is the case with the photo of Claus that Kirsten talks to in the home. As such, photos can be important ritual means to continue the everyday life together: *everywhere*. Photos are, however, not only portable objects, they are also fragile, and can easily be destroyed and lost, just like the deceased has been lost. That Kirsten worries about her photos is something she mentions when showing me the two photo albums. She also tells me that a

video made at their wedding has sadly gone missing. This is quite a contrast with a large heavy stone like a gravestone, which does not disappear, but stays where it is. It does not break (or get sick), but stays whole (and well). It is, for example, these properties of stones that the British artist, Tracey Emin, points to as an important reason for her to marry a stone in one of her art projects. She says of her stone that is “beautiful, it’s Palaeolithic, it’s monumental, it’s dignified, it will never, ever let me down. It’s not going anywhere” (Needham 2016). As such, gravestones may function as an especially important means of controlling the abruptness of death. You can be sure that a gravestone will remain: *always*.

Focusing on the practices on the grave, we have seen that the deceased has been dealt with as being, for example, able to see, listen, freeze, receive, share and *hygge*, as well as being someone with whom everyday life in some form can be continued. The living continue to take care of, and communicate with, the deceased, and do things with the deceased that they used to do. In this way, the deceased person is perceived of as being capable of doing what he did when he was alive. Kirsten and Sanne, however, also attribute abilities to Claus that he did not have as a living person, this is also in connection with the grave visits: Claus is, for example, imagined to be able to mind read when Sanne writes “I’ll visit you [in the cemetery] in half an hour, because I need to just sit with you. Even though I don’t say anything, I know you can feel and read my thoughts” (Guestbook, 10 January 2013). With some reservation, Claus is also imagined to be able to control the heavenly elements, and use them as a means of communication when Kirsten writes:

“Sanne and I have been up to [visit] you, and [we] have been sitting a bit on the bench and talking with you. The sun was shining as if it was you who sent down some beams to tell us you knew we were with you.” (Guestbook, 19 June 2012).

Sanne takes this reading of weather changes even further though still with some reservations:

“[I] have seen so many things which, if you believed in it, would be signs from you that I should move on with my life, or just do something. Light that goes up and down, the sun that starts to shine when I start crying. On the first anniversary of your death, it was raining and,



at the very moment we drove away from you [in the churchyard], it was thundering like crazy. What is it that you want to tell us, Dad?" (Guestbook, 3 July 2009).

Another time, Sanne is unable to join the rest of the family in the churchyard as planned, to celebrate her father's birthday. She writes to Claus: "[I] [h]ad a car accident in Odense, and [I] know you're sitting up there and held your hand over me" (Candle, 8 November 2008), meaning that she attribute to her deceased father to have saved her life. Claus is imagined to have superhuman or—to use Turner's term—preternatural agency and to be able to miraculously intervene to prevent bad things happening, as well as to make good things take place. In the messages from both Kirsten and Sanne on the Internet memorial, they again and again beseech the deceased to help them in difficult situations. Kirsten writes:

"Dearest...help your children, as much as you can from where you are...they really try, but sometimes things go wrong. Can't you send some luck down here to us, so we can slowly move on. We have almost no-one left, and everyone has enough with their own, and [I] don't know how we're to move on." (Guestbook, 27 September 2009)

Attributing him with protective powers, Kirsten calls Claus "a guardian angel" and, on the Internet memorial, both Kirsten and Sanne frequently refer to Claus as an "angel in heaven." This view seems to be more widespread: Walter (2016) draws attention to the increasing popularity of regarding the dead as angels, of which he also sees signs in Scandinavia. Quartier also notes that "Bereaved people can establish contact with their departed loved ones in the form of angels, who represent everything the deceased had meant to their relatives" (2009: 55). Heaven is imagined as a place where life is very similar to here on earth. A point Walter (2016) also makes. As mentioned, the grandson, Mikkel, is told that his grandfather drives a truck up there, and also birthdays, wedding anniversaries and Christmas is thought to be celebrated in heaven. Again, we see a focus on the continuation of life as it used to be. On the day Claus would have turned 70 years old, Kirsten writes "I hope that [your] mother-in-law and [your] father-in-law are throwing a big party for you, so that you can sit and talk about memories from the good old days together. [I] [k]now that you are waiting for me, and [I] look forward to the

day that we shall finally be together again.” (Guestbook, 8 November 2014). Heaven is thus imagined as a place where one will be reunited with the loved ones. When asked to expand on these afterlife beliefs Kirsten does, however, not have a lot to tell:

AK: Do you have more concrete ideas about how it will be to be together again?

“Not at all. Definitely not. It’s just something I’m sure about; that we will meet again. When my time is up, they’ll be standing up there and waiting to receive me.”

While we have seen Kirsten unfold rich religious practices in relation to the dead, putting words to religious ideas about the afterlife is more difficult to her.

What we have observed in this case is that grave visiting, and other rituals, transcend the boundary between life and death, but also between heaven and earth. By means of material objects, the rituals make a reciprocal vertical relationship manifest. In accordance with the basic economy of religious rituals, as described by Turner, it is imagined that the living can interact with the dead, and that the dead - in preternatural ways - can respond with actions on behalf of the living. These are however beliefs that do not sit well with the doctrines of the Lutheran Church, of which Kirsten and her family are members (cf. Chapter 4). How does Kirsten herself balance this?

Kirsten states about herself “I’m not much of a believer when it comes to being a Christian, but very much so when it comes to something between heaven and earth.” The last statement, she explains, means to believe “that there is something that takes care of us somehow.” The same understanding can be found on [mindet.dk](http://mindet.dk) where both Kirsten and Sanne use the expression “believing in what is between heaven and earth” in connection to experiencing, or hoping to experience the protective agency of Claus. Sanne, for instance, writes:

“If I am to believe in what is between heaven and earth, I think you have chosen to give us some happiness now, and I’m really happy about that. Send some warmth and some sign[s] down, so that I know that you’re still thinking of me.” (Guestbook, 23 September 2009)

Kirsten, however, also talks about God as protectively intervening for her sake:

AK: You write a lot about guardian angels in there [on [mindet.dk](http://mindet.dk)], but do you also think that there is a God?

“I know there is, because he has held his hand over me several times, so I’m fully convinced of that. But I can’t say who he is. I can’t tell you that. No-one knows.”

So believing in God is also a part of “believing in what is between heaven and earth”, but the difference is that the beloved dead are known and so, it is easier to unfold a relationship with them, it seems.

With respect to believing in God, why does Kirsten then say “I’m not much of a believer when it comes to being a Christian”? Probably, because she knows that being a Christian is seen by some— maybe including the researcher interviewing her — in terms of church attendance. So she perhaps gives an answer that anticipates this prejudice, because, as already mentioned, Kirsten only attends church in connection with the ecclesiastical rites of passage. Kirsten explains further “I’m a Christian, but I’m not a Christian in the sense that I have to go there [to church] every Sunday.” The reason she gives for this is “I just have it, like, I can just as well believe here [at home] as in the church. I always have the belief with me, so I don’t have to go to church to hear that.” It could be argued that this standpoint is a radical version of the Lutheran doctrine on the priesthood of all believers. But why would one then be a member of the church at all? Kirsten says:

“I’m a Christian, and will always be, and I can’t imagine that I would ever resign my membership of the Lutheran Church, because I’d like to be buried in the Christian faith, and I could imagine that my children would want the same.”

The importance of church membership to Kirsten is found in relation to the funeral, where God and the dead, church and churchyard intersect. After the death of Claus, Kirsten’s relationship with the church and her church attendance have not changed, with one exception: Kirsten now often takes part in the service on All Saint’s Day in the church where Claus had his funeral. This one Sunday every year the church and the church-

yard also intersect: “Tomorrow I’m going to a service in the church. A candle will be placed on your grave and your name will be read aloud [in church]” (Guestbook, 1 November 2008). As we have already seen in this study, in two cases Kirsten has, in her own way, also made the ecclesiastical rituals of baptism and wedding relate to the churchyard, by ending the baptism with bringing the just baptized grandchild to the grave, and by burying a wedding ring together with her late-husband’s urn.

### **Concluding remarks**

Kirsten is wearing a necklace with a cross. She wears it every day, but says that “It has nothing to do with God or anything.” So, is it then an empty religious symbol? And what about her being a member of a church where she never attends the Sunday service? Does that mean that she cannot really be counted as religious? Although, like most Danes, Kirsten does not spend her Sunday mornings sitting in the church, this chapter has shown that Kirsten performs rich religious practices in the churchyard just outside the door of the church, as well as in her own home. Through the peeping hole of an Internet memorial and the information given in interviews by its holder, we have seen how rituals and ritual objects, such as gravestones, can blur the line between life and death, and how an imagined reciprocal relationship with the dead can unfold. If we want to know about the religiosity of the Danes, we should not just look inside the church and ask about beliefs and faith. We have to step outside, and look at what people are doing in their everyday lives. If we fail to look beyond the church, we may miss key evidence.

