

11-1-1966

The Church's Approach to Death and the Funeral

William Matzat

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, bill@dovetailcreations.net

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholar.csl.edu/mdiv>



Part of the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Matzat, William, "The Church's Approach to Death and the Funeral" (1966). *Master of Divinity Thesis*. 75.
<http://scholar.csl.edu/mdiv/75>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Concordia Seminary Scholarship at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master of Divinity Thesis by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

THE CHURCH'S APPROACH TO DEATH
AND THE FUNERAL

A research paper presented to the
Faculty of Concordia Seminary, St.
Louis, Department of Practical
Theology in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

William A. Matzat

November 1966

44197

Approved by: Richard Caemmerer
Advisor

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.	1
II. THE HISTORY AND PURPOSE OF THE CHRISTIAN FUNERAL. . .	3
The Funeral Practices of the Early Christian Church.	3
The Purpose of the Christian Funeral.	4
III. THE THEOLOGICAL CONCEPTS OF THE BODY, DEATH AND THE RESURRECTION.	6
The Body-Soul Unity of Man.	6
The Flesh-Spirit Forces Controlling Man	8
The Judgment of God on the Whole Man -- Death . . .	9
The Resurrection of the Whole Man	11
The State of Man After Death.	14
The Popular Views of Death Which Hinder this Theology.	16
IV. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONCEPTS OF GRIEF AND MOURNING. . .	20
The Need to Emphasize the Reality and Finality of Death.	20
The Need to Facilitate Mourning and Grief Work. . .	22
The Need to Support the Bereaved Psychologically and Sociologically.	29
V. THE CULTURAL PRACTICES OF THE AMERICAN FUNERAL RITE.	32
Materialistic Concerns.	32
The Casket.	34
The Flowers	36
The Vault and the Tombstone	37
The Viewing and the Wake.	39
The Prolongation of the False "Reality of Life" . .	43
The Social Secularity of the Wake	45
The Funeral Parlor Service.	46
The Morbid Context.	47
Privatization	48
The Memorial Service.	50
The Practice of Cremation	51
VI. CONCLUSION.	54
FOOTNOTES	55
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	64

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A funeral is not an occasion for a display of cheapness. It is, in fact, an opportunity for the display of a status symbol which, by bolstering family pride, does much to assuage grief. A funeral is also an occasion when feelings of guilt and remorse are satisfied to a large extent by the purchase of a fine funeral. It seems highly probable that the most satisfactory funeral service for the average family is one in which the cost has necessitated some degree of sacrifice. This permits the survivors to atone for any real or fancied neglect of the deceased prior to his death.¹

Statements such as this one, from the August, 1961 issue of the National Funeral Service Journal, have caused great furor throughout the American populace. If this is an example of the attitude of even a small percentage of the population, some serious thinking must be done, especially within the church.

Jessica Mitford in her book The American Way of Death has pictured the funeral rite and the funeral industry in a state of decay. And even though she writes with much superficiality in the fields of theology, psychology and anthropology, she does cause the public to think about the many farces within and behind the American concept of death and the funeral.

It is evidently necessary that the church take a more positive stand against the corrupted practices existing in the American funeral rite. Some excellent material has been written on this subject. Far too often, however, its scope has not been sufficiently broad or the articles and books have been treated with less respect than Mitford's prejudiced, emotional best-seller.

This paper, therefore, will attempt to point out the approach which the church should take regarding the various cultural practices prevalent

in the American funeral rite. After a brief historical perspective, it will examine the theological concepts of the body, death and the resurrection, and the psychological concepts of grief and mourning. With this as a basis for analysis, some of the cultural practices of the American funeral rite will be considered.

CHAPTER TWO

THE HISTORY AND PURPOSE OF THE CHRISTIAN FUNERAL

The Funeral Practices of the Early Christian Church

The early Christian church followed most of the burial practices existent in its Jewish ancestral background. In fact, all of its beliefs regarding death and the disposal of the dead were founded upon the general mortuary ideology of the Hebrews.¹ Christ actually vivified these principles and, in some instances, augmented them in scope -- adding the new dimension of the resurrection hope.

Generally speaking, primitive Christian burial customs were simple, unpretentious and organized within the context of community living. In contrast with the Hebrew culture, the Christian church paid more respect to the actual bodies of the deceased, because it regarded them as temples of the Spirit of God even after death. It called the places of Christian burial koimeterion (cemeteries: "sleeping-places"), because these same bodies would be raised to newness of life. This belief and practice was in direct contrast to the church's pagan environment, as stated in volume VII of Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History.²

The early Christians continued the Jewish custom of the "wake," watching the dead for an interval of eight or more hours before burial. The two-fold purpose of this practice was to adjust to the changed conditions resulting from death and to make sure that there were no signs of life remaining in the body.³

The wailing existent in ancient Hebrew burial rites gave way to a more restrained and dignified form of grief. It was the usual custom to

celebrate the Holy Eucharist, to sing hymns and psalms and to say prayers, thanking God for the example and faith of the departed and asking Him to bless the living in like manner. Funeral sermons were very rare before the fourth century, but developed greatly after Christian persecution ended.⁴

Probably the most predominant influence on Christian funeral practice was the example of Christ's burial. After the body was washed (Acts 9:38), it was wrapped in fine linen sheets or bandages (Mark 15:46; John 11:44), scented with myrrh and aloes (Mark 16:1; John 19:39f.) and, if possible, laid in a new cave or subterranean passage.⁵ In addition, the whole process of the Christian funeral, as a result of Christ's resurrection, became tinged with a latent sense of triumph and exhilaration.⁶ Death marked the finality of earthly life, to be sure; but it also brought with it a victory, the beginning of a better life "with Christ."⁷

The Purpose of the Christian Funeral

It might seem unnecessary to state the purpose of the Christian funeral. Yet, here lies the crux of the problem for the church. "The attitude of the church toward the funeral is perhaps best characterized by the term ambivalence: theological, psychological, sociological ambivalence."⁷ "Perhaps nowhere else has the church done less strenuous thinking and given weaker guidance than in the matter of burying the dead."⁸ When the church knows clearly the purpose of the Christian funeral, then it can attempt to deal with the cultural problems posed by the funeral.

First of all, it is the purpose of a Christian funeral to provide a sense of finality, so that the bereaved can regard death realistically. In this atmosphere of finality, the feelings of the bereaved can be recognized and the proper outlet for mourning provided.⁹

Secondly, because only God-given faith through Christ Jesus can come to grips with the reality of death and separation, it is the purpose of a Christian funeral to reaffirm the faith of the bereaved family and the Christian community.¹⁰ This faith will find strength in the words of the risen Christ: "Because I live, you will live also" (John 14:19).

Finally, it is the purpose of a Christian funeral to be a service of worship to God. It needs to express praise and thanksgiving to God for the life of the deceased and to commit him to God's care. It also needs to relate God's abundant love to the mourners, sustaining and supporting them in their grief, and encompassing them with the fellowship of acceptance and understanding which can only come through God's love.¹¹

Throughout the Christian era the funeral has been an important rite of the church. It seeks to meet the needs of the bereaved for a resource of comfort and strength which cannot be found in man himself but only in God. The funeral is a means not only for expressing the fact that the church shares the burden of loss and sorrow with the bereaved; but also for testifying to the common experience of mortality. The funeral is a ritualistic endeavor on the part of the church to relate itself and its resources to the needs of its sorrowing people.¹²

CHAPTER THREE

THE THEOLOGICAL CONCEPTS OF THE BODY, DEATH AND THE RESURRECTION

The Body-Soul Unity of Man

Ask an ordinary churchgoer who inquires about life after death what he means by 'life' and he is likely to give an answer which he thinks is self-evident to every Christian. Human life, he will say, has two parts, the life of the body and the life of the soul. The life of the body ends in death but the soul is immortal. It is the possession of an immortal soul that distinguishes man from the flowers and beasts of the field. This view of life is considered to be so essential to Christianity that anyone who questions it may be suspected of heresy. Yet biblical scholarship has shown that it is based on a way of thinking which is foreign to the Bible.¹

Scripture always views man as a psychophysical unit (σῶμα ψυχικόν) -- a body-soul unity. These two qualities of man dare never be separated, for they are man in his totality. Ultimate life for him is not determined by the condition of his soul or the nature of his body, but by his total relation to God. The Greek words σῶμα (soma) and ψυχή (psyche), as they appear in the New Testament, are not considered in isolation from each other. Rather, they always reflect the Old Testament Hebrew word נֶפֶשׁ (nephesh), which means "a breathing being."² This Hebrew word is also translated "soul," but it defines the composite character of man as a psychophysical unity.

St. Paul tells us in his First Epistle to the Corinthians that the body is not meant for fornication or destruction, but "for the Lord" (1 Corinthians 6:13-20). This is to differentiate the σῶμα (soma) of man from the σὰρξ (sarx) which would control man. Unlike the σὰρξ (sarx), the σῶμα (soma) has an eternal destiny; it is "for the Lord." It is the temple of the Holy Spirit. "One cannot say that all σῶμα

(soma) is grass; that dust it is and to dust it shall return. Rather, it is 'for the Lord.'³

Regarding the whole man as σῶμα (soma), it is wholly destined for God; regarding the whole man as σάρξ (sarx), it is wholly destined for destruction. Paul never promises his Christian readers resurrection of the flesh, because man as flesh cannot inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 15:50). He does, however, proclaim that there will be a resurrection of the body, because man as σῶμα (soma) can inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 15:44). In fact, life after death is inconceivable without the body.

One of the main reasons for Paul's great detail explaining death and resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 is to distinguish the Christian view of the unity of man from the Greek duality of man. Platonic philosophy held that the soul was imprisoned within the body, that the soul was spiritual and the body physical. The soul was regarded as being eternal while the body was regarded as being something to be discarded as rubbish. St. Paul inveighs against this belief.

He calls the soul-body unity of man the σῶμα ψυχικόν (soma psychikon), or "natural body" (1 Corinthians 15:44). The ψυχή (psyche) is not something distinct from the σῶμα (soma), but rather, it is σῶμα (soma) insofar as the σῶμα (soma) is a living being. Man is not a soul which has a body; nor is he a body which has a soul. He has neither mortality nor immortality in himself as soul-body, but he has life insofar as God wills it.

Throughout all the Pauline letters ψυχή (psyche) is used to translate the Hebrew word נֶפֶשׁ (nephesh), which means the self, the whole person, the living being.⁴ The soul is never represented as an indestructible

substance of its own, connected with the body but antagonistic to it. "Rather than being a fragment of the divine essence, as the Greek would define it, it represents a perspectival view of the total man."⁵

The Flesh-Spirit Forces Controlling Man

Romans 8:5-6 and Galatians 5:16 make it evident that the "flesh" and the "spirit" cannot be equated with, or be treated as being synonymous with, the concepts of the "body" and the "soul." The Greek words σῶμα (soma), ψυχή (psyche), σάρξ (sarx) and πνεῦμα (pneuma) all stand for the whole man, but they represent man from different points of view. In contrast to the whole man as being inherently soul and body, the flesh and the spirit represent powers from without, working on this psychophysical unity.

The powers of the flesh working on man as his σάρξ (sarx) do not refer so much to the mass of tissue that is part of man; rather, they refer to the whole man (soul-body) in his natural state of alienation from God.⁶ The New Testament concept of σάρξ (sarx) refers to man as being mortal and destructible, while man as σῶμα (soma) tends "toward a hoped-for restoration of relationship with God."⁷

The New Testament concept of πνεῦμα (pneuma), or spirit, is dependent upon the Old Testament concept of רוּחַ (ruach). This is the power working on man from without, which has its origin in God. After God created man, he breathed into his entire psychophysical being this רוּחַ (ruach), making him a "living soul." In the New Testament Paul speaks of this same "spirit," πνεῦμα (pneuma), as being the power of the Holy Spirit which restores and sustains man in his "life in the Spirit." Hence, while the soul is a natural part of man and is unified with his body, the

spirit is the power of God working on man from without, and battling the forces of the flesh from without, in order to draw man into a relationship of love with God.

