

CONCERNING FUNERAL SERVICES

Some Anonymous Reflections

Funerals: understandably not a subject much discussed in coffee-bars, hostelrys or, more cosily, over late-night Horlicks. Their very inevitability accounts for that, along with parallel and unavoidable thoughts about our own mortality. Consequently, what is at best a tepid topic is bound, if aired, to plummet in temperature and appeal. While such disincentives are hard to set aside, we might nonetheless persevere, and ask by way of introduction: How do close family members in the midst of bereavement regard the impending funeral service?

People tend not to exteriorise their feelings at such a time. Nevertheless, ministers with even averagely-sensitive antennae develop a 'feel' for such things. Not surprisingly, attitudes in the few days before a funeral are bound to vary. The most down to earth view, if you'll forgive the phrase, is probably that, since a funeral causes great emotional stress, the shorter the interval before it takes place, and the simpler it is on the day, the better. At the other end of the scale is the perception that the deceased's life should be remembered in a fashion worthy of him,¹ whatever emotional pressures the funeral might impose upon the close family.

One tends to think that more merit is attached to the latter view than to the former (which raises a further question about who, individually or corporately, is awarding the rosettes). It is simplistic to identify these two poles and to imagine that everyone falls into one or other of these categories. Christian commitment can co-exist with the short, simple service, while being conspicuously absent from the larger, more public occasion. And there are surely numerous permutations in between, with religious feelings registering throughout at various levels of intensity.

Ministers of experience and sensitivity will long ago have entered for themselves a *caveat* about making premature judgments on such matters. Today, parish church and parish minister continue to have a significant role in helping people to work through their grief. It would, however, be short-sighted to overlook the fact that, while death remains immutable, funeral attitudes – for long relatively static – have changed.

In previous generations families took it for granted that the authorised service of the Church conducted by the minister would most appropriately set within a Christian context the death of one of their members. Almost entirely, give or take a favourite hymn or psalm, they would leave matters of form and content to him. Now, diverse influences from film, television and the press flood the corporate consciousness. Expectations are different and, not unreasonably, the parish minister feels obliged to be as accommodating as his calling permits. This manifests itself in incorporating, at the request of the family, elements which purport to say something special about the deceased. What often emerges, however, can resemble a *pot pourri* of associations and reminiscences, significant and trivial, set within the shrinking framework of the Church's beliefs.

The Reformers, reacting against abuses of which the pre-Reformation Church was guilty, reduced the service to a bare minimum. Rather oddly, the demand in our less believing age is for pomp and circumstance, often verging on vulgarity. This arises more from secularity and emotionalism than from religious conviction. Football scarves on fences and soft toys laid against a tree speak of disbelief and bafflement, and the need to 'do something.' As we know, too, from events of the last decade (witness 'Candle in the wind'), this is expressed at every level of society far beyond football tribalism.

The Need for Objectivity

The curiously prevalent commingling of secular and sacred has its problems. The parish minister is no longer the sole 'agent' (to put it in those terms). But, while he will rightly feel responsible for the genuine support the service gives to those who are left, pitfalls abound.

Thus, friends who are asked (or who volunteer) to speak about the deceased often find themselves less up to the task than they first imagined. Many a well-meaning but unpractised orator has found his emotional self-control evaporating at an alarming rate. The key instrument, the voice, may be halting and inaudible. The editorial red pencil may not have been applied with sufficient rigour. The poem that meant so much may be incomprehensible to the congregation. The 'with it' gem of an anecdote can, on re-telling, be distinctly 'without it.' And the quotation that fitted the deceased to a tee turns out to be too much of a mouthful.

Careful thought is needed when such appendages are grafted on to the Church's service. But thinking is a painful exercise, and the immediate demands of coping with death bring pain aplenty without having to engage in more. Little wonder, then, that potential hazards slip through unnoticed. The advice of the minister, who should know a thing or two about funerals, may not be given much weight: instead, what happened at a friend's wife's father's funeral carries the day. Consequently, to have the family's budding clarinettist playing 'Smoke gets in your eyes' (father's favourite tune) in a crematorium chapel does seem, at least in retrospect, ill thought out. Or again, asking *three* work colleagues to speak in church – invitations so fitting at the time – merely guaranteed repetition, scant disregard for the clock and inevitable regret that wiser counsels had not prevailed.

