

A SURVEY OF FUNERAL CUSTOMS

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Ambassador College
Graduate School of Theology

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Bill L. McDowell

1970

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One

Man's Real Problem: DEATH	1
Modern Preoccupation	2
The Professionals	3
The Pattern of Avoidance	4
Convenience for the Mourner	5
Man Offers IMMORTALITY	7
The Exact Moment of Death	8
After Death	10

Chapter Two

Burial of the Ancients	11
The Barbaric Ones	12
The Civilized Ones	13
The Unsurpassed Egyptians	14
Preparation After Death	16
The Coffin of Coffins	18
The Book of The Dead	19
Other Ancient Customs	21
The Greeks and Romans	22
Multiples of Customs	24

Chapter Three

Biblical, Jewish and Early Ecclesiastical Customs	25
What is Death?	26
Jacob and Joseph	28
General Biblical Customs	29
Family Burial Plots	30
Preparing for the Grave	31
Mourning	32
Cremation	34
Jewish Customs	35
Early Ecclesiastical Customs	37
Medieval Confusion	39

Chapter Four

Modern Burial--A Curious Blend	41
The Wake	42
The Early American	43
The Undertaker Emerges	45
The Profit Margin	46
The Services	47
The Embalming Process	48
The Cemetery	51
The "Other" Charges	53
The Sales Pitch	54
The Clergy	56
Cremation	59
The Memorial Service	59
The Lack of True Dignity	60

Chapter Five

What Should a Christian Do?	62
Ministers' Responsibilities	62
The Christian's Responsibility	64
Advance Practicality	66
The Memorial Society	67
The Final Step	68

Bibliography	70
------------------------	----

CHAPTER I

Man's Real Problem: DEATH

Death is permanent. Death is irreversible. Death is inevitable. Death is not understood.

Some attempt to explain it, but who has been there and back to document it for us? Where is the record of what it is really like and how can one be sure? What visions, fears or awesome unknowns await a man who ceases to be among the land of the living?

Man's research abilities, intellectual reasoning powers and philosophy have yet to present a satisfactory answer to these compelling questions. An answer is needed, and history characteristically demonstrates man's utter frustration and endless struggle to cope with this finality he has been unable to control!

His monuments and edifices for the living have seldom been preserved beyond their usefulness and are often destroyed or left to become ruins. But his arrangements for the dead have singularly been prepared to be as permanent as possible--classic reminders of the never-ending quest that eludes man's full understanding!

While ancient ruins have disintegrated, archaeologists have often discovered ancient burial grounds to remain undisturbed as perpetual monuments to man's preoccupation with the dead. "Belief that the dead lived on and had the same needs as the living is shown in the stone implements placed with the Le Moustier, Spy I, and La Chapelle burials . . . and in

each case the home of the dead is, as in life, the rock shelter or cave."¹

As the archaeologist has meticulously examined multiple grave sites through ages termed "Stone," "Copper," "Bronze" and "Iron," he has discovered an immense variety of burial customs. But predictably, man has demonstrated at least two definite similarities: (1) a belief or hope in some kind of life or existence after death; and (2) some type of relationship between the dead and the living.²

The ancient Egyptians hold the undisputed record for the most highly developed funeral industry--both for preservation of the physical body, and for attention paid to what happens after death.³ The annals loudly speak of the concern and preoccupation man has had with death. Modern man is no exception!

Modern Preoccupation

Psychologists have demonstrated "that a primary subconscious concern of the person over fifty, as revealed through projective testing, is the preoccupation with his own death."⁴ As a man grows older, he realizes how fragile he is. He becomes less daring and more thoughtful on how to preserve life and limb. He sees potential dangers in everyday life situations far more than the young man in the prime and "carelessness" of youth.

Fighter pilots, stunt men, racing drivers and daredevils must be young! They take chances in life because they cannot yet believe they

¹"Dead, Disposal of The," Encyclopedia Brittanica, 1966, Vol. 7, p. 96.

²Ibid., p. 971.

³Edward, D. Johnson, A History of the Art and Science of Embalming (New York: Reprinted from Casket and Sunnyside, New York), p. 4.

⁴Paul E. Irion, The Funeral: Vestige or Value? (Nashville, Tenn: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 30.

will die! The older person believes he may die but hopes against hope that he won't! As Sigmund Freud puts it, "At bottom no one believes in his own death . . . everyone of us is convinced of his own immortality."⁵

The common man is not the only person who may have difficulty facing death. The professional man--the man whose business it is to deal with death regularly--also fights a personal battle with the reality of death.

The Professionals

Research carried out by concerned psychologists, physicians, educators, and clergymen has resulted in some surprising observations! They have found that:

Physicians and clergymen who work with dying persons are often uncomfortable with death, and sometimes they reject both death and the dying person.

Attitudes toward dying and the dead are slowly changing, and there may be a growing conviction among people that death is not man's inevitable end after all.

Many clergymen are afraid to work with the dying patient. They go through the traditional forms, read some Scripture, but never really get into the person's loneliness. It is because they haven't come to terms with their own death.⁶

In some cases it was demonstrated that the more training a physician had, the more unwilling he was to become involved in the physical duties dealing directly with preparation of dead bodies. Once a person is near death, the tendency is to become increasingly aloof from the

⁵Sigmund Freud, "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," (1915), Collected Papers (New York; Basic Books, 1959), IV, 305.

⁶Terence Shea, "New Seminar Helps Take the Sting out of Death," The National Observer, Jan. 5, 1970.

patient--leaving his care to those of lesser status, who ultimately become responsible for caring for the body after death.⁷ Particularly in America, the reality of death is largely avoided.

The Pattern of Avoidance

Frederic P. Herter, M.D., Chairman of the Department of Surgery, Columbia University, proclaims a man's right to die in dignity--with the full knowledge of his illness and his possibilities of death! He writes:

Preoccupation with physical comfort precludes serious examination of the meaning of death or of a life spent. Physicians are frequently responsible for this frenetic and fearful form of ending: bound by a misapplied duty as healers they resist death, often more vigorously than does the patient. Too seldom do they allow their charge the dignity of dying uncluttered by lies or half-truths or the paraphernalia of keeping life's flame flickering for a few moments more. Too seldom do they give the patient the credit of being able to accept the finality of his condition. This blame, however, must be shared with the families of the dying. Almost invariably they exhort the responsible doctor to play games with the patient, to withhold the truth, to offer hope where hope does not exist--to do everything, in fact, to keep the patient ignorant of the realities.⁸

Seldom do you hear a dead person described as having "died." Rather, he has "passed away," "passed on," "is asleep," or has "expired." Euphemisms take the place of reality. From childhood we are protected and detached from death. Today, more people die in hospitals--unseen by relatives. If they die at home, a quick call to the undertaker removes the dead--to be seen again only in the guise of being as much "alive-looking" as possible through the undertaker's efforts.

⁷David Sudnow, "The Logistics of Dying," Esquire (Aug. 1967), p. 102.

⁸Frederic P. Herter, "The Right to Die in Dignity," Archives of the Foundation of Thanatology (Vol. 1, Number 3, Oct. 1969), pp. 93-94.

Speaking before the National Catholic Cemetery Conference in Philadelphia, Archbishop John J. Krol stated he found escapism in "efforts to create the illusion that a corpse is not a corpse; that burial is not burial; that a cemetery is not a cemetery." He was obviously hitting some of our American practices of avoidances in the undertaking and cemetery industries --such as covering the grave with fake grass and not lowering the body into the ground until the "bereaved had left the cemetery in their limousines." He also attacked the "perpetual care" of the dead: "Might it not be sufficient," he queried, "for a cemetery to provide a place in which a human corpse will move through the normal passage of returning to dust?"⁹

Recently in Illinois, a minister about to perform a funeral noticed the hearse was not present at the funeral home. Later when he inquired, the undertaker replied,

It was unheard of in the old community, but with changing elements in new suburbia--and the influence they are having on changing customs--it is not uncommon to be asked to move the funeral car (hearse) before the family arrives as they do not want to be reminded of death. Many do not want to think of a funeral as involving someone dead; the waiting hearse seems to be more of a reminder than the dead person!¹⁰

Of course, the undertaker will seek to satisfy the wishes of his clients--he might even add a wrinkle or two of his own for the benefit of "the bereaved."

Convenience for the Mourner

The latest development is a classic example of American ingenuity

⁹Editorial, "How Dearly Beloved," America (Oct. 29, 1966), p. 504.

¹⁰Edward H. Heine, personal letter.

of the grotesque. There are drive-in movies, banks, restaurants, and even churches--so why not a drive-in funeral home? Atlanta Mortician Hirschel Thornton opened a specialty funeral home in 1968 which sports a drive-up window through which you can observe a draped and carpeted room bathed in soft fluorescent light with an open casket tilted toward the window for easier viewing.¹¹ This makes it much more convenient for more people to observe the "deceased" and be assured he "looked so natural"--as alive-looking as human hands could make him!

Reality gives way to the bizarre. Serious talk about death becomes taboo. Everything is geared to "soften" the blow of death--from the funeral service to the tremulant chords of the organ to the death-defying appearance of the corpse--"Death is shrouded in an air of unreality, dividing it from the reality of life with an insulating barrier of illusion."¹²

But there are those who talk seriously of death and its ramifications. They not only think and talk of it in candid and realistic terms, but they are searching for a solution! Their disappointment is aptly summed up by religious author Leslie Dewart:

The difficulty is that the classical theological interpretation of death has gradually exhibited intellectual and religious weaknesses. This is why contemporary Christian thought needs to recast the Christian hope in the light of a more adequate understanding of the nature of death.¹³

This weakened theological interpretation of death leaves some intellectuals to seek their own access to immortality.

¹¹"Automotive Mourning," Time (Apr. 5, 1968), p. 61.

¹²Paul E. Irion, The Funeral: Vestige or Value? (Nashville, Tenn: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 46.

¹³Leslie Dewart, "The Fact of Death," Commonweal (Nov. 14, 1969), p. 207.

Man Offers IMMORTALITY

Man's version of immortality is offered in a recent book by Robert C. W. Ettinger entitled The Prospect of Immortality! His solution is to freeze the body and thaw it out at a later date when modern technology has advanced to the capability of offering cures for all ailments. As he puts it,

No matter what kills us . . . and even if freezing techniques are still crude when we die, sooner or later our friends of the future should be equal to the task of reviving and curing us.¹⁴

He feels through this technique we have at this time a chance to avoid permanent death! And this is the crux! From the Ancient Egyptians to modern man, the quest has been to avoid permanent death! The Egyptian felt to be eternally preserved as a mummy was better than rotting in the grave. Mr. Ettinger feels the freezer is better than the grave. He succinctly states the case of the modern American:

We are mature enough to be materialistic in the sense of wanting freedom and wealth for ourselves, and not just for some dim posterity . . . It is we who are generally godless and not the Reds: we may acknowledge the ascendancy of Jehovah, but seldom consult Him in practical affairs. . .¹⁵

Admittedly following "Jehovah" in name only and frustrated by increasingly weakened theological ideals and explanations for death and its meaning, man looks elsewhere--only to be further frustrated because, unfortunately, full recovery after complete freezing has not yet been achieved with any mammal! To be frozen and hope to regain life places the same faith in man to develop the ability to bring the body back to life as the religious person must place in God for the Resurrection!

¹⁴Robert C. W. Ettinger, The Prospect of Immortality, (New York, N. Y.: Macfadden-Bartell Corp. 1969), p. 15.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 109

Here are some interesting questions posed by the exponents of freezing:

Will widows and widowers be allowed to marry again in their first life? What will a "revived" person do when confronted by two or more former husbands or wives?

Can a corpse vote and have legal rights and obligations?

