

LITURGY AND DEATH:

an examination of the pastoral and theological issues relating to funerals, with special reference to selected funerary rites

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

Abstract

An abundance of anecdotal evidence suggests criticism of funeral services. In a society where religious pluralism, agnosticism and non-belief are increasing, funerals are probably the most common occasions upon which people without formal (or informal) religious belief meet the services of the Christian Church. There is a growing call for alternative funeral provision.

This thesis offers a theological and ritual analysis of Christian funeral rites. It suggests that Christian funerals should be at least consistent with a theological anthropology, should relate the dead person to the death, descent and resurrection of Jesus, and should attend to the pastoral needs arising from the circumstance of each particular case.

From such considerations it examines contemporary discussions about death, bereavement, and human existence. In response both to the current debate and to traditional Christian understandings, it proposes its own unitary theological anthropology using a language of *zoetics*. From such a view the life, death and resurrection of Jesus are presented as representative of all personhood. A review of social anthropology draws upon the work of van Gennep and describes how funerals act as rites of passage. The separating, transitional and incorporating phases of such rites are used in conjunction with the Paschal Mystery as a proposal for future Christian funerary liturgies. The establishment of a unitary anthropology, derived from the Hebrew concept of *nephesh* and rooted in a theology of Christ the Representative is combined with a universalist reading of the Paschal Mystery. Such a pastoral theology makes possible the celebration of Christian funeral rites for all who seek the Church's ministry.

The historical development of Christian funeral rites is described and leads to a major review of the current liturgical provisions of a number of Christian churches in Britain. In the concluding part of the thesis general and specific proposals are offered, which seek to minister to the dual passage of death and bereavement. These are then tested against six fictional corpses whose funeral rites are described and analysed.

A concluding section suggests future lines of enquiry arising from this research.

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Frontispiece

May the babe of Bethlehem be mine to tend,
May the boy of Nazareth be mine for friend,
May the man of Galilee my soul defend.
Then, God, your holy angels send
That I may see thee at the end.

Bishop Leslie Lloyd-Rees
ex-prison chaplain
Prayer taught to a man in the condemned cell
Timewatch BBC2, Wednesday 2 June 1993

The hour will come - it is here already -
when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God,
and all who hear it will live.

John 5.25

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In submitting this thesis for examination, I acknowledge the contributions of the living and the dead.

To undertake the task of theological research is to be indebted to the whole community of those who throughout human history have considered the mighty ways of God. Some of these women and men find their way specifically into the references contained within this work; others cast their influence in less explicit but no less significant ways.

I have conducted and attended the funerals of adults and children over many years: from all of them I have learnt. Chief among them was my mother, whose Anglo-Catholic faith sustained her in her final illness.

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Despite the best efforts of all these people, what is offered is partial. Much remains to be done, and any errors are mine. Nonetheless, I have written in the hope that what I have learnt may be a contribution to pastoral theology and liturgy both in academic debate and in the Church's ministry at the time of death.

Introduction: A Question of Life and Death

Chapter One: Ritual Blunder

An introductory review

For more than a quarter of a century there has been a sense in Britain that funerals are frequently unsatisfactory both to mourners and to officiants. One of the first to observe and record this unease in detail was Geoffrey Gorer. In his book *Death, Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain*, he ascribed to death a taboo status similar to that previously accorded to pornography.¹ He described the decline in social semiotics (such as the black armband) associated with death and bereavement, and noted a decline in socially agreed beliefs and practices, which he saw as providing difficulties for the ritual nature and purposes of funerals.² Along with the anecdotal evidence which journalists have reported in the newspapers and on television, there has been a significant increase in the work of psychiatrists and grief counsellors investigating how death affects the bereaved and how funerals assist or impede the process of mourning. The clinical and social phenomenologies of bereavement grief have been documented and analysed by a succession of practitioners in the fields.³

The minister of religion, who may not have read the theory, will nonetheless be aware of the general unease, in which (s)he will often share. Among her/his concerns will be the constraints upon the time permitted at a crematorium and the frequent lack of previous contact with the family. There may also be a feeling that it is the officiant who will most often be blamed where dissatisfaction is expressed. Perhaps the most common criticism is that the funeral was “anonymous” or “impersonal”. The suggestion is made that “it

¹ G. Gorer, *Death, Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain*, Cresset, London, 1965.

² The changes which Gorer described led to traditional ritual practice at funerals being seen as meaningless. Paradoxically it is this decline which I shall argue makes the liturgical articulation of funerals potentially more significant, since funerary observance is one of the few communal expressions of ritual left in our society.

³ Hinton and Parkes were early investigators in the United Kingdom. Parkes also undertook work in the USA where Kübler-Ross has made an enormous contribution. In more recent years they have been joined by many others including Bertman, Davidsen-Neilsen, Golding, Hockey, Leick, Littlewood, Stedeford, Wallbank and Worden. See the bibliography for publication details.

could have been anyone” and that there has been no sense of the individuality of the deceased.⁴

This research project began from my own awareness as a minister of this dissatisfaction - a dissatisfaction which is aggravated by the perceived irrelevance of religion in the everyday experience of most people. I felt compelled to ask a number of questions about the purpose of funerals and the expectations both of those who frame them and of those who attend them. I outline these issues in this Introduction to the thesis (**Ritual Blunder - A Question of Life and Death**). There follows in Part One a reflection upon the nature of human death and bereavement (**Death and the Human**) in which I seek to elicit from a consideration of death in its medical, legal, philosophical, social, anthropological and ritual aspects the human agenda which confronts the funeral. Part Two (**Death and God**) looks at the Paschal Mystery, and asks how the death and bereavement known therein by God are related to the particular death and bereavement which summon the Christian minister to any given funeral. Parts One and Two thus provide some criteria (arising from human experience, ritual practice and theological consideration) by which it may be possible to assess the pastoral and theological concerns of existing rites. Part Three (**Death and Liturgy**) examines a number of contemporary Christian funeral rites in the light of the issues raised by the previous chapters. In Part Four (**A Dance of Death**) I attempt to address the original concerns of the research by offering some liturgical proposals of my own.

⁴ The accusation may well have force where the minister is officiating by reason of being on a duty roster, or where for some other cause (s)he has been unable to visit. The funeral director will always have visited and spent some time talking through the details of arranging the funeral, and will therefore have established some rapport however rudimentary.

What are funerals supposed to do?

In 1965, the Liturgical Commission of the Church of England offered an answer to this question in its introduction to the Second Series of Alternative Services. It wrote:

Having faced the question afresh in the light of theological and pastoral considerations, the Commission puts forward the following fivefold answer:

- (a) To secure the reverent disposal of the corpse.
- (b) To commend the deceased to the care of our heavenly Father.
- (c) To proclaim the glory of our risen life in Christ here and hereafter.
- (d) To remind us of the awful certainty of our own coming death and judgement.
- (e) To make plain the eternal unity of Christian people, living and departed, in the risen and ascended Christ.

It would perhaps be natural to add a sixth point, namely the consolation of the mourners; but the Commission believes that this object should be attained by means of the objects already included in its answer.⁵

It is worth noting that the primary emphasis is upon dealing with the dead. In Part Two I shall consider what the focus on the dead involves; for the present, I wish simply to note that for the Anglican Communion the difficulty is particularly sharp. I shall examine this aspect of the problem in Part Three, when I review a number of contemporary Christian rites.

An example of this difficulty is found in the Church of England where the Catholic and the Protestant traditions do not always sit together easily, and where debate about what can be done for the dead is ever present.⁶ Non-

⁵ The Church of England Liturgical Commission, *Alternative Services. Second Series*, 1965, pages 105-106.

⁶ When I speak of a Protestant tradition within the churches of the Anglican Communion, what is intended is a distinction from those who, within Anglicanism, describe themselves as Catholics.
At the time of writing the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England is preparing a document on "Salvation" for consideration by the General Synod. Part of the discussion has addressed the theme of personal eschatology, and the predictable difficulties have arisen.

Catholics will find difficulty with those who suggest that the liturgy can in any way have an ontological effect on the dead. For those who belong to the Protestant traditions, prayers for the dead are highly problematical. Although such prayers had been reintroduced in the 1928 rites, that revision had not gained final authorization.⁷ The 1928 rite could be understood as an option for the Catholic wing of the Church of England in a way that the Alternative Service Book never could be. Michael Perham described the result in Series Three as

the sort of tinkering required to modernize the language and reach an acceptable compromise on prayer for the dead.⁸

Although the problems are particularly acute for the Anglican traditions, their debate is one which the whole Church has to address. In the funeral rite what are we doing for the dead? If there were no corpse there would be no funeral, and the bereaved would need no rite of passage. Their passage is secondary and contingent upon the primary and necessary rite for the dead. Knox's solution of ignoring the dead (except for the public health requirement of burial) and addressing the service, or rather the sermon, exclusively to the living is not a good solution if the rite's primary focus is on the dead.⁹

The Liturgical Commission concluded that the funeral is also an occasion of ministry to the living, to the bereaved. As far as I have discovered, this conclusion is universally accepted; and we might be forgiven for thinking that there is no further problem. However, it seems to me that what we and those who mourn believe about death and the dead will determine how we minister to them, and on these matters (as I have already suggested) there is a divergence of opinion. Moreover, I am eager to resist the widely accepted notion that the aim of ministry to the bereaved is to "get them back to normal". In Part One I shall address the work of psychiatrists and grief

⁷ The 1928 book was approved by the Church of England, but failed to gain the assent of Parliament.

⁸ M. Perham, "The Funeral Liturgy", *Towards Liturgy 2000*, ed. M. Perham, SPCK/Alcuin Club, London 1989, page 53.

⁹ Calvin argued that burial was important as a sign of the resurrection (*The Institutes of Christian Religion*, III.xxv.5 and 8, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh. John Knox's Genevan Service Book of 1556, urged a reverent burial and at the church a "comfortable exhortation to the people" about death and resurrection.

counsellors, and review the implications of what their studies show for the work of Christian ministry. Conclusions which I reach will form part of the foundation for what I propose in my own liturgical agenda in Part Four.

At the heart of the Liturgical Commission's statement is an affirmation about our sharing in the resurrection life of Christ. The Commission intended this as an allusion to the communion of saints; but it also reminds us, however obliquely, of the social nature of death at the human level. Death is not simply a private event, there is a social dimension. At its most earthbound, there are certificates to be completed, and legalities to be observed; but beyond these duties, there is the sense of inter-relatedness which John Donne articulates in his celebrated seventeenth meditation.¹⁰

In Part One, the agenda of social anthropology finds its place. If the social life of a human being is remembered at all in the funeral, it is usually in the homily. I shall want to consider whether liturgy can better articulate the social nature of death than by assuming that a gathering of mourners is an adequate expression in itself.¹¹

The underlying question is, "What is the pastoral agenda when we attempt to address these individuals and groups in our liturgies?" Other questions follow. Is the Christian funeral simply an expression of practical, kindly care - and no more? If so, how does it differ from a humanist rite? In anthropological terms, can a rite of passage be reduced to a formalised cheerio?

If there is more to the Christian funeral than expressions of sympathy and the recounting of memories, the liturgist needs to be aware of what it is. I shall argue in Part Two that the Christian funeral is not simply an occasion for human kindness, but that it is also an arena of confrontation and disclosure. In this arena the ultimate mystery of God is perilously encountered; here the story

¹⁰ "No man is an Island, entire of it self; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind; And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee". J. Donne, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, Meditation XVII.

¹¹ Often the social nature of a particular death is better expressed outside the funeral rite, and particularly in the social gathering which follows the funeral.

of God in Christ and the story of this dead person are interwoven. I shall investigate how the death of Christ is representative of our death, and how Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the beloved disciple are icons for our grief.¹² I shall also consider how the grief of the Father in the death of Jesus is a kerygmatic word to all who mourn.¹³ This raises key questions for the Christian funeral: “How does God in Christ relate to the dead and to the living?”, and “How does God hold the keys of life and death?” Crucially, I shall consider how the Paschal Mystery forms the basis of funeral rites. This has been a principal concern of those who have prepared the *Order of Christian Funerals*. Their work has been a response to the sense that death must be answered by resurrection. However, it has perhaps not taken account of what anthropologists call the transitional or liminal where chaos threatens to overwhelm order. In the language of the Paschal Mystery I shall give detailed attention to Holy Saturday and the descent to the dead. This is, I shall argue, the pivot of the Easter event, and a dynamic myth for the dead and the bereaved in the funeral liturgy. In Part Four I shall endeavour to give this liturgical expression.

The gap between expectation and experience

I propose to identify four areas in which contemporary funerals may be subject to criticism. The officiant’s performance may be seen as automatic or in some way uncaring; the liturgical content of some rites may not be always conducive to a helpful rite of passage; the theological presuppositions of rites may not correspond with the beliefs and understandings of those who mourn; the necessary sense of community upon which rites of passage depend for their successful performance may not exist in the course of any particular funeral. Initially, I shall consider the first two issues; I shall then illustrate how they have impinged upon a particular funeral. I shall then return to consider the final two matters.

Ministerial Performance

My own observation of those who officiate at funerals is that the overwhelming majority of ministers want to help those who mourn. Where there is no previous knowledge of the deceased or of the mourners, the way in

¹² I am particularly indebted to the Focolare Movement for the latter insight.

¹³ This is, of course, Moltmann’s great contribution to the debate.

which ministers set out to achieve their aim is by attempting to create what they hope will be a caring ambience. Many believe that this is produced by careful attention to tone and style. Body gestures and voice timbres are pitched almost in imitation of the doctor's bedside manner.¹⁴ Where there is a good previous connection with the family, the artificiality in which style and tone predominate is diminished. In such cases pastoral care has already been established, and what occurs in the funeral rites is simply part of an existing continuum of ministry.

Frequently, however, the officiant's first knowledge of the death and first meeting with the bereaved is as a result of a funeral director's phone call. Where the minister is able to arrange a meeting with the contact provided by the funeral director - and this is not always the next of kin - the visit which follows will reveal a host of constraints upon what the minister feels herself able to do at the funeral. Christian funeral rites frequently presume the Christian faith not only of the deceased but also of the mourners. Sometimes the presumption is implicit in the liturgy, on other occasions explicit comment is made in rubrics or other instructions.¹⁵ However, the minister will often find either a faith which was only ever voiced at baptism many years previously or no faith at all. In such circumstances (s)he is placed in a difficult situation: the liturgical forms are Christian, but those for whom they are now being used have no faith at all in the sense which the liturgy assumes. What is required in the minds of many such mourners is much more like a humanist event - a dignified farewell without institutional religious expression.¹⁶ Where

¹⁴ One minister, now himself dead, but in life the possessor of a splendid *basso profundo* voice, was described to me by a colleague as having "a grand graveside manner"!

¹⁵ For example, the *Order of Christian Funerals*, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1990, confidently begins paragraph 4 of its General Introduction [page 2]:

At the death of a Christian, whose life of faith was begun in baptism and strengthened at the eucharistic table...

The first rubric of the Funeral Service in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* states [page 388]:

Here is to be noted, that the Office ensuing is not to be used for any that die unbaptized, or excommunicate, or have laid violent hands upon themselves.

¹⁶ Humanist officiants are available, but funeral directors do not always know whom to contact, and families do not always know how to ask. The British Humanist Association offers help in its publication, *Funerals without God: A Practical Guide to Non-Religious Funerals*, Jayne Wynne Willson, London, 1989.

there is a serious objection to religious content, the minister may wish to withdraw. But time is often short, and where no alternative officiant can be found, the minister may feel obliged to offer some sort of ritual care for reasons of simple humanity. In such cases, the result may well be unsatisfactory either to the minister, or to the family, or to both.

On other occasions, the officiant may be serving as the duty minister at the crematorium. Here the chance of meeting with the family and planning anything together is fairly remote, and it is very likely that even the most capable minister will be unable to offer anything much more than a standard form with one or two amendments to fit the name of the deceased. It is clear how this kind of situation may leave the mourners feeling cheated - the minister probably has the same reaction.

The sociologist, Tony Walter, proposes that ministers should spend time with families planning the funeral, encouraging them to take the initiative in making the arrangements rather than leaving it to the professionals - ministers or funeral directors.¹⁷ In principle this is good, but it presupposes a number of things which in practice may not be possible. It assumes that the minister can meet with the family frequently enough, or for long enough, to make such arrangements. At least two things may hinder this. The time may not be available either to the minister or to the family, and the family may not be available in a sufficiently representative form to make the sort of decisions which Walter advocates. Even if the minister and the family meet together, not all families are ready or able in the days immediately following death to

¹⁷ J. A. Walter, *Funerals - And How To Improve Them*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1990. In the course of his book Walter argues that the designation "funeral director" indicates a shift in status and role from the old "undertaker", a shift in which the mourners lose control of the funeral.

In a diary column in *The Independent on Sunday*, dated 21 November 1993, Geraldine Bedell wrote of her recent experience. She began: "The modern municipal funeral can seem a bleak and perfunctory affair. My grandmother had hers last week, and I spent most of the service worrying that the vicar would get her mixed up with someone else. In the event, he did get her name and most of the details right. But it must have been much easier when vicars knew the people they were burying, and did actually bury them, while the relatives threw earth at their coffins and said their sad goodbyes". She concluded: "Vicars ought to encourage people to write or say something themselves, to choose a poem or something else which has mattered to the dead. Otherwise it's hard to feel that the ritual isn't vaguely absurd."

make the kind of complex choices which planning a funeral ritual entails. Many non-churchgoers know only a few hymns, of which two are usually “The Lord’s my Shepherd” and “Abide with me”. Of course, both of these hymns are quite acceptable for use at funerals. But once this choice has been made, the idea of sitting in a group discussing with a stranger what the deceased would have wanted or what they prefer is alien to the majority of people, who are numbed by what has just occurred, and who may well find that the dynamics and atmosphere of such a group do not liberate them all.

The explanations I have offered so far avoid what is sometimes at the root of the problem: ministerial slackness. It is undeniable that not all funerals receive from ministers the kind of care which mourners have a right to expect: the wrong name is used for the deceased; the prayers are gabbled; the homily either makes so little mention of the deceased that it is clear that no preparation in this area has been made, or the minister describes someone so devoid of faults or weakness that “canonisation precedes interment”, as one Catholic priest put it. Where this sort of incompetence occurs, a serious damage is done.¹⁸

For many people the pastoral offices are their only experience of church; they have discarded Christian faith and practice as boring, out of touch, and irrelevant. The officiating minister who allows mourners to depart with these opinions hardened has missed an opportunity to put matters right; proclamation becomes evermore difficult.¹⁹

¹⁸ The Superintendent of a cemetery and crematorium in Manor Park, London, addressing a conference of The Churches’ Group on Funerals in Cemeteries and Crematoria, on Tuesday 12 October 1993, added other horrors: ministers who didn’t clip their notes together, so that a sudden gust of wind distributed pieces of paper around the cemetery; ministers who didn’t bother to acquaint themselves with the buttons at the crematorium lectern and started the coffin on its journey instead of fading out the taped music; ministers who wouldn’t accept the time limitations and caused funerals that followed theirs to have to queue; ministers who forgot - either where the funeral was, or that there was a funeral at all - and failed to turn up. The examples he gave seemed endless; and although he delivered his address with gentleness and humour, the catalogue of disaster was a shameful reproach.

¹⁹ I am not suggesting that the funeral should have a hidden agenda of trying to fill next Sunday’s pews with today’s bereaved; but the preaching of the gospel is one of the tasks of the Christian Church, and experiences which harden attitudes do not assist the proclamation of the God of life and love.

Liturgical Content

The remoteness of much of the Christian faith to contemporary people ought to challenge liturgists and pastoral officiants to be particularly sensitive to the language and ideas in which pastoral liturgy seeks to express itself. The funeral is not an unequivocally good example of such attention. Much of what is said must sound strange - even alien - to those who hear it.

Frequently the first words which are spoken are the sentences of scripture as the coffin is borne into the crematorium chapel.

I am the resurrection and the life, says the Lord; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.²⁰

If the deceased person was indeed a member of a Christian tradition, those who hear these words are entitled to wonder why their relative or friend is dead. Yet beyond the awkwardness of the apparent equation between belief and not dying, there lie the difficulties of using male pronouns when the deceased is female, and of using such a text where no Christian belief was expressed by the deceased in life.

Similarly, in a burial, at the graveside, as the coffin is being lowered, the words are heard:

To the One who is able to keep you from falling,...²¹

When asked about the appropriateness of such texts, ministers suggest that people know what is meant and that they understand that such words are not to be taken literally. It is uncertain to me that this can be universally assumed. Some mourners are acutely sensitive to the least infelicity of expression, and one detail may colour their recollection and, indeed, the effectiveness of the

²⁰ In the main rites provided in the service book used in most cemeteries and crematoria, *Funeral Services of the Christian Churches in England*, Canterbury Press, Norwich, 1986, only the Catholic order does not begin with some wording of John 11.25,26. Nor is this text used in committal rites of the later Catholic *Order of Christian Funerals*.

²¹ *Revised Funerals 1987*, General Synod of the Episcopal Church of Scotland, Edinburgh.

A different reading of the same text is proposed by the *Alternative Service Book* of the Church of England, 1980.

entirety. Tony Walter argues that mourners “are often in great pain and are unable to take in every word, or even one word”. He suggests that it is the general tone which counts, “the ring of language that *sounds* significant”. While I accept the broad thrust of what he says, my own pastoral experience indicates that people do remember oddities, and that often the general impression retained is the result of a particularity which provides a hermeneutic for the whole. The main concern of Walter’s argument at this point is for specific, personal and poetic language rather than “stodgy abstract prose”, and with this I am in total agreement.²² Language is important. If Christian liturgy is adequately to meet the occasion of the funeral, it will have to use language which expresses the nature of the relationship between God and the one who has died. For this it will need to address the particular as well as the universal.

Yet beyond the language of liturgy there is the ritual structure and form which that language expresses.

Ritual Blunder

For most people the funeral is an experience out of the ordinary. Even for regular church-goers, the funeral brings unfamiliarity. The particularity of the death which confronts the congregation also raises questions with which, for most of the time, people do not concern themselves. Issues of mortality present themselves with an immediacy and urgency which are outside our everyday patterns of thought. The funeral takes us out of the normal routine of life and ritualises not only our fear of death but our grief for this death.

Much of human grief and fear is by its nature inarticulate. Gesture, symbol and music may offer to mourners other ways in which their concerns may be expressed. But as is the case with language, these additional ritual expressions must be carefully prepared. Where the signal is confused, the ritual expression will be ineffective. In his account of the death of his father, Blake Morrison shows how lack of proper preparation causes a sudden lurch in the proceedings. He describes the crematorium committal which followed the church service at his father’s funeral:

It is a short service: two minutes of Albinoni on tape (his Adagio in G minor, a piece I’d taken to playing with doomy

²² J. A. Walter, *Funerals: And How To Improve Them*, pages 227-228.

repetitiveness just before my father's illness), then the tape fading for three minutes of the vicar. As he speaks of committing to God this beloved servant, he reaches for the rope-pull which will switch the curtains round the coffin and activate the conveyor belt - at which point Malcolm [the Funeral Director] leaps from the front stalls and whisperingly intervenes: the family wish the coffin to remain visible and in place until after the service; it is they who will disappear, not the deceased. The vicar nods, the service ends, Albinoni resumes...²³

Morrison's experience is a negative one for the Church. He is not a church-goer himself, and so the vicar (a newcomer) starts off at a disadvantage:

The vicar begins to talk - knowledgeably: you wouldn't guess he didn't know my father...²⁴

The Funeral Director has a name (Malcolm); the vicar has none. The incident at the crematorium chapel is not necessarily the vicar's fault; Malcolm may have forgotten to advise the vicar of the family's wishes, but Morrison is left with a sense of ritual blunder. His prior suppositions about the Church have hardened.

The music was right, but the curtain was wrong; and it is the curtain which is so important. The crematorium curtain may carry for the mourner an unconscious theatrical undertone; as the curtain closes it marks the end of the play. But in this funeral of a West Yorkshire General Practitioner, the family wants to leave the stage to the central player, the dead man. Whether or not such a decision is symptomatic of a refusal to accept the fact of death is irrelevant;²⁵ the ritual which the family wanted to enact was endangered by an inappropriate gesture.

Whilst this is a specific instance of ritual disorder which is reported by an unusually articulate and observant mourner (Morrison is the Literary Editor of the *Independent on Sunday*), it indicates that cultural linkages need to be made

²³ Blake Morrison, *And when did you last see your father?*, Granta Books, London, 1993, page 198.

²⁴ B. Morrison, *And when did you last see your father?*, page 195.

²⁵ Throughout the book Morrison describes his emotional ambivalence, but he is far from denying what has happened. The question which forms the title of the book is one addressed to the relationship of personality and bodily collapse.

for the successful performance of ritual. In the case of the Christian funeral, the liturgy starts with assumptions which the vast majority of mourners does not share. It is to this area of belief that I now wish to turn.

Theological Framework

Christian belief lives with the scandal of particularity. Where others may speak of God in nature and in history, Christians affirm that God is revealed primarily and uniquely in the history of Jesus. Yet more, God is present and active most clearly in Jesus the Crucified.²⁶

Whilst the death of Jesus may be understood as an example to us of the love which is self-giving to the end, it is unsatisfactory to the major strands of Christian belief to limit the Cross simply to an exhortative example. Christian tradition has wanted to explain the death of Jesus as having an atoning power. Saint Paul described the preaching of the Cross as a scandal - especially to those who otherwise understood God as entering human history.²⁷

What is often construed as an exclusivity continues to be offensive to many, and yet the death of Jesus is an utterly fundamental constituent of the liturgy of Christian funerals. I shall want to argue in Part Two that the particularity of Jesus' death is not necessarily exclusive, but is rather a signpost to a universality. Nonetheless, there is an awkwardness here for the conceptual framework of the majority of our contemporaries. I am uncertain whether this difficulty can be resolved without a considerable adjustment either in Christian theology or in contemporary pluralism or in both as they address each other.²⁸

A second area of difficulty is that of eschatology - both anthropological and cosmic. The questions "What will happen to me when I die?" and "What will happen at the end of the world?" depend for their answers upon theories of the nature of the human and of the universe.

²⁶ The crucifixion of Jesus is but one act in the drama of the Paschal Mystery and is not to be separated from the whole. I shall be discussing this in Part Three of the thesis, "Death and God".

²⁷ 1 Corinthians 1.23; Galatians 5.11. Cf. Romans 9.32; 11.11.

²⁸ The difficulty for some Christian theology will be in accommodating a wider application of the implications of the death of Christ for the cosmos. For contemporary pluralism, the difficulty will be in accepting the continued emphasis of Jesus as the focus of universal history.

The Christian Churches have for most of their history held to an anthropology which has distinguished between body and soul (with the frequent division of the soul into mind and spirit). Recent debate has addressed the question of how authentic the body-soul anthropology is.²⁹ The suggestion has been urged by some that the body-soul anthropology was alien to the Old Testament, and that the earliest Christian preaching talked of the resurrection of the body as opposed to the immortality of the soul. I shall begin to discuss this issue in more detail in Part One (when I shall also offer a contribution to the discussion of the logically anterior question “What is death?”) and more specifically in Part Two (when the discussion will introduce consideration of the person of Jesus) . I simply note here that what we believe about death has consequences for the way in which we mark its advent by our liturgies, and that belief in life after death is less widely embraced than Christian funeral rites assume.

Part of the modern disenchantment with the language of Christian discourse as it addresses individual eschatology is concerned with the resurrection of the body. Two difficulties present themselves. Firstly, there is a general perception that “science” has in some way demonstrated that we do not possess souls, that there is a high degree of improbability amounting to impossibility that the body which has dissolved - either in the ground, the fire, or the sea - can be reconstituted as the body it once was. This for many people leads them to the conclusion that personal survival beyond death and (more certainly) the resurrection of the body are not believable.³⁰ Secondly, the narrowness of concern with individual survival, given the ecological and military threats to the planet, seem to others to betray an exaggerated egoism.

²⁹ See, for example, the contributions of W. Pannenburg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1985 and S. Tugwell, *Human Immortality and the Redemption of Death*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1990.

³⁰ I think that this is a fair summary of the popular understanding of “science”. I do not think that it is a fair summary of the conclusions of natural scientists, who are as divided about life after death as are the generality of people. Further, it begs the question as to whether absence of proof is the same as proof of absence: that I cannot prove the existence of X does not mean that I have proved that X does not exist. Even given the majority’s scepticism about life after death, there is a wide interest in the paranormal, in near-death experiences, in the occult, and in any movement which suggests that “we are not alone”.

If the concept of life after death is no longer an article which Christian faith can assume, then belief in the final judgement and heaven and hell is even more contentious.³¹ Despite the frequent popular formulation of the problem of evil with its underlying call for God to do justice, any theodicy which proposes a *post mortem* delay is impatiently dismissed. Theologies which talk of judgement in terms of God putting things right or of God being in process have not as yet been able to root themselves in public awareness; and those, who in sympathy with popular questions about God and the creation have tried to speak of God in other ways, have been derided in the media. There is nothing new in this, but it does serve to illustrate the gulf between the language of theological discourse and popular belief. In the funeral, when the Christian Church seeks to minister to the bereaved, this gulf can quickly become a credibility gap.

Some Christian theologians have suggested that after the horrors of global war, language about heaven and hell can no longer be used. Certainly, glib talk is no help - but it never has been. However, if theologians disengage from talk about hell, not everyone else has felt so fastidious. Novelists and dramatists have investigated the theme with an urgency born of the very events which silence others. Film-makers have portrayed the violence which darkens the human psyche; and titles like "Apocalypse Now", "The Omen", "The Exorcist" join the existentialist enquiry into what is seen as the meaninglessness of so much of human life. Among the plays, "Waiting for Godot" is a waiting for deliverance; "Huis Clos" is set in a hell which initially seems unthreatening but grows darker and darker until the realisation comes -

l'enfer, c'est les autres.

There is no need for brimstone, stake or gridiron. Hell is other people.³² Nonetheless, all three occupants of the room are dead! Sartre, for all his existentialism, still places hell beyond death.

The funeral liturgist requires enormous courage in facing these themes: in articulating the darkness of death, and in expressing the Christian hope. It cannot be done in essays; Tony Walter is right to contrast the lifelessness of

³¹ Various surveys in recent years reveal that increasing numbers of church-goers do not believe in life after death.

³² Sartre, *Huis Clos*, scene 5.

prose with the energy of poetry.³³ Where the Christian faith is proclaiming life in the midst of death, it must address the heart with imaginative fire.

Ritual Community

An additional concern of Part One will be a consideration of the theory of rites of passage. At least one of the pre-conditions for ritual coherence is the existence of a community with common understandings and traditions about life and death are, about what values we may attach to life and death, and about what the rite is.

One does not have to subscribe to the view that there is no such thing as society, to observe that a vibrant sense of community is much diminished in contemporary living. In part this is a result of increased personal mobility. It is not simply that people move from the area in which they grew up when they reach adulthood, there is a greater movement in the search for work. Fewer people hold one job for all their working lives. More people live in one town and travel to another for work, and even to another for shopping or recreation. Increasingly families are becoming scattered, and the nuclear family can no longer automatically look to extended family support within a few minutes' walk. This geographical dislocation means that sometimes families are only found all together at weddings and funerals. In such circumstances, there will be little sense of community even within the family.

Perhaps this might matter less if people were able to make communities where they live. However, where workers are commuting to large conurbations, leaving home early and returning home late, the occasions for shared life are fewer. Even in rural Britain, in the villages, there is no guarantee of a sense of community - especially where villages have become the homes of rich city-dwellers seeking the rural idyll.³⁴ Late twentieth century Britain is in huge social flux, and the resultant patterns of shift weaken the social groupings

³³ See earlier, page 11.

³⁴ Two examples of the urbanite disruption of village life will show what I mean. A farmer in the Home Counties found people moving into the village protesting about the smell of his pigs, and using planning regulations to force him out of business. A North Yorkshire jobbing builder was told by newcomers that his business was destroying the peace of the countryside; his retort was that the countryside was made by people working, not by people coming home to watch their television. In both instances, heavy pressure was brought to bear on local people by those whose common cause was privacy.

which normally foster the common history, identity, customs, language, and memory which give shape and meaning to social ritual.³⁵

Alongside the geographical scattering, there has been a gradual dissolution of the community of faith. Religious belief has largely been privatised, and those religious communities who seek to bind themselves together under a clear and close identity are frequently treated with suspicion. Their determination not to lose their identity is variously seen as a refusal to inculturate (that is, here, to become “British”), as a ghetto instinct, or as religious fundamentalism.³⁶ The privatisation of belief has led to two distinct challenges to ritual community. It is no longer possible (as I noted earlier - page 13 and the discussion following) to assume that there is a consensus about what may be believed - or even about what may be disbelieved. It is quickly becoming an *a priori* assumption that religion deals with the individual’s private beliefs rather than addressing public issues. When what the individual believes is her/his own business anyway, and when the expression of wider moral challenge to public policy is seen as trespass, the challenge to traditional Christian concepts of community is very deep.

These are issues to which the liturgist and the officiant must be sensitive. It is not that they can change the sociological ground swell by telling the sea to turn back in their rites and ceremonies, but choices will have to be made about how community can be fostered so that ritual can be effective. Two possibilities seem immediately available; and although I present them here as alternatives, they may in fact be developed together. Either the officiant attempts to generate an *ad hoc* community (largely, I think, the present practice), or the attempt can be made to produce a liturgical community along

³⁵ Richard Sennett, argues in the opening chapter of *The Fall of Public Man*, Faber and Faber, London, 1990, that there has been a substantial shift in the nature of what it means to be public and to be private and that the 19th century crisis of public life led to obsession with selfhood and private space. The nature of common life has changed.

³⁶ Residential zoning has long been a feature of British life; and those who are loud in their condemnation of “Little Pakistan” in some of the old East Lancashire cotton towns are frequently complacent about the quiet avenues of detached houses that exist in “desirable residential areas” of the very same towns. The latter are just as much ghettos as the former in housing terms, but my own observation is that ritual awareness is far higher in “Little Pakistan”.

the lines proposed in the *Order of Christian Funerals* in which the local congregation becomes a community of consolation.³⁷ I shall discuss this further in Part Four when I offer some suggestions for liturgical revision of Christian funeral rites.

Conclusion

Can the pastoral and theological agenda which I have proposed be expressed in liturgy alone? I shall suggest that, while a rich variety of liturgical provision is a vital part of the process by which the living express their new relationship with the dead, a rite of passage serves to formalize in communal language a process which requires other complementary forms of ministry and human care. Ultimately the rite cannot perform what the community does not share.

However dazzling our liturgies, they are dust; they require breath to bring them to life. The words of Jesus to pious and holy men, religious leaders struggling with their scriptures to interpret and be obedient to their understanding of God, may be relevant here:

You pore over the writings, because you think that in them you have the life of the age to come; and they give their witness to me, but you do not come to me to gain life.³⁸

To summarize, death alerts us to questions of anthropology, of psychiatry, of the natural and biological sciences, of law and ethics, of theology, Christology and eschatology. Funerals address these issues more or less directly, and the Christian liturgist and officiant are given the task of particularizing the universal when confronted by the death of a human.

³⁷ *Order of Christian Funerals*, "General Introduction", paragraphs 9ff.

³⁸ John 5.39,40 - my own translation. Later, in the Fourth Gospel Jesus contrasts the spirit which gives life and the flesh which has nothing to offer (6.63).

Part One: Death and the Human

Chapter Two: Medicine and the Law

What is death? A medical definition: failure and limitation

The starting point for many Christian theologians in considering human death has been the story of the Fall, and the primary focus of discussions which have begun in this way has been an aetiological one. When the question is asked “What is death?”, the answer has been “God’s punishment for sin”. Those who make this reply stand in a strong theological tradition and can claim among their champions the apostle Paul with his declaration that the wages of sin is death [Romans 6.23]. Yet Paul’s affirmation is not really an answer to the question “What is death?” so much as to the question “Why do we die?”

On the whole the question “What is death?” does not seem to have troubled theologians in quite the same way as the question about why we die. Inasmuch as there has been concern, it has been rather more with what happens after death than what death itself is. I would contend that, by ignoring the question of what death is, theologians have allowed what may appear to be no more than speculation to proceed in detachment from much of the work of anthropologists, medical scientists, philosophers and jurists. In so doing the Christian Church has made a less significant contribution to the ethical and pastoral debates about death than it should have done.

I intend, therefore, to start with the phenomenology before proceeding to aetiological considerations. The question “What happens to me when I die?” may receive a variety of responses, but for contemporary understanding the medical answer is the one which will gain the widest acceptance.³⁹

Death arrives clinically by one of two major routes:

failure of the heart and lungs leading to failure in the brain;

³⁹ I fully accept that any medical definition of death is provisional. In part it is dependent upon the advances in medical science, in part upon the agreement of those who set the legal and ethical boundaries. The legal and philosophical debates are dealt with later in this chapter at page 26f. and in chapter 3 at page 38f.

severe damage in the brain stem leading to failure in the brain and subsequently to failure of the heart and lungs.⁴⁰

The first of these is the more common process. The brain ceases to function as the vital supplies of oxygen carried in the blood stream come to a halt with the failure of the heart and lungs. This can happen gradually as entropy and increasing age conspire; or it may occur traumatically by a heart attack or by catastrophic loss of blood resulting from major injury sustained in, for example, a road accident or a wounding (whether criminal or surgical).

In the case of brain stem fatality, there follows a deterioration of the control systems governing the heart, lungs and cardiovascular system which produces a chaotic breakdown in the control processes for the heart and lungs, and which in turn leads to death. In such circumstances the heart and lungs may be mechanically ventilated, but when this support is withdrawn breathing and circulation will inevitably cease - usually fairly rapidly.⁴¹

In a statement issued on 11 October 1976 by the Honorary Secretary of the Conference of Medical Royal Colleges and their Faculties in the United Kingdom, the medical profession in these islands was advised as to the way in which a diagnosis of brain death could be determined. Three coexisting conditions were indispensable for considering a such a diagnosis:

- (a) The patient is deeply comatose.
- (b) The patient is being maintained on a ventilator because spontaneous respiration had previously become inadequate or had ceased altogether.

⁴⁰ This explanation of mechanisms leading to death was arrived at in conversation with Dr T. M. Jack MB BS LRCP MRCS FRCA, who is a Senior Consultant Anaesthetist and the Clinical Director of the Oxford Regional Pain Relief Unit. He kindly passed to me the paper from the *British Medical Journal* to which I refer in what follows.

A detailed discussion of the process of death is available in a recent book by a distinguished American surgeon: S. B. Nuland, *How We Die*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1994. It is an explicit and at times discouraging account of the clinical progress of dying.

⁴¹ There are extraordinary circumstances where after brain stem death residual electrical impulses in the heart may be measured by electrocardiograph, for example after execution in the electric chair, for periods as long as 30 minutes. Normally events move very much more quickly.

- (c) There should be no doubt that the patient's condition is due to irremediable structural brain damage. The diagnosis of a disorder which can lead to brain death should have been fully established.⁴²

These headings were amplified in technical detail, and doctors were then advised that the following tests could be used to confirm the diagnosis - again technical details explaining the procedures were included.

- (a) The pupils are fixed in diameter and do not respond to sharp changes in the intensity of incident light.
- (b) There is no corneal reflex.
- (c) The vestibuloocular reflexes are absent.
- (d) No motor responses within the cranial nerve distribution can be elicited by adequate stimulation of any somatic area.
- (e) There is no gag reflex or reflex response to bronchial stimulation by a suction catheter passed down the trachea.
- (f) No respiratory movements occur when the patient is disconnected from the mechanical ventilator for long enough to ensure that the arterial carbon dioxide tension rises above the threshold for stimulating respiration.⁴³

Doctors were reminded that:

- (a) tests should be repeated in order to eliminate observer error;
- (b) spinal cord reflexes can persist after the ir retrievable destruction of brain stem function;
- (c) electroencephalography was not necessary for the diagnosis of brain death, but where used strict criteria had been recommended by the International Federation of EEG Societies;
- (d) body temperature might be low because of medical procedures or brain stem damage and so diagnostic

⁴² *Diagnosis of Brain Death*, British Medical Journal, 13 November 1976, 2, pages 1187-1188.

⁴³ *Diagnosis of Brain Death*, British Medical Journal, 13 November 1976, 2, pages 1187-1188.

tests should not be carried out at temperatures below 35°C.

- (e) Experienced clinicians in intensive care units, acute medical wards, and accident and emergency departments should not normally require specialist advice. Only when the primary diagnosis is in doubt is it necessary to consult with a neurologist or neurosurgeon. The decision to withdraw artificial support should be made after all the criteria presented above have been fulfilled and can be made by any one of the following combinations of doctors:
 - (a) a consultant who is in charge of the case and one other doctor;
 - (b) in the absence of a consultant, his deputy, who should have been registered for five years or more and who should have had adequate experience in the care of such cases, and one other doctor.⁴⁴

In medical terms we may speak of death as the irretrievable breakdown of those processes which require energy and oxygen and of those systems which maintain homeostasis between anabolism and katabolism. Death is a process as well as an event, and the descent into chaos occurs both before the person is pronounced dead and after that moment. I shall return to this understanding of death as chaos at the beginning of Part Two of the thesis when I review some theological patterns of personal anthropology (see pages 74 ff.).

To express as an answer to the pastoral question which opens this chapter such a precise clinical definition is profoundly shocking, since the very analytical guidelines which are offered to organ transplant teams confront us in the starkest terms with our mortality. Shorn of its modern use of sophisticated diagnostic techniques and hardware, anyone throughout human history would recognise what is being described. It is that process in which life and breath leave the body, and the person becomes a corpse. Whether we hold a bronze mirror to the nose, or pass the final stitch of the seaman's canvas shroud

⁴⁴ *Diagnosis of Brain Death*, British Medical Journal, 13 November 1976, 2, pages 1187-1188. Sub-paragraph (e) has been quoted in full.

through that same sensitive member,⁴⁵ the absence of breath from the nostril and the stilling of the pulse indicate to us the advent of death.

For many of our contemporaries death is defined by medical failure or limitation; people die because the doctors cannot keep them alive. As medical science and technology advance, the physiological and neurological functions which stimulate and sustain life can be maintained where otherwise they would fail and the patient die. Switching off support systems produces a very sharp division between life and death in the popular imagination, and where doctors take the decision no longer to use extraneous mechanical support there is inevitably an acknowledgement of limitation.⁴⁶

When we describe death in these terms, we are using the language of control. To exercise control in any given situation or process, there must be an elimination of as many random elements as possible. In the control of death this means the prevention of disease and sepsis and a high degree of precaution against accidental or deliberate injury. Hospitals are designed to offer an environment in which these aims may be achieved; consequently much of our care of those near death occurs in hospitals. Inevitably (if ironically) hospitals have become the commonest place of death.

The arena of death: home and hospital

Not the least of the changes which has occurred in the management of death has been in the area of control. Philippe Ariès's important contributions to the anthropology of death have included an historical survey of Western attitudes to death in which he has described the transfer of the control of the dying process.⁴⁷ He argues that whereas in the Middle Ages control was held by the dying person or her/his family and was most likely to occur at home or in the community to which (s)he belonged, the predominant place for death in the

⁴⁵ The final stitch through the nose was an 18th and 19th century custom in the Royal Navy to detect those who were shamming death in battle. It was, apparently, one of the few diagnostic devices which was believed never to have failed!

⁴⁶ I am not convinced that we ought to talk of "failure" in these circumstances. Failure is frequently accompanied by feelings of guilt. Where the limits of knowledge and care have been reached, then recriminations are worse than useless, they are counter-productive.

⁴⁷ P. Ariès, *Western Attitudes towards Death*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1974 and *The Hour of our Death*, Peregrine Books, Aylesbury, 1983.

modern age is in the hospital where control is held by the medical profession.⁴⁸ Ariès draws the disturbing conclusion that the support, which in the mediaeval period had come from the family and community who surrounded the dying person, is no longer available; death is isolated. Whatever our misgivings about Ariès's observations about death in the mediaeval period (see footnote 48), it is worth noting that in 1985, 26% of deaths in England and Wales occurred in the person's own home, while 69% occurred in institutions.⁴⁹

Towards the end of Chapter Four (pages 67ff.) I shall discuss how this change in the arena of death may have consequences for the ritual community at a funeral.⁵⁰ For the present I want to suggest that the control of death has

⁴⁸ In the opening chapter of *Western Attitudes towards Death*, Ariès argues that in the millennium before the early modern period the descriptions of death that we possess show a number of common phenomena: awareness in the dying person that death was near, preparations made by the dying person for her/his death consisting of prescribed ritual postures and gestures, and a number of formalised remembrances and pardonings articulated in the presence of the community to which (s)he belonged.

However, some of the source documents which Ariès quotes present the twentieth century observer with evidential problems:

La mort d'Artus
Les enfances de Lancelot du Lac
La chanson de Roland,
Le roman de Tristan et Iseult
 hagiographical account of Saint Martin of Tours
 Don Quixote

are all accounts which we may suspect of containing some elements of idealization or of legend. To what extent, therefore, they are historical in the sense of recording "the facts" we may exercise some doubts. While Ariès's later observations may be less open to question, his assertions on the mediaeval period are not without complications. We are entitled to question whether all death was as he describes it from the limited sources he draws upon. We may prefer to accept Thomas Hobbes' description (*Leviathan*, part i, chapter 13) of life for the vast mass of people as

"solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short"

with its accompanying continual fear and danger of violent death. This is quite different from Ariès's more romantic vision.

⁴⁹ These figures come from the survey published as *Mortality Statistics: Review of the Registrar General on Deaths in England and Wales, 1985*, DH1 No.17, OPCS, HMSO, 1987, and support Ariès's contention about the predominant arena of modern death. It is not at all clear that people would prefer to die in hospital; in fact, the preferred place of death is home.

⁵⁰ This later discussion will introduce further questions about control. If medical staff increasingly control the process of death, who controls the ritual of the funeral?

passed from the one who is dying and her/his family and friends to medical advisers whose concerns and priorities may be quite different.

While a great deal of attention is paid to ensuring that people die “with dignity”, this is usually taken to mean without pain. The instinct and training of those in hospitals are to increase analgesics which the patient may be able to control by means of a hand-held pump; their purpose is to avoid the distress of a painful death. But where opiates are being used to depress pain a frequent side-effect is to increase drowsiness. There is nothing inherently sinister in this, although at least one case has resulted in criminal proceedings;⁵¹ indeed, there is much to commend. However, where patients drift into drugged comas from which they never emerge, questions arise about “unfinished business”; and those questions have implications for funerals.⁵²

Dying can be an opportunity for reconciliation. The preface to the orders of service for “Ministry to the Sick and Dying” in the prayer book of the Anglican Church of the Province of South Africa puts it thus:

Our Lord Jesus Christ proclaimed the coming of the kingdom of God not only by preaching but also by healing the sick. He brought healing in all its fulness: physical cures, the healing brought by the forgiveness of sin, restoration of broken relationships, assurance of salvation, acceptance of the sinner by God...

In the ministry of healing ... It is right and fitting to pray for healing of the body, of the mind, of the emotions, of the memories; for healing too of relationships and society.⁵³

⁵¹ R. v Cox, Winchester Crown Court, 1992. The doctor who administered drugs in order to end the life of a woman whose terminal illness was both long drawn-out and extraordinarily painful. The body had been cremated before Dr Cox was charged, and so the indictment was attempted murder. Dr Cox was found guilty and received a suspended sentence. He was subsequently subject to disciplinary proceedings by the General Medical Council.

⁵² Dr Jack (see page 20) notes, in correspondence with me dated 14 February 1994, that

it is precisely those dying with “unfinished business” whose pain, being mental as much as physical, is poorly responsive to ordinary doses of pain-killers - which may tempt doctors to prescribe more and more, with greater risk of drowsiness. In more straightforward cases, good pain relief does not inevitably bring such side-effects

⁵³ The Provincial Trustees of the Church of the Province of South Africa, *An Anglican Prayer Book*, Collins Liturgical Publications, London, 1989, page 489.

Where this process has been hampered by the dying person's extended unconsciousness, and where the words of sorrow and forgiveness remain unspoken and unheard, the funeral agenda is increased and the opportunity for thankfulness rather than for guilt is lost.

As the hospital takes the dying person out of the context of her/his family and friends, the management of death becomes more and more a problem of technology. Death, however, will not go away; and the problem cannot be resolved, only delayed. While death is seen in these terms, two things follow:

as technical sophistication increases, the ethical boundaries are stretched;

death is increasingly viewed in terms of mechanical control, and human life is defined by the same language.

In the remainder of this chapter I shall consider the questions which medical ethics faces and give some account of how society responds to these issues in the legal system. In Chapter Three I shall address the question of human identity.

The medical and legal interface

Karen Grandstrand Gervais, in her book *Redefining Death*, challenges the view that death is simply a question of biological definitions. She seeks to determine the conceptual framework underlying the adoption of brain stem death as an adequate delimitation of that state which distinguishes what we call a dead person from what we call a living person.⁵⁴ Her analysis gained impetus from the fact that brain stem death was finding acceptance as a definition of death in the law courts of the United States of America. This development arose without a clear distinction drawn between that condition and the persistent vegetative state. It is a distinction which she herself is unwilling to draw.

Gervais refers to the earlier work in this field of Michael Green and Daniel Wikler, raising questions about the ontology of personhood.⁵⁵ She begins by asking what is meant by the statement the "Patient Jones is alive".⁵⁶ The two

⁵⁴ K. G. Gervais, *Redefining Death*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1986.

⁵⁵ M. Green and D. Wikler, "Brain death and personal identity", *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 9, no.2 (Winter) 1980, pages 105-133.

⁵⁶ Gervais, *Redefining Death*, page 113.

reasonable deductions are that “the patient is alive” and “the patient is (remains) Jones”. By saying that the patient is still (remains) Jones, we maintain that the patient retains that set of psychological traits which we have always distinguished as making up Jones.⁵⁷ What, however, if the patient is alive, but does not retain that psychological set, and nor does anyone else? Can we say that Jones no longer exists, that Jones is dead?

Here, for Gervais, is the nub of the matter:

The circumstance in which the patient is alive, yet Jones is dead, is an uncomfortable one.⁵⁸

Generally, she argues, when we talk of Jones we do not distinguish (as Green and Wikler do) between the psychological traits that mark Jones and Jones’s body. Green and Wikler wish to define the aliveness of the body by reference to heart-lung criteria,⁵⁹ but use the criterion of psychological continuity for discerning the aliveness of the person:

Jones’ death ... occurs *either* at the time the patient dies, *if* the patient has remained Jones; *or* at the time the patient ceases to be Jones, whichever comes first.⁶⁰

Gervais objects that Green and Wikler’s distinction obscures matters, and suggests that when we speak of Jones dying we speak of Jones ceasing to be, however caused:

Human death is the ceasing to be of the person (Jones); after that event, talking about the life status of the body is inappropriate.

For Gervais, the differentiation made by Green and Wikler between the death of the patient and the death of Jones makes for dualism. Jones becomes an

⁵⁷ Gervais’s way of talking about the psychological traits of Jones seems forced. It would be easier and more natural if she were to speak of Jones’s personal traits. I shall use Gervais’s terminology in referring to her work, although I think that she appears to be making a distinction without a difference.

⁵⁸ Gervais, *Redefining Death*, page 113.

⁵⁹ That is the continuance of a heartbeat and of respiration.

⁶⁰ Green and Wikler, “Brain death and personal identity”, page 118. cited by Gervais, *Redefining Death*, page 114. The question of continuity and discontinuity is an important issue in my discussion of the resurrection of the body. See Part Two, Chapters Five and Six.

entity with a particular set of psychological traits, yet Green and Wikler do not clearly describe what that entity is which possesses such a psychological make-up. Gervais regards this as a fatal flaw.

What are we to make of those occurrences of patients who lose their distinctive set psychological traits but whom we would not wish to describe as brain dead? If Jones were to contract Alzheimer's Disease, we might want to say that Jones' body no longer possesses Jones's psychological life, and that somehow the patient has ceased to be Jones. We might be less happy to conclude that Jones is dead. After all, some mental life - however diminished - continues to be supported by Jones's body. If a new person has emerged, when did this occur?

Gervais suggests that, if we were to decide that a new person has emerged, we might need to give the new person a different name and identity. Would such a person then be entitled to dispose of Jones's estate, and how would Jones's family be related to this new person? Gervais concludes by rejecting a purely mentalist approach to personhood:

... there is something important about a continuous link between body and consciousness, however altered that consciousness may be. We must resist the idea that such neural deterioration, by destroying all psychological continuity, is a sufficient condition for the death of the person. Bodily continuity must have a role in personal identity in some circumstances, then, though possibly not in all circumstances.⁶¹

Furthermore, as instances of amnesia show, we are more than our memory of ourselves. Not least there are the memory and recognition that others have of us. Amnesia is not a certifiable cause of death!

As long as Jones's body continues to function and his brain supports some set of psychological traits, the person Jones must still be regarded as alive.⁶²

Gervais thus aligns herself with a more conservative approach which sees the human person as an embodied consciousness. What defines life is an experiencing consciousness. Death is the irretrievable failure of an organism

⁶¹ Gervais, *Redefining Death*, page 118.

⁶² Gervais, *Redefining Death*, page 118.

(in this case a human organism) to be able consciously to receive and respond to stimuli. Gervais proposes a moral framework for her understanding of personhood and for the definition of death which follows from it. Her intention is to offer guidelines for American public policy in medical ethics, and she concludes by redefining “brain death” as the permanent cessation of consciousness. Anyone in a persistent vegetative state should be declared dead.

Such a conclusion has no legal force, and doctors continued to be faced with how to determine death. In the United Kingdom, Professor David Short wrote a brief article on the persistent vegetative state (PVS) in which he described PVS in distinction from brain death.⁶³ He noted that the prognosis was poor:

Of patients who remain in the PVS for three months, about a half die within twelve months; but some survive for fifteen years or more. One has been recorded as surviving for 36 years; sustained simply by basic nursing care and nutrition by nasogastric or gastrostomy tube. A few regain consciousness, but all remain very severely physically and mentally disabled and dependent.

Short noted that there was a move to see PVS as a form of brain death, but suggested three difficulties: the criteria for brain stem death are not fulfilled by PVS; there is no suffering (by which I presume Professor Short to mean that where consciousness is suspended there can be no suffering on the part of the patient - however distressing things may appear to onlookers); some patients regain consciousness. Professor Short was not making his observations in a vacuum. As he wrote there was a tragic case which had been in the news for some time. It was the case of Tony Bland (see below, page 30). Short’s next comments were therefore not without some interest, since they raised the central issue at trial in *Bland v Airedale NHS Trust*. He wrote of such patients:

If they could make a rational decision, they might request to be allowed to die. But they have not the cerebral capacity either to make such a decision or to express it.

⁶³ David S. Short, “The Persistent Vegetative State”, *Ethics and Medicine*, 1991, 7.3, page 39.

He noted that in the American courts, a case had been decided in which a young woman who had been in a persistent vegetative state for four years had been “allowed to die”. But evidence had been brought by several witnesses that she had on a previous occasion “expressed wishes which had favoured withdrawal of treatment”. The American Medical Association had not been able to arrive at an agreed view about how to deal with such cases, and Dr Short concluded: “This is clearly a subject which requires further careful consideration”. Such consideration was given in a case decided in the English courts in 1992 and 1993. The issues which Gervais and Short had raised were vital.

Bland v Airedale NHS Trust

Anthony Bland became 21 on the 21st September this year but for the past three and a half years he has been totally unaware of the world around him. As a keen supporter of Liverpool Football Club he was at the Hillsborough football ground on the 15th April 1989. He was then 17½. He was one of the victims of the disaster. He suffered a severe crushed chest injury which gave rise to hypoxic brain damage. His condition rapidly deteriorated and despite the intensive and heroic efforts of the doctors and nurses he has remained ever since in a state of complete unawareness. This is known to the medical profession as a “Persistent Vegetative State” (PVS). Although his brain stem is intact he suffered irreparable damage to the cortex. All the higher functions of Anthony Bland’s brain have been destroyed. There is no hope whatsoever of recovery or improvement of any kind. That is the unanimous opinion of all the distinguished doctors who have examined Anthony Bland.

So began the President of the Family Division of the High Court in delivering his judgement in the above case in November 1992.⁶⁴ Since there was no hope of improvement, the question arose about terminating treatment. What

⁶⁴ I obtained all the judgements in this case direct from the judges. In each instance I wrote to the presiding judge of the courts convened to consider the case- Sir Stephen Brown, President of the Family Division, Sir Thomas Bingham, Master of the Rolls, and Lord Keith of Kinkel. From each I received a prompt response, and from the Master of the Rolls and Lord Brown-Wilkinson (a member of the court in the House of Lords to whom I wrote subsequently about his judgement) I received encouragement in my enquiries. All citations are from the *All England Law Reports [AER]* 1993, volume 1, published by Butterworth, London. The full report of the case occurs on pages 821-896. The extract in this reference is at page 824f-h.

was proposed was that the nasogastric tube by which Tony was fed should be removed. The judge described what would happen:

If this course were to be adopted then within some 10 to 14 days the lack of sustenance would bring to an end the physical functioning of the body of Anthony Bland and he would in terms “die”. The process would be that of “starvation”. This would be unpleasant for those who had to observe it but Anthony Bland himself would be totally unaware of what was taking place.

The doctor in charge of the case contacted the coroner charged with dealing with cases arising from the Hillsborough disaster, and was advised that such a course of action might result in criminal proceedings. The hospital therefore decided to obtain a declaration from the courts that the doctors could lawfully discontinue treatment and support designed to keep Tony Bland alive. An *amicus curiae* was appointed by the Official Solicitor to represent Tony Bland’s interests. Argument was brought to suggest that feeding Tony Bland was not medical treatment and that while medical treatment might be withdrawn, feeding might not. It was submitted that to withdraw food was to act with intention to bring about the death of the patient, that such an act would be unlawful - indeed it would be murder. In each of three courts this argument was rejected unanimously by the judges (nine in all), although some were extremely hesitant about the implications of what they were saying.⁶⁵ In

⁶⁵ For a criminal prosecution to be successful, it must be established that a criminal act (*actus reus*) has been committed with criminal intention (*mens rea*). Three different degrees of criminal intention may be possible in a successful prosecution for murder: intent to kill, intent to cause grievous bodily harm, intent to act in such a way that a reasonable person would know that either of the first two possibilities would follow. In *Bland v Airedale NHS Trust* it was agreed that a *mens rea* was present since the action of depriving Tony Bland of food would inevitably result in his death. It was therefore vital to prove that the proposed course of action was not an *actus reus*.

When the case reached the House of Lords, Lord Brown-Wilkinson sought to distinguish between acts of commission and omission in defining the *actus reus*:

As to the guilty act, or *actus reus*, the criminal law draws a distinction between the commission of a positive act which causes death and the omission to do an act which would have prevented death. In general an omission to prevent death is not an *actus reus* and cannot give rise to a conviction for murder. [*AER*, page 880j]

I wrote to Lord Brown-Wilkinson to establish whether his distinction in the *actus reus* could be replicated in the *mens rea*.

If I push a child under a car there is an *actus reus*,
if I see that same child run into the path of that

the House of Lords, there was a clear call for Parliament to consider legislation, since the criminal law was a poor sledge-hammer for the ethical nut.

The judges were not particularly concerned to ask themselves about the nature of death in other than medical terms, although in the court of first instance the President of the Family Division said:

To his parents and family he is “dead”. His spirit has left him and all that remains is the shell of his body.

same car yet fail to do anything to prevent the accident there is no *actus reus* But this is not the case with Anthony Bland. The cause of death in the mind of Dr. Howe, who will presumably complete the death certificate, is the set of fatal injuries he received at Hillsborough. He has said as much in an interview televised after the House of Lords’ decision. It was directly put to him that by failing to feed Anthony he was killing him. His reply was that this was not the case, Anthony’s death was a result of his injuries. In Dr. Howe’s mind, the end of the death had been delayed.... Could we not therefore argue that the purpose of stopping the artificial feeding is to *complete* the death of Anthony Bland rather than to bring it about. It has been brought about by [his] injuries. [Letter to Lord Brown-Wilkinson, dated 10 February 1993]

I sought in my letter to suggest that, just as the judges had found that there was no *actus reus*, so equally they could have resisted the suggestion that there was no *mens rea*. In his reply to me [dated 12 February 1993], Lord Brown-Wilkinson rebutted my suggestion by applying it to a hypothetical case where a patient who was sensate, but unable to survive without mechanical ventilation. If his ventilator was switched off by someone who stood to gain financially by his death, he would (on my proposal) avoid conviction for murder.