The Judgment of God on the Whole Man — Death

The human situation is one of death. Death for the Hebrew is never a purely natural phenomenon. Man as סַרְסַר (sarx) is 'of the earth' (1 Cor. 15:48): 'Dust thou art,' says God to Adam (Gen. 3:19). But man, unlike the grass of the field and the beasts, is not merely סַרְסַר (sarx). For all his being as flesh, he is created to live in a unique relationship to his Creator. He is made in the image of God; he is intended, not simply for annihilation, but 'for the Lord.' Consequently, the ensuing phrase of Gen. 3:19, 'and unto dust shalt thou return,' is a word of judgment, subsequent upon the Fall. For man to die is unnatural. It is punishment for sin (Rom. 1:32).⁸

Death was not a natural characteristic of created man before the Fall. It became man's destiny only because it "came by man" (1 Cor. 15:21). And Paul says it "entered into the world . . . through sin; and . . . passed unto all men, for that all sinned" (Romans 5:12). Death results from the judgment of God on sin; it is separation from God, the source of life.

To get at the core of the understanding of death, a biblical perspective is needed. According to Job and the Psalmist, death is "to be no more" (Job 7:21; Ps. 39:13); that is, when a man dies, his נֶפֶשׁ (nephesh), or soul-body, dies. To the Hebrew mind, "after death, nothing is left that can be called life."⁹ "We must all die, we are like water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again" (2 Samuel 14:14). When man has arrived at the end of life, he goes the way of all earthly creatures (Joshua 23:14; 1 Kings 2:2). This is the physical form of death resulting from the judgment of God. It is characterized as the opposite of life. As life is represented by נֶפֶשׁ (nephesh), death is represented

as the disappearance of נֶפֶשׁ (nephesh); the נֶפֶשׁ (nephesh) is no more (Genesis 35:18; 1 Kings 17:21; Jeremiah 15:9). The soul-body of man as נֶפֶשׁ (nephesh) dies (Ezekiel 13:18,19).

According to Genesis 3:19, man is pictured as being created out of perishable matter -- "You are dust, and to dust you shall return." Man's original nature appears to be one of mortality. Yet, if man had lived in obedience to God by obeying His divine commands, it is entirely possible that God would have changed man's natural condition to one of immortality. Man's disobedience destroyed this possibility completely. Prior to the Fall, death is not a reality, since man is unaffected by it. Afterward, however, the entire existence of man is placed under the reign of death.

The scope of death, however, does not end with its physical aspect. Spiritual death is not only the result of sin, but it is also the reality of our estranged transient nature. It is God's eternal judgment on man's sinful nature; and it is man's willful separation from God, who is the source of life. Man fears death not because of the coffin and the grave, not because of the decomposition of his body, but on account of his sins, which the Law of God has revealed and threatens to punish.¹⁰ To die, for fallen man, means eternal separation from God; physical expiration is just the outward confirmation of being in fact already "dead" (νεκρός - Ephesians 2:1).

~~This~~ This spiritual death under the Law of God could be called an eternal dying; it is an eternally ongoing process. Hence, the Law of God had to be fulfilled for the eternally dying man in the person of the God-Man, Jesus Christ.

In all human history only one death has occurred which was death in the true and full sense of the word. Christ's death was not a dying; it was death, a killing, a destroying,

an annihilating death. Christ was not, as we are, surrounded by death in the midst of life. He was at all times the Lord of life, of His life. But as the Lord of life He enters the realm of death . . . He assumed our death.¹¹

It is only because Christ assumed our death that we can claim a victory over death -- His victory and ours. The Christian believer puts on the life of Christ and thereby terminates the process of his spiritual dying.

In His death, Christ not only revealed the true nature of death, but at the same time swallowed up death in victory (Is. 25:8; Heb. 2:14; 2 Tim. 1:10; 1 Cor. 15:55). His death is the antidote against our dying, and the only antidote. Christ not only died our death, but He killed our death. Christ has destroyed the spiritual dying in which man is held captive by nature. In the midst of death the believer is now surrounded by life. He has arisen to a new spiritual life, the very antithesis of the eternal dying. 'Whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die' (John 11:26).¹²

Paul can only speak of death as a gain (Philippians 1:21) because of Christ's vicarious death; the process of physical death becomes analogous to that of a seed which has to be buried in order to initiate the process of transformation into a new fruit. It is only after faithful submission to physical suffering, decay and death that the Christian can experience the reality of resurrection and eternal life.

The Resurrection of the Whole Man

Since man is a psychophysical unity in death, he is likewise a psychophysical unity in resurrection. The biblical view of totality deals with life and death and new life after death in terms of the total death of man and the total restoration of his being. The Christian lives as a whole, dies as a whole, and is given new life as a whole man.

It has been made evident that man is mortal in his entire being. Immortality for him can only mean eternal damnation because of God's

judgment upon his sin. That is precisely why Paul states that "this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:53) -- given by Christ unto eternal life. This immortality can only come to man as a gift from the God who alone is immortal (1 Tim. 6:15-16). If man could put his trust in the power of his own "immortal soul" to combat the forces of death, then why would he need Christ to give him immortality? Hence, we come to realize the explicit purpose of our Lord's resurrection; and, because of the same, we are given the power of resurrection by the indwelling Spirit (Rom. 8:11).

X There are no simple answers to the questions Paul raises in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:35): "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" Instead of producing a long dissertation on the resurrection-body, Paul simply related an analogy. He reminds his wary Corinthian readers that when they sow grain, it must first "die," that is, if it is to bring forth the newness of life. The unplanted seed has a very different kind of "body" from that of the full-grown wheat, and yet there is a definite continuity between them. Paul says that the seed actually is "raised" in a transformed nature. What is harvested is different from what is sown, and yet it comes from what is sown. Hence, there is a definite continuity and a definite discontinuity between the actual substance of the deteriorated seed and the resulting new plant.

X This is analogous to the process of man's resurrection from the dead, Paul continues. We are sown a physical body, but we are raised a spiritual body. As the physical body is perishable, sown in dishonor and sown in weakness, so the spiritual body is imperishable, raised in glory and raised in power (1 Cor. 15:42-44). Death destroys the whole man, but resurrection brings new life to the whole man.

What about man's resurrection body, or "spiritual body"? First of all, it has to be remembered that the sown "physical body" (σῶμα ψυχικόν),

or soul-body, means the total personality of man. Secondly, this σῶμα (soma) is not completely abrogated in the σῶμα πνευματικόν (soma pneumatikon), nor is the σῶμα πνευματικόν (soma pneumatikon) an exact reproduction of the σῶμα ψυχικόν (soma psychikon).¹³ The main facet of continuity lies in the personality and identity of the person; that which is raised and transformed into the new body, fashioned by God, is the total personality of man.¹⁴ This is the continuity and this is the transformation.

Paul would also remind us here that the seed does not have the power within itself to provide the body, "but God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body" (1 Cor. 15:38). In Philippians 3:20,21 Paul again stresses the transforming power of Christ in this process: "Who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself." Despite the transformation by which God will recreate man's body, it will still be man's body. It will still be recognized and identified as man's body, only in a glorified state.

The resurrection body will be imperishable, glorious, powerful and spiritual (1 Cor. 15:42-44). Obviously, the physical body (σῶμα ψυχικόν) was none of these things. Whereas the physical body was subject to all the laws and conditions of physical life, the resurrection body will be controlled only by the πνεῦμα (pneuma). It is this spirit, formerly the antagonistic opponent of the flesh within the physical body, which will bring the σῶμα (soma) into complete harmony with the Spirit of God in the transformed σῶμα πνευματικόν (soma pneumatikon). Then the whole man, having put on the immortality of Christ, will have perfect freedom and complete control of life. Man will finally be what God created him to be.

Two thousand years of theological reflection have made the resurrection no less a mystery than it was in the first century of our era. Yet it has persisted as one of the central meanings of the Christian faith enabling the confrontation with death. The unique quality of the Christian funeral rests on this meaning.¹⁵

The State of Man After Death

According to popular opinion, when a man dies he goes directly to heaven or hell. But this view does not express accurately the teaching of the Bible. If it were true, the whole rich content of the Scriptural teaching on the "last things," the Second Coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment which determine heaven and hell -- all this would be meaningless.¹⁶

What is the teaching of Scripture concerning the state of man after death? This question has plagued the minds of many biblical scholars, since Scripture nowhere indicates a specific state of being. The Holy Bible does, however, give reference to this question. But it must be kept in mind that this reference is disconnected and very general in most instances.

Viewing man as a totality, Scripture makes many comparisons of the reality of death to "sleep." It does not minimize the concept of death, but describes the condition of those who die in faith as having fallen asleep in the Lord. This concept of sleep occurs in the Old Testament and the New Testament: Job 14:10-12; Ps. 3:5; 4:8; 13:3; Is. 26:19; Jer. 51:39, 57; Dan. 12:2; Matt. 27:52-53; John 11:11-13; Acts 7:60; 1 Cor. 11:30; 1 Cor. 15:6, 18, 20; 1 Thess. 4:13-15; 5:10.

Psalm 90:5 views death as a dream: "Thou dost sweep men away; they are like a dream." It is very possible that the sleep of death described here could be a sleep of dreams; and, taking into consideration the words of Paul, this sleep of dreams would be an occasion for a more intimate communion "with the Lord" (Phil. 1:23).

The reality of the resurrection of the body and the continuity between the physical body and the spiritual body has already been discussed. Eternal life is to be experienced fully after our resurrection. But Scripture also makes it quite clear that eternal life does not just remain to be experienced after our resurrection; it does, in fact, describe eternal life as a present reality. "He who believes in the Son has eternal life" (John 3:36). "And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (John 11:26). "We know that we have passed out of death into life" (1 John 3:14). "The continuity between eternal life as a present possession and its complete consummation in the future is provided by the Holy Spirit. He is the 'earnest' of the future inheritance."¹⁷ Insofar as the Holy Spirit has transformed man through faith in Christ during man's lifetime, and has renewed him unto eternal life, so will he also keep man in this state even though he is dead. "Although he (man) still 'sleeps' and still awaits the resurrection of the body, which alone will give him full life, the dead Christian has the Holy Spirit."¹⁸ "Whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord" (Rom. 14:8). "If the Spirit dwells in you, then will He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead call to life your mortal bodies also through the Spirit dwelling in you" (Rom. 8:11).

So, regarding the state of man after death, we can say that those who have been brought to Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, continue to be with Christ after death. Physical death cannot bring about a separation. Whether we live or die, we are His. And while that period before Christ's return is characterized by images of sleep and waiting, the Christian already has a foretaste of the awaited perfection.

The Popular Views of Death which Hinder this Theology

The Immortality of the Soul

"Our modern confusion concerning immortality in the New Testament is in part traceable to the ambiguities in the words 'body, soul, flesh and spirit,' as they are used in all kinds of discussion, but especially that concerning life after death."¹⁹ Scripture teaches that when man dies, the soul also dies, because the soul is part of the physical body (σῶμα ψυχικόν). When Paul says he will be "with the Lord" (Phil. 1:23) during his state of death, he does not mean that his soul will be with the Lord. It is the רוּחַ (ruach), or πνεῦμα (pneuma) within man which would be described as leaving him at the time of death; and yet, this is a poor way of explaining the reality, since the "spirit" is a force from without, working on the total man. It has its origin in God and it is the very essence of the third person of the Holy Trinity. The רוּחַ (ruach), which makes man a living being (Gen. 2:7), and which ceases to exist in man at the time of death, is not, properly speaking, an anthropological reality. It is a gift of God; and the only way in which man can describe its lack of existence in him at the time of death is that it "returns to God who gave it" (Eccl. 12:7).

