Disposal: What Do We Do With A Dead Body?¹

Research Article

John Lampard

London, England

Abstract: This article looks at the different ways in which dead human bodies are disposed of in modern society, particularly in Britain, and examines the social, theological, liturgical, and practical issues they raise for the Christian Church. It argues that the churches have failed to reflect theologically on cremation. In particular, it argues that ashes remain part of the body and should be treated with equal respect; the ashes of a Christian should be buried. Finally, it looks at the effect of the COVID pandemic on funeral practices.

Keywords: *Funeral • cremation • burial • pastoral care*

Introduction

Let me begin with two outliers representing extreme attitudes to disposal, between which most current decisions on disposal lie. According to Cicero, the radical thinker Diogenes (ca. 412–323 BC) told his students that when he died, he wanted his body to be thrown over a wall where it could be devoured by wild animals. He would be gone, his body was of no value, and as he was dead it could not be injured when it was torn apart. To Diogenes death was death; the dead body represented nothing and has no cultural or religious significance. Perhaps the modern equivalent is a person who says, ‘when I’ve gone, you can get the local dust-cart to take me away,’ or ‘when I’ve gone, I’ve gone, that’s it. Full stop.’

Contrast this position with the decision of a person who arranges for their body to be carefully prepared and then deep-frozen (cryogenics) in the hope that, at some time in the future, advances in science would enable their body to be reanimated and brought back to meaningful life. In this viewpoint, death is not death and the human body should never be discarded if there is hope that life can at some point continue.

Between these understandings of disposal a whole range of positions fit in, many of which have been shaped by Christian understandings of life beyond death, and others which have clashed with and affected Christian positions. I begin with what has been the most common method of disposal, burial.

Burial

It is not widely realized that until the Christian faith spread through Western Europe, the burning of a corpse on an open fire was the method widely used for the disposal of a dead body. In many countries, including the

* E-mail: johnslampard@googlemail.com

Roman Empire, burial pots or urns containing human ashes have been found, often with a wide variety of objects buried with them, indicating some sense of life beyond death. In contrast to this, the Jewish people traditionally practiced burial, and this approach was adopted by the early Church, both in following its Jewish roots and being counter-cultural in a Greco-Roman world.

The major factor that swung European societies away from cremation to burial was the influence of the Christian Church's theological emphasis on the resurrection of the body. In its simplest form, the argument went that a Christian should try to follow the way of Christ both in life and in death, leaving the body in the best possible position for resurrection with Christ. It should also be added that in practical terms the Church held a monopoly position on the interpretation of death and method of disposal, which was only broken in the nineteenth century.

A second and reinforcing impetus away from cremation came in the Middle Ages, when burning became the ultimate means of punishment for people who were to be obliterated, like witches, common criminals, or heretics. Often the body was disfigured both during dying and after death, and was then burned. The ashes could be scattered so that the person's place was known no more; they represented a non-person not worthy of remembrance, memorial, or memory. Behind this practice of diminishment lay a general belief that in some way the integrity of the body was necessary for the final judgment. Of course, it was recognised that some people died in unfortunate circumstances and left little or no bodily remains. Early theologians such as Augustine recognised that God had the power to re-create a body, but a cremated body, which had had this punishment visited upon it, had symbolically lost the power that body and soul might be reunited.²

The funeral parts of service books from 1662 (and earlier) assume a Christian burial. It was Cranmer who developed the phrase 'earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust' and I have often wondered why it includes 'ashes to ashes.' Of course, the use of ashes is part of the burial and mourning tradition, but it seems as though he puts ashes as a middle part of the disposal process: earth, ashes, and dust. How prescient for a reflection on cremation!

Secular burial sites

Over the years the place of burial has altered, but we live with a false memory of the past if we picture all burials in an idyllic churchyard. Only the well-off could afford such disposal. In the nineteenth century and earlier, disposal was brutal and unpleasant, particularly in an urban context. There are frequent accounts of overflowing church cemeteries, with stinking piles of bodies being buried up to six feet *above* ground level, barely covered with earth. The graveyard opposite Wesley's Chapel, now known as Bunhill Fields, used to be called 'Bone-Hill Fields'.