So why does Kirsten wear a cross around her neck every day? She explains that it is “mostly because I got it for my confirmation from my parents. That’s the main thing.” Like Claus, Kirsten’s parents too are both dead, buried and imagined to be angels in heaven, with protective agency in accordance with Kirsten’s belief that “there is something that takes care of us somehow.” From this perspective, the cross she got from her parents is in no way an empty religious symbol, it is a part of the religiosity that she lives – and wears against her skin – every day. From the view point of the Church, participation in ecclesiastical rites – in this case, a confirmation – binds God and humans together, but to Kirsten it

more prominently binds the living and the dead together, just like the grave visiting rituals in the cemetery that belongs to the church do. While the dogmas of the Church are of no great relevance to Kirsten, the Church as an institution is, because it, so to speak, provides the infrastructure or framework of some of her religious practices. Though her religiosity is not in full accordance with official religion, it does intersect with the Church in important ways.

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## CHAPTER 6

### STILL IN THE PICTURE: PHOTOGRAPHS,

### GRAVES AND SOCIAL TIME\*

#### At the end of our days?

Ultrasound images placed at a grave of a deceased future grandfather (see Figure 4.a), together with his photograph, raise the question of what relation between death and time they entail. The pictures link the unborn child with the passed away man. Both will undergo a change of social



Figure 4. a) Ultrasound images placed at a grave with also a photograph of the (deceased) grandfather-to-be, 2012. b) Photograph of the new-born child placed at the same grave five months later, Nijmegen region, the Netherlands, 2013. Photos by Nicole Schubert and Eric Venbrux.

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\* This chapter has earlier appeared as: Kjærsgaard, Anne and Eric Venbrux (2016). Still in the picture: photographs at graves and social time. In: P. Bjerregaard, A.E. Rasmussen and T. F. Sørensen (eds), *Materialities of Passing. Explorations in Transformation, Transition and Transience* (Studies in Death, Materiality and the Origin of Time, 3) London: Routledge.

status, but they cannot be met in person yet or anymore, respectively. Absent is also the pregnant woman, who visited the grave, informing the ones who pass it about her impending motherhood. Her father has already passed from this world and her child has yet to enter it. The images of the foetus point to a child birth in the near future of which the dead man apparently should not be unaware. When we visited the grave five months later, the ultrasound images had been replaced by a photo of a newborn child (Figure 4.b). The dead man now had a granddaughter. At another grave in the same cemetery near Nijmegen, the Netherlands, there was, similarly, a photograph of a baby substituted for a framed ultrasound image.

In Denmark, too, we came across examples of the dead being kept posted about high points in the life of the family. After her wedding, for instance, a bride placed her bridal bouquet on the grave of her deceased father. We were told it was customary when there was a deceased parent, especially a dead father. The woman's sister visited the grave with her baby daughter later on, photographing the child sitting on her grandfather's grave (photographs in the possession of the authors). She sent the photo to her elder sister living elsewhere to assure her that their father's grave was being looked after well. Like the photograph of the bridal bouquet on the grave it attested to the dead man's inclusion in the ongoing life of the family. This ongoing life beyond the day of death of the *pater familias* comes to the fore in a Danish example we will discuss further below: the celebration of the man's birthday with his family gathered around the grave; this event too was photographed (Figure 5). The posthumous birthday party suggests that his days did not end on the day that he died.

This does not sit well with the idea – derived from Protestant theological discourse – that cemetery visits are mainly to honour the *memory* of the dead. Graves attesting to the celebration of birthdays can also be found in other seemingly secularized countries, such as Switzerland and The Netherlands. And as the Dutch case of the ultrasound images clearly shows, the pictures do not necessarily point to the past but can also point towards the future. Do photographs in connection with the grave enable people to “transcend the reality of biological death” (Astuti 2007: 227)?

## Graven den 8/11.08



Nogle af dine børn, svigerbørn og barnebarn siger tillykke til dig

Figure 5. Photograph of a posthumous birthday celebration at a grave uploaded with a text on a memorial website, Denmark, 2008. Screenshot by Anne Kjærsgaard. Reproduced with permission.

“Photography is the inventory of mortality”, according to Sontag (1990: 70). The different images made over time demonstrate that we inevitably grow older – and eventually die, an irreversible passage of time. Certainly, the close relationship between photography and mortality has often invited attention or scrutiny (cf. Barthes 1981; Metz 1985; Venbrux and Jones 2002; Grimes and Venbrux 2010): “In a sense, photography kills what it captures in rendering it inanimate and devoid of life” (Shaw 2009: 257). Conversely, photographs fixed onto a headstone might tell us that the person depicted is dead, but for the survivors it may simultaneously keep that person alive.

“Photography’s peculiar temporal characteristics, in particular its ability to bring past and present together in one visual experience”, meant

that at the time of its emergence it was often associated with necromancy or communication with the dead (Batchen 1999: 92). The belief that a photograph – not unlike a reflection in a mirror, which is covered after a death – could capture one’s soul dates back to the early days of photography. This belief vanished as photography became more common and familiar. “Nevertheless, the underlying assumption that the photograph stands in a direct causal and mimetic relationship with its referent has continued to condition the ways photographs are viewed and understood” (Rojas 2009: 208). Furthermore, there might be a striking subjective element in the picture that evokes the known person’s presence, as Barthes (1981) reports with regard to a childhood photo of his recently deceased mother. Mitchell (2005: 10–11) speaks of a ‘double consciousness’ with regard to photographs. “Everyone knows that a photograph of their mother is not alive, but they will still be reluctant to deface or destroy it. No modern, rational, secular person thinks that pictures are to be treated like persons, but we always seem to be willing to make exceptions for special cases” (*ibid.*: 31). Especially when the persons in question have passed away, photographs can bring them near (Walton 1984: 251–253). This feeling might be even more heightened with photos at graves.

Graves are contact points between the living and the dead (Wartmann 1986). In their research in London cemeteries Francis, Kellaheer and Neophytou found that grave visits attest to a “social interdependency across time and death” (2000: 46). Graves happen to be loci for exchange between the living and the dead (Francis, Kellaheer and Neophytou 2005: 144), indicating that a death does not annihilate the bond. “The current use of photographs at the site of graves embeds them within an unfolding set of material relations and exchanges which sustain the dead as socially living persons”, according to Hallam and Hockey (2001: 152). But what do these photographs contribute to the process of transcending physical death? And what kind of time characterizes this dealing with the dead?

Writing on death and time, Humphreys remarks that a “study of the use of photographs by mourners is badly needed” (1981: 272; but see Riches and Dawson 1998). While mortality puts the time in the life of an individual in perspective (May 2009), those who stay behind after a death have a need to not be constrained by the limits of the deceased’s lifespan. They act, we argue, from within a different time frame. In our view, photographs at graves can be best perceived in terms of social time, such

as time related to the life of the family rather than the individual. Following Bourdieu (1990: Chapter 2), photography – being widely introduced in the decade before the Great War – obtained the important function and meaning of “an index and instrument of the integration” of the family or social group. We will draw on Bourdieu in our discussion, and will show that his argument can be extended to photographs in relation to graves.

In this chapter we focus on the role of this technology in blurring the boundary between the living and the dead. Placing photos at graves as well as the act of photographing grave visits are part and parcel of a wider set of practices, including the widespread one of talking to the dead (Schmied 2002; Bachelor 2004: 110–111; Francis, Kellehar and Neophytou 2005; Stringer 2008a,b), in which the living consider themselves to be in touch with the dead and by which they continue their relationship and communication with the dead. As Walter (2009: 219) notes, “communications with the dead can be seen as, in the broadest sense, religious experiences”. Stringer (2008a,b) takes a similar view. When people do not consider physical death as the end, we may safely assume that we are dealing with religiosity. We therefore regard the practices with photographs at graves as telling us about the limits of secularization.

### **Photos on graves**

Pictorial representations of the dead have been applied in memorial settings long before the invention of photography; and the history of painted and sculpted portraits is deeply connected with death (see Belting 1990). “There is a direct relation between the portrait and death”, according to Ariès (1981: 261). Ariès notes that when, early in the nineteenth century, the grave became “a place for family pilgrimage”, sculptures displaying family unity could be seen at the resting places of the more wealthy citizens. From the mid nineteenth century onwards, however, photographs, depicting the deceased, on the mass-produced headstones of the middle classes, expressed the same idea “of a family presence” (Ariès 1985: 260).