Granted, the funeral service has to point to the Christian hope without excluding reference to the life and personal qualities of the deceased. To remove all such reference would be both insensitive and unhelpful. Family and friends have not come to the funeral of A. N. Other, but to someone they knew and, in most cases, loved. In the past, mention of the life of the deceased was made by the officiating minister in the course of the 'long prayer.' Now, however, it has become common for this custom to be replaced by an address (or addresses). Inevitably, the balance is tipped in a different direction, the funeral service 'doubling,' as it were, for a memorial service.

The word 'balance' is of importance in this respect, and the role of the minister is central in seeing that objectivity is not lost. The funeral has to testify to the faith once delivered to the saints; and Christian burial, which is a simple act, will briefly underline the same things. While other elements may have their place, the essentials must not be obscured.

Structure

Some bold spirits seem to conduct funerals without recourse to any structure. The main element of locomotion is public prayer, the facility for which has been honed to an apparent state of perfection. The locomotive, once on track and on the move, picks up speed at an alarming rate, ignores all possible sidings, disregards signals at red, and only comes to a halt when the boiler has run dry. It is usually a *tour de force*, concerned primarily with rehearsing all the salient points of the Divine Plan for humankind. Certainly this approach, engulfed in

wave on rolling wave of *Heils-geschichte*, could not be charged with dwelling over-much on the past life of the deceased which seems in danger of being incidental to the occasion.

On reflection, however, it is perhaps misleading to say that no structure exists. Those prayers have been used over and again and have become so much a part of the officiant's *enchiridion* that they constitute a liturgy of sorts. What emerges is, in fact, a liturgy of stock phrases. In that sense, a structure is in place, even if somewhat monolithic. But a legitimate if unresolved question persists about its aim. Is it an affirmation of faith; a vehicle of pastoral support; a challenge to stiffen the resolve of believers; a bid to convert unbelievers; a stern reminder of the Great Assize; or obsequies in respect of the departed one?

Public prayer, of course, can be – and often is – inappropriately addressed not to God but aimed at the congregation. Its thinly-veiled disguise, however, does not hide its real didactic and sermonic intention. Notwithstanding such ‘elliptical’ prayers or overtly evangelistic urgings, there are other occasions for proselytising; the funeral service is not one of them. To use it thus is to do violence to an intensely personal event in order to ‘get at’ those who have attended as a mark of respect to the deceased. There is something calculating about this, justified, no doubt, on the grounds that no opportunity for evangelism should be allowed to slip by. Yet it succeeds only in causing confusion in the ranks of the mourners. ‘Who is the minister speaking about?’ ‘Is there something about John’s past I did not know?’ ‘What has this harangue to do with the funeral?’

There is nothing wrong in praying that we may use the remainder of our days wisely and well, so long as it does not distort one’s perception of the true purpose of the service. Ultimately, however, the keynote should not be one of exhortation but of declaration. The *curé d’Ars*, Jean Vianney, is reputed to have preached sermons almost exclusively about the Love of God. The Evangelical, John Willison of Dundee, was not so very different. Perhaps this should be the over-arching theme at every funeral. The structure of the service ought primarily to set forth the Love of God in respect of the deceased and of his or her family and friends. That is the true evangelical emphasis. William Temple drew attention to the fact that the words of Jesus, ‘I am the good shepherd,’ could be translated ‘I am the shepherd, the beautiful one’² or ‘I am the shepherd with the power to attract.’ One of our prayers asks that God may keep us in

the fellowship of Jesus Christ 'in whom Thou hast brought near to us the glory and beauty of a holy life.'³ That should be a test of the component parts that make up the service: do they reveal or obscure 'the glory and beauty of a holy life,' the life of Jesus.

The Service

Who's responsible?

The answer, we think, is surely obvious: the minister. But while society values people who get things done, it is suspicious of those who are seen to be 'in charge.' It refers to them glibly and disparagingly, in the vogue phrase, as 'control freaks.' The pastoral involvement of a minister with his people at a time of death is not, of course, a relationship based on mere pragmatism. It is not primarily about getting things done, or, even less, being in charge. But, as the undertaker on one level has to help the family of the deceased to make decisions, so the minister on another has to support, guide, suggest – and himself absorb what might be called the dynamics of the situation. He is not 'in charge' in an authoritarian way, but he may well be looked to for a lead in what is little-known terrain for the family. His role involves him in much more than arriving on the day at the house or the church with service-book in his hand. In our time, the relationship is further complicated by fashionable buzz-words like 'consultation,' 'participation,' and 'ownership' being in the air; all, too, are now 'stakeholders.' Most ministers have the sensitivity to judge when, in the majority of cases, matters of detail relating to a service are left entirely to them by the family. Few would fail to respond to wishes and ideas arising from discussion amongst the close relatives, although past experience might prompt a word of caution or a suggested alternative.