Is there a conflict between the freezer problem and religion? If we can live on earth forever, what happens to heaven and hell?

How will women's sexual role change when test tube babies are born in artificial wombs--and can be produced by either parent?¹⁶

But even more pressing is the question of "when" are you really dead? One would not want to be "frozen" until he had used up the last possible moment of life in this time--before placing his ultimate destiny in man's hands to "keep" him frozen until (hopefully) man finally devises a way to keep him alive forever!

December 3, 1967 marked a time when everyone--not just the "freezer" people--should know the moment of death. This was the date of the first cardiac transplant in Capetown, South Africa.

The Exact Moment of Death

From the time of Maimonides till the present, the record shows concerned physicians have been hesitant to make the final death pronouncement for fear the person had "only fainted," or for some reason was still alive but did not show normal signs of life. As late as 1959, the American Encephalographic Society recommended most patients with flat brain waves not be declared dead until another test made twenty-four hours later also resulted in flat brain waves.

¹⁶David Haber, "Watching the Sunset in 4,000 A.D.," The Prospect of Immortality (Preface).

One major guideline set by the AMA in 1968 for organ transplants is:

When a vital single organ is to be transplanted, the death of the donor shall have been determined by at least one physician other than the recipient's physician. Death shall be determined by the clinical judgment of the physician. In making this determination, the ethical physician will use all available, currently accepted scientific tests.¹⁷

But what is "ethical" and "scientific?" Most physicians agree that death has occurred when the following criteria are present: (1) complete bilateral pupillary dilation unreactive to light; (2) absent reflexes; (3) cessation of spontaneous respiration; (4) absence of measurable blood pressure or detectable pulse; and (5) a flat electroencephalogram.¹⁸

To complicate matters, the legal definition of death varies from the religious; and the religious definition differs from the medical-- but even the medical community has differing ideas!¹⁹

Others, being more liberal, define death as: (1) the time when a person can no longer participate as an active member of society (social death); or (2) when a person's mental faculties no longer function (intellectual death); or (3) when body metabolism grinds to a halt (physiological death); or (4) when the soul leaves the body (spiritual death)--which, of course, must be evaluated and interpreted by a church.²⁰

¹⁷"Ethical Guidelines for Organ Transplantation," Journal of the American Medical Association (Aug. 5, 1968), pp. 341-342.

¹⁸Fred Rosuer, "The Definition of Death," The Archives of the Foundation of Thanatology (Vol. 1, Number 3, Oct. 1969), p. 106.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 105

²⁰Ibid., p. 105

Clearly the question is muddled! Medical advances demand an answer that satisfies, and research is being carried out; but the authorities claim the final answer is yet to be heard. It seems everyone has a different idea, a different approach, a different understanding!

This confusion is not new. Archaeologists and historians can and do attest to that. Scientifically, we are no doubt closer to an absolute definition of the fact of death than ever. The real problem lies in the definition of what happens AFTER death!

After Death

Understanding the fact of death does not give guidelines concerning final placement of the body. This has been, and still is, determined by religion and belief in some existence after death.

Today's customs have been largely influenced by ancient practices. Millions of people have lived, died and been given a final resting place on this earth in countless ways--depending on the people's economic, cultural and religious background at the time.

But how much of their ways should we follow? What is practical and of value to us in a modern, fast-moving society? How can we best understand and prepare for funerals in a balanced and proper way--considering our relatives, friends, neighbors, community, and God?

We should first examine some of the burial practices and customs which have been preserved for today.

CHAPTER II

Burial of the Ancients

No one has spoken so loudly and vociferously as the ancient dead! Archaeologists must depend on him and his preserved and entombed artifacts to tell the story of his lifetime. Other records have long since decayed or been destroyed by predators, enemies and the unceasing ravages of time.

Because of their beliefs about the dead and the after life, and the ritual accompanying the burials (especially of the wealthy and noble), artifacts were buried with the bones of the dead that reveal their culture and advancement (or decay) of their civilization.

The graves and tombs of old reveal mysteries of fabulous wealth, riches and ceremony--and harsh, barbaric, cruel customs to make the Western mind cringe! The earliest, or "least-developed" ages, as classed by the historians, are characterized by a peculiar barbaric disregard for human life.

Though the mute record indicates that some, on the outer fringes of civilization, indiscriminately discarded their dead without ceremony and concern, the vast majority of archaeological "finds" show definite rituals, beliefs and superstitions attached to the dead. This is indicated in many ways: position in the grave, direction of the body, care with which the body was preserved and what was buried with it. The archaeologist has long since recognized that "ritual burial presupposes some recognition of

the spiritual nature of man, of the existence of a soul capable of living on after death."¹

These beliefs of life after death gave rise to the manner of burial. Historians believe some of the earlier customs began also because they were not sure the person was really dead--much the same reason for the more modern "wake."

The Barbaric Ones

Historian H. G. Wells reasons concerning what is termed Palaeolithic Man and Neanderthal Man as being unsure and confused--burying their dead with food and weapons should they not be dead or perhaps a belief of some sort in a future life after death.²

Neolithic Man, according to Mr. Wells, was also confused and killed on theory for monstrous and (to us) incredible ideas. Through fear, he killed those he loved. Not only did he make human sacrifices at seed-time, but all indications are wives and slaves were sacrificed at the burial of chieftains--as well as killing men, women and children in hard times or whenever they thought the gods were thirsty.³

Stone Age people performed even more weird and unimaginable acts! Although "more civilized" than those who did not bother to bury their dead, these misguided unfortunates evidently performed a most grisly ritual before burial. They are supposed to have cut off portions of the "loved one's" flesh and eaten them out of reverence for the departed ones. In the words

¹Graham Clark, Archaeology and Society (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1960), p. 232.

²H. G. Wells, The Outline of History (2 Vols.; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1949), Vol i, p. 118.

³Ibid., p. 130.

of Sir Flinders Petrie, the dead were "eaten with honor."⁴

The supposedly Aryan-speaking Prehistoric Ones of European vestige showed unmistakable signs of outright cannibalism! Their dead are found in the caves in which they lived--only they are mere traces of the dead--broken and used artifacts lying amid portions of charred, broken, and cut human bones, including the bones of children.⁵

The Civilized Ones

The excavations at Ur uncovered remains of the Sumerian civilization which existed shortly after the Noachian Deluge that exhibited a high level of development "astonishingly early."⁶

These "graves of the kings of Ur" held amazing treasures. Bodies that had long since decayed were surrounded with costly drinking cups and goblets, bronze tableware, skillfully shaped jugs and vases, mother-of-pearl mosaics, and valuable silver. For their musical entertainment, harps and lyres were placed against the walls of the tombs. In addition, treasure wagons were found laden with costly and artistically designed household furniture and other treasures.

In this way they were much further advanced than their less civilized counterparts. But more was found. The treasure wagons were still attached to the skeletal remains of oxen. The search unearthed more skeletons, but they were not animals! The treasure wagons had been drawn into the tombs by live oxen, accompanied by as many as twenty live servants of the king.

⁴H. G. Wells, The Outline of History (2 vols.; Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1949), Vol. i, p. 171.

⁵Ibid., p. 271

⁶Werner Keller, The Bible as History (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1958), p. 28.

Apparently they took some drug, gathered around him for the last time and died of their own free will to be able to serve him in his future existence.⁷

Religious education had also advanced. Those who accompanied the dead ruler into the tomb to die did it voluntarily! This type of blind faith and surrealistic belief continued to flourish and was ultimately epitomized by the Egyptians and their highly advanced funeral industry.

The Unsurpassed Egyptians

The early Egyptians developed the most highly skilled, ritualistic burial, and preservation system ever. No civilization has rivaled the Egyptian physicians and embalmers in their ability to pickle a body "for eternity."

The increasingly popular Egyptian custom of embalming can be directly related to the religious teachings of the cult of Osiris. They preached that the dead body of a man was a sacred thing and not to be burnt, mutilated or devoured by men or beasts. Great care was taken to insure the body was left intact and buried in a carefully concealed tomb.

This body preservation was of vital importance because Osiris dogma was that from the body would spring the "translucent, transparent, immaterial, refulgent and glorious envelope in which the Spirit-soul of the deceased could take up its abode with all his mental and spiritual attributes."⁸

⁷Werner Keller, The Bible as History (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1958), p. 27.

⁸E. A. Wallis Budge, The Book of the Dead (New Hyde Park, N. Y.: University Books, 1960), p. 5.

The Legend of Osiris was perpetuated by his "mother-wife," Isis, after Osiris was overtaken by Set and suffered a cruel death and horrible mutilation. His dismembered body was then scattered across the land. According to the legend, when Isis heard of this she constructed a boat of papyrus and sailed about collecting the fragments of his body. Whenever she found one, she would build a tomb and consecrate it.

As this legend and the cult of Osiris grew, the deceased came to be directly identified with Osiris. That is, if Osiris lives forever, then the deceased will live forever. If Osiris dies, then the deceased will perish.⁹

The Osiris cult taught that the whole man consisted of these parts: (1) a natural body; (2) a Spirit-body; (3) a heart; (4) a double; (5) a Heart-soul; (6) a shadow; (7) a Spirit-soul and (8) a name. There was an Egyptian expression, "the Osiris of a man." When this expression was used, it referred to all these parts as a combined unit to make up the whole man.

All of these parts were bound together inseparably, and the welfare or any single part depended on the welfare of all. Therefore, to insure the well-being of the spiritual parts, it was necessary to preserve the body.

The Egyptians believed in eternal life, but not in a resurrection. The Osiris cult taught that the Spirit revisited the body in the tomb, re-animated it and conversed with it. The Spirit could transverse at will and

⁹E. A. Wallis Budge, The Book of the Dead (New Hyde Park, N. Y.: University Books, 1960), pp. 52-56.

was able to consume the funeral offerings of food left in the tomb. In fact, if not properly nourished, the body was believed to be liable to decay.¹⁰

To demonstrate the strength of this belief, note the inscription recorded on the linen wrappings of the mummy of Thothmes III:

. . . Homage to thee, O my father Osiris, thy flesh suffered no decay, there were no worms in thee, thou didst not crumble away, thou didst not wither away, thou didst not become corruption and worms; and I myself am Khepera, I shall possess my flesh for ever and ever, I shall not decay, I shall not crumble away, I shall not wither away, I shall not become corruption.¹¹

Obviously, this belief about the body led to much concern and expense in preparing the body for "eternal existence" in the tomb. For the rulers and the wealthy nobility, cost was no object; but the poorer, lower-classed individual found himself with a problem. Many who were barely able to afford the bare necessities of life were induced by the priesthood to spend large sums in preparation for their death.¹²

Preparation After Death

Without exaggeration, no one has rivaled the Egyptian embalmers, or "physicians" (as they were termed by Joseph in the Bible), in their peculiar abilities to preserve "the remains"! Not only could they embalm, but they had also developed the "art" of selling their services as well. Here is the way the historian, Herodotus, describes it:

¹⁰E. A. Wallis Budge, The Book of the Dead (New Hyde Park, N. Y.: University Books, 1960), pp. 76-81.

¹¹Ibid., p. 70.

¹²Alexander Hislop, The Two Babylons (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1959), p. 169.

There are a set of men in Egypt who practice the art of embalming, and make it their proper business. These persons, when a body is brought to them, show the bearers the various models of corpses, made in wood, and painted so as to resemble nature. The most perfect is said to be after the manner of him [probably Osiris] . . . ; the second sort is inferior to the first, and less costly; the third is the cheapest of all. All this the embalmers explain, and then ask in which way it is wished that the corpse should be prepared. The bearers tell them, and having concluded their bargain, take their departure, while the embalmers, left to themselves, proceed with their task.