The invention of the technology of photography, in 1839, thus led in due time to an availability of portraits that was no longer restricted to the happy few. Professional photographers became memory-makers *par*

*excellence*, taking pictures of the living as well as the dead to fulfil this purpose. Post-mortem photos comprised an important part of the photographers' business from very early on; the same goes for photographic portraits that could end up at gravestones and depictions of gravesites (Spira 1981; Ruby 1995; Linkman 2011; Kragh 2003: 124–126).

Already, from the 1840s onwards, photographs were placed on gravestones in the USA; in Europe this occurred at least from the 1860s (Ruby 1995: 143; Linkman 2011: 119). The challenge was to find a way to fix photos in a waterproof and durable way to the stone. Initially glass frames were used to solve the problem (the first American patent dates from 1851, cf. Maturri 1993: 23), but soon photoceramic technology was developed (in 1855 in France, cf. Christen 2010: 117), allowing photographs to be baked onto porcelain or enamel. While photoceramics is still widely employed, new techniques, such as laser etching, to reproduce photos directly onto the headstone, also came into use in the late twentieth century (Ruby 1995: 142ff; Linkman 2011: 120–121; Reynolds 2012: 42–43).

Notwithstanding the techniques to make photos more durable and less fragile than ever, more and more people are placing unprotected or barely protected photographic prints on graves. These involve low costs and can easily be reproduced and replaced. Whereas previously formal portraits made by professional photographers were fixed upon the headstone, people now increasingly place informal snapshots taken by themselves at the grave, which reflects how this type of photography has come to dominate family collections (Linkman 2011: 121–122) and the grave sites are conceived of as an increasingly personalized space (Hallam and Hockey 2001: 147; Worpole 2003: 93).

The presence of photographs on gravestones varies greatly over space and time. In some places there are quite a few, in other places they are almost absent. In the cemetery of Westmalle, Belgium, 20 per cent of the headstones dating from the 1970s and 1980s had a photograph; in the 1990s this increased to 25 per cent of the graves, according to Bleyen, which was still relatively less than in other places in Flanders and also remarkably less than in the Westmalle columbarium where a photograph was counted in 50 per cent of the instances (Bleyen 2005: 177). The same would probably hold true in the Netherlands; in a place like Volen-

dam a photographic portrait of the deceased is fixed to almost all headstones in the Catholic cemetery, and in Leur, near Wijchen, in the previously predominantly Catholic South of the Netherlands, quite a few Protestant graves also have a photo attached to the headstone.

In Lutheran Denmark such photos are rare. A stronger identification between the dead person and the headstone might take place instead, because in contrast to many other places it is not the area where the body lies that is marked and embellished, but the gravestone. Photos are, however, sometimes seen on gravestones in Denmark too, particularly in Zealand and in urban cemeteries (cf. Haakonsen 2011; Helweg 2010). First they appeared on graves of migrants. But during the last 10 to 15 years they can also be seen on the gravestones of ethnic Danes, albeit it is still an uncommon practice. Haakonsen (2011), for example, counted a mere 15 gravestones with photos in two cemeteries in Copenhagen in the autumn of 2009. But these are not without earlier antecedents. Figure 6.a, for example, shows a photographic portrait on a gravestone in Tømmerby churchyard of a man who died in 1911. But such early examples of photographs on gravestones are extremely rare.

In general, the practice is more widely spread in – culturally speaking – Catholic regions than in Protestant ones (cf. Worpole 2003: 113). Schmied (2002: 148) relates it to the Protestant aversion to imagery and preference for ‘the Word’. In parts of confessionally split Germany photographs on gravestones are common, in other parts they are not or are even forbidden (albeit sometimes condoned). In 1995 the court ruled that survivors were not allowed to put a photo of their loved one on a gravestone, in an Evangelical cemetery in Lüneburg, because it was considered inappropriate (Schmied 2002: 148). This stands in sharp contrast to the popularity of having photographs on headstones in non-Protestant Southern and Eastern Europe (Linkman 2011: 116).

In the predominantly Catholic, Swiss Canton of Ticino they are also a common sight. Visiting cemeteries there, Starck observes that there are so many photographs that inevitably the looks of the living and the dead intersect. Not only do they add something personal to the tombs, but it is also much easier to have silent dialogues with faces rather than with writings on bare stones (Starck 2013: 5). A photo of the deceased on a gravestone, as Starck points out, gives the dead person a face.



Sooner or later the memory of what a dead person's face looked like might be lost unless we resort to photographs. We tend to read a lot from faces (Jeggle 1986), but due to the conventions of social interaction it is very hard for us to remember a face in full, even of someone we know intimately, as Elkins (1997: Chapter 5) reminds us. Characteristic details come to mind, often in train with emotions, rather than the face as a whole, because in order to avoid intrusive staring we fail to see it as such. Yet, "a face is a place where looking and feeling are very closely allied" (ibid.: 181). Hence, depending on the context, photographic portraits can evoke the feeling of the presence of a deceased relative or partner. Barthes (1981) attributes this to subjective elements. And it is precisely the characteristic details, which are hard to pinpoint, that allow us to recognize others over time. "The force of a photograph is that it keeps open to scrutiny instants which the normal flow of time immediately replaces", Sontag notes (1990: 111). Besides the all-too-obvious transience, we contend that the bereaved see in the photographic portraits of their loved ones emotionally touching signs of permanence. Or, as Bourdieu puts it, "while seeming to evoke the past, photography exorcizes it by recalling it as such" (1990: 31). To our mind, the subjective, characteristic details of recognition are lasting.

What is special about photography, Walton (1984: 251) argues, is that "it gave us a new way of seeing", a manner of looking that negates the passage of time: "We see long deceased ancestors when we look at dusty snapshots of them" (Walton 1984: 251). For Walton, "Photographs are *transparent*. We see the world *through* them" (ibid.). Or as Barthes puts it, "Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its matter, a photograph is always invisible, it is not what we see" (1981: 6). Walton claims that "... we *see*, quite literally, our dead relatives themselves when we look at photographs of them" (Walton 1984: 252). This seeing (and it can be distorted, like seeing with the real eye or in a mirror) has to be distinguished from seeing the object of the photograph. The seeing through photographs is "a way to find out about the world"; in that sense what matters is that "we can *see* our loved ones again" (ibid.: 253). Walton's point is that due to the photographs' transparency – our seeing via photographs – we are in *perceptual* contact with them. To many this photographic realism makes sense.

The manner in which photographs of the dead are perceived and experienced is of course also influenced by religious tradition. Matturri (1993: 20–27) discusses the photographs of the deceased on gravestones in Italian-American cemeteries up until the 1940s. In this Roman Catholic context the survivors considered them ‘windows’ through which they could communicate with the dead. “Like religious images and relics, they served to establish a cultural space in which the earthly and spiritual realms could intersect”; the photographs thus helped to maintain “a continued relationship between the living and the dead” (Matturri 1993: 27).

The Greek Orthodox, too, make use of photographic portraits of the dead. Sometimes mention of the practices with photographs is made in ethnographic reports. Danforth (1982: 10, 44–45) describes how in the mid 1970s women in rural Greece used to take a photograph of the deceased from the house of mourning to the grave on the eve of the fortieth day after the death of the person in question. Together with a lamp it was placed in a box at the newly made grave monument. The time taken for the territorial passage of the photograph coincides with the 40 days that lapsed between Christ’s resurrection and ascension. For between three and five years the women would visit the graves of their dead on a daily basis. They looked at the photographs placed at the graves, wailed and sang laments (1982: 11–12, 16). Finally, the bones were exhumed and, together with the photograph, placed in the ossuary (Danforth 1982: 11, 20, 22). Seremetakis (1991: 108–111) relates how in the 1980s a photograph and a box with the bones of the son were placed next to the corpse of a woman, laid in state, in a house of mourning in Inner Mani (southern Greece). It indicated that this particular lineage had died out. The photograph, according to Seremetakis, “expressed the separation of soul from body” (ibid.: 111).

As mentioned, the Protestant attitude to headstone-photographs and placing photographs at graves in general differs greatly from the Catholic and Orthodox stance and practices such as those described above are often anathema to them. After the Reformation, the “dead were becoming a part of history” (Koslofsky 2002: 30). All that remained was the memory of their lifetime, because the teachings held that on the occasion of death the ties with the dead ought to be broken. Objections to intercessions had already been raised by earlier reformers, according to

Goody and Poppi, “from the Waldensians onwards” (1994: 195). Protestant Christianity “bans relationships with the dead”, whereas “secularism considers such relationships impossible” (Walter 2013: 13). Although proscriptions are not always in accordance with the actual practices of the adherents (ibid.), in theory, the living can only deal with the memory of the deceased.