The Reformers never held the concept of the "immortality of the soul," because they "were content with the ancient creeds which teach the 'resurrection of the body.'²⁰ Scripture stresses "cosmic eschatology" -- "the regeneration and restoration of all things at the Second Advent."²¹ Resurrection of the body will not be an isolated reality for man. Rather, it will be "a part of the cosmic renewal promised by God."²²

The Body -- a Prison for the Soul

Very closely related to the popular view of the "immortality of the soul" is the view that the body is something intrinsically evil, something to be discarded. This false concept of the body, held by many Christians, stems from misunderstood Pauline theology. Paul constantly stresses the corrupt nature of the σάρξ (sarx), not the corrupt nature of the σῶμα (soma). The flesh works upon him continually, making him unable to do the good he desires and causing him to do the evil he despises. The war is fought between the flesh and the spirit, both trying to control him from without; it is not fought between the body and the spirit.

The body is regarded as a part of the created order. In the language of Paul, the Christian sees it as the temple of the Holy Spirit. Even in death it represents part of the total person, in no less sense than the nonphysical elements of man. Thus the Christian funeral is not intent upon ignoring the body nor despising it, getting it out of sight or thought as quickly as possible. The Christian funeral seeks to put the body in perspective as a part of the total person who has died.²³

We must remember that the body was created "for the Lord" (1 Cor. 6:13). Just as the body dies in the death of the whole man, so also is the body raised to newness of life in the resurrection of the whole man. Therefore, our hope for life after death does not consist in getting rid of our bodies and living on as souls. "It is the assurance that the Spirit of God will transform 'our lowly body to be like his glorious body' (Phil. 3:21)."²⁴

The Dead Body -- Exactly the Same as the Resurrection Body

If our mortal bodies were literally the same as our resurrection bodies, then why would we need Christ to give us immortality? Why would Paul have gone to all the trouble of trying to explain the discontinuity

between the physical body and the spiritual body in the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians? What man possesses is mortal both in body and soul. He has to put on the immortality which God alone can give him in a transformed resurrection body.

This fact needs to be emphasized because "the Christian funeral is not intent upon centering all attention on the corpse, making of it an object of reverence, seeking to maintain the existence of the person by preserving the body ad infinitum."²⁵ How often people have misunderstood the theology of death and the resurrection and have sought to preserve the bodily remains, as if this really could be done, so as not to hinder God in resurrecting the body.

Death -- Not Real

"Facing death realistically is the major objective (of the funeral) from which all others follow."²⁶ It must be stressed that "in every case of death life actually comes to an end. If this were not so, then the Christian doctrine of resurrection, the creation of new life by the power of God, would have no meaning. Only the dead can be resurrected. Unless this is acknowledged, there can be no truly Christian discussion of life after death."²⁷

Since the thought of death is extremely painful for the "natural man," he attempts to deny its reality. This fact is evident in many of the practices of the American funeral industry, and it is evident in man's attempt to lose himself in his materialistic philosophy of life.

"Modern man has changed his view of death, has sought to hide from its reality, has divorced it from life, has denied its significance for life."²⁸ Christ told one of his disciples who wanted to bury his father before he

industry, and there are many efforts made to encourage exorbitant spending. Although L. E. Bowman is somewhat harsh on the profession as a whole, he does relate many truths in the following statement:

Funeral directors defend the concept (that a family should arrange for a funeral on the level of its capacity to pay) on the dual assumption that according to the accepted custom: (1) a family should spend a sum and present a display on a level appropriate to its status, and (2) the love and respect of the family for its dead is shown to the whole world by the quality of the funeral in terms of money spent. They express disbelief, disgust, or violent disapproval of standards contrary in effect to their assumptions. To ignore them is to go against 'the American way of life,' as they interpret it.¹¹

The casket is but one of the more expensive pieces of merchandise offered by the funeral director for an "appropriate" and "fitting" funeral service. He also offers many services and modern additions in "up-to-date funeralolatry." The following list mentions some of these: uniformed casket bearers, parking directors, cosmetology specialists, refrigerated caskets, hermetically-sealed caskets, special "form-fit" shoes for the loved one, inner-spring mattresses, caskets with built-in canisters for velum recordings of the deceased's achievements, matching pastel limousines, etc.¹²

"No one is against a befitting sorrow for the dead. But one begins to wonder if it is really tempered with Christian joy for the heavenly homecoming when the bereaved spend extra hundreds on an early American coffin because 'he was always fond of colonial.'¹³ The deceased is dead; how can he appreciate the colonial coffin? As Edgar Jackson so vividly states in his book For the Living, the funeral is just that -- for the living; the dead are dead and have no use for anything done to them and for them in this state.¹⁴

The church can take at least one specific stand in regard to the display of the casket during the funeral. It can suggest, as is done in

would be His disciple: "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead." Quoting an old Jewish proverb, Christ simply meant that life must not be controlled by the factor of death. It must be realized, to be sure; but it dare not interfere with God's demands on life. "It (death) is a distraction, a hindrance, which tests severely our ability to live by faith, assert hope and practice obedient love -- obedient, that is, to the claims of living persons and of the living God."²⁹

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONCEPTS OF GRIEF AND MOURNING

Having considered the death of man theologically, it is necessary to consider the effects of death on the bereaved, with a psychological understanding of grief and mourning. Three factors must be analyzed: (1) the need to emphasize the reality and finality of death, (2) the need to facilitate mourning and grief work, and (3) the need to support the bereaved psychologically and sociologically.

The Need to Emphasize the Reality and Finality of Death

"People 'pass on' or 'pass away' or 'go west,' everything save plain 'die.'"¹ Our very language many times betrays the sentimentality we hold regarding death. We know what has happened, but many times we try to rub off the rough edges of its reality by using half-truths. This may seem harmless enough, but it fosters unrealistic thinking and acceptance on the part of the bereaved and the community involved.

Death is a fact; it is the judgment of God, and it is experienced by all mortals. We should not in any way try to distort this reality. The New Testament writers hardly denied the reality of death. Their faith in life everlasting did not distort the certainty that their physical existence would come to an end; in fact, this faith enabled them to view death as but one of the many aspects of physical life. *no! unstructured*

"Death is an amputation; concealment will not change the fact. It will only delay and therefore distort reality."² William Rogers stresses the fact that the full impact of the loss of a loved one may take some time; "the intellectual acknowledgement of a fact, and the emotional

acceptance of it are two quite different matters."³ "The ties which bind one to his beloved are not instantly broken at death, but continue to hold him. If he is to be free to complete the mourning process and to re-establish his life in his new situation, then he is faced with the problem of breaking these ties."⁴ Yet, this fact does not minimize the importance of impressing upon the bereaved the finality of death and the reality of the present state of separation.

This is the first important aspect of the funeral service; it should be a dramatization of loss. "Some of the practices in vogue today (in our funeral services) seem to be designed more to deny reality and fact than to reinforce the truth that must be courageously accepted."⁵ As a result of this, connected with the various misconceptions concerning the death of the whole man, many bereaved persons actually do not believe their loved one has died.

"We must realize that there is no known easy way to face the death of one who was deeply loved. We need courage to endure pain, aware that ours is essentially a healthy pain, one that has within it its own healing qualities."⁶ Unless death is faced realistically and grief is allowed to be worked out fully, this psychological healing process will not take place, and abnormal psychological development will follow. The taking of sedatives to "subdue the grief" is but one example of postponing reality and hindering the natural healing process.

Nature has a wisdom of its own which helps the person to tolerate discomfort at a schedule the emotions set for themselves. To interfere with this natural process upsets nature's own wisdom, creating new problems rather than solving existing ones.

The Need to Facilitate Mourning and Grief Work

Grief is not the result of what happens to the loved one. It is rather the result of what happens to the bereaved. Something of great importance to the individual, something that is a part of his psychic life, has been torn out, leaving a great pain - the emotion which we call grief.⁸

After the finality of death is realized by the bereaved, grieving becomes the obvious consequence. Grieving and mourning are synonymous terms expressing the state of bereavement, and the more structured form of this condition is called "grief work," or the work of mourning.⁹

Edgar N. Jackson, one of the most prominent men in the field of grief work, expressed the concept of grief in this manner:

Grief is the silent, knife-like terror and sadness that comes a hundred times a day, when you start to speak to someone who is no longer there. Grief is the whole cluster of adjustments, apprehensions and uncertainties that strike life in its forward progress and make it difficult to recognize and redirect the energies of life.¹⁰

From the emotional aspects of this condition grows an awareness of the state of being in which the bereaved finds himself. Normal grief work, therefore, will entail a three-fold process of awareness and action. First of all, the bereaved will make a specific effort to break off his former bondage to the deceased.¹¹ This will vary according to the former dependence-independence factor. If the bereaved is to be fully emancipated from the deceased, the entire relationship between the two must be reviewed. This also means that both the positive and the negative aspects of the relationship must be accepted.¹²

The whole process of recollecting the deceased is a part of the therapy of mourning. The funeral sanctions the process of remembering the deceased and enables the mourners to undertake it. Dr. Erich Lindemann, who did pioneer work in the modern psychology of grief, speaks of it as learning to live with the memory of the deceased.¹³

The second phase of grief work will involve a "readjustment to the environment in which the deceased is missing,"¹⁴ as well as a reinvestment of the bereaved's "emotional capital in new and productive directions."¹⁵ This facet of grief work actually stems from the first phase -- the emancipation of the bereaved from his bondage to the deceased. Although this is an artificial dividing point, it necessarily follows that unless phase one is realized, phase two will not take place.

Finally, the bereaved will form new relationships to compensate, at least in some degree, for the former relationship with the deceased.¹⁶

No one individual will fill the gap left by the beloved who has died. Neither will any group of individuals. That one was a special person who occupied a unique and deep place all his own in our life. Nevertheless a number of more casual friendships can help to fill the empty space. As social beings, we need the support of friendships and the occupation of social intercourse. Friends won't take the place of the deceased, but they will help us to bear the loss.¹⁷

Before the normal and abnormal reactions of grief work are analyzed, the Scriptural approach to mourning should be discussed. Christian mourning should be of a nature different from the hopeless mourning of the heathen. Paul nowhere forbids mourning and weeping over the dead; in fact, none of the New Testament writers believed faith in the resurrection of the body would prevent the natural sorrow that occurs at the time of death. Scripture does not demand stoical fortitude as being the mark of faith. On the contrary, it acknowledges the anguish caused by death and the separation from our loved ones (John 11:35; Phil. 2:27). And it is this very faith which gives us the courage to face the reality of separation, rather than to pretend that it does not exist. It enables us to see through the sorrow; it does not condemn it. True mourning is regarded by Scripture as being an aspect of faith rather than an evidence of the

lack of it (Phil. 2:25-30; Acts 20:36-38; 1 Thess. 4:13). Grief work for the Christian is especially constructive, "since it is based upon the knowledge that the separation which is real is not final."¹⁸

It also needs to be understood that Christian mourning must never descend to the level of those who do not have faith in Christ, who do not have the hope of resurrection (Eph. 2:12). Therefore, the Christian should moderate his sorrow and the expressions of his sorrow accordingly -- without neglecting the psychological healing process of adequate grief work. According to Paul, physical death does not mean total annihilation or eternal destruction, but the initiating factor leading to eternal communion with the Lord (1 Cor. 15:55-57).

When the Christian pastor is confronted with death and bereavement in his congregation, he acts most beneficially by "persuading the persons involved to yield constructively to the process of mourning."¹⁹

The pastor's purpose is not to make the mourner suffer, to cause him to grovel in misery. We never go out of our way to induce feelings within people. We merely do not stand in the way of the expression of what people are feeling. They need to understand what they were feeling and let these feelings come out in as productive and constructive ways as possible.²⁰

The emphasis needs to be placed upon the "natural" expression of grief and the "natural" acceptance of the same. Any effort made to distort the "natural" on the part of the pastor or the bereaved leads to unhealthy grief reactions.