The mode of embalming, according to the most perfect process, is the following: They take first a crooked piece of iron, and with it draw out the brain through the nostrils, thus getting rid of a portion, while the skull is cleared of the rest by rinsing with drugs; next they make a cut along the flank with a sharp Ethiopian stone, and take out the whole contents of the abdomen, which they then cleanse, washing it thoroughly with palm wine, and again frequently with an infusion of pounded aromatics. After this they fill the cavity with the purest myrrh, with cassia, and every other sort of spicery except frankincense, and sew up the opening. Then the body is placed in a natrium (a kind of salt brine from nearby lakes) for seventy days, and covered entirely over. After the expiration of that space of time, which must not be exceeded, the body is washed, and wrapped round, from head to foot, with bandages of fine linen cloth, smeared over with gum, which is used generally by the Egyptians in the place of glue, and in this state it is given back to the relations, who enclose it in a wooden case which they have had made for the purpose, shaped into the figure of a man. Then, fastening the case, they placed it in a sepulchral chamber, upright against the wall. Such is the most costly way of embalming the dead.¹³

The two lesser expensive methods of embalming are not quite so carefully handled. They were dipped in brine, but were not given the special treatment described as the "most perfect process" by Herodotus.

Also, they did not allow a woman to be given over to the embalmers till she had been dead for at least three or four days to avoid sexual violation.¹⁴

¹³George Rawlinson, The History of Herodotus (4 vols.; New York D. Appleton & Co., 1880), vol. ii, pp. 118-123.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 124-125.

The portions of the body which had been removed during the embalming process were mixed with myrrh and soda and kept in ornamental urns called "canopic jars," which were then placed in the tomb with the mummy.¹⁵

This was only the beginning! Today's modern mortuary establishments boast of hermetically sealed caskets, bronze or steel instead of wood, and concrete vaults to place the casket in--but they had nothing on the Egyptian!

The Coffin of Coffins

Egyptian coffin-makers enjoyed enormous success--particularly those who built them for the royalty. Although the grave robbers have destroyed much of the splendor and magnificence of most of the ancient tombs, a few have remained intact until today to reveal their secrets.

One such valuable discovery was that of a minor king, named Tutankhamon. From Tutankhamon we find that not just one, but three coffins, were used to enclose the body! Though made of wood, they were masterpieces of construction and the jeweler's art--covered with sheet gold and fabulous inlay. The innermost coffin was of solid gold weighing 2,448 pounds!

In addition to these three magnificent coffins which were laid one inside the other, there was yet another enclosure, called the sarcophagus. The sarcophagus was made of stone such as quartzite, granite or diorite. Though the grave robbers could steal almost everything

¹⁵Jurgen Thorwald, Science and Secrets of Early Medicine (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1963), p. 31.

else, they were usually unable to make off with this very heavy and burdensome sarcophagus. That's why so many of them can be seen resting in museums today.

The sarcophagus was then placed inside three shrines--one inside the other. These shrines, made of gilded wood, carried the magical texts which were at one time written on the walls of the great pyramids.¹⁶

Three coffins, a sarcophagus, three shrines--seven enclosures not counting the tomb--what more protection could any man ask for his body! But all this was only a portion of what had to be done. The religious ceremony was of vital importance!

The Book of the Dead

The magical texts found buried in the shrines give detailed accounts of the important religious ceremony that accompanied burials--particularly of the rulers. There were so many of these found that it would be impractical to attempt to publish them all in one volume. The most noteworthy work was prepared by Sir Wallis Budge in three separate volumes, each known as THE BOOK OF THE DEAD. Even these momentous volumes contained less than half of the great body of texts written for the benefit of the dead--which an educated Egyptian deemed necessary for salvation!

Such a religious ceremony must have taken weeks to accomplish! In addition to the multitude of physical ceremonies described in those ancient plates and scrolls, here is a very short, much-abbreviated, list

¹⁶Barbara Metz, Red Land, Black Land--The World of the Ancient Egyptians (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1966), pp. 338-341.

of the chapters used:

- "The Opening of the Mouth
- "The Sunrise
- "The Weighing of the Heart
- "The Eater of the Dead
- "Water, the Primeval God
- "The Self-Produced God
- "The Gates of the Other World
- "Of Supplying Words of Power
- "Of Preserving the Heart
- "Of Obtaining Air
- "Of Preventing Decay of the Body
- "Of Keeping the Head of the Body
- "Of Obtaining Freedom for the Soul
- "Of Revisiting the Old Home
- "Of Obtaining Life after Death
- "Of Becoming a Swallow and a Hawk
- "Of Becoming a Serpent and a Crocodile
- "Of Avoiding Corruption
- "Of Avoiding the East
- "Of Becoming a Lily"

In these chapters, known as the Chapters of Ani, no greater example can be given of the absolute attention to detail in ceremony and consideration of each part of the body than the "Deification of the Members," which went something like this:

1. The hair of the Osiris Ani, whose word is truth, is the hair of Nu.

2. The face of the Osiris Ani, whose word is truth, is the face of Ra.

This interminable list goes on and on until every known part of the body was dedicated in the name of some god! Imagine the hours of intonations of these rites that must have taken place!

Other Ancient Customs

The customs and rites of other nations and peoples are much simpler in comparison. The Babylonians felt that to touch a dead body would make a person unclean, and therefore placed much less emphasis on the human corpse as such.¹⁷

Unlike the Egyptians, whose physicians had their training ground deep in the mortuary system, the Babylonians had no physicians and tended to bury their dead in crocks and urns of honey--though they did have lamentations similar to the Egyptians.¹⁸

The Medes and Persians were greatly influenced by the ancient Magi, who had some weird beliefs also! They attributed a sacred character to what they called the four elements--earth, air, fire and water. That made it a bit difficult to determine what to do with the dead!

The "deceased" could not be burnt, for that would pollute the fire; or buried--that would pollute the earth; or thrown into the river or sea--that would pollute the water; or left exposed to rot away--that would

¹⁷George Rawlinson, The Seven Great Monarchs of the Ancient Eastern World (3 vols., Chicago: Belford, Clark & Co., 1875), Vol. ii, p. 228.

¹⁸George Rawlinson, The History of Herodotus (4 vols.; New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1880), Vol. i, p. 263.

pollute the air!¹⁹ Nor is there any evidence that they embalmed. They were left with only one alternative. Thus they began and followed the barbaric custom of leaving their dead to be devoured by dogs and birds of prey!²⁰

However, there is some exception to this rule. Cyrus, at the point of death, is reputed to have charged his children to inter his body --using the expression that he looked upon the earth as the original parent from whence he came, and to which he ought to return.²¹

Through the ages, there has been almost every conceivable type of burial man could devise, and almost all of them can be directly attributed to religion and superstition.

The ancient Vikings are a classic example of superstition. Their dead have been found buried in a sea-going vessel! Archaeological finds indicate their servants were forced to die with their masters--the instrument of death being strangling and stabbing. In other cases, the dead, along with a murdered servant, were burned on the funeral pyre of a Viking ship!²²

The Greeks and Romans

The Greeks carried much of the old ways into their burial customs. The corpse was bathed, perfumed, clothed in the finest the family could

¹⁹George Rawlinson, The Seven Great Monarchs of the Ancient Eastern World (3 vols., Chicago: Belford, Clark & Co., 1875), Vol. ii, p. 263.

²⁰Ibid., Vol. iii, p. 441.

²¹Charles Rollin, The Ancient History of the Egyptians, Carthaginians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes and Persians, Macedonians and Grecians (8 vols., 1: Philadelphia: W. W. Woodward, Robert Desilver, Thomas Desilver, McCarty and Davis, and Uriah Hunt, 1825), Vol. ii, pp. 204-205.

²²Howard LaFay, "The Vikings," National Geographic (April, 1970), pp. 492-538.

afford, and crowned with flowers. Mourning was an elaborate process throughout the funeral--after which they customarily returned home to a funeral feast, much as many people of various ethnic backgrounds yet do in the United States.

There were two general methods of disposal of the dead for the Greek. Cremation was popular in the Heroic Age, and interment in the Classic Age.²³ Like the Egyptian, he would bury artifacts with the dead--a set of chess with a good chess player, a clay orchestra with a musician, or a small boat with one who loved the sea. Why should he not enjoy the comforts and pleasures he enjoyed most in this life?

In the early centuries of Rome, the dead were cremated. As Christianity spread, burial became more popular. Like the Greeks, they had great reverence for the dead and believed that the spirits of the dead survived and watched their progeny. Accordingly, great processions and pagan splendor accompanied burials.²⁴

Many of the Roman plays and tragedies were performed as a part of, or in connection with, Roman funerals.²⁵ This is besides the brutal fact of the Roman games in which the lives of many men were offered in sacrifice to dead men. In 264 B. C., the sons of Brutus Pera gave a spectacle of three duels in honor of their dead father. Twenty-two combats were fought to the death at the funeral of Marcus Legidus in 216 B. C. Seventy-four men fought to the death in the gladiatorial games sponsored

²³Will Durant, Life of Greece (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1939), p. 311.

²⁴Will Durant, Caesar and Christ (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944), p. 83.

²⁵Ibid., p. 378

by Titus Flaminius at his father's death.²⁶

Multiples of Customs

To continue to examine each nation in history for all the customs to have existed would truly be a lesson in multiplicity. Notable is the fact that you cannot account for all these practices by any monistic, simple view. The more pagan the people were, the farther removed from the heart of a monotheistic civilization, the more superstitions and gods they found to worship, the more complicated and rigorous became their beliefs and customs concerning the dead.

The Aborigines of New South Wales, Australia, are a prime example. Considered by archaeologists to be "throwbacks" to the evolutionary process--strangely so far behind today's civilization--these primitive people have TWELVE different means of disposing of their dead!²⁷

These paganistic historical examples make a rude comparison to the basic and simple practices advocated by the God of the Bible as outlined in the next chapter!

²⁶Will Durant, Caesar and Christ (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944), pp. 381-382.

²⁷William A. Lasa, "Death, Customs and Rites," Collins Encyclopedia, 1967, Vol 7, p. 757.

CHAPTER III

Biblical, Jewish and Early Ecclesiastical Customs

"Dust thou art," said God, "and unto dust shalt thou return!"

His first instruction to man quickly explained what we are able to prove by scientific methods today: the human body decays and returns to its original composition, the dust of the earth.

The Egyptians knew the body would decay, and because of their religious beliefs about death and life after death, devised highly-skilled means to stop it. The ancient Bible patriarchs, as a rule, were not embalmed, nor did they make any attempt to preserve their dead bodies intact after death.

They understood principles of how the body functions, which bear scrutiny today. They knew, for example, that the life is in the blood¹-- the oxygenation process which is today a known scientific fact.

In analogy, King Solomon writes of the process of death,

. . . because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the DUST return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.²

These allegorical statements are taken by the scholars to mean: The silver cord is the spinal cord; the golden bowl is the brain; the fountain is the liver; and the wheel is the skull.³

¹Leviticus 17:11.

²Ecclesiastes 12:5-7.

³A. Cohen, ed., Ecclesiastes, The Five Megilloth, The Soncino Books of the Bible (London: The Soncino Press, Ltd., 1961), p. 187.

The ancients of the Bible understood much about human anatomy, and they understood the meaning of death.

What is Death?

The Bible depicts death in a much more realistic and meaningful way than that ascribed to by the pagans. The Patriarchs realized the human body was destined to return to the dust of the ground to await a resurrection--contrary to the Egyptian "eternity of the flesh."

The Apostle Peter spoke of David, King of Israel, remaining in his grave until the resurrection:

Let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day David is NOT ascended unto the heavens.⁴

But what is it like in the grave? Is it anything like the elaborate process proclaimed by the Egyptians? No! In fact, far from it!