Surprisingly, however, ministers occasionally find themselves in greater difficulty in their pastoral involvement with close friends who have no church background. Rather flatteringly, they seem to imagine that he can cope with every last-minute eventuality or after-thought. 'Oh, did I tell you that X would like to read a poem, and I really feel now that Y should say a few words.' There is no indication of how few Y's 'few words' will be; and, since he happens to be on his way to Glasgow from Basingstoke, staying overnight somewhere in Preston, he is incommunicado. As to what poem X is reading and how long it is, all is mystery. The moral must be: do not take services without knowing *precisely* who is participating, what he or she is doing and how long it will take.

Rudyard Kipling is unlikely ever to have conducted a funeral service, but we would do well to learn from him.

*I keep six honest serving-men
(They taught me all I knew);
Their names are What and Why and When
And How and Where and Who. ⁴*

'Each to his own'

Many of the infelicitous elements encountered in the taking of funerals could be eliminated by a greater familiarity on the part of the officiant with the *Book of Common Order*, 1940, or one of its revisions of 1974 or 1994.⁵ There is still in some quarters, however, a residual suspicion of printed orders, allied to a somewhat hubristic conviction that homespun material is more sincere and nearer to the lives of ordinary people. How this can be measured is not clear. Historically, I would guess, this attitude may have been more deep-rooted in the Secession and Disruption traditions of the United Free Church than in that of the Established Church but comparison of the service books before the Union of 1929 suggests that the difference lay within rather than between the Churches. There is, too, a more contemporary development which probably leans heavily towards individually devised input as far as services are concerned. Numerous candidates for today's ministry have not been brought up within the Kirk, but in a variety of nonconformist traditions, some of which have no liturgical background. This does not mean that the views of all such candidates are necessarily static and only reflect past upbringing; but some, at least, will reinforce the un-liturgical stance of existing conservatives who prefer praying 'from the heart.'

Versions

Current received wisdom (perhaps slightly modified by the current year's anniversary celebrations) frowns on the *Authorised Version* being read aloud in church on the grounds that congregations no longer understand its archaisms. Yet individuals who make up these congregations buy secular newspapers and magazines which include endless references to biblical phrases long embedded in the English language. Are we to believe that such references are incomprehensible to the reading public? And are we henceforth destined to calibrate the libretto of public worship with the limited vocabulary of the semi-

literate? The *Authorised Version*, so the argument runs, has lost its power to communicate and, as far as meaning is concerned, creates obscurity rather than clarity. The problem with this view, to which so many now subscribe, is that modern versions, for all their pedestrian language, are not able to shed light on biblical imagery and its meaning. Indeed, the flat prose of the *New English Bible* falls far short of that of the *Authorised* in that it markedly fails to stir the imagination and to elevate heart and mind. The majestic prose, the poetry, rhythm and vocabulary of the out-of-fashion *Authorised Version* do all of these things. It is precisely because of the subtle use of analogy, metaphor and typology in Scripture that translations, no matter how up-to-date their language, are powerless to 'explain' the inexplicable or to 'de-mystify' the mystery. No new translation comes close to the powerful numinous quality of the opening verses of St John's Gospel in the *Authorised Version*. So it is with the Scriptural phraseology which has come to be associated with the funeral service in all branches of the Church. Such opinions, of course, run against the stream; but by abandoning the *Authorised Version* we only succeed in making access to one of the great sources of comfort and inspiration more difficult in times of personal crisis.

Lessons and other Readings

It might seem unnecessary to underline how important a part the voice plays in communicating the written word to the congregation. After all, ministers make public use of this instrument at every service of worship. Why should this occasion make special demands? Just as there can be an unnatural 'pulpit voice,' so the expression of emotion or empathy can cause what might be called a 'funeral voice.' It manifests itself variously: in breathy tones; in overdone elocution; in ultra-slow enunciation; in extended pauses for effect. If you are still unconvinced, recall the funeral services attended at which special treatment seemed to be meted out to well-known verses from the last chapters of *The Book of Revelation*. By trying too hard, the person delivering the spoken word can generate an atmosphere which is counter-productive. It can also intrude in such a way as to lessen the authority and objectivity of the Scriptures and cause the spotlight to fall on the minister. Yet again, brevity is essential. There is little virtue in choosing lengthy passages from Scripture at a time of bereavement, although the psalms, epistle and the Gospel should have a central place. The current fashion of including a proliferation of readings from poetry or prose can only add substantially to the service, often without any benefit. Either the reader may not be up to it, or the sentiments expressed (given that they

are worth expressing) are not easily grasped by the congregation at a single hearing. For other reasons, the oft-heard passage 'from the Works of Canon Scott Holland' must surely have had its day by now.