It is very difficult to describe accurately the normal process that mourning should take. Erich Lindemann, M.D. has done the most extensive clinical research in this area, and almost every modern literary work on grief and bereavement incorporates the results of his study.

Normal grief reactions at the time of bereavement can be described in the following manner:

Sensations of somatic distress occurring in waves lasting from twenty minutes to an hour at a time, a feeling of tightness in the throat, choking with shortness of breath, need for sighing, an empty feeling in the abdomen, lack of muscular power, and an intense subjective distress described as tension or mental pain.²¹

These reactions are "normal" to the extent that they do not continue beyond the average bereavement period. Intensive and extended preoccupations in one or more facets of the above are definitely classified as "abnormal." Yet, according to Lindemann, there are some immediate preoccupations which are not so classified; he views them as being part of the "normal reaction" of grief:

There is intense preoccupation with the image of the deceased. Another preoccupation is with feelings of guilt. The bereaved searches the time before the death for evidence of failure to do right by the lost one. He accuses himself of negligence and exaggerates minor omissions.²²

The matter of guilt can easily become an abnormal preoccupation. While it is true that this feeling will express itself in some form during every period of bereavement "because of the inability to make restitution"²³ following the death of a loved one, it is also true that guilt can lead to abnormal preoccupations, especially with funeral extravagance. "There are some instances where the funeral becomes a vehicle for some person or persons to relieve guilt feelings they may have accumulated because of something they did or neglected to do during the lifetime of the deceased."²⁴ This abnormal, dominating force of guilt feelings, therefore, is one of the factors which leads to the over-emphasis of materialistic concerns in the funeral.

Having studied the normal psychological grief reactions resulting from the awareness of the death of a loved one, there still needs to be a proper understanding of the emotional expressions resulting from these reactions. Basically, normal expression of loss during bereavement follows

along two directions -- weeping combined with other emotional releases, and verbalization.²⁵ The former is the most obvious within the community setting; and it is adequately described by Dr. Gert Heilbrunn in an article entitled "On Weeping" (The Psychoanalytic Quarterly, 1955):

Whenever stimuli of grief, disappointment, anger or 'overwhelming' joy exceed the tolerance of the organism, the ensuing state of tension is alleviated by a release of energy from various organs or organ systems which abolishes the tension. The shedding of tears furthers the homeostatic principle so well that it is the favorite mechanism of release during childhood. Probably it would so continue throughout life were it not suppressed by the demand of society for emotional restraint and replaced by other modes of discharge.²⁶

Since the shedding of tears is the normal expression of loss for both male and female alike, no effort should be made to hinder its release. We should not demand emotional restraint, but rather, a normal expression of feeling. This is hindered, however, by comments such as the following: "Buck up, it could be much worse;" "We must act bravely at the time of death;" "What will people think if you can't act like a man?"

The second facet of the normal expression of loss is less obvious, but just as natural. In fact, it is needed even to a greater extent than that of weeping. William Rogers states that the entire process of mourning will be "greatly speeded through verbalization."²⁷ Its effects will be more healthful and lasting for the bereaved, since two-way communication is involved rather than just isolated expression of emotion. Rogers adds to this the factor of needed clarification of guilt feelings.²⁸ This is the time when the bereaved feel out the reality of their guilt feelings by depending upon relatives and the concerned community either to reinforce the feelings or tear them down.

Primitive man worked out his grief directly -- working through systems of personal and social rituals. For the most part, he realized the

necessity of proper grief work and did not seek to hinder the same.

"Modern man does not seem to know how to proceed in the expression of this fundamental emotion."²⁹ Then again, modern man may know how to proceed but finds the sophisticated mores and folkways of society too strong to disregard. Distorted reactions in grief stem from this lack of proper expression. They do not differ in type from the normal grief reactions already discussed. The main factors labeling them "abnormal" and "distorted" are found in the intensity and duration of reaction.

Unresolved grief reactions, according to Erich Lindemann, lead to the following possible, abnormal behavioral patterns: (1) an "overactivity without a sense of loss" following the period of restrained bereavement; (2) "the acquisition of symptoms belonging to the last illness of the deceased" without any physical explanation; (3) an actualized "medical disease, namely, a group of psychosomatic conditions, predominantly ulcerative colitis, rheumatoid arthritis, and asthma;" (4) an "alteration in relationship to friends and relatives" taking a permanent form; (5) a "furious hostility against special persons" leading to specific negative action; (6) a vicious change in character "resembling schizophrenic pictures;" (7) "a lasting loss of patterns of social interaction" beyond the sphere of relatives and friends; (8) "a coloring which is detrimental to his own social and economic existence" resulting in self-punitive or self-destructive behavior; and (9) "a straight agitated depression with tension, agitation, insomnia, feelings of worthlessness, bitter self-accusation and obvious need for punishment."³⁰

These nine distorted reactions cannot be viewed in isolation from each other; they are not nine distinct reactions of individuals classified as "abnormal." They are, however, a series of stages or plateaus which

might be experienced by the totally disintegrated personality, following the bereavement period.

To clarify the general "abnormal" pattern, it might be helpful at this point to state Edgar Jackson's three-fold analysis of the distorted grief reaction. The first facet involves an internalization or identification with the deceased. What the deceased was, the bereaved tries to be. The bereaved definitely believes that the former role of the deceased must be integrated into his own personality structure. Secondly, the bereaved may try to exteriorize or substitute an object to take the place of the deceased. This may or may not have any connection with the former life of the deceased. For example, the bereaved might spend great lengths of time gardening and landscaping around his home, while prior to bereavement he hated even the thought of the same. Finally, the factor of guilt, abnormally prolonged, may cause strange physical, mental and emotional disintegrations of personality.³¹

Jackson emphasizes the psychosomatic effects of unwisely managed grief. He states, in fact, that "the major direction of psychosomatic medicine today revolves around guilt, loss and separation as contributing factors in the development of a multitude of physical and emotional disorders."³² Many times we fail to realize the profound results of grief which is unwisely managed. Just to emphasize the disastrous consequences that can result, Jackson quotes Dr. William Parker, a cancer surgeon for 53 years: "It is a fact that grief is especially associated with the disease (of cancer)."³³ Dr. Lawrence LeShan, in an article of The Journal of the National Cancer Institute continues the observation of Dr. Parker, linking cancer and grief, by stating:

Emotions affect the glandular system most immediately. The glandular system controls body chemistry, and body chemistry

controls cell division. When the chronic disturbance of the emotions that can come from unwisely managed grief keeps the glandular system disturbed, the result is a persistent disturbance of the body chemistry, and this could be a cause of irregular and unhealthy cell division.³⁴

The Need to Support the Bereaved Psychologically and Sociologically

The chief obstacle standing in the way of bereavement is, of course, the tendency to avoid the grief experience, or grief work. The bereaved must (1) free himself from bondage to the deceased, (2) readjust to his environment as well as reinvest his energies in productive directions, and (3) form new social relationships to compensate, at least in some degree, for the former relationship with the deceased.³⁵ These are all facets of action depending upon the initiative of the bereaved. What has to be coordinated with this process of grief work is outside psychological support and sociological reinforcement.

In his manual The Psychology of Pastoral Care, Paul E. Johnson emphasizes the need for a simultaneous working together of the bereaved, who must strive to adjust to the reality situation, and "other persons who participate in the forming of new relationships to bridge the sense of loneliness and re-establish the social linkages essential to normal living."³⁶ If the bereaved conscientiously attempts to follow through with the third phase of grief work and is met, in turn with a lack of acceptance toward social integration, then his grief work will be to no effect.

Again, the emphasis needs to be placed upon the "natural" acceptance and relationship. If the bereaved does not sense security, if he does not feel the genuineness of acceptance, then that attempt on the part of the concerned person or community does little good. "The bereaved, at the time

of acute loss, needs that which can fulfill his deepest emotional needs without destroying the integrity of his intellectual processes, and without confounding his sense of what is real."³⁷

Since a personal void exists with the loss of the psychological support of the deceased, the bereaved needs to find a new source of personal security before group reorientation is possible. That is why, in most instances, "some one individual will need to establish a good relationship with him"³⁸ prior to the forming of new social relationships. If this initial process of personal support does not take place, especially when the bereaved was very dependent upon the deceased, the bereaved will, most likely, regress into further isolation from group reintegration. The resulting isolation will bring about many of the abnormal grief reactions previously described.³⁹ Also, when well-meaning friends, for a lack of anything better to say, attempt to encourage the bereaved to "buck up" or "be brave," they may add to this isolation; the bereaved senses the lack of genuine understanding and concern for his situation.⁴⁰

As stated in the introduction of this paper, it is the purpose of the Christian funeral (1) to regard death realistically, (2) to affirm the faith of the bereaved family and the Christian community, and (3) to be a service of worship to God. Behind all of these purposes, especially the second and the third, lies the presupposition of community support and reinforcement. A Christian funeral without the community dynamic, the concerned members of the Body of Christ in action, is unthinkable. "The funeral gives the community a chance to recognize the loss of one of its members, and so doing to offer support to the relatives of the dead person."⁴¹ When we lose this community aspect underlying the very nature of the Christian funeral,

and when we substitute the materialistic and economic lavishments for the community dynamic, as being the primary consideration of the funeral, then it is time to discard the "funeral." "The funeral is not a public display but a group sharing the deep sorrows of some of its number."⁴²

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CULTURAL PRACTICES OF THE AMERICAN FUNERAL RITE

In the old days the neighbors gathered to lay old Uncle John away without even a "store boughten" coffin and no professional help but the carpenter and the minister. Now the embalmed and beautified body lies under the hermetically sealed glass window in a bronze casket on the thick carpet of an air-conditioned and luxuriously appointed funeral chapel hushed by soft music from an electric organ, and then, manipulated by a large and sanctimonious staff, is carried in a \$25,000 funeral car to be mechanically lowered into a vault of concrete or bitumen guaranteed to preserve the body from the processes of nature 'not for years, not for life, but forever.'¹

What a farce we have allowed the funeral to become. Funeral practices even in the Christian church have tended to imitate the materialistic customs of our time. "Without anyone's conscious decision about it, and without recognition of it, the popular funeral has become materialistic."²

Materialistic Concerns

Who is to be held responsible for the cultural vulgarity of the funeral? This is not as easily answered as it is asked. We could condemn the entire funeral industry as being the cause, and we would come close to the total judgment of Jessica Mitford.³ We could condemn the American public for desiring all the materialistic customs existent in the American funeral rite. Finally, we could condemn the church for not taking a more positive stand against these materialistic practices. If we are to condemn one, we must condemn all the groups involved.

In the United States there are approximately 24,000 funeral homes,⁴ or one for about every 7500 people.⁵ This ratio may seem very high, yet it must be remembered that there are only about 70 funerals per establishment each year. That averages six funerals per month. In order to "make ends meet," the average, ethical undertaker must make a certain percentage

of profit from his "side-line," caskets. And the prices of this merchandise run anywhere from \$100 to \$10,000. In any business there will be profiteers and unethical business practices; this fact does not, however, warrant an "all-out war" on the entire funeral industry.

According to the National Funeral Directors Association, which took a survey of 90,055 funerals in 1961, the average funeral cost is \$738. X That figure does not include the vault, the cemetery plot, the flowers, the clothing, or any of the "special services."⁶ The Association tabulated the average margin of profit, including the sale on clothing and the vault, and reported the profit to be \$51 for the establishment. Since the margin of profit is figured over and above the salary of the funeral director and all his employees, the figure \$51 does not really tell the entire story. Various studies on this issue, especially those of Herhold and Harmer, have shown that the annual salary of the funeral director is relatively high on the income scale.