The law tries to draw a distinction between the motive with which an act is done (which is irrelevant) and the intention with which the act is done. Although the motive of the doctor who removed the artificial life support and the motive of the person who wishes to make a financial benefit out of the death are different, their intention is the same in both cases, viz. to bring about the death of the patient.

For myself, I believe a more fruitful line of approach is to re-define death for legal purposes as not being confined to brain stem death but also including those who have no sensate awareness of any kind and never will have. [my stress]

Whether Sir Stephen Brown is a deliberate or instinctive dualist does not really matter to the resolution of *Bland v Airedale NHS Trust*, although as I shall suggest in Chapter Five it is highly significant to our theological understanding of human existence and has implications for the ritual agenda of funerals. Here it is sufficient to note that the difficult legal and ethical judgements which this case aroused depend upon an agreement that death (at least in this instance) is a matter of medical control.

Yet even in this case where the medical issues were central, all those who were appointed to adjudicate referred to the moral dilemma, and the language of control (cf. page 23). A consideration of death may begin with the medical questions and definitions, but it cannot end there.

One judge was prepared to tease the issue out in some detail, and I shall recount how he did this in the next chapter. The issues which he addresses move our consideration of death from medical analysis to philosophical and anthropological descriptions. In order to describe death we shall need to consider questions about human existence. The conclusions which I reach will determine how I suggest that death can be confronted in the social and ritual contexts of the funeral.

Chapter Three: The End of Life

Lord Justice Hoffmann's dilemma

When *Bland v Airedale NHS Trust* came to the Court of Appeal, Lord Justice Hoffmann approached the ethical issues as matters not simply of legal jurisdiction but of a broader, widespread debate. Giving judgement third, Hoffmann began by rehearsing the non-contentious detail of the case, and briefly indicated that he would concur with his colleagues in declaring that no criminal liability would arise from ceasing to keep Anthony Bland alive. He continued:

But this case has caused a great deal of public concern. People are worried, perhaps not so much about this particular case, but about where it may lead. Is the court to assume the role of God and decide who should live and who should die? Is Anthony Bland to die because the quality of his life is so miserable? Does this mean that the court would approve the euthanasia of seriously handicapped people? And what about the manner of his death? Can it ever be right to cause the death of a human being by deliberately depriving him of food? *This is not an area in which any difference can be allowed to exist between what is legal and what is morally right.*⁶⁶ The decision of the court should be able to carry conviction with the ordinary person as being based not merely on legal precedent but also upon acceptable ethical values. For this reason I shall start by trying to explain why I think it would be not only lawful but right to let Anthony Bland die. In the course of doing so I shall also try to explain why the principles upon which this judgment rests do not make it a precedent for morally unacceptable decisions in the future.⁶⁷

Lord Justice Hoffmann conceded that it was an unusual procedure for a judge to argue from moral rather than purely legal principles, but he wanted to understand the case by examining the moral principles involved. In doing so he acknowledged the help that he had gained from conversations with Professor Ronald Dworkin and Professor Bernard Williams.⁶⁸ Hoffmann saw the case

⁶⁶ Italics mine.

⁶⁷ Judgement of Hoffmann, LJ, Court of Appeal, December 1992, *Bland v Airedale NHS Trust*, All England Law Reports [AER], page 850f-j.

⁶⁸ Professor of Jurisprudence and White's Professor of Moral Philosophy respectively at Oxford University. Professor Dworkin was in the process of writing *Life's Dominion* [Harper Collins, 1993], and Lord Justice Hoffmann had also been able to read the manuscript.

as resting upon a conflict between a number of ethical principles: the sanctity of life, the right of self-determination, and respect for the dignity of the individual. We may argue that it is almost always wrong to cause the death of another human being “even one who is terminally ill or so disabled that we think that if we were in his position we would rather be dead”.⁶⁹ We may equally argue that whatever our own beliefs another person has the right to refuse treatment which might keep her alive.⁷⁰

A person of full age may refuse treatment for any reason or no reason at all, even if it appears certain that the result will be his death.

I do not suggest that the position which English law has taken is the only morally correct solution. Some might think that in cases of life and death, the law should be more paternalist even to adults. The point to be emphasised is that there is no morally correct solution which can be deduced from a single ethical principle like the sanctity of life or the right of self-determination. There must be an accommodation between principles, both of which seem rational and good, but which have come into conflict with each other.⁷¹

The importance of Hoffmann LJ’s judgement for this thesis is that in setting the various moral principles against one another, the judge proceeds to show how the principle of respect for others influences not only what kind of medical provision we may offer to the dying, but also the respect we pay to the dead. “We pay respect to their bodies and their memory because we think it an offence against the dead themselves if we do not”.⁷² Such a respect meant that in the case before the court there was a conflict between the principle of the sanctity of life and the view expressed by those who knew him best that Bland would have chosen to die rather than live. In the specific circumstances of *Bland v Airedale NHS Trust* Hoffmann believed that Bland’s right to self-determination was the stronger principle.

⁶⁹ Hoffmann, LJ, AER, page 851e.

⁷⁰ Hoffmann instanced the Jehovah’s Witness who refuses to take a life-saving blood transfusion.

⁷¹ Hoffmann, LJ, AER, page 852e-f.

⁷² Hoffmann, LJ, AER, page 854a.

In concluding his judgement, Lord Justice Hoffmann said, “I would expect medical ethics to be formed by the law rather than the reverse”. This reflects a not uncommon reluctance to allow doctors to set the ethical boundaries for themselves as they seek to exploit technical advances. When those advances relate to competence in prolonging life, the hesitation is frequently intense.

The learned judge asked whether the courts were to assume the role of God in deciding issues of life and death. His unease is shared by doctors who have to make precisely these decisions in the performance of their duties. It will not ease their burden but it may make the critics less censorious, if we consider the possibility that it is precisely the struggle with such moral complexity that the Priestly account of creation foreshadows in its description of human creation in the image of God [Genesis 1.26-27] and which the Yahwist describes in talking of the Fall as in some sense involving the acquisition of moral awareness - “the knowledge of good and evil” [Genesis 3.5,22]. If we accept such a reading of these Old Testament passages, then certain things follow. We cannot allow ourselves to blame others for our own errors of judgement.⁷³ Equally, we cannot allow others to evade their moral choices. Finally, we are all involved in the making of our ethical boundaries, which will never cater for every situation.

Codes of ethics are provisional suggestions for response to hypothetical situations; the realities mean that we often have to “play God”. Our anxiety is based upon our recognition that hard cases make bad laws. Language about playing God usually assumes that God is omniscient, infallible and static; our own self-knowledge makes us aware that we cannot play that sort of God.⁷⁴ We are bound to make mistakes, and the knowledge of our limitation conflicts with the image that we have of God.

⁷³ Helmut Thielicke makes this point in his collection of sermons on Genesis 1-11 entitled *How the World Began* [James Clarke, London, 1964, pages 152-170, in the sermon “Guilt and Destiny”]: Adam blames Eve, Eve blames the snake; neither of the protagonists admits responsibility. This, for Thielicke, is as important (more, even) as the eating of the fruit, for the denial of guilt excludes grace and the possibility of forgiveness.

⁷⁴ I want to understand playing at God not in its usual pejorative or hubristic form, but to see play as an important educational tool in which we learn from the world of imagination (of image-ing) how to live in the “real” world.

If we take seriously our responsibility to make moral decisions, then such an understanding of God has to be modified to permit a more dynamic view in which God is still at work.⁷⁵ It may then be easier to move from an antithetical stance in which limitation is always viewed as failure (or worse, guilt) to more creative possibilities in which we dare to take our responsibilities to create a moral universe in cooperation with and in dependence upon God.

In the context of death and bereavement, blame-finding is a catastrophic way of proceeding, since it locks us in the past with little or no hope of a new future. This progress from the past to the future is important in coming to terms with death and bereavement, and in Chapters Four and Six I shall show how ritual categories delineated in social anthropology demonstrate this and what the pastoral and theological implications are for funerals.

At the beginning of Chapter Two I suggested that theologians had not addressed the question “What is death?”. At its close I noted that Lord Brown-Wilkinson wanted a legal definition which moved from using only brain stem death as a criterion to one which included

those who have no sensate awareness of any kind and never will have (see footnote 65).

It should not pass without comment that Brown-Wilkinson’s proposal still leaves the crucial question in the hands of the doctors. Who is to determine whether sensate awareness is something that a given patient “never will have”, if not the doctor - or those acting upon the doctor’s advice?⁷⁶

Lord Justice Hoffmann’s dilemma rests upon the difficulty of balancing competing principles relating to human life and its termination. The case of Tony Bland raises questions about how we relate personhood and the

⁷⁵ Cf. John 5.17, where the healing at the pool of the paralytic who picks up his mat and carries it away provokes a debate with the Pharisees about work on the sabbath. Jesus refers to the continuing work of God - “Ο Πατήρ μου ἕως ἄρτι ἐργάζεται, κἀγὼ ἐργάζομαι - which is to be complemented by his own work. The scandalous implication is that the sabbath rest of God (which, the rabbis taught, God was still enjoying after his labour on creation) is not a refraining from work at all. Unlike the deities of Mount Olympus, Yahweh does not dwell in ἀταραξία; the work of bringing order out of chaos continues. In my judgement this continuing work includes the realm of ethics, in which human beings cooperate with God in discerning good and evil.

⁷⁶ I did not take this particular issue up with Lord Brown-Wilkinson, since I felt diffident about entering into any protracted correspondence with him.

biological aliveness of a human being. For doctors and the courts a person is considered in relation to her/his physiological status; but is this an adequate way to describe human existence? When Professor Fred Feldman tackled questions of personhood and death, he approached the issues from quite a different perspective.⁷⁷

I think not, therefore I am not?

Feldman's philosophical method in describing the nature of death is to advance successive definitions which he analyses in order to discern how further refinement may be made at the next stage of the discussion. Thus, although he has no formal debating partner, Feldman's style is basically Socratic.⁷⁸ In his introductory remarks he observes that talk about death necessarily involves talk about life. Yet he resists the notion that death is simply ceasing to exist:

When Hamlet says, "To be or not to be, that is the question," he really means "To die or not to die, that is the question." Hamlet apparently supposes that when a living thing dies, it stops existing - it ceases to be. Very many philosophers agree. But this "termination thesis" blatantly conflicts with some obvious facts. There actually exist very many dead bodies. Each of these formerly was alive. Hence, these seem to be things that died but did not cease to exist....
I try to unravel this conceptual tangle.⁷⁹

Feldman's thesis reveals the awkwardness of biological and psychological theories of death, and his analysis demonstrates the inadequacy of biological categories to arrive at a satisfactory philosophical definition of death. The implication for Christian theology is that metaphysical enquiry is essential to its understanding of death.⁸⁰ When we join him, Feldman has arrived at the point where he denies the truth of the statement:

Necessarily, no biological person's history as a biological person extends beyond his or her death.⁸¹

⁷⁷ F. Feldman, *Confrontations with the Reaper: A Philosophical Study of the Nature and Value of Death*, OUP, New York, 1992.

⁷⁸ His conclusions about life and death are far from Socratic.

⁷⁹ Feldman, *Confrontations with the Reaper*, page 6.

⁸⁰ John Macquarrie's health warning about metaphysics, notwithstanding. *Principles of Christian Theology*, SCM, 1966, pages 14, 19-20.

⁸¹ Feldman, *Confrontations with the Reaper*, page 119.

The biological history of a human being transcends biological life, since the corpse has existence and is identifiably human. Moreover, the history of their biological existence is necessarily distinct from that existence. However, with death a person's psychological existence and history may well be coterminous, and Feldman posits:

Necessarily, no psychological person's history as a psychological person extends beyond his or her death.⁸²

Whereas, according to Feldman, corpses continue to be biological persons, they are not psychological persons.⁸³ The notion of biological personhood continuing beyond death is not one which I find helpful, although the bereaved often wish to address the dead person directly.⁸⁴ I acknowledge that a person's legal personality survives death in the disposition of his or her estate, but Feldman's category of biological existence beyond death does not seem to me to be saying anything other than that after death there is a corpse. He admits that "when a living thing dies, it ceases to exist as a living thing";⁸⁵ this seems to me to be crucial. To speak of a corpse having biological existence is to stretch the concept of biological existence too far. A corpse no longer has any centrally organised and sustained being; it is in decay. The examples Feldman gives of things which cease to exist yet do not die (boys who cease to be boys when they become men, caterpillars which cease to be caterpillars when they pupate, and so on) are so different in their order of existence from the gulf between life and death that they effectively invalidate his argument.

At first glance it appears that in 1 Corinthians 15 St Paul uses a similar argument about things ceasing to exist in their old form but finding new life in different orders of existence. However, Paul is arguing from metamorphosis in nature to the experience of the resurrection of the body which is found in Christ. This is quite a different account of how human personality survives death, and the similes used by the apostle and by Feldman are equally distinct in their philosophical purpose. Similarly, the saying of Jesus, recorded in John 12.24,

⁸² Feldman, *Confrontations with the Reaper*, page 121.

⁸³ Feldman, *Confrontations with the Reaper*, page 123.

⁸⁴ At the funeral of Robert Maxwell, his eldest son addressed the dead man directly: "Dear Dad ..."

⁸⁵ Feldman, *Confrontations with the Reaper*, page 105.

unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit uses the language of metamorphosis in a metaphorical sense but to a different end.⁸⁶

As part of his enquiry, Feldman asks whether it is possible to define death as a punctiliar event. He draws a distinction between the process of dying (which we may describe as, for example, a slow death) and the instant when an organism passes from being alive to being dead.⁸⁷ However, after protracted analysis Feldman is left to acknowledge:

that death is a conceptual mystery - that it is impossible to formulate a fully satisfactory philosophical analysis of the concept of death.⁸⁸

But death is profoundly destructive. Brain cells are inevitably ruined by death. Thus, death does seem to mark the end of the history of an entity as a psychological person. Although a given psychological person may continue to exist for a time after death, he or she almost certainly will cease to be a psychological person when he or she dies.⁸⁹ A rotting corpse no longer has self-conscious intelligence.⁹⁰

Feldman's concern is not with questions about whether death is a transition to some other form of life. He simply asks what death is; and his enquiry leads him to the conclusion that the biological and psychological sciences do not provide an adequate answer for philosophy.⁹¹ In my view, Feldman's conclusion is inevitable given that his language about personhood is

⁸⁶ The reference in the Johannine text is not to the resurrection of the body, but to the salvation wrought by Jesus' death. What is important here is to distinguish these scriptural examples of the language of metamorphosis as they relate to death from the usage of Professor Feldman.

⁸⁷ Feldman, *Confrontations with the Reaper*, page 109.

⁸⁸ Feldman, *Confrontations with the Reaper*, page 125.

⁸⁹ I take this to refer to the distinction between death as a process and death as the moment of transition from life to death.

⁹⁰ Feldman, *Confrontations with the Reaper*, page 124.

⁹¹ In the second part of the book Feldman goes on to ask questions about the value of death, and to these I will return (see page 41).

unequivocally materialist. His philosophical discussion is limited by that constraint, which denies to him an effective metaphysical arena of discourse.

Gilbert Mury, a French Marxist, also needed an explanation of death which was wider than the biological and psychological, and used the metaphysic of history.

We do not treat the dead body as a living person, but, confronted with the body, we bear witness that not the whole of man has been destroyed.

The end to personal consciousness is something intolerable. But we do not say this as an existentialist would: for us, consciousness means action. It becomes real in what it does. That is why all is not abolished. The table survives the carpenter and the "job" survives the labourer...

And if all this sound rather banal, the reason is that death itself is a banal tragedy. And even to say this is in itself banal.⁹²

Mury's view is classically Marxist, and his distinction of the Marxist from the existentialist position is underlined by Heidegger's view of death as that which gives meaning, urgency and authenticity to all living. Heidegger does not speak for all existentialists any more than Mury represents himself on this issue as speaking for all Marxists. Nonetheless, Mury appears to represent something of a unified Marxist tradition when he speaks of the job surviving the labourer. He understands action in the arena of history as that which validates the individual human life. The individual derives value only from her/his contribution to the socio-historical process. While death is "banal", its presence does not rob human existence and endeavour of its meaning, since these are granted or withheld by history. Heidegger, on the other hand, proposes that our lives gain their authenticity only as we experience the "nothing" of death. It is the willingness to understand our finitude and our guilt that enables us to see death as the great possibility in which we are set free. When we have seen death in this way we are released to find coherence and focus in living.

Such a view is in sharp contrast to that proposed by Feldman, who discusses the value of death in purely utilitarian terms.⁹³ Feldman argues that death is

⁹² G. J. Mury, "A Marxist View of Burial", *Concilium*, vol.2, no.4, February 1968, pages 79-80.

not always bad, but suggests that there are occasions when we should see death as a bad thing. He instances the case where it deprives the individual of a good or happy life. The particular instance he gives is of a boy who while undergoing minor surgery dies as a result of an anaesthetic mishap. Since the boy might have lived happily for many more years, his death results in an extrinsic loss for him. Such a loss is bad.⁹⁴ Feldman agrees that the death of one person may mean sadness and loss for others, but he focuses his attention upon the value death has for the dying person.

A similarly individualistic emphasis pervades Dworkin's book *Life's Dominion* (see footnote 68). Professor Dworkin seeks to chart a way for medical ethics in the contentious areas of abortion and euthanasia. Part of his concern is to discover what we mean when we say that life is sacred.⁹⁵

Heidegger's concern was to see death as the explanation of life, which enabled life to be lived more authentically. Feldman's analysis ignores death as an "explanation" of life, and describes death's value in terms of individualist utilitarianism. Dworkin describes the sacred as "inviolable", adding that it gains its inviolability from intrinsic rather than incremental value. Something is incrementally valuable if there is a direct relationship between the frequency or amount of its occurrence and the value we place upon it (for example, precious stones or metals). Intrinsic value arises from the very fact of the existence of whatever (or whoever) it is that we value.

The hallmark of the sacred as distinct from the incrementally valuable is that the sacred is intrinsically valuable because - and therefore only once - it exists. It is inviolable because of what it represents or embodies. It is not important that there be more people. But once a human life is begun, it is important that it flourish and not be wasted.⁹⁶

⁹³ I am not here concerned with the issues abortion and euthanasia to which Feldman gives much attention. Important as these questions are, they do not fall within the scope of this thesis.

⁹⁴ Feldman, *Confrontations with the Reaper*, page 139.

⁹⁵ The argument about the sacred is worked out by Dworkin in Chapter Three of *Life's Dominion* ("What is sacred?", pages 68-101). The crucial section occurs on pages 71-81.

⁹⁶ R. Dworkin, *Life's Dominion*, pages 73-74.

Dworkin's concept of the inviolable is based upon a value system rooted in loss; that is, what would appal us by its destruction or our deprivation of it. Given that his book is about abortion and euthanasia, this category is a considerable advantage to the general argument he wishes to make. However, I am not so sure that his category of inviolability is adequate in a discussion about human existence. He begins by talking about why great works of art are inviolable - even if they are not to any given individual's taste - and concludes that their sacredness derives from the human act of creation which produced them. When he proceeds by analogy to consider human life, his category of the sacred does not seem to amount to much more than a great degree of mutual human respect. There is no taboo in Dworkin's theory, and I am convinced that this is because he has no adequate totem. Despite his attempt to advance arguments about life and death beyond ideas of expedience, he leaves the issue as one in which polite differences of opinion are the only guide for ethical decision-making. This is an inadequate position, since ethical judgement requires some sort of social consensus - an agreed basis of value. However sophisticated the argument, the alternative will always teeter on the edge of utilitarianism; for those who espouse religious belief this is an unsatisfactory basis for proceeding.

For the Christian theologian Heidegger's approach offers more scope since his evaluation of death is not limited to advantage or expedience, but addresses questions of meaning. Helmut Thielicke concluded that:

you cannot define man on the basis of his biological origin;
you must define him in the light of his destiny, his goal.⁹⁷

This may appear to overstate the case, but Thielicke does not suggest that humans have their biological origins other than in the evolutionary order. His concern is to deny to origin a status as the sole explanation of what it means to be human. For a reliable understanding of human existence we need to take account of both goal and origin. This seems to me to be a helpful suggestion and to be sympathetic to Heidegger's understanding that it is our end that gives meaning to our existence. It encourages me to develop an understanding of our personhood which starts from a consideration of death. The argument will prepare the way for a reappraisal of death and resurrection in Part Two (Chapter Five).

⁹⁷ H. Thielicke, "Creation and Evolution", *How the World Began*, page 84

The future of the soul: bios and zoe⁹⁸

Early in my research, I was fortunate enough to meet one of the most distinguished Catholic liturgists of the modern era, Fr Gy, who gave me an unequivocal answer to my question about the nature of death.⁹⁹ I asked “How do you understand death? Do you see it as the separation of the soul from the body?” His reply was clear and succinct: “Yes. We cannot allow any anthropology which is not that of the Gospels.”¹⁰⁰

There has been a revolt in some theological circles against the description of human personality which talks in terms of a body and a soul. Those who have led the charge have taken their stand on Old Testament categories of thought, and have examined carefully the description of the human being as a *nephesh*.¹⁰¹ It is not, they argue, that Adam had a soul - he was a soul. Certainly, many of the Old Testament writers seem to have viewed the human being as a psychosomatic unity (though, of course, to use the word “psychosomatic” is to use categories of thought alien to what I am describing). Death was dreaded because it represented the end of communion with God. Sheol was a place where the dead faded away - the “soul” with the “body”, and where the praise of God was no longer possible. The hope of Israel for

⁹⁸ Βίος and ζωή are used in this section in their anglicized form. In this chapter I shall begin to distinguish between bios and zoe. The distinction is central to my consideration in Part Two (Chapter Five) of the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body.

⁹⁹ Fr Gy chaired Working Group 23 after the Second Vatican Council. The group’s commission was to begin the work on funeral rites which article 81 of the Constitution on the Liturgy urged. Funerals were to reflect the Paschal Mystery. This agenda is central to my work in Chapter Eight, when I assess how the *Order of Christian Funerals* approaches death and bereavement.

¹⁰⁰ My conversation was a result of a private meeting with Fr Gy in Paris on Thursday 28 February 1991.

¹⁰¹ The other common Hebrew word used to describe the unity of the human is *basar*. This is frequently translated ‘flesh’. It would be wrong to understand *basar* as ‘flesh’ in opposition to ‘spirit’, or indeed as in opposition to *nephesh*. Indeed *basar* can mean the visible organization of life. Nonetheless, in the later Hellenistic period, it attracted the Greek dualistic distinction from the immortal soul. Since what I am attempting to describe is more than the visible organization of life, *basar* is not sufficient for my purposes. I used *nephesh* to include the social dimension of the person and all her/his mental and emotional activity. The choice is not easy, and others may prefer *basar* to *nephesh*. Nonetheless for my purposes *nephesh* seems a closer conceptual fit. See my later discussion in Chapter Five.

the everlasting knowledge and worship of Yahweh was in the continuance of the nation. This is why all the pogroms and holocausts were so serious. It was not simply the dreadful matter of the deaths of all those individuals, but the threat that, if the nation were eradicated, the covenant would become extinct and with it the knowledge and praise of Yahweh in the earth.

Yet the *nephesh* solution is only partial, and for two reasons. First, *nephesh* was applied to all living creatures and not simply to humans. Second, the *nephesh* tradition did not survive unchallenged. There was a development within Judaism as it encountered other religious philosophies (the Egyptian as well as the Greek) which introduced the notion of an alternative anthropology which talked more easily of body and soul.¹⁰² Certainly, this would make some of the language of Daniel [12.2], of the books of Wisdom and Sirach, and of Maccabees more intelligible in its divergence from the *nephesh* anthropology.

The *nephesh* tradition confronts us with other problems: those of human particularity and distinctiveness from other creatures, and the possible danger of understanding human existence only in biological terms. However, the problems raised by the body/soul hypothesis (the devaluation of the physical world and the hierarchy of values attached to personality in which intellect always heads the race) are antipathetic in my view to a proper acceptance either of the doctrine of creation or that of the incarnation. These primary doctrines require us to see the material as of intrinsic value. The material creation is a delight to God, and the saving of the world (in Christian theology) can only be achieved by the action of God in and through the incarnate Jesus. Given these convictions, I prefer an anthropological model which sees human existence as unitary. However, I still want to make a distinction between such an understanding and a biologically reductionist view.

At the beginning of Chapter Two, I suggested that Christian tradition places a strong emphasis on death as punishment for sin.¹⁰³ Genesis 3, in speaking of the Fall, shows how death enters the scene. When Adam and Eve are banished from the Garden, they are denied access to the tree of life. The mythic

¹⁰² Perhaps of all the Old Testament traditions it is in Wisdom that the language of the soul as a separate entity occurs most clearly.

¹⁰³ See page 19.

symbolism teaches us that death is the natural result of disrupted communion with God.¹⁰⁴

At the end of Romans 6, we encounter Paul's famous aphorism that the wages of sin is death. I am not convinced that we can press this into service as quickly as others would have us believe. Paul is contrasting two conditions: slavery to sin and slavery to righteousness, life outside Christ and life in Christ. His concern is to talk about holy living, and to show that baptism into the death of Christ leads us to emancipation from sin. His conclusion is to contrast death and the life of the age to come, not death and some sort of earthly life which does not end in death.

The connection between sin and death is clearer when we understand sin as alienation from God who is the source of life. In alienating ourselves from God, we separate ourselves from the source of life. In this sense the wages of sin is death; and the sting of death is precisely in this separation from God who alone in Christ has conquered sin and death. We fear death because we have separated ourselves from the source of life.

I am not certain, however, that we can say that without sin human beings would not have died. There are too many assumptions here. Is the Genesis story offering a scientific explanation of death? Or is it trying to express the complexity of the human condition in which we need to account for a perfect God and an imperfect world? If we adopt a less static understanding of the interaction of God with the world, we may take a less punitive view of death and see its occurrence as a reminder of our creaturely finitude. We are not eternal or immortal; that belongs to God alone. Life is sustained by dependence upon God. Where this is characterised by a communion which is openly and gladly expressed, our death becomes another occasion in which God the creator and sustainer of life shapes the world by breathing into the dust and ordering the chaos.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ If hell is separation from God and life is dependent upon God, we need to reflect upon what sort of existence is possible in hell.

¹⁰⁵ Although my language about God is not one that Heidegger would have used, I think that this understanding of death is one that he would recognize as giving authenticity to life. Cf. page 41 above.

The conceptual framework which sees body and soul not simply as separate but (by and large) in opposition comes to us in its familiar form from the philosophy of Plato-Socrates.¹⁰⁶ The Greek tradition which viewed the soul as immortal and the body as corrupt was for many in the post-Apostolic and Patristic periods a convenient and hospitable means of expressing a Christian anthropology. Its constant difficulty was to avoid the perils of dualism - whether Gnostic or Manichee. While acknowledging the shift in emphasis, we do not necessarily need to see the body/soul description as inferior to a "purer" *nephesh* anthropology. It is probably better to view the change as an appropriate response to a shifting anthropological understanding in the world of ideas in the centuries surrounding the birth of Christ. Our contemporary dilemma is to decide whether the body/soul model is now an essential part of Christian theology, or whether we need to make a fresh appraisal of human existence in the light of contemporary scientific and philosophical categories.¹⁰⁷ In my view we must attempt a less divided anthropology than the model most widely understood and accepted in traditional theologies.

It is in the clues given to us by Heidegger and Thielicke (pages 41 and 43) that I find a way to advance. Certainly, I want to construct a theological anthropology which takes full account of the biological and medical science, but I am also concerned to understand human existence in terms of our destiny. Since I am also committed to understanding personhood in unitary terms (see page 44), I want to speak of our life in terms of our origins as *bios* (or "biotic" life) and our life in terms of our destiny or calling as *zoe* (or "zoetic" life).

Biotic life ends with death. Nothing survives. In these terms, at death we lose our ambitions, our status, our hopes, our dreams, our achievements, our wealth, our memories, our relationships, even our selves. This is to affirm that the *nephesh* language is exact in its description of the end of *bios*.

¹⁰⁶ I have hyphenated these two great thinkers and made of them one, since it is frequently almost impossible to discern whether it is Socrates or Plato who speaks. Their explanation of the world is still the framework within which much popular understanding operates, whether in agreement or dissent.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. S. Tugwell, *Human Immortality and the Redemption of Death*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1990

Zoetic life also ends with death. We are not immortal. Yet this end is not extinction but teleological; for zoetic life is life in communion with God. At our death, we are called into a new order of being:

the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear
the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.
[John 5.25]

I intend to argue this at greater length in Chapter Five. For the present I wish only to suggest that a Christian theology is possible which avoids the body/soul anthropology. I propose this because the dualist tradition reflected a theological response to the understandings of human personhood of its day, and Christian theology ought now to offer some reflection upon the understandings of our own era.

Contemporary understandings and theologies of death present the funeral liturgist with challenges in the selection of scriptures and the construction of prayers. The task of creating a rite which does not avoid the biotic but which expresses the zoetic remains largely unaddressed. In Chapter Nine, I shall attempt to suggest ways in which this failure may be put right.

Chapter Four: Death in the Community

The social nature of death

If I should go before the rest of you
 Break not a flower nor inscribe a stone,
 Nor when I'm gone speak in a Sunday voice
 But be the usual selves that I have known.
 Weep if you must,
 Parting is hell,
 But life goes on,
 So sing as well.¹⁰⁸

Joyce Grenfell's lines remind us that death is parting, and that there is in death loss not only for the dying person but also for the bereaved. Although dying my death is something that no one else can do for me, my dying is not without wider implications.

This social dimension is what Gorer referred to in his study *Death, Dying and Mourning* (see page 1). One of his conclusions was that death was not talked about, and many have repeated this assessment in the years that have followed. However, so many have said this in their discussion of death that one begins to wonder how true the comment remains. As Philip Mellor observes in his essay "Death in high modernity: the contemporary presence and absence of death",

There is now a vast body of literature on death which has been developing over the past decade, and this trend looks set to continue.¹⁰⁹

Mellor adds that this does not suggest a reticence on the subject of death. The academic interest in the death studies has clearly increased greatly, but death remains hidden. Indeed, this is a principal theme of Mellor's essay. Part of the phenomenon of high modernity has been the sequestration of death by privatizing and subjectivizing our experience of it; talking about death may as much conceal as reveal it. Mellor argues that this privatization has meant that, as death has become the province of specialists and especially of the medical

¹⁰⁸ J. Grenfell, *Joyce: by Herself and Her Friends*, Macmillan/Futura, but cited here from D. J. Enright (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Death*, OUP, 1983.

¹⁰⁹ This essay opens the collection of essays edited by David Clark, *The Sociology of Death*, Blackwell, 1993. The extract I cite is found at page 11.

professionals, so funerals no longer belong in the public domain.¹¹⁰ They have become private events arranged by funeral specialists.¹¹¹ He continues:

Because meaning has been so privatised, any attempts to construct meaning around death are inherently fragile.¹¹²

This privatization of meaning has influenced clinical studies of bereavement grief. There has been a tendency to assume that it is a psychological disorder rather than a social phenomenon.¹¹³ Psychiatrists have attempted to establish a pathology of grief, whereas social anthropology has described the ritual process.

The ways in which people react to bereavement are enormously complex, yet the work of clinicians and social anthropologists has suggested a number of common features.¹¹⁴ This chapter will introduce some of their conclusions, as I attempt to explain how various individual and social responses to death and bereavement shape demands upon the rites of passage associated with death. I shall also offer some suggestions as to how liturgists may try to meet these demands.

Bereavement is loss occasioned by the separation of death. We might expect this particular experience to be one principally of pain without variation. Yet not all loss is painful; and we cannot describe all bereavement as unremittingly painful without danger of over-simplification - even of falsification. Indeed, one quite normal and frequent response to the death of another is relief.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Mellor's language of privatization is not meant to describe simply an individual internalization. The contrast is with social, public and institutional experience and expression.

¹¹¹ Mellor, *Death in high modernity*, page 20.

¹¹² Mellor, *Death in high modernity*, page 21.

¹¹³ Grief may, of course, be both psychological disorder and social phenomenon. The two categories are not mutually exclusive.

¹¹⁴ I am thinking here of the work of social anthropologists from Gorer (1965) and of clinicians from Hinton (1967) onwards.

¹¹⁵ This is frequently the case where death has been drawn-out and painful. In such circumstances the bereaved often describe the death as "a blessing".

In his commentary on caring for the bereaved, J. W. Worden observes at the outset that loss implies attachment, and adds that some have suggested that the goal of attachment behaviour is the securing of a bond of affection.¹¹⁶ Whether that particular analysis is correct or not, the severing of such a bond often provokes a powerful effort to find the lost partner. This searching is a common reaction throughout the animal kingdom and is poignantly reported by Konrad Lorenz in his description of the behaviour of a greylag goose separated from its mate:

The first response to the disappearance of the partner consists in the anxious attempt to find him again. The goose moves about restlessly by day and night, flying great distances and visiting places where the partner might be found, uttering all the time the penetrating trisyllabic long-distance call.... The searching expeditions are extended farther and farther and quite often the searcher itself gets lost, or succumbs to an accident.... All the objective characteristics of the goose's behaviour on losing its mate are roughly identical with human grief.¹¹⁷

Worden presses home his conviction that grief as the human response to loss is extremely widespread:

There is evidence that all humans grieve a loss to one degree or another. Anthropologists who have studied other societies, their cultures, and their reactions to the loss of loved ones report that whatever the society studied in whatever part of the world, there is an almost universal attempt to regain the lost loved object, and/or there is the belief in an afterlife where one can rejoin the loved one.¹¹⁸

Among the factors which contribute to the way in which bereavement is experienced a major consideration will be how the bereaved views death. For example, if death is seen as final and without any hope of survival, then the

¹¹⁶ J. W. Worden, *Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner* (2nd edition), Tavistock/Routledge, London, 1991, pages 7-8. Worden cites the work of John Bowlby in particular who asserts that there is a survival value to such attachment beyond food and sex which relates to safety and security.

¹¹⁷ K. Lorenz, *On Aggression*, McEwan, London, 1963.

¹¹⁸ J. W. Worden, *Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy*, page 9.

loss will be differently managed from what would be the case where death is understood to be transitional.¹¹⁹

Although bereavement and the management of grief are experienced differently by individual mourners, they are not simply private occurrences endured *in vacuo* (cf. page 49). The bereaved knows and experiences her/his grief by reference to a set of codes and *mores* gathered from the social group to which (s)he belongs, as well as by the particular personal circumstances of the death.

Even from this brief introduction, it will be evident that pastoral and liturgical concerns will reflect and attempt to address a wide variety of expectations. There will be greater or lesser appropriateness and success as the officiant is able to identify with or enter into the universe of thought which the bereaved inhabit.¹²⁰ This task is made no easier where within the one funeral the mourners reflect different attitudes and beliefs from one another and/or from the deceased. Whatever the task of the funeral, we may have to concede that there will be ambiguities of meaning and significance among those present.¹²¹

The psychology of bereavement: a critique of “back to normal”

Colin Murray Parkes is often regarded as one of the pioneers in field of the clinical psychology of bereavement. His book *Bereavement* (first published in 1972) has become a major text in the field, and subsequent researchers in the field have felt bound to refer to his work.¹²² Parkes identified three stages in

¹¹⁹ For a fuller consideration of the factors which determine how grief may manifest itself and be managed see the discussion beginning on page 55.

¹²⁰ How we may derive criteria of “appropriateness” and “success” demands a more detailed discussion than can be offered here. However, I have in view a consideration of the task of a funeral, and how such a rite (or rites) may facilitate or impede that passage from the old world of the living in which the dead person was once a member to the new world of the living in which the dead person is no longer a member. Part of this discussion will concern the social anthropology of rites of passage (see page 62f.); the remainder will be dealt with when I introduce the detailed consideration of selected liturgies in Chapter Eight.

¹²¹ An initial concern prompting this research project was the divergence of meaning applied to the funeral rite frequently found between officiants and mourners.

¹²² C. M. Parkes, *Bereavement: Studies in Adult Grief* (2nd edition), Pelican, London, 1986. The studies which Parkes undertook in London and in Boston, Massachusetts, were among widows. This is a very specific sub-group of the bereaved; yet none of the subsequent commentators that I have read regard Parkes’s conclusions as flawed by this particularity, although van Gennep does remark in his classic, *The Rites of*

bereavement grief which he described as numbness, pining, and disorganised despair.¹²³

The value of such categories lies in the taxonomy of grief by which the clinician or counsellor is enabled to recognise the various forms and moods which grief takes. Yet it would be inappropriate to understand them as separate, self-contained, sequential mood-states. Frequently those who are bereaved move back and forth between these conditions. There are times of numbness which invade pining and despair and vice versa. Pastoral visitation of the bereaved has led me to observe fluctuations in mood which can be both rapid and violent. Even after a considerable lapse of time (at least a year, sometimes many years), those who are left may occasionally experience unbelief (“Sometimes I still can’t believe he’s dead”),¹²⁴ or attacks of intense pain triggered by events which often appear to be otherwise insignificant.¹²⁵

Numbness should not be confused with the Novocain tingling of the dentist’s anaesthetic; it is quite simply no feeling at all. As Parkes describes numbness, it includes that sense of disbelief which cannot take in what has occurred. Before the death this disbelief frequently manifests itself in concealment of the impending disaster from the dying person.¹²⁶ After the death there is

Passage (translated by M. B. Vizedom and G. L. Caffee), Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1960, that

“it does seem right that widowers and widows should belong to this special world [between the living and the dead] for the longest time”.

¹²³ C. M. Parkes, *Bereavement*, page 27.

¹²⁴ Parkes’s work was based on surveys of widows, and my own pastoral experience indicates that prolonged disbelief is more common among widows than widowers. Although I cannot demonstrate it conclusively, I suspect that this disparity may be due to that long-established social conditioning which has made women invest their emotional lives in their families in a way that men have not.

¹²⁵ An example of an insignificant event-trigger was experienced by my wife (albeit not at so great a distance from the event), when she was with friends at a restaurant. A drink she had ordered came to the table with a “bendy” plastic straw; she burst into tears, and just pointed. Fortunately, I realised what the trouble was. The straw was identical in style and colour to those employed in the hospice where her mother had died. These straws were used to help patients to take their morphine in solution by mouth. For my wife an enjoyable evening had, without warning, been invaded by her mother’s death.

¹²⁶ In my pastoral experience, this concealment is quite often a two-way process. I have been invited in the course of pastoral visitation not to tell “Fred”, only to be asked by “Fred” not to tell the family! The concealment is always well-intentioned; it is not always conducive to a good resolution of the pain felt by all in the situation.

frequently an almost frenzied busy-ness, which is compounded by the administrative tasks surrounding the official notification of death. Often this welter of activity enables the mourner to avoid dwelling on the reality of what has occurred.¹²⁷

The avoidance of thinking about what has happened - "distancing" - is a frequent strategy for coping with early sharpness of grief, and it certainly can ease the initial anguish. Where this distancing is prolonged into persistent denial and flight, the ensuing management of grief is less likely to encourage a healthy emergence from the trauma of bereavement.¹²⁸

Pining often involves a search for the lost/dead person.¹²⁹ Alarmed arousal and tension are typical mood-states. Mourners may become so preoccupied with thinking of the one they have lost, that they create a vivid, imaginary world in which the dead person acquires a continuing existence with developing habits and characteristics as though they were indeed still alive. At the same time the bereaved may lose interest in personal appearance and other matters which normally occupy attention. Instead, they concentrate on places and associations where the lost person might otherwise (i.e., if not dead) be likely to be found - even calling for the lost person by name.¹³⁰ Of course, few or none of these things may happen. It is well to remember that the psychological norms which Parkes and others describe are in effect statistically derived averages. Individual mourners may be acting well within their own normalities without necessarily falling within the apparently clear clinical boundaries. I want to question any assumption that people are made in the likeness of the statistic rather than in the image of God, who transcends all numerical analysis.

Clinical observation has led psychologists to identify a range of reactions within grief which cover the emotional, physical, cognitive, and behavioural

¹²⁷ C. M. Parkes, *Bereavement*, pages 84-86.

¹²⁸ Denial is perhaps best characterised as a refusal (conscious or otherwise) to accept the fact (in this case, of death); flight may be understood as a refusal to accept the consequence arising from that fact. See also page 57 and the accompanying reference in footnote 139.

¹²⁹ Cf. the citation of Konrad Lorenz earlier, page 51.

¹³⁰ C. M. Parkes, *Bereavement*, page 67.

patterns of bereaved people.¹³¹ When grief is analysed in such a way, we may reasonably ask whether bereavement grief is in effect a form of depressive illness. However, clinicians and psychologists resist too simplistic an identification. For while there is evidence of similarities in the disturbance of sleep and of appetite as well as in the intense sadness, there is one major difference.

... in a grief reaction, there is not the loss of self-esteem commonly found in most clinical depressions. That is, the people who have lost someone do not regard themselves less because of such a loss or if they do, it tends to be for only a brief time. And if the survivors of the deceased experience guilt, it is usually guilt associated with some specific aspect of the loss rather than a general, overall sense of culpability.¹³²

It is important, therefore, to distinguish between grief and depression as the root causes of similar behavioural patterns. In the situations where there are no excessive dysfunctional complications such as hallucination or obsessive treasuring of objects or places associated with the deceased, we can still see sufficient similarities which will prompt us to recognise the needs of those who mourn the death of those they love.¹³³

The ways in which grief is expressed depend upon a range of factors beyond the fact of the death that has occurred. Worden notes as significant the nature and depth of the relationship between the mourner and the deceased; the nature of the death - whether due to natural causes, an accident, suicide or homicide; how the bereaved copes generally with anxiety and stress, and whether there is any previous experience of bereavement; whether there are

¹³¹ J. W. Worden, *Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy*, pages 22-30, offers detailed clinical observations under each of these four main headings.

¹³² J. W. Worden, *Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy*, page 30. One particular example of guilt among bereaved people is where they have survived an event in which others have died. Survivors often talk of feeling guilty simply for having survived.

¹³³ While the funeral *per se* cannot cope with disturbed sleep and appetite, a mourner who is experiencing these symptoms is likely to be physically low, and the funeral catches the bereaved when such a low may be accompanied by a deep emotional trough. Even where the funeral is seen primarily as a rite for the bereaved, it ought to be noted that they may not easily be able to participate; there may well be unfinished business. Later (see page 66, and the discussion in Chapter Seven), I indicate that I prefer to share the focus between the dead and the bereaved, and that I believe that the funeral has a primary task to effect on behalf of the dead person.

any religious or cultural affiliations with accompanying expectations of behaviour or of support; and whether there is any other stress in the bereaved's life apart from the bereavement. All these, he suggests, may effect the progress and eventual outcome of grief.¹³⁴

What all this demonstrates for pastoral theology and liturgy is that in the funerary provisions which we offer there has to be an intense sensitivity to the fragility of the living whom we serve. In the vast majority of cases, those closest to the dead person are deeply traumatised. Although the minister may address herself or himself to the needs of the living, there need not be undue surprise at the failure funerals to achieve a final resolution of the grief of those who mourn. It may be that clergy do not and ought not to expect such a resolution.

However, there may be an important task of explanation in the course of pastoral visitation before the funeral. Ministers may need to speak to mourners about how the Christian faith contemplates death and bereavement. The pastor may acknowledge the limitations of people to respond in other than partial or diminished ways in the immediate aftermath of death, and yet (s)he may want to talk about how death challenges our values and assumptions. Rather than re-establishing the old normality (the apparent aim of some psychologists), there may be a challenge to discover resurrection in new and transformed ways of living.

Frequently the funeral is the only ritual occasion within which death and bereavement are addressed. We need to be realistic about what can be achieved on a single occasion which is frequently limited to less than half an hour.¹³⁵ Where grief is aggravated by additional complicating factors, the pastoral agenda is itself intensified. Before Parkes's work on bereavement

¹³⁴ J. W. Worden, *Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy*, pages 32-34.

¹³⁵ I recognise that in one sense death forms part of the eucharistic liturgy insofar as it is a celebration of the paschal mystery. Further, in much evening hymnody there are references to death. However, much of this focus is distanced where the worshipper thinks of her or his death on these occasions in pietistic terms. In traditions where it occurs, praying the rosary attends to death in a more direct and particular way - both in the Sorrowful Mysteries and in the first Glorious Mystery, which may be said at the Reception of the Body into Church. Yet I suspect that for most people who attend a funeral - even regular Christian worshippers - it is the primary occasion on which they confront the reality of mortality in everyday experience.

was published, John Hinton had recorded his psychiatric observations of death and bereavement. He noted that the sense of loss occasioned by death was related to emotional links that existed in life. Where those ties had been very close and love had been possessive, Hinton held that the fear of death could quickly become morbid. He wrote:

Undue emotional dependence easily gives rise to a sense of resentment too disturbing to contemplate. It is distressing to feel angry, frustrated or irritable towards the person who is so needfully loved. In this emotional climate fears for the safety of the loved person can arise; there are torturing thoughts that the needed one will die, which seems to be the worst thing that could happen.¹³⁶

Parkes's work confirmed Hinton's view that a strong emotional attachment in life produced deep reactions in grief. In a joint study at Harvard which he conducted with others, he observed among widows in Boston, Massachusetts that:

intense yearning for the dead person in the early weeks of bereavement predicted chronic grieving later.¹³⁷

He also affirmed what Worden later described. Conflict in more than one area in a marriage complicates the grieving process.¹³⁸ Moreover, while distancing the event is a way in which the journey through grief can be undertaken step by step, repressing grief is counter-productive.¹³⁹

In a series of seminars and consultations I have held with clergy and ordinands on the issue of funerals, there has been universal awareness that the expression of grief is in some way therapeutic. All have known that repression is not helpful; but this has been almost entirely an intellectual recognition. Nearly all

¹³⁶ J. Hinton, *Dying* (2nd edition), Pelican, London, 1972, page 29.

¹³⁷ C. M. Parkes, *Bereavement*, page 143. Parkes instances a widow, who had expressed a strong sense of her husband's presence amounting almost to indwelling -

"My husband's in me, right through and through. I can feel him in me doing everything" (*Bereavement*, page 107)

- as grieving "intensely for several years after the death of her husband" (*Bereavement*, page 143).

¹³⁸ C. M. Parkes, *Bereavement*, page 155.

¹³⁹ C. M. Parkes, *Bereavement*, pages 158-159.

have admitted that there have been occasions where the strong expression of emotions has caught them out and has made the situation difficult to handle. This is a rare occurrence, but it is noteworthy simply because officiating clergy learn to distance themselves by adopting a professional *persona*.¹⁴⁰

There is a contemporary dread which is frequently expressed among bereaved people about “letting go”. They fear that the emotion of the occasion may overwhelm them and that they may break down. To some degree this arises from expectations about keeping a “stiff upper lip” and putting “a brave face” on things.¹⁴¹ To express grief by any more than wiping away a quiet tear with a handkerchief, or blowing one’s nose, has been seen as letting the side down. Such weeping is often described as “uncontrollable”. For ministers the problem is not really that these judgements spill over into pastoral attitudes; most officiants are well aware that expressing grief can be liberating. Where they find difficulty is in coping with the conflicting emotions aroused in them on such occasions. There is the professional job to be done of presiding over the rite of passage on behalf of the wider social group and being the capable and efficient administrator of that rite. Equally, there is the pastoral impulse to come to the aid of the distressed in immediate compassion. It is extraordinarily hard to stop the whole funeral in order to deal with the grief of someone who does break down. There are difficulties of time - especially at crematoria - and of perceived social appropriateness, which might easily be regarded as infringed by any hiatus in the “main” proceedings.¹⁴² Such a

¹⁴⁰ Since the inception of this research (October 1990) I have sought informal opportunities to visit theological colleges, in-service training conferences, and fraternal in order to discover prevailing attitudes and beliefs.

¹⁴¹ While these considerations are stereotypically white, middle-class and English, they are not exclusively confined to that conventional grouping. There is, however, a two-fold shift from the stereotype:

- (a) more and more people are aware of the need to express grief;
- (b) fewer and fewer people are judgemental of those who do “give way” - there is often a deep sympathy and understanding, even where it is awkwardly articulated.

¹⁴² Another potential social embarrassment is caused where some members of the family express their grief while others keep silent, or where the family remain silent but another person cries out. The embarrassment is felt because of an implicit challenge to the public hierarchy of grief which may hide a private agenda - for example, where the husband is silent but a son weeps, or where the wife is silent but the deceased’s mistress cries aloud.

conflict cannot be easily resolved to the satisfaction of all; clergy know this, and they become anxious when one arises. They feel threatened by the twin demands of detachment and empathy, and in such circumstances feel things “going out of control”.¹⁴³

Social anthropology and death: rites of passage

The social anthropologist R. B. Taylor describes the task of ritual as

the symbolic affirmation of values by means of culturally standardised utterances and actions.¹⁴⁴

If my death is something that no other individual can undertake for me, it is equally true that the death of any person is not simply a private event. Death is more than a biological phenomenon; it is a social event. When someone dies, there is a disruption in relationship. Jennifer Hockey stresses the social nature of death by reference to its accompanying ritual in similar terms to those of Taylor:

If the “success” of death ritual can be discussed at all usefully, it is with respect to its power to express and to recreate a society’s central values in a convincingly authentic fashion. Current dissatisfaction in the West with death and mourning ritual, coupled with nostalgic glances towards exotic or bygone forms, reflects the persistence of this requirement.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Where the funeral is for a regular member of the congregation (or where those closest to the deceased are regular members) and where the service is in the church or chapel, some clergy feel more able to keep control, and are able to minister to the immediate expression of grief without fear of losing others present. The comments contained in this footnote and the paragraph to which it refers are the result of my conversations with clergy about this issue.

It ought also to be noted that expressed grief is often catching. One weeper may trigger another - possibly, the officiant, who may thereby endanger her/his professional *persona*.

In her essay “The acceptable face of human grieving? The clergy’s role in managing emotional expression during funerals”, Jennifer Hockey records the comments of clergy in this area. While all acknowledged the need for grief to be expressed, there were some who set limits which they would not allow the mourners to overstep. Hockey observes that clergy find disruption not simply problematic, but threatening. *The Sociology of Death*, pages 129-148 - particularly on this point pages 130-135.

¹⁴⁴ R. B. Taylor, *Cultural Ways* (3rd edition), Allyn and Bacon, Boston, Mass., 1980. I shall return later to the question of what contemporary social codes there are which are concerned with death and bereavement.

¹⁴⁵ J. Hockey, *Experiences of Death: An Anthropological Account*, Edinburgh University Press, 1990.

Hockey then offers a survey of how the historical development in our cosmological understanding has repercussions for our social codes as we try to make sense of death and the accompanying rites of passage. What follows is a summary of her argument.

The revolution introduced by Galileo, Copernicus and Kepler defined the quantifiable aspects of the world in mathematical terms; nature was reduced to shape, number and motion. This was followed by Descartes' analytical contribution which effectively overturned the mediaeval integrative world-view. The Cartesian analytical framework has predominated in the subsequent three centuries. Newton's mechanical construct of the world and Locke's theories of individualism were based on rationalism, and the mechanical view of the universe developed into a rational view of the individual. The mediaeval world-view saw God as ubiquitously immanent; the rationalist approach saw God as distinct and separate.

The mechanical-rationalist approach has led us to a medical model which is based upon Linnaean analytical taxonomy, and which is itself primarily mechanical and concerned with laws of control and motion. The mediaeval linguistic and conceptual link between "health" and "holy" has all but disappeared. However, the more recent movements of feminism, ecological concern, holistic medicine, and even fundamentalism (Christian and Islamic) are forms of rejection of the analytic-rationalist construct.¹⁴⁶

While this summary is an abstract of an already abbreviated over-view of the philosophical shift characterised as the Enlightenment, its broad outline can serve here as a basis for proceeding. The strong emphasis on analysis and rationalism has produced an understanding of the individual which in turn has privatised religious belief.¹⁴⁷ In such an atmosphere the absolute truth claims which lie at the heart of most religions may be either accommodated by relativism ("If that's what you want to believe, then that's fine for you"), or simply rejected as making no sense. The claim of the Judaeo-Christian tradition that

¹⁴⁶ J. Hockey, *Experiences of Death*, pages 60-62.

¹⁴⁷ This view is supported by Mellor, "Death in high modernity", and Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*.

To Yahweh belongs the earth and all it holds,
the world and all who live in it (*Psalms 24.1*)

is judged to be not simply meaningless, but presumptuous.¹⁴⁸ Religious leaders are frequently enjoined to refrain from comment or action which is perceived to be beyond their competence. The underlying assumption is that there is an unbridgeable gap between the sacred and the secular. In today's terms the prophetic outbursts of Amos are not just embarrassing, they are meddlesome. Religion is about the soul, politics about the real world; and the two should be kept separate.

It is a small wonder, then, that at the funeral there is a strong element of the private world.¹⁴⁹ This is encouraged by the distancing which often occurs at funerals. Other members of the congregation sit apart from the family,¹⁵⁰ and announcements in the local paper frequently reinforce this with notices requesting "Family flowers only".¹⁵¹ Families often feel that "too many" flowers can be a waste of money, and prefer to invite donations to charitable causes which may be understood to mark the deceased's life and death more fittingly. There is much to commend this practice in terms of cost-effectiveness, but there is a difficulty. Whereas cards and letters can express the condolences of the wider group of mourners to the closer circle, flowers are an expression made directly to the dead person(s). Where death has occurred in a particularly tragic way, and where members of the public outside the circle of acquaintance have been moved (e.g., the Hillsborough football stadium disaster [1989], the Warrington bombings [1993]), the placing of floral tributes at the site has become a way in which even complete strangers

¹⁴⁸ The logical positivism of A. J. Ayer and others which deems all metaphysical statements "meaningless" since they cannot be verified or falsified according to an agreed verification factor has become widely accepted, even if the underlying philosophical argument has not been understood. However, since the verification principle itself cannot be verified, it is open to the suggestion that it too is "meaningless".

¹⁴⁹ By private I intend a reference to the domestic as opposed to individual psychology. It may of course be noted that the nuclear family is itself a largely private institution in contemporary Britain, resisting intrusion from outside.

¹⁵⁰ People would be shocked to imagine that they were doing anything other than showing respect. The intention is to avoid intrusion and to respect privacy, but the effect may be to isolate.

¹⁵¹ Cf. J. Hockey, *Experiences of Death*, page 48.

may express their feelings. When funerals are made domestically “private”, friends of the deceased, who are frequently closer than kith and kin, are easily excluded. The consequent emphasis upon the family reduces death to an event tied to the bloodline (and the spouse or partner). I suggest that it is friendship (both within and beyond the family) which reinforces the relational nature of human existence, and which affirms the social nature of death.

Funerals are not simply private occasions without societal references; and it is the social codes surrounding death which in turn inform the rites and ceremonies of death. The shift from the mediaeval world-view has changed our expectations of what should occur at a funeral. Where death and dying are seen in terms of medical control or the loss of it, it is increasingly to discern “the everlasting arms” of the funeral rite.¹⁵²

Hinton, writing in 1967, comments on this divergence from the Christian rite in the following succinct manner:

If our society wholly accepted traditional Christian beliefs, there would be a general conviction that death was vanquished. In fact, in England about a quarter of the population disclaim any religious belief and about a half do not believe in an after-life.¹⁵³

We do well, therefore, to consider what rites of passage seek to achieve. It was van Gennep who pioneered the work in this field.¹⁵⁴ He identified three phases in such rites: rites of separation - *preliminal*; transition rites - *liminal*; rites of incorporation - *postliminal*.¹⁵⁵

The *limen*, or doorway, is something that must be passed through, and represents a chaotic interlude between two worlds. The control of the chaos is the task of the one who presides at the rite of passage. In the Judaeo-Christian tradition the control of chaos is the task of God, who brings out of

¹⁵² Deuteronomy 33.27. Cf., for example, the Funeral Service provided in *Patterns and Prayers for Christian Worship*, Baptist Union of Great Britain, OUP, 1991, page 145.

¹⁵³ J. Hinton, *Dying*, page 37.

¹⁵⁴ A. van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*.

¹⁵⁵ A. van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, page 11. Van Gennep uses both sets of terms in the same paragraph.

the void order and form. This has great importance for the conduct of funeral rites.¹⁵⁶

When he first considered funeral rites, van Gennep anticipated that it would be the element of separation which was most clearly expressed. His study of the data, however, led him to a different and surprising conclusion. Separation rites were few in number; what predominated were transition rites which were many and complex.¹⁵⁷

Joan Littlewood summarises van Gennep's work on the three phases of rites of passage as it applies to funerals: separation removes the dead person and the bereaved from the living members of society; transition moves the dead from the world of the living towards the world of the dead, and moves the living from the world of the dead back towards the world of the living; incorporation places the dead into the world of the dead, and places the ~~dead~~^{living} into the world of the living.¹⁵⁸

What now becomes clear is that, anthropologically speaking, the funeral is a rite of passage both for the dead and for the bereaved. This is crucial. It will be an important issue when I come to consider present liturgical provision, and when I offer my own suggestion for funeral rites.¹⁵⁹

In 1965, Geoffrey Gorer described the ritual of grief in contemporary Britain, and observed a number of changes in the post-war social codes relating to death. He argued that the decline in religious belief and ritual in general had removed an important source of guidance for mourners and society at large in

¹⁵⁶ In Chapter Six, I shall give extended consideration as to how Van Gennep's analysis can be combined with the Easter triduum to offer a pastoral and theological framework to funeral rites.

¹⁵⁷ A. van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, page 146.

¹⁵⁸ J. Littlewood, *Aspects of Grief: Bereavement in Adult Life*, Tavistock/Routledge, London, 1992, Table 4, page 24. Littlewood offers the same analysis in her essay "The denial of death and rites of passage in contemporary societies", *The Sociology of Death*, page 75.

¹⁵⁹ I offer this analysis in Part Three (Chapters Seven and Eight).

the social expression and management of grief. This change he regarded as both significant and unhelpful.¹⁶⁰

Not all commentators agree with Gorer's conclusions as to the helpfulness or otherwise of past observances, yet it is generally acknowledged that there is no common social code referring to death in contemporary Britain. As Parkes observes, the old quarantine is gone,¹⁶¹ and there is no social norm or expectation to guide either the bereaved or society at large in their meeting with one another.¹⁶²

But beyond the chances of encounter in the world of the living, the lack of an agreed social code of universal values and meanings leads to a sense of meaninglessness in the ritual of mourning. "Where there is no vision the people perish"; where there is no agreed code of meaning and value, people go to pieces.

This lack of social agreement in the realm of values as they relate to the dead has much to do with the privatization of religious belief.¹⁶³ Faith is

¹⁶⁰ G. Gorer, *Death, Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain*, Cresset, London, 1965. He gives an autobiographical account of how his description of himself as a mourner embarrassed others:

I wore a black tie for about three months. I had great pleasure in seeing real friends, but was unwilling to meet strangers. A couple of times I refused invitations to cocktail parties, explaining that I was mourning; the people who invited me responded to this statement with shocked embarrassment, as if I had voiced some appalling obscenity. Indeed, I got the impression that, had I stated that the invitation clashed with some esoteric debauchery I had arranged, I would have had some understanding and jocular encouragement; as it was, the people whose invitations I had refused, educated and sophisticated though they were, mumbled and hurried away. *They clearly no longer had any guidance from ritual as to the way to treat a self-confessed mourner* [emphasis mine]; and, I suspect, they were frightened lest I give way to my grief, and involve them in a distasteful upsurge of emotion.