Address

If there is to be an address (which should not be regarded as *de rigueur*), let it have its place at the start. This is a funeral and not a memorial service which, if desired, can come later. The name of the deceased should be used in full, at least to begin with. No life can ever be summed up in a few sentences, and it is best not to try. Thanks should be offered to God for the life that is past. Where possible, personal knowledge of the person should inform what is said. Humour *may* be appropriate, but should be used very sparingly and should not obscure the solemnity of the occasion. On the other hand, it is unhelpful to introduce a false solemnity through accent, tone, demeanour, spurious emotionalism or other histrionics. Often, too, the lay person asked by the family to speak is not practised in striking a proper balance. He or she would do well to remember that such an address ought to assist the family (rather than make it more difficult for them) to cope with their own emotional stress at this time. More intimate recollections and reminiscences may turn out to be a hindrance in this respect as well as being insensitive. The tenor of the address will set the scene for what follows. If not appropriate, or if ill-judged, it will jar. The speaker who intends to rely on 'only a few notes' should, if at all possible, be prevailed upon to compose a text that is complete and readable. Brevity is vital.

Economy

Ministers have numerous gifts, but brevity of speech is normally not one of them. This deficiency may simply arise from natural garrulousness, but it can in the main be traced to the clerical addiction to repetition. Telling people what you are going to say, saying it, and revisiting what you have just said may be justified in preaching. The effectiveness of public prayer, however, lies not in repetitiveness but in economy of words. Liturgy is succinct, direct and to the point. It is, moreover, addressed to Almighty God. Sermons are addressed to human beings who are a prey to distraction and have limited concentration, and it is therefore wise to make the same point in different ways. Public prayer, however, should not adopt these devices. God is neither deaf nor in need of incessant reminders. 'There is no searching of his understanding.' The officiant

who relies on 'free prayer' rather than a set form is much more liable to rehearse the familiar phrase *ad nauseam* and be carried where the spirit leads him – usually in circles. In the event of a minister giving an address (not a sermon) at a funeral, repetition merely extends the service to no good purpose and causes the family's burden to become heavier.

Hymns

There can be something atavistic about the choice of hymns families make. Although they have but rarely attended church, memory takes them back to a favourite of a grandparent. It is then proposed for funeral use these several generations later. Yet choosing a hymn or hymns is still a prerogative that many families wish to exercise in spite of the most tenuous or non-existent church connection. A degree of flexibility – even indulgence – is required on the part of the minister. The hymn may not be entirely suitable, but it is their selection, and, in a sense, their contribution. The minister can give his help if needed, of course, and it is useful to have a hymnbook to hand, with a note of suitable items. For most people, however, any familiarity they have will be with better known tunes rather than words. Regular church-going families usually make up their own minds, although they, too, in the circumstances, might seek help from the minister.

Music

It is a truism to say that organists vary in quality. There is usually some opportunity for family and minister to confer with the organist of the local parish church, or his or her substitute. The same is unlikely to be true of crematorium organists. Some can be very good; often, however, they are literalists. Mention of the deceased's fondness for a particular hymn is likely to ensure that it is played incessantly, without altered registration, both before and after the service. Most will in any case do what makes least demands upon them in the absence of other instructions. Special music will be beyond the majority; but if there is confidence in the organist's ability, the music must be supplied well in advance. Any deviation from the organist's familiar routine will require careful briefing. Ministers generally do not have time to make prior journeys to the crematorium, especially if they live outside a city; nor is it always easy for them to arrive early on the day, when, in any case, the organist will be preoccupied with other funerals. It is, however, desirable that some prior contact should be established, otherwise the results will be unmemorable.