A more sober report on funeral cost was made by Roul Tunley in the June 17, 1961 issue of the Saturday Evening Post. Here is a section of his article entitled, "Can You Afford to Die?":

At the moment the average funeral director's bill runs to \$764. But the total costs run to almost twice the figure, because the \$764 does not include charges for cemetery plots, gravedigging, flowers, newspaper notices, extra limousines, and so on . . . The country's annual burial bill of nearly \$2,000,000,000 exceeds⁷ by far the amount we spend each year on getting well in hospitals.

These statistics cause one to shudder. Yet, as much as the fault seems to lie solely in the hands of the funeral director, we dare not focus our judgment only in his direction.

The Casket

The sick display of materialism is most noticeable with the casket. Although arguments have been voiced primarily against the funeral director for "pushing his most expensive merchandise" all the time, it is evident that the American public usually wants such costly merchandise -- to the extent that they have to live up to their "image."

One almost universal characteristic of funerals is the lavish display of expenditures noticeable in the costly casket. . . . The uninitiated observer cannot but be struck by the contrast of the social and spiritual emotions aroused by the death, and emotions characterized by the superficial desire to live up to the Joneses.⁸

Paul Irion sums up the rationale behind this desire on the part of those who demand a costly funeral: "The assumption is that the more a thing costs, the more it is worth, and the more a person is able to spend, the more worthwhile he is."⁹

L. E. Bowman, in his book The American Funeral, reminds us of one of the main psychological reasons why people feel they need to spend a large amount of money on the funeral of a loved one: "The most powerful as well as the most universal force playing on the family at the time it meets the funeral director is the sense of guilt."¹⁰ In most cases, the bereaved does not recognize his feeling as being one of guilt. Rather, he feels that because he might have done something harmful, or neglected to do something important, during the lifetime of the deceased, he "owes" him this last favor. The obvious connections these guilt feelings have with extravagant funeral expenditures need not be enumerated here; they are self-evident.

The funeral director's role in the matter of financial outlay need not be minimized in any degree. There are abuses prevalent within the funeral

Page

35

Missing

the Episcopal Church, that the casket, "whether pine box or magnificent solid bronze," be "covered with a funeral pall."¹⁵ This practice minimizes the "showpiece aspect," as the Right Reverend James A. Pike puts it.¹⁶ If the church keeps in mind the Christian purpose of the funeral, then it will try to minimize the expense of the casket together with the "added extras," and use a funeral pall to minimize the display of craftsmanship of the same.

The Flowers

The most striking note in the surroundings of the casket is the large number of flowers arranged in bunches or woven into floral designs. Often they are so numerous that little or no aesthetic effect is produced.¹⁷

The giving of flowers by close friends and relatives at the time of death has been the symbol of thoughtfulness and remembrance. It is remembrance of the deceased and thoughtfulness to the bereaved, since the deceased has no awareness of the thoughtfulness. If the deceased and the bereaved have many friends and relatives, the funeral home and grave site become "gardens" of expensive, mis-matched floral bouquets. It has been estimated that \$414,000,000 is spent each year on funeral flowers; that averages over \$246 spent for each funeral.¹⁸

The floral industry is constantly advertising the necessity "of remembering in the proper way," because this source of income -- through "sympathy flowers" -- is a large portion of the industry's support. The May 12, 1960 issue of The Florist's Review estimated that 65% of all flower orders were sympathy flowers, while the periodical Casket and Sunnyside (June, 1961) recorded a 70% figure.¹⁹

For many the practice of giving "sympathy flowers" seems a great waste of money. One solution already practiced by the church is the

giving of memorials in place of flowers. The church has no quarrel with the floral industry, but it does inveigh against poor stewardship. Hence, it is a growing custom among the many good stewards within the church to place notices in the obituary column: "Please Omit Flowers," and to suggest the giving of memorials.

Living memorials are given for specific "causes" or organizations. The bereaved family usually decides upon the "cause" or organization, and the friends and relatives contribute according to their personal desires. Besides helping specific organizations within the framework of the church (e.g. The Lutheran Hour), living memorials are given to aid the needy, to establish scholarships for higher education, to care for orphans and the aged, to promote medical research in many areas, to establish missionary outposts, to promote peace, and to support other Christian activities.

While it is evident that the church must condemn the excessive use of money for flowers, it should not condemn the modest use of the same.

There is a growing tendency to request contributions to a favorite charity in lieu of flowers. But a funeral without any flowers, or with very few, seems quite barren and cold. A modest number of wreaths would seem in place, but an excessive number a waste.²⁰

The Vault and the Tombstone

The extravagances of the funeral do not end with the casket and the flowers. In many cases these extravagances are multiplied by the cemetery plot, the vault and the memorial stone. The average bereaved family wants the final resting place of the deceased to be somewhat more than just respectable, and so a spacious, prominent plot is selected.

The next consideration is the vault. Many cemeteries require the use of the vault to prevent erosion and sinking. This seems to be a valid

consideration for the preservation of the cemetery's beauty; but, as with most funeral and burial accouterments, the most elaborate is stressed as being "appropriate."²¹ Vaults are described as being "bomb-proof,"²² "air-tight and guaranteed to preserve the body from the process of nature 'not for years, not for life, but forever.'²³ The sad fact is that many people believe these advertisements and spend a small fortune as a result. The cost of a mere cement vault, the cheapest made, amounts to \$70 or more;²⁴ but this type is not guaranteed to be bomb-proof, air-tight, or capable of preserving the body forever.

Finally, comes the matter of selecting a tombstone or memorial stone for the grave. If there has been good salesmanship in the area of the cemetery plot and the burial vault, then there most certainly will be extravagance regarding the tombstone. Just "the ordinary bronze marker, inscribed with the name of the deceased and his dates of birth and demise, sells for \$75 to \$180 for a single grave."²⁵ The cost of any prominent, highly-polished stone monument alone would exceed the budget of the average American family. The solution of this particular problem lies with the combined effort of the cemetery directors to outlaw "tombstones and aboveground monuments in favor of flush markers;" then cemeteries become "memorial parks" and the maintenance costs are cut about forty percent.²⁶

If the church takes a united stand against these unChristian extravagances, it will make a greater impact upon this present American "cultural sickness."²⁷ Since the church has not yet taken a united stand, many concerned individuals have gathered together on a secular level to combat abuse in funeral practices.

These concerned individuals (many of whom are, of course, affiliated with the church) started their work in 1939, and, for the lack of a

better name, called themselves "The Memorial Association."²⁸ Since its inception, nearly 100 "societies" have been formed in the United States and Canada, with a total membership of approximately 200,000 people. Life-time family memberships range from five to fifteen dollars. And even though there has been great opposition to these groups by the funeral associations, a growing number of undertakers have endorsed the societies and have provided funerals at minimum costs, ranging from \$100 to \$300.²⁹

The Memorial Society has exerted an influence upon the American people. Despite the drawbacks in the plan it offers, it has some definite advantages which the church should at least consider:

They (the "societies") enable the reduction of funeral costs because of the simplicity of their funeral services. They offer a channel for educating the public for possible revision of funeral practices by providing group support for variation from the cultural norm. They encourage a more rational and less emotional response to the funeral and its meaning.³⁰

Paul Irion stresses the important fact that these "societies" not only provide group support aimed toward "possible revision of funeral practices," but they enable the individual family to decide for itself -- without any cultural pressure -- what they really want in a funeral.

It is suggested that the universal need for some facilities to care for the body of the deceased and the wants of the mourner justifies consideration of regarding funeral arranging as a public utility. The purpose of any of these steps, according to the author, would be to offer to the individual family freedom either to plan a fully conventional funeral or to make plans in a way more suitable to their preference.³¹

The Viewing and the Wake

The most controversial issue in funeral practice today is the viewing of the body. Psychologists, psychiatrists and theologians differ strongly on this matter, not just as professionals but as individuals within their profession. Extreme positions are supported by prominent men, and this

leads to great confusion, especially for the American Christian. The church needs to review these positions and help its people evaluate the current practices.

Before the church can understand the "pros" and "cons" of this issue, however, it must have an awareness of the history and purpose of "viewing." As was stated previously,³² the early Christians continued the Hebrew practice of the "wake." This practice of "watching" the deceased for a period of eight hours was necessary for two specific reasons: (1) it gave the close relatives a chance to adjust to the reality of death and (2) it gave the bereaved an adequate length of time to make sure his loved one was really dead.³³ The body of the deceased was not embalmed, nor was anything done to make the body's appearance "more desirable."³⁴

Embalming was actually initiated as an art by the ancient Egyptians. They sought to preserve the body ad infinitum, since the condition of the body was of essential importance for the "afterlife."³⁵ The Greeks took over this practice of preservation, and the Romans borrowed it from the Greeks.³⁶ As Christianity grew numerically, so did the number of pagan influences upon it; embalming was one of these influences. Gradually, more and more Christian funerals practiced a public form of "viewing the body," after the necessary embalming and restoring had been done.³⁷ Hence, the essential purpose of the "wake" became changed; longer periods of time passed before burial; and the art of embalming grew in scope -- including also the art of cosmetology.

In this present age, embalming is considered to be standard procedure, although there are no laws which require the same -- providing that there is immediate interment.³⁸ The sole purpose of embalming lies in the fact "that it makes it possible to delay the natural processes of decomposition

so that psychologically and socially suitable funeral ceremonies can be carried through."³⁹ In addition, since public viewing of the deceased is the standard procedure in the American funeral, making the "corpse presentable for viewing in a suitable costly container" also becomes a "necessity."⁴⁰ As a result, cosmetology is now a specialized profession within the funeral industry.

There is only one sound psychological reason for viewing the bodily remains of the deceased: reinforcing the reality of the situation. This is the sole rationale stressed by psychologists and psychiatrists, as well as by theologians:

The seeing of the body of the deceased in repose can help the mourners to realize that life and death have intersected and that the relationship to the deceased as they have known it is now ended. It now has entered into a new dimension.⁴¹

The funeral with the body present impresses the reality of the situation upon the minds and emotions of the bereaved. The experience of funeral directors indicate that the vast majority of people (the bereaved) need and want it.⁴²

For close relatives and dear friends, the viewing of a body can be a vital part of coming to terms with reality. A sorrowing look into the face of death confirms the truth of what has happened -- truth that our minds and hearts desperately wish not to accept.⁴³

Jackson emphasizes the specific people who need this reality-reinforcing situation; they are the "close relatives and dear friends."⁴⁴ Nowhere is it stated that the entire community needs to view the body in order to reinforce reality; only those who were very close to the deceased might need this experience. Thomas Glidden makes the same point: "relief can be seen on the faces of those closest to the deceased immediately following the viewing of the body."⁴⁵ Whether his statement is factual in its totality, remains to be seen. The point is that "those closest" are the only people who really can benefit. Hence, public viewing as such

fails to achieve any real purpose, since the community does not need reality-reinforcement, and since it does not need to start "the healing process of an emotional wound."⁴⁶

When it is stated that "viewing" achieves more than the reinforcement of reality, opposition must be voiced. Habenstein and Lamers say that viewing

creates a final and corrected image of the dead, which image is likely to crowd out the images formed during final illness and at the time of death itself. The substitution of this corrected and more pleasing image, conforming more closely to the image of the deceased in life, is likely to have therapeutic value.⁴⁷

While this statement is not completely false, the ideas of a "final and corrected image" and a "more pleasing image" have no foundation, psychologically:

A universal contention of funeral directors is that the last look at the 'restored' face of the deceased creates an image that remains permanently in the memory of the bereaved person. The burden of the claim is that the 'restorative' operation of the undertaker is of great and lasting value in bereavement and the adjustive process. No evidence that this claim is justified is to be found in the works of psychologists.⁴⁸