The official religion of Lutheranism in Denmark professes that due to the personal relation with God, the survivors cannot do anything for the dead in the other world (cf. Chapter 2). As the recent exhibition *De dødnes liv* (‘The Dead Live’) at the Moesgaard Museum (in Aarhus, Denmark) shows, however, the dead are not entirely absent for some Danes (Høiris, Otto and Rolsted 2014); the intricate links that Danish people maintain with their dead have been further documented by Trap (2013). Just to mention a few examples involving photographs: A woman attached a photographic portrait of her deceased father to her bridal bouquet so that he would still accompany her when she walked down the aisle (ibid.: 86–87). A man had a photographic portrait of his daughter, who died at the age of 24, tattooed on his chest (ibid.: 58–59). And a woman decorated her Christmas tree with a small, framed photographic portrait of her deceased mother (ibid.: 64–65). Others opt for the grave as a place for maintaining “a living connection with the dead” (*en levende forbindelse til den døde*; Trap 2013: 70). An extension of these practices – with ample use of photography – is performed on memorial websites, such as Mindet.dk (as we will discuss further below).

In a region such as Brittany, France, that used to be predominantly Catholic, the official religion did not completely erase the still widespread common people’s view of the afterlife. In this Breton view, as Badone makes clear, the cemetery is “the locus for the continued existence of the dead” (1989: 156). Rather than being separated, “the body and soul remain together in the tomb” (ibid.: 132). The deceased is thus seen as “*homo totus* at rest in the tomb” (ibid.: 133). Badone attributes this to the local familiarity with death and the importance of the collective, although changes are underway towards an increased importance of the individual (ibid.: 133–134). This can hardly be a sufficient explanation, however, for in the Portugese region of Minho exists the same familiarity with death and appreciation of the collective, but in fact the people believe in the separation of soul and body (de Pina-Cabral

1986: Chapter 6). It is our belief, however, that generally speaking the bodily remains will somehow remain associated with the living person as a feature of the usually unacknowledged magical thinking in our societies. Plaques with photographs of the deceased can be seen placed on the Breton graves (see the photo in Badone 1989, Figure 9 following on p. 130), but unfortunately Badone does not comment on them.

Christen, referring to German-speaking areas, notes that such durable photos – in spite of the subterranean decay of the corpses – visually suggest the continued existence of the persons in question. Moreover, the placement of the photographic portraits of both husband and wife on the couple's joined grave demonstrates that their bond of marriage extends into death (Christen 2010: 120). Social relations continue between the dead, but also between the living and the dead, for the photographs allow the survivors to encounter the familiar faces of their dead whenever they visit the graves. The images make sure that the dead stay in the picture.

The experience of the deceased's presence, however, varies with the type of relationship and changes over time. Bennett and Bennett point out that it also varies in intensity: "At its weakest this is a feeling that one is somehow being watched; at its strongest it is a full blown sensory experience" (2000:139). Actually, it is quite common that people report seeing, hearing or feeling the presence of close friends or family members who have died (Sanger 2009), especially when it concerns their deceased spouse (Greely 1987; Rees 1971). For parents with stillborn children the 'realness problem' can become particularly acute, according to Layne (2000: 323). The possession of baby things bought for the baby-to-be such as baby blankets, clothes and toys helps to convince them and others of the child's existence and their own parenthood. What is more, ultrasound images are often "the only things available to testify to the fact that a 'real baby' ever existed" (ibid.: 334). Bourdieu stresses that mainly 'social roles' are read in family photographs (1990: 24). Photos of a new-born child are swiftly distributed to family and friends, because "the arrival of the child reinforces the integration of the group" (ibid.: 26). As we have seen, this also applies to family members who are deceased – ultrasound images and subsequently photos of a new-born child were placed on the graves, making them part of the social time of the living.

We also have to take into account “the materiality of images” (Edwards and Hart 2004) and the qualities of photographs as sensory objects (Barthes 1981; Edwards 2012). Edwards (2012) has recently described them as “objects of affect” and also draws attention to the matter of ‘placing’, the role of photographs in assemblages of objects. She argues that “photographs cannot be understood through visual content alone but through an embodied engagement with an affective object world, which is both constitutive of and constituted through social relations” (ibid.: 221). In relation to this, it is important to note that the way in which a photograph is seen depends on “where it is inserted” and on the context of its use (Sontag 1990: 105–106). Furthermore, as Riches and Dawson argue, “photographs can provide an important prop both as an object of personal internal conversation *with* the deceased and as a vehicle for conversations between surviving relatives and others *about* the deceased” (1998: 124; for a Danish example, see Trap 2013: 102–103). For Sontag, a photograph “is also a trace, something directly stenciled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask” (1990: 154). Photography has something magical about it, she explains. In her view, “a photograph is not only like its subject” but also “part of, an extension of that subject; and a potent means of acquiring it, of gaining control over it” (ibid.: 155). It is somewhat akin to a relic. Frazer’s laws of contagion and similarity seem to apply to these magical properties (Frazer 1922: 11). One can get in touch with the deceased by means of the photograph due to the lifelike image as well as ‘the physical proximity’ (Hallam and Hockey 2001: 143) or contact with the portrayed person at the moment it was taken. In this sense, the photograph has the characteristics of a contact relic.

Photographs fixed upon gravestones have a particularly “relic-like quality” (Matturri 1993: 20). While these photographs themselves can be perceived as remains, the direct association of these “ghostly shadows” (Sontag 1990: 9) with the actual bodily remains in the grave increases their efficacy as relics. According to Hallam and Hockey, the durable gravestone – as perceived or experienced – substitutes for the corpse; and the photograph attached to the headstone consolidates the association at the same time as it animates the stone (2001: 146–147). An analogy can be seen with memorial hairworks that include photographs of the deceased (Figure 6). The addition of hair – bodily remains –



Figure 6. a) Photographic portrait attached to a headstone in Tømmerby churchyard, western Jutland, Denmark. b) Framed hairwork with photographic portrait, dating from 1943. Kept at the Limburgs Museum, Venlo, the Netherlands. Photos by Klaus Bertelsen and Eric Venbrux.

strengthens their effect. Hairworks with photographs are mostly framed, in a medallion to carry around or in a frame behind glass to hang on the wall. The hair makes us aware of the sensory aspects (Batchen 2004a: 32–35), namely vision, touch and smell that apply likewise to objects such as old photo-prints and albums. Also, gravestones are often touched; sometimes they are held, kissed and cared for by being wiped off or washed. With regard to the sensory experience there is thus also some resemblance between the hairworks with photographs and the gravestones with photographs of the once living attached. The grave provides another frame and contact point due to the bodily remains it contains, to which photographs have been added. Whereas in some religious understandings a future *rendezvous* of relatives or marriage partners can be stressed, the practice of “speaking to photographs” (Francis, Kellaher and Neophytou 2005: 90, 96) of the dead suggests an ongoing presence in whatever form. In the domestic context, this presence is sometimes evoked by placing objects associated with the deceased, such as personal belongings, near the framed photographs (Batchen 2004b: 41; Parrott

2009: 136). The presence of the dead, however, appears to be sensed most strongly at the location of the bodily remains. So while talking to the dead can occur almost everywhere, people tend to visit the grave when it concerns a really important matter (see Miller and Parrot 2007: 157). The particular photographic portrait placed at the grave and encountered in recurring visits to the grave becomes emblematic of the deceased. Yet, “a photograph is only a fragment, and with the passage of time its moorings come unstuck” (Sontag 1990: 71); it will acquire new meaning in association with the grave.

The very same photograph as the one attached to a gravestone would have often seen a wider distribution, in different circumstances (see Christen 2010). The image would have been used on other occasions and the picture itself may have been taken for a special occasion, such as a wedding. One can find it in a family album, at a house shrine or as a framed portrait in the living room. If cut from a portrait with two or more people, the social life of the photograph continues in its use and distribution on, for instance, a prayer card among Catholics in Switzerland. It might also be advertised with the death notice or distributed to family and friends after the death (see Christen 2010). Finally, it might be attached to a grave or placed in a columbarium, so one can get in touch with the person portrayed again. The media may differ but the image links social occasions at various points in time and gives substance to ties in a web of social relations. The photographs are passed around, passing the person who passed away back into the social realm.