Rubrics

It is not necessary always to have printed orders of service at a funeral. The preparation and printing of such orders for distribution in church or crematorium has nevertheless increased with the advent of home publishing and copying facilities. It does, of course, mean more work. But there are advantages of a sort. People generally no longer know how to behave in church and, without some prompting, could well sit moored to their seats for the entire service. A printed order can include rubrics – when to stand, when to sit, what to sing, what to say. It can ensure that mobile phones are turned off (although one cannot fully legislate for the thoughtless). It can inform if all are welcome to attend the burial following the service, or if it is to be a private family occasion. It can express thanks and invite those who have travelled a distance to share a meal with the family. In spite of the acids of modernity, standing still denotes respect. In addition to the hymns or psalms, it seems desirable that the congregation in church should stand as the coffin is brought in and borne out. A rubric can make that plain to all. Again, at the committal in a crematorium chapel it seems equally desirable that the congregation should stand;⁶ so with the benediction at the close of the service. A rubric leaves the congregation in no doubt about what they should do. If ministers kept previous orders of service they could be a useful guide to family members at the time of preparation for a funeral. This would preclude much *de novo* thinking.

Experimentation

Committees are usually the chief begetters of ‘provisional liturgies.’ But many of us, being impressed early on by the prayers of Lancelot Andrewes, John Donne and Cranmer, embarked on unilateral attempts to improve on existing services. Usually, we eschewed imitation and sought rather to find a contemporary ‘voice’ of our own. The writer recalls his own efforts of many years ago, and those particularly which were addressed to the Almighty at a conference attended by a number of older colleagues. Upon uttering the arresting phrase (arresting only in its fatuosity), ‘frail fragments of our humanity,’ he became aware of a commotion to the rear of the small chapel. Four decades later, the feeling of indignation at what were clearly mutterings of disapproval has given way to one of complete sympathy. The later verdict, ‘Too clever by half,’ was well-deserved, although the prescription, ‘Use only collects,’ was perhaps a little limiting. But the rebuke was chastening. Writing prayers is a creative activity ministers

should foster, but with due humility: few, if any, will be latter-day Cranmers. There is, however, a clear line between occasions when 'arresting phrases' *might* be risked and those, like funerals, when experimenting should be left severely alone. It is not surprising that the same phrases or sentences from Scripture appear and reappear in the Church's funeral rites over a lengthy period. They are unsurpassed and the service is merely diminished by homespun attempts at improvement.

Memorial Services

Whether there should be a memorial service or a service of thanksgiving will rest with the family and not the minister. It seems as though such a service has become more fashionable. There is, of course, no need to have one and following 'fashion' usually turns out to be the least compelling reason. The family may wish to have a private burial or cremation followed some weeks later by a memorial occasion. This, too, may commend itself if the deceased held public office or other position of prominence with many friends and associates some distance away at the time of death. There are numerous factors to be taken into consideration, and other reasons for having a memorial service. But for most, the funeral service will suffice.

The Use of Names

Occasionally one attends a funeral at which the officiating minister refers to the deceased as 'this, our brother/sister' as though anonymity had to be preserved. These words, of course, are in the service-book. But the universal and general formula in the Church's rite is meant to be made particular and individual at the funeral. After all, each person has a name, a *Christian* name. Why should it be overlooked? If a Christian minister is called upon to conduct a funeral by the family it can normally be taken that the Church's service will be the matrix for what is to be said. The name of the deceased ought to be a *sine qua non*, whatever additional (and sometimes eccentric) elements may be added to the service at the wish of the family.

Scripture, as any concordance will reveal, has examples which show the importance placed on a person's name. At least once, preferably at the beginning, the *full name* of the deceased should be used. We need to know clearly and unambiguously how the deceased person was identified and by what names he was known in this world.

Nick-names, endearments, abbreviations and diminutives present the officiant with his first hurdle. Service personnel are accustomed to 'Nobby' Clark, 'Dusty' Miller, 'Tug' Wilson, and so on. Somewhat tediously, these have usually become part of the bearer's *persona* over many years. It is therefore difficult to pretend that they do not exist. Again, someone who was officially known by his three initial letters and his family name ('T. A. M. Smith') is unlikely to have been known by his given name ('Tarquin,' let us say). How he was addressed by his close family should guide the minister; but if they, too, plumped for 'Tam' in preference to the rarer 'Tarquin' it would be hard to bypass. 'Horace,' at home, may well have been 'Jack' at work. Physical characteristics, linked with a degree of affection, must have created many who became, and cheerfully put up with, 'Tubby' and, sometimes (for those above 6'3"), 'Tiny.' Many a Crosby must have had to exercise extreme resignation at the inevitable 'Bing.'