Many Christians prefer to remember their loved ones' faces as they were when radiant from the spirit within. Sometimes the sight of artificially composed features serves only to confuse such happy memories.⁴⁹

When we consider the viewing of the body, we must also consider the theology of the body, death and the resurrection. Public "viewing" tends to accentuate the "display." "The open casket, while it might display the embalmer's skill, does not help us concentrate on the reality of eternal life."⁵⁰ Public "viewing" does not emphasize the reality of eternal life because the "attention of people is fixed on an out worn body that is about to be interred or cremated."⁵¹ Neither does it emphasize the reality of death after the body is embalmed and cosmetics are used "to create the illusion of life."⁵²

Charles Potter, in the Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore Mythology and Legend, overstates his case, but does bring out the farce of public viewing. Comparing present-day professional embalmers, "who use every cosmetic artifice to restore the bloom of youth to even the elderly face," with Congo corpse-painters, he makes this conclusion:

The murmured admiration by chronic funeral-attenders is in the same class with the louder expressions of the dwellers of the Congo who pay admission to see the art exhibit.⁵³

Similar is the statement made by E. T. Randall in his article, "Funerals Can be Christian!":

Much of the rivalry among competing morticians focuses in the artificial manipulation of facial expression. For many (viewers) the total impression of the most profound spiritual considerations is wiped out in an instant by a remark about 'how natural Aunt Minnie looks.'⁵⁴

Psychologically, "viewing" may be very helpful for the immediate family of the deceased; it may reinforce the reality of death for them, leading to a more complete therapeutic process of mourning. Theologically, "viewing" for the bereaved may emphasize the proper Judeo-Christian understanding of man as a psychosomatic unity in death, pointing to the hope of resurrection. But beyond these possibilities, there is little value in "viewing," especially for the community.⁵⁵

The Prolongation of the False "Reality of Life"

Sometimes the accouterments of burial are so described as to convey the illusion of continuing life. The comfort of the deceased or his well-being becomes a concern in the presentation of caskets with innerspring mattresses or burial vaults which endlessly defy the ravages of the elements.⁵⁶

When the concern of funeral practice becomes centered around the "comfort of the deceased," as described above, then the Christian nature of the funeral is denied. What is left can only be called "pagan."

There should be no attempt made to "convey the illusion of continuing life" with materialistic practices:

The emphasis on leak-proof caskets, and the display of the physical remains artfully improved by cosmetics and specially tailored casket apparel, represent essentially a reversal of Christian belief and its candid committal of the material body to ashes and dust.⁵⁷

The pagan materialistic emphasis, together with its attempt at long-term preservation, negates psychological principles as well as theological beliefs. The body is no longer the means by which the reality of death is reinforced for the bereaved, when "the embalmed corpse is decked out brighter than life with fancy garb and layers of cosmetics."⁵⁸ Furthermore, when the period of viewing is extended for any length of time, it becomes a "means of reinforcing unreality."⁵⁹

These practices become an effort on the part of the bereaved to control death.⁶⁰ The bereaved family certainly does not want to accept the reality of death; they do, in fact, wish it were not so. Unconsciously, they attempt to deny the reality of the situation. And denial will continue up until that point when outside influence moves them to accept the fact as it really exists. Hence, efforts made to "restore life" to the deceased, to make the body "more comfortable" and to preserve the body should be rejected for theological and psychological reasons.

The Christian theology of death and the resurrection stresses the continuity of the body in death and at the resurrection, but it also stresses the discontinuity of the body. And it is this element of discontinuity involved in the concept of resurrection that "provides no warrant for the long-term preservation of the body."⁶¹ The very purpose of long-term preservation today is essentially the same as that of the ancient Egyptians, "who sought to preserve and reanimate the body in

order to assure its survival beyond death."⁶² Accordingly, death would no longer mean total physical annihilation as a result of the judgment of God upon sin, and it would no longer mean total resurrection of the body, through the action of God.

When the bereaved believe that the body is capable of being preserved ad infinitum -- via embalming, air-tight caskets and moisture-proof vaults -- then, denying the dissolution of the body, they affirm "that the devastation power of death is at least partially held in check."⁶³ And, in many cases, "there is the assumption that the body of the deceased maintains its presence in the grave."⁶⁴ Not only is that assumption erroneous, but it fosters a morbid sense of continuing relationship to the assumed presence of the deceased; this deters successful completion of grief work.⁶⁵

The Social Secularity of the Wake

Activity at the wake is predominantly social intercourse. When a large number of persons is present, as is often true in the evening, the occasion becomes a party. Most of them speak about the likeness to life of the face of the dead acquaintance.⁶⁶

Far too often the wake serves this purpose alone -- that of a "party." The custom of the "wake" is practiced differently in various sections of the United States. The most extreme form can be seen in the South and in many of the larger cities throughout the country; a small room is set aside for the "viewing," while most of the activity is centered in an adjacent lounge. Here the "bereaved" often engage in excessive alcoholic consumption and social intercourse.⁶⁷

The pagan influence upon the original purpose of the wake is evident. It "originated in a custom, rarely still practiced, of relatives sitting up all night with the body."⁶⁸ The two-fold purpose of this procedure

has already been discussed.⁶⁹ To the extent that the "wake" includes these pagan features, it creates two basic problems. First, it is "inclined to lighten the spirit of the occasion and . . . avoid the mournful aspects of death."⁷⁰ It is a psychological fact that, although many and varied emotions are experienced at the wake, "it is the least emotional meeting of the series of funeral assemblages."⁷¹

The actual viewing, which is the original intention of the wake, becomes "primarily a series of personal visits rather than a group congregating. The activity is individual rather than corporate."⁷² The reality of the situation becomes subdued, and, in the more extreme examples of the wake, the social secularity in the adjacent room makes light of the situation. Secondly, since much time is spent with the prolonged experience of the ordeal, "little time is left the family for the routine tasks" involved with the funeral.⁷³ Consequently, the bereaved experiences greater tension, which builds within him until the time of the burial.⁷⁴

The Funeral Parlor Service

"There seems to be general agreement that in most communities the place of the funeral is shifting from the church to the funeral home."⁷⁵ In a survey made by Paul Irion, less than one-third of the 2,000 funeral services studied were held in a church building. The most common reasons given for not holding the service in the church were the following: (1) the church is too formal in nature and (2) few people attend the church service -- making the place seem empty.⁷⁶

While these arguments might seem noteworthy, the problem does not lie with the church; rather, the problem lies with the community and the culture. The growing custom of the funeral parlor service stems from a

lack of knowledge in the areas of the history and purpose of the funeral. Custom has become, moreover, what the masses have deemed most convenient rather than what is most historically correct. L. E. Bowman states:

The funeral service is a ritual lying traditionally in the province of the church. Even among non church members, the majority of persons look upon the church as the place for the holding of the service.⁷⁷

While convenience for the bereaved is not to be ignored, and while tradition does not always provide the practical answer, the church should recognize that the presence of the funeral service in the funeral parlor necessitates certain psychological and theological denials.

The Morbid Context

(The funeral parlor) symbolizes death to the participant . . . and in greater measure holds the attention to this one unusual happening. It emphasizes, not so much the span of life nor the long stretch of time, but the short period of the funeral activities.⁷⁸

From early Christian times the purpose of the funeral service has emphasized the continuity of death with life, not the isolated experience of death.⁷⁹ And so, Andrew Blackwood is correct when he stresses this same facet from a practical aspect:

One of the most difficult places in which to conduct a Christian service of farewell is at a funeral parlor or cemetery chapel. Such places are doubtless essential. If present trends continue, the majority of funerals may be held in rooms set apart exclusively for the purpose. For that very reason the atmosphere is likely to seem sepulchral. The associations are with death, not with life everlasting. No matter what is said or done, the services may seem hollow, if not hopeless.⁸⁰

The church building, on the contrary, offers the bereaved and the community a "truly fitting and proper place for the final service for one its members."⁸¹ The reason is two-fold. First, the fact of continuity is emphasized. Death is not seen out of context with the total life experience,

and it never should be so regarded. "The mind of the participant in the context (of the church funeral service) dwells less on the period of a lifetime and more on the vast stretches of time and on the meaning of eternity."⁸² What makes the church building even more meaningful for the Christian funeral service is the fact that the deceased Christian "probably worshipped there through the years, was baptized there and confirmed there, was married there and took communion there."⁸³ Could there be a more fitting place to mark the end of his physical life and the beginning of his realized eternal life?

Secondly, we dare never forget just what the funeral service is -- namely, the worship of God. If it does not focus on worship, then there really is no funeral service, in the proper sense of the term. "At the church the symbols of faith make their imprint, and solemnity as well as architectural grandeur seem fitting. Here not only the deceased and his family, but the gathering itself becomes merely a part of the expression of ultimate human longings."⁸⁴ The house of the Lord, then, expresses the continuity of life in the midst of death, and it also enables the proper worship of God. Second Samuel 12 points to the example of David in this matter. While his stricken son was still living, David fasted and besought God to heal his child. When David heard that the child had died, he "arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he went into the house of the Lord, and worshipped" (2 Sam. 12:20).

Privatization

The Christian funeral demonstrates a relatedness between the bereaved and a community which shares his loss. Within this community, he gains support for undergoing the difficult and painful experience of mourning. The form of the Christian funeral which follows the function of providing a framework of supportive relationship is that of a worship service of the church.⁸⁵

The funeral parlor tends to be more of a private, isolated place in relation to the church setting.⁸⁶ This is not always the case, to be sure; but as a general rule the very nature and practices of the funeral parlor are more privatized. Now, privatization itself is not wrong, but when it is applied to the worship service, or lack of it, then it should be corrected. "Customs such as the participation in the viewing rather than the funeral service and private committal rites followed later by a memorial service point to a tendency toward privatization of bereavement and the resources for meeting it."⁸⁷

The community of the faithful, on the contrary, offers sustaining support to the bereaved through its witness to the Christian hope for new life after death and its ministry of strength, which God provides for the facing and accepting of reality.⁸⁸ The church is not just the observing community, it is the participating community. And "in the corporate experience there is a tangible affirmation that death has affected the entire group. All have in some respect suffered loss. The group itself has actually been touched and changed by death."⁸⁹ The bereaved, in turn, sense the acceptance of their feelings and become assured that their "deepest hopes are not merely private wishful thinking."⁹⁰

It is true that the church funeral service lacks many of these "ideal" aspects in actual practice. Many times congregational hymns are absent, the Lord's Prayer is not prayed in unison, and the funeral becomes a "monologue of the pastor directed toward the bereaved family."⁹¹ This, however, should not be the case. The church funeral service can degenerate to the level of funeral parlor service if we let it become such. But the point is that the church can offer so much more than the funeral parlor in terms of a concerned-community setting -- just by the very nature of what

the church is. "An effort to screen a bereaved family from the community, to privatize the funeral, carries the implication that this community is unable or unwilling to accept and share in the expression of the mourner's feelings."⁹² Traditionally, the Christian funeral service has always been held in the church because of its community orientation and support. This serves the needs of the bereaved family most beneficially.⁹³

The Memorial Service

The memorial service remembers the deceased without any visible symbol of the body. Three major arguments are proposed which favor this type of service over the funeral service: (1) whereas the funeral service places the emphasis on the physical, the memorial service places the emphasis on the "spiritual;" (2) there is less emotion expressed because the body is absent; and (3) the memorial service focuses more clearly on life than on death.⁹⁴

There are many risks involved with the use of this type of service. First of all, "the strong emphasis of the memorial service, with its negation of the physical by the removal of the body, is in contrast with the emphasis on the whole man which the funeral conveys."⁹⁵ What is left is essentially dualistic, ascetic, and docetic in meaning.⁹⁶ If the body is not present, because it is regarded as being unimportant or a hindrance to the service, then the bereaved family holds the Greek philosophy of man which states that the soul is immortal and the body is but a prison for the soul. The "spiritual" aspects are over-emphasized and generalized to the extent that little theological and psychological benefit is received by the bereaved. If this is not the case, then the other extreme is usually practiced -- eulogizing the deceased; the recollections and testimonies

regarding his earthly accomplishments tend to move in the direction of secularity.⁹⁷

Secondly, the memorial service tends to "reduce, or even eliminate, the expression of emotion."⁹⁸ It is one of the purposes of the Christian funeral to emphasize the reality of death and thereby provide an avenue for healthy mourning and grief work. When the body is not present and when death is not stressed as a reality, then emotions do not have an outlet, and grief work becomes postponed.