The social life of the photographic images (Pinney 1997) is thus intertwined with the social life of the group. In the words of Bourdieu, such photographs have the function of “reinforcing the integration of the family group” by “solemnizing and immortalizing the high points of family life” (1990: 19). Typically, photographic portraits attached to headstones show the deceased at his or her best, “the idealized image” (Sontag 1990[1977]: 85). Moreover, they have often been taken at important occasions in the life of the family, such as rites of passage. With regard to photographs used on headstones, Matturri notes that “particularly common are photographs taken at weddings, first communions, confirmations and graduations” (1993: 27). All are status passages, celebrated by the family. They mark moments of integration as well as the passage of so-

cial time. Leach writes, “We talk of measuring time, as if time were a concrete thing waiting to be measured; but in fact we create time by creating intervals in social life” (1961: 135). Commonly celebrated rites of passage of family members and other occasions when families gather mark the intervals in family life, and so constitute its social time. This notion of time goes beyond the limited lifespan of the individual member. The family existed before the individual was born and will continue to exist after one’s death. Intergenerational exchange at graves (Francis, Kellaher and Neophytou 2005) underscores the notion of ongoing family life. The photograph on the headstone, being “an almost temporally transparent image” (Matturri 1993: 20), mediates the relationship between the living and the dead. Let us now turn to how photography also brings the dead and the living together.

### **Integration of the dead and the living**

While for a long time it was photos of the deceased that were most often seen, we now observe photographs of the living appearing more and more at graves and in columbariums in the Netherlands. They are placed alongside pictures of the dead. Some are laminated or covered with transparent plastic to protect them against the weather. Seemingly, graves and niches with urns are increasingly considered domestic spaces. Furthermore, the dead are increasingly welcomed ‘home’ by the living, rather than thought to vanish to a distant other world (cf. Heessels 2012). The this-worldly perspective and their reintegration is emphasized by placing photos of the living along with those of the dead. The boundary between the living and the dead has been blurred (cf. Heessels, Poots and Venbrux 2012); the photos of the living are there to comfort the dead. A nice example is the photograph of two grandchildren on a tile placed at a headstone in the cemetery of Someren, the Netherlands. The text on the tile reads: “Dear grandfather, in this way we are still somewhat with you”.

We encountered another similar example in a cemetery in Nijmegen. On the headstone, which is in the shape of a heart, there is a photograph of a 26-year-old man looking over his shoulder. Below the photo the text reads: “As often as you see my image/in the name of heaven forget me not”. Next to it is installed a photograph of three children, two



daughters and a baby. Although the man died 36 years earlier, a boat-shaped box planted with succulents was placed on the grave to celebrate his birthday. An accompanying card says “heartfelt congratulations”. It is as if in the understandings of the survivors the man’s life somehow continued and, although deceased, he was still amongst them. Bringing the photographs of the living and the dead together at the grave increases the impression of that presence.

Perhaps not so common at graves, the practice is widespread in the interior of people’s homes, where portraits of the dead and the living hang jointly on the wall or stand on a mantelpiece or cabinet. Sometimes graves are associated with the home and/or garden (e.g., Venbrux 1991; Hallam and Hockey 2001: 147). In the case of an ‘untimely’ death the need for the ensemble at the grave might be more pressing, stressing continuing bonds in time that otherwise would have been spent together. And if cremation is a more transient way of bodily disposal, it is understandable that one can encounter more photographic ensembles of the dead and the living at columbariums. The pigeon-holes in the Dutch case are more akin to the home memorials that almost always contain photos of the dead (cf. Wojtkowiak and Venbrux 2010). Across Europe, many graves or places where urns are kept have photographs of the deceased. Sometimes ensembles of photos of dead relatives are created, with flowering plants signalling the visits of the living. These are places where the living can converse with their dead kin. The imaged and imagined co-presence contributes to a sense of belonging, surpassing the boundary between life and death.

As Morgan notes, “Protestants have generally avoided free-standing imagery” (1999: 236). Therefore, one would expect relatively less photographs at graves in areas that are or used to be predominantly Protestant. Not only photos of the dead but also those of the living considered to be in bad taste. For example, Hauser reports that in the Swiss city of Zurich photos of the bereaved were no longer allowed on gravestones because, as the responsible officer put it, “we want a tomb culture, not a photo album at the cemetery” (1994: 283). Haakonsen (2011: 40) refers to a case in Denmark in which the friends of a deceased girl brought photographs to the grave, but her parents did not approve of it. As we have seen, photographs at graves are rare in Lutheran Denmark. However, at the memorial web site [Mindet.dk](http://Mindet.dk), run by the newspaper

*Kristeligt Dagblad* (Christensen and Sandvik 2013: 101), the bereaved upload many photos of graves and grave visits. These pictures are integrated with text and, therefore, probably less prone to offending religious sensibilities (cf. Morgan 1999: 236).

A montage of images of the deceased in photographs of their living kin offers another way of placing them together, against the odds of time. Their individual lifetime has passed, but the dead are presented as still amongst the living. The fact of their demise is thus erased in family photographs taken at some point after their passing away. Figure 7 shows a portrait of a Danish family from northern Jutland in which an older photographic image of a dead child has been pasted in. In the background of another, from the album of the same family, photographic portraits of relatives, dead and alive, are displayed on the wall. Assembling kin by means of placing photographic portraits together or employing photo-editing technology defies spatiotemporal separation.

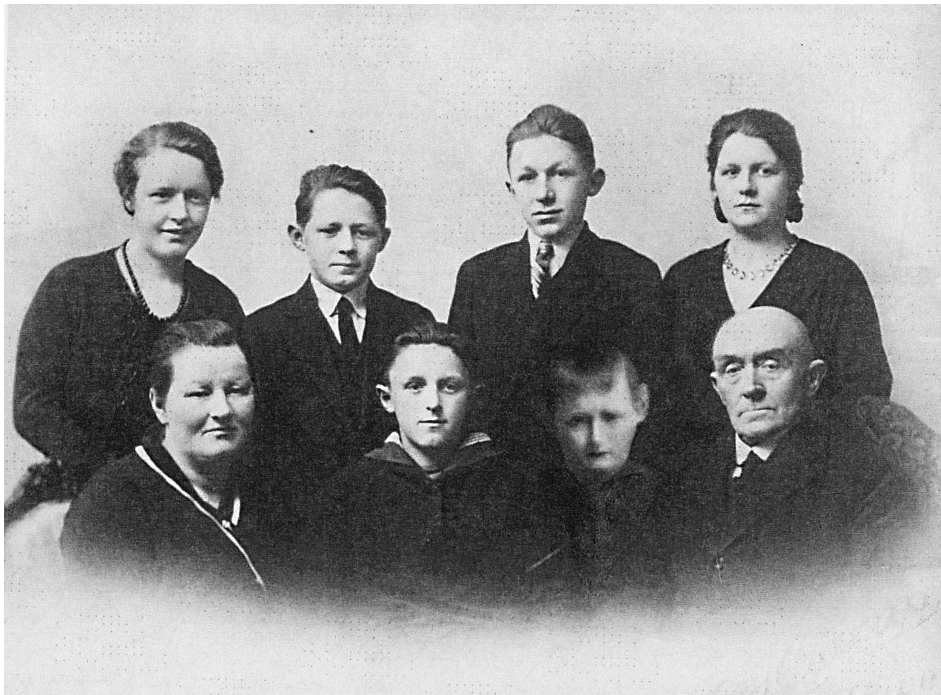


Figure 7. Family photograph, including the image of a dead child, northern Jutland, Denmark, 1930s. Courtesy of Niels Peter Vistisen.

Christen (2010: 158–161) relates how a Swiss family that went to a photo studio with a stand-in two decades after a family member, since deceased, had had a portrait made in the very same studio. The face of the latter was retouched on the substitute person in the newly made family portrait with the parents, two brothers and three sisters (*ibid.*: 159, 161, Figs 96 and 97). The manipulated portrayals help in “imagining the intangible” (Whincup 2004). The practice might seem odd but, historically speaking, family portraits had their origin in painted portraits of both the living and dead members (Ariès 1981: 257). Historical epitaph paintings of notables and their families that are still on display in churches in Denmark portray the living as well as the dead (*cf.* Kragh 2003: 122; Jørgensen 1987: 61).

Montage and assemblage also points to another form of bringing the dead and the living together by means of photography, namely photos made of representations of non-existent others and living persons. Gibson (2004: 293–296) tells how she showed her dying father an ultrasound image to inform him about the future grandchild, Joshua, who he would never see in real life, an event of which a photo was taken. She notes, “Joshua and Dad have only met each other through a photograph. My father is with Joshua for the first and last time, in the only way that is possible. They were in the same photograph at completely different stages in life, and yet existentially they were close to each other” (*ibid.*: 296). Photography here provides the technology of ‘meeting’ like it probably did for those who placed ultrasound images at Dutch graves (Figure 4). However, in Gibson’s case we know that a photo was taken of the event, which is also used in another way to keep the absent person socially alive. What Gibson actually did was to take a family photograph, like she would have done of grandfather and grandchild together when the child had been born. In this way the very act of making the photo constructs the family for the future as consisting of both those absent and those present.