The Bible pictures man's body as no different from that of an animal that dies.⁵ He totally ceases from any activity of any kind. "His breath goes forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish."⁶

In the grave there is nothing but a dead, lifeless corpse which will eventually decay back into its original form of dust of the ground. ". . . for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the GRAVE, whither thou goest."⁷ Compare this to the interminable list

⁴Acts 2:29, 34.

⁵Psalm 49:11-14.

⁶Psalm 146:3-4 .

⁷Ecclesiastes 9:10 .

of funerary chapters devised by the Egyptians to give a hope of continued life after death.

The hope of the Bible Patriarchs was of the resurrection from the dead! Job declared:

O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time and remember me. If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my CHANGE come.⁸

The time spent in the grave is simply a wait, with no activity, no thought process, no work--NOTHING! There would be no fears of unsuspected horrors happening after death. No tortures, punishments or changes into other beings over which the person would have no control! There would be no fear of the unknown, because it is known what happens to the body and thinking process at death. The hope is in what happens after death--the resurrection from the dead.

Some have asked how the dead would be raised up and what body they would have at the resurrection. The Apostle Paul explained that the body is buried to become corrupt--rotten--and it is to be resurrected without corruption. The natural, physical body is buried, but the resurrection is to be a spiritual body! Just as Job waits for his change, Paul proclaimed the hope of one who follows God is that "we shall be changed."⁹ His whole life (after conversion) was spent so that he "might obtain the resurrection of the dead!"¹⁰

The prophet, Daniel, wrote, "And many of them that sleep in the

⁸Job 14:13-14.

⁹I Corinthians 15:36-52.

¹⁰Philippians 3:8-11.

dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." ¹¹

When this change at the resurrection takes place, it will happen suddenly and quickly--"In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump." ¹²

The understanding of what happens to the body after death--decomposition into the dust it came from--and the hope of the resurrection of the dead led to the general Biblical practice of burial of the dead without embalming. There are two notable exceptions to this, however.

Jacob and Joseph

Jacob and Joseph were both embalmed according to the Egyptian fashion and given Funerals of State by the Egyptians. Scholars recognize these as having been special occasions--apart from the customs generally practiced in the Bible. ¹³

Joseph and his family were foreigners in the land of Egypt and under the authority of the Egyptian Pharaoh. It would have been offensive to the Pharaoh to have done otherwise. However, the final disposal of their bodies did not follow Egyptian custom. Joseph received permission of the Pharaoh to take Jacob out of Egypt to be buried in the cave purchased and prepared by Abraham. ¹⁴

After a long life of 110 years, Joseph died, was embalmed, and placed in an Egyptian coffin. However, he took an oath of the children

¹¹Daniel 12:2.

¹²I Corinthians 15:52.

¹³James Hastings, ed., "Burial," A Dictionary of the Bible (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898), p. 332.

¹⁴Genesis 50:5-13.

of Israel that they should carry his bones out of Egypt.¹⁵ This was later accomplished by Moses at the Exodus, and Joseph's bones were finally buried in Shechem in a parcel of ground previously purchased by Jacob.¹⁶ Obviously, Joseph's remains could not have been enclosed in all the seven containers used by Egyptians, or the Israelites could not possibly have carried it out of Egypt! The final removal of their remains from Egypt was prophetic--especially in that Egypt is shown as a type of sin in the Bible.¹⁷ It has also been the traditional desire of the Jewish people to return to the land of their fathers no doubt in part due to this example of Joseph and Jacob.

General Biblical Customs

It is commonly understood that the people of Bible times were buried quickly after death. In the Old Testament example--a prophecy to be fulfilled by Christ--a man who was executed for sins had to be buried that same day.¹⁸ This is evidently one reason Joseph of Arimathaea was anxious to take Christ's body off the stake, as well as the fact it was the preparation day.

Lazarus, the close personal friend of Christ, was evidently buried the very day he died. Ananias and Sapphira, who died because they lied to the apostles, were buried immediately.¹⁹

There were no "wakes" as practiced in modern times. Abraham,

¹⁵Genesis 50:25.

¹⁶Exodus 13:19 and Joshua 24:32.

¹⁷Hebrews 11:26 and Revelation 11:8.

¹⁸Deuteronomy 21:13 and Galatians 3:13.

¹⁹John 11:11 and Acts 5:6, 16.

when arranging for a burial spot with the sons of Heth, purchased the ground ". . . that I might bury my dead out of my sight." He was already aware that "He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days." Christ used this very principle and applied it in type to the scribes and Pharisees, declaring: "For ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness."²⁰

With the knowledge that the body was to return to dust, and there was no need to attempt to thwart that natural process, the Biblical people were simply buried! God made certain this would be done by placing the law of uncleanness on anyone who touched the dead body. This meant those who had to prepare the body for burial and bury it had to remain apart from the congregation and come near no one for a period of seven days from the last time the body was touched.

"Family" Burial Plots

Abraham was the first to begin the custom of setting aside a portion of ground for the purpose of burying his family. Since that time it has been generally followed by the Jews and to some degree, Christianity. When a man died, two expressions were often used. He was either "gathered to his people" or "gathered to his fathers." "Gathered" is translated from a Hebrew word which means "to gather, remove, take away"--as, to be taken from the land of the living to the sepulchre of their fathers.

²⁰Genesis 23:4; Numbers 19:11 & Matthew 23:27.

These terms referred to a person's state of being with his fathers, or people, immediately upon death. Jacob was "gathered to his people" when he died, but it was no doubt at least four months before he was actually placed in the burial place prepared by Abraham.²¹

These places were known by the tribes through the years, and did not require any special markings. Though it is obscure what markings may have been at many of the grave sites, or sepulchres, the Bible has only one specific reference to a specific gravestone having been set up. "And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave: that is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day."²² Rachel would have been considered royalty. It is almost certain no special markers were set up for the "common" man not of royal position.

It is evident that God did not intend a worship of the dead bodies or burial places of famous people, for Moses' grave site was purposely hidden and ". . . in early centuries the effort seems to have been to conceal the place of burial"²³-- particularly from those other than the immediate tribal family.

Though Joseph and Jacob were both embalmed by the Egyptians, there seems to be very little mention of any formal preparation of the body until we get to New Testament times.

Preparing for the Grave

It became the responsibility of the closest of kin to care for the

²¹Genesis 49:33-50:13.

²²Genesis 35:20.

²³"Burial in the Bible," The New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967, vol. ii, p. 894.

body as taken from God's expression to Jacob that "Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes"²⁴ when Jacob was to go to Egypt. This expression is taken to mean that Joseph would close Jacob's eyes at death--this being done by the person directly responsible for the dead.

It later became known as the custom to perform certain physical duties to the body before burial. Most of this information is available because of the careful record preserved of Christ's crucifixion.

The body was first washed.²⁵ Then a special mixture of spices (myrrh and aloes--about one hundred pound weight, or as some critics say, a mixture of myrrh and aloes, one pound each) was prepared. This mixture was then wound in linen clothes thoroughly around the body, and a special "napkin" was placed over the head and face.²⁶ The body was then taken immediately to the grave for burial.

Mourning

It is surprising to note the absence of any formal service stipulated in the Bible as a part of burial. "The body was placed in its last home without any particular ceremony."²⁷ Though Joseph declared a seven day mourning period for his father,²⁸ which may have continued and been followed concurrently with the seven day unclean period later imposed, little else is related that might be construed as "official" ceremony for

²⁴Genesis 46:4.

²⁵Acts 9:36.

²⁶John 11:44, 12:7, 19:39-42, 20:6, Matthew 27:59; Mark 15:46 & Luke 23:53-56.

²⁷John Kitto, Palestine From the Patriarchal Age to the Present Time (New York: Peter Fenelon Collier, 1899), p. 88.

²⁸Genesis 50:10.

the dead. Quite a contrast to the Egyptian "Book of the Dead!"

But the Patriarchs were certainly not without feeling! Abraham wept for Sarah. Jacob shed bitter tears when he was deceived into thinking Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. Joseph wept feelingly at his father's death. David mourned and cried greatly for Saul and Jonathan--and later for his murdered general, Abner, and his wayward son, Absalom. Though the expression, "Ah, my Brother," or "Ah, my Sister," was often used for kings,²⁹ weeping is probably the most universal sign of mourning. The Patriarchs were no exception.

Jacob first set the example--which later became a custom -- to rend the clothing, wear sackcloth and put ashes on the head.³⁰ This was also a universal sign among the Hebrews for any calamity--personal or national.

Many of these examples of grieving were collected and used as models for later times and ceremonies--employed specifically as funeral dirges--but are not to be construed as "official ceremonies" of the Patriarchs! Though not sanctioned by God, and obviously viewed with displeasure by Christ,³¹ professional "mourners" began to flourish and be employed at burials³²--most likely repeating these "now famous" sayings of the ancients, though there is no "text" of their dirges preserved for us today.

They were expressly forbidden to react as the heathen nations around them and (1) make special designs in their hair, (2) make special

²⁹Jeremiah 22:18.

³⁰Genesis 37:34; Joel 1:8; II Samuel 13:19.

³¹John 11:31-43 & Matthew 11:23-25.

³²Amos 5:16; II Chronicles 35:25; Ecclesiastes 12:5.

designs in their beards, (3) make any cuttings in their flesh, (4) print any marks on their bodies, (5) shave their heads, or (6) shave off their eyebrows for the dead.³³

Fasting was also practiced at death--particularly if it were a disaster. Saul's men fasted for him seven days after he was killed in battle. On the other hand, David fasted rigorously for the illegitimate child born from his adultery with Bathsheba while it was sick. But when it died, he ceased to fast, and took food. He realized that fasting or any other vain and rigorous acts of remorse would not bring the child back to life.³⁴

Later, it became a custom of the Jews to feast rather than fast, which is a universal custom today--but not found in the Bible.

Cremation

As previously mentioned, cremation, or burning of the dead was not practiced by the Hebrews. The notable exception is that of Saul and his sons who were burned after they had been killed in battle with the Philistines. The reason indicated for this was that the Philistines mutilated them cruelly as a special show before their idols and their people.³⁵

Other references that appear to refer to the burning of the dead actually refer to the burning of spices "in honor" of the dead.³⁶ They

³³Deuteronomy 14:1; Revelation 19:27-28, 21:5; Jeremiah 10:2.

³⁴I Samuel 31:13 & II Samuel 13:15-23.

³⁵I Samuel 31:7-12.

³⁶John Henry Blunt, ed., "Burial of the Dead," Dictionary of Doctrinal and Historical Thanatology (London, Oxford & Cambridge: Rivington, 1871), p. 94.

did not burn their bodies.

Burning of the dead was regarded as a punishment and a disgrace. It was reserved for sinners and criminals as a warning to others who might be tempted to err--a direct type of the "lake of fire" which was the final punishment of all those who remain sinners to the very end.³⁷

Jewish Customs

Professing the "Holy Scriptures," known by Christians as the Old Testament, to be the direct account of their history, the Jews largely follow the customs indicated there as interpreted by their own writing (viz., the Talmud) and their rabbis.

The noted Jewish historian, Josephus, explains the basis for a Jewish funeral:

Our law has also taken care of the decent burial of the dead, but without any extravagant expenses for their funerals, and without the erection of any illustrious monuments for them; but hath ordered that their nearest relatives should perform their obsequies . . .³⁸

Of course, they did deviate from their early guidelines of simplicity by adding professional mourners and "singers" to make mourning more elaborate--but they never rivaled the Egyptians!

Although it is doubtful they felt the dead would use them, "Objects used or favored by the dead, such as a writing tablet, a pen and inkstand, a key or bracelet, were often put into the coffin or grave."³⁹ This was probably a concession to the beliefs and customs of the gentile nations around them.