(*Death, Grief, and Mourning*, page 14)

See also page 1.

¹⁶¹ Quarantine is derived from the Italian *quarantina* (forty), the number of days for the seclusion of widows at one time in that country.

¹⁶² C. M. Parkes, *Bereavement*, pages 179-180.

¹⁶³ This privatization relates to individual psychological entities rather than to the domestic privacy described on page 61.

compartmentalised and religious enquiry is intrusion. Religion is seen as one possible way of expressing the emotion of loss and grief, but its account of what has occurred is perceived as inadequate. There is a feeling that to know what has happened we must turn to medical and psychological models.

Yet, as I argued earlier (pages 38ff.) even here all is not well. Medical models, like their psychological counterparts, turn out to be inadequate since they belong to those explanations of the world which are analytical and which relate to mechanical control. The metaphysical question remains unanswered. Religious answers to the metaphysics fail because they do not speak in terms which are appropriate to the conceptual framework of most people asking the questions. Such a framework demands a demonstrable knowledge, offering control of what seems beyond control and resolution of what is apparently beyond resolution.¹⁶⁴ Yet death is not something we can control or resolve, and part of the theological attempt to address death is the recognition that death represents the sharpest and most intense expression of our finitude.

I have already commented (pages 52ff.) that some infer from the psychologists that part of the task of funeral rites as they relate to the bereaved might be to re-incorporate the mourners within the world of the living in such a way that mourning may conclude in a new normality without the deceased. There are two problems here: one for social anthropology, the other for Christian theology.

In terms of rites of passage, we have to be very clear that the “new” normality is indeed new. A return to the old normality is physically impossible (the dead are dead), and psychologically dangerous. The psychiatric counsellor knows full well how unsatisfactory regression is. Moreover, a return to the old is a failure to pass through the ritual doorway. The temptation of many is to dismiss ritual as being empty of meaning and value. To describe someone as a ritualist is commonly held to be pejorative.¹⁶⁵ However, Professor Tom Driver of Union Theological Seminary argues that ritual is far from empty. Rather, ritualization is the way by which we learn to make meaning and sense.

¹⁶⁴ J. Hockey, *Experiences of Death*, page 58.

¹⁶⁵ A similar “name calling” accompanies the word “psychological”. When people say that something “is just psychological”, they are commonly suggesting that it has no real weight or meaning - worse, they may be suggesting that someone whose suffering they have described as “just psychological” is simply malingering.

Everything points to the supposition that our remote ancestors were ritualizing before they became human. This activity became the pathway to the human condition. ritualization is a way, an experimental way, of going from the inchoate to the expressive, from the sheerly pragmatic to the communicative. Hence, in humans, it is a close relative of art, especially the performing arts. In fact, we had best think of it as their progenitor, and as the source also of speech, of religion, of culture, and of ethics. It is not as true to say that we human beings invented rituals as that rituals have invented us.¹⁶⁶

If Driver is right, and his case convinces me, then ritual has the capacity to effect change where it is properly enacted. The possibilities for funeral rites are important, even if we only understand the potential for change to exist among the living. If we believe that the rite has implications for the dead, then a profoundly different agenda emerges. When I come to consider the history and theology of early Christian funeral rites, we shall see how the dead person was the focus of the liturgy. I believe that this emphasis has been forgotten in many contemporary funerary rites, and that the loss has profound significance for those who mourn.¹⁶⁷

For Christian theology, going back to the old ways cannot be an appropriate response to death. The call of God is ever to new paths of life, to conversion.¹⁶⁸ Death is answered by resurrection, which is not an endless experience of present modes of life or even adjustments to old patterns, but a radical reordering which may find its best analogy in the language of second birth or new creation.¹⁶⁹ In any event, Littlewood in reporting the work of other workers in the field of social anthropology notes their findings that ritual behaviour is not always an effective mediator of healing and wholeness. Where tensions exist in the social group, the rite may express these without

¹⁶⁶ T. F. Driver, *The Magic of Ritual: Our Need for Liberating Rites that Transform Our Lives and Our Communities*, Harper Collins, San Francisco, 1991, page 31.

¹⁶⁷ The history and theology of early Christian funerary rites will be described in Part Three, Chapter Seven: "Past and Present".

¹⁶⁸ In part at least, Jesus' word to the potential disciple "Let the dead bury their dead" [Matthew 8.22] is a reminder that we cannot live in the past. Life is the concrete now with all its changes, not the static past.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. John 3; 1 Corinthians 15; Revelation 21.

necessarily offering any resolution.¹⁷⁰ Indeed one of her colleagues (M. B. Vizedom) believes that rituals are only helpful where there exist relative social homogeneity and stasis, and expresses great pessimism about the ability of rituals to facilitate transition in any contemporary cultural context.¹⁷¹

Despite Vizedom's pessimism, there is a widespread agreement that the disposal of the dead is not simply a public health matter. Whether people want to say "Goodbye" or give thanks for the life of the deceased, marking death by formal means still seems to have importance. The difficulty is to find ritual significance for that last act of compassion which gathers a group of mourners whom the liturgy addresses as a community.

The ritual community of death: gathering for the funeral

To speak of a ritual community or of a liturgical community is to invoke Vizedom's comment that effective ritual demands social cohesion. Not least of the contributors to the cohesion required in ritual and liturgy is shared belief. What has emerged in this chapter is that, although death has its impact on the social groupings to which the deceased belonged, there is no agreed body of belief about death. The privatization of belief has led to the fragmentation of communal certainty, and its compartmentalization has led to specialists who have sequestered belief and ritual.¹⁷² Among those specialists are ministers and clergy.

Tony Walter's call for funeral officiants to give to families the planning of the funeral might be understood superficially as a reaction against the specialist; but he does not make that connection.¹⁷³ Indeed, Walter suggests that a "free market" approach to funeral arrangements might lead to the emergence of a group of clergy specialists whose expertise was acknowledged -

¹⁷⁰ J. Littlewood, *Aspects of Grief*, page 22, citing M. R. Leming and G. E. Dickinson, *Understanding Dying, Death and Bereavement*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1985.

¹⁷¹ M. B. Vizedom, *Rites and Relationships: Rites of Passage and Contemporary Anthropology*, Sage, Beverly Hills, California, 1976.

¹⁷² Sennett argues this in Part Four of *The Fall of Public Man*, "The Intimate Society", pages 259-340. See also Mellor and Schilling, "Modernity, Self-Identity and the Sequestration of death", *Sociology*, volume 27, 1993.

¹⁷³ J. A. Walter, *Funerals And How to Improve Them*.

because they are good at funerals, not because they are hopeless at everything else!¹⁷⁴

Walter does not apparently intend to tackle the root problem for those who are asked to officiate at Christian funeral rite; his book primarily addresses the bereaved.¹⁷⁵ He has much to say to those entrusted with many of the practicalities of funerals, but his critical stance does not address the question of the ritual community in a fragmented society.

One of the tasks confronting the ritual president is to form a community for the rite. To this end (s)he will listen to the stories of the dead person as they are told by the bereaved. But if (s)he were to ask “What does this death mean?”, there is no guarantee that any answer would be forthcoming. Of course, the question about meaning may be precisely the one which the bereaved themselves are asking - especially in those cases where a child has died or where death has been otherwise premature or violent. It may be that the officiant can in such circumstances build a community on the foundation of the shared question. If this question can be addressed to the God who has been bereaved, then there may be a way forward.¹⁷⁶ But many funerals are of the old who have suffered. For them death is a release, and the question uppermost in the minds of the bereaved is not what the death means but “Why did (s)he have to suffer?” While this is an important question, it may divert attention from the question about death which makes the funeral necessary.

¹⁷⁴ J. A. Walter, *Funerals And How to Improve Them*, page 270. The comment is made to Walter by a funeral director, but Walter cites it with apparent approval.

The expression “free market” is mine, not Walter’s, although I think it accurately reflects what he calls for.

¹⁷⁵ Although much of what Walter says forms a critique of funeral practice and so comments directly on the attitudes and activities of funeral directors and clergy, he writes from the perspective of his own experience of bereavement. His concern is to empower the bereaved. In the course of his proposals he does not always give consideration to the practicalities which Maura Naylor addressed in her doctoral thesis for the University of Leeds, *The Funeral: The Management of Death and its Rituals in a Northern Industrial City*, Department of Social Policy and Sociology, June 1989. The result is that, while his critique is one to which clergy and funeral directors should attend, Walter is open to the suggestion that he has not seen the difficulties “from the other side of the counter”.

¹⁷⁶ I have personal experience of such a way of proceeding in the funeral of a child. Not all the mourners had any formal religious belief, but the possibility of asking the question out loud, without soothing answers, led to an intensely moving experience in which all the anger and loss were shared and acknowledged. The family told the undertaker later that the funeral had been better for its honesty.

For the vast majority of mourners death is dreadful because no meaning can be attached to it. In such circumstances the minister may open the order of service, and read "I am the resurrection and the life" with little confidence that the funeral is going to be a Christian rite in anything other than the words. The idea of a ritual community is empty.

Where death has no meaning beyond its finality, where it is a dead end, there can be no Christian rite of passage for the deceased. The journey for the deceased needs to place the dead in the world of the dead, but in Christian theology the world of the dead is not a world of non-being. The words of Jesus

And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? *He is God not of the dead, but of the living.* [Matthew 22.31-32]

challenge those who consign the dead to non-existence. This call reminds us that the rite of passage takes the dead person into a new world. There is a real passage into another mode of existence, and that existence is one of life.

The insistence of Jesus that the resurrection is a reality gives the Christian liturgist reason to examine carefully the work of van Gennep. Social anthropologists will themselves be divided in their reactions to the religious conviction of Jesus. However, their work on rites of passage provides an invaluable tool in enabling the funeral officiant to shape the liturgy not only for the bereaved, but for the deceased. What draws the ritual community together at a funeral is death. The funeral is for the dead person, and the mourners meet to say farewell. The Christian minister will want to enlarge that purpose, to commit the dead to God, and to entrust the dead to the Christ who himself died.¹⁷⁷

To this extent there is a consensus that something should be done which places the dead person at the centre of the rite. The bereaved gather round.

¹⁷⁷ There is equally, though in my view secondarily, the task of entrusting the mourners to God, incorporating them into the activity of God in Christ.

Coda: The Agenda for Funerals

How concerns for the human shape the rites of death

Of course, one of the difficulties with many modern funerals is that the bereaved attend, but they do not gather round. The crematorium layout often hinders that symbolic action which the grave enables. Gathering round is a sign of love, and of protection. It can often signify welcome, but it can equally express farewell. To those who form the circle it also expresses belonging. Yet beyond these significances, the circle may invoke the holy. Into its centre only the initiated may go, and the space is taboo to all others by reason of its holiness.¹⁷⁸

Here there may be a possible starting point for liturgy. Given that much will simply pass the benumbed mourners by, the gathered circle expresses the resources which they will learn to rely upon in the days ahead. It will also have at its centre - at the focus of the holy - the dead person. Farewell can be said to the dead person; committal can be made of the dead person. In human terms we mark the life of one whom we love, and commit the body to the elements for its integration with the whole of creation. But by our placing of the dead in the holy space where there is a taboo on the living, we effect a significant ritual action. We place the dead beyond our reach, where new modes of relationship are required.

In Christian thought we commit the dead to God: the grave (the place of taboo) is hallowed by the death of Christ; and love survives death, which cannot separate us from the love of God [Romans 8.38-39]. Yet more than this, we set the dead in the only place where resurrection can occur - the sphere of death where God acts to bring the divine purpose to its consummation.

¹⁷⁸ The stone circles of prehistory mark places where the holy was enshrined (cf. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, OUP, 1923, page 68). There is one contemporary manifestation of the holy circle which is frequently encountered in our city centres. The Salvation Army street meeting marks out a holy place by its circle of musicians and singers. To cross the space is not an easy passage. The unbeliever may pass, but the passage is often a show of bravado and defiance of the taboo; even the leader of the group may move into the space only to retreat once more to its perimeter, as though to acknowledge that prolonged exposure to the holy is in some way dangerous.

Such a holy act requires time because grief itself takes time, and the holy can no more be rushed than can grief. We may, therefore, be constrained to create rites of passage which span the time which death and bereavement occupy, and which are celebrated at significant points within that time. Moreover, the primary focal point for the liturgy will become the dead person, who from the sacred space will find her/his voice in the utterances of those who stand at its perimeter. The words which the mourners articulate, they speak not first for themselves, but for the dead.

In this way the cry of the psalmist

Out of the depths have I cried to thee [Psalm 130.1]

will no longer be primarily the sob of the bereaved. It will be the call of the dead to God for resurrection; and the place of fear and taboo will become the place of the sacred and of hope.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ Resurrection is an alien language to many, of course, and abhorrent to others, and we must respect that. Yet as Christians our answer to the metaphysical questions will be found in the witness we bear to the central mystery of our faith: that God raised Christ from the dead.

Summary and Signpost

How Part One introduces the remainder of the thesis

Part One of the thesis has identified a number of fields in which death is a matter of discussion and debate. What I have attempted to show is something of the milieu in which theological reflection on death and the liturgical considerations of funeral rites must operate. In their conduct of funerals officiants may not always consciously articulate the range of issues I have outlined. Nonetheless, in their ministry to the dying and the bereaved clergy frequently encounter issues of medico-legal ethics and practice. The “why?”, “what?” and “how?” of death are questions which they cannot for ever avoid. The careful pastor will be better prepared to enter into the struggle of those to whom she ministers where she has first wrestled with the problem herself.

In the remainder of the thesis I shall be arguing that funeral rites need to address death and bereavement as processes rather than in the punctiliar manner which the crematorium “slot” frequently encourages. It is therefore important to have established that while not everybody dies in hospital more than two in three do. Dying and death have thereby often been taken (or seem to have been taken) from the control of the dying person and the family and friends. At the time of the funeral it is those people whose personhood and whose loss will have to be met and addressed.

The funeral may apparently be about death and the disposal of a corpse, but that death and that corpse have a social identity and history. Is there any more to the deceased than the dead body? Does the person whose death we mark have any identity beyond the cadaver? Does the way in which society defines and monitors death indicate a philosophical stance in relation to the nature of persons and the “sacredness” of life? I believe that these questions and the answers which we give to them have profound implications for the way in which we ritualize death and disposal.

These wider questions find unique focus in the special circumstances of any funeral. It is not a generality that we are burying or cremating. We are summoned by the death of a particular person. In the course of the funeral rites we will want to recall the life story of that individual. The deceased is not a statistic. All this is true. However, if we are to remember Mary as a person and yet what confronts us is her coffin, we need to be able to articulate what makes any of us persons. If she has died at home of old age, or she has drowned at sea in a ferry disaster, we may not need to address medical

definitions of death, but we may still want to know how we shall continue to know her beyond death. If she has died in a hospital or hospice, we need to reassure ourselves that, as far as we have been able, her personal dignity has not been eradicated by the treatment and care she has received. Where her dignity has been lost in her dying, we need to be able to explain whether and how it can be restored in death and resurrection.

These have been the considerations which have led me to the reviews I have undertaken in Chapters Two and Three. Much of what I have discussed there may often be obscured in the preparation and practice of particular funeral rites. I have given them space here because unasked questions can lead to ritual blunder.

Chapter Four has looked at the ritualization of death and bereavement, and its conclusions are used throughout the remainder of the thesis. It introduces the exposition of a theological anthropology in Part Two, it provides criteria for the liturgical review of Part Three, and it offers some underpinning for the proposals I submit in Part Four.

Part Two: Death and God

Introduction

Part Two of this thesis moves from discussing humanity and death against the background of social and natural sciences to a direct theological discussion. In Chapter Five I establish a unitary anthropology developed from the Hebrew understanding of the human as a *nephesh*, and I show how such an anthropology is exemplified in Jesus. I demonstrate how a *nephesh* anthropology leads to a distinctive theology of death and resurrection, and argue that this is seen in the death and resurrection of Jesus in which the myth of the descent to the dead plays a vital role. Finally, I argue that such a view of the death and resurrection of Jesus establishes a κηρυγμα to the dead which offers a genuine hope in the context of the funeral.

In Chapter Six I link the Easter triduum with the work of van Gennep, and argue that the triduum is particularly helpful in offering theological and ritual structure to funeral rites. Such an approach offers a theological rationale for approaching funerals as rites of passage.

The thesis thus moves from describing the human phenomenology of death to offering a theological understanding from which we can proceed to the liturgical review and proposals of Parts Three and Four.

Chapter Five: The Human in Christ¹⁸⁰

For the Christian theologian a description of what it means to be a person which is simply a “naming of parts” is inadequate.¹⁸¹ This is not just because in some way the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, but because the Christian does not see personhood in terms of atomic analysis. We exist both in relationship to one another and in relationship to God. These are creation categories of existence. Male and female are two parts of the one, but the myth of Adam and Eve gives assent to the further proposition that all humanity is related to its source and hence is “family”. The answer to Cain’s question “Am I my brother’s keeper?” [Genesis 4.9] is “Yes”. Moreover, we rely upon God for breath itself [Genesis 2.7] and are accountable to God for our living [Genesis 3.8f.].

Further, the doctrine of Incarnation ties God to the creation in such a way that the ‘material’ cannot be separated from the ‘spiritual’ in some Gnostic fashion. This insight had profound implications in the early development of Christian doctrine as it related both to the person of Christ and to salvation. Although the Two Nature theory made the unity of Christ’s personhood susceptible to division, the early Church resisted the challenge of dualism. The creation was not the action of a Demiurge, and the salvation of the world was not achieved by a divided Christ - “What Christ has not assumed he has not healed”. Nonetheless the body-soul anthropology led to some extreme awkwardness of expression, as for example in the aphorism ἀπαθῶς ἔπαθεν.

I have suggested earlier that the Christian theologian is prompted to say more about what it means to be a human being, and that the body-soul language is no longer an appropriate way of speaking (see page 47). I have also suggested that a way forward may be to use the language of *nepshesh*, *bios* and *zoe*. It is to this discussion that I wish shortly to turn after commenting upon one other matter.

For the Christian the life, death and resurrection of Jesus are constitutive of what it means to live, to die and to be raised by God. It is central to the Christian tradition that we live and die in dependence upon and relation to

¹⁸⁰ This title is deliberately ambiguous: it refers both to the humanity of Christ (Jesus the man) and to the new humanity in Christ (the redeemed).

¹⁸¹ “Naming of Parts” is a phrase borrowed from Henry Reed’s poem of that title.

God, and that resurrection is God's answer to death. Such living, dying and resurrection is seen most completely in Jesus. It is therefore the task of this chapter to investigate a theological anthropology which will establish Jesus as normative for all human experience.¹⁸²

My first task will be to look at a general anthropology and then to show how this is pre-eminently true for Jesus, and derivatively so for humanity in Christ. I shall then argue that the death and resurrection of Christ are representative in their function, and that the salvation offered in the paschal mystery offers hope not only for the living but for the dead. Finally, I shall indicate how these considerations raise questions for our understanding of what a funeral is meant to do.

Personal anthropology: *nephesh*, death and resurrection

In the Old Testament *nephesh* is a way of describing a living being. One of its most common uses is reflexively ("I will do this myself"). *Nephesh* is not simply a category of description reserved for humans or even for created beings.¹⁸³ When YHWH speaks to Moses in Leviticus there are examples of *nephesh* being used in this reflexive way, and a similar usage occurs in the Book of Psalms.¹⁸⁴ Frequently *nephesh* has been translated as 'soul', but it may also be rendered 'self'.¹⁸⁵

Thinking of *nephesh* as the self is a useful point of departure for the anthropology which I wish to propose. A human person is an ordered self. The ordering is effected by God's breathing into us and by social relationships as well as by centred conscious awareness. I gain knowledge of whom I am by my own self-awareness, by the awareness and recognition which others accord to me, and by the awareness and recognition granted to me by God.

¹⁸² That is, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus are what God normally intends for human beings. Our fallen nature frustrates this normality, and it is this which makes essential a doctrine of atonement.

¹⁸³ In Leviticus 24.18 *nephesh* is used for an animal.

¹⁸⁴ Leviticus 26.11,30; Psalm 11.5. Yahweh has, or is, a *nephesh*!

¹⁸⁵ There are many other translations; mind, heart, life, one, someone, body or corpse, appetite, desire or throat, breath, lust, person, will.

These external identifications are important. They confirm who I am when I cannot identify myself.¹⁸⁶ At its most trivial and commonplace this recognition may be accorded to me when I am asleep. More seriously, it may be granted to me when I am in a trauma - either of a physiological or psychological kind. I am still me, even if I have lost arms and legs or have collapsed after an accident or operation into a coma. I am equally still me if I have lost all recollection of who I am. The 'me' in such a trauma is obviously diminished, but I remain the one whom God called into being and whose history makes me who I am. This holds good in the realm of human development. In the early stages there is a growing self-awareness; yet before the infant "I" knows who I am, I am known by others.

This external recognition is crucial against those who end up by giving my psychological history a distinct ontology from "me". Even though those who recognize me may only do so with difficulty, even though they may say "He's not himself any longer" or "He's not who he was", there is yet a recognition that the "he" of whom they speak is related to the previous "he" whom they remember as me. There is change and alteration; but there is also continuity.

Of course, the human person is not only accorded recognition by others. In relationship with others there is formation and growth into personhood. Our personhood is ordered by its self-awareness, its relationship to others, and its calling into existence by God. This ordered being I call *nephesh*. However distorted or diminished it may become, the *nephesh* is the self.

Bios is that which the *nephesh* organizes in order to be a living being. If the *nephesh*, as we at present experience it, is embodied, then *bios* is the energy which *nephesh* embodies. This *bios* may be thought of as the breath which made Adam from the dust. In everyday speech it is "life". When we speak of being alive it is with *bios* that we are concerned. The important thing to observe here is that this language does not separate *bios* from the religious or spiritual sphere. *Bios* is the gift of God; and this way of speaking reminds us that our everyday living is dependent upon God. All life is given, and cannot be compartmentalized into those areas which belong to God and those which do not.

¹⁸⁶ They are not, however, exclusive or incontrovertibly accurate or complete. My own self-awareness is not necessarily false.

Zoe is our response to the call by God to live teleologically. It is not separate from *bios*, nor is *bios* separate from *zoe*. *Zoe* is the God-ward orientation of *bios*; it is *bios* lived to a “zoetic” end. To live zoetically is to live with a *nephesh* in which *bios* and *zoe* are in harmony.¹⁸⁷ Sin is both the failure to order *bios* zoetically and the state in which that failure occurs. Just as *bios* is inclusive of all our living so also is *zoe*. There are not areas of existence which fall outside the teleological purposes of God.

To summarize, the *nephesh* is the way in which *bios* is organized, and this organization is both individual and social. A *nephesh* which organizes that God-given *bios* to fulfil the purposes of God expresses itself in *zoe*. By speaking in this way, we avoid a dualism which allows the body to decay in death while asserting that an immortal soul escapes. And it is to death that we now must turn.

Whatever model we use to describe human existence, no amount of argument can disguise the fact that we die. Indeed, Heidegger described it as *Sein-zum-Tode* (being-unto-death). For my theological position, death is a total event. Nothing escapes.¹⁸⁸ Karl Rahner sees the resurrection of the body and the immortality of the soul as parallel statements arising from different ways of speaking of the human.¹⁸⁹ He is unwilling to allow that death can be adequately described as separation of soul and body,¹⁹⁰ and writes later that

187 The hymn writer John Hunter spoke of this call to harmonization and its fulfilment in Christ:

Dear Master, in whose life I see
All that I long, but fail to be,
Let Thy clear light for ever shine,
To shame and guide this life of mine,
Though what I dream and what I do
In my poor days are always two,
Help me, oppressed by things undone,
O Thou, whose deeds and dreams were one.

The Baptist Hymn Book, Psalms and Hymns Trust, London, 1962, number 465.

188 Karl Barth urges this totality of death:

When we die, all things and we ourselves come to an end.

Church Dogmatics III.2 - The Doctrine of Creation, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1960, page 588.

189 K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, volume 4, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1966, page 352.

190 K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, volume 4, page 127.

death puts an end to the *whole* man.¹⁹¹

The totality of death is a crucial tenet of my theology. Like Rahner, I cannot subscribe to a dualist description of death. Since I want to describe human personhood and life in unitary terms, I am committed to a similar stance in relation to death. When we die, our *bios* seeps away and our *nephesh* loses its organizational control.¹⁹² This accords with the findings of medical science; and while I do not want to grant to medicine a metaphysical competence, a theology of death which ignores what we know of *bios* is to my mind perverse. Since my life in response to God's calling (*zoe*) is given to me as a *nephesh*, it too ceases without *nephesh* and *bios*.¹⁹³

Resurrection is then a gracious act of God in which *bios* and *zoe* are restored to a re-ordered *nephesh*. The *nephesh* is differently organized beyond death. If we speak of an embodiment, a resurrection of the body, then that body will be the "spiritual body" of which St Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 15. Resurrection is a new creation in which the energy (*bios*), which the *nephesh* organized before death in embodied form, is now reconstituted and organized in the *nephesh* beyond death. The *zoe* of God, our life in response to God's teleological claim, is now lived by the *nephesh* in freedom. Resurrection is not simply the same old thing beyond death. It is life in a radically new dimension of eschatological liberty.¹⁹⁴ Rahner puts it thus:

¹⁹¹ K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, volume 4, page 347. The stress is Rahner's.

¹⁹² The dead are described as *rephaim* (powerless) in the Old Testament. This corresponds to my description of a *nephesh* losing *bios* (energy).

¹⁹³ Insofar as *zoe* is a response to the calling of God, it ceases to exist. The *τελος*, to which we are called by God, continues independently of the existence of those who are summoned to its consummation.

¹⁹⁴ Frances Young tells the story of her handicapped son Arthur and reflects both as mother and theologian on what Arthur's experience means for our understanding both of personhood and of God. She concludes that resurrection cannot mean a "making perfect" which would erase both the suffering and joy of Arthur's life by making him "normal". To deny his handicapped experience in such a way would be to suggest that he is sub-human. Professor Young has no easy answer to the questions about the darkness of God. Her intellectual rigour applied to her family life is profoundly moving. I believe that my anthropology is open to what she has written. I would certainly want it no other way.

F. Young, *Face to Face: a narrative essay in the theology of suffering*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1990

We do not mean that ‘things go on’ after death, as though we only changed horses, as Feuerbach puts it, and rode on.

Eternity is not an immeasurably long-lasting mode of pure time, but a mode of the spirit and freedom.....¹⁹⁵

The importance of such an understanding of death and resurrection for funeral liturgies lies in the challenge it brings to the body-soul anthropology which is so commonly assumed. Language which speaks of commending the soul to God and the body to the elements loses its place. The whole person is dead, and all must be released to God. Resurrection is different from immortality, and the anthropology which I propose affirms resurrection as an act of God in response to the totality of death.

However, there is a further liturgical consideration. An increasing importance is being given to the funeral service as a celebration of the Paschal Mystery. I believe this to be a correct emphasis, since it addresses the transcendental questions about God which death poses. It is, therefore, to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus that I now wish to apply my theological anthropology of *nephesh*, *bios* and *zoe*.

Jesus as normative

I have indicated earlier that I have reservations about the Two Nature theory (see page 73). If, as I have argued, human nature may be described satisfactorily in terms of our relationship to God without recourse to a body-soul anthropology, then the Two Nature theory is redundant for Christology. Jesus was a *nephesh*; his uniqueness consists in his ability to harmonize *bios* and *zoe*. “He was obedient”, runs the *carmen Christi*; “Son though he was he learnt obedience” declares the writer to the Hebrews.¹⁹⁶ It is in this obedience to God that he demonstrates normative humanity in which *zoe* and *bios* are at one. This is what it means to be human (*nephesh*), to live life (*bios*) in obedience to the calling of God (*zoe*).

The death of Jesus exemplifies his loving obedience of God. This is the thrust both of the *carmen Christi* and of the reference in Hebrews. When Jesus gives up his spirit [Luke 23.46], it is the breath (πνεῦμα) which gives life (*bios*) to his *nephesh* which he returns to God. The docetic hypothesis that Jesus’ death

¹⁹⁵ *Theological Investigations*, volume 4, pages 347 and 348.

¹⁹⁶ Philippians 2.8; Hebrews 5.8.

is incomplete (or even feigned) is impossible in my reading, since the suggestion depends upon the Two Nature theory. The death of Jesus is total, as is our death. The sense of abandonment which Jesus feels is a recognition that death is “a return to non-being”.¹⁹⁷ The dead go down to Sheol where there is no praise of God, no communion with the source of all life who calls us into being. To this descent I shall return later, for Jesus’ descent to the dead is a crucial sign of hope in which the death of death is worked.

The resurrection of Jesus is the mighty act of God in which the *bios* of Jesus is reconstituted and finds itself newly organized in a resurrection *nephesh*. The *zoe* of Jesus is the bringing to glory the children of God. This is accomplished in the ministry he exercised in life and in death, and which by the resurrection he exercises yet. This resurrection is the expression of Christian hope for the creation, which groans for his freedom [Romans 8.19-25]. This, too, is normative.

When we speak of the dead at the funeral, we speak by reference to Christ the firstborn from the dead [Colossians 1.17]. The funeral rite which fails to make this connection is not, in my judgement, Christian. It fails to establish Christ as our representative. There is a cosmic implication to the descent of Christ to the dead which ought to be expressed in the funeral liturgy.

I intend to address myself in the remainder of this chapter to this universal reference of Christ’s death. I shall do so first by a consideration of this teaching as it occurs in 1 Peter and in Origen’s later development. At the conclusion of the chapter I shall show how a contemporary theologian, Dorothee Sölle, has expounded a theory of Christ as representative.

Holy Saturday and the descent to the dead

If, as I have argued, the death of Jesus is so complete that he is incapable of any activity, then it follows that the descent to the dead is myth. A meta-historical event is being described in terms which demand of us a *theological* rather than an *historical* response. The Apostles’ Creed says simply “*he descended into hell*”. The Greek has εἰς Ἅιδου - “into [the realm] of Hades”, and we might wish to avoid confusion about the nature of hell as a place of punishment by translating this clause “*he descended to the [realm of the]*

¹⁹⁷ Barth describes death in this way when he speaks of death as a sign of judgement. *Church Dogmatics, III.2*, pages 595 ff.

dead".¹⁹⁸ The scriptural warrant for this formula is the passage in 1 Peter running from 3:18 to 4:6.

The question that all students of that text must decide is: "*Who are the 'imprisoned spirits'?*". Various possibilities have been proposed by Church Fathers and modern New Testament scholars.

- (1) The reference is to Noah's contemporaries. In this case, verse 20 makes a very natural contrast between the obedient Noah and the disobedient people of his day - a contrast which was frequently made in Jewish teaching and by Jesus himself. The internal textual support for this understanding is provided by 4.6 where νεκροῖς is used rather than πνεύμασιν. In 3.19, πνεύματα is used to describe the souls of the dead. The passage speaks of a proclamation to the dead.
- (2) The spirits are the fallen angelic spirits referred to in Genesis 6.2-4. These were the subject of a great deal of speculation in contemporary Jewish apocalyptic. It was a major theme in the Book of Enoch which describes these "spirits" as being in Gehenna or the abyss.
- (3) Jesus' proclamation is to the "righteous dead" of Israel. This view is a qualification of (1), and holds that 1 Peter is a conservative text, which is unlikely to be advocating a universalist soteriology. The understanding of πνεύματα as the dead is again contested. J. R. Michaels rejects φυλακή as meaning a prison, preferring to translate "security".¹⁹⁹ In advocating this view, Michaels urges us to understand the preaching to the dead referred to in 4.6 as preaching in their life-time. The proposed link between 3.19 and 4.6 is severed, and the writer is seen to be advocating God's covenant faithfulness to those who heard the good news and repented in their day before Christ. This view would accommodate the Noah story.

The second understanding is frequently favoured for two main reasons:

¹⁹⁸ The language of descent ought not to be understood in spatial terms. "He descended to the dead" is simply a way of saying "he died". Nonetheless the metaphor of descent is hospitable to a theology which wants to say that in Jesus' death there was a progress to God which was inclusive of all the dead.

¹⁹⁹ J. R. Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Books, Waco, 1988, pages 205-211, 234-242.

- (a) πνεύματα is very unusual for those who have died; for such an idea the usual word is ψυχαί. There are instances of being πνευματα used for “the dead”, but they are rare.
- (b) The passage (3.18-22) ends with the exaltation of Christ over all the spiritual powers. In such a setting ἐκήρυξεν (3.19) could scarcely be a proclamation of the gospel. Rather, “made proclamation” would refer to the exaltation and sovereignty of Jesus (3.22), whose suffering was according to the flesh (4.1) and whose exaltation was to God. This theme is found elsewhere in the New Testament. Here, then, ἐν φυλακῇ (3.19) must mean that the πνεύματα are guarded, but not necessarily “underground”. Indeed, the suggestion is that they are in the heavenly realms and that the proclamation is made by the risen Christ after his exaltation and ascension.

Against this view we may note:

- (i) 3.18-22 need to be read within the context to 4.6.
- (ii) It is still not finally demonstrated beyond argument that the πνεύματα are not those of the dead.
- (iii) It would then follow that κηρύσσειν (3.19) might be understood in its normal New Testament usage as a synonym for εὐαγγελίζεσθαι (4.6).

This line of argument observes the link with 4.6 very closely. Indeed, the cited example of Noah is given specific force since the people of the Flood were, in Jewish thought, the wickedest people of all time and for them there simply was no hope. The reference here to them suggests that, contrary to conventional religious wisdom, those with no hope can find hope since Christ himself has brought it to them. This exegesis is lent force by the echo of Jesus’ warning that the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah would find hope in the judgement before those who heard his proclamation and refused it (cf. Matthew 10.13-15; 11.20-24).

Against Michaels we may observe:

- (a) The universalist line of interpretation of this text began in the early church (Irenaeus and Origen) whose understanding of Greek and its nuances was presumably at least as good as our own. They were able to read the passage in the context of “conservative” 1 Peter and to place upon it a wider soteriology without linguistic

embarrassment - though, of course, not without theological controversy!

- (b) To propose that 4.6 is written simply to remind its readers that God keeps covenant faithfulness with those repentant before Jesus does require that it be held apart from 3.19-22. The point can easily be made without any reference to the descent of Jesus εἰς Αἴδου. I believe this separation to be a forced one, and stand by my earlier comments.

Leonhard Goppelt in his commentary on 1 Peter takes a similar view, siding with those who see the text as a κήρυγμα to the dead. He writes:

“The spirits in prison” are, therefore, the souls of the flood generation preserved in a place of punishment after death. I Peter 3:19f. contains, therefore, an important kerygmatic statement. In rabbinic tradition the generation of the flood were regarded as thoroughly and ultimately lost: “The generation of the Flood have no share in the world to come” (*m. Sanhedrin* 10:3a, *The Mishnah*, tr. H. Danby [Oxford, 1958], 397). But I Peter declares: Even to this most lost part of humanity Christ, the One who died and rose, offers salvation.²⁰⁰

The doctrinal implications arising from such a position are sketched by Pannenberg in his book on the Apostles' Creed.²⁰¹ After remarking that the clause “he descended” was a later insertion into the Roman baptismal creed, Pannenberg suggests that for Jesus rejection by God's people which he experienced in his death would have implied rejection by God himself. Hell is to be understood as conscious separation from God of creatures who are utterly dependent upon the gifts of God for existence and sustenance.

Yet even this is not enough; for the Church has historically held another theology of the descent into hell, seeing it not in terms of Christ's suffering but of his triumph over death and hell [cf. Ephesians 4.10;²⁰² Colossians 1.18-20].

²⁰⁰ L. Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1993, page 259. The commentary appeared in translation for the first time in 1993; it was published in German in 1978 as *Der erste Petrusbrief* by Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, of Göttingen. That publication was posthumous, for Goppelt had died in 1973. In his discussion of the passage 1 Peter 3.18 - 4.6, Michaels refers to Goppelt, but takes a contrary view. See above, page 80f.

²⁰¹ W. Pannenberg, *The Apostles' Creed in the Light of Today's Questions*, SCM, London, 1972, pages 90-95.

²⁰² I acknowledge that not all exegetes understand τὰ κατώτερα μέρη τῆς γῆς as a reference to Christ's descent to hell. G. B. Caird, *Paul's Letters from Prison*, OUP,

The universalist tendency of the 1 Peter text was bold even for the early church. Only in the face of considerable controversy was Origen able to develop this idea, and to talk of the redemption of Adam. Later, the harrowing of hell became a prominent theme of Christian art - both in the mystery plays and in painting.

As the tradition of the early church about the descent to the dead developed, it found its most radical expositor in Origen for whose theology it had great soteriological importance. He asks the very questions which the funeral officiant is forced to ask. "Who is to be saved?" "Is the gospel good news only for a few or for all?" "Is there hope for the dead?" His answers depend upon his understanding of the immortality of the soul and upon his doctrine of the resurrection of the body. Yet such beliefs were available to his contemporaries; where he begins to break new ground in his perception that the descent and proclamation to the dead place salvation in a universal context.

Hades (by which name Origen refers to Sheol and from which he distinguishes Gehenna - the eternal fire) is the region of the dead, but it is a place where God's Old Testament saints await Christ's passion and descent following the sins of Adam which closed the gates of Paradise. Christ's descent to Hades reverses the devil's captivity of humanity:

After having vanquished the demons, his enemies, Christ led the people, who were under their sway, as if these people were the booty of victory and the spoils of salvation.²⁰³

Here is an echo of Ephesians 4.8.²⁰⁴ Hades is closed forever; the faithful may enter Paradise through the now open gates.

Origen is sensitive to the Gnostic charge that eternal punishment is unfitting for a "spiritual" God, and reflects Old Testament rather than New Testament images. He therefore spiritualizes the fire of Gehenna and sees its "food and material" as the wood, straw and stubble to which St. Paul refers in 1

1976, pages 73ff., for example, prefers a reference to the outpouring of gifts at Pentecost.

²⁰³ Origen, *Hom. Num.*, 18.4.

²⁰⁴ *He ascended into the heights;
he took captives into captivity;
he gave gifts to men.*

Corinthians 3. In so doing he draws on Stoic ideas in which the “passions” are compared with a burning fever. It is in this connection that he develops the doctrine of ἀποκατάστασις.

In fact, as Crouzel notes,²⁰⁵ Origen rarely uses either the noun or its cognate verb, and he does not regard the teaching as anything new. Indeed, he views his work as an explication of the Pauline doctrine of 1 Corinthians 15.25. It is often suggested that in *de Principiis* Origen suggests that the devil will share in the final restoration.²⁰⁶ Yet the passage in question refers to death rather than to the devil. While elsewhere death and the devil are linked as the final enemy and represent a denial of all that God is, there is no explicit link made in this context. In a later text, the *Letter to Friends in Alexandria*, Origen records that he is alleged to believe in the salvation of the devil and forthrightly rejects such a view.²⁰⁷

What happens to me when I die? For the faithful, the fire of judgement awaits, yet its primary purpose is purification - a process which can begin in this life as the believer's thoughts and actions are purged by God. For those who have been mystically united with the death and resurrection of Christ in baptism the hope is of restoration with and by God. As for the fate of the unrepentant, Origen hesitates to adopt an unqualified doctrine of eternal punishment - the objections of the Gnostics and his own philosophical conscience have too much force. The references in scripture to eternal fire are very powerful, his personal hope for a universal ἀποκατάστασις is unremitting. In balancing the two, Origen returns to the concept of free will and has to allow that it must be possible for some (if freedom is to be true freedom) to reject the proffered restoration.

The importance of Origen's contribution is that he understands the descent to the dead as soteriological myth. His Platonism is alien to my anthropology,

²⁰⁵ H. Crouzel, *Origen*, page 257.

²⁰⁶ Origen, *de Principiis*, 3.6.5.

²⁰⁷ *De Principiis* is not to be taken as Origen's final statement, but as an interim stage in theological exploration. In his *Commentary on John* he describes how consistency of habit produces a human character or nature. This means security for the righteous who have become by frequent charity by nature unchangeably free, it also means that the demons (and, of course, the devil) make themselves evil by nature.

but I share his belief that the proclamation of which 1 Peter 3.18- 4.6 speaks is hope for the dead.

For the dying, the descent of Jesus to the dead on Holy Saturday has two implications: that death is subject to the creative word of God and that where we go alone Jesus himself has gone alone; that even in our death and beyond our dying the cross of Christ has redemptive power.

Pastorally, the first implication means that in the mystery of death we encounter the greater mystery of God. In our death we lose all that we own: our material possessions, our status, our achievements, our ambitions - even our self and identity. In this stripping we are left alone with nothing, and here we are confronted by the mystery of God who can take of that nothing and make a new creation.²⁰⁸ The priestly account of creation in Genesis 1 talks of the creative spirit of God hovering over the water. Out of that primeval chaos God creates *ex nihilo*. In our dying and death, where the homeostasis of our bio-system disintegrates and deteriorates into chaos, God is at work once again in a new creation.²⁰⁹

The second implication is yet more daring. While death is a once for all event in which lies judgement,²¹⁰ judgement is not to be understood simply as the condemnation of those who have not professed faith in their earthly life in propositional terms which accord with our understanding of the gospel. In the mercy and grace of God, even the people of Sodom and Gomorrah are led out from the realm of dead in Jesus' great victory parade. The universalist implications of the cross are worked out more forcefully here than perhaps much evangelism allows.²¹¹ The death of Jesus is the death of death, which

²⁰⁸ Strictly speaking, if our death is total, there is no "we"; language fails us.

²⁰⁹ I understand creation as God's producing order, pattern and system out of chaos. The doctrine of creation is a statement of the priority of the Creator over the creation, the distinction between the two, and creation's dependence upon God for all its existence. He is the source of all energy, he orders it and calls it into being where it manifests itself in beings (cf. John Macquarrie's *Principles of Christian Theology*, SCM, London, 1966).

²¹⁰ Barth is insistent that death "is the sign of God's judgement on us". See *Church Dogmatics, III.2*, pages 595-598.

²¹¹ If the death of Christ is really the death of death, and if there is hope for the dead in the descent to the dead, does not this have implications for those who believe that the judgement arises from human response to the gospel in this life? The imperative is

no longer has power to separate the creation from the source of all life and love. The τετέλεσται from the cross is not simply the cry of a man who has accomplished what he has set out to do. It is the utterance of a pious Jew who means by “*it is accomplished*” no less than “God has brought to its goal his plan of salvation”.²¹² The descent to the dead is for the proclamation of this gospel to those apparently otherwise without hope.

Any theology of the cross must in the end be a theology of hope offered to those whom Moltmann has called “the no future people”.²¹³ We must now consider, therefore, how the death of Jesus is for others.

Christ the Representative: the Paschal Mystery and human death

Jesus is often referred to as the Man for Others. This may be taken variously to mean the one who offered himself in service to others, or the one who by his life and death offered himself to God for the world. It is this second emphasis which I want to examine. In particular I want to ask in what sense we can describe the death of Jesus as being “for us”.

Evangelical theology has primarily espoused a substitutionary theory of the atonement in which Jesus is seen as dying in our place, instead of us. The problem for such a view is twofold and simply stated. Where is the morality in putting a guiltless person to a death which the guilty deserve? How can one man’s death release all others from their deaths?

The answers traditionally given rely upon an appreciation of the awfulness of sin, the demand for a perfect sacrifice, and the idea that the sinlessness of the one will pay for the sin of the many. However powerfully these suggestions

often announced in terms such as, “If they do not hear, they will go to a godless eternity”. The theology which I have evinced argues a different case.

²¹² Cf. Matthew 7.7, where “it will be given you” and “it will be opened to you” are ways of describing how God answers the petitions of those who pray.

We ought also to note that τέλος and τετέλεσται are cognate. The cry from the cross indicates that God has in Christ brought bios and zoe into perfect (τέλειος!) unity.

²¹³ The phrase occurred in a public lecture he gave in Liverpool in the early 1980’s entitled “The Double Presence of Christ”. The reference was to the people of Matthew 25.31-46 to whom service was given or from whom it was withheld.

are made and however widespread their acceptance, there are those who feel that there is an unresolved moral dilemma in this theory.

The substitutionists point to the Marcan phrase “a ransom for many”, and rightly interpret the Greek preposition ἄντι to mean “in place of”. Yet the NT appearances of ἄντι are overwhelmed by the incidence of ὑπέρ which does not mean “in place of” but “on behalf of”.²¹⁴ The NT emphasis is not on substitution but on representation. For example, the whole of the Pauline theology of being in Christ depends on representation rather than on substitution. It is not so much that Christ dies in my place so that I do not have to die, but that his death makes sense of and gives meaning and hope to mine. John Robinson argued this in his essay “What future for a unique Christ?”;²¹⁵ but perhaps the most complete modern exposition has been Dorothee Sölle’s *Christ the Representative*.²¹⁶

Such an understanding leads to a soteriological shift. Rather than seeing Jesus’ death as objectively complete, the substitutionary view relies upon the believer to appropriate the death of Jesus for her/himself. Substitutionists deny this; but in my judgement their view leads us to see the death of Jesus as rather like a French railway ticket which needs validating before it can be used. The salvation afforded by the Cross is limited by human response, which must validate it to render it effective.²¹⁷

A representationist, however, may argue that the cross is complete in itself. The work has been done, regardless of human response. The weakness of this view, it may be argued, is that it denies to human beings their accountability before God. Yet a thorough-going representationist view may argue that

²¹⁴ There are 13 instances of ἄντι meaning “for” in the New Testament. Of ὑπέρ there are 132 appearances meaning “on behalf of”.

²¹⁵ J. A. T. Robinson, “What Future for a Unique Christ?”, *Where Three Ways Meet*, SCM, 1987

²¹⁶ D. Sölle, *Christ the Representative*, SCM, 1967

²¹⁷ It may well be argued that the substitutionist is more concerned with the theme of judgement than with that of the Cross. Judgement is punishment rather than correction, and the Cross is an avoidance of judgement rather than an implementation of it.

Jesus has made the acceptable response to God, on behalf of (ὑπέρ) all - as their representative.²¹⁸

Such a divergence between two main lines of Christian doctrine leads to a difference in proclamation. The preacher who espouses a substitutionary view will be eager to urge repentance and faith in the hearer. The representationist will talk of these things as accomplished by Christ, and invite the listener to live what has been given.

I have suggested that the NT speaks of the death of Christ as having cosmic significance. Such a view leads towards a universalist position, and is better

²¹⁸ Sölle argues a completely contrary case to mine in distinguishing substitution from representation. She argues that it is substitution which eradicates human response, and representation which demands it. The essence of representation for Sölle is its provisionality. She insists that substitution denies to the person substituted her/his identity and accountability, since the substitute's action is complete in itself, and the one in whose stead it is done has no more to do. Representation, Sölle argues, does not replace the one represented, and so the provisional nature of what is done can be responsibly appropriated by the one on whose behalf it is undertaken.

Where I disagree with Sölle is in my appreciation of how the responses to substitution and representation can be made. In my view, the substitutionary theory of the atonement leaves salvation as an individualistic experience which can only be experienced by faith's completing Christ's work. The cross is defective insofar as it cannot save without personal belief. The representative theory of the atonement does not deny to human beings their accountability in faith, but it presents the death of Christ as effective *de facto*, and it offers a corporate understanding of salvation. Such a view means that participation in salvation, as Sölle observes, gives the church a representative task role for and to the world:

What can be real for us is the actor who plays God's role, the leading player who is followed by many others. What he, the leading player, did - we can do too. Namely, play the role of God in conditions of helplessness. We can claim God for each other. Certainly this play-acting of ours retains the provisional character of all theatrical performances. God, too, is not so fully represented by his representative as to leave nothing of himself still to come. Nevertheless, the identification with God, which Christ ventured and pioneered, means that this identification is at the same time possible for us. We, too, can now play God for one another.

[*Christ the Representative*, page 142]

I acknowledge the force of Sölle's argument, and share many of her conclusions as they delineate substitution as an annihilation of the one who is replaced. Nonetheless, my own preference is for Robinson's exposition of the doctrine of representation rather than Sölle's. At least in part this is because Robinson's question is concerned with salvation as the coherence of all things in God. His sermon "What Future for a Unique Christ?" was preached to the Divinity College of McMaster University, the words of whose motto he quotes with approval in his peroration (*Where Three Mays Meet*, page 14) - τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν [Colossians 1.17b].

expressed by the understanding of Christ as representative than as substitute. In the context of the funeral, the gospel can be proclaimed, but there will be a determination to avoid using the emotional trauma of bereavement as an occasion of further stress. What can be appropriately addressed are: the reality of death, and the need for separation; the change that this death means, and the need for transition; the life beyond this death, both for the deceased and for the bereaved, and the need for incorporation.²¹⁹

That is to put it in anthropological terms, but there is here the language of conversion in which the old is left behind and the new is begun. In the context of the funeral rite, questions about God, death, and destiny can be confronted with hope. This hope will not be a whistling in the dark, but will express a confidence in the cross of Christ as the place where God brings light out of darkness and life out of death.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have offered a new theological anthropology which has sought to describe human personhood in unitary terms. I have shown how this can be applied to Christ, such that his life, death and resurrection are seen as normative. I have discussed how the death of Christ means hope for the dead, and how his death and resurrection are representative rather than substitutionary in their effect. For funeral liturgies, this will mean a twofold agenda. The totality of death can be confronted without qualification, finding its answer in a new creation which is the resurrection of the *nephesh*. Moreover, the death and resurrection of the deceased will be seen as taken up into the death and resurrection of Jesus.

This chapter has offered a theological response to the philosophical question of the death of an individual. In the chapter which follows, I shall propose a theological response to the question of ritual mourning raised by social anthropology.

²¹⁹ Neither Robinson nor Sölle speak of representation in relation to the 'forgotten day' of the Paschal Mystery. As I hope to show in the next chapter, such an omission in the context of death, bereavement, and the funeral leads to ritual and pastoral awkwardness.

Chapter Six: Rites of Passage

In Chapter Four I identified some of the impact that social anthropologists have had on the study of death and its associated rituals. In particular I described how van Gennep had identified three elements in rites of passage: separation, transition and incorporation. It is to van Gennep's work that I wish to respond in this chapter. I intend to demonstrate how the threefold structure which he distinguished can be linked to the Easter triduum. In this way a Christological shape can be given to funeral liturgy

The common sense answer to the question "What is the purpose of a funeral?" is "To bury Mary". Clearly the task of disposing of the body is a primary one. However, if there were no more to it than that, we could dispose of human remains by burying them in the back garden without further ado. Yet even when children bury the hamster or the budgerigar in the back garden, there is more to be done than simply making a hole in the ground, depositing the inert body, and covering it over. There is a social ritual. There is a procession to the grave, there is a solemnity either of silence or of words - perhaps of tears, there is a recognition that what previously had life has life no more, and that a loved thing has gone.

I do not want to make any exaggerated claims about the anthropological significance of pets' funeral rites. What I do want to suggest is that, while adult information and suggestion probably support the child in their ritualization, it is ritual that we require in the face of death. Social anthropologists have commented in great depth about death rites in primitive societies, and some of the earliest archaeological evidence that we have of human societies comes from funerary sites. Funerals are important since they mark the passing of a human being from the society of the living to the world of the dead. Death is a passage which the funeral formalizes; it is a rite of passage.²²⁰

In the funeral we may well ask whether it is the dead alone who undertake this passage, or whether there is a parallel passage which the living must follow.²²¹

²²⁰ See my earlier discussion of van Gennep's work in Chapter Four, at page 62.

²²¹ For many people this will seem a strange question to ask. They will see far more clearly the passage that the living traverse than the one which the dead follow. In particular, Protestants will fight shy of the suggestion that a funeral enacts anything for the dead, citing Hebrews 9.27:

The liturgical agenda

I wish to suggest that the funeral should mark a dual rite of passage in which the dead and the living share. For the dead, the journey passes from life in this world, through death, to life beyond death. For the living, the way leads from life where the departed has been part of their physical experience, through bereavement, to life where the deceased is present by recollection and memory. This double procession motif is based not only upon the work of contemporary human sciences, but upon the earlier Christian tradition of the funeral procession.²²²

At the beginning of the thesis (page 3), I cited the answer of the Church of England's Liturgical Commission in 1965 to the question of the funeral agenda. In the same period the Liturgical Constitution of Vatican II said of the burial rite:

it should express more clearly the paschal nature of Christian death.

The two statements are profoundly important in their emphasis on the funeral as an occasion of ministry relating to death rather than to bereavement. While it is the living who gather to form the liturgical assembly at a funeral, it is not they who are the focus of what is to happen. This is not an opinion which has been unanimously held at all times among Christians. The Reformers in the days of Calvin and Knox would have subscribed to quite a different view. They agreed that the corpse should be reverently buried, but they used the funeral as an occasion upon which to warn the living of the last judgement and the certainty of hell for those who remained unrepentant.²²³

it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgement.

[NRSV]

They will mean by their quotation that death ends the possibility of repentance, and hence any amendment in the deceased's eternal destiny. Yet the story in 1 Peter 3 and 4 of the descent of Christ to the dead seems to suggest something different, and I regard these texts as crucial to the discussion of the *kerygma* at funerals. (See my discussion in Chapter Five at pages 80f.).

²²² The processional nature of a funeral will be examined in Chapter Seven, when I undertake a brief historical and theological review of the practice of early Christian funeral rites.

²²³ Cf., for example, Calvin, *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, III.25.5.

I have already indicated in Chapter Five that I understand the death of Christ in terms which are more universalist in tone than anything the Reformers believed. My position leads me to take the view that the funeral is more than a memorial of the dead and a warning to the bereaved, although it carries within itself the grim reminder *memento mori*. In what follows I intend to suggest how the Paschal Mystery may be taken as a paradigm of the rite of passage which is heralded in the funeral.

The Paschal Mystery and van Gennep

Good Friday and Separation

Good Friday is the day of death. It is the moment of separation. However, I do not see this separation as being of the soul from the body. The words of Jesus "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" [Luke 23.46] are an utterance of dependence upon God, not an anthropological definition. Rather, Jesus is separated from the source of life: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" [Matthew 27.46; Mark 15.34].

One religious development within Israel spoke of resurrection as a way in which the righteousness of God could express itself. God could yet act justly even when the wicked appeared to have escaped in this life without punishment and the righteous to have died without reward. It is not unduly surprising to note that the Wisdom movement which concerned itself with this issue of theodicy also introduced into Jewish theology the Greek idea of the immortal soul. Jesus rejected the Sadducaic arguments against belief in the resurrection, and his confidence was in the God of the living. Among these were to be numbered the patriarchs [Matthew 22.32; Mark 12.27; Luke 20.38].

Yet for the pious Jew there was the parallel belief that Sheol was a land of shadows where the life-force seeped away as the flesh fell from the bones. For Jesus death was not merely a shuffling off of "this mortal coil", as it was for Hamlet. Nor was it instantaneously "the gate to life immortal".²²⁴ Death for Jesus may well have implied the descent to Sheol, where the praise of God

²²⁴ The phrase is taken from Christian Gellert's hymn
 Jesus lives! thy terrors now
 Can, O death, no more appal us
 translated by Frances Cox.

falls silent. This is quite a different emphasis from that derived from the body-soul view of human personhood.

I affirm that when Jesus died, he died completely; and that in our dying so do we. We do not have immortal souls which escape the consequences of our human existence; *a priori*, immortality belongs to God alone. When we die, we die utterly. Nothing remains. Our *nephesh* disintegrates with the collapse of *bios*. In that dying our ability to respond to the calling of God (our *zoe*) also comes to its end - the praise of God falls silent.

Good Friday demonstrates to us the terror of death in the loss of communion with God. When the Evangelists describe the death of Jesus they speak of the tearing of the Temple curtain, of the sun going dark, of the graves giving up their dead. The death of Jesus has implications for us in the shattering of our religious systems, in the dissolution of the creation, and in the re-awakening of the human past.

In the funeral we need to articulate this sense of total loss. The particular death which a given funeral summons us to mourn is dreadful because it is in one sense the end of the world. Death is one of the four eschatological verities. It calls upon us to ask ultimate questions. For the Christian believer such questions turn us to God as revealed in Christ; and the question of death can only be answered by the death of Christ. In the cosmic disturbances surrounding his death there are clues which suggest to us how we may deal with the end of the world we have shared with the deceased. As we enter the darkness of death and bereavement, we enter the drama of the cross.

Holy Saturday and Transition

The transition which Holy Saturday marks is frequently forgotten in talk of the Paschal Mystery and almost never considered in the context of funerals.²²⁵ Yet it is in this area of chaos and transition that the 1 Peter texts can make their great contribution to the liturgies of death. The early and medieval church understood the descent to the dead to be a harrowing of hell in which the victory of the cross was effective even among those whom previous ages had condemned. In the total loss which is the human reckoning of death, there

²²⁵ Not the least of Hans Urs von Balthasar's contributions to theological reflection is his great text on this theme *Mysterium Paschale*, published in English by T. & T. Clark of Edinburgh in 1990.

is yet an activity of God which leads to salvation - even in the face of human judgement.

Language about judgement (or, to use Pittenger's language, "appraisal"²²⁶) is part of what we use when we speak of the dead - even if we adopt the advice *nil nisi bonum de mortuis*. To speak of the dead is to appraise them, to summarize their lives, and we make our judgements as much in what we omit to say as in what we dare to speak. While clergy may rightly wish to refrain from comment which could be interpreted as speaking the judgement of God on the eternal destiny of the departed, part of the task of the funeral is to address the phase of transition.

At the funeral service the chaotic nature of the transitional is abundantly clear. The reality of what death means is frequently only just beginning to manifest itself. People who have been able to "cope" thus far, or who have really not properly taken it in, are now confronted with the finality of death - especially at the committal. The funeral does not mark a distinct hinge between life and death, but expresses much of the ebb and flow between acceptance and non-acceptance that marks so much of early bereavement.

Failure in the liturgy to express the transitional (however partially) is failure to acknowledge the psychological state of the mourners. More critically, it is a failure to connect death with the new creation in which God calls forth order from the chaos once again. It is my contention that the story of the descent to the dead offers Christian ministers a means of making this connection.

The proclamation of the gospel to the dead is a declaration that death no longer holds creation in thrall. The judgement of God begins with the defeat of death. Death marks our finitude as created beings, but it does not control the Creator. The descent to the dead announces to the disintegrating *nephesh* that there is yet another word to be spoken which inaugurates new life (*bios* and *zoe*). Death is not extinction but transition; it is, indeed, the gate to eternal life. This sense of movement from death to life must form part of Christian funeral rites, if they are truly to express the Paschal Mystery and to set forth Christ the Representative.

²²⁶ N. Pittenger, *"The Last Things" in a Process Perspective*, Epworth Press, London, 1970. See above at page 93.

Easter Day and Incorporation

A unitary anthropology might lead some to draw the inference that the apparent logical corollary is that the resurrection was a physical and not a 'spiritual' event. However, to describe the resurrection as a physical event is to miss the point. Bishop David Jenkins is right to seek more than a conjuring trick with bones. At the Areopagus St Paul talks of the "standing up of corpses" [Acts 17 - the actual phrase is used in verse 32: ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν]. The phrase amuses the Greeks precisely because of their body-soul anthropology which leads them inexorably to contrast the immortality of the soul with the corruptibility of the body.²²⁷

The resurrection of Jesus is not an act of his own but of God the Creator and New-Creator. In it his life (*bios* and *zoe*) is reconstituted in a new *nephesh*. The resurrection of the body (the *nephesh*) means that out of death we are incorporated finally into God and into the Christ. In the funeral this story must also be told. It is a story which speaks not of survival but of a new order of life whose significance is for the living as for the dead.²²⁸

The Paschal Mystery is a threefold witness to an eschatology which Christian faith asserts is not merely an irruption of chaos but is of teleological significance. Our end is made part of God's purpose. I must therefore briefly turn to the question of eschatology.