Clergy are often portrayed as being out of touch. To ignore such names and pretend that the person was always referred to by his formal Christian name when he was not merely heightens this impression. But his full name [given names and family name] should always be used initially, and given names at the most solemn parts of the service; whether at other points to lapse into the nick-name, *etc.*, would again depend on family wishes, but there is no harm in an explanatory aside to give light to those who sit in darkness. Once again, constant reference to 'this, our brother/sister' seems inexcusable and might suggest that the minister had not bothered to find out who the deceased was.

The writer, as parish minister, once attended the funeral of the sole Roman Catholic in the village. The priest from the nearest town was on holiday and in his place was an aged stand-in. 'And now, Lord,' he said at the graveside, 'we commend to you ... (here he paused, and looked across at the family), '... what was her name again?' In chorus, quite unperturbed, the family volunteered 'Jean.' 'Ah, yes, Jean ...', he continued, '... your servant, Jean ...'. And so she was buried, with prompting but calmly, without fuss and certainly without rancour. The old priest possessed a certain decrepit Irish charm and gave the impression that forgetting names came naturally to him. I doubt the regular man would have elicited the same indulgent smiles.

Even in this informal age, another infelicitous mode of referral occasionally heard in the course of a service is that of 'Mr' or 'Mrs.' This smacks of ministerial gaucheness and is an inappropriate form of genteelism. Such a usage might also lead to the conclusion that the minister had crossed swords in life with the person so described, and had not quite shaken off the effects; an element, perhaps, of once bitten, twice shy.

That a name has biblical provenance does not always guarantee recognition. The writer, though himself not yet resident in a care home for the elderly, recently met a courteous male care-worker from Africa. The assistant, on volunteering his name, saw that it did not register and, helpfully repeating it, explained that it was in the Bible. The name was 'Cometh,' and it is indeed in the Bible, at least eighteen times. 'Goeth,' surprisingly, appears only twice. Neither verb, however, is normally used as a name.

Once, precedents were observed in naming successive children in a family. Thus, the first son would by use and wont receive the Christian name or names of his father's father, the first daughter would receive the names of her mother's mother, and so on. Although not followed universally, this practice was widely adopted. Today, of course, such precedents are largely ignored and names are chosen which appeal to the parents. Indeed, post-modern debunking of continuity and tradition has so influenced the giving of names that 'celebrities' in the sporting and entertainment world coin synthetic names.

Christian charity would lead us to wish a long and happy life to Petal Moonbeam McGillicuddy. The sad event of her demise, however, presents the minister with a conundrum to which there is no easy answer. Perhaps the best course is to fall back into the (hitherto unrecommended) safety-net of 'this, our sister' throughout. What a relief! (some faint-hearted clerics might say) when the family of the late Petal Moonbeam devise their own obsequies without benefit of clergy. Others, of course, would regard their pastoral exclusion as a lost opportunity for prosyletising. It rather depends...

In Conclusion

From generation to generation the Church, in ordering its services, is preoccupied with appearing to address the needs of the contemporary world.

Perhaps it should not try so hard. What informs this attempt to keep up is usually a desire to attract young people who are not interested in the Church, its affairs and services. New hymnbooks, new orders for this and that, new seating arrangements and reorientation of church interiors come to pass. The only discernible result seems to be the steady alienation of existing members, while the apathy of the young shows no sign of reversal. Of course people are not drawn to church by the vintage of any particular *funeral* order; but they do attend funerals in church in quite large numbers. It would be good if they were to experience there *the Church's service* rather than the increasingly subjective creations built around everything from popular music ('I did it my way') to hearty if unprofound reminiscences and hard-to-grasp literary interpolations.

I, for my part, will happily settle for the *Nunc dimittis*.

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- 1 For the sake of brevity and to avoid the repeated 'his or her' and the ungrammatical use of 'their', the use of the singular 'his' should be understood throughout as embracing either gender.
 - 2 *Readings in St John's Gospel*, 166.
 - 3 *Book of Common Order*, 1940, First Evening Service, 51.
 - 4 From *The Elephant's Child*.
 - 5 Forty years ago, numbered with BCO 1940 would have been *Prayers for Divine Service* in the editions of 1923 and 1929 and the U.F. BCO of 1928
 - 6 In a crematorium the committal is meant to be the homologue of the act of burial at a grave. Disguising it while a prayer is in progress does not seem adequately to reflect the intention.