The photograph would most likely end up in the family album. According to Bourdieu, “there is nothing more decent, reassuring and edifying than a family album” (1990: 31). Family photographs obtain a “sacred character” because they evidence the continuing history of the family and thereby “consecrate its social identity, always inseparable from permanence over time” (*ibid.*: 31). In other words, the photographs

assembled in the album enable the family to draw “confirmation of its present unity from its past” (ibid.). Both dead and living members are commonly represented in the family album. “Through photographs, each family constructs a portrait-chronicle of itself – a portable kit of images that bears witness to its connectedness”, says Sontag (1990: 8). She continues by saying, however, that right when photography became ‘a family rite’ in Europe and America the extended family was losing ground to the new phenomenon of the nuclear family. Nevertheless, the photograph album was to convey an image of the extended family, albeit no longer rooted in reality (ibid.: 8–9). The inclusion of photographs of more distant and absent relatives along with the dead upheld the idea of a larger family unity.

Like Gibson (2004), the first author of this chapter, has also looked at her family’s photographs. She went through the photograph albums made by her mother in Denmark. She found an amazing number of family photos that confirmed Bourdieu’s understanding of them as an index of the integration of the family ([1965] 1990: Chapter 2). The photographs chronicled the history of the family, not just the nuclear family but also the moments of gathering with other relatives and friends over time. In the family album, as Bourdieu puts it, “the common past, or, perhaps, the highest common denominator of the past, has all the clarity of a faithfully visited grave” (ibid.: 31). Actually, although Bourdieu does not refer to photographs of the dead, there were photos of people now deceased, grandparents’ funerals, their fresh graves covered with flowers, family reunions at the grave and of grave visits that took place on memorable days, such as birthdays, Christmas and Mother’s Day.

Figure 8.a shows one of these visits, picturing Anne Kjærsgaard, her siblings, mother and grandfather, together with her (dead) grandmother who is represented by the gravestone. The visit was made on the anniversary of the grandmother’s (*mormor*, mother’s mother) death. Although most of the photographs in the albums were taken by Kjærsgaard’s mother, her father (who is clearly without practice) took this one at the request of her mother, who is the one who generally takes responsibility for maintaining the relations with the dead (and more particularly in this case because it concerns her own mother). So on her initiative, a photograph was also taken years later at the same grave on the day of the deceased’s birthday, but now it included a member of an-

other generation, the dead woman's great-grandson. Figure 8.b shows Kjærsgaard with her mother and son at the grave, where Kjærsgaard likewise was photographed as a child. Her grandfather, who had died in the meantime, is also made present by the gravestone that is now inscribed



*Figure 8. a) Photograph of three generations visiting the grave of a deceased wife/mother/grandmother, 1986. b) Photograph of the same family making a three-generation visit at the grave one generation later, 2011, both in northern Jutland, Denmark. Photos by Ole Kjærsgaard.*

with the names of both grandparents. The family album contains photographs of every birthday celebration within the family, and no difference is made between those of the living and the dead. The practices of celebrating a dead person's birthday, taking photographs of descendants at the grave and placing them in the album amongst other family photographs blur the boundary between the living and the dead. It conveys the message that the dead are still members of the family, regardless of their demise. They live on as social persona.

Digital photography, according to Ennis, has resulted in vernacular post-mortem photographs being kept private and secret, restricted to intimates (2007: 18–19). It could therefore be expected that the family photos at the grave would become more restricted than is already the case. Digital and digitalized photographs, however, can also easily be distributed and graveside photographs do appear on memorial websites. In contrast to the digital post-mortem ones, the digital graveside photographs are made public.

On the Danish website Mindet.dk people write about and to the dead person. People also upload a lot of pictures that document the grave in its various stages, freshly made and covered with flowers, or with the headstone and ornaments placed, and so forth. They also document their visits to the grave with *in situ* photographs and often write about the context of the visit. Because photography fulfils a social function with regard to the family, it is, according to Bourdieu, “dependent on the rhythms of the group” ([1965] 1990: 31). In other words, it reflects and marks the group's social time.

Like in family albums, we find photos of grave visits on special days, such as the anniversary of death, the dead person's birthday, the wedding anniversary and Christmas and Easter when the family normally meets. Confirmation, a wedding or other rites of passage of close relatives give further reason to visit the grave. Figure 5 provides a nice example of a birthday celebration at the graveside, photographed by the widow (whose shadow can be seen), complete with the customary Danish flag, coffee and the favourite cake of the one having his birthday. The caption on the cake reads: “Some of your children, children-in-law and grandchild congratulate you [on your birthday]” (Figure 5). The dead person is addressed as if he were still alive.

Website memorials demonstrate that taking photographs of people at the graves of their dead is a very common practice in Denmark. However, the memorials on Mindet are mainly for people who met an ‘untimely’ death (disruptions of what is perceived or experienced as the normal course of time of the member’s participation in the social group). This might suggest that grave-visit photography more often takes place in cases of an untimely death. Other evidence, however, indicates that this type of relationship with the dead is not fostered with all the deceased members of the family. It has more to do with the relation that was maintained with the dead persons when they were alive than with the mere fact of an untimely death. Schmied (2004: 226–227) found that this applied equally to the care for the actual grave: some felt obliged to and others did not.

Moreover, the practice of talking to the dead at the grave frequently appeared to be a continuation of the conversations one had with the deceased during the latter’s life (Schmied 2004: 332). One of us (Eric Venbrux) is acquainted with a man who paid daily visits to the grave of his mother at a cemetery in Lucerne, Switzerland. The woman had been ill and in a wheelchair for 30 years and her son had nursed her during that time. His care was now directed to the grave. The state of the unblemished grave – with a colourful pattern of different types of flowering plants, candles, and an elevation he described as an ‘altar’ – reflected his devotion. The man brought her a bunch of fresh flowers (often roses) every week, as he used to do when she was alive, and he spoke to her as well as to her dead friends at their graves in the same cemetery, assuring them that everything (meaning the grave) was alright. Like the memorials on the Danish website Mindet, his actions illustrate that the relations between the living and the dead tend to be extensions of the relationship that existed before the death occurred. The same accounts for the man’s younger brother, who had had sporadic contact with their mother. Subsequently, he rarely visited her grave.

The nature of the relationship can also be contested. Family conflicts are played out in relation to the care of the grave (Schmied 2002: 226–227) as well as entitlement to the grave. In the latter case, graveside photography can be a powerful means to (re)establish links. We have seen that children born after the death of an ancestor are often introduced to their ascendants by either placing photographs at the graves or photo-

graphing them in person at the grave. Simultaneously, the photographs attest to the relation of kinship, a relationship that transcends the boundary between life and death, and suggest that the deceased forebear lives on in the living descendants.

On an autumn day in the old cemetery of Kolding, Denmark, Kjærsgaard encountered a woman who was taking pictures of her daughter next to the family grave, using her mobile phone. It turned out that the woman took the photographs to link her young daughter to her grandmother, with whom she had had a very close emotional bond. Living in another part of Denmark, she usually visited the grave every second month, but on this special occasion, around the anniversary of her grandmother's death, she had brought her daughter. The grandmother died at the age of 96. In spite of a family conflict, she was buried in the family grave. As a granddaughter, the woman encountered had had no say in the decision making and the ashes had been put in a corner of the grave. Although the other part of the family tolerated the interment of the ashes, they did allow a headstone – next to the three already installed – to be placed there. They had been paying for the family grave for decades, refused the woman's offer of reimbursement, and did not accept any further 'invasion' on their entitled grave. It was like moving into an apartment rented by others, the woman explained. She had not liked the other dead when they were still alive. And, as we later learned from her blog, even her relationship with her mother had been troubled, so she tried to emulate her grandmother (instead of her mother) when raising her daughter. The woman claimed the grandmother had kept the family together. The latter's husband was in an anonymous grave (see also Sørensen 2009). The woman never visited him, because she had not known him, being only four years of age when he died. But the relationship with her grandmother was of great emotional significance to her, and was the reason why she wanted to assure a similar connection with her daughter by means of photography. The inscriptions on the grave gifts they brought – *mormor* (mother's mother) and *olde mom* (meaning *oldemor* or great-grandmother) – further attested that they belonged together. The daughter, however, did not 'belong' to the other dead of the family. The woman told Kjærsgaard that she turned the camera away from the headstones on the family grave on purpose. These were left out of the picture.