³⁷Genesis 38:24; Joshua 7:25; Leviticus 20:14, 21:9; Malachi 4:13; Mark 9:43-47; Revelation 20:9, 14-15, 21:8.

³⁸Josephus, Against Apion, Book II, Sec. 27.

³⁹"Burial," The Jewish Encyclopedia, 1946, Vol. III, p. 436.

There was to be no "wake," but the early custom was that the relatives should visit the grave for the first three days to determine whether the dead had come to life again.⁴⁰ Jewish writings urge that burial should follow closely after death, and in addition to friends and relatives, any stranger was expected to follow out of respect whenever he saw the dead being carried to the grave.

Though quick burials risked being buried alive, they were certainly a deterrent to extravagance! In fact, great emphasis was put upon the simple, frugal, low-cost burial for everyone--rich and poor alike -- to avoid discrimination even in death.⁴¹

The records indicate the early Jews followed the same general customs of preparation for burial as already described for New Testament times. However, the simple understanding of death has, through the years, become a bit more complicated--as described by Leo Baeck:

The secret end path, united for man in atonement, are again attained by him in immortality. Eternity is the great atonement of finiteness; all atonement is fundamentally the reconciliation of the earthly with the infinite. The secret which become the path and the path which become the secret are unified in Judaism as the 'return,' Teshuvah. Death is the great 'return,' the liberation from the mere earthly and limiting. With death the earth vanishes and eternity receives. 'The dust returns to the earth whence it came, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.' (Ecclesiastes 12:7). The true meaning of atonement for Judaism is that the life of man can begin again. With death there comes the decisive and concluding beginning, and last rebirth, the new creation which comprises everything--the whole path and the whole secret. That is why eternal life, just like the Day of Atonement, is called the great Sabbath, 'the day which is wholly Sabbath, and the repose of life in eternity.' It is the great peace.

⁴⁰"Burial," The Jewish Encyclopedia, 1946, Vol. III, p. 434.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 436.

The living man seeks and moves 'toward peace;' he who has passed away is, according to the Talmud, 'in peace.'⁴²

Not only a bit more complicated, but also a change from the Patriarch Job, who expected to lie in the grave awaiting a change at the resurrection, and David, who was still waiting in his grave by New Testament times!

The Jewish Customs of the New Testament times had a great influence on the primitive Church as shown by the Acts of the Apostles. "As Christianity spread, however, the rites were adapted to local usages that were greatly modified by Christian belief in Redemption, salvation, and eternal life."⁴³

Early Ecclesiastical Customs

The Church Fathers who wrote just prior to the Nicene Council of 325 A.D. opposed Jewish Burial Customs. Clement, Bishop and Citizen of Rome, decried the association of "Jewish" and "early Christian" burial customs:

Do not therefore keep any such observances about legal and natural purgations, as thinking you are defiled by them [the dead]. Neither do you seek after Jewish separations, or perpetual washings, or purifications upon the touch of a dead body. But without such observations assemble in the dormitories [early word for cemetery], reading the holy books, and sing for the martyrs which are fallen asleep, and for all the saints from the beginning of the world, and for your brethren that are asleep in the Lord, . . . For those that have believed in God, although they are asleep, are not dead.⁴⁴

⁴²Leo Baeck, The Essence of Judaism, (New York: Schocken Books, 1948), p. 183.

⁴³"Burial, Early Christian," The New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967, Vol. ii, p.895.

⁴⁴Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., "Constitutions of the Holy Apostles," The Ante-Nicene Fathers (8 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), Vol. VII, Book VI, Sec. VI, p. 464.

They believed the dead were not quite really dead! Perhaps it is because they did not have modern medical advancements to aid their proof of death (unfortunately, as stated in Chapter I, even modern medicine doesn't know for certain!). These early Church Fathers did go so far as to examine the body some time after death as expounded by Tertulian:

As for the nails, since they are the commencement of the nerves, they may well seem to be prolonged, owing to the nerves themselves being relaxed and extended, and to be protruded more and more as the flesh fails. The hair, again, is nourished from the brain, which would cause it to endure for a long time as the secret aliment and defence. Indeed, in the case of living persons themselves, the whole head of hair is copious or scanty in proportion to the exuberance of the brain.⁴⁵

Like the Jews, if a person were buried the same day of death, a three-day watch was often held at the grave. The wake itself was an all-night vigil before burial. This later became an occasion for friends to console the relatives and to pray for the dead person. It was greatly influenced by monastic practices which included candles, certain ceremonies and reading of passages during the vigil.⁴⁶

From the beginning, the early Church people practiced interment, rather than cremation. It is believed that this practice caused their pagan persecutors to burn them so as to preclude their belief in the resurrection

In the Catholic Church, Christian burial has always been considered an ecclesiastical rite, and as such, it has come down substantially unchanged through the centuries. It consisted of three basic parts: (1) the escorting of the body to the church or cemetery; (2) religious rites at the house, the church and the cemetery; and (3) burial in the ground set aside by the

⁴⁵Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., "A Treatise on the Soul," The Ante-Nicene Fathers (8 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), Vol. III, Chap LI, p. 228.

⁴⁶"Burial, Early Christian," The New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967, Vol 2, p. 895.

authority of the bishop for the interment of the faithful.⁴⁷

Other customs that developed through the years was the practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper or Holy Eucharist at the grave site; the saying of Mass--which developed into the Requiem Mass; ringing of church bells; burying the dead with their head toward the East; and the lighting of torches. The lighting of torches came many years later and was forbidden for some time because of its pagan origin.⁴⁸ The torch-burning custom is still very prevalent to this day as evidenced by John F. Kennedy's grave.

Writings and prayers of the early Church Fathers tended to emphasize the dead.

The Reformation and Martin Luther's teachings brought a different concept to the Protestant world. It was at this time that funeral services began to be more for the living than the dead. Martin Luther said, "I believe in Christ who rose from the dead. His resurrection is mine." However, the Lutheran Church still followed the same general guidelines set by the Roman Catholic Church of escorting the body to the burial place, holding rites at the house or church, and burying in sanctified ground.⁴⁹

Medieval Confusion

It was during the Middle Ages that confusion and strange customs began to be more and more followed by the people and the churches. This can be illustrated no better than to cite a case in point--that of "Lady

⁴⁷"Burial, Early Christian," The New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967, Vol. 2, p. 896.

⁴⁸"Burial," The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church, 1965, Vol. 1, p. 343.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 343.

Odelina" of the Thirteenth Century:

The moment breath quitted the noble dame's body, the servants ran furiously through the castle, emptying every vessel of water lest the departing soul should be drowned therein. The dead body was also watched carefully until burial, lest the devil should replace it in its coffin with a black cat, and likewise lest a dog or cat should run over the coffin and change the corpse into a vampire [More reasons for a wake?]. . . Next the body was carefully embalmed. The heart was removed, to be buried at a nunnery whereof Lady Odelina had been the patroness. A waxen death mask was made of the face, and the body was laid out on a handsome bed with black hangings. A temporary altar was set up in the apartment that Masses might be said . . . while round the bed blazed two or three scores of tall candles. The interment took place in the abbey church . . . They laid upon the Lady Odelina's breast a silver cross engraved with the words of absolution; and in the heavy stone casket also were buried four small earthen pots, each of which had contained some of the incense burned during the funeral ceremony.⁵⁰

The fate of the sinner was a more terrifying ordeal yet! They were not allowed burial and their bodies were left on the open ground to be torn by the dogs and crows. Even if he were to repent at the last minute, to be restored to the graces of religion, his body was frequently burned, while laden with iron or brazen fetters. This further mortified the body after death so as to abate the fires in purgatory most certainly awaiting all but the most perfect saints who could have direct access to heaven.⁵¹

Throughout history we can easily see and pinpoint many of the abuses, misunderstandings, beliefs and practices of the ancients. It comes as quite a shock and surprise to find many of these same practices and ideas still being employed today--only dressed up (sometimes) in more modern terminology and made more "convenient" in a mechanized age.

⁵⁰William S. Davis, Life in the Middle Ages (4 vols.; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1923), pp. 284-285.

⁵¹Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

Modern Burial --A Curious Blend

Little has changed since ancient times. Commerce, culture and technical knowledge flourish--but men still die! The last concern still is concentrated in how to take care of the man who dies.

Egypt is still first, but modern man--especially the American--strives hard for second in the funerary industry. If time allows and "progress" continues, we might even catch up!

Much has been written criticizing the American undertaker for exorbitant practices, but we cannot blame him altogether. The general lack of understanding of death, and the inability of the average person to cope with it, contribute greatly to the barbaric appearance of the modern funeral.¹

Today's practices are markedly similar to the ancient pagan ritual.² The main ideas for funerals and funeral rites, which generally hold true today, were:

1. The pollution or taboo attached to a corpse.
2. Mourning.
3. The continued life of the dead as evidenced in the housing and equipment of the dead, in the furnishing of food for them, and in the orientation and posture assigned to the body.

¹Ernest Harriman, "Are Funerals Barbaric?" McCall's (May, 1956), p. 96.

²Barbara Metz, Red Land, Black Land--The World of the Ancient Egyptian (New York: Coward-McCann, 1966), p. 326.

4. Communion with the dead in a funeral feast and otherwise.
5. Sacrifice for the dead and expiation of their sins.
6. Death witchery.
7. Protection of the dead from ghouls.
8. Fear of ghosts.³

Difficult as it is for the modern "sophisticate" to admit it, many of these fears and beliefs are still very real today. The "Wake" is a prime example.

The Wake

The word "wake" is of Anglo-Saxon origin meaning "to watch" the dead person in a ritualistic vigil before burial. Older than Christianity, the custom was first practiced by the ancient Celts. Strictly religious in nature and observed in the home or in the church, it was greatly influenced by the monastic orders of the Roman Catholic Church, who instituted candles and prayers for the dead during the wake.⁴

True enough, one very valid reason for the Wake's origin was to be certain the corpse was in fact really dead! Wakes soon degenerated into fairs and drunken revelry. Other fears crept in that the devil would exchange the body for a black cat, or it might be turned into a vampire. The custom of lighting candles all around the body was to ward off the

³"Funeral Rites," The Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th Ed., Vol. ii, p. 329.

⁴"Burial, Early Christian," The New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1966, p. 895.

demons who might assault the dead person.⁵ Even the word "funeral" has been derived from the Latin "funus" meaning "torch." It was believed that torches and lights at a funeral could guide the departed soul to its eternal abode. Lamps, it was considered, aided the dead to find their way through darkness.⁶

With the Reformation, the custom eventually died out in England, but has been kept alive principally through the Irish as a monument to the ancient pagan and primitive custom of the funeral feast.⁷

Many still "wake" their dead but don't know why. It is just done as "their custom" dating back to antiquity. Their fears and superstitions from the past prove a fertile ground for the enterprising undertaker!

The Early American

The undertaker has not always enjoyed such a going business, however. Simplicity to the point of starkness was the hallmark of many early inhabitants of the U. S. Laying out of the dead by friends, the plain pine box and the bearing of the coffin to the grave by the family marked the earlier American funeral.

The Puritans were greatly criticized for their total lack of any kind of formal burial service.⁸ Even they were susceptible to the tradition of the funeral feast!

⁵"Funeral Rites," The Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th ed., Vol. ii, p. 332.

⁶R. Brasch, How Did It Begin? (New York: David McKay Co., Inc., 1966), p. 60.

⁷"Funeral Rites," The Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th ed., Vol. ii, p. 331.

⁸John A. Blunt, ed., "Burial of the Dead," Dictionary of Doctrinal and Historical Theology (London, Oxford, and Cambridge: Rivington's, 1871), p. 95.