Thirdly, "the effort of the memorial service to focus totally on life contrasts with the possibility of focusing on the conjunction of life and death in the funeral."⁹⁹ The memorial service tends to emphasize the memory of life rather than the reality of death and the resurrection. The bereaved, therefore, attempt to view death only from its aspect of discontinuity -- without the necessary aspect of continuity. Hence, the church should note these three arguments when consideration is being given to the memorial service; and, except in special cases where the body is not able to be present, it should stress the funeral service in place of the memorial service.

The Practice of Cremation

Cremation means reducing the body rapidly to its basic elements by means of heat.¹⁰⁰ Those who prefer this manner of bodily dissolution, in place of burial, usually accentuate the following points: (1) It gets rid of the dead more completely and finally. For some people, much anguish is felt when they think about the slow process of decay that the body undergoes. Why wait for dissolution, when it can be performed in a very short period of time? "The feeling is growing that this is a beautiful, dignified,

self-respecting way to dispose of our 'earthly vessels.'¹⁰¹ (2) It favors economy of space. In this day of population explosion, burial space is at a premium, especially in the urban areas. Cemeteries take up valuable space -- space which could be used for housing, parks, schools, etc. "An urn or box containing six to twelve pounds of ashes and skeletal remains takes but little space."¹⁰² (3) Cremation avoids the costly outlay necessary with burial. Embalming, make-up, and special funeral clothing are not needed, and much less expensive caskets are used.¹⁰³

According to Habenstein and Lamers, less than one percent of the dead were cremated in the United States at the beginning of the century. This figure rose to 3.8 percent in 1950, and has remained about the same since that time.¹⁰⁴ According to Irion's survey, some 6.5 percent of all Protestant churches use cremation for the disposition of the body.¹⁰⁵ He does not say what percentage of the bodies are cremated, but it is relatively small. Cremation is practiced more noticeably in the Northwest section of our country and in the urban areas.¹⁰⁶

There are three considerations which need to be understood when cremation is favored. First of all, while cremation at the present time is less expensive than burial, there is no guarantee that costs would not increase.¹⁰⁷ Cremation could become very popular within the next few decades; and if this happens, then the funeral and burial industries will have to raise the costs of cremation to stay in business. Secondly, it is very possible that people will misunderstand "man-made" dissolution. They may regard the body as being of little significance, and think it truly is something to be discarded.¹⁰⁸ Hence, a theological problem could arise. Finally, this process of dissolution may be a means by which the bereaved seek "to evade the pain of mourning, or the awareness of the reality of death."¹⁰⁹ It

makes little difference to the deceased what is done with him when he is dead. The important matter is the psychological acceptance of death by those who must live on and make their vital emotional adjustments.

Scripture tells us little about cremation and burial. Of course, the usual method for disposing of the dead body was burial (Gen. 23:19; 49:29; 50:7; Deut. 34:5,6; 2 Chron. 9:31; Matt. 26:12; 27:59,60; etc.). Cremation normally was not practiced, except for the following reasons: (1) extreme cases of criminality, as in Lev. 20:14; (2) cases of harlotry -- used to inflict a disgraceful death, as in Gen. 38:24; and (3) cases where a body had been defiled by the enemy, as with King Saul's body.¹¹⁰

Habenstein and Lamers give an excellent summary of the attitude of the early Christian Church toward the practice of cremation:

They held it revolting that the human body, 'once the temple of the Holy Spirit, once sanctified and refreshed spiritually by the sacraments' should be burned, except in 'well-defined, isolated instances when because of disease or epidemic, cremation is absolutely necessary to prevent the disease. . . .' Although cremation was prohibited finally in Christendom during the reign of Constantine the Great, (306-337 A.D.) Christianity as a whole has never taken a final stand in the matter, and today some of the more 'secularized' religious groups, such as the Unitarians, actually favor the practice.¹¹¹

There is nothing in present-day Christian theology which frowns upon cremation or which requires burial. While cremation has been contrary to Christian tradition, and has been practiced extensively by heathen nations, it need not be a symbol of unbelief or paganism. In the event that our cemeteries become overcrowded, or an epidemic strikes with disastrous force, it will be necessary to cremate bodies. There is no good reason for a Christian's objecting to this practice;¹¹² it is an adiaphoron.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

While specific answers to some of the American cultural practices cannot be given, the church's approach to death and the funeral must emphasize the three-fold purpose of the Christian funeral -- to provide a sense of finality, to enable the reaffirmation of faith, and to foster the worship of God.

Proponents for the materialistically-orientated funeral tend to disregard not only this three-fold purpose of the Christian funeral, but also the ancient tradition which lies behind it. Modern lavishments in the form of caskets, flowers, vaults, tombstones, cosmetic treatments and the like, have become the symbol of the "conventional" funeral, while the proper concepts of the body, death, grief and mourning are very often disregarded.

The church must realize these abuses in the funeral rite, and it must lead its people in the direction of proper theological and psychological understandings, attitudes and practices. Education must take place within each congregation before death strikes one of its members. Then the bereaved family and the concerned community will have the appropriate orientation, enabling them to mark the conclusion of life for one of their loved ones with proper respect for the body, proper recognition of their grief, and proper worship of their God.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER ONE

- ¹ Jessica Mitford, The American Way of Death (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), p. 18.

CHAPTER TWO

- ¹ R. W. Habenstein and Wm. M. Lamers, The History of American Funeral Directing (Milwaukee: Bulfin Press, 1962), p. 57.
- ² L. H. Zuck, "The Changing Meaning of the Funeral in Christian History," Pastoral Psychology, VIII (November, 1957), 18.
- ³ Ibid., p. 19.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Habenstein and Lamers, p. 68.
- ⁷ Paul E. Irion, "The Funeral and the Integrity of the Church," Pastoral Psychology, XIV (June, 1963), 28.
- ⁸ R. M. Herhold, "The High Cost of Dying," Dialogue, II (Winter, 1963), 70.
- ⁹ W. B. Oglesby, Jr., "The Resurrection and the Funeral," Pastoral Psychology, VIII (November, 1957), 15.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Irion, p. 30.
- ¹² Paul E. Irion, "The Church and the Bereaved," Social Action, XXV (April, 1959), 4.

CHAPTER THREE

- ¹ T. A. Kantonen, Life After Death (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), p. 6.
- ² E. W. Chrenstein, "Immortality in the New Testament; Testimony on Eternal Life," Encounter, XXII (Winter, 1961), 32.

- ³John A. T. Robinson, The Body (London: SCM Press, 1963), p. 31.
- ⁴Paul E. Irion, The Funeral: Vestige or Value? (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 149.
- ⁵Ibid.
- ⁶Ibid., pp. 148-149.
- ⁷Ibid.
- ⁸Robinson, p. 34.
- ⁹Fred D. Gealy, "The Biblical Understanding of Death," Pastoral Psychology, XIV (June, 1963), 35.
- ¹⁰F. E. Mayer, "Christ's Death and the End of Our Dying," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXII (February, 1951), 128.
- ¹¹Ibid., p. 127.
- ¹²Ibid.
- ¹³Irion, Vestige, pp. 156-157.
- ¹⁴M. E. Dahl, The Resurrection of the Body (Naperville: Alec R. Allensen, 1962), p. 94.
- ¹⁵Irion, Vestige, p. 166.
- ¹⁶Kantonen, p. 31.
- ¹⁷Kantonen, p. 30.
- ¹⁸Oscar Cullmann, Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Body (London: Epworth Press, 1958), pp. 54-55.
- ¹⁹Ohrenstein, p. 32.
- ²⁰Kantonen, p. 14.
- ²¹Ohrenstein, pp. 33-34.
- ²²Ibid.
- ²³Irion, Vestige, p. 107.
- ²⁴Kantonen, p. 30.
- ²⁵Irion, Vestige, p. 107.
- ²⁶Ibid., p. 121.

²⁷Kantonen, p. 18.

²⁸Irion, Vestige, p. 120.

²⁹E. Gitlin, "The Experience of Death; the Biblical Response," Encounter, XXII (Winter, 1961), 13.

CHAPTER FOUR

¹L. E. Bowman, The American Funeral (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1959), p. 4.

²Edgar N. Jackson, For the Living (Des Moines, Ia.: Channel Press, 1963), p. 50.

³William F. Rogers, "The Relationship of the Funeral to Counseling with the Bereaved," Pastoral Psychology, VIII (November, 1957), 23.

⁴William F. Rogers, "The Pastor's Work With Grief," Pastoral Psychology, XIV (September, 1963), 27.

⁵Jackson, Living, p. 44.

⁶Ibid., p. 29.

⁷Ibid., p. 51.

⁸Rogers, "Pastor's Work," p. 20.

⁹Erich Lindemann, "Symptomatology and Management of Acute Grief," Pastoral Psychology, XIV (September, 1963), 11.

¹⁰Jackson, p. 21.

¹¹Lindemann, p. 11.

¹²Paul E. Irion, The Funeral and the Mourners (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), p. 37.

¹³Paul E. Irion, "The Church and the Bereaved," Social Action, XXV (April, 1959), 9.

¹⁴Lindemann, p. 11.

¹⁵Edgar N. Jackson, Understanding Grief (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 18.

¹⁶Lindemann, p. 11.

¹⁷William F. Rogers, Ye Shall be Comforted (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), p. 32.

- 18 W. B. Oglesby, Jr., "The Resurrection and the Funeral," p. 14.
- 19 Jackson, Grief, p. 143.
- 20 Paul E. Irion, "Selecting Resources for the Funeral," Pastoral Psychology VIII (November, 1957), 34.
- 21 Lindemann, p. 9.
- 22 Ibid., pp. 9-10.
- 23 Irion, "Bereaved," p. 7.
- 24 T. Glidden, "The American Funeral," Pastoral Psychology, XIV (June, 1963), 17.
- 25 Rogers, "Relationship," p. 31.
- 26 Jackson, Living, p. 31.
- 27 Rogers, "Pastor's Work," p. 23.
- 28 Rogers, "Relationship," p. 31.
- 29 Jackson, Grief, p. 57.
- 30 Lindemann, pp. 13-15.
- 31 Jackson, Grief, pp. 60-101.
- 32 Jackson, Living, p. 63.
- 33 Ibid., p. 32.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Lindemann, p. 11.
- 36 Paul E. Johnson, Psychology of Pastoral Care (New York: Abingdon, 1953), p. 249.
- 37 Jackson, Grief, p. 113.
- 38 Rogers, "Pastor's Work," p. 26.
- 39 Supra, p. 27.
- 40 Rogers, "Pastor's Work," p. 23.
- 41 Jackson, Living, p. 15.
- 42 Paul E. Irion, The Funeral : Vestige or Value? p. 220.