Overflowing burial grounds in urban areas was one of the reasons that the Church's monopoly on burial was broken; so, a second stage developed in the nineteenth century, disposal in secular cemeteries. These offered space and the opportunity to memorialize the dead in ways the Church would not (and often still does not) allow. Unfortunately, in too many of these commercial cemeteries, the maintenance of older graves could only be funded by new burials. When insufficient burials took place or the cemetery was judged to be full, the money ran out and the cemetery fell into disrepair.

The third stage of places for sites for burial was the development of cemeteries by local authorities, who were assumed to have deeper pockets. For many years, this has proved to be an illusion, with councils unable to afford the upkeep. Some years ago, a vast cemetery was sold by a local authority for £1 in order to get the liability off its accounts.

Natural Burial Sites

A fourth stage in disposal by burial has been the more recent development of Natural, or Woodland Burial Sites.³ These sites are judged to be more environmentally friendly, ecologically sound, and are part of the 'green' movement. According to the Association of Natural Burial Grounds there are about 270 (up from 230 in 2006) sites (in 2018 there were 300 crematoria), so there may soon be more woodland burial sites than there are crematoria, but of course they are not so intensively used.⁴

Natural burial sites can offer advantages over the cramped, regulated pattern of a traditional cemetery. Apart from the fact that they are not consecrated ground, they do not raise any particular issues for Christian burial. However, those considering using them should approach with caution. Many such sites are not inalienable land and could be used for another purpose in future years. The cost of upkeep of such sites, although less than that of a traditional cemetery (assuming it is properly maintained), will depend on money provided by future users. The question of memorialisation is even more complex than it is in a traditional cemetery or churchyard. Each woodland burial ground has its own rules, which vary from site to site. Families may discover too late that on one site they

cannot have the memorialisation, or even a marker that indicates the grave, whilst another may allow stones, as long as they are below grass level.

Reusing old graves

In urban areas, where there is a pressure for space, sometimes old graves are reused. This is allowed at some cemeteries in London but is not widely practiced. The grave must be over 100 years old and there must be no traceable owners. After due diligence, the grave is opened, and if any contents are found they are, 'lifted and lowered' so new coffins can be buried above. Sometimes the old gravestone is used with details of the newly burial engraved on the reverse side. This practice has not received adverse comment by the churches.

Cremation

In modern cremation, a body is reduced to about two kilos of ash and ground, burned bone. The problem facing the churches is what happens next? The standard question asked by a funeral director after a death is, 'Will it be a burial or a cremation?' This is not an appropriate question because burial and cremation are not equal methods of disposal; the outcome of the two routes is not the same. With cremation, there is a remainder available for disposal.

The Church's failure to respond in a Christian way to the modern introduction of cremation is symbolised by the unfortunate mistake which happened in 1874 when one of the very first cremations took place in Germany. The body was lying ready by the brand new Siemens cremator, the mourners were assembled, Herr Siemens himself had his finger on the button to start the fire. All were ready to begin, but the clergyman designated to take the service failed to turn up. Siemens was forced to ask those assembled to bow their heads and say a private prayer.⁵ One might say, the Church got cremation wrong then, and has continued to do so ever since.

The false choice (burial or cremation) is the result of the Church's failure to think theologically about cremation, or its production of 'bad' or inadequate theology. If there is a burial, the whole body enters the earth, there is no remainder, and the traditional Christian pastoral act has been carried out. Our honouring of the dead, our handing down of a two-thousand-year tradition of Christian burial and, difficult as it is, retention of the imagery of resurrection, is diminished if we do not treat the ashes in a distinctive Christian way. The fact that for two thousand years burial and not cremation was the accepted Christian way only emphasizes how powerful were the social forces which in the United Kingdom, and other parts of the traditionally Christian world, have virtually swept burial away. In four generations, the percentage of people cremated in this country moved from 0% to over 70% today. Even more remarkable still is that this social phenomenon has until recently been a silent revolution, hardly commented on, even less explained.