Since Colonial times this custom has been the most costly and lively occasion connected with funerals. Irish wakes were not the only legendary drinking bouts. Almost every nationality that migrated to America practiced some version of the feast. It reached the point where family honor came to depend upon a good spread of plenty to eat and drink after a funeral.⁹

This pseudo-gaiety continued to influence the American funeral through the 1800's. The dead were buried in church lots or private plots, guests came from all around, much food and drink was consumed, and the extravagant customs of the past soon became an integral part of "the American Way of Death!"¹⁰

In all of this, there was one person directly involved who faced a paradox. He profited and suffered at the same time. He was the undertaker who prepared the dead, but had been traditionally looked down upon. He occupied a lower social position, representing "in person" the fears, loathings, resentments and rebellions the ordinary person held for death.

He was not originally called an "undertaker" until about 1850 because the original "undertaker" was usually engaged in some other occupation: carpentry, cabinetmaking, upholstering. As the business grew and became more specialized, "undertaking" became more of a specialty than a sideline business.

⁹Ruth Mulvey Harmer, The High Cost of Dying (New York: Collier Books, 1963), pp. 71-73.

¹⁰Ishbel Ross, Taste in America (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1967), p. 40.

The Undertaker Emerges

The Civil War marked the true beginning of the American undertaker's business. Along with the other vices, abuses and frauds perpetrated during the war, the undertaker came in for his share.

Seeing an opportunity to turn the dead as well as the living to a profit, hundreds in the funeral trades stormed the capital. Coffin makers, cemetery owners, surgeons and specialists plying the new 'art' of embalming, railroad lobbyists, undertakers--all demanded to know what could be more patriotic, what could do more for troop morale and national morale than shipping the bodies of the dead soldiers back home for burial . . . Surely the government could see to it that the right thing was done. The government did, thereby helping to set the pattern for the American funeral with all its ostentation and commercialism.¹¹

From this point developed the industry that was to emerge from the socially ostracized to a point of "almost respectability." Almost, because rare is any man--modern or ancient--who is really comfortable around the dead or those whose business is to care for the dead!

As the funeral business grew and others saw the profit in it, more "hopefuls" crowded into the obviously limited industry. Today, the funeral industry is composed of many small firms and only a very few large ones. About 10 per cent of the industry's firms receive nearly 40 per cent of total revenue in the industry.¹² This means the average establishment must make a "hearty" profit on each "case" or go under!

¹¹Ruth Mulvey Harmer, The High Cost of Dying (New York: Collier Books, 1963), p. 79.

¹²Roger D. Blackwell, "Price Levels of Funerals: An Analysis of the Effects of Entry Regulation in a Differentiated Oligopoly," (Unpublished PhD. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1966), p. 1.

The Profit Margin

The average person will think of the funeral as a service to the deceased but this is a misleading concept. One purpose is to dispose of the dead, but the second more important purpose is for the living. Funerals are a service to those yet alive and decisions concerning a funeral should be made with this in mind but seldom are because of the concentration on the dead and the empirical concerns of, "Did he have a nice burial?" or "Did we get a nice casket?"

Since the undertaker was originally a builder of caskets, the price charged was historically for the coffin. This practice has been retained even though the product has become one of "service" rather than merchandise. Hence, the funeral is purchased and paid for as a unit as though it were the price of the casket.¹³ The problem is that you are not free to choose which "services" you might prefer! The price of this "service" and the quality of casket are affected by such variables as social class, income level, age, ethnic membership and religion.

A brief example of the mean price of funerals in the United States is: 1948--\$396.00; 1954--\$502.00; 1958--\$616.00; and 1963--\$716.00.¹⁴ That is an increase of 188 per cent in 15 years. Today's

¹³Roger D. Blackwell, "Price Levels of Funerals: An Analysis of the Effects of Entry Regulation in a Differentiated Oligopoly," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1966), p. 10

¹⁴Ibid., p. 11.

price would run closer to \$1,200.00 to \$1,500.00 per funeral!

The cost of the American funeral is the third largest expenditure, after a house and a car, of the American family.¹⁵ Surveys indicate that the funeral cost consumes from 15 to 23 per cent of the estate of the dead.¹⁶ Obviously, this is one area in which the consumer is at the mercy of the vendor! It is a demand product for which there is no refund and no way of knowing if the services really do what they are supposed to do!

There is no real guideline to tell the undertaker what price to charge. He must "play it by ear." The generally recognized "rule of thumb," however, is to take the cost of the casket and multiply by five or six.¹⁷ Therefore, if the undertaker pays \$100.00 for a casket, he will plan to charge at least \$500.00 - \$600.00 or more, if the traffic will bear it--and there are enough insurance policies to pay. This is to take care of his "services."

The Services

As most any funeral director will tell you, he does not just sell a casket, he sells his services. He considers it takes about nine and a half days of labor for every funeral handled, including the time of the employees and the proprietor.

¹⁵Jessica Mitford, The American Way of Death (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), p. 28.

¹⁶Ruth Mulvey Harmer, The High Cost of Dying (New York: Collier Books, 1963), p. 161.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 167.

Other considerations include the use of automobiles, hearses, a building (including a chapel and other rooms which require building maintenance), insurance, taxes, licenses, depreciation, heating in the winter, cooling in the summer, light and water.

They figure it would take one man forty-two hours to complete a funeral, and list "65 items of service."¹⁸ Included in this long list of "service" are some very interesting items! "Securing statistical data" will mean completing the death certificate and finding out how much insurance was left by the deceased. "The arrangements conference" means the conference in which the sale of the funeral is made to the survivors. "Keeping of records" will probably mean his own process of bookkeeping.

These services come entirely in one price structure--the price placed upon the casket in the display room. Obviously the undertaker does not consider that all the client gets is the casket. The casket only represents all the other, which can be summed up as the "professional services" of the mortuary establishment. Not the least of these services is the embalming--better referred to as the "embalming and restorative art" by the trade.

The Embalming Process

Most undertakers will inform you that embalming is required by law. Not only that, but it is necessary for purposes of sanitation and

¹⁸Jessica Mitford, The American Way of Death (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), p. 65.

health. They also say it prevents "live burials."

These are misleading statements. A quick check will amply demonstrate there are no state laws requiring embalming, with exceptions for the body which is to be transported by common carrier and not buried for several days. Although there may be some local ordinances that have been fostered by the funeral directors, the only laws they might be referring to would be the "laws" of that particular establishment, or the "laws" of the local cemetery.

As for sanitation and health, Dr. I. M. Feinberg, an instructor at the Worsham College of Mortuary Science, answers,

Sanitation is probably the farthest thing from the mind of the modern embalmer. We must realize that the motives for embalming at the present are economic and sentimental, with a slight religious overtone.¹⁹

Pathologists, who work daily with dead bodies, fully realize there is much less danger of contracting disease from a dead person than a live one because the dead do not excrete, inhale, exhale or perspire. Of course, the person who has died of a noncommunicable illness such as heart disease or cancer presents no health hazard. The spread of communicable disease from cemeteries has been from rodents and from seepage from the graves into the city water supply, particularly a hazard since most graveyards have been situated on hills and other prominent high places!

The solution is better city planning, engineering and sanitation rather than embalming! The organisms which cause disease live in the

¹⁹Jessica Mitford, The American Way of Death (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), p. 82.

organs, the bowels and the blood, and cannot all be killed by the embalming process.²⁰ This is speaking of the modern process.

Chances are the Egyptian method will kill anything!

In the words of a former mortician,

Modern embalming for funeral purposes is little more than the retardation of natural destructive processes for the duration of the "wake" period. If you had any idea of how often the funeral men fret for fear the body will not "keep" until after the funeral, your illusions regarding the duration of the preservation would be shattered.²¹

A body embalmed "to last" would look like tanned shoe leather! But who wants to see a "loved one" like that? Perhaps the Egyptians had good reason for completely covering the mummy with wrappings. The modern "restorative art" involves a refined process of whisking the body off to the preparation room to be sprayed, sliced, pierced, pickled, trussed, trimmed creamed, waxed, painted, rouged, and neatly dressed--transformed from a corpse into a "Beautiful Memory Picture."

To achieve this effect, the embalming should be done as quickly as possible after "somatic" death, even before cellular death has taken place.²² This is no doubt one of the reasons a mortician will proceed to embalm the "deceased" as soon as possible after arrival without even asking the survivors--no matter what kind of casket he might be placed in.

²⁰Jessica Mitford, The American Way of Death (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), p. 83.

²¹Coriolis, Death Here is thy Sting (Toronto/Montreal: McClelland & Stewart, Ltd., 1967), p. 29.

²²Jessica Mitford, The American Way of Death (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), p. 70.

At its "best," this must be a grisly task! This is evidenced by the fact that eighty out of one hundred aspirants desert the field within five years.²³

One criticized mortician who is more realistic about his trade states that "any good plumber could learn to embalm in sixty days," and that he could "embalm a human body for 40 cents and an elephant for \$1.50."²⁴

Though the actual costs of materials may be cheap, embalming is the "bread and butter" of the funeral industry. Without it, they could not "display" their clients and make the funeral the fanfare it is today. They tend to abhor any suggestion that would vary from this practice. Throughout the industry there is an accepted axiom that the "closed casket" results in lower-priced goods--hence the elaborate "slumber" rooms and fostering of the "wake" by the industry.

After the moritician has completed his "services," he must hurry the body to the cemetery to be inhumed hopefully before it decomposes.

The Cemetery

It has only been in recent times that the cemetery has become a commercial interest. The cemetery was a church monopoly until the nineteenth century. Concern with the separation of church and state extended itself even to the cemetery. Early American business acumen

²³Coriolis, Death Here is thy Sting (Toronto/Montreal: McClelland & Stewart, Ltd., 1967), p. 44.

²⁴Jessica Mitford, The American Way of Death (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), p. 42.

came to fore and secular cemeteries began to be formed for a profit.²⁵

The desire to possess in death all the things denied in life-- famous neighbors, the best of everything worldly, and a good "religious" send-off--has made profits soar for cemetery operators. Most prominent among these operators has been Hubert Eaton, "builder" of the famous Forest Lawn. He has effectively used the principle of selling: people think they get more when they pay more!

Forest Lawn's unique combination of mortuary services and cemetery have proved most lucrative. For the right price, one can be buried close to a famous movie star who might have paid as much as \$100,000.00 for his own burial plot! The price can easily run into thousands of dollars for a single plot for burial.

Of course, even Abraham bought and paid for a piece of ground to bury his dead, so owning a burial plot is time and Bible honored. The problem is the profiteering of those who are merchants of grief! Purchasing ground for cemetery use is now considered to be a very profitable investment. Churches have also taken a cue and now many use much the same business tactics to insure a profitable burial in the church cemetery.

Prices in these areas fluctuate greatly, but in many places can average \$300.00 to \$400.00 per grave site. To this price may be added the cost of crypts which are also sold by the cemetery. These go for what the market will stand--starting for at least \$1,200.00 in the Los Angeles area.²⁶ The rural areas prove to be much cheaper. The cemetery part of the funeral industry has the same leverage as the mortician--a

²⁵Ruth Mulvey Harmer, The High Cost of Dying (New York: Collier Books, 1963), pp. 119-124.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 130-131.

demand service which is highly emotionally charged!

A grave site should be purchased for the very practical reason of burying the dead--not for who the neighbors are, or the extravaganza, or the emotional impact. These are the reasons for profiteering by "grief merchants" who have the distinct advantage over grief-ridden clients who do not and cannot reason as they might in any other business venture!

The "Other" Charges

The cemetery charge is one of several which are not included by the mortician in the original price of the funeral. The cemetery charges alone could conceivably double the original funeral price, especially if an expensive crypt were purchased. The morticians and cemetery owners now compete for the sale of the vault!