CHAPTER FIVE

- ¹E. T. Randall, "Funerals Can be Christian!" The Christian Century, LXV (January 7, 1948), 11.
- ²V. O. Vogt, "We Commit This Body," The Christian Century, LXII (March 21, 1945), 362.
- ³Jessica Mitford, The American Way of Death, *passim*.
- ⁴Robert W. Habenstein and W. M. Lamers, Funeral Customs the World Over (Milwaukee: Bulfin Press, 1963), p. 750.
- ⁵T. Glidden, "The American Funeral," p. 11.
- ⁶Ibid., p. 12.
- ⁷R. M. Herhold, "The High Cost of Dying," p. 68.
- ⁸L. E. Bowman, The American Funeral, p. 23.
- ⁹Paul E. Irion, The Funeral: Vestige or Value? p. 80.
- ¹⁰Bowman, p. 33.
- ¹¹Ibid., p. 47.
- ¹²A. L. Kershaw, "Burial and the Christian Church," The Journal of Pastoral Care, IX (Autumn, 1955), 169.
- ¹³"To Die is Gain," America, CIX (September 21, 1963), 278.
- ¹⁴Edgar N. Jackson, For the Living, *passim*.
- ¹⁵Mitford, p. 195.
- ¹⁶Ibid.
- ¹⁷Bowman, p. 17.
- ¹⁸Mitford, p. 87.
- ¹⁹Ibid.
- ²⁰F. D. Whitesell, "Ministering to Human Grief," Christianity Today, VI (June 8, 1962), 12.
- ²¹R. M. Harmer, The High Cost of Dying (New York: Crowell-Collier Press, 1963), pp. 226-228.
- ²²Ibid., p. 228.
- ²³Randall, p. 11.

- ²⁴Mitford, p. 111.
- ²⁵Ibid.
- ²⁶Harmer, p. 228.
- ²⁷Harmer, p. 13.
- ²⁸Cleveland Memorial Society, "Preparation for the End of Life; Providing for Simple Funeral Arrangements," Social Action, XXV (April, 1959), 22-24.
- ²⁹Ibid.
- ³⁰Irion, Vestige, p. 80.
- ³¹Ibid.
- ³²Supra, p. 2.
- ³³L. H. Zuck, "The Changing Meaning of the Funeral in Christian History," p. 19.
- ³⁴Robert W. Habenstein and W. M. Lamers, The History of American Funeral Directing, pp. 65-67.
- ³⁵Zuck, p. 18.
- ³⁶Habenstein and Lamers, Directing, p. 68.
- ³⁷Ibid.
- ³⁸Jackson, Living, pp. 54-55.
- ³⁹Ibid.
- ⁴⁰Mitford, p. 54.
- ⁴¹Paul E. Irion, "The Church and the Bereaved," p. 9.
- ⁴²Glidden, p. 16.
- ⁴³Jackson, Living, p. 53.
- ⁴⁴Ibid.
- ⁴⁵Glidden, p. 16.
- ⁴⁶Ibid.
- ⁴⁷Habenstein and Lamers, Customs, p. 767.
- ⁴⁸Bowman, p. 12.

- ⁴⁹Randall, p. 12.
- ⁵⁰Frances, Tucker, "How Christian are our Funerals? Eternity, X (March, 1959), 17.
- ⁵¹Jackson, Living, p. 54.
- ⁵²Irion, Vestige, p. 48.
- ⁵³Charles F. Potter, "Embalming," Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore Mythology and Legend, edited by Maria Leach (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1949), I, 173.
- ⁵⁴Randall, p. 13.
- ⁵⁵Irion, "Integrity," p. 27.
- ⁵⁶Irion, Vestige, p. 48.
- ⁵⁷Kershaw, p. 169.
- ⁵⁸Harmer, p. 226.
- ⁵⁹Irion, Vestige, p. 52.
- ⁶⁰Ibid.
- ⁶¹Ibid., p. 165.
- ⁶²Ibid.
- ⁶³Ibid., p. 52.
- ⁶⁴Ibid., p. 53.
- ⁶⁵Ibid.
- ⁶⁶Bowman, p. 19.
- ⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 16-20.
- ⁶⁸Ibid., p. 16.
- ⁶⁹Supra, p. 16.
- ⁷⁰Bowman, p. 21.
- ⁷¹Ibid., p. 20.
- ⁷²Irion, Vestige, p. 201.
- ⁷³Bowman, p. 20.
- ⁷⁴Ibid.

- 75 Irion, Vestige, p. 15.
- 76 Bowman, p. 21.
- 77 Ibid.
- 78 Ibid., pp. 23-24.
- 79 Irion, Vestige, p. 49.
- 80 Andrew W. Blackwood, The Funeral (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952), p. 74.
- 81 Jackson, Living, p. 72.
- 82 Bowman, p. 23.
- 83 Jackson, Living, p. 72.
- 84 Bowman, p. 23.
- 85 Irion, Vestige, p. 170.
- 86 Ibid., p. 219.
- 87 Ibid.
- 88 Ibid., p. 107.
- 89 Ibid., p. 171.
- 90 Ibid.
- 91 Ibid., p. 18.
- 92 Ibid., p. 181.
- 93 Ibid., p. 221.
- 94 Ibid., p. 213.
- 95 Ibid.
- 96 Ibid.
- 97 Vogt, pp. 362-363.
- 98 Irion, Vestige, p. 213.
- 99 Ibid., p. 215.
- 100 Bowman, p. 166.
- 101 E. W. MacNair, "Cremation or Burial?" Social Action, XXV (April, 1959), p. 14.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁰⁴Habenstein and Lamers, Customs, p. 750.

¹⁰⁵Irion, Vestige, p. 17.

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 208.

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 209.

¹¹⁰Zuck, p. 18.

¹¹¹Habenstein and Lamers, Directing, pp. 59-60.

¹¹²John H. C. Fritz, Pastoral Theology (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1932), p. 307.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bachmann, C. C. "More on the American Way of Death," (Reader's forum) Pastoral Psychology, XV (April, 1964), 54-55.
- Becker, R. J. "Funeral; Memorial or Burial?" Pastoral Psychology, XV (April, 1964), 50-53.
- Bendann, Effie. Death Customs. London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., Ltd., 1930.
- Blackwood, Andrew W. The Funeral. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952.
- Bowman, L. E. The American Funeral. Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1959.
- Brown, E. S., Jr. "Holds Funerals are Pagan," The Christian Century, LXXVIII (June 13, 1956), 717.
- "Worship Notebook," The Lutheran, XXXVIII (May 30, 1956), 23-25.
- Cleveland Memorial Society. "Preparation for the End of Life; Providing for Simple Funeral Arrangements," Social Action, XXV (April, 1959), 22-24.
- Cullmann, Oscar. Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? London: Epworth Press, 1958.
- Dahl, M. E. The Resurrection of the Body. Naperville: Alec R. Allensen, 1962.
- "Death and Burial," Time, LXIII (January 18, 1954), 93.
- Forest, J. D. "The Major Emphasis of the Funeral," Pastoral Psychology, XIV (June, 1963), 19-24.
- Fritz, John H. C. Pastoral Theology. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1932.
- "Funeral Customs the World Over," Review, Time, LXXVII (January 6, 1961), 66f.
- "Funeral Furor," The Christian Century, LXXX (October 16, 1963), 1259.
- "Funerals," Scientific American, CLXXXIII (November, 1950), 28.
- "Funerals Should be Christianized," The Christian Century, LXXVII (August 10, 1960), 918.
- Gealy, Fred D. "The Biblical Understanding of Death," Pastoral Psychology, XIV (June, 1963), 33-40.
- Gerer, Geoffrey. Death, Grief and Mourning. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965.

- Glidden, T. "The American Funeral," Pastoral Psychology, XIV (June, 1963), 9-18.
- Gitlin, E. "The Experience of Death; the Biblical Response," Encounter, XXII (Winter, 1961), 3-14.
- Habenstein, Robert W., and W. M. Lamers. Funeral Customs the World Over. Milwaukee: Bulfin Printers, 1963.
- . The History of American Funeral Directing. Milwaukee: Bulfin Printers, 1962.
- Harmer, R. M. The High Cost of Dying. New York: Crowell-Collier Press, 1963.
- Herhold, R. M. "The High Cost of Dying," Dialogue, II (Winter, 1963), 68-70.
- cf Irion, Paul E. "The Church and the Bereaved," Social Action, XXV (April, 1959), 3-10.
- . "The Funeral and the Integrity of the Church," Pastoral Psychology, XIV (June, 1963), 25-32.
- . The Funeral and the Mourners. New York: Abingdon Press, 1954.
- . The Funeral: Vestige or Value? Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966.
- . "Selecting Resources for the Funeral," Pastoral Psychology, VIII (November, 1957), 33-40.
- Jackson, Edgar N. For the Living. Des Moines, Ia.: Channel Press, 1963.
- . Understanding Grief. New York: Abingdon Press, 1957.
- Johnson, Paul E. Psychology of Pastoral Care. New York: Abingdon, 1953.
- Kantonen, T. A. Life After Death. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962.
- Kershaw, A. L. "Burial and the Christian Church," The Journal of Pastoral Care, IX (Autumn, 1955), 167-170.
- Kidorf, I. W. "Jewish Tradition and the Freudian Theory of Mourning," The Journal of Religious Health, II (April, 1963), 248-252.
- Knight, G. L., and Others. "The Funeral Service and Hymns," Hymn, X (April, 1959), 39-48.
- Leach, W. H. The Improved Funeral Manual. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1956.
- Lindemann, Erich. "Symptomatology and Management of Acute Grief," Pastoral Psychology, XIV (September, 1963), 8-18.

- Lippert, H. G. "Giving Memorials - In Place of Flowers for the Deceased," Social Action, XXV (April, 1959), 24-25.
- Matz, M. "Judaism and Bereavement," The Journal of Religious Health, III (July, 1964), 245-252.
- Mayer, F. E. "Christ's Death and the End of our Dying," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXII (February, 1951), 126-129.
- MacNair, E. W. "Cremation or Burial?" Social Action, XXV (April, 1959), 11-17.
- Mitford, Jessica. The American Way of Death. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963.
- Mueller, John T. "Cremation or Burial?" Concordia Theological Monthly, XVIII (September, 1947), 699.
- Oglesby, W. B., Jr. "The Resurrection and the Funeral," Pastoral Psychology, VIII (November, 1957), 11-16.
- Ohrenstein, E. W. "Immortality in the New Testament; Testimony on Eternal Life," Encounter, XXII (Winter, 1961), 28-36.
- Perske, R. "Death and Ministry; Episode and Response," Pastoral Psychology, XV (September, 1964), 25-35.
- Potter, Charles F. "Embalming," Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore Mythology and Legend. I. Edited by Maria Leach. New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1949. p. 173.
- Randall, E. T. "Funerals Can be Christian!" The Christian Century, LXV (January 7, 1948), 11-13.
- Robinson, John A. T. The Body. London: SCM Press, 1963.
- Rogers, William F. "The Pastor's Work With Grief," Pastoral Psychology, XIV (September, 1963), 19-26.
- "The Relationship of the Funeral to Counseling with the Bereaved," Pastoral Psychology, VIII (November, 1957), 27-32.
- Ye Shall be Comforted. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950.
- Stuenkel, Omar. "Questions and Answers," The Lutheran Witness Reporter, October 16, 1966, p. 5, col. 2.
- Stylites, S. "High Class Funerals," The Christian Century, LXXVI (November 25, 1959), 1391.
- Thran, Sally. "New Funeral Rites Drawing Many Favorable Comments," St. Louis Review, September 30, 1966, pp. 1 and 8.

- "To Die is Gain," America, CIX (September 21, 1963), 278.
- Tucker, F. "How Christian are our Funerals?" Eternity, X, (March, 1959), 16-18.
- Vogt, V. O. "We Commit This Body," The Christian Century, LXII (March 21, 1945), 362-363.
- Wallis, C. L. The Funeral Encyclopedia. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953.
- Whitesell, F. D. "Ministering to Human Grief," Christianity Today, VI (June 8, 1962), 11-13.
- Zuck, L. H. "The Changing Meaning of the Funeral in Christian History," Pastoral Psychology, VIII (November, 1957), 17-26.