We owe to Peter Jupp a clear understanding of the combined influences that brought about this change. There is only space to headline what these were before looking at the theological issues. Jupp points to the slow but steady lobbying and influence of the Cremation Society; the invention of internal cremators in which bodies could be placed; the sense of pressure for land usage after the First and Second World Wars; the low cost of cremation compared with burial; the support of the medical profession, who favoured a clean and hygienic method of disposal; the support of funeral directors, who could organise more funerals in a day; the funeral, which could be conducted without fuss; the nonreligious need not to use a church; and finally, the lack of opposition from the churches (apart from the Roman Catholic Church).⁶ The Catholic Church only withdrew its prohibition against cremation in 1963.

Quite remarkably, the Church of England refused to accept that cremation was a theological issue at all. This position came about in the years during World War II when there were a series of debates in the Convocation of Canterbury about cremation. These have been well covered by Jupp in his book *From Dust to Ashes*, and I draw from his fascinating account of the debates.⁷ They are important because they raised over a period of years a number of important issues, many of which unfortunately became lost from view in the decisions of later years.

Very importantly, the question was asked, how could the Church demonstrate that cremation was not an alternative to burial? This view was stated against those who said that cremation should be regarded as an acceptable alternative to burial in the ground, just as a burial at sea was a justified alternative. What this view failed to recognise was that the body was disposed of when buried at sea, but that there was a remainder after cremation. This issue was subsumed into the (minority) view that cremation was acceptable only as preparation for burial (and in consecrated ground).

The Church of England finally abdicated all theological responsibility when the bishops stated that 'we attach no theological significance to the practice [of cremation]'.⁸ In fairness, they were trying to defend a wholly permissible view that cremation in no way affected the Church's belief in the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, but their 'hands-off' approach encouraged a laxness in liturgical practice, a 'bad' theological understanding of cremation, and an encouragement for Christians and non-Christians to engage in practices which have had no parallel in two thousand years of Christianity.

The Church of England has begun to claw back a theologically appropriate position from the errors of the 1940s in its two prayer books of 1980 and 2000. The *Companion to Common Worship* continues to amend the errors of the bishops sixty years ago by commenting, 'The burial of ashes is to be preferred over scattering, as it makes the Christian hope in bodily resurrection more coherent if the remains lie in a grave.'⁹ In *Common Worship*, the Burial of the Ashes is contained in a separate section, 'After the Funeral'. It would perhaps have sent out a stronger message of wholeness if it could have been included more noticeably as a part of the funeral, as is the burial of the body, even though it may be separated by a space of time.

What do you do with the ashes?

If burial and cremation are seen by the churches as synonymous, it is hardly surprising that they have been equally lax in their attitude towards the ashes. Until about twenty years ago, 70% of ashes were left with the crematorium for final disposal. They were generally scattered on rose beds by crematorium staff, some of whom invented their own liturgical words as they scattered them. Today about 70% of ashes are collected by relatives. The 'creative' ways in which ashes have been used, or 'abused', depending on one's viewpoint, do not need to be rehearsed here, but none of them have Christian origins.

The first attempt to 'reclaim' the ashes and for the Church to have some control over their disposal was made by the Church in Wales, which has insisted that ashes must be buried (in consecrated ground).¹⁰

In 2016, the Catholic Church issued *Ad resurgendum cum Christo* (*To Rise with Christ*), setting out a positive Christian viewpoint in relation to ashes. The main argument of the document is that the ashes of a deceased person should be treated with the same dignity and respect as a body. The document does not permit the scattering of ashes on land or in the sea. It forbids the retaining of ashes in a domestic residence or preserving ashes in some form of memento or jewellery, all of which are popular secular practices. In addition, it does not permit the division of ashes among family members. The document says somewhat hopefully, 'The practice of burying the dead in cemeteries or other sacred places encourages family members and the whole Christian community to pray for and remember the dead.'¹¹ No doubt many people would say that having a relation's ashes in an urn on the fireplace would be a more immediate way of remembering them. The document is well summarized by John Deehan,¹² who expresses a concern that many people will not have given any thought to the theological and practical issues and warns that this instruction from Rome could be seen as an infringement of their right to choose.