Families who were led to believe their funeral would cost \$300.00, \$800.00 or \$1,500.00 have been astonished to find these "extras" have swelled their bill by hundreds of dollars--far out of keeping with what they had planned and prepared for! These "extras" will include flowers, clothing, clergy and musician's honorarium, transportation costs, flower car, cemetery and vault costs.²⁷

A person would do well to make certain of all the costs before making final arrangements for the funeral services! The final price is always higher than anticipated. The national averages show the mortician's bill will come to only 77 per cent of the total, and that the other 23 per cent comprises these hidden "other" charges.²⁸ This means

²⁷Albert Q. Maisel, "Facts You Should Know About Funerals," Readers Digest (Sept. 1966), p. 82.

a "cheap" \$700.00 funeral will invariably cost \$1,000.00 or more before all the "charges" are met.

The Sales Pitch

Few people realize the extent of sales preparation in the funeral industry. The design and material in the coffins, the layout of the building, the terminology used all have a bearing in the sale of a funeral.

The word "death" is to be avoided as much as possible. He didn't die, he "expired," or "passed away." The death certificate is to be referred to as the "vital statistics form." The body is not "hailed," but "transferred" or "removed," and it is done in a "service car," not a "body car." The grave is "opened" and "closed," not dug and filled, and the graveyard or cemetery is now a "memorial park." Cost of the casket is referred to as "amount of investment in the service."²⁹

But whoever stops to realize the man who buys the \$400.00 funeral gets the same "service" as the man who buys a \$2,000.00 funeral? The very same attention must be paid to each dead person--the only difference being a fancier-looking coffin and more profit for the undertaker!

The display rooms and the caskets in them are deliberately arranged for the best psychological advantage. There are generally four price ranges. The lower-priced caskets (under \$600.00) are designed to look just that--low! The next price range (\$600.00-\$700.00) is a little better, but still cheap-looking in order not to sell. These are sometimes deliberately

²⁸Albert Q. Maisel, "Facts You Should Know About Funerals," Readers Digest (Sept. 1966), p. 85.

²⁹Jessica Mitford, The American Way of Death (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), p. 78.

damaged in some way to sell a higher-priced funeral. The third category (\$700.00-\$900.00) is very nice and "pushed;" the fourth line (above \$900.00), as one director said, "gives satisfaction."³⁰

These are then strategically placed to assure the sale of one of the "better" caskets and the price tags usually read \$587.00, \$767.00, \$897.00, etc.--in odd figures to make it more difficult for the buyer to reason properly. The undertaker is in control and very likely will make a good sale.

He also has the advantage of insurance. He knows that: the Veterans, Social Security, life insurance, hospital insurance, accident policies, unions and fraternal orders all make some compensation for death. Once he has asked a few leading questions, he can give an "educated guess" within a few dollars of what he feels the survivor can easily "afford" to part with! It is an interesting fact to note that almost all funerals usually cost "a little more" than the value of the insurance benefits!

But he is not without his problems! Here are a few of his difficulties:

Flowers: a necessary evil. Arranging them, tending them, and disposing of them after the funeral requires considerable work, but they are considered to be an integral part of the 'memory picture,' and grumbling is done privately.

Closed Caskets: disturbing. Although there are many instances when he would prefer a closed casket to long hours spent at restoration, the funeral director is ever-mindful of warnings of the trade press that they result in the sale of lower-priced goods.

³⁰Coriolis, Death Here is thy Sting (Toronto/Montreal: McClelland & Stewart, Ltd., 1967), pp. 93-95.

Clergymen: disdain. Their voices are not recognized as of consequence in the arrangement of funerals. Any efforts of a clergyman to influence a family regarding anything from expenditure to service time are regarded as interference.

Memorial Societies: disgust. Few funeral men have had occasion to deal with a memorial society, but their opinions have been preformulated by the trade press, which terms memorial society members 'burial beatniks.'

Criticism: contempt. He is convinced that everyone is out of step but him.³¹

Only in the last two decades have there been many real voices to speak out against the funeral industry, and they have yet to be very effective. The minister, the one who should be best able to advise and help in such a time of need, has been surprisingly ineffective!

The Clergy

The minister should be able to advise, but experience in the mortuary field demonstrates the minister to be usually very naive about prices, comparative quality or pricing procedures. Perhaps it is because they feel their responsibility is more in the "spiritual" end, but the record indicates that many are not willing to become involved in the business transaction at all! A small minority have been known to accompany the survivors into the selection room and suggest a cheaper selection--only to suggest further that the "savings" be donated to the church!³²

It is traditional that the minister is responsible only for the message and eulogy at the funeral. The funeral director takes care of all else--including, in many cases, paying the minister!

³¹Coriolis, Death Here is thy Sting (Toronto/Montreal: McClelland & Stewart, Ltd., 1967), p. 49.

³²Ibid., pp. 76-77.

The growth of the American funeral industry and its specialization has relegated the average minister to a peculiarly impotent position regarding disposal of the dead. He is no longer sought out for counsel in how to dispose of the dead. In fact, he is many times contacted by the undertaker rather than the family!

Even if the minister should be so bold as to accompany the family to the mortuary, he is likely to be rendered ineffective by the planned diversion of the funeral director such as the following:

Ministers seem to be getting into the act more and more, and, in general, becoming more and more inimical to us . . . We make a point of emphasizing, during our pre-selection period, the idea that making the selection is something that only the family can do. . . We emphasize this very strongly, particularly if there is a minister around. Also, we make a point to think up something to talk about, if the minister comes with the family. . . such as the new addition to the church property, their parking problem, the local Boys' Club in which they are interested, their golf game, politics . . . or anything else that will keep them occupied and happy while the family goes ahead with the selection.³³

He is regarded by the funeral director as a "necessary evil," because people require ritual and ceremony and the minister is the one who supplies the dignity and aplomb for the ritual of funerals!

Even atheists, who deny God and religion, agree that "rituals concerned with death are a form of art and . . . can serve as a healthy release and purge of tension."³⁴ Among those who do not profess a "Christian faith," many still desire a minister to perform their funeral. In these instances a funeral is planned and a minister is secured, even though there is no connection between the deceased and the minister's

³³Jessica Mitford, The American Way of Death (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), pp. 243-244.

³⁴"Last Rites for Atheists," Time (Nov. 22, 1954), p. 65.

faith.³⁵

Recently, a survey was taken from among a representative group of Protestant ministers who were asked to define what a funeral meant to them. They collectively arrived at seven basic points:

1. The funeral is a worship service which bears witness to the Christian hope in the resurrection.
2. The funeral is a worship service in which God is praised and thanked for the blessings of life.
3. The funeral is a gathering of concerned community of friends, neighbors, and family to manifest shared sorrow.
4. The funeral is a worship service in which God's gracious help is sought in a time of crisis.
5. The funeral is a means of commemorating the life of one who has been known and loved.
6. The funeral is a service to lend a fitting conclusion to life.
7. The funeral is a ceremonial means for disposing of a dead body with dignity and propriety.³⁶

Unfortunately, the entire survey revealed very little about how the minister should be effective in assisting the family with those trying funeral arrangements in their time of real need!

Because of secularization in the United States, (though some ritual is felt needed), all funerals are obviously not "Christian" in content. Funerals have been classed as three types: (1) religious--essentially oriented in a religious community; (2) conventional--same as religious, except not by religious people, those who are not "involved" in a "faith" but wish a ritualistic religious funeral; and (3) humanist--

³⁵Paul E. Irion, The Funeral: Vestige or Value? (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 55.

³⁶Ibid., p. 111.

nontheistic ritual which denies the religious community and accepts the atheistic approach that death is the final end of the individual conscious personality.³⁷

Although the actual service may vary according to beliefs, cremation is now beginning to show prominence in the United States--especially with the advent of memorial societies.

Cremation

History is replete with examples of burning the dead, or cremation as it is known today. Frowned upon by the Catholics and some branches of the Jewish faith, cremation is now becoming more popular in the United States and England and is sanctioned by the majority religions.

The advocates of cremation laud the idea because of sanitation, neatness, simplicity and space conservation. Opposition comes mainly because it seems to be "against the laws of nature," viz., natural decomposition as opposed to rapid dissolution by fire.

Most often associated with the cremation (though not a necessity) is the memorial service rather than having a conventional funeral service with the body present.

The Memorial Service

The memorial service is often recommended as more spiritual than the funeral, firstly because of the de-emphasis on the body. Secondly, it is less emotional than the funeral. Thirdly, the service is focused more

³⁷Paul E. Irion, The Funeral: Vestige or Value? (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 129.

clearly on life than death--especially with the body absent. Other reasons are convenience and economy.³⁸

No public viewing is held, and the body is either buried by the undertaker in a simple casket or cremated.

Arguments against it are: (1) not enough "therapeutic emotion" involved as a psychological release, and (2) substitution of intellectualism for emotionalism--leaving no proper balance between the two.

Others claim it is an "avoidance" pattern that would tend to eliminate death and hide from the real issue of the finality of this physical life. They feel this conscious or unconscious evasion of the reality of death does not serve the same function as a funeral.

However, the popularity of the memorial service continues to rise in the more liberal communities. This is no doubt in part due to the adverse publicity of the funeral industry and the personal anguish suffered by many at the grotesque exhibitions carried out under the guise of the modern day funeral!

The Lack of True Dignity

The unfortunate pagantry and secular materialism displayed in today's funeral is an indignity!

To go through the nightmarish embalming procedure--sliced, sewn, pierced, painted and "arranged"--is an indignity!

To be admired, evaluated, ogled and fussed over with exclamations of, "How nice he looked!" or "What a good job they did with him!" is truly

³⁸Paul E. Irion, The Funeral: Vestige or Value? (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 212.

an indignity, a shame and a mockery!

Only for those who will think rationally and make personal decisions and plans with balanced foresight can it be changed from the bizarre to the dignity a man should have in death!

CHAPTER V

What Should a Christian Do?

"DOWNRIGHT PAGAN" is the term used by Edgar S. Brown, Jr., director of worship for the United Lutheran Church, to describe many modern funerals!¹

Other church representatives are equally as vociferous in denouncing today's trend of burial--but these practices continue! The objections are against the secular ostentation with which "the deceased" is treated. The elaborate preparations, long and senseless "wakes," viewing of the body, materialistic display and heedless expenses are causing more than causal concern in many religious communities.

Though it is seldom done, the first recommendation by church bodies is to notify the local pastor of a death. He should then be responsible to assist the family in their time of need.

Ministers' Responsibilities

It has long been recognized as one of the prime functions of the minister to help in time of death. The ancient Waldenses made specific note of this:

¹"Holds Funerals as Pagan" The Christian Century (June 13, 1956), p. 717.

And whereas, in former times, it hath been the custom to cause the disconsolate widow to spend much money on singers and ringers, and on persons who eat and drink, while she weeps and fasts, wronging her fatherless children; it is our duty, from motives of compassion, to the end that one loss be not added to another, to aid them with our counsel and our goods, according to the ability which God hath bestowed on us, taking care that the children be well instructed, that they may labor to maintain themselves, as God hath ordained, and live like Christians.²

Contrary to the modern conception of the minister "staying out" of the "physical" needs of a death-stricken family, those ministers felt a duty, a compassion, a responsibility to do something to relieve the burden of the widow!

Times have not changed so much, after all. Great amounts of money are still being squandered needlessly on "singers, ringers, eating and drinking!" How often does a minister see this happen today, feel personally appalled, but does nothing about it, because he feels it might be "out of place" for him to speak up? Without realizing it, Mr. Brown echoed the very wording of the Waldenses by stating, "Every Christian has a responsibility to live his faith. Funerals are a good place to begin."³

But records indicate the average minister is ill-prepared to be of real help in these matters and is relegated to a "simple flunky" who says a few ritualistic words at the funeral service!