Eschatology

The eschatological themes of judgement, heaven and hell have been discarded by some as inappropriate categories of thought for contemporary theology. Our world which has seen the trenches of the Somme, the gas chambers of

²²⁷ What then is the resurrection of the body if it is other than the immortality of the soul? While acknowledging the shift in emphasis, we do not necessarily need to see the body-soul description as inferior to a "purer" *nephesh* anthropology. It is probably better to view the change as an appropriate response to a shifting anthropological understanding. What we have to decide is whether the body-soul view is an essential part of Christian theology, or whether we need to make a fresh appraisal of human existence in the light of our own contemporary scientific and philosophical categories.

A full discussion of this issue is to be found in Simon Tugwell's book *Human Immortality and the Redemption of Death*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1990.

²²⁸ For the living the resurrection of Jesus is experienced as "now but not fully". For the dead raised to life it is promise fulfilled.

Auschwitz, and the horrors of the gulags - to name but some of the hells which have visited the twentieth century. Hell is in this life, we need no other.²²⁹

Moltmann and others have offered us a theology which responds directly to the hells of present experience. God is not seen as impassively distinct from the creation, but entering into its sufferings.²³⁰ Indeed, the *kreuztheologie* movement of German theology advances the view that God is most clearly seen as God in the Cross which is a paradigm for all human suffering and death. In affirming such an understanding, Moltmann expressly draws upon the tradition of Luther's *theologia crucis*.

Process Theology also challenges static understandings of God and one of its exponents, Norman Pittenger, argued very forcibly for eschatology, in his "*The Last Things*" in *a Process Perspective*.²³¹ He suggested that love was not truly love which did not see clearly. God cannot turn a blind eye to what is wrong with things - that would be to sentimentalize God's love; and it is precisely this "appraisal" that gives us the hope of salvation.

Heaven (life lived freely in the presence of God) and hell (deliberate alienation from God) are part of Christian doctrine. We can only ignore their place in the scheme of things by altering that teaching. While I wish to re-interpret the tradition, I am unable to change it and remain true to it at the same time. For love to be love there must be a relationship of freedom. Heaven and hell are responses to the divine love. Love cannot be coerced - even by God, so there must always be the possibility of alienation. To this extent an absolute universalism must, in my view, be modified by human freedom. More than that, I believe, cannot be said.

The pictures of bottomless pits and everlasting fires must point to a reality if they are to be true. But we ought not to confuse pictures with reality: the

²²⁹ See the earlier reference to Sartre's *Huis Clos* on page 15.

²³⁰ J. Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, SCM, London, 1974. See especially pages 211-214 in which Moltmann addresses Luther's *theologia crucis*.

From a different perspective the English Anglican W. H. Vanstone came to a similar conclusion in *Love's Endeavour, Love's Expense*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London 1977.

²³¹ N. Pittenger, "*The Last Things*" in *a Process Perspective*, Epworth, London, 1970.

finest portrait is not the person, the greatest statue is only a suggestion.²³² Funeral liturgies may be able to deal with these issues by reference to our response to the love of God, but we need to be very cautious in the imagery we use - particularly at the crematorium!

Back to the funeral

Can the funeral address the questions of ritual from a theological perspective to which I have referred in any meaningful way? If by this we mean: Can the funeral complete the rite of passage which death and bereavement initiate, then I think we must say, "No". However, that would be to misunderstand the nature of ritualization. What the funeral sets out to do is to rehearse the journey which the living and the dead must travel. It needs in some way therefore to articulate a sense of passage even where it cannot itself be that passage in its entirety.

Much work has been undertaken by psychiatrists and bereavement counsellors in studying the nature of mourning and in proposing schemes of support whereby those who are bereaved may learn to live with their loss. We know that the process is drawn out, and most suggest that at least a year is needed to work through this grief - often longer. Whatever the stages and patterns are which we discern, the categories are not watertight compartments. All this is agreed, and so much work has been done in this field that the Christian minister is often left to assume that (s)he has simply to apply the lessons in order to get the bereaved "back to normal". Yet there is a danger here. In terms of van Gennep's language of liminality, to get back to normal is to fail to reach the new room of incorporation, since getting back is distinctly different from passing through. The *limen* is a gateway, and Christian faith understands this when it speaks of death as the gateway to life.

There is also a psychological danger in the language of "back to normal". Regression is not a healthy state, and "getting back" (even to normal) may be simply a form of regression.²³³ The world to which we return after Mary's funeral is both continuous with and discontinuous with the world in which she

²³² Even among those who continue to express their eschatology in traditional images, there is a reluctance in the conduct of the funeral to consign the deceased to the eternal fire and the insatiable worm.

²³³ See also the reference to regression and rites of passage in Chapter Four, at page 65.

was physically present. For the living there must be a new and radical ordering of living in which *bios* and *zoe* become one. Such a change is what St Paul calls *καὶνὴ κτίσις* and the Fourth Gospel calls being born again (*ἄνωθεν*). In calling us to leave the past behind and through the turmoil of death summoning us to begin life anew, the funeral announces the gospel which itself is a call to follow Christ, to engage upon a journey to God.

Conclusion

Death has a social dimension which the funeral must address. The dead and the living make their way to the place of separation. Thence through the disintegration of the *nephesh* and the turmoil of loss they enter an arena of transient chaos. Their journey is to a new order of being in which they live in different ways. The funeral needs to set forth this unfolding journey. A Christian funeral will do so by reference to the way which Christ himself has gone, inviting the living and the dead to find their future in the Risen One.

The three days of the Paschal Mystery offer a very convenient vehicle for van Gennepe's threefold elements as they are found in funeral rites. Together with the Representative Christology and the exegesis of the descent myth, which I offered in Chapter Five, they form a theological and pastoral basis for future liturgical experiment.

In Part Three of the thesis I shall offer an account of the historical development of Christian funeral rites and review a number of contemporary Christian liturgies. This will be followed in Part Four by some proposals of my own.

Part Three: Death and Liturgy

Introduction

The Christian funeral is a call to journey with God from glory to glory. Contemporary funerary rites do not always give this impression. The Church of England's Liturgical Commission is presently considering the new liturgies which must supersede those of the *Alternative Service Book* (ASB). Early reports suggest that these will be liturgically more elegant and ritually more comprehensive.²³⁴ It is devoutly to be hoped so; the present ASB funeral rite has little to commend it. However, two sister churches in the Anglican Communion have made real contributions in more recent days.

The Scottish Episcopal Church in its *Revised Funeral Rites* of 1987 consulted throughout with Dr Colin Murray Parkes, whose book on bereavement is still a classic text.²³⁵ *Revised Funeral Rites* also used material from the French Catholic rites whose poetry and beauty survived their translation into English. Here there is glory. The Church of the Province of New Zealand has drawn heavily on indigenous Maori funerary traditions, and has incorporated them into the Christian texts.²³⁶ The results are magnificent, not least in the rite of the incorporation of the bereaved into new life.

The new Roman Catholic *Order of Christian Funerals* has had its critics. In the main they have been critics of detail - I shall have more general issues to raise in Chapter Eight. However, I remain unconvinced that the rites have handled adequately the ritual element of transition (despite the traditional Catholic interest in this phase of death in its doctrine of purgatory).

Among the Free Churches the United Reformed Church has offered its own liturgical revision in recent years. Funeral liturgy is very much alive! Yet much remains to be done.

²³⁴ My observation arises from discussions with those whose personal computers hold draft proposals. Since these have not yet formed part of the agenda of the Liturgical Commission, it is inappropriate for me to make any detailed comment.

²³⁵ C. M. Parkes, *Bereavement: Studies of grief in Adult Life* (2nd edition), Penguin, London, 1986. See earlier, page 52 following.

²³⁶ See my work on Anglican Funeral Rites in *Kommentierte Edition der orientalischen, lateinischen und reformatorischen Sterbe und Begräbnisriten*, The University of Mainz, 1994, and the discussion which follows in Chapter Eight.

Part Three reviews Christian funeral rites both of the past and the present. Chapter Seven introduces the historical background to the rise of Christian liturgies of death, and describes some of that development from early days to the medieval period. In Chapter Eight I undertake a detailed review of a number of liturgies currently in use.

Because the words on the paper and the enacted rite are not always the same thing, the review of liturgical provision can only be partial where there is no parallel examination of ritual practice. It is therefore important to note that in Part Four, where I make liturgical proposals, I also offer some indication of how these might work out in practice.

Chapter Seven: Past and Present

The historical beginnings of Christian funerals

Christian funerals began as soon as there were Christian dead; however, no liturgies have come down to us from the earliest days.²³⁷ In searching for early clues Geoffrey Rowell has argued that there were two main influences upon early Christian funerary rites: Jewish religious custom, and Roman secular practice.²³⁸

The burial of Jesus is marked by Jewish observance, and it is this mode of disposal of the corpse which Christianity adopted from Judaism.²³⁹ Talmudic and Mishnaic regulations are detailed in their references to burial and mourning; it is not unreasonable to infer that burial was a most important religious obligation within Judaism. Three stages of mourning were advocated: three days of weeping; abstinence from work until the end of the first week; less deeply formal mourning until the thirtieth day.

The first and second of these are described in Ecclesiasticus:

My son, shed tears for one who has died;
raise a lament for your grievous loss.
Shroud the body with proper ceremony
and do not neglect his burial.
With bitter weeping and passionate wailing
make your mourning worthy of him.
Mourn for a few days and avoid criticism;
then take comfort in your grief,
for grief may lead to death,
and a grieving heart saps the strength.
With the burial, grief should pass;
a life of misery is an affliction to the heart.

²³⁷ What the funeral of Stephen was like we can barely guess. Presumably in the very earliest cases Jewish rites were used - possibly with the addition of some resurrection hope. Kenneth Stevenson, in his book *The First Rites*, suggests that Stephen's funeral is Christianized by the martyr's dying words "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit". K. Stevenson, *The First Rites: Worship in the Early Church*, Marshall Pickering, London 1989.

²³⁸ D. G. Rowell, *The Liturgy of Christian Burial*, SPCK, London, 1977, pages 1-18.

²³⁹ The reluctance of the Christian church to adopt cremation is linked to the burial of Christ as much as to the negative symbolism in Judaeo-Christian mythology of fire after death. Several rites refer to the hallowing of the grave by the tomb of Jesus.

Do not abandon yourself to grief;
 put it from you and think of your own end.
 Never forget: there is no returning;
 you cannot help the dead and can only harm yourself.
 Remember that his fate will also be yours;
 "Mine today, yours tomorrow."
 When the dead is at rest, let his memory rest too;
 be comforted for him as soon as his spirit departs.²⁴⁰

Weep for the dead; he has taken leave of the light;
 weep for the fool: he has taken leave of his wits.

....

Mourning for the dead lasts seven days;
 for an impious fool it lasts all the days of his life.²⁴¹

Opportunity for the expression of grief was an intrinsic part of the Jewish funeral.²⁴² During the return from the grave the funeral procession stopped seven times to provide for the mourners to be comforted.²⁴³ Yet mourning was not to lead to demonstrative excess, and Rabbi Gamaliel II ordered the simplification of funerals, removing all elaborate and costly show. All Jews were to be buried at a cost which would not "leave the poor ashamed".

Important though provision for the mourners is, it is not the central act of Jewish funeral liturgy - rather, it is the *Kaddish* which is at the heart. This is the oldest element contained in the earliest written liturgy we possess - *Tzidduk Ha-din*.

Exalted and hallowed be his great name
 in the world which he created according to his will.
 May he let his kingdom rule
 in your lifetime and in your days
 and in the lifetime of the whole house of Israel,
 speedily and soon.

²⁴⁰ Ecclesiasticus 38.16-24.

²⁴¹ Ecclesiasticus 22.11a,12.

²⁴² Cf. the funeral of Jairus' daughter recorded in Mark chapter 5 - especially verses 38,39.

²⁴³ *Baba Bathra*, 100b, cited by Rowell, *The Liturgy of Christian Burial*, page 6.

Praised be his great name from eternity to eternity.
And to this say: Amen.²⁴⁴

Tzidduk Ha-din is a ninth century work, and is clearly too late to be understood as an influence upon Christian liturgical forms. Nonetheless, it echoes an older tradition of trust in the faithfulness and justice of God both in life and in death. As such, it shows us the roots of the Christian development.

If Christians adopted Jewish practices in funerary rites, it is equally clear that they were also influenced by the customs of the secular world of the Roman empire. By the second century AD, burial was more widespread than cremation, and a common pattern was emerging which J. M. C. Toynbee describes in his *Death and Burial in the Roman World*.²⁴⁵ At death, the nearest relative kissed the dying person in order catch the escaping soul. The eyes were closed, the body washed and formally dressed (*togatus*), and a coin placed in the mouth for payment to Charon, who would ferry the departed across the Styx.²⁴⁶ A funeral procession to the grave, dressed in black, would include (in the case of a distinguished man) an encomium in the Forum. Where there was a cremation, the ashes were drenched with wine. The procession would reassemble on its return to be purified from the contact with death.²⁴⁷ Later a funeral feast was held at the grave. On the ninth day after the funeral full mourning was concluded at a further feast during which a libation was poured to the shade of the deceased.

²⁴⁴ Jeremias notes the similarity of the *Kaddish* with the Lord's Prayer, and comments: "The Jewish community and the disciples of Jesus pray for the revelation of the glory of God in the same words. Yet there is a great difference between them. In the *Kaddish*, a community is praying which is still completely in the courts of waiting. The Lord's Prayer is prayed by men who know that God's gracious work, the great turning-point, has already begun."
[*New Testament Theology I: The Proclamation of Jesus*, SCM, London, 1971, page 199].

²⁴⁵ J. M. C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1971, pages 43-64.

²⁴⁶ The *viaticum* in later Christian practice became the administration of the eucharist to the dying. St Ambrose and St Basil were believed to have died with eucharist in their mouth. What was not allowed was communication *post mortem* - this was proscribed at the Council of Hippo in 393.

²⁴⁷ It is difficult to decide whether this rite of purification was in effect a re-admission to the world of the living or a final separation from the dead. The later rites may suggest the former, yet ritual washing may well contain a note of initiation and incorporation. Toynbee gives no explanation.

Common to the Roman and Jewish observances are the processional features - even to the extent of feasting. These processions provided opportunities for the therapeutic expression of grief. Yet the early Christian church was uneasy about such occasions, since in the Roman practice such feasts often became riotous occasions, and suggested the sustenance of the dead in their journey. However, this initial discomfort was overcome as the anniversaries of the martyrs were commemorated with feasts and the special days of mourning, adopted from Jewish custom, were given Christian glosses:

the third day after death was linked with the resurrection of Christ;

where the seventh day was observed, it was linked with the creation stories of Genesis;

where the ninth was kept, it was linked with the Lord's appearance to Thomas "after eight days";

a fortieth (rather than the Jewish thirtieth) day was more problematic, and different justifications were offered - among them the Ascension of Christ.²⁴⁸

As well as the similarity of what we might call the "liturgical rubric" of processions, there was a parallelism in the understandings held by Jews and Romans regarding the progress of the dead. In Roman theory the dead were escorted by the boatman Charon across the river Styx to the realm of the dead. In the Judaism of the inter-testamental period there arose the idea that the dead were guided to their abode by angels.²⁴⁹ Such ideas were Christianized and found their way into later Western liturgy in the antiphon:

²⁴⁸ The variation of custom between the keeping of the seventh and ninth days seems to have been dependent upon local usage rather than on competing theological preference. If the choice had been determined simply on theological grounds, I should expect to have found evidence of a debate within the early Church in which the different positions were hammered out. While it is impossible to draw a firm conclusion from silence, the lack of such a debate seems to me to indicate either that it was seen as a matter of theological unimportance or of local practice. Since funerary rites were taken seriously by the early Church, the balance of probabilities seems to me to lie in seeing the two traditions as having adopted local pre-Christian observances for which convenient theological explanations were readily to hand.

²⁴⁹ The development of angelology in the inter-testamental period shows signs of contact with Persian thought, and finds its expression in the apocalyptic writings. The Persian influence is evident in the New Testament Apocalypse where the angels of the seven churches appear to bear similar roles to those of the Persian *fravashi*.

In paradisum deducant te angeli, in tuo adventu suscipiant te martyres, et perducant te in civitatem sanctam Hierusalem.

If we ask about the distinctive Christian contributions which mark out new beginnings, we are guided by Kenneth Stevenson to Luke 16.22 and its image of the bosom of Abraham. Stevenson observes that this expression is not to be found in Jewish writings, and must therefore be regarded as original to the Christian tradition.²⁵⁰ Together with Stephen's self-commendation,

Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,²⁵¹

this seems to be the limit of our knowledge about the apostolic contribution to funerary rites. The dearth of other information from the apostolic period should not lead to the inference that funerals were unimportant. The principal issue relating to the death of Christian was that addressed by St Paul in 1 Thessalonians.

The congregation at Thessalonica shared with Paul the conviction that Christ's return was imminent. For them, therefore, the question of death and beyond was differently expressed. Since the parousia was so close, it might occur before their own death; how would those who had not died experience the resurrection, and how would those who had died experience the parousia? Paul deals first with those who have died; they will be raised. As for those still alive, in language reminiscent of that of the ascension, Paul posits an alternative resurrection in which they will be

caught up in clouds to meet the Lord in the air.²⁵²

As time went on and belief in the imminence of the parousia faded, this language and mapping were abandoned. Yet the central point for Paul always remains: whether we have died or are alive on the day of Christ's coming, we

²⁵⁰ Stevenson, *The First Rites*, page 93.

²⁵¹ Acts 7.59. Whether the echo of Jesus' words from the cross
 Father into your hands I commit my spirit [Luke 23.46]
 is consciously in Stephen's mouth or Luke's pen, we cannot be certain, but the echo is striking.

²⁵² 1 Thessalonians 4.17.

shall always be with the Lord.²⁵³ As he contends in his letter to the Christian community in Rome,

I am convinced that there is nothing in death or life, ...
nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of
God in Christ Jesus our Lord.²⁵⁴

Yet this concern with what we may call personal eschatology does not vanish entirely. Paul in prison begins to consider his own future and its end in death rather than with the parousia of Christ. In writing to the church at Philippi he frankly acknowledges the possibility of his imminent end. E. P. Sanders considers that the reference in chapter 1.21-25a reveals a conceptual shift:²⁵⁵

We see here the Greek idea of the immortality of the soul, which is individualistic rather than communal. It envisages the ascent of each person's soul at death, rather than the transformation of the entire group of believers, whether living or dead at Christ's return. Without posing these conceptions to himself as alternatives, Paul simply accepted them both. If he died, he would immediately be with Christ, at the end the Lord would return and bring his own, in a transformed state to be with him.²⁵⁶

It is not immediately clear why a concern with individual life after death should imply immortality of the soul rather than resurrection of the body. While we can agree with Professor Sanders that the emphasis has shifted from the corporate view of the Thessalonian letters, we do not need to accept that Paul has adopted a different philosophical stance - even in tandem.

²⁵³ Yet Paul urges his hearers not to be complacent (1 Thessalonians 4.11-12); the imminence of the parousia is not an excuse to withdraw from the responsibilities of this life (1 Thessalonians 4.11-12). In his later letter to the same congregation, Paul underlines the point: Christ's coming means judgement (2 Thessalonians 1.6-10).

²⁵⁴ Romans 8.38,39.

²⁵⁵ For me to live is Christ, and death is gain. If I am to go on living in the body [ἐν σαρκί] there is fruitful work for me to do. Which then am I to choose? I cannot tell. I am pulled two ways: my own desire is to depart and be with Christ - that is better by far; but for your sake the greater need is for me to remain in the body [τῇ σαρκί]. This convinces me: I am sure I shall remain.

²⁵⁶ E. P. Sanders, *Paul*, Oxford University Press, 1991, p.32.

This reading of Paul is repeated in Sanders' comments on 2 Corinthians 3-5; restating his opinion that Paul did not see the two views as alternatives, he concludes:

it is quite possible that some Diaspora synagogues had long since combined immortality and resurrection. In later Jewish and Christian literature they would be explicitly harmonized: at death the soul ascends to heaven, to await the resurrection; at the resurrection soul and body are reunited.²⁵⁷

It is quite a leap from the possibilities of Diaspora synagogues to a certainty about Pauline teaching, and the necessary connection remains to be demonstrated. There is no evidence that Paul, who addresses precisely this distinction between body and spirit, resurrection and immortality, with his new language of the spiritual body in 1 Corinthians 15, at some later stage abandoned this thinking. He could quite consistently have adapted his eschatology without shifting his anthropological stance.

All that this goes to show is that the practical issues of disposal were apparently not a contentious matter in the earliest Christian communities, but that the question of real concern was teleological.

Post-Apostolic Developments

Early liturgical detail is scant. Tertullian talks in *de Anima* of an "appointed office", but there is no indication as to its form or content.²⁵⁸ Eusebius indicates that Christian burial of the dead was a loving rite:

with willing hands they raised the bodies of the saints to their bosoms; they closed their eyes and mouths, carried them on their shoulders, and laid them out; they clung to them, embraced them, washed them and wrapped them in grave clothes.²⁵⁹

Rowell cites a prayer of Bishop Serapion and an apocryphal narrative of the funeral of Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist, to show that as well as prayer

²⁵⁷ Sanders, *Paul*, p.33.

²⁵⁸ Tertullian, *De Anima*, 51.

²⁵⁹ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 7.22,9.

and scripture, singing was a feature of the liturgy in this early period.²⁶⁰ Jerome says that the singing of psalms is intended to be a contrast with the pagan custom of weeping and lamentation.²⁶¹

The psalms sung are identified in the record of the burial of the Novatian bishop of Constantinople in 438 as Psalms 22, 23 and 116. While Psalm 23 would be recognised by many modern funeral congregations (chiefly from its metrical setting as a hymn), the psalm of abandonment and the Passover psalm would be less commonly known.²⁶² Chrysostom forbids the use of professional mourners,²⁶³ and the outward repression of grief is seen in Augustine's bearing at his mother's funeral.

And behold the corpse was carried to the burial; we went and returned without tears. For neither in those prayers which we poured forth unto thee, when the sacrifice of our ransom was offered for her, when now the corpse was by the grave's side, as the manner there is, previous to its being laid therein, did I weep even during those prayers.²⁶⁴

There was a determination to avoid in the liturgy any suggestion that death was a finality rather than a transition. The funereal black (or unbleached) clothes of secular Roman practice were avoided since, as Cyprian argued, the dead person now wore the white of heaven.²⁶⁵ Cyprian stresses the note of joy which should accompany the death of the Christian, as he develops his theme:

Let us show that this is what we believe so that we may not mourn the death even of our dear ones, and, when the day of

²⁶⁰ Rowell, *The Liturgy of Christian Burial*, pages 20-21.

²⁶¹ Jerome, *Ep.*, 108.30.

²⁶² The Baptist Union's *Patterns and Prayers for Christian Worship* and the Roman Catholic *Order of Christian Funerals* both propose Psalm 116; neither refers to Psalm 22. The Joint Liturgical Group's order refers to neither.

²⁶³ Chrysostom, *Homily on John*, 6.2.

²⁶⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, 9.

²⁶⁵ Cyprian, *de Mortalitate*, 20: the brethren
 "who have been freed from the world by the summons of the Lord should not be mourned, since we know that they are not lost, but sent before".

our own summons comes, without hesitation but with gladness we may come to the Lord at His call.²⁶⁶

The earliest collection of material which gives detailed information regarding Christian funeral liturgy is the *Apostolic Constitutions*. In Book VI, there is a clear indication that the eucharist was celebrated at funerals, following the reading of scriptures and the offering of prayers.²⁶⁷ In Book VIII prayers for the dead are proposed, though how widespread their use was remains unclear.²⁶⁸ The deacon was instructed to pray for the forgiveness of the deceased and for her/his reception

into the land of the pious that are sent into the bosom of Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob ...

The bishop prays similarly, but at greater length, and then pronounces a blessing which seeks for the living that they may

²⁶⁶ Cyprian, *de Mortalitate*, 24. Two paragraphs later, at paragraph 26, he writes:
 We should consider, dearly beloved brethren, that we have renounced the world, and are in the meantime living here as guests and strangers. Let us greet the day which assigns each of us to his own home, which snatches us hence, and sets us free from the snares of the world, and restores us to paradise and the heavenly kingdom. Who that has been placed in foreign lands would not hasten to return to his own country? Who that is hastening to return to his friends would not eagerly desire a prosperous gale, that he might the sooner embrace those dear to him? We regard paradise as our country - we already begin to consider the patriarchs as our parents: why do we not hasten and run, that we may behold our country, that we may greet our parents? There are a great number of our dear ones awaiting us, and a dense crowd of parents, brothers, children, is longing for us, already assured of their own safety, and still solicitous for our salvation. To attain to their presence and their embrace, what a gladness both for them and for us in common! What a pleasure there is in the heavenly kingdom, without fear of death; how lofty and perpetual a happiness with eternity of living.

²⁶⁷ *Apostolic Constitutions*, 6.30:
 Do you according to the Gospel, and according to the power of the Holy Spirit, come together even in the cemeteries, and read the holy Scriptures, and without demur perform your ministry and your supplication to God; and offer an acceptable eucharist, the likeness of the royal body of Christ, both in your congregations and in your cemeteries, and on the departures of them that sleep - pure bread that is made with fire and sanctified with invocations - and without doubting pray and offer for them that are fallen asleep.

²⁶⁸ See Rowell's discussion, *The Liturgy of Christian Burial*, page 26.

fight the good fight and finish their course, and keep the faith.²⁶⁹

There are also instructions for the observance of anniversaries.

It may not be unjust to infer that what is being sought for the living is what it was believed had been granted to the dead. The funeral links the living and dead not simply by the memory of the dead, but by exhortation and example for the living.

Just over a century later another Syrian document emerges, the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, in which the death of the Christian is celebrated as a joyous triumph. The corpse is received,²⁷⁰ there is a prayer of thanksgiving, and a reading of scripture relating to the resurrection; psalms are sung, then the catechuminate and penitents leave; a list of the faithful departed is read, and the recently deceased is named as worthy of inclusion; those present are then asked to pray for “an ultimate happiness in Christ”. The bishop prays over the body and then kisses the dead person - as do all present. There follows chrismation and a prayer for all the dead after which the body is buried in holy ground.

Developments in the East

The development of funeral liturgy in the Eastern Church proceeds from the *Apostolic Constitutions*. Although there are many variants for different deceased persons (male, female, adult, child, lay, ordained, etc.), there is an underlying common pattern:

- *introductory section in the home:*
prayers, responses, psalmody;
- *funeral procession to church:*
psalms, psalm-based liturgical chants;
- *service of prayers, hymns and psalmody:*
normally included two scriptures (Epistle and Gospel), possibly a ritual farewell (last kiss in Greek rite);

²⁶⁹ *Apostolic Constitutions*, 8.41.

²⁷⁰ The body of a priest was taken before the altar, a monk or lay person was left outside the sanctuary.

- *procession from church to place of burial:*
psalmody, anthems and responses;
- *burial:*
prayers of commendation, sprinkling of earth on
body.²⁷¹

The recurring prayer in the funeral liturgies of the Eastern church is ὁ Θεός τῶν πνευματικῶν καὶ πασῆς γῆς:

O God of spirits and of all flesh, who hast trampled down Death, and overthrown the Devil, and given life unto thy world: Do thou, the same Lord, give rest to the soul of thy departed servant *N*, in a place of brightness, a place of verdure, a place of repose, whence all sickness, sorrow, and sighing have fled away. Pardon every transgression which he hath committed, whether by word or deed or thought, for thou art a good God and lovest mankind; because there is no man who liveth and sinneth not: for thou only art without sin, and thy righteousness is to all eternity, and thy word is true. For thou art the Resurrection and the Life, and the Repose of thy departed servant, *N*, O Christ our God, and unto thee we ascribe glory, together with thy Father who is from everlasting, and thine all-holy and good and life-giving Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.²⁷²

In this Eastern tradition, which develops later in the Mozarabic and Chaldean rites, the movement through loss and grief, which we would identify as a rite of passage for the mourners, is expressed in a processional way. Indeed, the heart of the Chaldean rite is the funeral procession, which expresses the passage not so much of the mourners as of the dead from this life of suffering and sin to a life of sinlessness and incorruptibility. The body is clothed in the white which speaks of the heavenly garment, and the tone and theme of the funeral liturgy is, in William Macomber's description,

²⁷¹ Cf. Rowell, *The Liturgy of Christian Burial*, pages 31-32. Rowell goes on to list in detail the variant Easter rites:

Byzantine,
Armenian,
Coptic,
Ethiopian,
Syrian,
Assyrian,
Maronite.

²⁷² Reproduced *verbatim* in this translation from Rowell, *The Liturgy of Christian Burial*, page 54.

almost uniquely the glorification of God, that is that we may be enabled to glorify him at all times, especially in the face of death.²⁷³

The rite concludes with a prayer of blessing which rehearses the deceased's participation in salvation history:

May God, the Lord of all,
 who gave the commandment concerning thee,
 "Dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return",
 himself call thee
 and set thee at his right hand
 resplendent in the glory of the resurrection;
 and may the Holy Mysteries
 that thou hast received
 plead thy cause
 and win thee pardon at the judgement seat.
 Amen.²⁷⁴

The Mozarabic rite places a similar focus on the dead; many of its prayers and much of its worship are addressed to the Lord in the name of the deceased.

It is not that the bereaved are not supported, but their grief begins to be met by its expression in the context of the dead being raised to new life. This is a specifically Christian insight - that the hope of the dead is the hope of the bereaved. The gospel story finds clear articulation in the ritual observance of death. The last kiss and the psalms of lament display human sorrow; but the Christian determination to see death not as an end but as a transition means that grief is expressed in terms of joy. For the mourners the words of the psalmist are most pertinent,

He who goes forth weeping,
 bearing the seed for sowing,
 shall come home with shouts of joy,
 bringing his sheaves with him.²⁷⁵

²⁷³ Macomber, "The Funeral Liturgy of the Chaldean Church", *Concilium*, vol.2, no.4, February 1968, page 20.

²⁷⁴ Macomber, "The Funeral Liturgy of the Chaldean Church", *Concilium*, vol.2, no.4, February 1968, page 21.

²⁷⁵ Psalm 126.6 [Revised Standard Version].

The Medieval West

The common pattern which develops in the Western church is not in structure so very different from that of the East:

- preparation of the body;
- procession to the church;
- service in the church;
- procession to the grave;
- burial.

The particular emphases of the West were developed from within the monastic rites, rather than by the hierarchical differentiations of the Church in the East. Although there had always been prayers for forgiveness of the sins of the deceased, in the West there was a distinct shift towards a darker portrayal of death. The earlier liturgies were triumphs, now the mood became more sombre; a penal tone was now considered advisable, and the joy of the resurrection was muted - indeed, omitted.²⁷⁶

One example of this shift is the adoption of the *Dies Irae* into the funeral liturgies of the West.²⁷⁷ Its inclusion was influenced by the presence of other responses of the burial rites which reflected upon the theme of death and judgement, particularly the *Libera Me*. The *Dies Irae* was not formally in place in the Roman rite until the liturgical revision in 1570, but it had been widely enough used for it to attract the attention of the Reformers. The medieval concern with securing the release of the dead from pains of hell meant that the Requiem Mass took an ever larger place in the liturgy of the dead. For those who wanted to recover what they felt to be the evangelical certainties, in which death marked judgement without any further possibility of

²⁷⁶ Rowell, *The Liturgy of Christian Burial*, page 67, quotes the *Rationale divinatorum officiorum* (7.35.27,28) of Durandus of Mende (1230-1296), which notes that funerals should echo the mood of Holy Week when the *Gloria*, alleluias, pre-lectional blessings and joyful responses are all omitted. With the delay of the second coming, the impact of incorporation into the recent resurrection of Jesus faded. Christians had to live their lives from birth to death with the increasing realisation that their deaths would precede the return of Christ in glory. With baptism now universally administered to infants, the question of post-baptismal sin and accompanying judgement darkened the theological landscape, and death was seen less as a triumphant entry into the resurrection of the Lord. Rather, it became an arraignment at the Great Assize.

²⁷⁷ The original liturgical setting of the *Dies Irae* was in the service set for the First Sunday in Advent.

repentance, such practices were fit only to be swept away. In doing so the Reformers moved the focus of the funeral from the dead to the living.

The Reformation

There were two main positions relating to funerals within the Reformation: those who understood burial as a disposal of the body which had in itself no religious import,²⁷⁸ and those who saw the need for some religious rite in which the souls of the Christian dead might be commended to mercy of God.

While the former view held sway among some for a while, human need eventually overcame the minimalist approach, and even those most austere in their religious convictions eventually saw the need for some observance. The influence of the separationist view lends continuing weight to many funeral services in the frequent downgrading of the body's importance to which officiants give expression in their attempts to stress the survival of the "real person".

Among the Reformers who did attach religious significance to the funeral, however, there was an equal determination to root out any reference to purgatory:

for it is only by faith that God purges and cleanses his church from sin.²⁷⁹

The antiphons and psalms were frequently excised, and in their place a sermon was introduced in which there might be "a sincere preaching of the word of God".²⁸⁰ Services were to be simple and restrained. If the theme of the medieval West had been set by the *Dies Irae*, the tone of the Reformation was reflected by the equally sombre *Media vita* -

In the midst of life, we are in death.

²⁷⁸ This view is, in a sense, the logical conclusion of the separationist view of death. This earthly body has served its purpose; the soul (or spirit) will be clothed, but in a new body which will be utterly different in its make-up from the mortal coil which has just been shuffled off. All that we need to concern ourselves about is the soul; the body needs to be disposed of, certainly, and burial is a convenient means to this end.

²⁷⁹ B. J. Kidd, *Documents of the Continental Reformation*, 1911, pages 227-228, cited by Rowell, *The Liturgy of Christian Burial*, page 75.

²⁸⁰ Rowell, *The Liturgy of Christian Burial*, page 75.

Calvin saw the funeral as the pledge of new life, and urged its solemn performance as an occasion in which all bystanders might be reminded of the truth of the resurrection and so be shaken out of unbelief.²⁸¹ This understanding of the funeral as an occasion to sound a warning was softened by Knox, who advocated that the body should be taken directly to the grave, and that the minister should then return to the church to offer comfort to his people in a sermon which talked both of death and resurrection. With this view we see the beginning of the shift in direction which has led to the almost universal assumption that the focus in the funeral is on the pastoral obligation to the bereaved.

The Church of England went through several evolutions as by turn those more or less sympathetic to the Reformation gained ascendancy. The 1549 service is eucharistic, and follows the order set out below:

- a procession to the church or grave;
- the burial;
- a short office of the dead;
- a funeral eucharist.

In the office for the dead, Cranmer drew heavily on the old Sarum rite and included a traditional prayer for the dead. The continuity with Catholic tradition was thus firmly maintained.

Three years later, in 1552, psalmody was excised, and the funeral eucharist deleted. The *kyrie* and the Lord's Prayer were retained; but prayer for the dead was scrupulously avoided - it might have had a history in pious tradition, but it had no scriptural warrant, and should therefore be omitted. The soul was not committed to God, only the body to the ground. The Reformers successfully exercised a dominant pressure.

Elizabeth endorsed the 1552 order in 1559; but very soon in the years that followed conservative tradition was resurgent. In the remainder of Elizabeth's

²⁸¹ Cf. Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, 25.5. Note also my earlier reference to the Reformers in Chapter 6 (page 91).

reign only one bishop is on record as clearly having prohibited the funeral eucharist.²⁸²

By 1661 and the debate surrounding the introduction 1662 Prayer Book, the Reformation position was articulated in a strenuous effort to defeat the Catholic tradition. Rowell cites the exceptions expressed at the Savoy Conference,²⁸³ and they are worth setting out in full here:

- (1) that there should be a rubric stating that “the prayers and exhortations here used are not for the benefit of the dead, but only for the instruction and comfort of the living”;
- (2) that the priest should be free to conduct the whole service in church, and not to meet the cortege at the church-stile, “for the preventing of these inconveniences which many times both ministers and people are exposed unto by standing in the open air”;
- (3) that the reference to the “sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life” could not be said of “persons living and dying in open and notorious sins”;
- (4) that the prayer “that we with this our brother, and all other departed in the true faith of thy Holy Name, may have our perfect confirmation and bliss” could “harden the wicked” and was “inconsistent with the largest rational charity”;
- (5) that the words “as our hope is this our brother doth” could not be used of any who had not “by their actual repentance given any ground for the hope of their blessed estate”.²⁸⁴

Undoubtedly the Reformers and their successors believed that, in advancing these arguments, they were delivering the Christian Church from unscriptural practices and thereby recovering the earliest traditions of the faith. Their conviction that death closed the door for human repentance led them logically

²⁸² Bishop Barnes of Durham in 1577 so ordered. See also Rowell, *The Liturgy of Christian Burial*, page 91.

²⁸³ Rowell, *The Liturgy of Christian Burial*, page 91.

²⁸⁴ Cf. E. Cardwell, *A History of Conferences and other proceedings connected with the Revision of the book of Common Prayer*, Oxford, 1841, pages 332-333. Rowell notes that the bishops replied to the second objection that it related to tender heads rather than tender consciences and suggested the wearing of suitable caps! [*Liturgy of Christian Burial*, page 92].

to reject prayers for the dead, references to purgation, and funeral masses. Their emphasis on the judgement and the consequent need to repent in “this life” produced a sombre attitude to death, and provoked them to use the funeral as an occasion to preach for the repentance of their hearers. Further, their determination to defend the purity of the bride of Christ

ecclesia semper reformata, semper reformanda

meant that they mounted a constant watch on its members.

The old Catholic assumption (monitored by the sacrament of Penance) of the state of grace of all Christians meant that any differentiation in rites was either local or related to the role of the deceased in the Church. The Reformation emphasis was on separating sheep from goats; and while the intention was to assert that this occurred at death and was in the power and mystery of God, the effect was for the local minister (or congregation) to make judgements about who was fitted for Christian burial (and by implication heaven).²⁸⁵

The Catholic tradition sought to influence the fate of the dead by the prayers of the church universal; the Reformation seemed to settle the fate of the dead by the decisions of the local congregation.

1662 and beyond

With minor revisions and concessions to the Reformed party, the funeral service published in the 1662 Prayer Book follows the 1549 order. It contained a prefatory rubric which prohibited its use for the unbaptized, the excommunicated, or suicides, and with the ensuing assumption that its use would be for the burial of Christians it reinstated the office for the dead.

Subsequent revisions of the Church of England texts have not raised any further theological issues. Series One was, like the proposals of 1928, a revision of 1662's text.²⁸⁶ Series Three and the *Alternative Service Book* were again largely textual revisions rather than anything more comprehensive -

²⁸⁵ Whilst it may be thought that the Catholic Church's exercise of penance and excommunication amounts to much the same thing as the Reformed practice where the result is that the dead person is denied the benefit of Christian burial, at least in the Catholic Church the judgement is made in the affected person's lifetime and there thus remains some possibility in life of amendment. In the Reformed practice, the invidious decision is apparently made *post mortem* with no opportunity for repentance!

²⁸⁶ There was no funeral rite in Series Two.

although there was considerable difficulty relating to the inclusion of prayers for the dead. The eventual agreement was to offer such prayers as optional rather than to include them as central to the rite. This was intended to allow for freedom in practice without suggesting compromise in theology.

Historically, Free Church services espoused the Reformed tradition and shunned eucharistic celebration and prayers for the dead. Funerals were for the disposal of the body, but their direct address was to the bereaved. Informal discussions with Free Church ministers and ordinands indicate a common initial reaction that the funeral is for the bereaved. A very few have said that they believe that it is also addressed to the deceased, but they are unable to articulate how that might be. When pressed to declare whether they consider that a funeral rite can effect anything for the dead, the almost universal response is negative.²⁸⁷

Conclusion

An examination of funeral liturgies demonstrates that the broad division within Western Christianity between Catholic and Reformation churches holds good. The divergence over how the Church may or may not influence the state of the dead relates not so much to a question of ultimate destination - heaven or hell - as to how heaven may be appropriated by the faithful. By concentrating on that issue, I believe that the more important question is avoided and largely remains unanswered.

“What happens when I die?” is a question which the funeral ought to address. Indeed it is central to the rites of death. The answer of the earliest Christian Church was the resurrection of the body guaranteed by the resurrection of Christ. To lose sight of this is to lose sight of the gospel. This chapter has demonstrated that within the Christian tradition death raises most acutely the question of God. Different theologies have offered different answers. All,

²⁸⁷ My discussions in fraternals and theological colleges have been by invitation or arrangement, and have been based upon questionnaires designed to test (by the same questions) opinion formed before and after a seminar entitled *What happens at a Funeral?* There has been no real example of anyone at the outset believing that the funeral was only for the bereaved coming to the view at the end that it is only for the deceased. However, while some remain unconvinced that the funeral is for the dead, most take a “mixed” view. Yet in this largest group most feel that their duty to the dead is discharged by a careful telling of the life-story of the deceased. Hardly any feel that there is much sense in speaking for the dead - in the psalter, for example.

however, have taken it for granted that the funeral service is at heart an encounter not simply with death as an end of earthly life but with God.

In the chapter that follows, I introduce a broad range of funeral rites, and try to establish how (if at all) they address themselves to the encounter with God and to the issues of theology and the human sciences which I outlined in Parts One and Two. In doing so, I have had to make a selection from the material which I have read during my research. To select is to omit, and I have had to omit a large range of funerary practice by the choices I have made. My selection has not been capricious, but has been governed by a number of criteria to which I refer at the beginning of Chapter Eight.

Chapter Eight: A Liturgical Review

Which liturgy?

I have decided to look only at Christian rites. My critique of funeral liturgies is founded on the beliefs that death raises the transcendental question about God and that the death of Jesus offers the best way of approaching that transcendental question. It is hardly right to subject to those criteria rites which do not share that faith.

I intend to look only at those rites which exist in a written tradition. In many ways I regret this, since it eliminates the black churches many of whose rites demonstrate a very keen sense of separation, transition and incorporation. However, in the context of a liturgical and ritual approach a vast study of the ritual components of a huge number of funerals would be needed to produce a choreography which might correspond to more formal ways of encoding liturgy. Such an approach would form a separate piece of research.

I have selected rites which are in current use in these islands. There is one exception. I shall refer to the rite in *A New Zealand Prayer Book*,²⁸⁸ which offers an exciting challenge to those Anglicans at present working upon revisions for the 21st century. I have not been able to include in this thesis all the British liturgies that I have examined. Lutherans, Moravians, Independent Methodists, and the Joint Liturgical Group have all been omitted. I hope to be able to publish a comprehensive review elsewhere.

These, then, are the three principles of selection: Christian, written, current local use. This has still left me with liturgies from ten Christian traditions. Chapter Eight reviews this range of liturgical provision.

²⁸⁸ *A New Zealand Prayer Book*, William Collins Ltd, Auckland, 1989.

Anglican rites: introduction

While the Anglican Communion finds its origins in England in the reign of Henry VIII in the first half of the 16th century CE, and while its Primate holds his see in Canterbury, it is a mistake to imagine that the Anglican Communion and the Church of England are one and the same thing. The Archbishop of Canterbury is the spiritual leader of a communion as geographically universal as that of his separated brother in Rome.

However, whereas the recently revised Roman funeral rites published as *The Order of Christian Funerals* are effectively the same in the United States of America as they are in England and Wales and Scotland, the same unanimity is not to be found in the funeral rites of the Anglican Communion.²⁸⁹ It is therefore my intention comment upon texts currently used in these islands, or - in the case of the Church in Wales - upon a text in current preparation. The following texts will be cited:

the early English text established in the *Book of Common Prayer*, 1662;

the revision in the Church of England of 1928;

the revision in the Church of England contained in *The Alternative Service Book*, 1980;

the *Revised Funeral Rites 1987* of the Scottish Episcopal Church;

the texts of *Funeral Services 1987 according to the use of the Church of Ireland*, which include rites from earlier publications;

An Alternative Order for Christian Funerals from the Church in Wales.

By way of comparison I shall also examine the rite found in *A New Zealand Prayer Book* from the Church of the Province of New Zealand, 1989.

For a review of wider range of Anglican texts see my critical commentary for the University of Mainz, "*Anglikaner Traditionen*".²⁹⁰

²⁸⁹ *The Order of Christian Funerals* was produced by the International Committee on English in the Liturgy. It was approved for use in the United States of America in 1985, in England and Wales in 1986, and in Scotland in 1987.

²⁹⁰ Becker, H.-J., Einig, B. and Ulrich, P.-O. [edd.], *Im Angesicht des Todes: Ein interdisziplinäres Kompendium. Kommentierte Edition der orientalischen, lateinischen und reformatorischen Sterbe- und Begräbnisriten/3 Teil: Die nachreformatorischen*

The Church of England

THE 1662 BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER

The importance of the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* can scarcely be exaggerated. It was the text in overwhelming use in the Church of England for over 300 years, and in some parishes it remains the sole rite. In terms of liturgical and ritual observance and formation it stands as a foundation text. The only texts which have threatened its supremacy in the Church of England have been those introduced in the 1928 revisions and in the *Alternative Service Book 1980*. The *Series 1* texts of 1965 and the later *Series 2* texts never enjoyed the same breadth of use.²⁹¹

The 1662 *Order for the Burial of the Dead* is quite different in style from its predecessor of 1549. Like the 1552 service, it eschews any eucharistic celebration and avoids petitions for the deceased. The theological atmosphere is dark, and this tone is set from the outset. Previous rites had started with an initial rubric indicating that the officiant was to meet the corpse “at the Church stile”. This rubric is placed second after a clear definition of those to whom the Church may offer its ministry.

*Here is to be noted, that the Office ensuing is not to be used for any that die unbaptized, or excommunicate, or have laid violent hands upon themselves.*²⁹²

Matters of baptism and excommunication may well have been occasioned by two different concerns. By 1662 Baptists had arrived from the European mainland. Their concern for the baptism of believers meant that adherents with families would have repudiated paedobaptism. Such people could no longer look for the hospitality of the established church in the burial of their dead - assuming, of course, that they wished it. In the course of the establishment of the Church of England the weapon of excommunication had

Liturgien, “Anglikanische Traditionen”, Sheppy, P. P. J., *Pietas Liturgica*, St. Ottilien, (1994/95). At the time of writing, the final publication date is unknown.

²⁹¹ Series 2 was produced in the early 1970’s and was not a complete Prayer Book, but a series of selected rites. A funeral rite was not among them.

²⁹² *The Book of Common Prayer and administration of the sacraments and other rites and ceremonies of the Church according to the use of the Church of England together with the psalter or psalms of David pointed as they are to be sung or said in churches; and the form and manner of making, ordaining, and consecrating of bishops, priests, and deacons*, Oxford University Press, [1982 printing] page 388. Future reference to this text in footnotes will cite *Book of Common Prayer*.

been increasingly used as a political instrument. In previous generations in churchyards which had been the last resting place of all in the parish, Catholics were now excluded from grounds and churches which had been seized from Rome in the English Reformation. They could not be buried where their families had been laid to rest. The prohibitions regarding the burial of the unbaptised and excommunicate had doubtless always been in force (as had the ban on those who had committed suicide). What is new in Anglican ritual is this explicit reference to Canon Law in the rubric.

It is worth observing here that, although the opening rubrics speak of the service taking place in the church or at the grave, the rubrics which follow in the 1662 order describe the reading of scripture as taking place while the prayers are said at the graveside. In fact, various factors produce different practices.

The *Book of Common Prayer* assumes a parish church with its own yard in which the dead will be buried. The industrialisation of the 19th century and the urbanisation which followed it have led to a separation from the church and the place of disposal. The service may take place in the parish church or at a chapel at the cemetery or crematorium - or increasingly at the Funeral Director's chapel of rest. The committal is frequently geographically distant, and so the unity of the rite is imperilled. Further, burial is now a far less common form of disposal than cremation, so that at the committal words about committing the body to the ground have to be amended.

None of these changes could have ever been in the mind of those who wrote the 1662 liturgy, and it is a testimony to the strength of the rite and the conservatism of religious forms that the order of the *Book of Common Prayer* has survived for so long.

Opening Sentences

The sentences of scripture which stand at the beginning of the service are the same as those used in the earlier rites (John 11.25-26; Job 19.25-27; 1 Timothy 6.7 and Job 1.21). However in each text there are small changes of wording or of positioning which require some comment.

John 11.25-26

The wording used in the *Book of Common Prayer* concludes:

whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.²⁹³

The 1549 service read:

whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall not die for ever.²⁹⁴

The difference between *never dying* and *not dying for ever* is subtle but clear. Both expressions could include a reference to the “second death” (Revelation 2.11; cf. Matthew 10.28), but the 1549 reading would more easily yield such an understanding. Whether this was in the minds of those who framed the liturgies cannot at this distance be satisfactorily resolved.

Job 19.25-27

The *Book of Common Prayer*'s citation of the text includes the reference to the worms eating the flesh; a reference which 1549 adroitly turns.

Book of Common Prayer

I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another.²⁹⁵

1549

I know that my redeemer liveth, and that I shall rise out of the earth in the last day, and shall be covered again with my skin, and shall see God in my flesh; yea, and I myself shall behold him, not with other but with the same eyes.²⁹⁶

The 1549 text also turns the redeemer's stand upon the earth into the deceased's individual resurrection. This reflects the reading of the Vulgate; the *Book of Common Prayer* reveals the work of English translators.

²⁹³ *Book of Common Prayer*, page 388.

²⁹⁴ W. Keeling, *Liturgiae Britannicae: or the several editions of the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England, from its compilation to its last revision; together with the liturgy set forth for use of the Church of Scotland: arranged to shew their respective variations*, (2nd edition), William Pickering, London, and J. Deighton, Cambridge, 1851, page 329.
Page references relating to the 1549 and 1552 rites are taken from Keeling's edition.

²⁹⁵ *Book of Common Prayer*, page 388.

²⁹⁶ Keeling, page 329. There is a variant reading: *these eyes for the same eyes*.

1 Timothy 6.7 and Job 1.21

1662 conflates these texts while 1549 keeps them separate, although they are still intended to be used together.

The Reading of Scripture

As the funeral procession comes to its first stop in the church, a psalm or psalms may be read. Both Psalm 39 and Psalm 90 link the transience of human life with judgement for sin, and are used as penitential texts with a plea for mercy. There then follows the reading of 1 Corinthians 15.20-58. St Paul compares human resurrection with the seed which must die to bring a harvest, and contrasts the lesser glory of the earthly with greater splendour of the heavenly.

The scriptures chosen speak of the shortness of life, of the darkness of sin and therefore of death, and of the hope of the resurrection. Although the service makes no indication of hymnody or homily, these have generally been fitted into the order before the move to the graveside.

Hymns depend usually upon the availability of an organist and/or a choir, and may be omitted without much comment. The absence of a homily, however, cannot be so easily managed. Increasingly, what has been expected has been a potted biography of the deceased rather than what the Reformers would have expected - a proclamation of the resurrection to judgement. In part, this is a result of the twentieth century revulsion against earlier lurid depictions of the last things, an aversion which has arisen from the horrors of mass warfare throughout the world and throughout the century. In part, it arises from the fact that many funerals are for those who, although they are not disqualified by the opening rubric, have with their families rejected institutionalised Christianity and who may not want the officiant to offer much more than a ritualised farewell. Moreover, recent surveys indicate that increasing numbers of church-goers have no belief in life after death. Such attitudes unnerve many clergy.

Prayers of Committal

At the graveside the words of commendation and committal are spoken, followed by prayers which include a version of *Deus, apud quem omnia morientia vivunt* and a Collect.²⁹⁷

As the body is made ready for burial, the traditional text of Job 14 (attributed in the 1549 and 1552 services to Job 9) are spoken, followed by the Lutheran sequence *Media vita*.

Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live,
and is full of misery. He cometh up, and is cut down, like a
flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth
in one stay.

In the midst of life we are in death: of whom may we seek
for succour, but of thee, O Lord, who for our sins art justly
displeased?

Yet O Lord God most holy, O Lord most mighty, O holy
and most merciful saviour, deliver us not in the bitter pains
of eternal death.

Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts; shut not thy
merciful ears to our prayer; but spare us, Lord most holy, O
God most mighty, O holy and merciful Saviour, thou most
worthy Judge eternal, suffer us not, at our last hour, for any
pains of death, to fall from thee.

The *Media vita* represents in its appearance in funeral rites the medieval concern with the darker themes of eschatology. The form found in the *Book of Common Prayer* appears to reflect the translation of Miles Coverdale, the first verse of which Geoffrey Rowell reproduced in his work on Christian burial.²⁹⁸

In the myddest of our lyvyng
Death compaseth us rounde about:
Who sholde us now sucour brynge
by whose grace may we come out?
Even thou, Lorde Jesu, alone:
It doth our hartes sore greve truly
That we have offended thee.

²⁹⁷ See my earlier comment about the rubrics relating to the committal (page 123). In order to keep the sense of the 1662 order I shall continue to refer to burial and the grave or graveside.

²⁹⁸ D. G. Rowell, *The Liturgy of Christian Burial*. Rowell discusses *Media vita* in depth at pages 79-80.

O Lord God most holy
 O Lord God most holy
 O Lord God most myghtie
 O holy and mercyfull Savioure,
 Thou most worthy God eternall,
 Suffre us not at our last hour
 For any death from the to fall.
 Kirieleyson.²⁹⁹

The form of committal presupposes burial (see the earlier comments on pages 123 following) and subscribes to the traditional understanding of death as the separation of the soul from the body in commending the soul to God and committing the body to the ground. This body-soul anthropology is not allowed to obliterate a parallel belief in a resurrection, in which the failure of the earthly body is to be changed into the likeness of Christ's glorious body.

Then, while the earth shall be cast upon the Body by some standing by, the Priest shall say,
 Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God of his great mercy to take unto himself the soul of our dear *brother* here departed, we therefore commit *his* body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body, that it may be like unto his glorious body, according to the mighty working, whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself.³⁰⁰

There follows the vision of the Apocalypse in which the faithful departed are seen in bliss:

Then shall be said or sung,
 I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me,
 Write, From henceforth blessed are the dead
 which die in the Lord: even so saith the Spirit;
 for they rest from their labours.³⁰¹

There then follow a threefold *kyrie* and the *Our Father* without the doxology.

A form of *Deus, apud quem omnia morientia vivunt*, now follows which adopts the shorter form of the 1552 book rather than the extended version of

²⁹⁹ Original spelling as cited by Rowell, *Liturgy*, page 80.

³⁰⁰ *Book of Common Prayer*, pages 395-396.

³⁰¹ Revelation 14.13; *Book of Common Prayer*, page 396.

1549.³⁰² Even the 1552 version contains a phrase which the *Book of Common Prayer* deletes. The *Book of Common Prayer*, reproduced below, asks that “we, with all those that are departed in the true faith of thy holy Name, may have our perfect consummation and bliss” etc., whereas 1552 sought that “we, with this our brother, and all other departed in the true faith of thy holy Name, may have our perfect consummation and bliss”. The inclusion of the name of the deceased (whose funeral this now is) finds no place under the increasing influence of the Reformation. The excision indicates that the phrase was regarded as a prayer for the dead.

Priest.

Almighty God, with whom do live the spirits of them that depart hence in the Lord, and with whom the souls of the faithful, after they are delivered from the burden of the flesh, are in joy and felicity; We give thee hearty thanks, for that it hath pleased thee to deliver this our *brother* out of the miseries of this sinful world; beseeching thee, that it may please thee, of thy gracious goodness, shortly to accomplish the number of thine elect, and to hasten thy kingdom; that we, with all those that are departed in the true faith of thy holy Name, may have our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in thy eternal and everlasting glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*³⁰³

While the *Book of Common Prayer* excises the direct reference to the deceased in the foregoing prayer, the Collect which follows permits those who mourn to express the hope that they may rest in Christ, “as our hope is that this our *brother* doth”. The hope for the departed is, presumably, more a pious wish than the Pauline hope of faith (ἐλπίς), which might have fallen foul of being understood as petitionary for the dead. There appears to be a shift in credal value between the hope expressed for “our brother” and that earlier referred to in the collect where those who pray not to be sorry “as men without hope” where the text clearly explicates that hope as Pauline ἐλπίς.

³⁰² The prayer *Deus, apud quem omnia morientia vivunt* is derived from the Gelasian Sacramentary and appears in the English tradition in the Sarum rite. See H. A. Wilson (ed.), *The Gelasian Sacramentary: Liber Sacramentorum Romanae Ecclesiae*, OUP, 1894, page 299, paragraph 752.

³⁰³ *Book of Common Prayer*, pages 396-397.

The Collect

O merciful God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the resurrection and the life; in whom whosoever believeth shall live, though he die; and whosoever liveth, and believeth in him, shall not die eternally; who also hath taught us, by his holy Apostle Saint Paul, not to be sorry, as men without hope, for them that sleep in him; We meekly beseech thee, O Father, to raise us from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness; that, when we shall depart this life, we may rest in him, as our hope is this our *brother* doth; and that, at the general Resurrection in the last day, we may be found acceptable in thy sight; and receive that blessing, which thy well-beloved Son shall then pronounce to all that love and fear thee, saying, Come, ye blessed children of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world: Grant this, we beseech thee, O merciful Father, through Jesus Christ, our Mediator and Redeemer.

*Amen.*³⁰⁴

The service in the *Book of Common Prayer* concludes with the Grace.

The burial service of the *Book of Common Prayer* reveals a much simpler provision than the earliest rites of the Church of England. The liturgical change reflects the theological shift fostered in the ferment of Cromwell's Commonwealth. The old Catholic concerns with the faithful departed have been rejected, and any idea that the living can by their prayers obtain mercy for the dead has been rigorously expunged. The rite assumes that the deceased was a member of the Christian church in good standing (see the opening rubric), but is unwilling to do more than commit the dead to the mercy of God. That mercy is surely needed, since humankind is sinful and subject to the judgement of God (cf. Job 1.14 and *Media vita*). While the hope of resurrection is not lost, the overall tone is one which declares the awfulness of the last things. The intention is as much to warn the living, and to use death as reminder of the mortality of all, as it is to depict death as the gateway to life eternal.

Perhaps the exhortatory qualities of the rite had their place. Within three years of the *Book of Common Prayer's* introduction, the Great Plague had arrived and was sweeping the south and midlands of England, taking in its wake thousands earlier than they might otherwise have expected. In the midst of life, we are in death!

³⁰⁴ *Book of Common Prayer*, page 397.

THE 1928 BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER

The *Book of Common Prayer* produced in 1928 was, as its full title suggests, an expansion of the 1662 book as much as it was an alteration. The changes are mostly the result of addition rather than deletion.³⁰⁵ In the full text of the service in the 1928 book the amendments to the 1662 text are clearly marked.

The opening rubrics relating to Canon Law are expanded from the single note in the 1662 rite. The category of excluded persons now is to include any who “die in the act of committing any grievous crime”. In cases of doubt the matter should be referred to the Bishop “if time and opportunity permit”. The third introductory rubric allowed the minister to use whatever he wished from the 1928 rites unless “the nearest relative present” insisted on an unadorned 1662 rite.³⁰⁶

The Introduction

The opening rubric gives the customary details about meeting the funeral procession at the entrance to the Church yard. The “corpse” of the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* is described as “the body” in the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer*.³⁰⁷ While the words apparently mean the same thing, there is a subtle change. “Corpse” has a clear reference to death and decay, which “body” leaves neutrally in abeyance. It is almost as if genteel delicacy prefers to use a less brutal word! The process in modern Britain is has moved on further: contemporary people speak of “the coffin” rather than what it contains.

The opening rubric also re-introduces the practice of earlier funeral rites by proposing a number of Psalms which may be used in a procession to the Church or the grave. These psalms, which are penitential in nature, may be used in conjunction with the opening sentences of scripture which the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* offered, although the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*’s choice of scriptures has been widened in the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer*.³⁰⁸ This wider selection of texts has proved popular, and many

³⁰⁵ *The Book of Common Prayer with the additions and deviations proposed in 1928*, OUP, Oxford, 1928. Hereafter referred to as *1928 Book of Common Prayer*.

³⁰⁶ *1928 Book of Common Prayer*, page 422.

³⁰⁷ *1928 Book of Common Prayer*, page 422.