Of course, this instruction, which may or may not be followed by Catholics and their priests, does not apply to other Christians, but I would argue that it is a necessary and valuable corrective for all Christians. If, as is argued, cremation is an act of preparation of a body for final disposal, the resultant ashes should be treated with dignity and respect.

Ad resurgendum cum Christo offers an important corrective to the lax liturgical and theological practices of the Christian Churches, but it is doubtful if it will be sufficiently powerful to stem the tide of secular practices, even among committed Christians.

Direct Funerals

In recent years, a new funeral practice has developed: that of the 'direct funeral' (although a number of different titles are used). At its most basic, a customer informs a funeral director, by email, phone or on the Internet, that someone has died. The funeral director collects the body, arranges for it to be cremated, and, if requested, hands or posts the ashes to the client. There is no need for any personal contact between the two parties. The cremation, at which a client is not present, takes place at a time to suit the funeral director and the crematorium. It is up to the client to arrange, if desired, some form of ceremony, religious service, memorial or 'knees-up' to mark the departure of the deceased.

Direct funerals are now widely advertised on television and on the London Underground. One of the appeals of this approach (sometimes referred to as 'Cash and Ash') is that it is less expensive than a traditional funeral, there is no hearse or service at the crematorium, and a minimal number of staff hours are spent assisting at the funeral.

The funeral industry is somewhat split in its attitude to this development. Some fear that smaller bills and none of the lucrative 'add-ons' mean smaller profits, while others have embraced the new approach and reshaped the range of services they offer.

The implications of this development have been recognised by the churches, which has reduced their services and income as one of the 'add-ons'. A direct funeral can mean that there may not be any pastoral support by clergy or a funeral director, and disposal of the ashes moves even further from the influence of the churches.

Resomation (or water cremation)

Resomation is a novel 'cremation' process which uses water and chemicals instead of fire. The body is immersed in hot water and five per cent potassium hydroxide, a compound used in soap and shampoo, for around four hours. After the process a white 'ash' remains, consisting of bone, which crumbles to the touch. The inventor of this method says, 'Nothing goes up the stack' but of course the chemical elements to which the body has been reduced 'go down the drain.'

Planning approval for the first machine in this country (it is used in the USA) has been granted by Sandwell Council, but at the time of writing has not been installed because of Health and Safety issues over the disposal of the water. In view of the fact that it took seventy years for cremation to be widely accepted, will resomation take as long to be accepted? In view of the fact that there are still remains to be buried (and slightly more than after a cremation), it does not seem likely that the churches will have any objection to this method.

Is there a positive theology of cremation?

The increasing use of cremation has led to an opportunity for a 'creative' development of new rituals. If the ashes are to be disposed of in a Christian context, most churches have developed a new funeral liturgy for burial or scattering of ashes (one of only two new funeral liturgies developed by the Church in the last thousand years). But this liturgy has not caught on and has not been positively advocated. Davies puts well the reasons for this:

A great deal of confusion came to exist in the mid- and later twentieth century.... when priests were involved in the actual cremation service connected with the body and coffin but not with the cremated remains. In symbolic terms the crematorium service was directly equated with the burial service and the question of ashes left very much open and uncertain. This became increasingly the case when family members took the ashes and engaged in the private placing of them.¹³

If, when the earliest crematoria were built, the churches had said that they accepted this new process as an acceptable way of treating or preparing a body for burial and would be pleased to accept the ashes for burial as generations of corpses have been buried before, the whole field of the disposal of the dead might have been very different today.¹⁴

As mentioned earlier, until a few years ago, the majority of ashes remained at the crematorium and were scattered by the staff in one of a number of flower beds. What is remarkable, in this sad story of theological neglect, is that the churches and their Christian members have been so willing to allow this final ritual for the dead to be left to crematorium staff. Its significance never registered on their spiritual radar. No doubt the reason for this neglect was that clergy swallowed the fiction promulgated by the bishops (still widely held today) that burial and cremation were equal routes for disposal.