A responsible minister will make it his business to know the facts and be fully prepared to give wise counsel to the survivors on both

²Joseph Milner, History of the Church of Christ (3 vols.; Boston: Ferrand, Mallory & Co., 1809), Vol iii. p. 447.

³"Holds Funerals as Pagan" The Christian Century (June 13, 1956), p. 717.

spiritual and physical matters of death and burial so that his charges may "live like Christians!"

The Christian's Responsibility

To "live like a Christian" in a time like this, the Christian must do at least two things: (1) .He must thoroughly know, understand, believe and have faith in what the Bible plainly teaches about death and the resurrections; and (2) he must be practical, realistic and concerned with the living even during the crisis time of grief and mourning.

The Church and the ministry should be responsible to explain the Bible teachings and also give simple guidelines in practicality in times of crisis. A great deal has been written on the subject in the last decade. Ruth Mulvey Harmer does a creditable job in her book, The High Cost of Dying. She quotes some very practical and helpful suggestions:

1. When death comes, call your minister. Look to him for counseling not only regarding spiritual matters, but in connection with some of the practical details of the funeral.
2. Think seriously of holding the funeral service in the church. There is no rental or clergy fee for church members.
3. Costly caskets and expensive floral displays are not necessary for the expression of sorrow and affection. Gifts to medical research, libraries, charitable and educational organizations, and the church make significant and lasting memorials.
4. In order to keep the funeral as spirit-centered as possible, consider: (1) having the casket closed before the service begins or (2) having a private burial and cremation followed by a memorial service in a church.

5. If there is a graveside service, consider keeping it as simple and private as possible, perhaps having only intimate friends and members of the family present.⁴

Although these must be considered strict recommendations by undertakers and other more "liberal"-minded people, they are liberal compared to the strict simplicity of Bible times. Those who adhere to the Bible example would tend to avoid cremation, not because they think they could not be resurrected if burned, but because they seek to follow the example of the Bible--which shows burning as a punishment for criminals and those who have lost eternal life in the "lake of fire."

The entire burial procedure should be kept as simple as possible. The deceased should be buried as quickly as practical, considering family problems and needs. The funeral should be brief and simple with a reasonably inexpensive closed casket and preferably a graveside service. The indignities of embalming can be negated in this way, if desired.

To be avoided, if possible, are the long, arduous and wearying "funeral procession;" the exhausting and pagan-influenced "wake;" and the expensive and needless "feast" afterward which makes a severe drain on the family's already-damaged reserves.

An alternate suggestion, the memorial service, is sometimes helpful, but this is relatively new and could be offensive to relatives if they did not fully understand.

⁴Ruth Mulvey Harmer, The High Cost of Dying (New York: Collier Books, 1963), pp. 150-151.

Most people do not wish to think about death nor discuss it, until too late, and harsh reality is upon them without warning! Like Abraham, the Christian should think and plan in advance for the inevitability of death.

Advance Practicality

Confusion reigns supreme at the death of the unprepared! Yet, a few simple precautionary measures could avoid a great deal. There are certain arrangements every family should make. The first important step is to have or acquire a safe place to keep all valuable papers-- preferably a bank safety deposit box.

A safety deposit box can be obtained from \$5.00 to \$20.00 per year, depending on the size box needed. The bank usually supplies a handy listing of all important papers which should be kept in the box. Our modern technical society demands records unheard of and unneeded in the past.

Regardless of age, an adult with a family should have a will. Many would be shocked to find that state laws vary a great deal and very rarely allow the estate to be divided as they might wish. The solution is a concise and well-planned will. This should be properly made out and kept in the safety deposit box.

Other items should be checked and also included in the box. A great deal is lost each year by survivors who are not familiar with benefits available through various sources. For example: Veterans are eligible for a \$250.00 burial payment, military burial in a national cemetery

and a free grave marker; Social Security makes a burial payment * ranging from \$120 to \$255. There are death benefits in many accident and hospital policies. Unions, fraternal orders and some employers also have similar benefits available. In addition, many fatalities are covered under state workmen's compensation laws or other insurance policies.

The funeral director is familiar with most of these, but he will investigate primarily to find out how much he can charge for his services. He should not have this knowledge as a bargaining point in his favor! That is like asking a car dealer how much he will sell the car for, and he gains access to your bank account and requests the amount he knows you have available. It is an unfair advantage! The wise person keeps that advantage for himself.

An up-to-date record of personal and business finances is also wise to include--mortgages, debts, payments--those items which would quickly tell a widow where she stands and avoid as much confusion as possible. One more advantage to include in the safety deposit box is information concerning a memorial society.

The Memorial Society

Because of the unfair advantages and flagrant practices of the funeral industry, societies have been formed to assist the average individual in his struggle against the high cost of death. Principally, a memorial society is a voluntary group of people who have joined together to obtain dignity, simplicity and economy in funeral arrangements through

advance planning. It gives the advantage of collective bargaining and where to obtain the desired services at moderate cost.

It is not like joining a "union" or politically-oriented club or organization. It is simply an organization designed for the mutual benefit of its members in funeral arrangements.

There is a nominal lifetime fee of \$15.00 which makes these services available. Information can be obtained through the Yellow Pages or from the:

Continental Association of
Funeral and Memorial Societies
59 East Van Buren Street
Chicago, Illinois 60605

Generally, these societies encourage cremation but are concerned about a simple burial as well. This simple burial can be obtained at a much reduced price through the society. A sampling of the latest costs through the society showed the traditional funeral to be from \$400.00 to \$500.00 (maximum), and a "simplified" traditional funeral to be from \$250.00 to \$350.00.⁵ These costs are exclusive of cemetery costs which must be arranged individually.

In addition to price advantages, the society has prepared very helpful and instructive material to assist at the time of death. The memorial society is a distinct advantage in our age of commercialism and extravagance in the funeral industry!

The Final Step

No one desires or anticipates death! It is an enemy, the last

⁵Jennifer Schroeder, Secretary, Chicago Memorial Society, personal interview, May 12, 1970.

enemy to be destroyed in God's plan of salvation!⁶ But it is to be destroyed, and the Christian anticipates the resurrection from the dead. To a world confused, unsure and frightened about death, the Christian must set the true example and guideline of hope!

⁶1 Corinthians 15:24-26.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- America, Editorial, "How Dearly Beloved," Oct. 29 1966.
- "Automotive Mourning," Time. Apr. 5, 1968. p. 61.
- Baeck, Leo. The Essence of Judaism. New York: Schocken Books, 1948.
- Black, Roger D. "Price Levels of Funerals: An Analysis of the Effects of Entry Regulation in a Differentiated Oligopoly." Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Northwestern University. 1966.
- Blunt, John Henry. ed. "Burial of the Dead." Dictionary of Doctrinal and Historical Thanatology. London, Oxford & Cambridge: Rivington, 1871.
- Brasch, R. How Did It Begin? New York: David McKay Co., Inc., 1966.
- Budge, E. A. Wallis. The Book of the Dead. New Hyde Park, N. Y.: University Books, 1960.
- "Burial." The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church. 1965. Vol. I.
- "Burial," The Jewish Encyclopedia. 1946. Vol. III.
- "Burial, Early Christian." The New Catholic Encyclopedia. 1967. Vol. 2.
- Clark, Graham. Archaeology and Society. New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1960.
- Cohen, A. ed. Ecclesiastes, The Five Megilloth, The Soncino Books of the Bible. London: The Soncino Press, Ltd., 1961.
- Coriolis, Death Here is thy Sting. Toronto/Montreal: McClelland and Stewart, Ltd., 1967.
- Davis, William S. Life in the Middle Ages. 4 vols. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1923.
- Dewart, Leslie. "The Fact of Death." Commonweal. Nov. 14, 1969.

- "Disposal of the Dead." Encyclopedia Britannica. 1966. Vol. 7.
- Durant, Will. Caesar and Christ. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944.
- Durant, Will. Life of Greece. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1938.
- "Ethical Guidelines for Organ Transplantation." Journal of the American Medical Association, (Aug. 5, 1968), pp. 341-42.
- Ettinger, Robert C. W. The Prospect of Immortality. New York, N. Y.: Macfadden-Bartell Corp., 1969.
- Freud, Sigmund. "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death." (1915) Collected Papers. New York: Basic Books, 1959. Vol. IV.
- "Funeral Rites." Encyclopedia Britannica. 11th ed. Vol. ii.
- Haber, David. "Watching the Sunset in 4,000 A.D." The Prospect of Immortality. (Preface).
- Harmer, Ruth Mulvey. The High Cost of Dying. New York: Collier Books, 1963.
- Harriman, Ernest. "Are Funerals Barbaric?" McCall's, May, 1956, p. 96.
- Hastings, James. ed. "Burial." A Dictionary of the Bible. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898.
- Heine, Edward H. Personal letter.
- Herter, Frederic P. "The Right to Die in Dignity." Archives of the Foundation of Thanatology, Vol. I Number 3 (Oct. 1969), pp. 93-94.
- Hislop, Alexander. The Two Babylons. New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1959.
- "Holds Funerals As Pagan." The Christian Century. June 13, 1956.
- Irion, Paul E. The Funeral: Vestige or Value? Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966.
- Johnson, Edward D. A History of the Art and Science of Embalming. New York: Reprint, Casket and Sunnyside. New York.
- Josephus. Against Apion. Book II. Sec. 27.
- Keller, Werner. The Bible as History. New York: William Morrow and Co., 1958.
- LaFay, Howard. "The Vikings." National Geographic. Apr. 1970.

- Lasa, William A. "Death, Customs and Rites." Collins Encyclopedia. Vol. 7. 1967.
- "Last Rites for Atheists." Time. Nov. 22, 1954, p. 65.
- Maisel, Albert A. "Facts You Should Know About Funerals." Readers Digest, (Sept. 1966), pp. 82-85.
- Metz, Barbara. Red Land, Black Land--The World of the Ancient Egyptian. New York: Coward-McCann, 1966.
- Milner, Joseph. History of the Church of Christ. 3 vols. Vol. iii. Boston: Ferrand, Mallory & Co., 1809.
- Mitford, Jessica. The American Way of Death. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963.
- Rawlinson, George. The History of Herodotus. 4 vols. Vol. ii. New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1880.
- Rawlinson, George. The Seven Great Monarchs of The Ancient Eastern World. 3 vols. Vol. ii.
- Roberts, Alexander. "Constitutions of the Holy Apostles." The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Edited by James Donaldson, 8 vols. Vol. VII. Book VI. Sec. 6. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926.
- Rollin, Charles. The Ancient History of the Egyptians, Carthaginians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes and Persians, Macedonians and Grecians. 8 vols. Vol. ii. Philadelphia: W. W. Woodward, Robert Desilver, Thomas Desilver, McCarthy and Davis, and Uriah Hunt, 1825.
- Ross, Ishbel. Taste in America. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1967.
- Rosuer, Fred. "The Definition of Death." The Archives of the Foundation of Thanatology. Oct. 1969. Vol. 1. Number 3.
- Schroeder, Jennifer. Secretary, Chicago Memorial Society. Personal interview. May 12, 1970.
- Shea, Terence. "New Seminar Helps Take the Sting Out of Death." The National Observer. Jan 5, 1970.
- Sudnow, David. "The Legistics of Dying." Esquire, Aug. 1967, p. 102.
- The Bible.

Thorwald, Jergen. Science and Secrets of Early Medicine. New York:
Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1963.

Wells, H. G. The Outline of History. 2 vols. Vol. I. Garden City,
New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1949.