³⁰⁸ The psalms suggested are 6,32,38,51,102,130,143. The extra sentences of scripture are Psalm 25.6; Deuteronomy 33,27; Romans 8.38,39; Romans 14.8,9; Matthew 5.4; John 14.1.

continue to be used in more recent liturgies. The three which are found in the *Alternative Service Book 1980* are Deuteronomy 33.27, Romans 8.38,39 ~~and~~ (a text which Emil Brunner described as central to any Christian understanding of death),³⁰⁹ and Matthew 5.4. The attraction of the Matthaean text is obvious, but the question arises as to whether Jesus in uttering it intended the saying to be used at funerals. It may be argued that pastoral care is more important than doctrinal purity, but pastoral care can be expressed without insensitivity to scripture, and other texts used demonstrate this (cf. John 14.1 following). Popular usage has frequently overwhelmed the rigorists, and Matthew 5.4 looks set to stay in the Church of England texts for the foreseeable future.

The Service in Church

The first significant addition to the service in church is the introduction of two new texts: “Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord: and let light perpetual shine upon them” as an optional alternative to the *Gloria*; and the *Salvator mundi* as an optional antiphon for the Psalter.³¹⁰ This certainly reflects the growing influence of the Oxford movement in the Church of England at the time. These texts are quite different from those which gained the approval of the Reformation. There is a concern for the departed in *Lux eterna* which carries a clear intercessory note.

The psalter itself is extended by two psalms [23 and 130].³¹¹ In their reference to “the valley of the shadow of death” and the cry to God “out of the deep”, these psalms are frequently understood in popular imagination to be the call of those who mourn that God may deal graciously with them; and it is possible to read them in this way. But the early Church (for example, in the Mozarabic rite) thought of these psalms as the cry of the dead person to God. They were sung by the living who thus articulated the words in the liturgy on behalf of the deceased.

³⁰⁹ Emil Brunner wrote of Romans 8.38,39, “The whole of Eschatology is contained in this one saying of Paul”. *The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith and the Consummation: Dogmatics Volume III*, Lutterworth Press, London, 1962, page 344.

³¹⁰ 1928 *Book of Common Prayer*, page 423.

³¹¹ 1928 *Book of Common Prayer*, pages 426-427.

The scriptures which follow include the reading from 1 Corinthians 15.20 following (but with verses 27-34 omitted) proposed by the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*. This is supplemented by 2 Corinthians 4.16 - 5.6, Revelation 7.9-17, and Revelation 21.1-7.³¹² Although the reading from 2 Corinthians does refer to the judgement, the three additional passages are in their general tenor declarations of the hope awaiting the faithful departed. Together with the original reading from 1 Corinthians, they relieve the darker tone of the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*.

The rite of burial follows the form of the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, but continues to offer additions and alternatives to the 1662 provisions. The initial anthems drawn from Job 14 and the *Media vita* are supplemented by a proposed alternative, Psalm 103.13-17.³¹³

The committal to the earth is also supplemented by an optional alternative, but in this case the proposal is far more significant. The prayer of the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* declares that God has taken the soul, and then commits the body to be buried. The new prayer commends the soul to God and intercedes for the departed in the judgement.

We commend unto thy hands of mercy, most merciful Father, the soul of this our *brother* departed, and we commit *his* body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. And we beseech thine infinite goodness to give us grace to live in thy fear and love and to die in thy favour, that when the judgement shall come which thou hast committed to thy well-beloved Son, both this our *brother* and we may be found acceptable in thy sight. Grant this, O merciful Father, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our only Saviour, Mediator, and Advocate. *Amen.*³¹⁴

The intercessory note for the dead is quite different from what was offered in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, and it continues after the Lord's Prayer:

Minister. Enter not into judgement with thy servant,
O Lord;

Answer. For in thy sight shall no man living be justified.

Minister. Grant unto *him* eternal rest;

³¹² The readings are found at 1928 *Book of Common Prayer*, pages 427-430.

³¹³ 1928 *Book of Common Prayer*, page 431.

³¹⁴ 1928 *Book of Common Prayer*, page 432.

Answer. And let perpetual light shine upon *him*.

Minister. We believe verily to see the goodness of the Lord;

Answer. In the land of the living.

Minister. O Lord, hear our prayer;

Answer. And let our cry come unto thee.³¹⁵

The *Deus, apud quem omnia morientia vivunt* follows in the 1662 form and the Collect found in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* at this point in the rite.

Additional options are provided as reproduced below:

O Father of all, we pray thee for those whom we love, but see no longer. Grant them thy peace; let light perpetual shine upon them; and in thy loving wisdom and almighty power work in them the good purpose of thy perfect will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Almighty God, Father of all mercies and giver of all comfort: Deal graciously, we pray thee, with those who mourn, that casting every care on thee, they may know the consolation of thy love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

O heavenly Father, who in thy Son Jesus Christ, hast given us a true faith and a sure hope: Help us, we pray thee, to live as those who believe and trust in the Communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, and the resurrection to life everlasting, and strengthen this faith and hope in us all the days of our life; through the love of thy Son, Jesus Christ our Saviour. *Amen.*³¹⁶

A further rubric notes that:

*Here may follow the Collect of All Saints' Day, or that of the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity, or others from the Occasional Prayers.*³¹⁷

All these reveal with increasing weight the interest which this rite shows in restoring the pre-Reformation traditions of praying for the dead which were lost in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*.³¹⁸

³¹⁵ 1928 *Book of Common Prayer*, page 433.

³¹⁶ 1928 *Book of Common Prayer*, page 434.

³¹⁷ 1928 *Book of Common Prayer*, page 434.

³¹⁸ The presence of material congenial to the Catholic tradition should not be overstated. There was a very real sense of failure among Anglo-Catholics in their response to the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer*.

Later rubrics give instructions for situations where the burial may take place elsewhere, or where the burial occurs first, for funerals where a child is to be buried at the same time as an adult, and for funerals where there is to be a eucharistic celebration. These are followed by further rubrics detailing what must be done for the consecration of otherwise unhallowed ground, and for the comparatively new practice of cremation.³¹⁹

The most significant of the new rubrics is that which allows for eucharistic celebration at the funeral. This is a clear restoration of the provision which was available in 1549 but which was lost from 1552. For the first time in over three hundred and seventy five years, the Church of England proposed to allow for the possibility of intercession for the dead and for the funeral to assume a clear liturgical expression of the communion of the saints. This was a most important change, and reflected the significant influence of the Oxford Movement in the Church of England.

The 1928 *Book of Common Prayer* is of historical importance not simply because it represented a revision of the old 1662 book, but precisely because it did not replace the earlier texts as the official orders of the Church of England. Although it received approval from the Church of England's own governing body, this was insufficient. The status of the Church of England as the church by law established meant that Parliament reserved to itself the final right (among other similar provisions) to approve changes in the liturgy. The presence in various rites of intercessions for the dead and other Anglo-Catholic emphases of the Oxford Movement was controversial within the Church. In Parliament they met with suspicion so grave as to provoke refusal to consent. The Act of Settlement specifically forbade the English throne to Roman Catholics, and partisan politics of the 17th and 18th centuries raised their head in the debate about the new prayer book. Official approval was withheld from what were understood to be "Romish" practices. The Thirty Nine Articles had talked of the "blasphemous superstition" of the Catholic Mass, and feelings still ran high enough to ensure that the 1928 book was rejected by Parliament.

³¹⁹ All these rubrics are to be found at 1928 *Book of Common Prayer*, page 435. The readings appear on pages 435-437, and are: 1 Thessalonians 4.13-18; 2 Corinthians 4.16 -5.4; John 6.37-41; John 5.24-29.

So, although it was widely used, the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer* never held the authority of its 1662 predecessor. In the debates leading up to the *Alternative Service Book 1980*, the Evangelical party made clear its reservations about some of the proposals to include intercessions for the dead. In that case a different solution was reached, but much of the argument remained the same.³²⁰ The 1928 revisions were successful, however, in reintroducing to the Church of England a richer funeral rite with a wider variety of options than it had possessed since 1549; and the various revisions which led to the 1980 texts built on the work of those who had introduced that renewed tradition in 1928.

THE ALTERNATIVE SERVICE BOOK 1980

The *Alternative Service Book 1980* was introduced as an interim measure for use until the year 2000, at which time fresh liturgies will be introduced.³²¹

The liturgical movement of the 1960s and the earlier Parish Eucharist movement raised questions about the appropriateness of Morning and Evening Prayer being the staple diet of Sunday worship for Christian congregations. The question was not confined to the Church of England; the liturgical renewal, which proposed that the Eucharist should be the main weekly celebration of worship, was felt in all the main Christian traditions. In the Church of England it led to a process of revision which produced three series of alternative liturgies of which the *Alternative Service Book* represents the final edition.

The Funeral Services within the *Alternative Service Book* are still only a revision of what went before. The main shape of the rite and indeed much of its content is familiar to those accustomed to the provisions of 1662 and 1928. The first clear difference is in language: “thou”, “thee” and “thy” have been replaced by “you” and “your” - the previous forms were judged to be archaic.

³²⁰ The objections of the Evangelicals were sufficient to lead to an agreement that prayers for the dead should not be included in the main text, since the main text ought to represent what was agreed by all. However, the debate was less sharp in that the Evangelicals conceded that such prayers ought properly to have their place in the funeral rites of the Church of England, since they articulated the faith of a significant group. They therefore appear in “A Selection of Additional Prayers which may be used”, *The Alternative Service Book 1980*, pages 334-336.

³²¹ *The Alternative Service Book 1980*, The General Synod of the Church of England, 1980.

This in itself caused considerable comment, for with the archaic forms went traditional language, and with traditional language went many of the speech rhythms of blank verse which are so central to written and spoken English - especially in situations where words are to be spoken chorally, as is the case in worship.³²²

Those who valued the old forms did so for a range of reasons. Some were concerned about the beauty of language - especially the beauty of the language of the first Elizabethan era. Others were unwilling to shed the prayers and praises which had nurtured their spirituality. Others feared that the *Alternative Service Book* would not be used as an alternative but as a replacement for the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*.

As the year 2000 approaches, and with it the need for new liturgies, the debate about language continues.

The second matter which calls for introductory comment is the typographical layout of the service. The various components of the rite are numbered consecutively, but the numbering is not simply an indication of sequence. What is also intended is to indicate what is mandatory and what is optional. Mandatory sections are numbered in black; optional sections in blue.³²³ Commentary will proceed by reference to the section numbers.

The Service in Church

Section 1 (mandatory)

The main rite begins without any reference to the exclusions referred to in the rubrics of 1662 and 1928. (This change came with the first series of alternative rites produced in 1965.)³²⁴ The opening paragraph is the sentence from John 11.25,26.³²⁵

³²² "He said he thought that it would rain today" is as much an iambic pentameter as Shakespeare's "You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things!" (*Julius Caesar* Act 1, Scene 1).

³²³ Thus, section 1 is mandatory and the numeral is printed in black; section 2 is optional and the numeral appears in blue; sections 3-5 are mandatory and their numerals are black; and so on.

³²⁴ *Alternative Services: First Series* "Burial Services" 1965.

³²⁵ *Alternative Service Book*, page 307.

Section 2 (optional)

There are then offered additional sentences of scripture which the minister may use as desired.³²⁶ The table which follows shows the *Alternative Service Book's* texts compared with the corresponding texts offered in the 1928 revision of the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*.

Alternative Service Book	1928 Book of Common Prayer
	Job 19.25-27
1 Timothy 6.7; Job 1.21	1 Timothy 6.7; Job 1.21
Deuteronomy 33.27	Deuteronomy 33.27
Lamentations 3.22-23	
Matthew 5.4	Matthew 5.4
John 3.16	
	John 14.1
Romans 8.38-39	Romans 8.38-39
	Romans 14.8,9
1 Corinthians 2.9	
1 Thessalonians 4.14,18	

The most interesting addition is the text from 1 Thessalonians 4. Although these Pauline words had gained a traditional place in funeral liturgy, this ought not really to have been enough to justify their selection unless the intention was simply to reassure Christian people that all would be well in the end. 1 Thessalonians is a very early letter from St Paul's apostolic ministry, and comes from a period when the expectation was that the return of Christ to inaugurate the new order of the Kingdom would occur within the lifetime of those to whom the apostle wrote. As time passed, St Paul modified his eschatological understanding to meet new circumstances. To have chosen a

³²⁶ *Alternative Service Book*, pages 307-308.

text which its writer later found inadequate is (to put it no more strongly) strange.³²⁷

Section 3 (mandatory)

There then follows a congregational prayer seeking the strength and hope of faith.³²⁸ This prayer first appeared in the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer*. It starts with the “true faith” and “sure hope” of the resurrection of Jesus and concludes by reference to the final lines of the Apostles’ Creed. In their commentary on the *Alternative Service Book*, Ronald Jasper and Paul Bradshaw write that this sentence

with its reference to “true Faith” and “sure hope” establishes at the outset the positive note of confidence which the service tries to convey.³²⁹

Section 4 (mandatory)

Of the psalms which follow only one must be used, though more may be employed. Omitted from the selection is Psalm 39 (*I said I will take heed to my ways*) which was introduced in 1662. In its stead Psalm 121 (*I lift up my eyes to the hills*) is offered. The contrast between a psalm which describes life as short and its beauty as being eroded just as a moth eats a piece of cloth and a psalm which speaks of the Lord being our keeper is profound. The contrast is even stronger when we observe that Psalm 39 had previously been placed first even when, as in 1928, Psalm 23 was included among the options; Psalm 121 is, moreover a new selection. There is a further clear indication that no particular psalm receives a special place (as Psalms 39 and 90 did before). The psalms are now printed in the order of the psalter (viz., 23, 90, 121, 130). This non-preferential placing applies to the additional alternative psalms (27; 42.1-7; 118, 14-21, 28-29; 139:1-11, 17-18).³³⁰

³²⁷ Jasper and Bradshaw justify the reading from 1 Thessalonians 4 on the ground of its ancient usage. It was the epistle at the Funeral Eucharist both in the Sarum rite and in 1549, re-appearing in 1928 after being lost in the 1662 rite with the excision of the funeral eucharist (cf. *A Companion to the Alternative Service Book*, page 400).

Their comment confirms that *Alternative Service Book 1980* was not a revision of the funeral rite, simply of its language.

³²⁸ *Alternative Service Book*, page 308.

³²⁹ R. C. D. Jasper and P. F. Bradshaw, *A Companion to the Alternative Service Book*, SPCK, London 1986, page 399.

³³⁰ The psalms appear on *Alternative Service Book*, pages 308-311.

Although the psalms provided speak of loss and of anguish, they are not psalms of lament as Psalm 39 is. They are concerned with the search for God rather than with the bewailing of sins. The change in note is important in that it may be felt to reflect a shift in theological direction. Does the excision of the psalm of lament indicate a hesitancy to speak in the context of the funeral about the themes of judgement and hell? And does the inclusion of Psalm 42 (which disappeared after 1549) reveal a new emphasis on God as the source of life (even in death)? It is probably unwise to give an unambiguous “Yes” to these questions, yet the suspicion remains that the liturgies of the late 20th century have moved from the concerns of the Reformation. The work of historical research into the liturgy of the Church of the first millennium (pioneered in the Anglican tradition in England by Dom Gregory Dix, and in the field of funeral rites continued by Geoffrey Rowell) has led to the rediscovery of the note of joy in the resurrection which early Christian funerals possessed. It is worth noting that this research has not been undertaken in ecclesiological isolation; and precisely the same discoveries have been made by Roman Catholic liturgists leading to the *Order of Christian Funerals*.

Section 5 (mandatory)

In the provision of scripture readings, the non-preferential ordering used with the psalms is continued. Three main readings are proposed (John 14.1-6; 1 Corinthians 15.20-26,36-38,42-44a,53-end; 1 Thessalonians 4.13-18) and a number of alternative readings (Wisdom 4.810,11,13-15; John 5.19-25; John 6.35-40; John 11.17-27; Romans 8.31b-39; Romans 14.7-9; 2 Corinthians 1.3-5; 2 Corinthians 4.7-18; Philippians 3.10-end; Revelation 21.1-7).³³¹ This listing of readings in their order within the biblical canon marks the division between Old and New Testaments. The tradition of placing the Epistle before the Gospel does not apply where the funeral is a non-eucharistic office, since either may be used as the reading from the New Testament. However, when the eucharist is celebrated, the Gospel takes the final place.³³²

The reading from John 14 is newly introduced in this rite, and reflects a reassuring tone in which death is seen in less threatening terms. The traditional reading from 1 Corinthians 15 containing Paul’s argument for belief in the resurrection is retained, but observation of ministerial practice indicates

³³¹ *Alternative Service Book*, pages 311-313.

³³² An extended rubric on page 328 of *Alternative Service Book* makes this plain.

a preference for the Johannine text. There may be two reasons for this. The first is quite simply that where many funerals take place within a limited time allocation at a crematorium the longer reading may be too long. The second is that there is both a clarity and a directness about the gospel account. Without ornamentation or argument it speaks of a place prepared beyond death, and clergy may use this as a short cut in the pastoral complexities surrounding death and bereavement. The text from 1 Thessalonians 4, which was proposed in 1928 as part of the eucharistic form of funeral rite, now finds its way into the rite proper as one of the preferred selections. The earlier comments about the verses from this scripture used at the beginning of the rite are equally valid here (see page 137).

Section 6 (*optional*)

Provision is made for the preaching of a sermon. The Reformers would no doubt have regarded as pusillanimous the optional nature of the provision, and they might have considered some of the homilies that are offered as insufficiently robust. However, the minister who allows nothing to be said at the funeral about the dead person is likely to be roundly criticised. There is widespread criticism of many funeral services that they are impersonal; to make no clear reference to the deceased is to invite stern comment.

Nonetheless, the sermon ought not to be simply a biographical note, a sort of pious obituary column. The personal history is of importance because the one who has died was made in the image of God, and to recount the life of a human being is to speak of God in some way. But the story of this dead woman or man or child has to be placed in contact with the story of Jesus' death and resurrection, if the funeral is to be a genuinely Christian event. To say this is not to align oneself with a Protestant tradition in distinction from a Catholic one. The funeral orations of the early Church were not encomia of the dead, but proclamations of the risen Christ. The Christian funeral ought to affirm that "in the midst of death we are in life". Such an affirmation acts to announce the incorporation of the dead into a new order of relationship to God.³³³

³³³ Whether the preacher and the congregation understand such a relationship as one of salvation or damnation will depend upon their other beliefs (or lack of them) about God.

Section 7 (mandatory)

Verses from the *Te Deum* are then used.³³⁴ Alternatively, a hymn may be sung. The inclusion of the *Te Deum* (or at least a section of it) is an innovation. Jasper and Bradshaw remark on its appropriateness with the reference to Christ's victory over the sting of death.³³⁵

Section 8 (mandatory)

Following a three-fold *kyrie*, the Lord's Prayer is said.³³⁶ The text used for the Lord's Prayer is the text generally introduced into the rites contained in the *Alternative Service Book* - the ICET text, but with one alteration. When Series 3 (the experimental stage of the *Alternative Service Book*), was used and evaluated, the phrase *Do not bring us to the time of trial* did not gain sufficiently widespread acceptance, and so the prayer was revised to include the traditional wording at that juncture. The resultant form is reproduced below:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.

When at a later date various services from the *Alternative Service Book* were printed in separate editions for ease of handling, the ICET text (as amended) was supplemented by the modified traditional form of the prayer.³³⁷

³³⁴ *Alternative Service Book*, pages 313-314.

³³⁵ *A Companion to the Alternative Service Book*, page 400.

³³⁶ *Alternative Service Book*, page 314.

³³⁷ The debate about the wording of the Lord's Prayer continues. As recently as November 1993, the Bishop of Norwich advised the parishes in his diocese to avoid the modern version. He did so on two grounds: that the prayer in its modern form was not ecumenical (!), and that the older version was better-known to occasional visitors to church who ought to have something that they recognised and in which

Section 9 (optional)

This section consists solely of a rubric referring to other prayers which may be used here, and which are to be found in sections 50-60. In order to deal with the service in its ritual order, this commentary now turns its attention to these optional sections before reverting to section 10.

Section 50 (optional)³³⁸

This prayer assumes the faith of the deceased, and assumes that (s)he will be raised to life in the presence of God at the return of Christ. The millennial view is strongly Evangelical, and implies some sort of soul-sleep in which the dead await their resurrection at the Parousia.

Section 51 (optional)³³⁹

This prayer displays a similar theological stance to that in section 50, but has one great advantage over that prayer. It refers quite clearly to the death and resurrection of Jesus, declaring this as the ground of Christian anticipation of our own resurrection. In this way we are delivered from the danger of sentimentality to a clear theological hope.

Section 52 (optional)³⁴⁰

In this prayer there is an ambiguity. What is meant by “remember”? Is there simply a gratitude for all that the deceased has been such that the remembering is memorial and no more? Or is there a petitionary nature to the remembering? Those who like their theology cut and dried will find this

they could join. The ecumenical usage of the prayer, or the bishop's perception of its non-usage, arises from the Church of England's constant regard to what Roman Catholics are doing; the Romans use the modified traditional form of the Lord's Prayer in the Mass. Methodists and members of the United Reformed Church use ICET; Baptists suggest both possibilities. Certainly, with the fall in church attendance, fewer and fewer people in the general population who attend church only occasionally are aware of the ICET text, and the bishop may be right in his instinct about what is known. However, bishops have duties as teachers of the Church, and educationalists in England and Wales who have been consulted have suggested that the two versions be taught in schools in parallel. The argument is far from over, even if some have already made their decisions.

See my letter to *The Independent*, published 16 November 1993.

³³⁸ *Alternative Service Book*, page 334.

³³⁹ *Alternative Service Book*, page 334.

³⁴⁰ *Alternative Service Book*, page 334.

prayer unsatisfactory. But there is much to be said for ambiguity where it allows for varying legitimate theologies to meet in one prayer without division.

Section 53 (optional)³⁴¹

The remembrance in this prayer is to be performed by God, who is to raise the deceased from sleep. The prayer probably ought not to be read as suggesting that life eternal is in effect simply to exist in the memory of God. However, those who adopt that theological view would certainly find this prayer congenial. The notion that God needs to be reminded that *N* was one of the faithful departed, almost as if needing to consult some sort of list in case anyone is accidentally overlooked, is perhaps reading too much into the wording of this prayer. What is really intended is a commendation to God, and it is at this level that the prayer is generally used. “The sign of faith” is, of course, a baptismal reference.

Section 54 (optional)³⁴²

The opening phrase of this prayer is as close as we get to the old *Deus, apud quem omnia morientia vivunt*. Despite the attempt to give more expression to Catholic understanding of death and the dead, this link with Sarum is finally lost in the *Alternative Service Book*. The present prayer refers to the departed as being held by God, but rather than pursuing this thought it is transformed into a petition for the bereaved.

Section 55 (optional)³⁴³

As with the prayer in section 51, we are given a clear reference to the Paschal Mystery. But in this case an explicit link with the resurrection of the dead is not made, and the prayer addresses itself to the needs of the bereaved. The connection between the opening credal statement and subsequent petition is not really well made, and the prayer lacks coherent direction.

Section 56 (optional)³⁴⁴

This prayer is a re-wording of the third prayer offered in the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer*. It represents a more Catholic eschatology, but a significant

³⁴¹ *Alternative Service Book*, page 334.

³⁴² *Alternative Service Book*, page 335.

³⁴³ *Alternative Service Book*, page 335.

³⁴⁴ *Alternative Service Book*, page 335.

excision weakens the thrust of the prayer as it was printed in 1928 (and in the later revision of 1965). The earlier version asked:

Grant them thy peace; let light perpetual shine upon them.

These petitions no longer appear, and the effect is to weaken the intercession for the dead. Anglo-Catholics find this unsatisfactory.

Section 57 (optional)³⁴⁵

This prayer also made its appearance in the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer*, and is amended only in the loss of the archaic second person singular form of the personal pronouns. It retains a more poetic feel, and thus escapes the charge levelled at much of the language of the *Alternative Service Book* - that it is prosaic and unimaginative.

Section 58 (optional)³⁴⁶

This prayer, with its use of the imagery of evening and rest, evokes a tranquillity and calm which have made it immensely popular. It is the most poetic of all the prayers offered in the Funeral Service of the *Alternative Service Book*, and it is this cast of language which makes it so successful. Poetry is the language of ritual, and this prayer demonstrates the fact with absolute clarity.

Section 59 (optional)³⁴⁷

The bidding prayer of this section is a clear attempt to meet the sensitivities of Anglo-Catholic theology without upsetting those of the Evangelical party. The commemoration of the departed has not been without difficulty for Evangelicals - although, of course, they do remember the dead, and give thanks for the example of Christians who have gone before. But "commemoration" has intercessory overtones, which Anglo-Catholics want strongly to affirm. The ensuing petition - that God's "unfailing" love may extend to all, which gives expression to a more Catholic understanding of the

³⁴⁵ *Alternative Service Book*, page 335.

³⁴⁶ *Alternative Service Book*, page 335. This prayer is directly based on a passage from John Henry Newman's sermon of 1834, entitled 'Wisdom and Innocence'.

³⁴⁷ *Alternative Service Book*, page 336.

state of the dead - is certainly one which the old Reformers would have strongly resisted in the context of the funeral (if not elsewhere).³⁴⁸

Section 60 (optional)³⁴⁹

This short litany relates dying, death and bereavement to the Paschal Mystery by its opening address to God “who raised Christ his Son from the dead for the salvation of all”. It gathers the community of faith into one and, although the issue had not at the time of publication gained the strength it has now, it avoids gender-oriented language. In this last respect it is not alone (other prayers jar a little, cf. sections 50, 51, 52, 53). Nonetheless, of all the additional prayers printed the selection this prayer seems most sympathetic to current concerns about the use of gender-free language in liturgy.

Sections 50-60 provide some attempt to suggest the passage of the dead And reflect in their variety the diversity of expressed belief within the Church of England.³⁵⁰

Section 10 (mandatory)

Following the additional prayers, a concluding prayer is offered.³⁵¹ It offers a barely disguised *memento mori*, and leads to the commendation to God of the dead. The prayer is a new composition for the *Alternative Service Book*.

Section 11 (optional)

Immediately before the commendation a hymn may be sung.

³⁴⁸ The Calvinist doctrine of a limited atonement would surely not want to speak in such universal terms about God’s “unfailing” love.

³⁴⁹ *Alternative Service Book*, page 336.

³⁵⁰ These details are listed in section order in *A Companion to the Alternative Service Book*, pages 408-409.

In order to indicate the provenance of the prayers contained in sections 50-60, the following note is a summary of the details given by Bradshaw and Jasper. Sections 50 and 57 are new prayers (although 57 includes the old phrase “those whom we love but see no longer”). Sections 51, 53 and 55 are amended from the Series 2 proposals - section 51 appeared in the 1954 South African Prayer Book, section 53 is based on a petition from the old Roman canon. Sections 54 and 58 were drawn from the 1928 book - section 58 has been attributed to the age of Elizabeth I. Section 52 appeared first in a Memorandum from the Archbishops in May 1968. Section 57 appeared in the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer* and in the American book of the same year where it was found in the Burial Service of a Child - it has been attributed to Bishop Slattery of Massachusetts. Section 59 is taken from the Intercession of the Holy Communion Series 3. Section 60 was devised in response to a request from the General Synod’s Revision Committee

³⁵¹ *Alternative Service Book*, page 314.

Section 12 (mandatory)

Although it is not given a distinct heading, this section and the one that follow mark the commendation of the dead.³⁵² In this rite there is no clear distinction between commending the soul to God and committing the body to the ground (or the elements).³⁵³ This prayer reflects the debate about the body-soul anthropology. This prayer simply commends the person by name to God. While there is no evidence that those who drafted this rite gave lengthy consideration to the anthropological issue, the result is a commendable ambivalence!

Section 13 (mandatory)³⁵⁴

Where the committal is to take place elsewhere, this is effectively a summarizing prayer, gathering together the liturgical action thus far and moving towards the post-liminal phase of the rite. In a single sentence this prayer achieves that purpose by a synthesis of theological and pastoral expression which is far less cumbersome than its equivalent in the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer* (see page 133). It is a masterly formula.

The Committal**Section 14 (optional)**

A sentence of scripture [Revelation 14.13] may be used to introduce this phase of the rite. This is of particular importance where the committal occurs in a different place from the rest of the service. Otherwise it may be omitted.

Sections 15 and 16 (mandatory)

Section 15 is a rubric which introduces the two alternative sets of readings which are set out in section 16.³⁵⁵ The first selection is of verses from Psalm

³⁵² *Alternative Service Book*, page 315.

³⁵³ Jasper and Bradshaw argue that in Series 2 a clear distinction was made “between the commendation of the deceased person to God, and the committal of the remains to their last resting place”. They suggest that this distinction is continued in *Alternative Service Book* but “in a slightly different form. Now the whole person is commended to the mercy of God”. However clear it seems to Jasper and Bradshaw, the distinction seems to me to be lost by the very act of commending “the whole person”. Cf. *A Companion to the Alternative Service Book*, page 401, commentary on section 12.

³⁵⁴ *Alternative Service Book*, page 315.

³⁵⁵ *Alternative Service Book*, pages 315-316.

103, which speak of the comparative shortness of life and of the steadfast compassion and mercy of God.³⁵⁶

The verses used are clearly intended to be an encouragement to those who mourn that all will be well, but the verses which are omitted do not really allow the interpretation which the selection encourages. The Lord's goodness extends to those who keep covenant. This qualification is surely of some significance to the psalmist, and one has the feeling that the pastoral intention has been achieved at the expense of the integrity of the text. Most mourners will be unaware of this, and pragmatists will reassure themselves that it is the effect and the result which matter. Others may be less sanguine, and may well ask whether we can ever achieve a good result by doubtful means.

The alternative selection comes from a variety of sources: Job 14.1 following; the *media vita*; and the old prayer "Lord God, holy and strong, holy and immortal". It is an anthem which is traditionally attributed (with no conclusive evidence) to the Swiss monk, Notker.

Man born of a woman has but a short time to live. Like a flower he blossoms and then withers; like a shadow he flees and never stays.

In the midst of life we are in death; to whom can we turn to help, but to you, Lord, who are justly angered by our sins?

Lord God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, holy and most merciful Saviour, deliver us from the bitter pains of eternal death. You know the secrets of our hearts: in your mercy hear our prayer, forgive us our sins, and at our last hour let us not fall away from you.

These sentences place human existence and salvation in the framework of dependency upon God without glossing over the difficulties of sin and judgement. In so doing they reflect a less optimistic but more hopeful view of individual eschatology.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁶ Psalm 103 verses 8, 13-17.

³⁵⁷ I wish to distinguish between humanistic optimism which hopes for the best and theistic hope which looks to God. Romans 8.28 is an example of what I mean. The *crux interpretum* is whether πάντα is the subject or the object of συνεργῆν. If πάντα is the subject, Paul is understood to be arguing for a fatalistic optimism. Since this seems alien to the *corpus* of Pauline theology, the likelihood is that πάντα

Section 17 (mandatory)

The prayer of committal to the elements avoids speaking (as happened from 1552 onwards) of the soul being taken by God.³⁵⁸ The person is entrusted to God, even though the body is committed to burial or cremation. The body-soul anthropology is still implicit, even though the soul is not mentioned.³⁵⁹

Where the language of committal is used, it places those who prefer a unitary anthropology in a difficulty. Strict logic would demand that the officiant should say something along the lines of

.... we now commit *him* to the ground (or to be cremated)

which would be pastorally undesirable. In Chapter Nine I make a positive proposal about this ritual moment (see page 247)

Sections 18 and 19 (mandatory)

There follow two scriptural sentences from Psalm 16.11 and from Jude 24-25.³⁶⁰ Alternatively section 13 may be used. The mourners are dismissed into the keeping of God, the source of life and salvation.

The Interment of Ashes

A short form is offered where ashes are to be interred (sections 42-45).³⁶¹ It proposes a sentence of scripture (cf. section 2), uses as a prayer of committal the prayer previously given at section 17, offers a new prayer at section 44, and concludes with the grace at section 45.

The new prayer asks for unity in the vision of God:

Almighty God, grant that we, with all those who have believed in you, may be united in the full knowledge of your love and the unclouded vision of your glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

is the object of God's working. In this case, Paul's argument is that our hope is in God.

³⁵⁸ In 1549, the priest said "I commend thy soul to God...". Cf. Keeling, page 333.

³⁵⁹ *Alternative Service Book*, page 316. The words in square brackets may be omitted.

³⁶⁰ *Alternative Service Book*, pages 316-317.

³⁶¹ *Alternative Service Book*, page 324.

The Funeral Service with Holy Communion

The re-introduction in 1928 of the possibility of a funeral rite with a eucharistic celebration has been retained in the *Alternative Service Book*. Its order is set out in footnote 332 which reproduces the rubric of paragraph 47 in the *Alternative Service Book* rite.

SUMMARY

The funeral rite of the *Alternative Service Book 1980* is an awkward settlement between the Anglo-Catholics and the Evangelicals. While it is inappropriate to speak of the results in terms of winning and losing, there is no doubt that Anglo-Catholics feel that much of what they wanted to see as part of a funeral rite has been marginalized. This is particularly true of the Additional Prayers, which they wanted to see in the body of the rite. However, it is worth noting that although the contentious phrase "Requiem Mass" is nowhere used, the celebration of the Eucharist as the framework of a funeral liturgy is hardly what most Evangelicals would think of as normal. The fact that neither party is fully satisfied with the result is probably not the consequence of fudging, but of an irenic spirit of inclusion. In the event, the drafting of Series 3's Funeral Services was, in the words of one commentator - Michael Perham - himself a distinguished Anglican liturgist:

the sort of tinkering required to modernize the language and reach an acceptable compromise on prayer for the dead.³⁶²

Perham criticizes the lack of radical revision which occurred in the preparation of the Funeral Service for the *Alternative Service Book* on three grounds. First, he argues that there was assumption made which is no longer tenable (if, indeed, it was at the time of the revision) about the nature of the normal "funeral community". Families and other mourners are no longer drawn predominantly from a shared community - people have frequently moved far away from their sociological and geographical origins. Equally, there is no longer possible an assumption that people are familiar with Christian rites and liturgies, as the funeral services in the *Alternative Service Book* seem to imply. This leaves the funeral service itself as the only material - along with the shared grief - that, in the very limited time available, the officiant has to work on to make a liturgical community with

³⁶² M. Perham, "The Funeral Liturgy", *Towards Liturgy 2000*, ed. M Perham, SPCK/Alcuin Club, 1989, page 53.

a shared sense of belonging, a relationship with one another, and an atmosphere of worship.³⁶³

Perham's second difficulty is related to our developing understanding of the nature of grief. He comments upon the danger of distancing oneself from the fact of death, and suggests that the handing over of the management of the liturgy to a priest marks one stage in such a distancing. He believes that this is reinforced by the fact that death no longer predominantly occurs at home among the family, but in hospitals, and that the subsequent washing and laying out is no longer a family custom but is left to funeral directors who also carry the coffin to the grave or the catafalque. The family and other close mourners are almost left as observers rather than participants, having no contact with the body. This, he argues,

calls for a liturgy that helps us to take the body seriously, gives us more to "do", and compensates in some way for all that has been lost by this distancing.³⁶⁴

The third area of concern for Perham is not so much a pastoral one, as theological, and relates to the contentious area of prayers for the dead. Perham suggests that Evangelical sensibilities must be properly acknowledged and that any prayers provided should remain optional. Nonetheless, he believes that a richer and liturgically more satisfying provision can and should be made.

When revision of the *Alternative Service Book* is undertaken, Perham suggests four areas for fresh consideration:

- 1) a richer provision of texts that commend the departed to God, that affirm our fellowship with them, and that express our solidarity with them in prayer,
- 2) a need for a rite which binds the mourners into community, the "feel" should be eucharistic even if the Eucharist itself is not celebrated,
- 3) an awareness of how grief and loss may be expressed, and provision for more effective ministry to them,
- 4) rites which take the body more seriously, marking its passing more theologically - perhaps by reference to the

³⁶³ M. Perham, "The Funeral Liturgy", page 54.

³⁶⁴ M. Perham, "The Funeral Liturgy", page 55. Perham notes these pastoral issues, not in order to condemn past liturgies for failing to predict present trends, but in order to suggest the agenda which must be addressed when the *Alternative Service Book* undergoes revision at the end of its legal life in 2000.

rite of baptism with the sprinkling with water and the lit Paschal candle.

In so short an essay as Perham's,³⁶⁵ we cannot expect a full critique of the rites provided by the *Alternative Service Book*. That said, he provides a very clear and important agenda. I want myself to ask in addition whether the question of what happens at death has been fully addressed. The *Alternative Service Book* avoids any anthropological judgement about body and soul or integrated unity, and we may legitimately wonder whether this is in order to avoid further theological division. Nonetheless, there is a diversity of thought in the optional prayers provided. The example below seems to espouse the notion of soul sleep:

Remember, O Lord, this your servant, who has gone before us with the sign of faith, and now rests in the sleep of peace. According to your promises, grant to *him* and to all who rest in Christ, refreshment, light and peace; through the same Christ our Lord. **Amen.**³⁶⁶

Soul sleep has had a long history of advocates, but they have not been able to secure unanimous support. The Church of England has probably arrived at a solution peculiarly suited to its own diversity, which is to provide a range of options and allow officiants and mourners to select according to preference. It may be theologically untidy, but tidiness is impossible in the face of mystery, and it may be better to offer pastoral breadth rather than theological precision.³⁶⁷

In his later book *Liturgy Pastoral and Parochial* Perham argues for the liturgical colour to be white:

Traditionally the liturgical colour for funerals is black. That is not appropriate. Black may be an honest expression of the mourners' sorrow, but the Church is not in mourning, except as a gesture of solidarity with the mourners. The Church's involvement is to proclaim both forgiveness and resurrection. Of the former, violet is the traditional colour. It is appropriate for funerals. But white is the colour of

³⁶⁵ Perham's essay covers six small pages - fewer than 2500 words.

³⁶⁶ Section 53.

³⁶⁷ This is not to be construed as an invitation to liturgical chaos or *laissez-faire* attitudes to theological consideration of death. In my own liturgies (see Chapter Nine) I offer pastoral variety from my own definite theological position.

Easter and will nearly always be the most suitable liturgical colour for a funeral. The black scarf gives quite the wrong emphasis.³⁶⁸

Perham certainly has the earliest practice of the Church on his side, and the Roman Catholic proposals following Vatican II have consistently argued for white as signifying Christ's resurrection and our baptism. Black has almost everywhere lost its place as the liturgical colour of death. However, the move to white may not be as clearly advantageous as its proponents suggest, and nearly all remark that violet is an acceptable alternative. I believe that violet is the best colour, since it is used in the preparatory seasons of Advent and Lent, and reminds us that in death there is still judgement. Moreover, it is not at all clear that to move immediately to rejoicing is a wise pastoral strategy since the vital periods of separation and transition are lost. Von Balthasar has reminded us of the importance of Holy Saturday,³⁶⁹ and in that part of the Paschal Mystery there is much that properly addresses the ritual chaos which marks the transition between separation and incorporation.

The *Alternative Service Book 1980* does not represent a thorough re-working of the funeral rite in terms of a theological and liturgical response to contemporary thinking about death. It is really a revised edition of what has gone before. In some ways it goes beyond 1662, but not more than the 1928 revision did. Its real change is in the introduction of modern language. Like the New English Bible, it is not marked by the poetic spirit, and to this extent it fails as liturgy.³⁷⁰ New funeral rites will need to reflect hard thinking about social anthropology (death as a passage) and about theological anthropology (the nature of death in human existence before God). The results will then need to be written in a language rich and diverse in imagery. The task is immense.

³⁶⁸ M. Perham, *Liturgy Pastoral and Parochial*, SPCK, London, 1984, page 135. The black scarf to which he refers is the preaching scarf worn (usually by Evangelicals) at Morning and Evening Prayer.

³⁶⁹ H. U. von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1990.

³⁷⁰ The poetic instinct is to evoke rather than to explain (didactic poetry always has to defend itself). Poetry is a language of wonder rather than analysis, and it is *par excellence* the language of drama. It is uniquely suited therefore to the drama of the rite which invokes the transcendence as well as the immanence of God. It is also, of course, the language of love, and is especially privileged in its ability to address the love which marks funerals: love for the deceased and the love with which God calls the dead to new life.

Scotland, Wales and Ireland

Commentary on the liturgies of the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Church in Wales and the Church of Ireland will be limited to general rather than detailed observation. It will address itself to distinctive issues in rubric and text. I will also comment on the proposals for revision at present in process in Wales.³⁷¹

The Scottish Episcopal Church

REVISED FUNERAL RITES 1987

The *Revised Funeral Rites 1987* are the result of careful consideration not only of the Anglican tradition, but of the traditions of the wider Christian Church.³⁷² Where material has been borrowed, thought has been taken as to its original context and purpose, and wherever possible these have been preserved in the new rites. They also reflect a more homogenous theological position than exists in the Church of England. This has led to a greater liturgical coherence.

The Introduction describes the rite as having:

... the traditional structure of an office with psalmody, scripture reading and prayer. Where appropriate this can be adapted to become the liturgy of the Word preceding a celebration of Holy Communion.³⁷³

In describing the function of the rite it continues:

As well as committing the dead person into the keeping of God, within the context of the resurrection hope, there is a pastoral dimension to a funeral. Attention must be paid to the particular needs of the mourners at that death. Careful choice should be made from the alternative prayers provided. It may be right to discuss all the options explicitly with the bereaved family. On other occasions it may be the responsibility of the parish priest to make a sensitive selection, after listening carefully to the feelings expressed.

³⁷¹ The Revd Canon Dr Gianfranco Tellini of the Scottish Episcopal Church has asked that the proposed revision of the 1987 texts be abandoned until those given the responsibility have read this thesis. This has been agreed. Dr Tellini advised me of this decision in a conversation at the Joint Liturgical Group meeting on 23-24 March 1994.

³⁷² *Revised Funeral Rites 1987*, General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church, Edinburgh, 1987.

³⁷³ *Revised Funeral Rites 1987*, page 1.

Where the words provided do not meet the situation, other forms may be devised.³⁷⁴

It is most important to observe that what is being offered is not one rite which must be used inflexibly whatever the pastoral circumstances, but a series of psalms, readings and prayers which can be adapted with the family to make in every case a unique funeral service.

PRAYERS WITH RELATIVES at the time of bereavement

In this rite there occur four distinctive prayers. The first two commend the departed and the bereaved to the mercy of God, the third is used at the closing of the coffin, the fourth on leaving the house.³⁷⁵ The third prayer is extraordinarily evocative in its use of language and the fourth is a calm and sensitive prayer of separation. I reproduce the third prayer without further comment:

Father,
 your servant's eyes have closed
 in the final sleep of death,
 eyes that laughed, eyes that shed tears.
 Let them wake to the full vision of your glory,
 and our brother/sister see you face to face;
 through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

***THE RECEPTION OF THE COFFIN IN CHURCH
 before the funeral service***

This is introduced by an opening sentence (Deuteronomy 33.27) followed by verses from Psalm 42. These are marvellously apposite - especially if we take the view of the Mozarabic rite that the psalter is ^{not} articulated by the congregation for themselves but in order to give voice to the cry of the dead:

My soul is thirsty for God, thirsty for the living God:
 when shall I come and see his face?

 O put your trust in God:
 for I will praise him yet,
 who is my deliverer and my God.

³⁷⁴ *Revised Funeral Rites 1987*, page 1.

³⁷⁵ This prayer is a condensed form of the prayer written for the French Catholic funeral rites in the early 1970's. Other material in *Revised Funeral Rites 1987* has been taken from the same source.

The reading from John 14.2f. is followed by two prayers, the second of which is the old Third Collect for Evening Prayer (“Lighten our darkness, Lord, we pray”). The first prayer is another example of how the Scottish Episcopal Church has allowed poetic imagery to gather into a few words a whole range of emotion and ambience in these rites:

Father,
 give peace to your servant,
 whose body now rests in this place:
 May the prayers of your whole Church uphold him/her
 and support us in face of death’s mystery;
 may the stillness of this house enter into us,
 and our silence be the token of our trust. **Amen.**³⁷⁶

The linking of the evening stillness of the church with the stillness and silence of trust is very powerful, carrying the resonance of Psalm 46.10:

Be still, and know that I am God.

This rite will not invariably take place in an evening, but it is likely to be the prevailing practice. Moreover, the inclusion of the Third Collect from Evening Prayer makes the evening context especially suitable.

THE SERVICE IN CHURCH

As was made clear in the Introduction, this service follows the normal pattern. Once again, it is the prayers which make the strong impression. There are two options for the Collect, and a Prayer for the Mourners, and a Prayer of Faith - all of which display a sense of appropriate liturgical expression allied to pastoral and theological awareness.

Given the attention which those who wrote these rites paid to the nature of grief and mourning, it is not surprising that the rubric at the end of this section reads:

*The Prayer for the Mourners and the Prayer of Faith
 should always be said.*³⁷⁷

If the Holy Communion is to be shared, the Liturgy of the Sacrament follows here.

³⁷⁶ *Revised Funeral Rites 1987, page 7.*

³⁷⁷ *Revised Funeral Rites 1987, page 10.*

The committee charged with the preparation of these rites took counsel from Dr Colin Murray Parkes who has for long been associated with the clinical study and care of the bereaved. The Liturgical Committee of the Episcopal Church of Scotland chose well in their adviser. Not the least of the reasons why their rites are so helpful is their underlying awareness of how the grief of bereavement needs to express itself.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁸ The rites of the Scottish Episcopal Church come closer than any other to those of the Anglican Church in New Zealand in realising the *passage* which funeral rites represent.

The Church of Ireland

FUNERAL SERVICES 1987

Unlike many contemporary funeral rites (although like that found in the Church of England's *Alternative Service Book 1980*) there is no preliminary essay introducing the theological and pastoral considerations which inform the liturgy. The rites themselves are in a fairly conservative and Evangelical tradition. In the Funeral Service itself, the faith of the church is proclaimed in the saying of the Apostles' Creed.³⁷⁹ There is, however, little sense of the communion of saints and the life everlasting impinging on the congregation other than by a thankfulness for the example of the faithful of former days.³⁸⁰ For example, the Catholic versicle and response:

Rest eternal grant to him/her O Lord:
And let light perpetual shine upon him/her.

is nowhere to be found. There is no suggestion that the rites in any way effect the passage of the dead. This is unsurprising, when we try to understand the nature of a divided Ireland. A book could usefully be written which traced the liturgical sensitivities of the parties to the historical conflict in the island which represent themselves as Catholic and Protestant.³⁸¹

³⁷⁹ The Apostles' Creed is said at paragraph 9 on page 9 of *Funeral Services 1987* according to the use of the Church of Ireland, General Synod of the Church of Ireland, 1987. On the following page verses from the *Te Deum* are offered as an alternative. The rites have recently been republished by the Church of Ireland in *Alternative Occasional Services*, 1993.

³⁸⁰ Three prayers are provided under the heading "The Communion of Saints" on page 14 of *Funeral Services 1987*.

³⁸¹ The ordering of 'Catholics' and 'Protestants' is alphabetical rather than ecclesiological! I am unwilling to cry "A plague o' both your houses...!" (*Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare, Act 3.1.112), for they are both sisters and brothers to me. As, of course, they are to each other, and as their leaders so often proclaim, in the face of sectarian opposition. English comment on Irish affairs has too often been unwise. I prefer to keep silence!

The Church in Wales

DRAFT REVISED FUNERAL SERVICE - First Proposals brought to the Liturgical Committee of the Church in Wales

Five rites were introduced in the first proposals of the new funeral order: a vigil rite, a funeral rite for an adult, a funeral rite for a child, a rite for burial of ashes, a rite for the funeral of an unborn child. At this very early stage there are no introductory pastoral notes or essays. While it is fairly safe to assume that pastoral notes will be made available, it is to be hoped that the Church in Wales will follow the prevailing trend of making some statement about the Christian understanding of death. These essays do not need to be long, but they are of help in establishing how funeral rites form part of the Church's ministry to the dead and the bereaved.

The Vigil Rite

This follows a traditional form of optional Entrance Procession, Greeting and Opening Prayers, Readings and Homily, Intercession, optional Eucharist, and Blessing and Dismissal. It includes options for use where the dead person is a child.

Entrance Procession

Sentences of scripture are offered after the minister has met the body at the entrance to the churchyard, or at the church door.³⁸² It is of interest to note that, as with the early Church of England burial rites (1549, 1552, 1662), it is the body which is met and not the mourners. It ought also be observed that the rite may be adapted for use as prayers in the house.³⁸³

Greeting and Opening Prayers

The mourners are greeted with the Grace, the deceased is commended to the Lord, and prayers follow asking for faith, peace and confidence. Where a child has died, comfort and trust are sought for the parents. In the prayer for the deceased the phrase "let light perpetual shine upon them" is used - an indication of the strong Catholic tradition within the Church in Wales.

³⁸² Deuteronomy 33.27 [RSV]; Job 19.25, 27 [RSV]; Lamentations 3.22-23 [RSV]; Matthew 5.4 [RSV]; John 3.16 [NEB]; Romans 8.38-39 [NEB]; Romans 14.8 [GNB]; 1 Corinthians 2.9 [GNB]; 1 Thessalonians 4.14,18 [NEB]; 1 Peter 1.3 [NEB]; John 14.1-3 [RSV altered]; John 10.14 [RSV]; Matthew [5.8]. These may be supplemented or substituted by Psalms 103, 139 or 23.

³⁸³ This is proposed in the closing rubric to the rite.

Readings and Homily

The rubric indicates that the selection of readings should be from the passages offered in the Funeral Service. Where there is to be a Eucharist, there must be a Gospel, in the case of a child's vigil the Gospel recommended is Mark 10.13-16. A homily is optional. While I have a strong conviction that a homily or sermon at the funeral should not be optional, the tone at the vigil is much more one of contemplation and silence. If anything is to be said, it should be very brief. What counts at a vigil is an atmosphere of quiet trust upon God, and words are not at a premium. The rubric observes that "a *brief* homily on the reading(s) may follow" (my stress).

Eucharist

Instructions are given that where used the eucharist should proceed from the Peace; there is also guidance about which Proper is to be used. At this stage, because no pastoral notes are available, there is no explicit reason given for the celebration of the eucharist at a vigil. It is fair to surmise, however, that at least part of the reason will be to enable those who will not be able to be present at the funeral on the following day to make their communion as though at a Requiem. My own judgement is that while the pastoral intention is good this is an unhelpful practice. I am firmly convinced that, where the deceased has been a regular communicant member of the Church, the celebration of the Eucharist is an effective way of speaking of the communion of saints and the unity of the whole Church, living and departed. In this way, too, the death we mourn is linked to the Paschal Mystery. However, a Eucharist at the Reception and at the Funeral may be misrepresented as two Requiem Masses. In my judgment this leads to confusion.

Blessing and Dismissal

Two prayers are offered. The first links the words of Revelation 14.13 with the *lux perpetua*. The second looks for consolation in "the love of God and the peace of Jesus" and refers to the wiping away of all tears [Revelation 7.17; 21.4].

Funeral Service For An Adult

The outline of the rite is traditional: optional Entrance Procession, Greeting and Opening Prayer, Readings and Homily, Intercession, optional Eucharist, Commendation, Procession to the Place of Committal, Committal.

The Entrance Procession is the same as that provided in the Vigil.

Greeting and Opening Prayers

Of interest here is the brief opening statement made by the priest which clearly states the agenda of the rite:

We have come together to commend our *brother N.* into the hands of Almighty God our heavenly Father.³⁸⁴ In the presence of death, Christians have sure ground for hope and confidence, and even for joy, because the Lord Jesus Christ, who shared our human life and death, was raised again triumphant, and lives for evermore. In him his people find eternal life, and, in this faith, we put our whole trust in his goodness and mercy.

The task of the funeral is related to the dead person. The living are enjoined to place their confidence in the death and resurrection of Christ. Two prayers are offered. The second refers to death as the “gate of eternal life”, which suggests the idea of transition in a rite of passage.

Readings and Homily

The readings, psalms and canticles are set out with a brief indication of the content of each.³⁸⁵ Once again, in common with much of the Anglican Communion throughout the world, the homily or sermon is optional.

384 The typography at present proposed allows for the inclusion of the feminine within the masculine by the use of italics. This does not really seem adequate in a book which, if approved by the Governing Body of the Church in Wales, will form the liturgical provision for a Christian Church in the 21st century. What ought at least to be provided is the explicit alternative of the feminine - in this case *sister/brother* or *brother/sister*. However, given the very strong adherence to “tradition” in the Church in Wales (cf. the majority vote among the clergy against the ordination of women to the priesthood in early 1994), there will be considerable opposition to inclusive language in the liturgy which is seen as a fad of political correctness.

385 *Old Testament*
Isaiah 25.6-9; 61.1-3; Lamentations 3.22-26,31-33; Wisdom 3.1-5,9.
Psalms
42; 46; 90; 121; 130.
New Testament
Romans 5.5-11; 8.14-19,34-35,37-39; 1 Corinthians 15.20-26,35-38(43-44,53-58); 2 Corinthians 4.16 - 5.9; 1 John 3.1-2; Revelation 7.9-17; 21.2-7
Psalm or Canticle
23; 27; 106; 116
Gospel
Matthew 11.25-30; John 5.24-27; 6.37-40; 6:51-58; 10.11-16; 11.21-27; 11.32-38,40; 14.1-6

Intercession

Two forms are provided. Both are of great interest. Form A speaks of the death and resurrection of Christ and of baptism into that death and resurrection, and asks for forgiveness and comfort in grief. The opening of form B is, if anything, stronger still. In three brief strophes it relates by a series of parallelisms the story of Jesus to deceased. The remaining strophes re-phrase the themes of Form A. I reproduce Form B in full below:

For our *brother N.*, let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, who wept at the grave of Lazarus: comfort us in our distress:

Lord, have mercy.

You raised the dead to life: grant our *brother* eternal life.

Lord, have mercy.

You promised paradise to the penitent thief: bring our *brother* to the joys of heaven:

Lord, have mercy.

[Our *brother* was washed in the waters of Baptism and anointed with the Holy Spirit; give *him* fellowship with all your saints.

Lord, have mercy.]

[*He* was nourished with your Body and Blood: grant *him* a place at the table in your heavenly kingdom:

Lord, have mercy.]

[*N.* shared in the priesthood of Christ and led your people in prayer and worship: may *he* share now in the worship of heaven:³⁸⁶

Lord, have mercy.]

Comfort us in our sorrow at the death of *N.*: let our faith be our consolation, and eternal life our hope.

Lord, have mercy.

After a silence, two prayers are offered as alternative to one another. Both commend the deceased to God. The first speaks of *his* soul resting in peace with the souls of all the faithful departed.³⁸⁷ The second, using an equally

³⁸⁶ There are no women priests in the Church in Wales! Nor is there any idea of the sacramental priesthood of all believers. The question of lay presidency is, however, not simply confined to the episcopally governed communions.

³⁸⁷ This is an ancient and common wording in the Western tradition.

ancient tradition, seeks that the bereaved may share with the deceased in the Kingdom.

The Eucharist option, where adopted, is the same as that provided for in the Vigil.

Commendation

The fact that at this early stage there is still a division between commendation and committal suggests that the Church in Wales is unlikely to hold a debate about the body-soul anthropology. This is a predictable, if depressing, outcome given the inherent traditionalism of the Church in Wales.

The first prayer of commendation

Into your hands, O merciful Saviour,
we commend your servant *N*.
Acknowledge, we pray, a sheep of your own fold,
a lamb of your own flock,
a sinner of your own redeeming.
Receive *him* into the arms of your mercy,
into the blessed rest of everlasting peace,
and into the glorious company of the saints in light. **Amen.**

was first used by the Episcopal Church of the United States of America. It was printed in their *Book of Common Prayer* in prose form, rather than in the blank verse form of the Church in Wales proposals.³⁸⁸ The verse form was used by the Anglican Church of Canada in their *Book of Alternative Services*³⁸⁹ where it appeared with a *him/her* option in line 6, which the Church in Wales has ignored, reproducing the original male gender wording. While the Church in Wales may avoid inclusive language, it is highly doubtful whether the Episcopal Church in the United States of America will want to do so at its next revision.³⁹⁰ The prayer itself evokes a pastoral imagery which may be more appropriate in mid-Wales than in down-town New York. The

³⁸⁸ *The Book of Common Prayer*, The Church Hymnal Corporation, New York, 1979, page 465 (the Vigil) and page 483 (Burial I).

³⁸⁹ *The Book of Alternative Services of the Anglican Church of Canada*, Anglican Book Centre, Toronto, 1985, page 586.

³⁹⁰ In conversation with the Revd Canon Dr Keith Denison, Chairman of the Church in Wales's Liturgical Committee, I asked whether this was a deliberate move. Dr Denison warned me not to read too much at this point into the male oriented language. However, he did agree that the Church in Wales was liturgically conservative.

prayer will certainly have a poignancy in the farming parish, but we should not rely upon emotional attachment for the effectiveness of prayers. There are those who will argue that the image of the Good Shepherd is meaningless to those whose life has been in the city, and their voice is frequently heard in liturgical conferences. It does seem to me, however, that ~~the~~ this case can at least be initially resisted on two grounds. Theologically, the image of the Good Shepherd is an important one which describes the dependence of the creature upon its creator with very few, if any, negative associations. Sociologically, the city dweller is likely to have seen shepherds, even if only on the television screen. The image is not as devoid of meaning as some of its opponents suggest. In any event, I believe that this prayer is a good one which relates well to the one of the two hymns which many people will choose at a funeral, even when they are not church-goers.³⁹¹ I think the provision a good one.

Two other prayers are proposed which are simple commendations with, in the first case, the belief expressed that there will be a meeting in Christ at the last.

An anthem is also offered,

Give rest, O Christ, to youſ servant with your saints

which also appeared in the American Episcopalian *Book of Common Prayer* and the Canadian *Book of Alternative Services*.³⁹² The link is not, I think, entirely coincidental. The Church in Wales has in its first draft relied quite heavily on the Episcopal Churches of the North American sub-continent.³⁹³ The prayer is rooted in the creation and fall narratives of Genesis, citing in particular 3.19. The prayer relies, I believe, on the ancient prayer of the ninth century Chaldean rite.

³⁹¹ The hymn to which I refer is “The Lord’s my shepherd”, which even if it is not chosen (there may be no music), may still find expression in the reading of Psalm 23. The other hymn is “Abide with me”. Although modern-day shepherds may exercise their care of the sheep in different ways from those of biblical times, the image of care persists in the popular imagination. It ought not to be abandoned.

³⁹² *The Book of Common Prayer*, page 482. *The Book of Alternative Services*, page 586.

³⁹³ In a telephone conversation on 14 May 1994 with the Revd Canon Dr Keith Denison, I put this dependence to him, which he happily confirmed. It represented, he agreed, a tradition congenial to the Church in Wales.

The modern prayer is a version distinct from the Mozarabic formula, but the kinship is clear. The two prayers are reproduced below for the purposes of comparison. What emerges is the concise nature of the ancient liturgy with its direct address to God and without the modern style of liturgical address which feels the need to remind God of the creation and salvation history. The antiphon of the modern prayer, however, is a clever and creative linking of the teleology of the book of Revelation to that of the book of Genesis.

The Mozarabic Rite

May God, the Lord of all,
 who gave the commandment
 concerning thee,
 "Dust thou art, and to dust thou
 shalt return",
 himself call thee
 and set thee at his right hand
 resplendent in the glory of the
 resurrection;
 and may the Holy Mysteries
 that thou hast received
 plead thy cause
 and win thee pardon at the
 judgement seat.
 Amen.³⁹⁴

The Church in Wales

Give rest, O Christ, to your
 servant with your saints,
 where sorrow and pain are no
 more,
 neither sighing, but life
 everlasting.
 You only are immortal, the
 creator and maker of all;
 and we are mortal, formed of the
 earth,
 and to earth shall we return.
 For so did you ordain when you
 created me, saying,
 "You are dust, and to dust you
 shall return."
 All of us go down to the dust;
 yet even at the grave we make our
 song:
 Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.
 Give rest, O Christ, to your
 servant with your saints,

³⁹⁴ W. Macomber, "The Funeral Liturgy of the Chaldean Church", *Concilium*, vol.2, no.4., page 21.