Some theologians and liturgists have argued that there should be a distinctive theology of cremation and have latched on to some of the imagery of cremation, in particular that of 'fire', and attempted to develop a distinctive cremation liturgy. The problem with the imagery of fire is that it is, like fire, a double-edged weapon. I have already mentioned the practice of setting fire to people, particularly in the Middle Ages, to obliterate them. Fire has a dangerous destructive face, particularly when associated with hellfire. Of course, there are many images of fire which could be used in a cremation liturgy, and more than one liturgist has tried their hand at this. The most sustained, and sophisticated, theology of cremation has been offered by Douglas J. Davies in his book *Cremation Today and Tomorrow*. He emphasizes the fundamental distinction between burial and cremation. 'Where cremation

has occurred in other cultures it has not had to play the role of preparing the dead for resurrection.¹⁵ Davies argues here, as he has elsewhere, that our 'success culture', with its emphasis on this life, has meant that funerals now are retrospective rather than prospective, and this has major repercussions for cremation.¹⁶

Davies outlines the different theological perspectives of the resurrection of the body and the immortality of the soul. The former is better suited for burial and the latter for cremation, as cremation has 'violently' destroyed the body. The relationship between the two images is complex, and Davies argues that 'it may well be that the time is right for a more open consideration of these basic yet hard issues in the contemporary Church where implicit and half formed ideas rule the day.'¹⁷ So far, and perhaps for good reasons, no satisfactory liturgy for cremation has been developed, because there has been no positive theology offered.

The Order for Disposal

Unless the whole of the funeral liturgy takes place in a church or a crematorium, there is likely to be a 'two-centre' funeral (and this does not include the issue of the burial of cremated remains). The problem lies in the question, 'how can the whole mourning community be held together, and feel united together as one?' This problem has been an influence for many Christians when they choose a 'crem. only' service, bypassing the centre of their faith practice, their church.

The traditional model has been for a church service to be followed by cremation. Particularly if these took place in an urban setting, there was often a difficult journey from the church in a long convoy of cars with some drivers in danger of getting lost on the way. The brief service in the crematorium felt like an uninspiring 'afterthought'. Sometimes only the immediate family would leave the church, but if there was a reception afterwards, those who stayed had a wait for the family to return, or leave without paying their respects to the family and sharing refreshments.

A second model, often adopted in recent years, has been a committal at the crematorium, followed by a church service. Often the first part of the service is advertised as 'private', with only the family attending. This made the journey back to the church easier, but can lead to a dissonance of emotions, particularly at the start of the service. The family has been through the cathartic moment of a farewell and may enter the church in a different emotional state from those of the other mourners, who have not said farewell.

If the opening hymn is 'upbeat', there is little opportunity for the congregation to mourn. A second disadvantage is that for the majority of mourners, there is no coffin as a real symbol of death (although flowers from the coffin or a photograph of the one who has died can be a measure of a substitute). The shape of the service is also different in that it is difficult and, in many ways, inappropriate to include a Commendation or words of Committal. It is not so much a funeral service as a Memorial Service.

Indeed, it is worth making the point at this stage that the word 'Funeral' has almost disappeared from the language associated with death. The words 'Thanksgiving for the life of...' or 'Celebration of the life of...' are frequently used. There is a danger that the service centres on the past life of the deceased and not on the work of Christ and the hope of heaven, to use a summative phrase for a vast area of Christian hope.

A third model, popular in rural areas, where a crematorium may be many miles away, is to hold the whole service in church, but ending with a 'Committal into the hearse'. The coffin may or may not be accompanied by the minister conducting the funeral to the crematorium. If the minister does go, there is little liturgically to be done there. Of course, a prayer can be said, but the final rites of Commendation and Committal have already been carried out.

A fourth variant has developed more recently, and this is to hold the whole service, except the Committal, in church followed immediately by the reception, at the end of which the family travel to the crematorium. A reception is often a moment of emotional relief for the family, whose grief is assuaged by the warmth and comfort in greetings of friends, well-wishers and often long-lost acquaintances. It is traditionally a moment when grief turns to joy and laughter; what is the experience of the family when they leave this warm moment and set off to the crematorium on their own to once again face the reality of the loved-one's death?