Lifton and Olson, who recognized the idea of the dead living on in their progeny as ‘biological immortality’, note that it “is never purely biological” but “experienced emotionally and symbolically” and may not be restricted to “one’s own biological family” (1974: 60–61). Mindet also reveals that there have been strong emotional bonds between the dead and those who construct this mode of ‘symbolic immortality’ (ibid.) on the website by producing memorial pages rich in photography. Photographs and the accompanying texts tell about the deceased’s association with relatives and friends during the course of their life. They stress their social integration and connectedness. The photos are frequently taken on celebrations, especially in connection with rites of passage, and highlight family unity at those pivotal moments (cf. Bourdieu [1965] 1990: 19, 24, 26). For example, the recurrent photograph of a grandmother holding the grandchild in baptismal dress (when either one of them or both have died) emphasizes the continuity of the line, intermingling the transitions to death and life. The contributions to Mindet seem to suggest that, in spite of a death, the relationships between those portrayed endure. Strikingly, women play a major role in making the contributions, and thereby in keeping up the image of prevailing relationships with the dead, both of themselves and of other surviving family members.

Their use of photography displays what Drazin and Frohlich have dubbed ‘good intentions’ (2007). The imagined, ongoing bonds with relatives who might be dispersed or never be seen again as a result of death draw heavily on the technology of photography. An ideal picture is produced. As Sontag reminds us, “reality has come to seem more and more like what we are shown by cameras” (1990: 161). Hence, photographic images are a “potent means for turning the tables on reality” (ibid.: 180). Furthermore, photographs, as we have seen, can refer to emotional attachments. The sentiments concerning the proper context for their use have to be taken into account. The deceased can get a photograph of the spouse in the coffin (Vermeule 1979: 211, note 4), whereas others might consider keeping photographs of the grave as “too intimate” (Kellehar, Prendergast and Hockey 2005: 243). In contrast to the actual Danish graves, the memorial website Mindet does provide a context for the display of numerous photographs, including photographs depicting the dead, as well as of graves and visits to graves.

**Conclusion: death and social time**

Biological death terminates an individual's lifetime, but does not necessarily coincide with that person's social death. From the perspective of the survivors, as Humphreys points out, "becoming dead" is a process that "takes time" (1981: 263; see also Hertz 1960). She writes, "The process of dying, in its widest sense, stretches from the decision a person is 'dying' (as opposed to being temporarily unconscious, or seriously ill, but with chances of recovery) to the complete cessation of all social actions directed towards their remains, tomb, monument or other relics representing them" (Humphreys 1981: 263). We have dealt with the use of photography in this process of passing during which the survivors stave off the social death of persons who are biologically dead.

Biological death is transcended with help of the technology. Following Hubert and Mauss (1909), Leach considers the related mingling of two experiences in terms of time a religious move. Equating the experience of events that are repetitive (e.g. recurring seasons and rites) with those that are non-repetitive and irreversible (we grow older and eventually die) implies a denial of death (Leach 1961: 125–127). As we have seen, the photos related to repetitive events (such as rites of passage), reflecting "the rhythms of the group" (Bourdieu [1965] 1990: 31; cf. Munn 1992: 96), mark the family group's social time. We also found that Bourdieu's thesis of photography as "both an index and instrument of integration" (1990: 40) of the family or social group was confirmed with regard to photographs in relation to graves. Both the living and the dead were part of the image projected of the ongoing life of the family. The sense of continuity was further supported by emotional attachments and the practices with photographs we described as well as the materiality and "relic-like quality" of the photographs. By integrating the deceased with the social time of the bereaved they were no longer out of synchrony and thus transcending biological death. They stayed in the picture, socially alive, even more so because photographs have come to be seen as depicting the "really real" (Geertz 1973: 112). As we have seen, the photography provided an ideal picture of social connection and continuity. In that sense, it is perhaps not that far removed from the "model for reality" (Geertz 1973) found in religious worldviews. As a

technique of modernity photography paradoxically has contributed to a re-enchantment of the dead.

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## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

The problem that stood central in this thesis is whether religiosity can be found in a society that has been declared as one of the most irreligious and secularized on a global scale by sociologists of religion, in spite of continued religious affiliation of the majority of the population.

Part of the problem has to do with preconceived ideas about religion. Another part of the problem is that hitherto scholarly work has been mainly within the secularization paradigm, premised on a narrative of religious decline. To this comes the realization that a too narrow definition of religion might have led us astray.

In the past two decades an array of scholars, including sociologists of religion, have sought to refocus the study of religion on religion as practiced and understood by common people. When religiosity in Denmark, the society in question, falls under the radar of secularization theorists, it might offer better prospects to bring the approach of ‘lived religion’ to bear on the problem.

I focused on death-related behaviour, because death has generally been seen as a source of religion. Basically, the question then becomes whether death is conceived of as being the end or not. To put it slightly different, is death secularized or still invested with religious meaning?

Considered one of the most irreligious countries in existence, Denmark appears an interesting case to explore the limits of secularization. The secularization paradigm entails an expectation of religious decline as well as a specific idea about religion. My use of the phrase ‘limits of secularization’ speaks to both aspects. The attempt to find religion “hidden from view” demands breaking with the paradigmatic frame of secularization. This helps to raise other questions that go beyond “believing” and “belonging”, such as: In what way are Danish people religious? The perspective of lived religion opens a window on the practice of religion that directly matters to and for people themselves in their everyday life.

To capture this, however, offers a methodological challenge. It requires the use of “sociological imagination”, finding new ways to get at what is not so easy accessible. Lutheran understandings readily resonate of religion being an inward conviction one does not talk about, when raising the standard questions check-listing “belief”. So this thesis is somewhat unconventional from a methodological point of view. I have been trying to look at religion afresh, even in places where one, conventionally speaking, would least expect it. The previous chapters are the result of this exercise. I perceive it as a journey of exploration into what being religious might mean in my home country Denmark. Utilizing a range of sources, I directed my attention to death-related behaviour. I did so in various ways, from taking the broad sweep in chapter 2 to going into meticulous detail in chapter 5.

Perhaps chapter 5 is the most telling on how religion is experienced and lived. In chapter 2 I employed the sociological imagination to get at overlooked religion in the intimacy of deathbed decisions concerning organ donation. The medicalization of death has been heralded as a clear sign of secularization, but a comparison of donation and cremation rates between Protestant and Catholic countries showed unexpectedly a greater reluctance to organ donation amongst Protestants. This finding is not so strange when one realizes that these survivors, due to deep-seated religious convictions face the harsher emotional hardship of an abrupt and definitive good-bye of their close relative in comparison to members of the other group to whom the religious ban on intercession with the dead does not apply. In the extensive literature on organ donation such basic religious sentiments are overlooked as a possible factor. These limits of secularization, if my interference is correct, indeed, would thus be worthwhile to examine further.

Chapter 3 critically engages with Zuckerman’s study that gave the impetus to my research. This literature study—reading against the grain—brings the work in conversation with the approaches of McGuire and Stringer, sets out an argumentation and prepares the ground for empirical research. It makes a point of a greater appreciation of doing in the study of religion. Furthermore, I show that Walter’s models of funeral organization are related to respective welfare models. The comprehensive Nordic welfare model, that applies to Denmark, fits with the religious funeral model.

In chapter 4 I looked at non-prescribed or subaltern religious practices in the churchyard being increasingly limited by seemingly secularized, modernist design of graves and churchyard as well as introduced regulations. The church's embracement of cremation, allowing for a further sanitization of the churchyards from unwanted religious practices, in addition, strengthened the enforcement of Protestant norms. Often clothed with the veil of aesthetic considerations, lived religion in tension with the spiritual ('dematerialized') understandings of official religion is curtailed, as conflicts make manifest. The appearance of the churchyards materializes a particular form of religion with a particular understanding of material culture and consolation. Instead of a withdrawal of official religion I argue that the Lutheran church has actually increased its grip on the graveyard.

In chapter 5 I concentrate on grave visiting rituals as lived religion. The detailed case study follows a bereaved family in their communication with the deceased over time. The grave is carefully designed and serves as the main contact point. As a place for sharing and caring, the churchyard proves to be a fertile ground for lived religion. The ongoing relationship between the living and the dead is imagined as a reciprocal one. Superhuman powers are attributed to the deceased. The case study also tells about the agency of the grave-visitors within the constraints put by official religion. Being Lutheran intersects with religious practices and understandings that seek to carry on everyday life with the deceased.

Chapter 6 revolves around practices with photographs and photographing at graves. This chapter is consciously of a comparative nature. The Protestant disdain of photographs on headstones as being in bad taste (read: idolatry) is thus clarified. Nevertheless, taking photographs at graves that end up in photo albums or on Internet memorials is a common practice. The gravestones depicted substitute for the deceased person. This chapter calls attention to social time in which the termination of the individual lifespan is of less consequence as long as social death is staved off. Practices such as the ongoing celebration of birthdays point at the dead being perceived as more than a memory, which is also attested by photo captions on the Internet memorial addressing the deceased as living on.