The Mozarabic liturgy is marked by a focus on a biblical eschatology. The funeral is more than consolation for the bereaved or encouragement to pray for the deceased, it is a rite directed not at the living but at the dead. The prayers and worship offered are made to the Lord by the Church in the name of the deceased.

The liturgy demonstrates pastoral care rooted in a coherent theology of the Christian. Its eschatological tone is set by the use of psalm collects drawn from the normal ferial Offices - principally that of Morning Prayer, which would have been heard very often by the faithful. Although there are references to rest and tranquillity, the overwhelming images used of heaven are those of gladness, rejoicing and glory.

where sorrow and pain are no
more,
neither sighing, but life
everlasting.

This final blessing is a splendid rehearsal of the deceased's participation in the salvation history. It confronts human mortality and places death within the providence of God, reminding us of our creaturehood. It sees the Christian's resurrection as an act of God's summoning word (evoking, though not explicitly, the parallel word of creation and so linking with the cited Genesis text). Finally it relates the sacramental life of the Christian to the atonement.

The Procession to the Place of Committal

A hymn and the canticles *Benedictus*, *Nunc Dimittis*, and *Pascha Nostrorum* are offered from which a selection may be made.

The Committal

At the committal *In media vita* and an anthem combining John 6.37, Romans 8.11, Psalm 16.9, and Psalm 16.11 may be used. The two are quite distinct in their tone and emphasis. *In media vita* is dark; it originated in the medieval period and is concerned with the awfulness of judgement. The anthem is considerably more optimistic, rehearsing the promise of life and joy beyond death.

These are followed by the committal proper where three formulae are offered. The first speaks of the sure and certain hope of the resurrection and pronounces the Aaronic blessing. The second speaks of the transformation of the earthly body to be like the glorious body of Christ. The third, for use at sea, links the water of the deep with the water of baptism. This in itself is new in the committal formulae which I have been able to study, and strikes an imaginative note in which the waters become the place of new life.³⁹⁵ A further prayer commits the mourners to the comfort of God. The rite ends with the dismissal using one of the following: the Easter acclamation 'Christ is risen' with alleluias; the benediction from Philippians 4.7; the grace, or benediction, from Hebrews 13.20.

A final blessing of the grave is offered.

³⁹⁵ Cf. John 3.5, where birth by water and the spirit is seen by some commentators to carry a reference to human birth (verse 4) as well as to baptism.

Funeral of a Child

The structure of the service is the same as that proposed for the funeral of an adult. Prayers and readings are phrased and selected to take account of the particular sadness attaching to the death of a child. A clear emphasis is given both to the fatherly love of God and to the innocence of children.³⁹⁶ At the intercessions the story of the death of Lazarus is used thematically. While this gives a sense of the sadness of death within a family, the selection is a little forced since there is no indication that Lazarus was a child. The story of Jairus's daughter would perhaps be a better selection.

The remainder of the rite follows the shape and substance of that used for adults but with the addition of direct references to the family at the commendation and the committal. A special additional prayer is available for the mother of a young child. It is the same as that proposed by the Church of England in its *Funeral service for a Child dying near the time of Birth*.³⁹⁷ It is a prayer full of good intention, but stricken in my judgement by a most serious flaw. It is drawn substantially from the service in the old *Book of Common Prayer* called "The Churching of Women".³⁹⁸

Book of Common Prayer

O Almighty God,
we give thee humble thanks
for that thou hast vouchsafed
to deliver this woman thy servant
from the great pain
and peril of Childbirth;
Grant, we beseech thee,
most merciful Father,
that she, through thy help,
may both faithfully live,
and walk according to thy will,
in this life present:
and also may be partaker

Church in Wales

Loving Father,
in your mercy
you have brought *N*³⁹⁹
safely through childbirth.
We pray that she will know
your strength today
and trust in your unfailing love;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

³⁹⁶ The innocence and vulnerability of children are particularly expressed in the selection of Ephesians 1.1-3 (He chose us to be without blemish) and of Matthew 18.1-5,10 (Become like children) and Mark 10.13-16 (Let the children come to me).

³⁹⁷ *Funeral Service for a Child dying near the time of Birth*, Church House Publishing, London, 1989, page 10.

³⁹⁸ *Book of Common Prayer*, pages 398ff.

³⁹⁹ The Church of England rite has "your daughter *N*".

of everlasting glory in the life to come;
 through Jesus Christ our Lord.
 Amen.

It is unlikely that many parents will be aware of the source of a prayer which has been shortened and articulated in modern language. However, the Church in Wales fails to do what the Church of England did in its 1989 service which is to include a phrase about support in time of trouble. The result is that the prayer remains in essence that of the misogynist seventeenth century in which women are seen as dirtied by their sexuality and in need of cultic purification before re-admission to the house of God. I believe that an entirely different prayer needs to be written. The one provided by the Church of England in its prayer (c) of the 1989 rite is a good example.

Lord of all, we thank you
 for your work in creation,
 for nourishing life in the womb,
 for your love even in death.
 Thank you for the life of this child *N*,
 whom you gave to us and have taken to yourself.
 Thank you for the arms of your love
 embracing both us and *N* in your family.
 Thank you for your presence in our sorrow
 and your strength as our family grows older.
 Take our sadness, and fill us with your Spirit
 to serve you on earth
 and join your saints in glory,
 through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.⁴⁰⁰

A Funeral Service for an Unborn Child

For this service pastoral guidelines are proposed:

The loss of a child at any time during pregnancy causes deep distress, not only to the mother but to all the members of the family. Sensitive pastoral care is needed both immediately and subsequently. The family needs the assurance that God's promises are true, for this child as for another human being. They must be told, especially following a miscarriage or a still-birth, that this child was a unique individual, a person precious in the sight of God. The importance of a funeral service cannot be over-estimated. It must also be noted that the still-birth or miscarriage may be the first close experience

⁴⁰⁰ *Funeral Service for a Child dying near the time of Birth*, page 11.

with death for many parents and for the baby's brothers or sisters.

The service may take place in church, hospital, or crematorium, at the graveside, or at home. The minister must adapt it according to the particular circumstances. In some cases, a short Bible reading, with a prayer of commendation of the child, prayers for the parents, and the Lord's Prayer, is as much as is pastorally possible or desirable.

The Committal may be omitted if burial or cremation has already taken place.

The opening greeting acknowledges that

We had been looking forward to a time of joy and happiness;
but now there are tears and grief.

We are left with a feeling of emptiness,
and with unanswered questions.

However, the affirmation which follows of those truths which "we do know and hold onto" seems to move too quickly from those unanswered questions. Indeed, part of the problem with those questions is that they are not simply unanswered but unanswerable. An affirmation which follows so soon may seem a little like an attempt to answer precisely those agonies which cannot be answered with words. The second paragraph of the greeting needs re-drafting to offer the sharing of silence before any words are offered.

In the light of the above it may seem perverse that I should continue to insist on not making the homily optional. It does seem to me, however, that it is precisely in a short homily that the darkness of such a death can be quietly but clearly related to the mystery of darkness in God. It is here that the sun's darkness [Luke 22.44-45] and Mary's helplessness [John 19.26-27] are powerful witnesses to hope that can only be known in darkness.

It is most valuable that the additional prayers speak of the grief of Mary, and refer to the darkness of loss. In the Christian funeral the death of the one who is mourned in any particular rite must be linked to the events of Good Friday and the death of Jesus. Without that connection there can be no proper connection with the resurrection.

The Church in Wales rites are at an early stage of development. They express a Catholic tradition within the Anglican communion in traditional language and forms. It is unlikely that any emergent rite from this church will be in the vanguard of theological or anthropological innovation. It may be that pastoral

sensitivity is regarded as more important. It is part of the argument of this thesis that pastoral sensitivity will be better served by greater theological rigour rather than less. This is not apparently a view which will be accepted without reservation in the Church in Wales.

The Church of the Province of New Zealand

A NEW ZEALAND PRAYER BOOK / HE KARAKIA MIHINARE O AOTEAROU

As the caption suggests the prayer book published by the Church of the Province of New Zealand in 1989 is bilingual.⁴⁰¹ As my comments will make it clear, this is not a token gesture to the Maori nation; an important part of the funeral rites is derived from Maori traditions. The Maori contribution is very significant in its introduction of sensitivities that are often missing from Western funeral rites in the English and American traditions. The final rite, in particular, is immensely powerful.

In the variety of the rites which it offers the *New Zealand Prayer Book (NZPB)* is similar to the Roman Catholic *Order of Christian Funerals*. The Funeral Service *per se* is no longer seen as an adequate response to death, and there is a much wider provision of rites to meet the unfolding process which marks death and bereavement. The pastoral task is structured in such a way that guidance is given to the Christian congregation in its care for the dying, the dead and the bereaved. It would be unwise (and beyond the intention of those who devised these rites) to suggest that there is an unchanging pattern of events which can be ministered to by the mechanical selection of a given set of words at each inflexible stage. *NZPB* reflects the growing awareness that the funeral service in isolation is rarely, if ever, an adequate response to death.

NZPB begins with a short pastoral note explaining how the services seek to meet the event of death.⁴⁰² There is a clear recognition that while Christian theology will want to proclaim Christ's victory over death, pastoral sensitivity will acknowledge the pain of loss which may be so intense that at first the only response possible seems to be denial. The essay sets out how the rites seek to minister to what van Gennep described as the three-fold nature of all rites of passage: separation (pre-liminal), transition (liminal), incorporation (post-liminal).⁴⁰³ Preparation for death and strengthening for life beyond bereavement are features of the rites which encircle the central funeral service.

⁴⁰¹ *A New Zealand Prayer Book/He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa*, Church of the Province of New Zealand, 1989. I shall refer to the book as *NZPB*.

⁴⁰² *NZPB*, page 811.

⁴⁰³ A. van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*.

PRAYER AT TIME OF DEATH

The pastoral notes which precede this ministry begin by observing the importance of preparing people for death.⁴⁰⁴ Where a eucharist is offered, the notes suggest that family and friends should be present to share in Holy Communion.

An opening greeting is suggested which will include a text (or texts) of scripture. The texts have been chosen to place human death in the context of the presence of God.⁴⁰⁵

This is followed by the *Nunc Dimittis*, which may be accompanied by the reading of a psalm.⁴⁰⁶ The Lord's Prayer is then said. The prayer is available in three versions: the ICET translation, the Maori setting, and the traditional English form ("Our Father *which...*").⁴⁰⁷

The Commendation

The commendation referred to in this rite is parallel to the commendation of the person in the funeral itself. The dying person is commended to the care and mercy of God. Both the one who is dying and those who will shortly be bereaved are encouraged place their trust and confidence in God. Included among the prayers is the traditional formula:

Go forth *N (Christian soul)*....

The rite concludes with a blessing, in which an introductory prayer precedes the blessing pronounced either in English or Maori:⁴⁰⁸

Our Lord Jesus Christ be with you to defend you,
within you to keep you,
before you to lead you,
beside you to guard you,
and above you to bless you.
Amen.

⁴⁰⁴ *NZPB*, page 812.

⁴⁰⁵ *NZPB*, page 813 - Psalm 23.4; Romans 14.8; 1 Peter 1.3.

⁴⁰⁶ *NZPB*, page 813. The psalms from which selection may be made are: 23, 25, 91, and 121.

⁴⁰⁷ The ICET and Maori texts are found on page 814; the traditional form on page 817.

⁴⁰⁸ *NZPB*, page 816.

God be your comfort, your strength;
 God be your hope and support;
 God be your light and your way;
 and the blessing of God,
 Creator, Redeemer and Giver of life,
 remain with you now and for ever.
Amen.

The psalms and the traditional form of the Lord's Prayer referred to earlier (see previous page) are then printed as additional material.⁴⁰⁹

The importance of this rite is in placing the dying person and her/his family among the communion of the faithful. It sets the coming separation in the context of the promise of incorporation into Christ.

PRAYER BEFORE A FUNERAL

The introductory rubric to this rite says that the prayers may take place at home, at church, at the *marae*, or wherever the body is to be viewed.⁴¹⁰ A *marae* is a meeting-place or meeting-house where a tribe will assemble for formal debate. Every village has a *marae*, and visitors to the tribe or village will be welcomed at the *marae*. The *marae* is a significant place for the Maori people, and in all the funerary rites of *NZPB* there are suggestions that the *marae* is an appropriate site for liturgical action. Once again the importance of Maori culture is displayed.

The rite begins with the traditional funeral text - John 11.25. However, the translation offered allows for the usual incongruity to be avoided, and yields a considerable pastoral advantage.⁴¹¹ The text in *NZPB* reads:

Jesus said,
 "I am the resurrection and the life;
even in death,
 anyone who believes in me, will live".

The Greek text reads:

ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ καὶ ἀποθάνῃ ζήσεται

⁴⁰⁹ *NZPB*, pages 817-821. Psalms 23, 25, 91 and 121.

⁴¹⁰ *NZPB*, page 822.

⁴¹¹ *NZPB*, page 822. The incongruity arises since the text suggests that the believer will not die, and yet there (s)he is - in the coffin. It may be argued that the objector has misunderstood the text; but in the context of a funeral, we need to make things plain without being prosaic.

It is quite legitimate for the elided *καί* to have a concessive force, and in adopting such a translation the text gains an increased strength since it now meets the objection about believers who die.

The rite develops to pray for peace and commends the departed to God. The *Nunc Dimittis* and the Lord's Prayer are said,⁴¹² psalms and scripture are read,⁴¹³ and the rite concludes with the citation of Jude 24.⁴¹⁴

This little rite is so brief that some may doubt whether it is a rite. Yet it forms part of the ritual action of separation, and fully deserves to be seen in this light. It is best summarized by the versicle and response which follow the opening sentence of scripture:

God is with us;
 God's love unites us,
 God's purpose steadies us,
 God's Spirit comforts us.
Blessed be God forever.⁴¹⁵

The presence of God as a uniting, purposive, steadying and comforting influence describes precisely what is the pastoral agenda at a funeral. We bring the living and the departed into the love of God (cf. Romans 8.38,39, where St Paul declares that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus).

THE FUNERAL SERVICE

Not the least of the strengths of the New Zealand rites are the introductory notes. In the case of the notes attaching to the Funeral Service itself, these are directly addressed to the congregation.⁴¹⁶ They are of particular value in giving simple expression to Christian understandings of death. In this way regular church-goers are reminded of the faith, and those who are unused to Christian worship (or whose understanding of Christian belief may be slight or non-existent) are addressed honestly but hopefully about our dependence upon

⁴¹² Whenever the Lord's Prayer is said, the three forms are available for use: ICET, Maori, and traditional.

⁴¹³ *NZPB*, page 823; Psalms 27 and/or 139 and Romans 8.31b-39 are proposed.

⁴¹⁴ *NZPB*, page 825.

⁴¹⁵ *NZPB*, page 822.

⁴¹⁶ The notes are to be found at the beginning of the Funeral Service. *NZPB*, page 826.

God in life and in death. The notes also summarize the forthcoming liturgical action, and form a guide through the rite.

The Greeting

The service begins with an introductory statement about the rite. The statement falls into two parts: the first relates to the departed, the second to the bereaved. The pastoral and ritual agenda is clearly established from the outset:

We have come together
to remember before God the life of *N*,
to commend her/him to God's keeping,
to commit her/his body to be buried/cremated,
and to comfort those who mourn
with our sympathy and with our love;
in the hope we share
through the death and resurrection
of Jesus Christ.⁴¹⁷

The three duties to the dead outlined in this prayer form the main structure of the rite: remembrance, commendation and committal. As the service unfolds these three phases follow in succession, but at this immediate point there follows an invocation of the presence and blessing of God in the form of versicle and response.⁴¹⁸

The Love of God

In this section one or more sentences of scripture may be said.⁴¹⁹ There follows a reminder that we need never be separated from God's love, and then a prayer is said invoking the comfort and reassurance of scripture and of the Holy Spirit. It is worth remarking that, with the exception of one sentence of scripture [John 14.1] and the final prayer, this opening section of the rite is bilingual.

The Remembrance

Attention now turns to the first duty to the dead, that of remembrance (see above, page 174). The opening invitation is to silent thanksgiving for the life of the departed.⁴²⁰ Here it is worth remarking another linguistic development,

⁴¹⁷ *NZPB*, page 827.

⁴¹⁸ *NZPB*, page 827.

⁴¹⁹ John 11.25; John 14.1; Matthew 11.28; John 3.16.

⁴²⁰ *NZPB*, page 829.

that of gender-inclusive language. There has been an increasing acknowledgement that much liturgical language has spoken of the people of God as though all were masculine. Even *The Book of Common Prayer* of the Episcopal Church of the United States of America speaks of “our brother”, “he”, “him”, and “his” when referring to the departed.⁴²¹ The convention has been to typeset the various forms of the third person singular pronoun in italics as a sign to the officiant to use “our sister”, “she”, “her” and “her” (possessive) where appropriate. Feminist objections to the use of patriarchal language have alerted liturgists to a greater sensitivity in this regard.⁴²² While change relating to language about humans is now widely agreed, there is a far greater resistance to the use of gender inclusive language related to God. Only one official book of liturgy in English as yet speaks freely of God with feminine pronouns.⁴²³

After a silence a prayer is said, articulating the thanks of all, followed by a prayer speaking of death and resurrection and the hope of heaven. The second prayer provides an alternative where the funeral is of a child.⁴²⁴ The Lord’s Prayer follows, and itself precedes the Ministry of the Word.

The Ministry of the Word

A selection of Psalms may be used, with the choice from psalms 23, 121, 130, and 139.1-11.⁴²⁵ Choices for the scripture readings are set out on pages 864 and 865. Following a responsive prayer, a rubric declares:

*A minister may speak to the people.*⁴²⁶

⁴²¹ *The Book of Common Prayer* was published by the Episcopal Church in the United States in 1979, before the feminist issue of language was fully established. I suspect that any future Prayer Book coming from North America will reflect gender-language issues in an altogether inclusive way!

⁴²² *An Anglican Prayer Book* produced by the Church of the Province of Southern Africa in 1989 fails in this respect, but *The Book of Alternative Services of the Anglican Church of Canada*, published in the same year, scrupulously speaks of “brother/sister”, “he/she”, “him/her”, “his/her”. *NZPB* goes a step further, by placing the feminine alternative before the masculine - “her/him”, for example.

⁴²³ The Church of Scotland’s *Common Order*; see below, page 205f.

⁴²⁴ *NZPB*, pages 829-830.

⁴²⁵ The psalms are printed bilingually in the section headed “Alternative Commendation and Committal”, which is otherwise the Maori language version of these phases of the service. *NZPB*, pages 841-846

⁴²⁶ *NZPB*, page 831.

I do not know exactly to what custom and practice this instruction may refer. However, the permissive form of the rubric seems to indicate that a sermon is not an invariable part of the funeral rite in New Zealand. In the context of the Christian funeral it is a weakness for there to be no proclamation of how the death and resurrection of Jesus relate to the particular individual whose death is being marked. Such an absence, it is true, may be less of a weakness than a poor homily, but silence here is not golden. The *Order of Christian Funerals* is uncompromising on this issue. At the comparable point in *OCF* the rubric says:

A brief homily is given after the gospel reading.⁴²⁷

Of the contemporary Anglican funeral rites available to the present writer only one (the Scottish Episcopal Church's *Revised Funeral Rites 1987*) announces unambiguously "Sermon". Of the others which do refer to proclamation, the instruction is always cast in permissive form. This may reflect an Anglican diffidence about sermons, or it may acknowledge a variety in local customs. What it fails to do is to give an unequivocal invitation to the officiant to articulate with the family and friends a contemporary response of Christian faith to the fact of death. At a funeral this is a failure of the obligation to proclaim the word in season and out of season. The reading of scripture without explanation is not enough.

The Prayers

Intercessions are then made for those who mourn.⁴²⁸ Two forms are offered. Both seek strength for all who mourn, both speak of God's mercy and compassion as the grounds for trust. The difference is in their structure. The first form finds its congregational participation in three prayers of response (each a sentence long) to an initial intercession by the minister. The second form is more in the nature of a brief litany with topics introducing the congregational response "Lord, hear our prayer".

Further prayers speaking of the victory of Christ over death are provided, and the accompanying rubric suggests that one of these may be used.⁴²⁹ Each prayer links the death and resurrection of Christ with the hope of resurrection

⁴²⁷ *OCF*, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1990, page 109.

⁴²⁸ *NZPB*, pages 832-833.

⁴²⁹ *NZPB*, pages 834-835.

to eternal life of the faithful. These prayers conclude with the text of Ephesians 3.21.

The Commendation

The second duty to the dead is now begun - that of commending her/him to God. One or both of Romans 8.38-39 and 1 Peter 1.3 may be said, either in Maori or English. There then follows an English language rite which is followed by the English language version of the Committal. The Maori version is set out later.⁴³⁰ The commendation begins with a recital of the goodness of God, in which confidence the departed is commended

to God's judgement and mercy,
to God's forgiveness and love.⁴³¹

There then follows either a version of *Profiscicere, anima* - the commendation of the old Gelasian sacramentary - or the following:

Gracious God,
by your mighty power you gave us life,
and in your love you have given us new life in Christ.
We now entrust *N* to your keeping,
in the faith of Jesus Christ
who died and rose again,
and now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit
in glory for ever. **Amen.**

This prayer appeared (in a slightly different form) in the Church of England's *Alternative Service Book 1980* in the service for the Funeral of a Child.⁴³² It was set as prose in the *Alternative Service Book* whereas in *New Zealand Prayer Book* it appears in a blank verse form. The *Alternative Service Book* version is shown below for the purposes of direct comparison.

Heavenly Father, by your mighty power you gave us life, and in your love you have given us new life in Christ Jesus. We entrust *N* to your merciful keeping, in the faith of Jesus Christ, your Son our Lord, who died and rose again to save us, and is now alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit in glory for ever. **Amen.**

⁴³⁰ The Commendation begins on page 835; the Maori texts start at page 840.

⁴³¹ *NZPB*, page 836.

⁴³² *Alternative Service Book*, Church of the Province of Southern Africa, Collins, London, 1989, page 320.

The text *Profiscicere, anima* given in this rite is really only a version of the opening stanza.⁴³³ The full text of *Profiscicere, anima* refers to the reception of the soul in heaven by angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim, prophets and patriarchs, apostles and evangelists, and is accompanied by an extended litany. Originally it was used as a prayer for the dying person rather than for the dead as it is here. Certainly, where death is understood as the separation of the soul from the body, it makes far more sense to use *Profiscicere, anima* at the time of death rather than after death has occurred. It is a little late then to be telling the soul to go on its journey.

In the funeral rites of the Church of the Province of Southern Africa a form of the antiphon *In Paradisum* is used at the committal, which could equally well be used at this juncture:

May the angels lead you into paradise;
 may the martyrs come to welcome you
 and take you into the holy city
 the new and eternal Jerusalem.
 May the choirs of angels welcome you.
 Where Lazarus is poor no longer
 may you have eternal rest.⁴³⁴

The Committal

The rite now enters upon the third duty to the dead - the committal to the elements. This may take place immediately or at a separate place where the service has been in church but where the cemetery or crematorium is elsewhere.

In the first instance two alternative forms of committal are suggested: the first addresses the departed person directly while the second refers to the dead in the third person.⁴³⁵

Now therefore, *N*,
 we commit your body to be
 buried/ cremated,
 earth to earth,
 ashes to ashes,
 dust to dust;

Since the earthly life of *N*
 has come to an end,
 we commit *his/her* body to be
 buried/ turned to ashes;
 [earth to earth,
 ashes to ashes,
 dust to dust;]

⁴³³ NZPB, page 836.

⁴³⁴ *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989*, page 543.

⁴³⁵ NZPB, page 837.

in the sure and certain hope
of the resurrection to eternal life
in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

in the sure and certain hope
of the resurrection to eternal life
in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

The officiant may then cite Revelation 14.13, after which the following reassurance is given:

We have been parted from *N*,
but none of us need ever be separated
from the love of God.⁴³⁶

The prayer which follows is a slightly amended version of the prayer which opens the funeral service in the Church of England's 1928 *Book of Common Prayer* and its *Alternative Service Book 1980*:

Heavenly Father,
you have given us a true faith and a sure hope
in your Son Jesus Christ;
help us to live as those who believe and trust
in the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
and the resurrection to eternal life.
Strengthen this faith and hope in us
as long as we live;
so that we in turn
may not be afraid to die.
You are Lord of heaven and earth;
your goodness never fails.

Have mercy on your people who need your strength
and bless us now and evermore.
Amen.⁴³⁷

The amendments to the form in the *Alternative Service Book* require comment.

The first change is that the order of the second and third lines is inverted. While the meaning of the prayer is in no way altered, the effect of the change is nonetheless to weaken the prayer by obliterating the poetic structure which relied upon an inversion of the normal prose order. The *NZPB* adopts what the *Alternative Service Book* avoided, and the result is (literally) prosaic.

⁴³⁶ *NZPB*, page 837.

⁴³⁷ *NZPB*, page 838.

The second difference is to move the words “Strengthen this faith and hope in us ...” from its introductory connection with the reference to the Apostles’ Creed to introduce a second half of the prayer. The addition to the clause of the words “as long as we live: so that we in turn may not be afraid to die” is clumsy in comparison with the sparse elegance of the 1928 language, which the *Alternative Service Book* modernized without loss.

The third alteration is in the nature of the addition of the last two sentences, “You are the Lord of heaven and earth,”. The sentiments expressed are strongly biblical and they articulate confident dependence upon God; but they weaken the prayer. The literary style is different from what has gone before, and the join is clearly visible. Equally the petition expressed is quite different in content from the concern of the rest of the prayer, and so it loses force. It would have been better to have written a new prayer to meet the need to which the final sentences address themselves.

The changes have without exception enfeebled the original prayer, and it remains a mystery as to why they were ever undertaken.

The Blessing of Peace

By contrast, the dismissal which follows is very clear in expression and intent. It echoes Romans 12.9 and invokes the blessing upon the congregation in the language of hope.

Go forth into the world in peace,
be strong and of good courage,
hold fast that which is good.
Love and serve the Lord with singleness of heart,
rejoicing in the power of the Spirit;
and the peace of the Lord
be always with you.
Amen.⁴³⁸

Alternatively, the grace may be said, or the priest may give the blessing in another form.

A Form of Committal at a Graveside or Crematorium

If the committal is at another place an alternative form is provided.⁴³⁹ The texts of 2 Corinthians 1.3-4 and Deuteronomy 33.27 may be said and further selections are offered under a separate section on pages 853-855.

⁴³⁸ NZPB, page 838.

There follow two forms of committal, as before. The first is addressed directly to the dead person - "we commit your body", and the second uses the indirect form "we commit *her/his* body". The provision of forms of commendation and committal which directly address the departed gives a strong expression to the credal faith in the communion of saints. It may be objected that direct address to the departed does not make sufficiently clear the need for separation, for letting the deceased go. But that is expressed in commending and committing the departed to God and to the elements. This acknowledges that the living can no longer themselves care for those now dead, who must be surrendered to other hands and processes. In any case, the psychological separation will frequently last for some time after the ritual of separation has been enacted.

After further optional prayers the grace is said or a blessing pronounced. A Maori text is also provided.⁴⁴⁰

TE TIKANGA KARAI MO TE TAKAHI WHARE
PRAYERS IN A HOUSE AFTER DEATH

The introductory notes to this service explain how it operates as a post-liminal ritual act. The bereaved family is incorporated into the new world in which the deceased is no longer part of the physical reality. The language and the ritual source of the service are Maori, and the English text is not a translation but a parallel. The commentary is on the English text.

Returning to a house after the death of a family member can be a painful experience for a family. Friends may support them by accompanying them and sharing in a meal.

*In this service the Church marks the family's return home. It reflects the continuing care for their well-being as they take up their life again. In *Te Takahi Whare* and the meal, the house is re-hallowed for the now smaller family. This is marked by a formal entry into the house.*

*The service takes place at the earliest possible time after **The Funeral Service**. Where possible, every room is visited, either by the minister alone or by the minister leading the bereaved family and friends....*

If it is the custom of the people concerned that the house

⁴³⁹ NZPB, pages 839-840.

⁴⁴⁰ The Maori texts appear on pages 840 and 841 of NZPB.

should be sprinkled with water, the water should be sanctified before the service. (The form of sanctifying is given at the conclusion of this service.)

This service may be adapted as appropriate for use in other places.⁴⁴¹

The rite begins outside the house, and in the name of the Holy Trinity invokes the peace of the triune God. As priest and people enter the house there is a quelling of the haunting memories and presences of the past:⁴⁴²

Open, O God, the door of this house;
enter it and let your light shine here,
to drive away all darkness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

It is God who opens the door on what is to happen; and, although no reference is made, there is an echo of the Revelation to St John on Patmos:

The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one shall shut ...⁴⁴³

When God opens the door of this house its future is opened, and the door to the past is shut. As L. P. Hartley wrote in the prologue of his novel *The Go-Between*, "The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there". The intention of this rite is not to deny the past, but to allow the past to be past. As the darkness is driven away, the light of God (the light of salvation - cf. Psalm 27.1) floods in. The Lord's Prayer is said by all and then water may be sprinkled:

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

Amen.⁴⁴⁴

The water may be understood as a baptismal reference, and the prayer offered for the sanctifying of water reinforces that understanding. But with the

⁴⁴¹ NZPB, page 871.

⁴⁴² NZPB, page 872.

⁴⁴³ Revelation 3.7.

⁴⁴⁴ NZPB, page 873.

reference to washing away the effects of evil, both personal and demonic, there is also a strong suggestion of exorcism which is increased when the text is taken in conjunction with the earlier call upon God to drive away the darkness.

There then follow prayers seeking comfort and peace for the mourners, which speak of the dead being at rest and of those who mourn being protected from the forces of evil.⁴⁴⁵ The rite concludes with a blessing (Hebrews 13.20-21).

In my opinion this rite, which incorporates the bereaved family into the future, is of such great significance that, even if there were no other reason for commending the funeral rites of the *NZPB*, it alone would be sufficient to demand the attention of liturgists who wish to create funeral rites in the future. Although there are orders for the committal of ashes and for the unveiling of a memorial stone, this rite of *Prayers in a House after Death* is a superb climax to a series of funeral provisions which take seriously not only the faith of the Church but also the traditions of the indigenous people. The result is a creative sensitivity which, although not faultless, is in my view without equal in the Anglican Communion.

⁴⁴⁵ *NZPB*, page 874.

The Roman Catholic Church

ORDER OF CHRISTIAN FUNERALS⁴⁴⁶

In 1990 the *Order of Christian Funerals (OCF)* was published upon the approval of the Bishops' Conferences of England and Wales and of Scotland and their instruction that its use would be mandatory and exclusive from Easter Sunday 1991.⁴⁴⁷ *OCF* is based on the revised Roman Rite published and authorized in the pontificate of Paul VI. The British edition was prepared by the Liturgy Office of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales and the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL). ICEL undertook the translation of the Roman Ritual and the general preparation of the texts. The liturgies are therefore ICEL texts. The national Liturgy Office produced the necessary detailed revision for approval by the local Bishops' Conferences.

The first thing that strikes one about *OCF* is its size. Other churches who have published separate funeral rites have produced booklets which will fit in a cassock or jacket pocket. *OCF* is a two-volume work, with a page size greater than ten inches by six inches and a total of nearly six hundred and seventy pages.⁴⁴⁸

In early 1991 the bishop of Leeds summoned the priests of his diocese to a day conference at which they were to be introduced to the liturgies of *OCF* by a member of the national Liturgy Office. I was privileged to be a guest because of my research interest. When the time for questions and comment came, scarcely a priest who spoke refrained from criticizing the publication's size. There was a strong feeling that what had been produced was a magnificent (and expensive) lectern book. They asked for something less vulnerable to graveside committals in the wind and rain, something more portable. More than one priest suggested laminated cards for use in the open. The liturgies were of great interest, but the size of the book was intimidating.

⁴⁴⁶ *Order of Christian Funerals*, Geoffrey Chapman, London 1990.

⁴⁴⁷ The American Bishops' Conference has approved *OCF* for mandatory and exclusive use as from All Souls Day 198.

⁴⁴⁸ The American edition of *OCF* is of the same page size, but is contained in a single volume of fewer than 400 pages. The second volume of the Chapman edition is given over entirely to committal rites for use at cemeteries and crematoria and repeats in this separate book the committal liturgies provided in the first volume.

The physical bulk of the volumes is determined by the decision about how to present the funeral rites with the various options. Other churches have mostly produced a core liturgy and provided for additional readings and prayers in separate sections or appendices. The drawback with this form of book is that the officiant needs to flip back and forward as (s)he adapts the main service to the particular circumstances. This may be a small price to pay when *OCF*'s solution to the matter is held in the hands, for it cannot be held in one hand. The only way that an officiant using *OCF* can have a hand free to raise in blessing or to make any other gesture is to have a lectern or an acolyte holding the book. *OCF*'s way of dealing with the problem of options is to lay out every possibility in full in separate liturgies. This makes for much of the material being printed several times over. The advantage sought is that once the priest has selected the appropriate rite he can follow the chosen option from beginning to end without the need for thumbs, pieces of ribbon, or slips of paper to be used to keep the place.

The resultant duplication and reduplication make the book unwieldy and repetitive for the reviewer. I propose to look at what I judge to be the main lines in each of the rites. *OCF* divides its liturgical provisions into five main parts: funeral rites (vigil, funeral, committal), funeral rites for children (vigil, funeral, committal) funerals for catechumens, office for the dead, additional texts. I shall follow the same scheme, but after I have looked at the main developments, I shall simply refer to significant variations in the various options provided.

The guiding principle in the preparation of these funeral rites was the Liturgical Constitution arising from Vatican II which said of the burial rite that

it should express more clearly the paschal nature of Christian death.⁴⁴⁹

In the commentary provided in 1964 with the Constitution this was explained a little more fully:

Death for believers, is a participation in the paschal mystery. Baptism has initiated a movement that will terminate in death, which, after Christ's example, is a passage from this world to the Father. Sorrow accompanies death; but the

⁴⁴⁹ *Constitutio liturgica*, Rome, 1964, article 81.

thought of, and union with, the agony of the redeemer fill it with hope in the resurrection.⁴⁵⁰

PART I: FUNERAL RITES

VIGIL AND RELATED RITES AND PRAYERS

OCF's rites start with preparation for the funeral itself. This is done by means of vigil rites in which a watch is kept by the body before the funeral liturgy.

*Prayers after Death*⁴⁵¹

After an invitation to silent prayer, there is a short Gospel reading.⁴⁵² The Lord's Prayer precedes prayers for the deceased and those who mourn. The prayer for the deceased asks that forgiveness may be granted to her/him and claims the promise "to Abraham and his children for ever" in a short quotation from the *Magnificat*.⁴⁵³ Comfort and refuge are sought for those who mourn, and the death and resurrection of Christ are set forth as the ground for hope of reunion "with those we love".⁴⁵⁴ Blessings are pronounced. A first blessing is spoken for the deceased.⁴⁵⁵ This is followed by the couplet which is at the heart of Catholic remembrance of the dead:

⁴⁵⁰ *Constitutio liturgica cum commentario*, Rome, 1964, page 156. Commentary by P. Journel.

⁴⁵¹ *OCF*, pages 23ff.

⁴⁵² The passages offered are Matthew 18.19-20 (where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them); John 11.21-24 (at the death of Lazarus: I am the resurrection); Luke 20.35-38 (God is the God, not of the dead, but of the living). *OCF*, pages 25-26.

⁴⁵³ *OCF*, page 27. The *Magnificat* is the canticle of the evening office, which traditionally used the theme of evening rest as a metaphor for death. Its place in this opening rite is thus evocative of the daily prayers of the church as the faithful on earth enter into the worship of heaven. The deceased is now on her/his final journey to join in that ceaseless activity to which this canticle refers both in itself and its customary *locus* in the evening liturgy.

⁴⁵⁴ *OCF*, page 27. The reference to the death and resurrection echoes an acclamatory couplet from the eucharistic prayer of the Mass:

Dying, you destroyed our death,
rising, you restored our life.

In the eucharistic prayer of the Mass the congregational acclamation concludes:

Lord Jesus, come in glory.

As in the prayer for the deceased, the reference here to the continuing worship of the church places this office into a more familiar context than simply the dread of death.

⁴⁵⁵ An option is provided for children from Mark 10.14.

Eternal light grant unto him/her, O Lord.
And let perpetual light shine upon him/her.

There follows a blessing spoken to the congregation, and invoking the peace and love of God.

The rite is intended for use at the first pastoral visit, and it is suggested that the priest can use this occasion for preliminary consideration of how the funeral should be planned.⁴⁵⁶

*Gathering in the Presence of the Body*⁴⁵⁷

This rite is intended for use with the family as it first gathers around the body. After the sign of the cross, a verse of scripture is read, and the body is sprinkled with holy water in an evocation of the deceased's baptism.⁴⁵⁸ A psalm is then sung or said, followed by the Lord's Prayer and a concluding prayer.⁴⁵⁹ The same forms of blessing are used as in the rite *Prayers after Death*.

*Vigil for the Deceased*⁴⁶⁰

This is the principal rite used in the period between the death and the funeral. It may be used at the home, or in a chapel of rest, or in the church. At the church it should be celebrated well before the funeral. The focus of the vigil is the reading of scripture and includes a first reading, a responsorial psalm and the gospel.

The vigil begins with a greeting and an invitation to silent prayer. The silence is concluded with an opening prayer which links the death of the one for whom the vigil is held with the death and resurrection of Christ.

⁴⁵⁶ OCF, page 23.

⁴⁵⁷ OCF, pages 31ff.

⁴⁵⁸ Matthew 11.28-30 (Come to me, all you who labour) and John 14.1-3 (Do not let your hearts be troubled) are suggested, though other words may equally well be used. At the aspersion, texts are used speaking of the Lord as shepherd (Psalm 23), or of baptism in Christ, or of the baptised as the temple of God.

⁴⁵⁹ The psalms proposed are selections from 130, or 115 and 116. I shall use the non-liturgical numbering of the psalms in all my references to the Psalter in this review of OCF. Traditionally, liturgists have adapted the numbering of the LXX; 9 and 10 are conjoined, and the numeration recovers accord with the scriptural pattern at 147.

⁴⁶⁰ OCF, pages 39ff.

The Liturgy of the Word offers a vast selection for the various readings. The preferred passages are printed in full.⁴⁶¹ The rubric which follows reads:

A homily on the readings is then given.⁴⁶²

The pastoral notes accompanying the vigil rite add that this homily is given “to help those present find strength and hope in God’s saving word”.⁴⁶³ Those who parade their Protestant credentials, crying “*Sola scriptura!*”, would do well to reflect how frequently their funeral rites make the sermon optional, leaving the scripture isolated, unexplained and uncomprehended. The Roman Catholic emphasis on proclamation is a further result of the Second Vatican Council, whose Liturgical Constitution urged *inter alia* that all liturgical reform should be marked by active congregational participation, more interesting use of the Bible, and intelligibility of symbol and gesture.

The pattern of prayers of intercession (here taking the form of a litany), Lord’s Prayer, concluding prayer, and blessing, established in the previous rites, now follows.

*Vigil for the Deceased with Reception at the Church*⁴⁶⁴

This rite is a fuller version of the one just described. It is for use where the body of the deceased is brought into church, so that it may be placed at rest before the altar - usually overnight. The rite suggests that the one who has received Christ at the altar in bread and wine is now her/himself received there by Christ. The Easter Candle is lit - both as a visual reminder of Psalm 27.1 and as a proclamation of the link between the death of the faithful and the Paschal Mystery.

The main difference between the present order and the simple Vigil is in the introductory rites which include the reception of the body. The coffin is sprinkled at the door to the Church with holy water (baptism) and the Easter

⁴⁶¹ The texts are interchangeable for all the funeral rites. Here the preferred choices are: 2 Corinthians 5.1,6-10 (an everlasting home in heaven); Psalm 27 (the Lord is my light); Luke 12.35-40 (the sudden return of the householder).

The list of readings is printed in full in the American edition of *OCF* on page 207.

⁴⁶² *OCF*, page 47.

⁴⁶³ *OCF*, page 41.

⁴⁶⁴ *OCF*, page 52ff.

Candle lit. Where it is the local custom a pall is placed on the coffin along with a Bible, a Book of the Gospels, or a cross.⁴⁶⁵ The coffin is then taken in procession to the altar.

The preferred readings at the Liturgy of the Word are: 1 John 3.1-2; Psalm 103; John 14.1-6.

Where the body is to be received into church, but without a vigil, *A Simple Form of Reception at the Church* is provided.⁴⁶⁶ This is the same as the *Vigil and Reception* but without the Liturgy of the Word.

*Gathering of the Family and Transfer of the Body to the Church or to the Place of Committal*⁴⁶⁷

This rite is for use on the day of the funeral as the family meet together. The introductory note comments that:

The procession to the church is a rite of initial *separation* [my stress] of the mourners from the deceased; the procession to the place of committal is the journey to the place of final separation of the mourners from the deceased..... Reverent celebration of the rite can help reassure the mourners and create an atmosphere of calm preparation...⁴⁶⁸

A short introduction of a verse of scripture, and silent prayer is followed by Psalm 130 or Psalms 115 and 116 (or any other from the list shown on page 188). A litany rehearses the salvation history of the deceased through the story of the Passion, and ends with the Lord's Prayer, and a concluding prayer. The priest then extends an Invitation to the Procession with the words of Psalm 121:

The Lord guards our coming in and our going out.

⁴⁶⁵ It is important to note that the General Introduction to *OCF* makes the very clear and crucial observation:

Only Christian symbols may rest on or be placed near the coffin during the funeral liturgy. Any other symbols, for example, national flags, or flags or insignia of associations, have no place in the funeral liturgy.

OCF, page 11.

Military, masons, and scoutmasters please note!

⁴⁶⁶ *OCF*, page 63ff.

⁴⁶⁷ *OCF*, page 71ff.

⁴⁶⁸ *OCF*, page 71.

May God be with us today
as we make this last journey with our brother/sister.⁴⁶⁹

The Procession moves off to the words of Psalm 122:

I rejoiced when I heard them say:
'Let us go to God's house.'

The Funeral Liturgy follows.

The use of vigil rites and rites of preparation is important in the van Gennep scheme of things. The separation of death is undertaken carefully, and the ritual expression, far from emptying what occurs of meaning, gives to those who participate the framework within which meaning can be discerned and expressed. The old tradition of the funeral procession is not easily replicated in those situations where the home, the church and the place of committal are at a distance from one another. Nonetheless, the ritualization of procession reinvigorates the funeral rites, and provides a cord upon which the beads of the various services can be threaded to form a coherent unity.

FUNERAL RITES

There are two liturgies provided for funerals. The first is a liturgy for a Funeral Mass; the second is for a Funeral outside Mass. The preferred form is a Funeral Mass. Where this is not possible, the introductory note urges that family and friends should arrange for the celebration of Mass as soon as possible after the Funeral.⁴⁷⁰ The intention is demonstrate the unity of faithful in Christ: the living by means of Christ in the sacrament, the dead by the resurrection.

*Funeral Mass*⁴⁷¹

Where the body has already been received into Church, Mass begins in the normal way as set out in the Roman Missal. Where the body has not been received into Church, the introductory rite follows the pattern of reception to be found in the *Vigil and Reception* (see above page 188).

⁴⁶⁹ OCF, page 77.

⁴⁷⁰ OCF, page 80, paragraph 137.

⁴⁷¹ OCF, page 84ff.

The Liturgy of the Word follows the pattern for Mass; readings should be selected as the pastoral circumstances suggest. Once again, OCF's rubric is clear: a homily is to be given after the reading of the Gospel. There then follow the general intercessions. Two litanies are provided: Form A offers specific petitions for a deacon and for a bishop or priest. This follows ancient tradition; but ancient tradition raises a question. On what grounds should a differentiation be made in death between one Christian and another? If, as the note in the General Introduction observes, secular dignities and orders are not to be observed in the funeral liturgy (see the note above on page 189) why should ecclesiastical honours be noted? In the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem which John the Divine describes in the book of the Revelation, religion is at an end, and so are all its impedimenta.

I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God
the Almighty and the Lamb.⁴⁷²

The old argument was that the clergy would be recognized as clergy in heaven. From the perspective of the judgement, the argument has strong biblical warrant with the repeated warning to pastors that they will be called to account for those in their care.⁴⁷³ But there is no suggestion that the priestly office and cure of souls exist beyond death. What need will there be for it? There will be no need of sacraments when the ceaseless, eternal, coinherent and immediate presence of God is directly known by the blessed. What then is the meaning of the intercession for a bishop or priest "that he may be given a place in the liturgy of heaven"?⁴⁷⁴ I can make no theological sense of it.

The question of hierarchy is one that causes considerable awkwardness within *OCF*, as we shall see when we come to consider the funeral rites for children and for the catechumenate. This is but the first instance. There is not much notion here of Death the leveller.

Form B of the intercessions is less concerned with ecclesiastical matters, and the prayers include a petition for justice and peace. However, in both forms A and B the major concern is to pray for the deliverance of the deceased from

⁴⁷² Revelation 21.22.

⁴⁷³ Cf., for example, Ezekiel 34; 1 Corinthians 4.1-2; James 3.1; 1 Peter 5.1-4.

⁴⁷⁴ *OCF*, page 94.

eternal punishment, and to seek for the congregation a like reception into the company of all the saints.

The concluding prayer summarizes the intercessions and leads to the Liturgy of the Eucharist. It is not within the scope of this thesis to comment on the liturgy of the Mass, and so I shall move directly to the final action of the service in Church: the final commendation.

An invitation to silent prayer begins the final commendation, although there is provision for a member or friend of the family to speak in remembrance of the deceased first of all. Five forms of the invitation are printed in OCF.⁴⁷⁵ A and B articulate with particular clarity the separating nature of death and of the funeral rites. C uses the language of falling asleep in Christ. After silence, the coffin may be aspersed and incensed. A Song of Farewell speaks of the joys of heaven, and a final prayer of commendation is spoken.

This prayer occurs in two forms the first speaks of “the sure and certain hope” of the resurrection, and asks that the gates of paradise may be opened for the deceased. The second prayer seeks forgiveness and everlasting peace. It is noteworthy that, while form B of the prayer commends “the soul of *N*” to God, form A simply commends “our brother/sister *N*”. It would be unwise to place too great an importance on the lack of reference to the soul in form A. It is simply an alternative form of commendation. There follows the call to process to the place of rest. The traditional funeral anthems are available for singing:

May the angels lead you to paradise;
may the martyrs come to welcome you
and take you into the holy city,
the new and eternal Jerusalem.

or

May choirs of angels welcome you
and lead you to the bosom of Abraham;
and where Lazarus is poor no longer
may you find eternal rest.

A verse form is also available or any suitable psalm.

⁴⁷⁵ OCF, page 97. Invitations D and E are special options; A, B and C are general in scope. D is for use prior to burial, E for use prior to cremation.

These anthems are particularly beautiful and apposite to the liturgical action. The procession which will leave the deceased in the grave will give way to the procession of angels and martyrs who will lead the faithful to God. There is a genuine move through transition to incorporation here.

*Funeral Liturgy outside Mass*⁴⁷⁶

The rite is similar to that of the Funeral Mass. At the intercessions there are no distinctive prayers for deacons, priests or bishops, since it is inconceivable that at the death of a member of the clergy there will not be a Funeral Mass. A liturgy without Mass need not mean a liturgy without communion. A priest may preside at a communion when Canon Law precludes a Mass.⁴⁷⁷ If there is no priest present but there is eucharistic bread available, a eucharistic minister may preside at a sharing of the communion. If there is no communion a concluding prayer precedes the prayer of commendation.

Where there has been a communion, a post-communion prayer is said. Four forms are offered. One of these is for a catechumen; once again the hierarchical tone is introduced in a rite which is supposed to express the unity of the Church. The effect is at least inharmonious, and for some may be disturbing. The final commendation is the same as that provided for the *Funeral Mass*.

THE RITE OF COMMITTAL

It is at the rite of the committal that the reviewer's nightmare is realised. There are seven different rites of committal provided in *OCF* for the funeral of an adult. Similarly, there are seven different rites of committal for the funeral of a child. The multiplicity is initially bewildering and almost bizarre. Yet the pastoral notes preceding the rite give an explanation for the variety.

The rites of committal are differentiated in the following way:

- rite of committal at a cemetery

⁴⁷⁶ *OCF*, page 103ff.

⁴⁷⁷ Three reasons are offered for the use of this rite: when a Funeral Mass is not permitted by Canon Law - solemnities of obligation, Holy Thursday and the Easter Triduum, Sundays of Advent, Lent and Easter; if a priest is not available; if pastoral reasons make it more appropriate (see *OCF*, page 103, paragraph 188).

- rite of committal at a cemetery with final commendation
- rite of committal for burial
- rite of committal at a crematorium
- rite of committal at a crematorium with final commendation
- rite of committal for cremation
- rite for the burial of ashes

Basically the rites divide into two groups of three with a seventh separate liturgy. The first group relates to committal at the cemetery, the second group to committal at the crematorium. The place of the rite for the burial of ashes is self-explanatory.

The introductory notes to the rite of committal indicate that in each group of rites the first rite is for use when there has been a full funeral liturgy already. The second rite is for use where the funeral liturgy thus far has made no final commendation of the deceased. The third rite is for use where the funeral liturgy is to take place in its entirety at the place of disposal. In its comment on the third form of service *OCF* notes:

Many mourners who are not members of the Church, and who may not regard themselves as religious, are often among the most assiduous in attending funerals. While it may not have been the wish, either of the deceased or of the community, that the funeral should be celebrated in this way, arrangements are often made with the funeral director before contact has been made with the Church. It is important that the priest or minister bring out the particular insights and interpretations which Christian faith brings to bear on the reality of death and the experience of bereavement.⁴⁷⁸

There seem to me to be two assertions here which may need some qualification.

The first suggests a particular assiduity in attending funerals among those professing no religious faith. Formal affiliation is not the only form of religious belief. Whilst most people (including church-goers) may live on a day-to-day basis without an immediate awareness of God, death poses a challenge to day-to-day living. Death says effectively, "Day-to-day living does not go on for ever." And once that has been said, then questions of

⁴⁷⁸ *OCF*, page 125, paragraph 229.

transcendence begin very quickly to force themselves upon the mind. It is precisely because death raises the question of God that the priest or minister has the opportunity to speak of Christian faith in relation to death, and in particular to the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The second statement which demands some comment is the remark that funerals are often arranged without reference to the Church. Those charged with the responsibility for making of funeral arrangements may not themselves have any church connections. It is hardly surprising that in the first instance they turn to those whose professional business it is to deal with the arrangement of funerals and the other official business arising from death. Maura Naylor noted in her doctoral thesis for the University of Leeds that clerical frustration with funeral directors was mirrored almost exactly by the experience of funeral directors who frequently had to deal with incompetence and intransigence among clergy.⁴⁷⁹

I intend only to look at the main line in the *Rite of Committal at a Cemetery*. Since the five rites which follow are variations on the theme, I shall simply remark that they amend one another by the use of material already discussed.⁴⁸⁰ I shall then say something very briefly about the *Rite for the Burial of Ashes*.

*Rite of Committal at a Cemetery*⁴⁸¹

The rite begins with an invitation to pray:

⁴⁷⁹ M. Naylor, *The Funeral: The Management of Death and its Rituals in a Northern Industrial City*, PhD thesis, Department of Social Policy and Sociology, University of Leeds, June 1989.

My own conversations with undertakers and funeral directors reveal that ministers do not often make an early call to the offices of their local undertakers when they arrive in the parish. Frequently the first contact is when a funeral has been arranged by a mourner with the undertaker, simply because the new minister is not yet known in the community. There is more to the business of funerals than reaction to death after the event. Part of good pastoral practice is early contact with those other professionals with whom pastors do their work.

⁴⁸⁰ Official Catholic reserve about the appropriateness of cremation as a means of disposal is now at an end. Although separate rites are offered for use in the crematorium, there is little creativity about the provision. However, *OCF's* rites are no different in this respect from other rites covered in this review.

I shall be making some suggestions about crematorium rites in the next chapter.

⁴⁸¹ *OCF*, page 122ff.

Our brother/sister *N.* has gone to his/her rest in the peace of Christ. May the Lord now welcome him/her to the table of God's children in heaven. With faith and hope in eternal life, let us assist him/her with our prayers.⁴⁸²

The invitation to help the deceased is one of the clearer indications in *OCF*'s liturgies so far of a phase of transition within the funeral rites. I had expected to find far more explicit references to transition, since the Roman Catholic Church has a far more clearly defined doctrine of the progress of the faithful departed than the churches of the Reformation. The purgatorial emphasis is less discernible than I had anticipated.

The opening verses of scripture speak of the welcome in heaven for the faithful and the sureness of salvation through Christ the first-born from the dead.⁴⁸³ A prayer is then said at the grave; five options are given, of which four offer a blessing of the grave. Prayers B and D speak of the sleep of the deceased. This appears to be a departure from the language of purgatory. Prayer E offers at its conclusion an alternative view, though still a traditional one - the separation of soul and body:

In a spirit of repentance
we earnestly ask you
to look upon this grave and bless it,
so that, while we commit to [the earth/its resting place]
the body of your servant *N.*
his/her soul may be taken into paradise.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸² *OCF*, 129, paragraph 243.

⁴⁸³ Matthew 25.34; John 6.39; Philippians 3.20; Revelation 1.5-6.

⁴⁸⁴ *OCF*, page 132.

There is frequently a distinction made between paradise and heaven - paradise as an intermediate state and heaven as the fulness of the beatific vision - which I find myself unwilling to accept. The distinction is drawn by referring to the words of Jesus to the dying thief "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise" [Luke 23.43] which may be interpreted in one of three ways. Either the "today" is given a literal force and it is pointed out that Jesus descended to Sheol, and so if the dying thief was to be that day with Jesus it could not have been in heaven. Or the purgatorial idea is introduced. The argument then runs, "While the promise of salvation was made to the thief, and while that promise was assured from the moment of its utterance that day, he was still a thief and needed to be purged before he could enter the presence of the holy God". The traditional Protestant answer is that he was purged by the blood of Christ. I do not think that the riposte is quite good enough, since even the greatest saint is aware that there is still a great journey to be travelled to the holiness of God. The third possibility suggested is that the thief made a good final confession for which Christ gave full absolution. The thief therefore did

The prayer of committal allows for the possibility of burial at sea in all three options. The third form is specifically for such a burial, and is particularly noteworthy with its references to the primordial sea of chaos, to the stilling of the storm, and to the waters of baptism:

Lord God,
 by the power of your Word
 you stilled the chaos of the primeval seas,
 you made the raging waters of the Flood subside,
 and calmed the storm on the sea of Galilee.
 As we commit the body of our brother/sister *N.* to the deep,
 grant him/her peace and tranquillity
 until that day when he/she and all who believe in you
 will be raised to the glory of new life
 promised in the waters of baptism.⁴⁸⁵

This is a vivid and powerful prayer whose effect is found by linking chaos with death and tranquillity with new life. It seems to me a remarkably good example of how to handle the awkward stage of transition in this rite of passage. However, I think that it is more likely in the minds of those who wrote to have been a remarkably apposite prayer for burial at sea. To have secured two ends at one stroke is a remarkable achievement.

After the committal, intercessions are made both for the deceased and the bereaved. These are followed by the Lord's Prayer and concluding prayers which complete the act of separation and speak of the blessedness of the kingdom. The blessing is pronounced and the rites are at an end.⁴⁸⁶

enter heaven immediately. However, I am equally unsure that any of these expositions is satisfactory. In each case there is an undue reliance either upon a single word or upon an unproven and unproveable presupposition.

It is worth noting that in the prayers of intercession which follow the distinction is not made.

⁴⁸⁵ *OCF*, page 133.

⁴⁸⁶ The conclusion of these rites does not mark the end of ritual engaged upon in relation to the dead, however. As was noted above in the preliminary remarks about the rite of a *Funeral without Mass* (page 193), there may be a Mass after the funeral. Further, there is the *Office of the Dead* which forms an important part of the Church's life of prayer (see later commentary beginning at page 201).

*Rite for the Burial of Ashes*⁴⁸⁷

One of the difficulties attached to cremation is the disposal of remains. While families often find upkeep of graves a difficult business, especially when they are scattered, there is still for many the need to have a marker. Crematoria generally have some provision for this, but this does not always meet the needs of the family and friends. Where a previous member of the family (spouse, parent, or child) has been buried but the present deceased is to be cremated, the best choice for the family may be to have the ashes interred at the previously existing grave. This rite provides for this kind of situation. There is nothing particularly noteworthy about a rite whose shape I reproduce below:

- Invitation
- Scripture Verse
- Prayer of Committal
- Lord's Prayer
- Blessing.

PART II: FUNERAL RITES FOR CHILDREN⁴⁸⁸

These rites follow the same pattern as the ordinary Funeral Rites. Differences in choices of scripture and in prayers for the parents and other members of the family form most of the variations from the rites already described. Probably the most notable issue is the contentious pastoral decision to differentiate between children baptized and those not baptized. In the general introductory notes to the rites this explanation appears:

Funeral rites may be celebrated for children whose parents intended them to be baptized but who died before baptism. In these celebrations the Christian community entrusts the child to God's all-embracing love and finds strength in this love and in Jesus' affirmation that the kingdom of God belongs to little children (see Matthew 19:14).⁴⁸⁹

487 *OCF*, page 214ff.

488 *OCF*, page 220ff.

489 *OCF*, page 220, paragraph 334, which has the following footnote attached to it:

In the general catechesis of the faithful, priests and other ministers should explain that the celebration of the funeral rites for children who die before baptism is not intended to weaken the Church's teaching on the necessity of baptism.

Here, a little disguised - though not very well, is an echo of the doctrine of limbo. Catholic bishops are unwilling to affirm gladly that God welcomes children baptized or not, but make vague noises about leaving it to God. Surely, all judgement belongs to God, and polite episcopal murmurings do not hide the offensiveness of what is said here. Throughout the rites different prayers and gestures are made for baptized and unbaptized children.⁴⁹⁰ At certain points in the funeral liturgies the coffin may be sprinkled.⁴⁹¹ This is a gesture denied to the unbaptized, since aspersion is a reference to baptism. Never mind that the child died before her/his parents could have her/him baptized, the unbaptized are without caste.⁴⁹²

I spoke to a senior monsignor about this. He acknowledged that the distinctions jarred, but added that his attitude was that rubrics were simply stage directions and formed no substantial part of the liturgy.⁴⁹³ Since the instructions about sprinkling or not sprinkling and about praying this or that prayer were in the rubrics, they formed nothing to which he was required by Canon Law to adhere. His own pastoral practice was to treat every child as baptized. I know a number of parish priests who take the same line.

That pastorally sensitive priests are driven to such mental gymnastics by a rite promulgated in 1990 reflects one of two things. Either the Church is holding

⁴⁹⁰ In the Vigil rites at paragraphs 349 and 351.

In the Funeral Liturgy at paragraphs 375, 377, 379, 383, 388, 390, 392, 396, 399, 401, 407, 410, 413, 417.

In the Committal rites at the Cemetery at paragraphs: 425, 434, 438, 441, 443, 444, 446, 452, 454, 456, 458 463. Similarly in the Committal rites at the Crematorium

⁴⁹¹ Paragraphs, 375, 390, 396, 415, 436 and parallels.

⁴⁹² The distinction between baptized and unbaptized children also occurs in the provision of scripture readings. They are listed in the American edition of *OCF* at pages 247 and 265. The omission of NT epistle readings for the unbaptized indicates that a Funeral Mass will not normally be provided for such an infant. The texts omitted from the Psalter are those Psalms which speak of God as shepherd, of the longing confidence of the psalmist in God, of creation's praise for God. The omissions among the Gospel texts include the Marcan text "Let the children come to me", the Johannine texts from the eucharistic discourse of chapter six with their reference to the promise of eternal life, and the text from the Lazarus story. These selections demonstrate what I can only understand as a lack of pastoral sensitivity. Of all these omissions the most extraordinary is the Marcan Gospel text.