Backward-Looking Funerals

An Anglican acquaintance, who was too young to have grown up with the *Book of Common Prayer*, said that he had been asked to conduct a funeral service for an elderly member using the 1662 Funeral Service. It was virtually

new to him and he said what a surprise Cranmer's words were, 'They were so hopeful and filled with the promise of heaven'. His comments bring into stark contrast one of the major changes which has taken place, not just in funeral liturgy, but in what has been added to funeral liturgy. A funeral service has changed from forward-looking to backward-looking.

The traditional funeral marked the transition from this life and pointed to the future life beyond death. Biblical images and Christian beliefs have viewed this future life in many different ways, including purgatory; the necessity or otherwise of continuing prayer by the Christian community for the person who has died; a time of rest or sleeping; immortality of the soul; bodily resurrection; or immediate paradise in the midst of the heavenly host. All have played their part. The essential point is that all such funeral patterns and understandings are forward-looking, eschatological in nature, and concerned with the future life of the deceased. If the person who has died was a believer, the funeral service pointed to the heavenly glory to come in which the deceased would play their part.

This meant that details of the life of the dead person were of little significance, particularly if that life was to be compared to the future glory. Only if the person who had died was of particular social significance might the funeral service be followed some time later with a memorial service in which their life was 'memorialised' in words, readings, and music. In the last few decades, and increasingly in recent years, although the liturgy has not changed that significantly, the whole tenor of the service has changed to a backward or retrospective approach.

The quality of the service is judged, not by its assurance of heavenly glory, but by whether or not it captures the essence of the life of the departed. It celebrates all that they had been and pays due regard to all aspects of their life; family; work; service to the community; hobbies and interests; and contribution to the life of the Church. Different speakers with specialist knowledge are often called on to review aspects of the life of the deceased (instead of the minister trying to string together a few words and images gleaned from a pastoral visit). The deceased's favourite music, hymns, readings, and memories are a carefully chosen part of the service. Sometimes the deceased's allegiance to a particular football team is commented on and memorialised by draping the coffin with a flag of the appropriate colours.

Modern technology means that still and video clips of the life of the deceased can be shown either before or during the service. The memorial service for the remarkable few has become the right of everyone; to rephrase Andy Warhol, in death everyone is famous for fifteen minutes. What has been lost, with the replacement of the traditional funeral service by the memorial service, is the future religious trajectory of the service. It has to be a backward-looking 'good send-off', rather than the promise and celebration of a 'safe arrival'.¹⁸

As has been mentioned, there is a movement in the Catholic Church against this trend, and it will be interesting to see if it gains strength there and in other churches. Traditionally there was no eulogy in the funeral rite; memories were reserved for the reception afterwards. The Church came under pressure to include a eulogy, as in other churches, which in due course could almost overshadow the sermon. The new trend is still to include the eulogy, but to hold it either at the beginning of the service, or at the very end of the service after the celebration of the Mass. In this way, the work of Christ and the hope of resurrection are once again central (at least in theory) and the forward-looking thrust of the service is once again restored.

The COVID Pandemic

During the last year, restrictions affecting social distancing and assembly have had a profound effect on the rituals associated with disposal. Funerals have become attenuated and limited in attendance. This has led to a marked increase in the number of direct funerals, referred to earlier. In the last year, direct cremations have increased to 33% of all cremations and from 14% to 25% of all funerals. As there is no ritual, or attendance, at a direct cremation, the association of the Christian interpretation of death has been further attenuated.

A second effect of the COVID crisis has been the inevitable decline in memorial services. When direct or attenuated services were held in the early months of the crisis, many families said they would hold a 'proper' service later. But the months and the years have moved on, and questions are now being raised over the issue of the emotional energy and appropriateness of holding such a service many months after a death. Will there be a major national memorial service for the Duke of Edinburgh?

A final effect has been the necessary if belated upgrading in the recording and transmission of televised services. A service relayed by one ancient and fixed camera in a crematorium or church, with poor sound and interruptions by 'buffering' has diminished the effect of rituals associated with death. When the crisis is over, will the broadcasting of services become standard practice, with a decline in the attendance at services (in church and crematoria)?

Conclusion

I want in this final section to propose some actions, which might be followed by the Church in order to address the conclusions I have reached.

