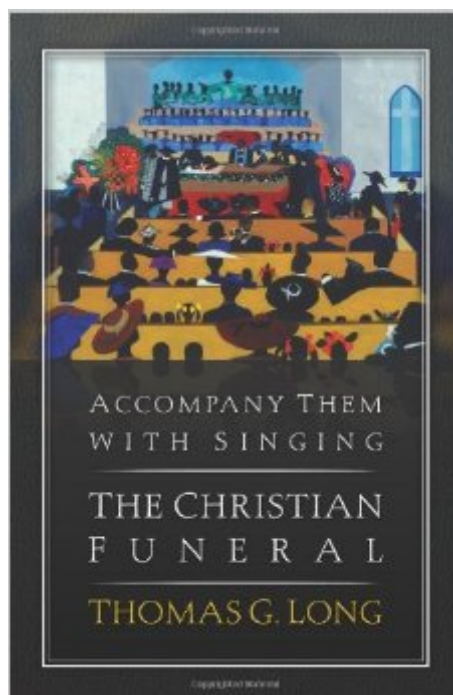


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Accompany Them With Singing--The Christian Funeral



Synopsis

Thomas Long begins this fascinating volume by describing how the Christian funeral developed historically, theologically, and liturgically, and then discusses recent cultural trends in funeral practices, including the rise in both cremations and memorial services. He describes the basic pattern for a funeral service, details options in funeral planning, identifies characteristics of a "good funeral," and provides thoughtful guidance for preaching at a funeral. Long also notes a disturbing trend toward funeral services that seem theologically right and pastorally caring, but actually depart from the primary aims of the Christian funeral. He argues that a new, less-theological and less-satisfying service that focuses on the mourner has begun to erode the Christian view. He contrasts the ancient grand community drama with today's trend toward body-less memorial services that focus primarily on the living and grief management. This is a loss for the church, he argues, and he calls for the church to reclaim the classic metaphor.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Thomas Long has written the quintessential book on the theology of Christians funerals, if not a primer on the theology of Christian dealing with death. Starting with the premise that `Christians do not live and die in the abstract (p15)' Long first examines background of Christian funerals and does so not as a seminarian, or a scientist, but as a liturgist, a pastor, and as a Christian. Throughout the book, the author with his flair for hymnody, tackles with great sensitivity, the issue of death and funerals for the Christians. Often times railing against the Neoplatonism which has long endured in

Christianity, the author draws a line in the sand against those who insist in seeing the body as nothing more than a shell. In doing so, he is forced to deal with the tension found in Scripture of waiting for the resurrection and immediately being with God upon death. His solution is rather unique and convincing. He draws together Christian Tradition with the subject of death by connecting the death of a Saint with the baptism. He has a strong liturgical use for baptism and often times casts the death and the funeral of a passed Christian in this light, and does so without theological issues which surround baptism. Long sees the Funeral of a Christian as the story of the Gospel itself. He acknowledges that for many Americans, death is like pornography in the way in which it is handled (p22), but Long takes it from the back room and brings it into full view in a manner consistent with his desire to see funerals treated as a vital part of the Christian liturgy.

While recognizing that pastors are still doing Christian funerals, Long offers us alternatives which will more richly proclaim the Gospel hope of resurrection. In a pastorally sensitive way, Long compares funerals to theatre. All involved have a role to play, including the deceased. "While it is true that the gospel is proclaimed in the words of a funeral, it is also true that the gospel is proclaimed in the actions of the funeral." Because of this, "Because the funeral is a piece of drama, it is crucial to enact the gospel script, that is, to be sure that it is the Christian narrative being performed at a funeral, not some other story. In this there are four necessary holy elements: A holy person - a sinner of God's own redeeming. A holy place - the church where the good news of Jesus is regularly proclaimed. A holy people - while not all at a funeral may be Christian, all have gathered for a holy purpose. A holy script - the good news of victory of Jesus Christ over the power of death. While the body of the deceased may not always be present, their normal presence helps say that we are traveling companions on the way of Christ. While there are often good reasons for not being in the church building, normally being in the sanctuary helps us proclaim the consistent message of God's victory in Jesus. While the community of faith cannot all be at every funeral, our presence is part of the gathering of the saints on both sides of death. While it is important that an individual has died, who should be honored and remembered, the message of the church is that in Jesus, while death is real, it does not have the final word. The book includes helpful chapters on planning the funeral and preaching at funerals.

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