⁴⁹³ He had been present at the funeral of an unbaptized child very soon after the introduction of *OCF*. He said that the tension in the congregation had been almost unbearable and that he had decided there and then to ignore the rubrics.

true to a theological dogma knowing the pastoral cost, yet believing the theological principle to be paramount; or a theological tenet has blunted pastoral sensitivity. This may look suspiciously like the same thing, but I do believe that here there is a distinction. While I want to argue for theological acuity, I believe that people come first - especially in rites of passage. I find the differentiation between baptized and unbaptized uncongenial.⁴⁹⁴

PART III: FUNERALS FOR CATECHUMENS⁴⁹⁵

The rites for the funerals of catechumens are not reproduced in full, but guidelines are given in general notes. Once again differences are drawn which seem to me to be pastorally insensitive. Officiants are reminded:

In choosing texts and elements of celebration, the minister should bear in mind that the catechumen had not yet celebrated the sacraments of initiation.⁴⁹⁶

It is permissible to place a cross on the coffin, or a bible or book of the Gospels, and the Easter candle may be lit, but the coffin may not be sprinkled with holy water. The catechumen was signed with the cross on admission to the catechumenate, so a cross on the coffin is acceptable.⁴⁹⁷ The bible is permitted since "Christ's followers live by the word of God and fidelity to that word leads to eternal life".⁴⁹⁸ The Easter candle can be reinterpreted for the poor catechumen. "At its highest level of symbolism, the Easter candle is baptismal". That is a resonance denied in this instance, but other levels of meaning can be offered instead - for example, "Christ's undying presence"

⁴⁹⁴ Someone defending the position would argue that truth is more important than congeniality. My answer is that truth is more than propositional accuracy. Christian truth is concerned with love for neighbour and enemy lived out in gentleness and forgiveness. Cf. John 8.11b.

Of course, the Catholic position on the baptism of infants gained its greatest advocate in Augustine of Hippo who saw baptism as effective as washing away sin, and defended the baptism of infants on the grounds of original sin. I remain unconvinced by Augustine's theology and by the rubrics of *OCF*.

⁴⁹⁵ *OCF*, page 366ff.

⁴⁹⁶ *OCF*, page 366, paragraph 514.

⁴⁹⁷ *OCF*, page 367 paragraph 518.

⁴⁹⁸ *OCF*, page 367 paragraph 519. It is worth noting what Jesus said about searching the scriptures and any consequent guarantee of eternal life [John 5.39].

among the faithful.⁴⁹⁹ But holy water and a pall on the coffin are denied to the deceased catechumen:

Blessed or holy water reminds the assembly of the saving waters of baptism. Consequently, this symbol is inappropriate for the catechumen.

The Pall, a reminder of the baptismal garment, is similarly unsuitable.⁵⁰⁰

The official line will be that a Christian funeral is not being denied to the catechumen. Rather, only those who are fully members of the Church may receive the Church's full rites at death. Yet at paragraph 517, in the note referring to the placing of the bible on the coffin, the explicit presumption is that the catechumen may be included among the followers of Christ. She/he is counted therefore as a sharer in eternal life. However, the funeral which she/he will receive (while being a Christian one) will not be the fulness of what the Church offers. To withhold in death what the believer earnestly desired by being a member of the catechumenate is to my mind indefensible.

I should make it clear that there is nowhere the slightest suggestion that the catechumen is not an inheritor of the kingdom. The judgement is simply about membership of the Church. Since church has no place beyond death in the sense of hierarchies of order (see my earlier comments at page 191), I would prefer to see no distinction drawn between those who are, as the introductory note observes, "Christ's followers".

PART IV: THE OFFICE OF THE DEAD⁵⁰¹

What are offered in the *Office of the Dead* are variations to the daily offices of Morning and Evening Prayer. The main interest in each case comes at the intercessions. In Morning Prayer this is to be found in the fourth petition of the litany, in Evening Prayer in the fifth petition.

The morning petition reads:

You delivered the three young men from the blazing furnace;
- free the souls of the dead from the punishments their sins
have deserved.

⁴⁹⁹ OCF, page 367 paragraph 520.

⁵⁰⁰ OCF, page 368, paragraphs 521 and 522.

⁵⁰¹ OCF, pages 378ff.

Lord, bring us to life in Christ.⁵⁰²

Here is the traditional Catholic understanding that the prayers of the living can affect the progress of the dead. It is a transitional statement reflecting the ancient use of the Church. For a Protestant arguing traditionally, it is too late after death to pray that there will be a change in the eternal destiny of the dead. The proof text given is Hebrews 9.27 (see also my discussion of this text at page 90).

At Evening Prayer the following petition is made:

You restored sight to the man born blind and opened the eyes of his faith;

- reveal your face to the dead
who have not seen your glory.

Lord, you are our life and our resurrection.⁵⁰³

From my point of view this is most significant, since it lends weight to my arguments about the implications of Jesus' descent to the dead (see Chapter Five, at page 82ff.). We may legitimately pray for the conversion of the dead.

PART V: ADDITIONAL TEXTS⁵⁰⁴

All but two of the additional texts offered are prayers of intercession.⁵⁰⁵ Forty-seven prayers are provided for the dead, fifteen for the mourners. I think that this accurately reflects the emphasis of *OCF* which sees funeral rites as primarily concerned with the dead rather than with the bereaved.

I have already indicated my reservations about the hierarchical nature of *OCF*, so there is no need to repeat them. I ought, however, to note that in the case of *Prayers for the Dead* distinctions are drawn between Popes and bishops, diocesan and other bishops, priests and deacons, religious and secular, baptized and unbaptized. In the list of *Prayers for the Mourners* there is also to be found the distinction between a baptized and an unbaptized child. Of

⁵⁰² *OCF*, page 393.

⁵⁰³ *OCF*, page 402.

⁵⁰⁴ *OCF*, page 407ff.

⁵⁰⁵ Two processional psalms are proposed: 25 and 114. They are printed at pages 429-431.

course, since the rites have already drawn the distinction, there is necessarily a need to offer special consolation for parents of the unbaptized.

Three prayers from those for the dead demand special attention, as does one from those for the mourners. A prayer is provided for “A deceased non-Christian married to a Catholic” and two for “One who died by suicide”. A prayer is also offered for those who mourn a stillborn child.

A deceased non-Christian married to a Catholic

Almighty and faithful Creator,
 all things are of your making,
 all people are shaped in your image.
 We now entrust the soul of *N.* to your goodness.
 In your infinite wisdom and power,
 work in him/her your merciful purpose,
 known to you alone from the beginning of time.
 Console the hearts of those who love him/her
 in the hope that all who trust in you
 will find peace and rest in your kingdom.
 We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.⁵⁰⁶

What is interesting about this prayer is its generosity of spirit in rites which elsewhere make so many distinctions and differences. The Catholic openness in this regard makes the earlier discriminatory attitude so much harder to bear.

One who died by suicide

God, lover of souls,
 you hold dear what you have made
 and spare all things, for they are yours.
 Look gently on your servant *N.*,
 and by the blood of the cross
 forgive his/her sins and failings.
 Remember the faith of those who mourn
 and satisfy their longing for that day
 when all will be made new again
 in Christ, our risen Lord,
 who lives and reigns with you for ever and ever.
Amen.

One who died by suicide

Almighty God and Father of all,
 you strengthen us by the mystery of the cross
 and with the sacrament of your Son's resurrection.
 Have mercy on our brother/sister *N.*

⁵⁰⁶ OCF, page 419.

Forgive all his/her sins and grant him/her peace.
 May we who mourn this sudden death be comforted
 and consoled by your power and protection.
 We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.⁵⁰⁷

Given the Roman Catholic Church's long opposition to Christian burial for suicides, these two prayers are remarkable simply by their presence. I think it would be unjust to conclude that the phrase asking for the forgiveness of sins and failings is a direct and intentional reference to the act of suicide as a mortal sin. However, the inference is there to be drawn, and the wording might have been better recast. In the first prayer this could have been expressed:

and by the blood of the cross
 grant him/her the life of your kingdom.

In the second prayer the phrase "Forgive all his/her sins" could simply have been omitted.

A stillborn child
 Lord God,
 ever caring and gentle,
 we commit to your love this little one,
 quickened to life for so short a time.
 Enfold him/her in eternal life.
 We pray for his/her parents
 who are saddened by the loss of their child.
 Give them courage
 and help them in their pain and grief.
 May they all meet one day
 in the joy and peace of your kingdom.
 We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.⁵⁰⁸

This is a prayer marked by a weakness and by a short phrase of real skill. The weakness is simply remedied. Whenever prayers are being said relating to a stillborn child or to a child dying near the time of death, the name of the child is of great importance. Loss of a child in these circumstances is for many the most difficult of all bereavements to suffer. The name of the child should be

⁵⁰⁷ OCF, pages 421-422.

⁵⁰⁸ OCF, page 428.

used wherever possible. This prayer will be pastorally more effective where this is done. However, it has one stunning phrase

quicken to life for so short a time

which parents to whom I have spoken find says so much of what they feel.

SUMMARY

The strengths of *OCF* are in its central focus on the deceased, which is clearly expressed throughout all the rites, and the strong sense of a rite of separation. Pastoral care to the bereaved is delivered precisely in allowing the fullest possible expression of the importance of the one who has died.

The weaknesses are equally briefly stated. There is not as clear a sense of transition as the processional nature of the rites and the doctrine of purgatory would give one rise to expect. Secondly, the hierarchical nature of the rite accurately reflects the nature of the Catholic church, but intrudes with considerable pastoral insensitivity.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁹ It was of great interest to me that on the day I was first writing these conclusions there should appear in *The Independent* a letter on the hierarchical nature of the Roman Catholic church from one of its people. The subject of the letter was Pope John Paul II's declaration about the ordination of women to the priesthood, but the general remark holds good. Its thrust has an especial force when death the leveller arrives. I reproduce the relevant paragraph of Vincent McLaughlin's letter below.

The argument that Jesus did not envisage the ordination of women on the grounds that the New Testament reports no example of his ordaining a woman is a risky one: the New Testament reports no instance of Jesus ordaining *anyone* to the priesthood.. On the contrary, the only priesthood the New Testament knows is the priesthood of Jesus himself and of *all* the people of God. The silence of Roman Catholic authorities, papal or episcopal, when their attention is drawn to this fact is deafening.

The Independent, 1 June 1994.

The Church of Scotland

COMMON ORDER⁵¹⁰

On 15 May 1994 the Panel of Worship of the Church of Scotland presented the Moderator with a specially bound edition of *Common Order* at the official launch of the book in John Knox's House, Edinburgh. I was present as Secretary of the Joint Liturgical Group of Great Britain, and was myself given a complimentary copy of the book.⁵¹¹ The Convenor of the Panel in his remarks to the Moderator noted that it was 300 years - almost to the month - since the publication in 1694 of John Knox's *Genevan Service Book*. While the new *Common Order* affirms its Genevan past, there was introduced alongside that heritage the tradition of Celtic Christianity which was an equal part of the Church of Scotland's inheritance.

That combination of Celtic and Genevan traditions is to be found in the new funeral rites of the Church of Scotland.

The funeral provisions in the book offer two main orders, suggestions of material to be used in distressing circumstances, additional prayer for funeral services, an order for a child's funeral, an order for a still-born child, and an order for the disposal of ashes. There is also an order for the dedication of a churchyard or burial ground.⁵¹² It is not my intention to look at all these in detail, but to draw attention to what is liturgically, ritually, or theologically of particular interest.⁵¹³

First Order for a Funeral Service

The service begins with the grace. A wide selection of texts is then offered for the call to worship. Along with the traditional sentences there are to be found texts promising the continuing and unfailing presence of God (Joshua 1.5;

⁵¹⁰ *Common Order*, St Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 1994.

⁵¹¹ Just as the event was about to begin at 10.30am the news reached us that John Smith the Leader of HM Opposition had died that morning. Those present were caught between the elation of the publication and deep sadness at the death of man they all knew and liked well, and who was an Elder of the Kirk.

⁵¹² The order for dedication of a Church yard or Burial Ground is separate from the other funerary rites in *Common Order*, but is intended to form part the overall provision.

⁵¹³ I shall not comment at all on the order for interment or scattering of ashes, which is really simply an extension of the committal and says nothing significantly new.

Matthew 28.20), declaring the beauty and mystery of God (Psalm 27.1; 1 Corinthians 2.9); warning of judgement (Romans 2.2,3); and asserting the safety of the faithful in the hands of God (Wisdom 1.1,3). The range is wider than is commonly found, and is the more helpful for that.

The opening prayers seek comfort for those who mourn and forgiveness for those who

... remember with sorrow how we have failed one another
and grieved your heart.⁵¹⁴

There follow the readings from scripture. The order suggests Old Testament, a Psalm sung or said, and New Testament ending with a Gospel.⁵¹⁵ This is a very full provision, and whether it is honoured in the breach or the observance it may be too soon to say. However, as the Moderator of the Church of Scotland remarked, the book is not mandatory, and there will be some who will never open it.⁵¹⁶

A sermon, called here an Address, is not optional. In the opening rubric to the service there is a clear directive that the address

which may include reference by way of tribute to the
deceased should proclaim the Gospel of the Resurrection.

The rubric adds that any separate tribute should be added after the address and before the prayers.⁵¹⁷

The prayer which follows begins by thanking God for Jesus who brought “life an immortality to light” (cf. 2 Timothy 1.10) and then paraphrases the line from William Bright’s hymn “only look on us as found in him”,⁵¹⁸ looking for deliverance from judgement to “the joy and peace of your presence”. The

⁵¹⁴ *Common Order*, page 254.

⁵¹⁵ The readings are produced separately from the orders of service at page 269ff.

⁵¹⁶ This observation was made in the Moderator’s short speech of welcome to the book at the launch in John Knox’s House. He himself looked forward to using the new *Common Order* but his comment about those ministers of the Kirk whose allegiance to previous service books had been at best occasional drew wry laughter from those present.

⁵¹⁷ *Common Order*, page 251.

⁵¹⁸ “And now, O Father, mindful of the love”.

prayer which follows is “Eternal God, you hold all souls in life”, which is to be found in the *Alternative Service Book*. Thankful remembrance is then made of the deceased and those who mourn are commended to the consoling love of God. The concluding prayer is typical of the new liturgy introduced in *Common Order*. Scriptural in reference and poetic in tone, it is reproduced below.

God of all comfort,
in the midst of pain
heal us with your love;
in the darkness of sorrow
shine upon us as the morning star.
Awaken in us the spirit of mercy,
that as we feel the pain of others,
we may share with them
the comfort we receive from you.
And at the last, bring us with all your people
into the kingdom of your glory,
where death itself is ended,
and every tear is wiped from every eye.⁵¹⁹

The commendation is marked by two prayers. The *Alternative Service Book*'s “Heavenly Father, by your mighty power” is slightly amended and avoids masculine language for God. It now reads “Gracious God, by your power”. The second prayer is the ancient couplet

Rest eternal grant unto *him*, O Lord.
And let light perpetual shine upon *him*.

This is quite a bold stroke for a church so very much aware of its Genevan tradition. An ascription of glory and a blessing are pronounced before the committal, which presumably follows at another place.

The committal is commendably brief. Opening sentences of scripture and the words of committal themselves are followed by the *Nunc Dimittis* and a modern language form of the prayer from the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer* “... you have given us new birth into a living hope...”. The service ends with the blessing.

⁵¹⁹ *Common Order*, page 256.

Second Order for a Funeral Service

In place of the usual sentences of scripture the introduction to this order of service offers a reflection of the nature of death, which it describes as “always a mystery”. It continues

Whenever it comes, it is never an end,
but is always a beginning

and links the present death with the death and resurrection of Jesus. The intention is precisely what I have been arguing in this thesis. It may therefore seem a little churlish when I say that, while there is a genuine attempt to use poetic language, the overall effect is rather didactic. The information needs to be the poetry, rather than being carried by it. The idea is excellent, and it only fails in execution by the slightest touch; but in poetry execution is everything. The language itself must be the meaning.

The theme of the service is light and darkness, and the references to the sun as symbolic of the light of Christ are many. In the prayer which follows the first hymn this theme is very clearly expressed:

Living God,
you have lit the day with the sun's light
and the midnight with shining stars.
Lighten our saddened hearts with the bright beams
of the Sun of Righteousness
risen with healing in his wings,
even Jesus Christ our Lord.
And so preserve us in the doing of your will,
that at the last we may shine
as the stars for ever;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

This is far more successful as a piece of liturgy than the introductory material, since it is not at all didactic. The prayer is simply a petition arising from adoration. The words are the message.

After the reading from scripture and the address, there follow prayers of petition and intercession. Here again the poetry of the prayers is resonant, although at times lacking complete assurance of rhythm and metre.

You deliver our eyes from tears,
our feet from falling
and our souls from death...

Help us to walk amid the things of this world
with our eyes wide open to your glory...⁵²⁰

The second excerpt is a little ungainly and would have gained from two slight emendations to retain the metrical pulse:

Help us to walk amid this world
with eyes wide open to your glory...

However, the prayers are illuminated with metaphor, and show a real determination to avoid the impersonal prose which makes for unsatisfactory liturgical language. These prayers are alive with direct address and concrete allusion. They are also remarkable for the use of the third person singular pronoun. Where often *he/him* is made to do common duty, here the Panel of Worship of the Church of Scotland has given the same role to *she/her*. This indeed is something new.

The committal continues with the use of the feminine pronouns, but is otherwise much the same as other committal rites which I have examined.

For Use in Distressing Circumstances

The Church of Scotland offers a collection of supplementary material for use in addition to or substitution for that provided in the first or second orders. Extra opening sentences are suggested, an additional opening prayer, and two further passages of scripture.⁵²¹ There follow prayers for various circumstances. The list is headed by a prayer which begins with the opening two paragraphs of the *Te Deum* before concluding:

Chase away the darkness of our night
and restore morning to the world.
Enlighten us with the healing beams of your love
and guide our feet into the way of peace.⁵²²

The switch is quite abrupt and while the favoured theme of darkness and light is continued, there is a slight problem for the ear which does not appear on the page. The visual contrast between night and morning is clear, but the aural impression may be confusing. I wonder how many congregations will hear

⁵²⁰ *Common Order*, pages 265,266.

⁵²¹ Opening Sentences: Psalm 46.1,2; Lamentations 3:22; 1 Peter 5.7; Isaiah 35.10b; Hebrews 13.5b; Matthew 11.28
Scripture Readings: Psalm 22.11-2,4-5,19; John 5.24-25.

⁵²² *Common Order*, pages 287-288.

“restore *mourning* to the world”? My own impression is that here the liturgists have pushed their imagery too far. Other prayers are grouped under themes: after a wasting illness; after a suicide; after violence. In these prayers the old usage of the masculine pronoun doing common duty reasserts itself.

Additional Prayers for Funeral Services

Additional prayers are offered for various sections of the two orders. There is a rich and wide provision whose themes are the approach, the reading of scripture (before and after), thanksgiving, those who mourn, the offering of life, petition, the communion of saints, facing death, commendation, and committal. Some suggestions are given for those situations when no body has been recovered. This additional material forms twenty seven different prayers and suggestions. I do not intend here to offer any detailed commentary.

Order for the Funeral of a Child

This order represents a clear decision to create a distinct rite rather than adapting existing liturgy by patching on a few new texts and prayers. The opening sentences of scripture demonstrate this from the outset. Three verses in particular stand out:

As a mother comforts her child,
so shall I myself comfort you.

Isaiah 66.13

Is all well with the child?
All is well.

2 Kings 4.26

Jerusalem will be called the City of Faithfulness:
and the city will be full of boys and girls
playing in the streets.

Zechariah 8.3,5

The prayers which precede the reading of scripture include a litany linking the life, death and resurrection of Jesus with children and parents.

Lord Jesus Christ,
you became a little child for our sake,
sharing our human life:
bless us and keep us.

You grew in wisdom and grace,
learning obedience:
bless us and keep us.

You welcomed little children,
 promising them the kingdom of heaven:
bless us and keep us.

You comforted those who mourned,
 grieving for their children:
bless us and keep us.

You took upon yourself
 the suffering of us all:
bless us and keep us.

Lord Jesus Christ,
 you rose from the dead
 bringing life eternal:
bless us and keep us
Amen.⁵²³

Among the scriptures proposed, there stands out as an interesting and creative choice the passage Matthew 18.1-5,10-14 in which two distinct pericopes are made to stand in juxtaposition. New Testament scholars may well have qualms about such a use of the text, but the effect is remarkable. Words of Jesus about who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven in which he points to the child whom he has called to stand in front of his disciples conclude with the phrase:

they have their angels in heaven ,
 who look continually
 on the face of my heavenly Father.

There follows, without ado, the parable of the straying sheep. The shepherd leaves the ninety-nine on the hills to look for the stray. The conclusion refers to the delight of the shepherd in his finding and adds:

In the same way,
 it is not your heavenly Father's will
 that one of these little ones should be lost.⁵²⁴

An address is followed by prayers of petition and intercession.

⁵²³ *Common Order*, page 307.

⁵²⁴ *Common Order*, page 311.

The excised material is understandably omitted. It contains two warnings. The first is about millstones and the sea being a better fate than what awaits those who mislead children. The second is about mutilation being preferable to damnation. However keen one is about not using scissors and paste with the scriptures, I think that this is one exception to which all would agree!

At the committal prayers are used which unambiguously declare that the deceased child has been welcomed into the loving presence of God. This is a bold affirmation which other traditions have not all felt able to make.⁵²⁵ Presumably pastoral considerations have been uppermost here. But many traditions, who are glad to make a special commendation of children to God's parental loving care, are diffident about declaring that the child has been welcomed "into the light and love of your presence". One admires Scots courage.

Order for the Funeral of a Still-born Child

Introductory words to this rite declare

All that has happened seems futile and pointless

but add that God's love is constant and

that his strength is available for us,
especially at those times when we feel
that we have no strength of our own.⁵²⁶

Among the scriptures chosen for reading is a selection from 1 Corinthians 13, with its reference both to "puzzling reflections" in a mirror and to the eternal nature of faith, hope and love. This is a scripture which can usefully become the text for an address for it confronts the desolate emptiness of still-birth with the gentleness of God's love. In the middle of the passage, these words shine out:

There is nothing love cannot face;
there is no limit to its faith,
its hope, its endurance.

A preacher who can link this love of God with the hurt and anger of parents denied the chance to love the child they have lost will have spoken a powerful word of God.⁵²⁷

⁵²⁵ Cf. the Church of England's form of committal in the *Alternative Service Book*, page 321, which provides no extra prayer beyond what is normally said at the committal of an adult.

⁵²⁶ *Common Order*, page 319.

⁵²⁷ Of course, those who have suffered this trauma or that of neo-natal death may never lose the memory of that short opportunity to love and cradle the child. But to love that child through each stage of normal human development is lost, and that loss is a gaping void which can never be made good.

In this order there is no mention of an address. Silence may be all that can be offered, and the prayers which follow may have to do the duty of speaking not only to God but to those who mourn. These prayers, like those in the previous order, unambiguously place the child in the fulness of God's presence:

Grant us such trust
in the finished work of your Son our Saviour,
that we shall look with hope
towards a full knowledge of *N...*,
whose earthly life we have so little share
but who is now complete with Christ in you.⁵²⁸

They seek that the family may be assured that

...with you
nothing is wasted or incomplete.

Increasingly orders of service are being prepared for the funerals for still-births and neo-natal deaths. In large measure this is a result of greater awareness of the particular grief of those in such circumstances. Although I have argued strongly throughout this thesis for there to be a sermon, in these cases I accept fully that words may do more damage than good. It will demand high pastoral sensitivity to speak for the resurrection in this awful sadness.

Order for the Dedication of a Churchyard or Burial Ground

The interest in this order for the thesis lies in two considerations; the setting aside of places of burial, and the anthropological assumptions made about human remains.

The order provides for a statement of the purpose of having a burial place.⁵²⁹ It observes the ancient tradition of linking the burial of Jesus with the graves of the faithful. The well-established connection made with Abraham's story is also made.⁵³⁰

⁵²⁸ *Common Order*, page 323. Prayer (c).

⁵²⁹ *Common Order*, page 394.

⁵³⁰ Genesis 23 forms the source text of the link with Abraham. The courtly dealings between Abraham and Hittites as each offers the other a better deal conceal contemporary property rights and their accompanying financial responsibilities. Abraham only wants a burial site, not the whole tract of land. The Hittites do not want to keep the field with Abraham and his family traipsing across on occasional visits to Sarah's grave. The to-ing and fro-ing are not so much generosity as haggling.

The anthropology of human remains is covered in the prayers:

Holy Spirit of God,
you strengthen us in weakness,
and wipe away all tears from our eyes.

Comfort those who sorrow here,
that by your power
they may find light in darkness,
hope in distress,
and faith in the midst of doubt.
Assure them that the souls of our loved ones
who lie buried in peace,
are safe in your everlasting arms;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The Church of Scotland has in its new *Common Order* funeral rites which offer new and imaginative liturgical forms and vivid language. However, in its anthropological stance there is no change. Death is the separation of the soul and the body. Is this old wine in new skins?

The Baptist Union of Great Britain

PATTERNS AND PRAYERS FOR CHRISTIAN WORSHIP⁵³¹

In its preparation of a book for those who lead worship in Baptist churches, the committee entrusted with the task consciously strove not to produce set liturgies or orders of service. It argued that set prayers and orders were inimical to the nature of Baptist worship which was seen to be characterized by freedom and flexibility.⁵³² Accordingly there is no funeral liturgy as such. There are two main suggestions given as to how a funeral service may proceed and several prayers are provided. However, the failure to articulate clearly a theology of death and bereavement results in services without ritual.

The preface to the two patterns provided declares at the outset that “Pastoral concerns should always be uppermost”. It follows that in each of the service patterns that follows reference to the dead is never what I would call primary variety but always of a secondary nature.⁵³³

The FIRST PATTERN proposes a “funeral service with committal followed later by a service of thanksgiving”.⁵³⁴ The initial welcome declares that the service is designed to say farewell, to give thanks and to commit the deceased and ourselves to God, and invites the mourners to listen to the promises of Scripture.⁵³⁵ Selected scriptural sentences are then offered. All are traditional words used at funerals with the exception of the text of 1 Peter 1.3-4.

⁵³¹ *Patterns and Prayers for Christian Worship*, OUP, 1990

⁵³² This is a view which I, as a Baptist, strenuously reject. For a start it is, in my judgement, naive in its phenomenology of worship. Even my Quaker neighbours comment that at Meeting the same people say much the same thing at much the same juncture week by week. Even if orders are not written down, they generally emerge by custom and practice. Further, the current climate among Baptists which has adopted the styles of the “soft charismatics” is not the prevailing historical tradition known among Baptists. *Patterns and Prayers for Christian Worship* is a halfway house between those who claim the Spirit of liberty and those who claim the Spirit of order. While the creation of a book of patterns and prayers might be thought of as more likely to come from those committed to a liturgical stance, the book’s general tone is more sympathetic to those of the contrary view.

⁵³³ Primary reference to the dead would articulate *for* the dead her/his cry to the Lord; secondary reference is talk *about* the dead.

⁵³⁴ *Patterns and Prayers*, page 135.

⁵³⁵ There is a careless use of the imperfect subjunctive following a main verb in the present imperative mood. Since this appears to be one of the few sentences not drawn from other sources, the critical commentator might have hoped for more care

While this text seems at first sight a strange opening for a funeral, it has the merit of tying human death into the death of Christ and into the hope of the resurrection of the dead. It is clearly intended as a text for use at the funerals of those who professed Christian faith.

The opening prayer is the ASB version of the prayer introduced in the 1928 Book of Common Prayer. While the prayer itself is a strong articulation of Christian faith, it is strange to find its clear reference to the concluding lines of the Apostles' Creed in the funeral service of a Christian tradition not given to saying the creeds in weekly worship. For the Anglican communicant this prayer links the Church on earth at the altar with the church expectant and triumphant with the Lord. The one who has received Christ in the Eucharist (where the Creed is repeated) is now received by Christ.⁵³⁶ For the Baptist this resonance is, I suspect, entirely lost.⁵³⁷

Reading from scripture is followed by a "brief address"; I am relieved to see that my own tradition does not regard this as optional. Prayers of Thanksgiving for Victory in Christ and of Remembrance and Thanksgiving are followed by what is called the act of committal. In fact, commendation and committal are offered in alternative prayers. I would have liked to think that this was because the distinction between the commendation of the soul and the committal of the body had been consciously rejected. In the second pattern there is an apparent distinction made. However, when I pointed this out to a member of the committee who prepared the book, he had not consciously been aware of the two approaches.

The service ends with the *Nunc Dimittis* and a prayer from the ASB.⁵³⁸ If the *Nunc Dimittis* is intended to be applied to the deceased, this is an interesting development, since the inference could be drawn that a prayer uttered for

in the writing of what was original. Alternatively, it may betoken a lack of the sort of literary ear used to listening regularly to the balances needed in liturgical phrasing. Frequently where versicles and responses are proposed which have not been borrowed from other sources, there is an inelegance of rhythm.

⁵³⁶ I acknowledge that it is the Nicene form of the Creed which is used at the Eucharist; but the placing of the coffin facing the altar evokes the eucharistic action.

⁵³⁷ When I wrote this I asked a number of Baptist ministers what the words of the prayer meant to them. Not one made the connection with the Creed.

⁵³⁸ *Alternative Service Book*, section 58.

someone now dead could have effect. Such a deduction is not likely to be made by many Baptists, and it is wiser to understand the choice of the *Nunc Dimittis* as a result of its having words which seemed generally to fit.

The blessing is the Celtic prayer

Deep peace of the running wave to you,
 deep peace of the flowing air to you,
 deep peace of the quiet earth to you,
 deep peace of the shining stars to you,
 deep peace of the Son of peace to you.

A Service of Thanksgiving is proposed either for the same day or at a later date. In terms of satisfactory grieving and of proper separation and incorporation, I would suspect that a thanksgiving would be better delayed where possible. I would argue this all the more since the central feature of the service is a sermon to which the following rubric is attached.

The emphasis will be on thanksgiving for the person's life
 and on a triumphant proclamation of the resurrection hope.

The prayers that follow express the rubric in terms which give no hint of the darkness of grief and bereavement. I am strongly in favour of proclaiming the resurrection at the funeral, but only in the context of the death of Christ. For me the transition is superficial and facile.

The SECOND PATTERN is a more traditional form of service. After the opening sentences - one of which is the powerful John 5.25 - a welcome outlines the purpose of the service. The purpose is effectively fourfold: to honour the dead person; to listen to the great words of the Christian faith; to give thanks for the life of the deceased; to renew trust in God.⁵³⁹

The assumption of the service is that the person who has died was a Christian. The prayer of remembrance and thanksgiving includes the words

we bless you that his/her sins are forgiven

which Baptists, with their Evangelical stance, will clearly attach to those who have professed faith.

The main interest for the liturgist in this pattern of service lies in two prayers which form part of the commendation and the committal. First to be offered,

⁵³⁹ *Patterns and Prayers*, page 146.

as a prayer of commendation, is a form of the *Profiscicere, anima Christiana*. For some reason (presumably to avoid what was felt to be an archaism), the traditional 'Go Forth' has been replaced by the word 'Depart'. The effect is not a happy one. 'Depart' in this imperative mood is redolent of the words of Simon Peter:

Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord,

or of Jesus' words in the parable of the sheep and the goats:

Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared
for the devil and his angels.

The old form has much to commend it and 'Go forth' is not so obscure that it requires alteration. 'Depart' is a poor substitution. What is even more interesting is that so Catholic a prayer should have been proposed in a book intended for those of a very different tradition.⁵⁴⁰

The second prayer of note is a selection of words from the *Te Deum*

You, Christ, are the king of glory...⁵⁴¹

Once again, it is good to see the use of the ancient texts of the Christian Church in a book meant for those who are often suspicious of church tradition. How many will recognise the source of the words is open to question. The earlier comments about recognition (page 217) apply here.

Beyond these two main patterns of service a number of other prayers and readings is proposed for special circumstances: a still-born or newly born child; a child; a sudden or violent death; a victim of violence. The selection is useful and offers perhaps the best contribution to funeral liturgy from the material offered by Baptists.

One other observation should be made. A comment is made about memorial services for public tragedies. In the course of what is said the following appears.

⁵⁴⁰ This form of the prayer was used in the previous Baptist worship book, *Praise God*, (edd. A. Gilmore, E. Smalley, M. Walker), Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, 1980.

⁵⁴¹ In the acknowledgements at the end of *Patterns and Prayers* the source of these words is given as the United Reformed Church's 1989 *Service Book*. While this form of the *Te Deum* is indeed found in the URC's book, the attribution is incorrect. It is in origin a text of the International Consultation on English Texts (ICET), as the *Alternative Service Book 1980*, in which the full text appears, makes clear.

A memorial service is not a funeral. Funerals are personal and relate more immediately to the release of the body. A memorial service is part of the reflective and healing process. Survivors need time to recover physically, and the service may be three, six, or even twelve months after the event.⁵⁴²

This is an important recognition that the funeral is primarily separation and that memorial services are much more part of transition and incorporation. The patterns of service, like the funeral services in other traditions at which we are looking, do not keep that distinction sufficiently in view. Funerals still have to bear too much ritual weight. Baptists are no better at avoiding this than others.

⁵⁴² *Patterns and Prayers*, page 156.

The Methodist Conference

THE METHODIST SERVICE BOOK⁵⁴³

The service follows the traditional pattern. The liturgy was published in 1975 and is a product of the great rush in liturgical renewal following the Vatican II and the Parish Eucharist movement. The opening prayers speak of God as the conqueror of death, whose love offers encouragement and hope in the scriptures, and who has “given us a High Priest who understands our human weakness” to whom we can turn in trust and confidence.⁵⁴⁴ The reference to God as the conqueror of death echoes the theme of *Christus Victor* which was in great vogue at the time that these funeral rites were in preparation.

The ministry of the Word is prefaced by a prayer which commends the hearing of scripture in the light of Christ “who shared our life and death”, who was “raised again triumphant”, and in whom “his people find eternal life”.⁵⁴⁵

Three Psalms are proposed from which one or more may be used, and four passages of the New Testament are offered from which a similar selection may be made.⁵⁴⁶ Other possible passages are cited where the principal selections are not chosen.⁵⁴⁷ It is interesting to observe that apart from the Psalter no Old Testament passages are chosen. This probably reflects a determination to give unambiguous emphasis to the new dimension to death which the resurrection of Christ brings. Yet the omission of the Old Testament passages speaking of death gives light without darkness, that sort of hope which is not true ἐλπίς since it takes insufficient account of the human realities. Short cuts to the resurrection always carry with them the danger of denying death its force. In his important contribution to the discussion of death, made at the time when the Methodist rite was in preparation, Eberhard Jüngel wrote:

Faith in the God who raised Jesus from the dead expresses nothing other than the relationship in which God stood to Jesus of Nazareth in his death.... The divine attitude which was final and decisive for Jesus himself was the expression

⁵⁴³ *The Methodist Service Book*, Methodist Publishing House, 1975.

⁵⁴⁴ *The Methodist Service Book*, pages 212-213 [F4-F5].

⁵⁴⁵ The second of these clauses renews the *Christus Victor* theme.

⁵⁴⁶ Psalms 130; 23; 103.8-17; John 14.1-6,27; 1 Peter 1.3-9; 1 Corinthians 15 (selected verses); Romans 8:28,31b-35,37-39.

⁵⁴⁷ Psalm 90; 2 Corinthians 4.16 - 5.10; Revelation 7.9-17; 21.1-7.

of God's relationship to a dead man. This is what the proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus is all about. It communicates that which took place in Jesus' death. However, it is not only communication; it also makes possible our participation. The believer is able to participate in what which took place in Jesus' death.⁵⁴⁸

Jüngel argues in his chapter on the death of Jesus Christ that resurrection is God's entry into death by which he transforms it.

Funerals which so quickly affirm eternal life that they ignore death are not simply at anthropological fault, they are in theological error. The Methodist service does not ignore death, but it does leave itself open to the possibility of misunderstanding in its failure to engage with the Old Testament.

Rubric 9 notes that "A sermon may be preached". I do not need to repeat earlier criticism of optional sermons or homilies here. The point has been made.

After the Creed, a thanksgiving is made for the death and resurrection of Christ by which the kingdom of heaven is opened to all believers. The prayer continues with a celebration of the faithful departed and is followed by further prayers for the departed.

The commendation and committal follow the general tradition of Christian funeral rites. The first of the optional prayers presented at this point includes a request that God will grant

to the dead, rest and light perpetual.

The Methodist rite combines the Evangelical and the Catholic without drawing attention to itself in doing so. It is an appropriate combination given the Methodist perception of Methodism as the "established" Free Church.

If Baptists eschew liturgical form, Methodists have most clearly embraced it among the Free Churches. In spirit the *Methodist Service Book* is kin to the *Alternative Service Book*. Both drew heavily on the work of the International Consultation on English Texts which was heavily engaged in the wave of liturgical revision in the late 60's and early 70's. The *Methodist Service Book*

⁵⁴⁸ E. Jüngel, *Death: the Riddle and the Mystery*, St Andrew Press, 1975, page 103.

also made extensive use of the revisions within Anglicanism as the list of acknowledgements at the beginning of the book makes very clear.⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁹ *Methodist Service Book*, page vi.

The United Reformed Church

SERVICE BOOK (1989)⁵⁵⁰

Of the Free Churches the United Reformed Church (URC) is most keenly aware of the Reformed tradition. It is a church avowedly ecumenical in its beginnings and in its continuing life, and is committed more clearly than any other to revision. Such change is seen both in its commitment to widen its denominational membership and its commitment to gender issues. Although it had produced a service book only a few years previously, an Assembly decision to use only gender inclusive language led to an immediate revision of liturgy and to the production of a new hymn book.

The funeral liturgy is subtitled “A Service of Witness to the Resurrection”, and after the opening sentences offers a preface which comes in two alternative forms. The first version expresses the purpose of gathering to be fourfold: the worship of God, the thankful remembrance of the deceased, the prayer for comfort and strength for the bereaved, and the affirmation that “death is not the end - but a new beginning”. The second delineates the purpose in the following terms: the worship of God, the thankful remembrance of the deceased, the sharing of grief, and the expression of the faith that “death is not the ultimate calamity that it seems”. The prayers that follow (from which one should be selected) speak of light in darkness and comfort in the word of God, and form an introduction to the Liturgy of the Word.

The principal readings of scripture are printed in full with further readings suggested.⁵⁵¹ Unlike the Methodist selection there is plenty of material here from the Old Testament. However, the problem referred to above (page 221) still applies here, since the provision of lists of readings does not ensure their use. A rubric indicating that one Old Testament text should be read in addition to any other(s) would remove the difficulty. The usual objection given to the use of two readings is that at the service in a crematorium chapel there is not adequate time. From my own experience I do not believe this to be true. It is my practice to use a selection from the Psalter as well as readings from both Old and New Testaments reading, and to give a homily. If the service has to be in the crematorium, then brevity and conciseness are necessary and possible.

⁵⁵⁰ *Service Book*, United Reformed Church, 1989

⁵⁵¹ *Service Book*, pages 70-74 .

The URC is true to its Reformed tradition in its clear provision of a sermon. The sermon is to be on the Christian Hope. Knox and Calvin would have wanted this to have included the theme of Judgement; but the sermon is here described as a *sermon* and not an address, and it is not optional.

Prayers of thanksgiving for the victory of Christ and of commendation of the departed follow. Two alternative prayers of thanksgiving are provided. The first contains a central clause which speaks of the life and death of Jesus as showing the ways of God in human life and demonstrating the limitless power of divine life. The second draws on Romans 8.

The commendation, which includes the usual opportunity for silent remembrance, is followed by petitions for the bereaved. Commendation, petition and intercession are offered in a variety of forms. Of these the most original begins with a prayer which seeks to lay the past to rest. Part of this (the last) form is reproduced below:

Intimate God,
 you are able to accept in us
 what we cannot even acknowledge;
 you have named in us
 what we cannot bear to speak of;
 you hold in your memory
 what we have tried to forget;
 you will hold out to us
 a glory we cannot imagine.
 Reconcile us through your cross
 to all that we have rejected in ourselves,
 that we may find no part of your creation
 to be alien or strange to us,
 and that we ourselves may be made whole,
 through Jesus Christ, our lover and our friend,
Amen.

It concludes with petitions and intercessions which declare:

... since we have all been but a hair's breadth from death since birth, teach us, O God, how close we are to that life in all its fullness which Christ alone can give....

Silence

Let us pray for... (*members of the bereaved family are named*) and all whom they love. For them we ask for resources stronger than anything we can offer: peace, joy, and hope; gifts that no one, no grief, can take away. May they grieve, but not as those without hope.

Silence

Sustaining and all-loving God, we pray also for others around the world who bear pain and grief, guilt and fear. May they find the peace and the wholeness, the healing and the joy we seek.

The Lord's Prayer is said before the service moves to the committal. The committal includes the same section of the *Te Deum* which was chosen in Baptist Pattern Two (see page 219). Two concluding prayers are offered. The first refers to the Church militant and triumphant (though not expectant!) and asks for the strength to move from the sadness of grief to "return to the duties which await us in the world" and to greater faithfulness to God in the service of one another. This should probably be seen as a move from separation into transition and incorporation, which is presumably its intention. The second prayer is a slight rewording of the well-known prayer "O Lord, support us all the day long of this troublous life". The blessing is then pronounced.

A short appendix offers prayers for special circumstances: the death of a child; the funeral of a still-born child; particularly distressing circumstances; and the burial or of scattering of ashes.

Concluding comments

The review which has formed the substance of this chapter has been limited in its choice of liturgies and detailed. More would have been possible had the thesis been simply a textual commentary on funeral rites. Nonetheless, I believe that a review of all the texts which I have examined would not show any profound ritual differences, although there would have been a greater range of theological emphases.⁵⁵²

I have found considerable evidence of pastoral concern in all rites, even if at times there has also been maladroitness. The focus of attention in the pastoral rites has not always been the same. Rites from more Catholic traditions have paid careful attention to the deceased and to prayers for the dead. The more Protestant churches have generally avoided this emphasis and looked more to the solace of those who mourn. This is fairly predictable and results from theological convictions. What has proved more challenging for the liturgist has been to express van Gennep's theory of rites of passage with its phases of separation, transition and incorporation. In particular, there has not been a very clear sense of incorporation into new life for either the dead or the living. The Anglican Church in New Zealand's *Prayers in a House after Death* and the Roman Catholic *Office of the Dead* have been fine exceptions. It is significant that in the case of each of these rites such a move has to come from beyond the main funeral liturgies. Just as there has been over the last few years a special attention given to the funerals of children still-born and of neonates, perhaps the next work to be attempted is the celebration of post-funeral rites.

⁵⁵² I have examined during my research in addition to those rites reviewed here the funeral liturgies of the following churches and groups:

Anglican

The Church of the Province of Australia, The Anglican Church of Canada, The Anglican Church of Papua, New Guinea, The Church of the Province of South Africa, The Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America.

Free Churches and Others

The Independent Methodists, The Lutheran Church, The Moravian Church.

Ecumenical

The Joint Liturgical Group, The Uniting Church in Australia

Non-Christian

The British Humanist Association

In Chapter Nine this will form part of the overall proposals I make for funeral liturgies. I do not expect necessarily to do any better than those I follow; it may be that I shall do differently.

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Part Four: A Dance of Death

Introduction

In this final part of the thesis I shall attempt to use the findings of what has gone before to achieve two ends: the provision of liturgical proposals, and the evaluation of how this thesis opens the way for future work.

In Chapter Nine I shall consider some of the ways in which I think Christian funeral liturgies should be serving the pastoral needs of those who approach the Church at the time of death. I shall tackle this discussion in two steps. I shall first consider general issues and principles, and make some suggestions about how rites of passage may be structured to meet the objectives I identify. I shall then offer some detailed suggestions. Some of these will be liturgical material of my own which I have written to meet the theological and pastoral criteria I have identified in Parts One, Two and Three.

In Chapter Ten I shall begin by using six specially prepared case studies to test how the proposals of Chapter Nine work, and to indicate the difficulties which will always arise in celebrating funeral rites in a fragmented community. I shall then indicate what I believe to be the continuing area of work requiring attention from pastoral theologians and liturgists in the realm of liturgy and death.

Chapter Nine: Ritual Steps

Issues and principles

Before I offer any liturgical proposals two issues must be decided. The first is a matter of theological anthropology, the second of social anthropology. Throughout the thesis these two fields of study have emerged to form the arena within which the pastoral and ritual concerns of death must be allowed to shape funeral liturgies. The theological issue is this: "Should there be different funerals for different people?" The question posed by social anthropology is a ritual one: "How can funeral liturgies best express the passage of the dead and of the living?" To these I shall now briefly turn.

Sameness and Difference

Is death the leveller, or are there distinctions we can make between the deceased which lead us to offer varying liturgical provision? Perversely, I want to answer both questions affirmatively.

The discussion of the 1 Peter texts in Chapter Five leads me to conclude that death does not separate believers from unbelievers in the kerygmatic statements we make at the funeral. All death is taken up into the death of Christ, and all the dead hear the voice of the Son of God.⁵⁵³ He calls them into being (*bios*) once again to fulfil their calling to life in God. The death and resurrection of Christ are for (*υπερ*) all. At every funeral it is the responsibility of the Christian Church to proclaim this saving word. In the words of D. T. Niles we are to be "one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread".

Notwithstanding the kerygmatic position, there are clearly features in the story of every dead person which mean that every funeral will have its own peculiarities. From the Christian point of view, the chief of these distinctions will be the Christian faith of the deceased and of the mourners. If the deceased and those who mourn her are part of the Christian community, then there is a shared understanding that the dead and the living are alike utterly dependent upon God.⁵⁵⁴ If the deceased had faith but the family do not, then the local congregation shares the vision and must communicate that to those

⁵⁵³ John 5.25.

⁵⁵⁴ It has to be acknowledged that this may be variously expressed, and may or may not include belief in the resurrection. To me the "optional" nature of resurrection faith is strange, but there is widespread uncertainty even within the Christian Church.

who do not. This is not to be thought of as a special task given at the funeral, but the continual apostolic vocation of all believers. If the deceased did not have faith and the mourners do, the task changes to warning the bereaved not to consign the deceased to an unmerciful judgement. Where there is not faith in either the deceased or the mourners, the transcendent questions about death and God need to be handled in such a way that pain and hurt are expressed without hope being extinguished. Such considerations will lead to different emphases in the main funeral rite itself.

Some of the differences will be made all the clearer because of the place chosen for the celebration of the rite. In a church or chapel, where the deceased and mourners are regular worshippers, the sense of hope may be more easily kindled than in the funeral director's chapel of rest or in the municipal chapel at the cemetery or crematorium. The ritual and processional nature of the rites is more easily expressed where worship and liturgy are the purpose of the space in which they take place. Where the main purpose of the space is the functional one of disposal, the task is considerably more difficult.

The Christian funeral liturgist needs to provide a rite which links the particular death for which it is being used with the death and resurrection of Christ. At the same time it must be frankly acknowledged that this hope is expressed in one way by a congregation of believers and in quite another by those to whom faith is alien. What I am myself most eager to resist is the suggestion that some Christians should have hierarchically ordered funerals according to their status in the Church. In this context death is a leveller. Our calling to life in God is not made on the grounds of our human achievement, but out of the love and mercy of God. It is right that we should remember with thanks service given to God in the life of the deceased; but it is thanks to God that we offer, not congratulations to the departed. Salvation is by grace not by works, and the funeral should not give a contrary suggestion.

Stepping through the Dark

Along with the theological issue of our equality before God, there is a question of social anthropology which must be decided. If van Gennep is correct in his basic observations about the elements in rites of passage, how should this be reflected in funeral liturgies?

It is important to remember that the phases of bereavement grief which have been described by the clinical observers are not watertight compartments. They do not always appear in a rigid sequence; there is ebb and flow. The

same proviso holds good for van Gennep's elements of separation, transition and incorporation. I do not regard the general outline which van Gennep describes as controversial, and I want to use the insights he offers in constructing funeral liturgies. Nonetheless, we cannot simply hive off the pre-liminal from the liminal and post-liminal. In every helpful reference to one of these elements there will be resonances of the other two. I believe that this can be made to work most effectively by the notion of a controlling emphasis.⁵⁵⁵ In some liturgies, it will be separation which chimes the dominant note, at others transition will lead, in others it will be incorporation which sounds the key. Yet in each instance the other themes will be there to add their counterpoint.

In my judgement funeral liturgies will reflect the processional nature of rites of passage if they are to be at their most effective in expressing Christian faith about death and resurrection. The funerals of the early Christian Church adapted the processional form to express the journey of the soul. The anthropological agenda for which I have argued is different, but I believe that the procession is still a useful model for a rite of passage. In part it can image the passage of the living. They are enabled to establish a new pattern of living which expresses the reality of death in determination and hope rather than in morbid despair. It can also offer a means whereby the Easter triduum is replicated. Christ's journey through death to resurrection is the archetype for the dead who are called into resurrection by the voice of the Son of God.

These two principles, then, form the basis for my liturgical proposals:

- While there will be a variety in liturgical celebration arising from the varying liturgical assemblies and their own sets of beliefs, the funeral rite *per se* must offer to all the same calling of God from death to resurrection. Every funeral should reflect faithfully the life and personality of the deceased, but all funerals must

⁵⁵⁵ I have taken this idea of control from the liturgical world of lectionaries. In most lectionaries, three readings (OT, Epistle and Gospel) will be given for the eucharistic celebration. The question in the minds of many preachers then arises: "Which one should I preach on?" Leaving aside the answer which I most prefer ("All of them!"), there has arisen a practice of suggesting that at certain seasons of the Church year the OT will be the controlling reading; at other times, the Gospel; at yet others, the Epistle.

unashamedly include the dead in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

- While most mourners will only expect one liturgy, there should be a sense of procession which reflects the journey of the dead and the living. Wherever possible the bereaved should be given the opportunity to express their own journey in relation to the deceased. This may be done in the provision of other liturgies which echo and enact the farewell to the dead and the commitment to new life of which the paschal mystery is both archetype and witness.

General liturgical proposals

The Holy Place

Death is an encounter with the holy, and the funeral is a rite of totem and taboo. Anything which reinforces the sense of the holy is to be welcomed. This does not mean a crude appeal to the threat of hellfire, but it does mean fostering an environment in which questions and doubts about the ultimate can be addressed. What the officiant should be aiming to achieve is a ritual space in which encounter with God is possible.

Many people decline the idea of a funeral in church since they have rejected institutionalized religion. A service in church is thought to be out of the question. The result is that funeral directors often suggest to the bereaved that the service may be held in a chapel of rest forming part of their premises.⁵⁵⁶ On the whole, however, chapels of rest do not encourage a sense of the holy. There is usually an insufficiently defined place for ritual action. A typical

⁵⁵⁶ Both the funeral directors in my town declare that they offer a complete range of venues for the service to the bereaved (church, chapel of rest, crematorium or cemetery chapel), and I believe them. Nonetheless, in the nearly six years that I have ministered in my present situation, I have had only one funeral in church where the deceased was not a member of the congregation. Of the remainder only two have been entirely at the crematorium. All the others have been at the chapels of rest. Conversations with other clergy and ministers revealed a similar experience. The two slight variations have been the Vicar and the Roman Catholic priest. The former has a very pretty church in his parish, popular for both weddings and funerals. He reports a slightly higher incidence of church funerals at this church, though not at the Parish Church in the centre of town. The Catholic parish priest tends not to be called upon by non-Catholics. However, he finds that there are two extremes at funerals. Nominal Catholics, who do not normally attend Mass, want the funeral anywhere but in church. The remainder want everything they can possibly have by way of funeral liturgies. He does resist having two Masses, and insists that the Reception into Church is brief and non-eucharistic. He reports an increase in funerals outside church.

layout is a mix between a lecture theatre and a church. There is a central aisle (this connotes Church), but the chairs are set in rows and a lectern is provided from which the officiant is to conduct the rite (lecture theatre). Taped music is drifted in to form a background, and is faded out and in at the beginning and end of the service. Funeral directors think that this creates a reverent ambience. Their intention is good, but their liturgical training is frequently non-existent. Instead of the music setting a context for the expression of the Paschal Mystery, the effect is of muzak. Far from calling the congregation to express sorrow, hope, or joy, the tape becomes something to talk over, a chewing gum for the ears.⁵⁵⁷

In the coda to Part I of this thesis, I indicated that the funeral is a rite in which taboo and totem were united in the holy place (see pages 70f.). That holy place demands both its own space and its delimitation. The physical environment has its effect on such considerations, which the minister ought at least to suggest to the family in the initial planning of the funeral.

Separating Rites

Two liturgies can carry the main characteristic of separation: *Reception into Church* and the *Funeral Service*.

*Reception into Church*⁵⁵⁸

The purpose of the liturgy is to bring the body into the realm of the holy by setting it before the place where the eucharistic action occurs. I should also want to stop the body at the place of baptism as a reminder that baptism is into

⁵⁵⁷ Funeral directors are not entirely to blame for this. English Christian congregations are notorious offenders in this respect. It is not so elsewhere in the world where the work of organists and other musicians is seen as part of the offering of worship to God as surely as is the reading of scripture, the sermon or the communion of bread and wine.

⁵⁵⁸ Where the family do not want a church service, there can still be an initial rite in which the body is formally acknowledged as dead and where its position in the world of the dead is clearly signalled. This cannot be done at a cemetery or crematorium; but it is possible at a funeral director's chapel of rest where the next action in that place will be the funeral service relating to that particular body. Normally, however, this is a specifically Christian rite which requires the resonances of the church or chapel building.

the death of Christ. The rite should have a strong but peaceful sense of relinquishing into the loving care of God one who is with us no longer.⁵⁵⁹

The importance of the sacramental life of the church which links the living and the dead is a key to this liturgy. Reference to it can be appropriately made where the deceased has been a member of the eucharistic community. Where this is not the case, there can still be a powerful sense of leaving one who is loved in the love of God.

The Funeral Service

This liturgy must usually do complete duty for the dead and the living. Where it can be seen as part of a process, some advantage may be gained by explaining to the liturgical assembly its importance as part of the whole. In any event the importance of separation must be made clear, and the hope of incorporation affirmed.

Transitional and Incorporating Rites

The passage from the early days of bereavement to new life is for many an uneven progress. Some days are good, others awful. There are, as Gorer pointed out, insufficient conventions which mark the progress. No one says how long it should be before a widower remarries, but tongues will start wagging if it is “too soon”. Yet how is the poor man to know what “too soon” is if there is no socially agreed period of mourning? How long must a woman grieve before she can become a merry widow? Is it permissible for a parent who has lost a child to burst into tears in the supermarket when (s)he

⁵⁵⁹ Some years ago a dear friend of mine died. John was a devout Anglo-Catholic and his body was taken into church overnight. His wife recounted the following story to me which she found profoundly moving yet wonderfully helpful.

Her small three year old granddaughter was in church with the rest of the family. Turning to her mother she asked what was happening to her grandad. This is the answer she received. “Well, darling, you know how it is when we’ve got visitors coming to stay. We get their room ready. We make the beds, we put out some nice fresh soap and some fluffy clean towels. We make the bathroom shiny and bright. We bake their favourite cakes, and make a special pudding for dinner. Then we wait, and when the front door bell rings, we all call out “They’re here!”, and we’re all excited and glad. Well, that’s what it’s like for Grandad. Jesus has been getting Grandad’s room ready, and now the front door bell has rung, and grandad’s there, and Jesus is excited and glad because he’s been waiting, and now grandad’s arrived.”

Like John’s widow, I reckon that this is an excellent exposition of John 14.1-3. It captures precisely those elements of separation and hope that should characterise this liturgy. It also, of course, speaks of transition and has a strong suggestion of incorporation.

sees someone buying a bottle of banana milk shake which their child so loved? How long can that continue? Transition and incorporation are very difficult to manage where there are no social codes. Perhaps the Christian community can help simply by the provision of rites which mark the passage and which confirm people in their new demographic status. I want to suggest two further liturgies: *Commemoration of the Dead* and *Affirmation of the Living*.

Commemoration of the Dead

One of the difficulties with our contemporary funeral rites is their frequent failure to mark the passing of time and with it the task of incorporation both of the living and of the dead into the resurrection. As a partial response to this gap I am at present experimenting with the celebration of the Feast of All Souls.⁵⁶⁰

I live in the shadow of Pendle Hill with its history of Widow Demdike and the witches of Pendle; at Hallowe'en there is always a lot of local interest in the old stories.⁵⁶¹ Some churches in the area have instituted a walk up to the top of Pendle in order to witness for Jesus against what they see as the powers of witchcraft. I am not at all convinced that this is the best way to deal with the situation. The local newspapers treat the whole thing as another example of the Church living in the past, and rather than "defeating the powers of darkness", Widow Demdike gets another free outing on her broomstick.

It seems to me that a more positive way forward is to speak of the victory of the cross over sin and death. I and my ministerial colleagues are inviting the bereaved to celebrate All Souls Day as the occasion when they can join together to commemorate their dead. Anyone who wishes may attend, and

⁵⁶⁰ This liturgy is for a rite of the community in which mourners from different families are called together to name and commemorate their dead. The private remembrance of an anniversary is a different occasion, and pastoral care needs to be exercised at such times in quiet consultation with those who mourn.

⁵⁶¹ The witches of Pendle are, of course, a gift to primary school teachers. Children dress up and have a high old time. It keeps the Halloween tradition alive along with pumpkin-lanterns; and children knock on doors for "trick or treat". There is less risk of injury than with "gunpowder, treason and plot", and the whole farrago fills a nice slot before Christmas carols and nativity plays get under way.

special invitations will be sent out to those who have been bereaved over the previous two years.⁵⁶² Initial response to the idea has been encouraging.

The liturgy is still under discussion. Possibilities include the Roman Catholic *Office of the Dead*, the Anglican service from *The Promise of His Glory*,⁵⁶³ or an experimental liturgy of our own devising. The rite will address transition and incorporation as well as affirming the separation which has already occurred.

It is hoped in this way to recover the old custom of marking the year of bereavement. For many it will mark another stage in their passage. It is hoped that in some manner we may be able to process - not to Pendle Hill, but perhaps to books of remembrance and to symbols of Christian hope: water, bread and wine, bible or book of the gospels, crucifix, and lighted candle.

Affirmation of the Living

I am also experimenting with a service in which the bereaved may return to receive permission, as it were, to cease or to modify their grieving and to be reaffirmed in the community of the living. The intention is not to deny the past but to declare the healing of the wound. This service ought not to be celebrated much before a year has passed. Where positive steps have been taken to move on in living (new relationships, for example), these can be offered to God for a blessing.

In the remainder of this chapter I shall introduce a number of specific liturgical proposals. These are not complete liturgies but are intended to suggest ways in which such liturgies could take shape. Where the forms and wordings are my own I have shown no attribution. Other sources are acknowledged.

⁵⁶² These invitations will not be sent out to those who have been bereaved within the previous three months, since they will be too recently bereaved for the service to do much else than to upset them.

⁵⁶³ *The Promise of His Glory: services and prayers for the season from All Saints to Candlemas*, Church House Publishing, 1990.

Liturgies of death and resurrection

RECEPTION INTO CHURCH

This is normally an evening liturgy. It should have four main sections:

- Approach and Reception
- Liturgy of the Word
- Liturgy of Prayer
- Blessing and Dismissal

Although some people may be present who cannot attend the funeral service on the following day, *Reception into Church* should not become an alternative funeral service. It will be best to keep the liturgy deliberately and clearly preparatory to the liturgy of the morrow. For this reason, I think it best to avoid a eucharistic celebration.⁵⁶⁴

Approach and Reception

This will be strongly processional. As the body is brought into church its progress may be marked with words of scripture and symbolic actions. The family should accompany the body until it reaches the altar or communion table. They should there be met by members of the congregation who will sit with them in the body of the church.