First, I want to commend the actions of the Catholic Church, which is almost the only Church which has responded to modern disposal methods. I would like to see all ministers encouraged to emphasize that the cremated remains of a Christian should be buried (and not leaving it to when they are making funeral arrangements). The theological conviction, which underlies that discipline, is the traditional understanding that the body has an integrity about it, which is not diminished either in death or by cremation. In this we can hear an echo of the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, which is symbolised by the return to the earth, from which we came, and from which in Christ we will arise.

I would like to see one order of service which would be held in church. The liturgy would move from the church service to burial of the ashes. Cremation could either take place beforehand, as it now often does, or between the service and burial. If cremation is understood to be what it really is, a preparation of the body for burial, there would be no need or requirement for anyone to attend the crematorium.

What I am arguing for is a distinctive Christian style of disposal, more in keeping with the way of Christ and Christian tradition, even though belief in the doctrine of the resurrection of the body is declining. It is part of a distinctive Christian life and death style that we are buried and our remains are committed to God by being placed in the earth. They are not to be the object of continual handling, entertainment, or endless temporary abode. I am aware that what I am proposing is counter-cultural, but much of what remains of Christianity today is counter-cultural.

Lastly, there is an urgent need to discuss these matters in churches and assemblies; it is not a popular subject, but this article might be a starting point.

Notes

- [1] This article includes some parts, and develops new aspects, of material I have used in "The Future of Christian Funerals", *Epworth Review*, 0111, January 2011, pp 42-57 and "Theology in Ashes: How the Churches Have Gone Wrong over Cremation," in P. C. Jupp, *Death Our Future: Christian Theology and Funeral Practice* (London: Epworth Press, 2008).
- [2] Augustine, of Hippo, *The Retractions*, (Washington DC, The Catholic University of America Press, 1968) Book ii, Chapter 64, 198.
- [3] The case for natural, or woodland burial, has been well argued by Peter Owen Jones, 'The Challenge of Green Burial' in Jupp, ed., *Death Our Future*, 148–57, but he does not address any of the potential problems outlined below.
- [4] These statistics only represent members of the Association of Natural Burial Grounds; there is no one organisation with responsibility for keeping statistics on all new burial sites.
- [5] See J. M. H. J. Keizer, "Siemens, Friedrich" in *Encyclopedia of Cremation* ed. D. J. Davies, and L. H. Mates, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 376.
- [6] Peter C. Jupp, *From Dust to Ashes: Cremation and the British Way of Death* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 125–55.
- [7] Jupp, *From Dust to Ashes*, 135–41.
- [8] *Chronicle*, Lower House, 13 October 1943: 234.
- [9] Bradshaw, Paul, *Companion to Common Worship*, (London, SPCK, 2001) 215–216.
- [10] See Keith Denison, "The Theology and Liturgy of Funerals: A View from the Church in Wales," *Mortality* 4, no. 1 (March 1999): 71–72.
- [11] Instruction *Ad resurgendum cum Christo*, 2016, para. 3.
- [12] Deehan, John, "Ready to Rise with Christ", *The Tablet: The International Catholic News Weekly*, (London, 8th December 2016).
- [13] D. J. Davies, 'Rites of Passage' in *Encyclopaedia*, 361.

- [14] For a general discussion on this issue, see H. J. Grainger, *Death Redesigned: British Crematoria: History, Architecture and Landscape* (Reading: Spire, 2005). On the prevention of the original intention to bury ashes, the refusal in 1875 of the Bishop of Rochester, Dr T. L. Cloughton, to sanction the use of New Southgate Cemetery as a site for the first crematorium was the decisive factor here. See B. Parsons, *Committed to the Cleansing Flame* (Reading: Spire, 2005), 46.
- [15] D. J. Davies, *Cremation Today and Tomorrow* (Bramcote, Nottingham: Grove Books, 1990), 30.
- [16] See D. J. Davies 'Theologies of Disposal' in P. C. Jupp and T. Rogers, T., eds., *Interpreting Death* (London: Cassell, 1997), 67–84.
- [17] Davies, *Cremation Today and Tomorrow*, 31.
- [18] This re-orientation from future to past is well analysed in D. Davies, *The Theology of Death* (London: T & T Clark, 2008).