Denmark, declared one of the most irreligious and secular countries in the world, forms an important test case for the appropriateness of the secularization paradigm. This study has demonstrated that although Danes may be not so outspoken about their “beliefs”, they do practice lived religion in relation to death. The general contention that death is secularized in Denmark could be falsified by finding religion that thus far has remained hidden from view in connection with death-related practices. It is likely we might find the same in other, less secularized countries too. The Danish case cannot be used as a showcase for the sustainability of the secularization paradigm. It does, however, make us reconsider in what way people can be religious.

SAMENVATTING (SUMMARY IN DUTCH)

## **FUNERAIRE CULTUUR EN DE GRENZEN VAN**

### **DE SECULARISATIE IN DENEMARKEN**

Deze studie over de funeraire cultuur en de grenzen van de secularisatie in Denemarken vormt een reactie op het boek *Society without God* (Samenleving zonder God) van de Amerikaanse socioloog Phil Zuckerman. Zuckerman kwam op basis van vraagg gesprekken tot de conclusie dat Denemarken een van de minst religieuze landen ter wereld is. Een zwaarwegend argument daarbij was dat zelfs de omgang met de dood gesecculariseerd zou zijn. Dat is echter een heikel punt, want doorgaans wordt juist het besef van de sterfelijkheid als een belangrijke bron van religie gezien. Zuckermans stellingname is aanvechtbaar, en wel vooral omdat hij van het vooropgestelde idee uitgaat dat religie bestaat uit het onderschrijven van een bepaalde geloofsinhoud. Bovendien veronderstellen de aanhangers van het seculariseringsparadigma, onder wie Zuckerman, dat er momenteel slechts sprake kan zijn van een afname van religie.

Sociologe Grace Davie heeft de vraag opgeworpen of er in deze zienswijze en benadering geen religie buiten beschouwing (“hidden from view”) blijft. Denemarken is het toonbeeld van de zogenoemde Scandinavische paradox: een zeer geringe mate van openlijk beleden geloof en van kerkbezoek gaat hand in hand met een zeer grote mate van deelname aan kerkelijke overgangsrituelen (doop, belijdenis, huwelijk en begrafenis) en officieel toebehoren tot de kerk. Derhalve heeft de idee van kerklidmaatschap zonder geloof (“belonging without believing”) postgevat.

Deze opvatting gaat echter voorbij aan de vraag op welke manier mensen religieus zijn. In deze dissertatie wordt vanuit het perspectief van geleefde religie geprobeerd om opnieuw te kijken naar religie in Denemarken, zelfs op plaatsen waar men die het minste zou verwachten. Mochten we in gedragingen rondom de dood religiositeit aantreffen, dan duidt dat op grenzen aan de secularisering. Denemarken is in dit op-

zicht een belangrijke testcase voor de seculariseringstheorie. In het onderzoek is gebruik gemaakt van uiteenlopende bronnen. Bovendien strekt het zich uit van het macro niveau, in hoofdstuk 2, tot aan het micro niveau, in hoofdstuk 5. Misschien zegt het laatste nog wel het meeste over hoe religie ervaren en beleefd wordt door gewone mensen die zich met de dood van dierbaren geconfronteerd zien.

Hoofdstuk 2 gaat over de in de medische literatuur veronachtzaamde invloed van religie op beslissingen aan het sterfbed met betrekking tot orgaandonatie. De medicalisering van de dood geldt als een duidelijk teken van secularisatie, maar een vergelijking van orgaandonatie- en crematiecijfers tussen protestantse en katholieke landen toont onverwacht een grotere terughoudendheid om organen te doneren onder protestanten. Deze bevinding is niet zo vreemd als men zich realiseert dat de protestantse nabestaanden in tegenstelling tot katholieken, althans volgens hun eigen theologische traditie, niets meer voor de overledene (die immers een persoonlijke relatie met God heeft) kunnen doen. Als gevolg van zulke diepgewortelde religieuze overtuigingen ervaren de naaste familieleden, zelfs als zij niet meer praktiseren, het afscheid als definitief en kunnen zij in emotioneel opzicht moeilijker afstand doen van een dierbare. Deze onvermoede religieuze factor zou, als mijn gevolgtrekking inderdaad klopt, de moeite van verder empirisch onderzoek aangaande de concrete beslissingen aan het sterfbed zeker waard zijn.

Hoofdstuk 3 biedt een kritische beschouwing van Zuckermans studie die de impuls tot mijn onderzoek gaf. Deze literatuurstudie zet het werk af tegen de benaderingen van McGuire en Stringer, bouwt een betoog op en geeft de insteek voor verder empirisch onderzoek weer. Het pleit voor een grotere waardering voor het religieus handelen of doen in de studie van religie. Verder laat ik zien dat Walters modellen van de organisatie van uitvaarten verband houden met respectievelijk modellen van de welvaartstaat. Het uitgebreide noordse welvaartstaatmodel, dat geldt voor Denemarken, past bij het religieuze model.

In hoofdstuk 4 heb ik gekeken naar niet-voorgeschreven religieuze praktijken op het kerkhof die in toenemende mate ingeperkt worden door schijnbaar gesecculariseerde, modernistische ontwerpen van graven en kerkhoven, alsook de regelgeving omtrent begraafplaatsen. De omarming van crematie door de kerk bood verdere mogelijkheden om kerkhoven te zuiveren van ongewenste religieuze praktijken en versterkte

de handhaving van protestantse normen. Onder de dekmantel van esthetische overwegingen wordt, zoals conflicten laten zien, geleefde religie als in strijd met de spirituele ('gedematerialiseerde') opvatting van de officiële religie aan allerlei beperkingen onderworpen. Het uiterlijk van de kerkhoven materialiseert aldus een bepaalde vorm van religie met een bepaald begrip van materiële cultuur en troost. In plaats van secularisatie of van het verdwijnen van officiële religie blijkt dat de Lutherse kerk haar greep op de begraafplaats daarmee juist daadwerkelijk vergroot.

In hoofdstuk 5 concentreer ik me op het ritueel van het grafbezoek als vorm van geleefde religie. De uitgebreide en gedetailleerde gevalstudie volgt een rouwende familie gedurende langere tijd in haar communicatie met de overledene. Het graf wordt zorgvuldig ontworpen en dient als belangrijkste contactpunt. Het kerkhof blijkt een plek te zijn om te delen en om te zorgen en kan daarmee beschouwd worden als vruchtbare grond voor geleefde religie. De relatie tussen de levenden en de doden wordt voorgesteld als wederkerig en aan de overledene worden bovenmenselijke krachten toegeschreven. De studie vertelt ook over de actieve rol van de grafbezoekers binnen de beperkingen van de officiële religie: het luthers zijn valt hier voor de betrokkenen samen met de uitvoering van religieuze praktijken die het dagelijkse leven met de overledene willen voortzetten.

Hoofdstuk 6 draait om praktijken met foto's en fotograferen bij graven. Vanuit vergelijkend perspectief poogt het licht te werpen op de protestantse verontwaardiging over foto's op grafstenen, die gezien worden als getuigend van slechte smaak (lees: bijgeloof). Niettemin is het maken van foto's van en bij graven een staande praktijk in Denemarken. Deze foto's worden volop aangetroffen in fotoalbums en op gedenksites op internet. De grafstenen vormen een substituut voor de overledene. In dit hoofdstuk wordt aandacht besteed aan de sociale tijd waarin de beëindiging van de individuele levensduur van ondergeschikt belang is, zolang de sociale dood maar tegengehouden of uitgesteld kan worden. In de hiermee verbonden praktijken gaat het om meer dan een herinnering, aangezien het voortleven van de gestorvene wordt benadrukt.

Als deze studie één ding heeft aangetoond, dan is het wel dat de vermeend irreligieuze Denen weliswaar niet zo uitgesproken zijn over hun geloofsovertuigingen, maar dat ze in het aangezicht van de dood wel degelijk geleefde religie in de praktijk brengen.





## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anne Kjærsgaard is born in Denmark and went to the gymnasium at Viborg Katedralskole. She studied History in combination with Science and Technology Studies (BA) and Theology (BA and MA) at Aarhus University, where she also lectured in Church History and acted as the secretary of the Network for the Historical Study of Religion. Furthermore, she has worked in various museums, including Museum Sønderjylland and the Danish Museum of Nursing History, and she has served as a minister in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. As a doctoral researcher in the Department of Comparative Religion, Radboud University, Nijmegen, The Netherlands, she joined the Centre for Thanatology. Her research interests are mainly in lived religion and material culture with reference to mortuary practice in past and present, especially in relation to the hospital, crematorium and cemetery. On these topics she has authored several refereed articles and chapters published in Danish and international journals and book series. Additionally, she is one of the editors of the journal *Kirkegårdskultur* and a member of the board of *Forening for Kirkegårdskultur*. Being a part of the collaborative research project Death, Memory and Religion, she is currently a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Practical Theology and Church History, Aarhus University and associated with Centre for Pastoral Education and Research of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