At the door, the minister and an acolyte should meet the body and the family. The acolyte will carry the lighted candle which will go with the body and stand with it at its resting place where it will burn overnight. As they meet the procession, the minister should greet the family with such words as:

Do not be afraid: it is I, the First and the Last; I am the Living One, I was dead and see I am alive forever and ever. I have set before you an open door which no one is able to shut.

[*Revelation 1.17; 3.8*]

They may then go to the place of baptism where the minister may say:

Here is the place of safety; here are the waters of hope.
Christ died and was raised to life for us,
so that our death and life might be hidden in his.

⁵⁶⁴ There may be those who want to mark the passing of the deceased with a eucharist, but who cannot be present at the funeral rite itself. In such cases it will be better for there to be particular remembrance of the one who has died at the next normal eucharistic celebration. At the preface to the *Sanctus*, the deceased may be mentioned by name. The same holds true where there is no funeral eucharist.

Thanks be to God.

Finally, they arrive at the altar or communion table. The acolyte stands the candle beside the body, and the bible is opened and set upon the coffin. The minister may say:

Here we receive Christ the Word of God,
the Light of the World.

Here he receives us and welcomes us home.

Members of the congregation known to the family should then escort them to their seats and sit with or close to them. As far as possible, any sense of isolation should be avoided. Of course, the opposite danger of crowding too close needs also to be prevented.

Where a hymn is sung, it may be one such as “Jesus invites his saints” by Isaac Watts.⁵⁶⁵

565 Jesus invites his saints
to meet around his board;
here pardoned rebels sit and hold
communion with their Lord.

Here we survey that love
which spoke in every breath,
which crowned each action of his life,
and triumphed in his death.

This holy bread and wine
maintain our fainting breath,
by union with our living Lord,
and interest in his death.

Our heavenly Father calls
Christ and his members one;
we the young children of his love,
and he the first-born Son.

We are but several parts
of the same broken bread;
our body has its several limbs,
but Jesus is the head.

Let all our powers be joined
his glorious name to raise;
pleasure and love fill every mind
and every voice be praise.

In this version from *Baptist Praise and Worship*, number 438.

Liturgy of the Word

This phase of the liturgy will include readings from scripture and a very short homily. Readings will be taken from Old and New Testaments. For the old Testament scripture I suggest Psalm 139.7-12 with its reference to the presence of God even in Sheol - the land of the dead - and its marvellous conclusion:

the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

The obvious New Testament passage is a selection from John 14, and I would choose verses 1-3. In each case I would offer an acclamation of the reading in the form of versicle and response based on the reading and Psalm 116.15:

The darkness is not dark to you,
the night shines as bright as the day:
**Precious in the sight of the Lord
is the death of his saints.**

I will come again and take you to myself:
**Precious in the sight of the Lord
is the death of his saints.**

A short homily (two minutes) should speak of the rest of the people of God and place the deceased among those for whom a room has been prepared.

Liturgy of Prayer

The prayers that follow should place the one who has died into the protection of God and commend those who mourn to comfort of the Holy Spirit. This may be done by a litany as happens in the Roman Catholic *Order of Christian Funerals* or by a series of prayers. The urgent need is for little speaking and conducted silence, and however the officiant proceeds there should be the most thorough preparation. The Liturgy of Prayer should conclude with the Lord's Prayer.

Blessing and Dismissal

The congregation should be encouraged to enter upon a silence like the Great Silence following Compline.

May God,
from whose love not even death can separate us,
grant you light in the darkness
and *N.* resurrection from the dead.
May the love and peace of God
keep you safe from fear
and lead us to that time and place

when we, with *N.* and all the saints,
rejoice in the society of God for ever.
Go in peace;
and the God of all peace go with you.⁵⁶⁶

FUNERAL SERVICE⁵⁶⁷

It is this liturgy which will be called upon to do the most work, since for most people it will be the only one used. Although, therefore, its primary emphasis is one of separation, there must be available clear options which provide for transition and incorporation. The liturgy will include the following sections:

- Approach
- Liturgy of the Word
- Liturgy of Prayer
- [Liturgy of the Eucharist]
- Liturgy of Release

Approach

Where the body has lain in church overnight, the service will begin with a greeting and opening sentences of scripture. Otherwise the minister should be present to meet the body and to greet the family and closest mourners at the door of the church or at the chapel of rest.

As the coffin is set in its place, the officiant should greet the congregation, inviting them to give thanks to God for the life of the one now dead and to release her/him to God so that the word of resurrection may be spoken.

⁵⁶⁶ The reference to the society of God is both to the Trinity and to the *communio sanctorum*.

⁵⁶⁷ If I were submitting a full set of liturgies I would provide separate rites for the funerals of children and of infant still-born or dying near the time of birth. However, I want to make two brief comments here:

- (a) I believe that the focus of a funeral is the dead person, and I believe that in death all are equal before God ("Naked I came from the womb, naked I return to the Lord"). The rite, therefore, undertakes the same task for every deceased human being regardless of age or status.
- (b) Pastoral experience suggests that the death of the newly- or still-born is the most difficult with which to come to terms. It is almost certain that quite different liturgies are needed to provide for these circumstances. I acknowledge this without demur, but I am not here providing any concrete proposals.

Among the opening sentences I would want to place: Deuteronomy 33.27; Matthew 11.28; John 5.25. These are all used in other funeral liturgies and so are not unexpected. Yet I should also want to add to the list a citation of Genesis 28.17:

This is the house of God, here is the gate of heaven.

At the funeral of a child Mark 10.14,16 and Luke 2.35 are possibilities. The first of these is common used on such occasions. The second is less so:

A sword shall pierce your heart.

The word to Mary is a word of sorrow relating to her child. It should not be used alone since it is so stark; but in conjunction with the Marcan verses, it may have its place. A further dark text for use at the funerals of children is Jeremiah 31.15,16 and 18a:

A voice is heard in Ramah,
lament and bitter weeping.
Rachel weeps for her children,
and will not be comforted.
Thus says the Lord:
Keep your voice from weeping
and your eyes from tears,
for I have heard.

Where possible a hymn should be sung.⁵⁶⁸ In this way the congregation begins to offer a corporate worship to God; confidence for the future in the present darkness can be articulated in familiar words. The familiar is important here, for the rest of the service is strange, and the known can help even the most experienced traveller through an unknown way.⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁸ Hymn singing at funerals is a difficult business. This is not simply because the general choice of hymns is so limited. There is a more serious technical matter. Singing and crying are very close in the way that the sound is produced - Italian tenors have always been able to demonstrate this! In a way it is possible to describe singing as a kind of controlled crying. For this reason people often find it very difficult to sing at funerals, since the sobs which they are trying to suppress emerge with the singing and threaten to make that singing impossible. In one sense this does not matter, provided that the congregation has confidence in itself and in the officiant not to worry. Indeed, the release of tears which a hymn or song may produce can be a beginning of expressed grief.

⁵⁶⁹ At my mother's funeral in January 1991, although I had had plenty of experience of funerals and knew my way through the liturgy, I felt a strangeness about some of the proceedings which lent them an air of unreality. I was there and not there. The hymns and the familiar words of the *Book of Common Prayer* were not themselves real, but pointed to a reality which I knew I would encounter later.

The opening prayer should be simple and direct. It needs to say enough to set the scene but not so much that the mind is battered by words:

Loving God,
 we are lost and it is dark;
 we are hurt, but we feel nothing;
 we know, but we cannot take it in.
 Be a light to our footsteps,
 a balm to our wounds,
 and lead us to your truth:
 Through Jesus Christ,
 your dead but risen Son.
 Amen.

Liturgy of the Word

Where a eucharist liturgy is to be included, there should be three readings of scripture (Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel), otherwise Old Testament and New Testament readings only should be read. The presence of Old Testament readings is very important. They reflect the theological roots from which the New Testament understandings of death are drawn. This is not to deny the radically new dimension which the resurrection of Jesus introduces. However, that act of God and the New Testament writers' reflection upon it are given their context by the Old Testament writings.⁵⁷⁰ Some churches always omit the Old Testament reading when they are allowed to make a choice of two from three. There is a danger of Marcionism here.

I do not propose to give here lists of suitable readings. These are widely available, and the range is comprehensive. However, I do wish to make some suggestions for introductions and responses. The *Liturgy of the Word* may be introduced by some such call as:

Listen for the word of God.

or

Let anyone with an ear to listen
 hear what the Spirit says to the Church.

After the readings the well-known

This is the word of the Lord:

⁵⁷⁰ The inter-testamental period also was crucial to the development of theologies of death and resurrection. Jesus' ministry makes its own contribution to the debate. For this reason the writings of the OT apocrypha should be counted among the OT writings.

Thanks be to God.

may be used. As an alternative I suggest a versicle and response based on Psalm 119.105:

God's word is a lamp for our feet, and a light for our path:
Shine in our darkness, and let there be light.

After the Gospel at a Eucharist:

The gospel is yours, Lord:
You have the words of eternal life.

There must be a sermon or homily. It needs to start with the life of the person whose funeral it is. Where the officiant has not known the deceased in life, (s)he should acknowledge this frankly and speak for those who mourn the story they would tell. The temptation to describe every dead person as a saint should be resisted. Very few people are altogether sweetness and light; equally, very few are altogether bad. I heard a colleague of mine at the funeral of someone well known in church and town as blunt to a fault. "You knew", he said, "where you stood with her." People smiled, and the awkwardness in life could be acknowledged and forgiven in death.

A sermon, however, is not simply a potted biography. The life that has come to its end needs to be addressed by the death and resurrection of Jesus. The meaninglessness of Jesus' death and its unfairness can stand for our death. The cry of dereliction can be our cry. The weeping of Mary and the others can be our sorrow. To all this death, God speaks the word of resurrection. Herein is Christian hope. We do not talk to ourselves in the dark to keep our spirits up. God speaks in the dark, and calls us to life.

Whatever the officiant says, there will be memories which are the silent possession of the mourners. After the sermon, therefore, there should be a silence.

Liturgy of Prayer

The prayers should avoid the abstract. They should be direct, personal and simple. They should commend the living and the dead to God's loving care and take account of any special circumstances surrounding the death. It may be possible to tie the life of the deceased into some helpful scriptural reference. This demands careful preparation, but may express for the mourners what they could not otherwise put into words. I offer some examples.

For an accountant

Loving God,
 your Son Jesus called Levi to follow him.
 Call *N.* now out of death to the life of resurrection
 that *her* treasure may be ever found in you.

For a schoolfriend

Loving God,
 Jesus watched his schoolfriends in the streets.
 They played at weddings and funerals,
 but today it isn't a game for us;
 we are sad and crying.
 Help us to know that *N.* is safe with you,
 and when we remember *her*
 help us to remember happy days and laughter too.⁵⁷¹

For a PhD examiner

Loving God,
 your Son Jesus
 taught us that mercy is the greatest judgement,
 and that to forgive a few pence or ten thousand talents
 is to share in your divine nature.
 Show your mercy to *N.*
 as *she herself* showed mercy to others.

For a botanist

Gentle God,
N. loved the world that you have made.
She knew the flowers and all their names -
 the wild anemones that toiled not nor span.
 Grant *her* delight in understanding now
 all that you have made,
 that in life beyond death
she may wear an eternal garland.

For a perfumer

Sweet God,
 at table someone poured perfume
 over Jesus' feet.
 Accept the life of *N.*
 as a costly fragrance poured out for you.

Other circumstances demand other approaches.

For a murder victim

O God,
 we are angry,

⁵⁷¹ Normally liturgical language is formal, and the form *isn't* would not be permissible. Here, I think it is right.

we have been robbed of *N.*,
 and *she* has been robbed of life.
 We have wept
 till there were no tears left to shed;
 and still we weep.
 We have shouted,
 we have called to you.
 And yet the heavens seem as brass.
 Your Son was murdered too.
 O God,
 we are weeping with you.

For a victim of an accident

O God,
 why *N.*?
 We want an answer,
 but no answer is good enough;
 for we really want *N.*
 But *she* is gone,
 and we are left with questions.
 Grant us courage to leave *her* with you.
 O God,
 we want to believe.
 Help us where faith runs out.

The Liturgy of Prayer should conclude with the Lord's Prayer.

[Liturgy of the Eucharist]

A eucharist is an opportunity to share in the communion of the saints. The dead person may be named before the *Sanctus*, and the living may receive Christ where Christ receives the dead. If the body is to be buried in a church yard, a rite may be constructed where the eucharistic liturgy follows the interment. This very clearly seals the separating part of the rite and begins the task of transition and incorporation. Holy Saturday and Easter Day can be liturgically ordered to follow Good Friday. At a Eucharist I would urge as an option for the Epistle 1 Peter 3.18-22 and for the Gospel John 20.19-23.

Where the funeral is of a child and children are present, a liturgy of Milk and Honey can be included. Milk and honey were the symbols of the land promised to the Exodus people. At a Eucharist they can stand as signs of promise for children, the promise of God offered to them, the promise of more

to come. As the adults receive bread and wine, the children are given milk and honey.⁵⁷²

Liturgy of Release

I have deliberately avoided the language of commendation and committal with its understanding of soul and body as separate entities. I have decided that I cannot commend an immortal soul to God and commit a corruptible body to the earth, sea or fire. So I speak of releasing the dead person to God.

Where this part of the rite is held at another place from what has gone before, there should be said before the congregation departs some word of dismissal for those who go and a word of invitation for those who travel with the body.

Eternal God,
go before us to lead our ways from death to life,
go with us to keep us in the paths of peace.
Gather us with *N.* into the company
of those who praise you for ever.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
now and for ever.

Amen.

At the graveside, at the crematorium, or at sea, the *Liturgy of Release* should begin with words which speak to our fear. Since this liturgy marks a very clear point of separation, words which address that finality will be of benefit. However, we need also to speak of the future journey of the living and the rest in Christ of the departed. It is for these reasons that I think that the promise of Romans 8.38-39 comes into its own here:

We may be certain of this: neither death nor life, no angel, no ruler, nothing that exists, nothing still to come, not any power, or height or depth, nor anything created, can ever separate us from the love of God which we have seen in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There follow the words of release; they will vary according to the method of disposal.

⁵⁷² This is the regular eucharistic practice of my present church. I met the practice first in a URC congregation in Oxford. Since then I have introduced it to a number of congregations for use at the great feasts of the Christian Church. It is widely appreciated. The honey is spread on pieces of bread; in effect it comes as honey sandwiches.

At a burial

From the dust you made us, O God;
to the dust we return.
Awaken your *daughter N.*,
whom we release to you,
from the sleep of death,
and feed her at your table with life eternal.⁵⁷³

At a cremation

Purge me as gold and silver
that I may be an offering to the Lord.
Receive *N.*,
whom we release to you, our God,
and bring *her* to life eternal.⁵⁷⁴

A burial at sea

Deep speaks to deep
at the thunder of God.
Bring *N.*,
whom we release to you, O God,
through the waters of death,
and may the trumpets sound for *her* on the other side.⁵⁷⁵

A prayer should be said for the mourners followed by a blessing and dismissal.

Jesus said,
“Peace I leave with you;
my peace I give to you”
Loving God,
we long for peace:
peace to leave *N.* with you,
peace to strengthen us for today and tomorrow,
peace with ourselves, with each other and with you.
Grant us that peace
which the world cannot give:
Through Jesus Christ, your Son.
Amen.

⁵⁷³ The reference is to the raising of Jairus’ daughter, Mark 5.35-43.

I have avoided the wonderful Greek words at the graveside. I do not think that the mourners that I have met could cope!

May the earth which fed you now eat you.

⁵⁷⁴ The image of fire in death is often that of hellfire. A more positive image of fire is of the tongues of flame at Pentecost; but the fire of the crematorium is fire which consumes. I have therefore felt it best to use the language of purification and refinement as found in Malachi 3.2b-4.

⁵⁷⁵ Psalm 42.7 and Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*.

Now may the peace of God,
 which surpasses all our understanding,
 keep guard in your hearts and minds
 so that you may be found secure in Christ at the last.

Dear friends, go in peace,
 and the God of all peace go with you.

Amen.

COMMEMORATION OF THE DEAD

The passing of time by the commemoration of the dead may be marked in two ways. The specific anniversary of the death may be kept; and the remembrance of the one among the many may be observed at the Feast of All Souls. These should not be regarded as mutually exclusive, but as different ways of marking the journey of the living and the dead.

The anniversary of the death may be marked in a number of ways. At its most simple, the minister may visit the family at home and says prayers with them there. Or (s)he may arrange to meet them at the grave or the crematorium garden of remembrance for a simple act of remembrance. There may be a service in church on the day itself, or on the Sunday closest there may be included in the worship some prayers for the family. In each case, the prayers should aim to reflect the ever-growing distance from the death, and should commend the living and the dead to the continuing care of God.

Such a remembrance may include:

- opening words of scripture
- a prayer
- a quiet thought
- the Lord's Prayer
- a blessing

I offer examples of each of the elements below.⁵⁷⁶ They are not definitive.

Words of Scripture

Jesus said:

This is the will of the one who sent me,
 that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me,
 but raise it up on the last day.

⁵⁷⁶ The Lord's Prayer should be said in the version best known to those who gather.

or

Do not despise one of these little ones;
for I tell you, in heaven
their angels continually see the face
of my Father in heaven.

Prayer

Eternal God,
we are so proud that we knew *N.*,
and even though we are still sometimes lost without *her*,
we acknowledge that we have journeyed on
since *she* was with us.

Keep us all in your tender care,
so that at the last we with *N.*
may be gathered into your loving embrace.

or

O God,
we still hurt and we are still angry.
When the darkness comes to overwhelm us,
hold us gently in your hand;
so that,
although we do not know how we shall go on,
we may be kept safe and still.
Keep your watch always over *N.*,
and grant at the last
that we with *her* may understand and know your love.

A Quiet Thought

I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: 'Give me
a light that I may tread safely into the unknown'. And he
replied: 'Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the
hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer
than a known way.'⁵⁷⁷

or

He whom we love and lose
is no longer where he was before;
he is now wherever we are.⁵⁷⁸

or

Roads go ever ever on
Over rock and under tree,
By caves where never sun has shone,

⁵⁷⁷ M. Louise Haskins, *The Desert*.

⁵⁷⁸ St John Chrysostom.

By streams that never find the sea.
 Over snow by winter sown,
 And through the merry flowers of June,
 Over grass and over stone,
 And under mountains in the moon.
 Roads go ever ever on
 Under clouds and under stars,
 Yet feet that wandering have gone
 Turn at last to home afar.
 Eyes that fire and sword have seen
 And horror in the halls of stone,
 Look at last on meadows green,
 And trees and hills they long have known.⁵⁷⁹

*Blessings and Dismissals*⁵⁸⁰

May the road rise to meet you.
 May the wind be always at your back.
 May the sun shine warm upon your face.
 May the rain fall softly upon your fields until we meet again.
 May God hold you in the hollow of His hand.⁵⁸¹

or

There is a mother's heart in the heart of God.⁵⁸²

or

Be the eye of God dwelling with you,
 The foot of Christ in guidance with you,
 The shower of the Spirit pouring on you,
 Richly and generously.⁵⁸³

or

The maker of all things,
 The Lord God worship we:
 Heaven white with angels' wings,
 Earth and the white-waved sea.⁵⁸⁴

579 J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*.

580 All the texts suggested here are from the Celtic tradition. I make no apologies for this. I think that this tradition has a wisdom about God and the world which is wonderfully apposite in blessings and dismissals. I venture to suggest that in the West no other tradition comes close to this sense of everyday life in God.

581 Old Gaelic Blessing.

582 From A. M. Allchin and Esther de Waal (edd.), *Threshold of Light: Prayers and Praises in the Celtic Tradition*, page 22.

583 Allchin and de Waal, *Threshold of Light*, page 50.

584 Allchin and de Waal, *Threshold of Light*, page 58.

At a *Commemoration of the Dead* on the Feast of All Souls, the atmosphere is necessarily less immediately intimate. The liturgy is one which involves many different groups of mourners remembering a variety of deaths and deceased. There are two tasks which the rite seeks to accomplish. We name before God those who have died, commending them to God's continuing love and care. Secondly, those who gather are encouraged to sense their belonging in community with others. The liturgy may include the following elements:

- Approach
- Liturgy of the Word
- Liturgy of Prayer
- [Eucharist]
- Blessing and Dismissal

Approach

The liturgy should begin with a strong opening hymn.⁵⁸⁵ An opening scripture should then accompany the welcome to the congregation. The *New Zealand Prayer Book* translation of John 11.25 is suitable:

I am the resurrection and the life;
even in death,
anyone who believes in me, will live.⁵⁸⁶

Alternatively, the words of 1 Corinthians 3.23 may be appropriate:

You belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

An opening prayer in which our need of God is acknowledged should follow. It may be penitential as suggested by *The Promise of His Glory*,⁵⁸⁷ or if this is felt to be unsatisfactory a more general form may be used:

God of time and space,
you hold all that you have made in your hands;
and not even the sparrows fall unnoticed.
Without you life is no life at all,
for our lives are hidden in your breath.
As we gather to remember those whom we have loved
and who have loved us,

⁵⁸⁵ *For all the saints* or *Thy hand, O God, has guided* may be possible.

⁵⁸⁶ NZPB, page 827.

⁵⁸⁷ *The Promise of His Glory*, pages 56-57. The form used there is not guilt-laden, but my alternative may be even less daunting.

help us to believe
 that you have forgotten neither them nor us,
 and grant us the comfort of your peace in these days.
 Through Jesus Christ, your Son our Lord.
Amen.

Liturgy of the Word

Readings of scripture should be followed by a homily. This is a liturgy in which the text from 1 Peter 3.18-22 could find its place, since it speaks of Christ's descent to the dead and of the hope which is found in the journey of Christ to resurrection. Other texts which may commend themselves are:

- Psalm 116
*Precious in the sight of the Lord
 is the death of his saints*
- Isaiah 35.1-6a,10
*The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
 and the ransomed of the Lord shall return*
- Philippians 2.[1-4]5-11
Have this mind in you which was in Christ Jesus
- Revelation 21.[1-3a]3b-4
The dwelling of God is among mortals
- Luke 23.30-35
He was known to them in the breaking of the bread
- John 20.19-23
Peace be with you; receive the Holy Spirit.

Liturgy of Prayer

The Litany in *The Promise of His Glory* is strong, but the first petition may need re-wording to include those who would feel excluded by the baptismal reference.⁵⁸⁸ It might then read:

Jesus, risen Lord,
 you died and our death is found in yours,
 may we be raised with you to glory, full and everlasting.
 Hear us, Lord,
Our resurrection and our life.

After the litany the names of the dead should be read slowly and clearly with a short space after each. There should then follow a prayer of commemoration and release.

⁵⁸⁸ *The Promise of His Glory*, page 59.

Eternal God,
 these are the dead whom we remember before you.
 Keep them in your eternal care,
 call them to new life in you,
 and raise them to share in the feasting of your new creation.
 When our pain eases and our lives grow full again,
 keep us true to what was best in them, that we with them
 may at the last see you face to face
 and hear your welcome home -
 “Well done, good and faithful servant”.
 Hear us for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ,
 who died and rose for us,
 and who lives now to pray for us
 when our prayers fall silent.
 To him and to you with the Holy Spirit
 be glory and praise for ever.
Amen.

The Lord’s Prayer should be said.

[Eucharist]

A eucharistic celebration is to be encouraged since it links the people of God with the Paschal Mystery and with the communion of saints. A Proper Preface should be used. This may be specially drafted for the occasion, but an Easter Proper or the Proper of All Souls is particularly appropriate.

Blessing and Dismissal

Some of the suggestions made for the liturgy at the anniversary of a death may be of help (see above, pages 251f.). At the conclusion of the liturgy the *Nunc Dimittis* should be said, using a plural form (“servants”, “our eyes”).

AFFIRMATION OF THE LIVING

This is a new rite of my own devising. The New Zealand *Prayers in a House after Death* is different in that it does not mark a specific new development in life as this liturgy is intended to do.⁵⁸⁹ *Prayers in a House after Death* marks a general incorporation of the family into new ways of living; that is its great strength. No other rite like it exists to my knowledge.

Affirmation of the Living is intended for use when the bereaved decide that their time for grief is over and they want to start new schemes and plans. It may be that a new partner is becoming established, or a move to a new home

⁵⁸⁹ NZPB, pages 871-875.

is in hand. All sorts of situations may give rise to the feeling that a new life is being built. This may be accompanied by feelings of doubt and guilt: “Am I betraying the past?”, “What would *N.* think?”, “What will other people say?”

I am proposing a rite which will celebrate the future without denying the past. Friends and neighbours can be included, and the atmosphere should be one of liberty. The liturgy may contain the following elements:

- Approach
- Liturgy of the Word
- Liturgy of Prayer
- Affirmation and Blessing

Approach

An opening greeting might run:

We are here to celebrate with *A* and *her* family/friends as they start on something new. They are starting a new life together/moving house/starting a business/emigrating, and they want us to join them in committing the future to God.

This may be followed by a prayer such as:

Loving God,
we are so glad for *A* and *B* and their families.
As they plan their future life together
help them to know
that the past is not a ghost that it should haunt them,
nor a stick that it should beat them,
but a foundation that they may build on it.
Except the Lord bless the work
the builders' work is useless;
bless therefore, dear God, their future,
that all who enter it
may be enfolded in their love and yours.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Liturgy of the Word

Two scriptures (Old and New Testament) should be read. They should speak of a new beginning with God. From the Old Testament I suggest:

- Joshua 1.1-9
The promise to Joshua after the death of Moses

- Proverbs 3.1-6
*In all your ways acknowledge him
and he will make straight your paths*

From the New Testament the following may be suitable:

- Mark 4.26-32
*Secret seeds, sure harvests;
small beginnings, unimagined results*
- 1 John 3.18-22
*Let us love, not in word or speech,
but in truth and action*

A short homily speaking of God's future should encourage those who seek this rite to lay the past with God as surely as they receive from God their future.

Liturgy of Prayer

Prayers of thankfulness and commitment to God may be offered. Where the death was a sad or violent one, thanks for the healing of the past and intercession for the recovery of others should be made.

Affirmation and Blessing

The final act of this rite needs to be strong and vibrant. It may include a hymn of praise. Those present should leave with gladness and determination as their overwhelming emotional response.

Loving God,
You have brought us through dark days
and now your light begins to shine.
You are the rock on which we can stand secure,
you are the foundation on which we can build with trust.
You have opened for us a door which no one can shut,
grant that it may open for us to life with you
now and forever.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Loving God,
walk with *A.* wherever *she* may be.
Guide *her* wherever *she* may walk;
keep *her* feet from stumbling
and *her* steps from slipping,
and lead *her* to the fulness of your joy for ever.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

May God, the living and eternal One,
who loves you with an everlasting love
be with you in your going out and your coming in
and bless you, preserve you and keep you in his love
till at the last he receives you with all the saints
in joy and liberty for ever.

Amen.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to show how liturgies can respond both to a theological understanding of the person as a unity before God and to the pastoral care of those who mourn. It is my hope at a later date to write funeral liturgies for a new book with my colleagues on the Joint Liturgical Group. It may be that some of the suggestions that I have made here will survive their careful scrutiny. Much work remains to be done. The funeral rites produced by the Joint Liturgical Group were greatly influenced by other theological stances and by the liturgical work of the English Language Liturgical Consultation. In my opinion, revision is beginning to become urgent.

What I have failed to do is to take any account here of the need for secular funerals. However, I do not judge such a provision to fall within the range of this thesis. Nonetheless, the issue must be faced, though whether the Christian Church is the body to provide such rites I doubt.⁵⁹⁰

In the final chapter of this thesis, I shall look at how my proposals might help at the funerals of six corpses. I shall also discuss how this research leads on to further work.

⁵⁹⁰ See J. W. Willson, *Funerals without God: a practical guide to non-religious funerals*, British Humanist Association, 1989.

Chapter Ten: Loose Ends and Far Horizons

Six corpses in search of a funeral

Introductory Comments

I have produced six composite pictures which are intended to cover a wide range of people for whom a funeral is required. None of them represents any particular individual, though each of them draws on men, women and children I have known. I shall begin by giving thumbnail sketches of each of the six. I shall then see how the ritual and liturgical proposals of the previous chapter provide for the varied circumstances of my notional deceased.

I ought to add that, for the purposes of this exercise, I shall have to assume that in every instance the officiant will be using my liturgical provisions rather than those to which (s)he is accustomed by practice or canon law. I acknowledge that this is a suspension of reality, but I will not otherwise be able to make the analysis which I am proposing.

Alice

34, single parent, three children (two fathers) aged 18, 7 and 4. Cystic fibrosis. Both parents alive; two older sisters and a younger brother; they are a close family. She left school at fifteen and a half because she was pregnant. Until her final illness she had worked on the checkout at a supermarket. Nominal Anglican.

Bill

61, married, wife and one daughter. Daughter married and pregnant for the first time. There is an older, estranged brother. Bill was taken into hospital for a "routine" operation for the removal of his gall bladder. The operation was a success, but after an excellent initial recovery he collapsed and died the following evening just before visiting time. He was the landlord of a popular town centre public house. No known church connections, but the local Catholic priest was a Friday night regular at the pub and has been asked to do the funeral.

Chris

23, gay, only son of leaders in the local Baptist Church. Chris graduated from university two years ago, and had managed to keep the truth of his sexuality from his parents until AIDS developed finally. He had become HIV positive while a student; he told his lover when he first learned of HIV status. Despite the tensions they managed to stay together. He completed his course with a first class honours degree, and had begun to undertake postgraduate research in the art of the Italian Renaissance. His death was 18 months of pain and sorrow.

Dot

95, spinster; her “young man” died in the First World War, and she stayed true to him for the rest of her life. She was the eldest of thirteen children, three of whom died in infancy and four of whom survive her. She had twenty-four nieces and nephews, innumerable great-nieces and great-nephews, and recently a great-great-nephew, Thomas. Dot’s working life was spent in the local offices of an insurance company. She had been the Captain of her church’s Girl Guide company for over thirty years and for the last twelve of those she had been a Commissioner. A keen amateur musician, she had accompanied the local operatic society and a male voice choir from the next town for many years. In her retirement, she became a mainstay of the local history society. She had been a member of her Methodist church for 79 years.

Evangeline

5 months. A cot death. She was her parents’ first child. She had been baptised at the local parish church only two weeks previously. Mother is a weekly communicant; father is a “festivals only” attender. They have West Indian roots.

Frank

47. Frank was a violent man whose temper was suffered principally by his wife, Peggy, whom he frequently beat when he came home drunk. He excused his violence by saying that he only ever “knocked her about a bit” and that he “never took anything to her”. Certainly, he never hit Peggy with anything other than his fists, but she lived in fear of him and their four children knew from experience that it was best to keep out of his way once he started shouting. His violence was well known. Peggy had on several occasions been treated at the local hospital for injuries, and twice had been kept in overnight after receiving severe beatings to her head. In the last incident, she was saved by the massive heart attack which killed Frank. None of the family go to church, but the rector has been asked to officiate.

Alice’s funeral

Since the family is so close a great deal of planning can be done with those who knew and loved her best. It is important that Alice’s three children should be included. The eldest will have a great deal to tell, and that story will be important in the sermon. But the younger two will also have something to contribute. It may be a drawing or a poem or a favourite possession which they want to place in Alice’s coffin. Whatever it is that they are feeling and talking about, it is part of the story that is Alice. There may be a song or some other piece of music which was special to them. If it can be used it should be.

After initial discussions with the family, the vicar learns that they do not really want a church service. "I hope you don't mind, vicar, but we're not really religious." What the family wants is a service at the funeral director's chapel of rest followed by a cremation. Alice's mother would like "Memories" from Lloyd Webber's musical *Cats* to be played at the crematorium.

The *Liturgy of Approach* as outlined in Chapter 9 is almost entirely inappropriate for Alice's funeral. The funeral rite must be completed in twenty-five minutes, and there is little time for ornamentation. An opening verse of scripture and a prayer which allows the family to settle down are what is needed. With a disease which destroys a young life so quickly, there will be feelings of anger that life is so unfair as well as heartbreak at the loss of a mother and a daughter. This needs expression. It is the task of the officiant, as president of the rite and the one who is familiar with totem and taboo, to articulate this for the family so that it becomes safe to express the darkness of this death. An opening prayer which confronts these feelings will enable the family to find a comfort stronger than conventional sympathy. If it concludes with a word of scripture which speaks to the situation, then the words will not be lost in the opening turmoil of the service as the coffin is brought in and the family and friends find their places.⁵⁹¹

O God,
 we have lost someone we love.
 All her pain, all her hurt is gone,
 but so is she.
 O God,
 it all seems so unfair.
 All our life was bound up with hers;
 and now we do not know how it will be -
 for us or for her.
 We have so many questions.
 Give us courage to hold on
 when the answers are not there.
 And when the house seems empty,
 help us to hear the words you spoke so long ago:
I will not fail you or forsake you.
 Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

⁵⁹¹ The turmoil is itself part of the liminal-transitional nature of the funeral rite. The family and friends are in a half-and-half state, and part of the task of the funeral is to begin to move the bereaved through transition by completing their farewell in the rite. This is not to deny the transition, but is to see transition as precisely that - an in-between stage which must be passed through (Latin: *transire*).

The homily in the *Liturgy of the Word* should tell Alice's story and speak of the suffering of God in the death of Jesus. Bereavement in the heart of God and the pain of watching a child die are points at which the Gospel can be proclaimed. God understands; so we are not alone and there is hope for us.

The *Liturgy of Prayer* must transact the separation from that which can no longer be kept. Prayers which give thanks for Alice, and which release her to God, should be clear, direct and specific. There should follow prayers for the family and friends. Finally, it is often helpful to begin to move the bereaved on from their intensely personal concerns. This can be done by including a prayer which remembers others who will be coming to the crematorium that day to remember their dead.

The moment of release needs to be clearly expressed, and this is an area which should be planned with the family most closely. Do they want the curtains open or closed? Do they want the coffin to remain as they depart, or for the coffin to go while they are still there? Do they have piece of music or some poem played or spoken now? Do they want a flower or a letter or a toy placed on the coffin now? For the separation to be clear these things need to be discussed in advance. Then when the moment comes, although it may still be traumatic, it will be theirs and hers.

Alice's family are precisely the sort of mourners whom I would try to encourage to consider marking the passage of time by attending an All Souls Day service for the *Commemoration of the Dead*. They are unlikely to come unless pastoral care in the intervening period is careful and assiduous. However, the minister must be prepared to be rebuffed. Our task is to release the dead to God and to assist the living to share in that act. Although Alice's family may appear to be profoundly awkward in the religious environment, her funeral should not be allowed to become "something and nothing". Careful listening to the family and articulation of their grief may enable Alice's story and the story of Christ to foster the funeral as an occasion of hope.

Bill's funeral

Bill's family is divided. There will need to be some careful pastoral planning, since there will be three groups of people who have an interest in the funeral. Bill's wife and daughter and her husband want a "private" service at the crematorium after the main funeral which they know will be attended by many of the pub's clientele, whom they welcome. They are uneasy about Bill's brother Geoff. He had a row with Bill two years ago and they have not spoken since. They know that Geoff must be consulted about the funeral, but they do not know how to include him. The third group of people who will want to do their bit are Bill's regulars and his friends in the local branch of the Licensed Victuallers' Association.

Alice's death was expected; Bill's was "out of the blue". His wife, Sylvia still cannot take it in properly. She is not weepy, just numb. Their daughter Liz has taken over a lot of the organizing for Sylvia. She is a capable pragmatist. Her husband, Keith's father, died when Keith was seven. Bill was a second dad to him, and he has gone to pieces. Father Peter Thomas has agreed to let his church be used for the main funeral rite.

The *Liturgy of Approach* needs to be very strong in a situation where competing claims on the deceased may threaten to hijack the funeral. It may be that a word of unity needs to be spoken in the opening greeting.

We are all gathered here this morning to say farewell to one who belonged to us. His life was part of ours, and our life was part of his. Hear, then, the words of Scripture:

"We are members one of another."

This is the motto of the Plasterers' Guild, and I always used to smile when I entered Bill's pub that above the doorway there hung with the sign *The Plasterers' Arms* a verse from Bible. Now this morning you come to God's public house, and the same sign hangs here:

We are members one of another.

Let us pray.

This is a pre-emptive strike, but it is important at the outset to establish ritual control. Father Peter is a minister of the gospel of reconciliation. He must not paper over the cracks, but he must not allow the funeral to become a battleground. His task in this rite is to help the family and friends to release Bill to God, and to declare how Christ's death and resurrection mean hope for the future, whatever the past.

However the point once made needs to be judiciously handled thereafter. Psalm 123 may not be a good idea. Rather readings and homily need to address the suddenness of what has happened, and yet to affirm the conviction that death is itself defeated. Job's "Man, born of woman, has a short time to live" and two or three verses from the conclusion of 1 Corinthians 15 may be passages which can lead to a helpful proclamation of Christian hope.

The *Liturgy of Prayer* is always a place where the personal dimension of the homily can be continued. For Bill's funeral Father Peter knows that he has found a quotation which is not a prayer but which can link the sermon and the prayers, and by its lightness can enable people to smile through their tears. So he introduces the prayers by saying:

Bill and I used to talk about religion when we weren't arguing about football. I told him about an Irish monk's picture of heaven, and he kept a copy of it under the bar at *The Plasterers*'. It made Bill smile, and perhaps as we say our prayers, we too can smile a bit. Here it is:

I would like to have the men of Heaven
In my own house
With vats of good cheer
Laid out for them.

I would like to have the three Marys,
Their fame is so great.
I would like people
From every corner of Heaven.

I would like them to be cheerful
In their drinking,
I would like to have Jesus too
Here amongst them.

I would like a great lake of beer
For the king of Kings,
I would like to be watching Heaven's family
Drinking it through all eternity.⁵⁹²

Let us pray.

The *Liturgy of Release* needs to urge the living to bury the past. Bill's death must become also an opportunity for the death of bitterness.

Eternal God,
in the death and resurrection of Jesus,
our wounds can be healed and our past renewed.
As we release Bill to you now,
we let go of the past
which could make the future bitter or sad.
Help us to forgive what is past
as we seek forgiveness ourselves.
There was so much good in Bill,
and at his best he brought the best out in us.
May that best rise now to new birth and fresh flowering.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Eight months after the funeral Sylvia decides that she does not want to continue running the pub any more. She is moving to a nearby town not too far from friends and family, but she wants a new start. Father Peter suggests a rite of *Affirmation of the Living*. Sylvia is quite taken by the idea. So with family and few close friends among

⁵⁹² Allchin and de Waal, *Threshold of Light*, "The Heavenly Banquet", page 40.

the regulars she organises a farewell party in the pub's reception suite. Keith and Liz come with their three-month old daughter, Vicki. Geoff comes, too, he still says Bill was an old fool, but the anger has gone out of the remark and he has no grudge against Sylvia. He and his wife never had any children, and he would like to be an honorary grandfather. He hopes that the occasion can be a bit of bridge.

Before the party gets under way, Sylvia calls the gathering to order and explains Father Peter's idea. Father Peter then says that he hopes that everyone present will want to wish Sylvia all the best in her future. He adds that part of that best will be to give Sylvia not only our blessing but God's. In the homily he speaks of new beginnings and new life and welcomes Geoff and Keith and Liz with their small daughter as signs of new hope. The rite is completed in ten minutes, and although some people find religion in a pub a bit strange, they like Father Peter, and know him as a bit of character. One of them accuses him of swearing at the ref at the previous Saturday's football match. This seems to raise Peter in everyone's estimation, and his retort that not even the good Lord could have made that blind man see simply appears to improve matters. The rite has had its intended effect. Sylvia is free to start her new life without gossip or mischievous comment. Incorporation is established.

Chris's funeral

Chris's sexuality is what dominates the funeral arrangements. Chris's parents, Neil and Joan, tried to be accepting of Chris when he told them, but their theological presuppositions told them that homosexuality was sinful; and, although they never said so to Chris, they felt as though AIDS was a judgement of God. They still cannot cope with Tim, Chris's lover, in any other way than strict politeness. They find it almost impossible to think that Tim may be as shattered as they are by Chris's death. In their church they feel a kind of guilt by association. They have failed to bring up a bright Christian boy, and now he has died of "the gay plague".

I think that my rites may come strongly into their own for Chris's funeral, assuming that the minister can affirm the Cross as hope. A penal theory of the atonement will be pastorally disastrous. It will stress death as a punishment for sin, will leave Chris under judgement, will confirm Neil and Joan in their sense of guilt, and increase their grief by the fear that the young man to whom they gave life and love will be condemned to a godless eternity. I must therefore assume a pastor sympathetic to the theology I have argued earlier in the thesis.

Chris's funeral is held in Church. The minister rallies the congregation to remember the Chris they knew as the child and young man who grew up among them, and whom they liked so much. The *Liturgy of Approach* must grasp quickly the nettle of

acceptance. The opening sentences of scripture and the opening prayer must affirm this immediately and unequivocally. This can be done without confrontation by using a scripture which simply talks of the love of God for all that he has made. If possible a slide of one of Chris's favourite works of art should be projected onto a large screen throughout the service.

The *Liturgy of the Word* must continue the theme of God's delight in creation. The cross and resurrection of Jesus then become signs of that love and delight which will pay the greatest price to order and beautify what is made. The sermon must refer to Tim and affirm him and at the same time do the same for Chris's parents. To deny any of them their place in Chris's life is to deny them their place in his death.⁵⁹³

The *Liturgy of Prayer* needs to be very thankful for Chris's life, for his delight in the beautiful, and for his pursuit of understanding. These qualities can then be used to lead the congregation in its sadness to see how the future can be illuminated by Chris's life. The pain of his death should be offered to God with the suffering which Jesus in his ministry and death fought against as enemies of the kingdom.

Dying of AIDS can be an isolating experience, especially where parents who had earlier been close suddenly reject what is happening. At some stage this will need to be acknowledged with Neil and Joan - and, ideally, with the church. However, Chris's funeral is not the place or time to do it. The funeral service can only bear so much weight, and it cannot tackle every issue that arises in any particular death. Part of my hesitation in this case is a pastoral concern to avoid arousing controversy. Against this, however, we must place the issue of telling the story of Chris as a story of God - an issue which I have established as important earlier in the thesis. While I do not want to think of Chris's homosexuality in the category of sin, some of the congregation probably do. For this reason I would avoid the issue of attitudes to homosexuality in Chris's funeral service. The concern of the minister should be to enable the congregation to release Chris to God.⁵⁹⁴

⁵⁹³ What needs to be avoided is the kind of remark which patronizes the dead. "We cannot know what was in *N.*'s mind at the last, but...". We can never know for sure what is in anyone's mind. Besides, there is usually a hidden suggestion that "We know God ought to send *N.* to hell, but we hope an exception can be made in this case". Such talk is defended by its protagonists as humility before God's right to judgement. Sometimes, however, it is humbug, and quite indefensible. Rather should those who believe so say, "We fear *N.* has gone to hell. Repent, the rest of you, lest you fall into the same condition".

⁵⁹⁴ I shall investigate the issue of whether the funeral can address sin as well as death in the consideration of Frank's funeral.

The *Liturgy of Release* is made more difficult by the requirements relating to the disposal of those who have died from AIDS. Nonetheless, their needs to be strong sense of releasing Chris to the love of God who made him and loved him in life. I would avoid the texts about making new, since this may be misunderstood (or understood) as a “correction” of Chris’s sexuality. Perhaps the words of John 10.14-16 can help us here:

I am the good shepherd;
 I know my own and my own know me,
 as the Father knows me and I know the Father;
 and I lay down my life for the sheep.
 And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold;
 I must bring them also,
 and they will heed my voice.
 So shall there be one flock, one shepherd.

The prayer of release itself should be simple and plain, unhedged by ifs and buts:

Loving God,
 we weep for ourselves
 for it is hard to say “Goodbye”.
 Yet “God be with you” is what we say to Chris.
 To you, our God, we say,
 “Keep him whom we have loved,
 yet not so much as you have done;
 keep him whose name is dear to us,
 and whose name is known to you
 and precious through all eternity.”
 We release, dear God, to you,
 Chris, a man of your making and your redeeming.
 Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

At the next *Commemoration of the Dead* on the Feast of All Souls, Chris should be remembered, and both his family and Tim should be invited to be present. The marking of the death of the young should be always be marked. There is, I think, little worse than having to attend your own child’s funeral. Even if the family and/or Tim do not feel able to be present, I would remember Chris at such a celebration. I would write to the family and to Tim reminding them of my prayers for them, and letting them know that I had named Chris before God on their behalf.

Dot’s funeral

Dot’s funeral will be a big affair. She was so old and knew so many people; it is inevitable, that this will not be a small private event.

Dot’s family agrees that it would be nice to bring her body into church on the evening before the funeral. The secretary of the male voice choir phones to say that they

would like to sing at her funeral, but many of the members cannot get off work. It is arranged that they shall come to the *Reception into Church*.

At the church door the guide company forms a guard of honour, and her family are greeted by the minister and led to the font and the communion table. After readings and prayers, the minister pronounces the blessing and dismissal. The male voice choir sing the Revd Eli Jenkins' prayer from *Under Milk Wood*.⁵⁹⁵ The silence falls.

Every morning when I wake,
 Dear Lord, a little prayer I make;
 Oh please to keep thy lovely eye
 On all poor creatures born to die.
 And every evening at sundown
 I ask a blessing on the town;
 For whether we last the night or no
 I'm sure is always touch and go.
 We are not wholly bad or good
 Who live our lives under Milk Wood;
 And Thou, I know, wilt be the first
 To see our best side, not our worst.
 Oh let us see another day;
 Bless us this night, I pray.
 Then to the sun we all will bow
 And say Goodbye - but just for now.

The Funeral Service begins after the welcome with a rousing Wesley hymn. The opening prayer can express a gladness for Dot's long life and sense of completeness in her death. The Liturgy of the Word can gather all her life of offering for others into the offering of Calvary. There can be a confident expression of Dot's faith in God and her expression of it. Her family and friends can share in the story of her life, and the whole can be gathered into one in what the distinguished Methodist liturgist, Raymond George, calls "a dry anaphora" (an offering of life in a non-eucharistic setting).

The Liturgy of Release is at the crematorium, and makes a simple conclusion to the funeral rites which will have been characterized largely by gladness for a long and fulfilled life, brought to an end by death. The transitional element can be strongly expressed. At the end of a long life, mourners can far more easily understand death as a gateway. There will be tears for one who is loved, but not the tragic tears of Chris's funeral or of Evangeline's.

⁵⁹⁵ Dylan Thomas, *Under Milk Wood*.

This is a great favourite with male voice choirs, and is often sung at funerals.

Dot's death is marked not by a rite of commemoration such as I have suggested. As is his custom, the local Methodist minister will mention her with other departed friends at the next Annual Covenant service on the first Sunday evening of the New Year.

Evangeline's funeral

Evangeline's parents want everything for their little daughter. They loved her to distraction, and now she is dead. Evangeline's mother, Mary, is full of guilt feelings. She left her child asleep in the cot, and went to have quick shower. When she got back Evangeline was dead. Mary blames herself, and nothing her husband, Arthur, or her doctor or the district nurse says seems to get through. Arthur is deeply distressed, but he is a gentle man and is as worried for Mary as he is sad for Evangeline. Both sets of grandparents live nearby, and are very supportive. The people of the parish church of St James have helped by providing meals and doing the shopping for Arthur and Mary. Mary had just started back after maternity leave from her job as receptionist in the local health centre. Arthur works shifts at the nearby car factory where he is a skilled craftsman fitting the leather upholstery on the top of the range vehicles. Both have been given leave, but Arthur finds sitting in the empty house difficult and he wants to get back to work as soon as the funeral is over.

The pastoral agenda is complicated by the different stages and expressions of grief of the parents. Arthur may appear to be coping better - he is less violently distracted. However, his inability to stay at home for long stretches may indicate something deeper at work.

At the *Reception into Church* the family is met by the vicar at the door, and by Mary's best friend from the Mothers Union. Arthur is carrying the coffin in his arms. They go to the font where, with Mary sobbing, Arthur nearly buckles at the knees. The acolyte and Mary's father (who is close by) rush to help Arthur, who recovers. At the altar, Mary and Arthur are taken by their friends to sit together with their family. The Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of Prayer are brief, and as the vicar resists the temptation to rush the atmosphere calms. The candle flickering by the coffin before the altar becomes a focus in the gathering darkness, and the vicar dismisses the congregation with the words:

The darkness is no darkness to you,
the night shines clear as the day.
Go in peace, dear friends,
for God sees in this darkness,
and in your night he is your light and salvation.

At the Funeral on the following day there is a eucharistic celebration. On Evangeline's coffin, at her parent's request, milk and honey are set along with the shawl in which she was baptized two weeks previously. The *Liturgy of Release* is the most harrowing in some ways. In accordance with West Indian tradition, Evangeline's grave is filled in by the men of her family. Her father and her two grandfathers join in the work as one of the grandmothers sings the hymn she has always sung on Good Friday, "The Old Rugged Cross". Despite the heavy sobbing, this expression of grief is characterized by a great dignity and seems to express separation and transition in a most powerful way. When the last shovel of earth has been added to the mound, there is a sense of completion which is almost tangible.

At the next Feast of All Souls Evangeline's name will be read at the *Eucharist of the Departed*. It will mark another stage in the incorporation of Arthur and Mary into a new chapter of living. It will also mark for them an opportunity to pray for the repose of their daughter in the love of God.

Frank's funeral

The funeral takes place at the crematorium. Peggy just wants it "over with". There is a lot of anger as the Rector begins the service. He has half an hour for his task. In this funeral, unlike that of Chris, the hostility of the congregation to what Frank is and what he has done has been openly expressed in the past. It can therefore be addressed here.

Frank's death raises the question about sin and hell. "Will God forgive Adolf Hitler?" is the question which this funeral raises. Frank's violence may be less awful in its scope than Hitler's - nobody has been killed, and "only" the family have been his victims - but for Peggy and the children Frank's violence has been life-distorting and directly experienced. His tyranny has been absolute for them, and they are victims who are now free from their oppressor. Part of their grief may be to rejoice in this death, and the funeral must not avoid this sense of freedom. At the same time the question remains: "What will God do about Frank?"

Paul Fiddes addresses this question in his book on the atonement. In his conclusion he argues for a theology of forgiveness which sees it as an act of creation which is an "agonising journey of discovery ... into the heart of the human tragedy".⁵⁹⁶ In using

⁵⁹⁶ P. S. Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation: The Christian Idea of Atonement*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1989. Fiddes' understanding of forgiveness is worked out in Chapter Eight of the book. My citation comes from pages 177-178.

the language of journeying, Fiddes acknowledges that forgiveness is not instantaneous. We cannot utter a formula and hope to eradicate sin. Moreover, for this family there is a greater difficulty. Forgiveness forms no part of their agenda; the primary response is relief. Only if we take seriously the judgement of God as part of the resurrection of the body is there any hope of reconciliation and forgiveness in this story. Even so, I do not believe that this should be the principal message of the funeral rite. In my view little can be achieved unless the oppression which Frank inflicted upon Peggy and the children is addressed.

In order to do so, the insights of liberation theology will be of great value. The vicar will be well advised to acknowledge that his pastoral care is going to be severely trammelled by the family's experience of male power which has expressed itself in violence. He will be well advised, therefore, to involve the caring presence of women throughout, and especially in his first visit to the family. Further, he will need to understand how to connect the family with those groups which seek to empower victims and to address the structural causes of such violence and damage.

In the funeral itself the family's sense of freedom can only be part of the agenda if the task of constructing a rite of passage for the dead is also to be undertaken. The *Liturgy of Approach* needs to set the scene, and perhaps the best way in which this can be done is simply by a brief sentence of scripture.

He does not keep the wicked alive, but gives the afflicted their right.

[Job 36.6]

This might be followed by an adaptation of the final clause of 1 Peter 2:23:

“Let us entrust ourselves to the one who judges justly.”⁵⁹⁷

I would not at this stage advocate a prayer. It might be seen as a whitewashing exercise. The vicar should persevere with the issue of theodicy.

The *Liturgy of the Word* therefore needs to continue the theme of God's doing right. Passages like Psalm 103 and Isaiah 61.1-3 may be helpful in speaking of the deliverance of the oppressed as part of the salvation which God brings for the world. Such a note allows the possibility to be thought of that even Frank himself may have

⁵⁹⁷ I acknowledge that this is taking a liberty with the text which refers to the unresisting victim Jesus, who simply trusts God! This can easily be used to keep victims passive. I have already indicated that I believe that this is far from what is required. As I have paraphrased the excerpt, the invitation is to trust God simply because there is will a just judgement. This addresses the needs of the family.

been one of the oppressed who needed and needs deliverance. However, such a thought needs very careful negotiation. In the homily, the question of how God will deal with Frank must be addressed. However, while it is perfectly right to speak of judgement, the judgement of God is not simply destruction, but restitution and putting right. The vicar must not allow himself to inflame anger and bitterness, even if they can be expressed. The distinction is fine, but it must be observed - and for two reasons. We are not God, and we cannot make a final judgement. Secondly, Peggy never left Frank. It is not unknown for victims still to love their oppressors, and we must not destroy something in which Peggy may yet find some value.⁵⁹⁸

The *Liturgy of Prayer* needs to place Frank and the family into the hands of God without too much further comment. Acknowledgement of the darkness of much that has passed and prayer for release into light will help to speak of transition to more hopeful days for the bereaved and for right dealing by God with the deceased. In the closing words of the service a prayer along the following lines may be appropriate.

O God,
 you have promised to be light in the darkness.
 Help us, as we leave Frank with you,
 to leave our fears and hurts behind.
 In our confusion,
 heal our wounds,
 and give us a firm foundation
 on which we may build our future together.
 Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This funeral service is extremely difficult to handle whatever theological and liturgical framework one adopts. There is no sense of liturgical community, there is no sense of faith from which hope can be kindled, and there is the awful difficulty of the darkness of the deceased's life. For the bereaved in such a case separation may be a blessed relief, transition a desperate hope, and incorporation a dream. What they want for the deceased may be quite vengeful, and yet the Christian minister in caring for the bereaved must still release the dead to God.

Loose ends and far horizons: some conclusions

If funerals are subject to criticism, where does the fault lie? In the course of my research I have identified a number of issues which need to be addressed by the pastoral liturgist and theologian.

⁵⁹⁸ There is no room here for extended discussion of this very difficult area. I simply note here that there are frequently complexities within complexities.

Social Understandings of Death

There is no commonly agreed belief about what death is or what (if anything) follows death. This diversity of opinion is found as much in the Christian Church as it is elsewhere. The lack of agreed beliefs and codes relating to death makes the observation of funerary rites a less easily patterned process. It is likely that the wider community will continue to reflect a divergence of opinion about death arising from its multi-cultural nature. However, Christian theologians can usefully help their communities of faith to reflect upon what happens at death.

The debate will need to start from the *a priori* consideration of what it means to be a human being. Can we continue to describe ~~the~~ ourselves in terms of our constituent parts? Despite the arguments of Gervais, Feldman and others, is it enough to describe the human in individualistic terms? Does personhood reside rather in relationships as McFadyen argues? Can we describe what it means to be a person without reference to God? We are thus led to questions of theology.

Theological Acuity

I have suggested that to describe a human being in terms of separable parts is an inadequate means of procedure. Such a view leads to an understanding of death which demands fresh thinking about what is meant by the resurrection of the body. Funerals need to address the dead and the bereaved from a clear theological stance.

It is difficult in the contemporary world of ideas to maintain a body-soul image of human personality. I have indicated that the theological position in the Old Testament which describes us in terms of *nephesh* is a fruitful area for reconsideration. I have proposed a language of *zoe* and *bios* which understands the human person (*nephesh*) as an organization of energy (*bios*) called into living relationship with God (*zoe*) before and after death. Others need to offer a critique of zoetics if it is to become a sound theological foundation for new expression of funeral liturgy.

I have also argued that the humanities of Christ in Incarnation and Atonement are representational rather than substitutionary, and that the death of Jesus offers hope to the dead precisely because of its representational character. I have suggested that the Descent to the Dead is still a useful image for contemporary theology. Its cosmological presuppositions about a three-decker universe should not lead us to discard the theological insight contained in mythic language. There is a *kerygma* to the dead, and in the funeral it can be affirmed.

Ritual Weakness

The work of social anthropologists (and in particular of Van Gennep) has been available for long enough to have been used by practitioners as well as theorists. Unfortunately, contemporary funeral liturgies still seem unable to express the ritual function which social anthropology proposes. This has not been the result of a deliberate rejection of what has been described, so much as of piecemeal liturgical revision which has simply amended what already exists. On some occasions, radical revision has been rejected (for example, the *1928 Book of Common Prayer*). In other cases, those who have been responsible for the provision of funeral rites appear to have done little more than modernize archaic language (for example, the 1965 revision of the Church of England).

I have argued that van Gennep's codification of rites of passage is extremely hospitable to Christian theology and the proposal that Christian funeral rites should reflect the Paschal Mystery. The passage of Christ through death on Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday provides a paradigm by which we may model our death and our death rites. Elsewhere I should like to look closer at this issue, especially in relation to specific liturgical provision which ritualizes the chaos of death by reference to the transition of Holy Saturday.⁵⁹⁹

Liturgical Provision

Congregations mourning their dead need words and actions which articulate for them those ritual tasks which the funeral is designed to undertake: the disposal and release of the dead; the recognition of the chaos of death which must be restored to order; and the making of new life beyond death. Christian funeral liturgies seek to express these elements by referring to belief in God who calls the dead to life, and who has demonstrated this in Christ - the pattern for all human living, dying and resurrection.

I have indicated in outline form some suggestions as to how liturgies might be devised which took some clear account of separation, transition and incorporation. What I have proposed is preliminary, and a complete scheme will eventually have to be created. The case studies, which looked at how such liturgies might work in practice, suggested that in large measure the "success" of a funeral rite is not simply to be found in producing theologically alert forms of service. Christian funerals are primarily rites of the living and the dead in relationship to God. There are, therefore, inevitably

⁵⁹⁹ I have been commissioned to write an essay entitled *A Theology of Transition* for a collection of essays to be edited by Fr Tony Rogers and the Revd Dr Peter Jupp for publication in 1995.

theological events; but they are equally human events. We are made in the image of God, and so human events are inadequately expressed without theological reference. However, the doctrine of the Incarnation indicates to us that the expression of our love and care for God is found in direct relation to the expression of our love and care for one another. Funerals depend on the human touch. That is why the comment that a funeral was impersonal is such a devastating indictment; we have failed to care for God. It is as though Matthew 25's parable of the sheep and goats were to continue:

I died, but you did not bury *me*.

Pastoral Care

The funeral is a pastoral office. The case studies demonstrated to me that what is required above all else in the conduct of funeral rites is pastoral sensitivity in the officiant. This is not to say that the minister should select a tone of voice or set of gestures from a range of pastoral accessories. There is no shelf to which (s)he may go to collect the right tool-kit.

From the outset of the rites of death the minister becomes an officiant, expressing on behalf of others their hopes, their fears, their griefs, their feelings of guilt, their aspirations for the future. The president of the liturgical assembly is not there to express her/his personality. By careful listening and by using the gift of imagination (s)he enables the congregation to speak to God what they have said among themselves. We lead the living to the place where the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, we release the dead to God, and then with confidence we lead the living to hear that same voice calling them to new (καινή) life.

Within four months of my starting this research, my mother died. In recent months, my father underwent a cardiac incident following a heart attack the previous year. In the intervening period, two of my close friends died. As a Baptist minister in pastoral charge of a local congregation I have officiated at the normal run of funerals. This thesis has been written against the background of death; and yet throughout it has been a work of hope.

Could we but climb where Moses stood
And view the landscape o'er,
Not Jordan's stream, nor Death's cold flood,
Should fright us from the shore.⁶⁰⁰

⁶⁰⁰ Isaac Watts, *A Prospect of Heaven*

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