

FORUM LETTER

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The Church in larger terms

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The office of the bishop is political in the best sense of that term. Many of Basil [of Caesarea]'s letters reflect situations of high political intrigue where Basil extended the power and authority of his specific see to shore up and support the struggling churches in outlying areas or areas where orthodoxy had only a fragile hold on the clergy and people. Frequently he intervened in episcopal elections urging the clergy and people to elect a man who would be faithful to the traditions received from the apostles and the fathers. . . . What we gain from Basil's handling of a crisis such as this is a good conception of the role of historic continuity in shaping the character of the pastoral office. As bishop one is not only placed into a congregation which extends back several years or even several generations; but as bishop one has a responsibility to be faithful to the totality of the Christian experience as it has unfolded over the course of centuries. There is a corporate identity to the church which cannot be reduced to the sum total of the present situation, for in defining what it means to be Christian the totality of the Christian past must be taken into consideration. Basil's point is that the office of the pastor is one of the chief means by which the Church is able to maintain and articulate the meaning of Christian faith from generation to generation.

In Basil's own situation such awareness gave him freedom, for it allowed him to look beyond the immediate squabble with Arianism and the alliance of Arianism with the emperor. Perhaps Basil's comments have a conservative ring to our [modern] ears, for those who today frequently call for loyalty to the past are really hindering our dealing with the present and restricting our freedom to cope with the future. But I doubt whether this is really the case, for the past about which they speak is frequently the immediate past. . . . Seldom is it an appeal to the fullness of the tradition, a genuine catholic attempt to see the Church in larger terms than our immediate denominational tradition. . . . They usually mean the tradition of the last fifty or seventy-five years. —Robert L. Wilken, "The Practice of Piety: Basil of Caesarea and the Pastoral Office," *Una Sancta* (24:4, Christmass, 1967), 79-80.

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Another Missouri brouhaha



Heresy trials have a fairly dismal track record among American Protestants — or among any Christians anywhere, as far as that goes. In the United States, Baptists have been the most prone to such actions, with Presbyterians not far behind. One of the glories of American denominationalism is that when a church has expelled one of its teachers or pastors, the "heretic" has more often than not simply moved on to some other denomination

that is a better fit—and there are generally several options. Sometimes just the threat of a trial pushes the accused to leave before being kicked out. But it never leaves the denomination looking very good, and most churches, for better or for worse, tolerate a lot of dissension before firing up the inquisitional apparatus.

On the other hand, some denominations have factions that would happily expel anyone who deviates in the slightest from their version of official teaching. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has some of those, and they have been aroused recently by their wrath and indignation over the Rev. Dr. Matthew Becker, associate professor of theology at Valparaiso University.

Conservative *bête noire de jour*

Becker has been the *bête noire* of Missouri's extreme right for quite some time now. They are upset about two matters (in addition to his teaching at Valpo, which for some is enough to raise an immediate red flag). First, he has made no secret of his support for the ordination of women; second, he has argued that a good Lutheran need not embrace creationism, a literal Adam and Eve, and so forth. To conservative LCMSers, these positions are *anathema*.

Some time last year there were apparently formal complaints made against Becker to his ecclesiastical superior, Paul Linnemann, the President of the Northwest District. Pr. Linnemann followed the LCMS bylaws and sent the concerns to a "Referral Panel" in his district. In Missouri's polity, such a panel is chosen by "blind draw" from among the circuit counselors of the district. The panel's task is to investigate the accusation, and then make the determination about "whether or not to initiate formal proceedings." This is in theory supposed to be done out of the glare of public notice; if the panel decides that formal proceedings are not warranted, this "shall terminate the matter."

Petulant president

And that is what happened in Dr. Becker's case. Well, except for the "terminate the matter" part. The entire affair was brought to light by LCMS President Matthew Harrison, who apparently made some public comment about it at a district convention in North Dakota, and then said more on his own blog. Harrison's words: "When a public teacher

on the roster of Synod can without consequence publicly advocate the ordination of women (even participate vested in the installation of an ELCA clergy person), homosexuality, the errancy of the Bible, the historical-critical method, open communion, communion with the Reformed, evolution, and more, then the public confession of the Synod is meaningless. I am saying that if my Synod does not change its inability to call such a person to repentance and remove such a teacher where there is no repentance, then we are liars and our confession is meaningless. I do not want to belong to such a synod, much less lead it. I have no intention of walking away from my vocation. I shall rather use it and, by the grace of God, use all the energy I have to call this Synod to fidelity to correct this situation."

Strong words indeed. Some observers thought that it was highly inappropriate for the synodical president to make a public statement excoriating a pastor when accusations against him had been investigated by the proper authorities, who chose not to proceed with a formal process that could lead to expulsion—and particularly when the entire process is supposed to be confidential (presumably to protect the accused until such time as official charges are filed). Others thought it was OK for Harrison to have an opinion, even to express an opinion, but thought the way he did so—the not-so-veiled threat "I don't want to belong to such a synod"—was more than a little petulant.

Piling on

As is often the case in Missouri, the conservatives and the moderates jumped into the fray. Pr. Joshua Scheer, blogging on the right-wing "Brothers of John the Steadfast" website ("Defending and Promoting Confessional Lutheranism and its Media" is their slogan), howled that "the [constitutional] process has failed to discipline one of the most flagrant dissenters to official LCMS doctrine." "As for me," he went on, "the Becker case has been a sort of litmus test on how the LCMS can handle things with regards to false doctrine. This is sad, but shows how utterly broken the Synod is to handle even the most open and shut cases."

Of course few cases are really quite that "open and shut"; that's why churches (and other institutions) have constitutional procedures. But if one doesn't like what those procedures produce,

then one can always try an end run. So the “Brothers” are promoting an overture to the 2016 synod convention that would “publicly call Rev. Dr. Matthew Becker to repent and recant or remove him from the clergy roster of Synod.” It seems unlikely to me that the LCMS constitution gives the synod convention that authority, but then rules are made to be broken. Or changed.

Will we have a new pope?

On the other side, the “moderate Missouri” group Daystar published an open letter to District President Linnemann, commending him for “following the Synod’s Constitution, Bylaws, and standard operating procedures in the case of Dr. Matthew Becker.” (An aside: Linnemann is a district president who is not beloved by Missouri’s conservatives; three years ago he made no secret of his opinion that replacing Matthew Harrison as synod president would be a salutary thing.) “We are extremely offended by the actions of President Harrison in this matter,” said the six dozen or so Missouri synod pastors and laypersons who signed the letter. “If President Harrison seeks more power to overturn the present synodical Bylaws so that he can impose his own opinions on the Synod, will we, as Lutherans, again have to deal with a new pope?”

It is worth noting that the majority of the pastors signing this letter, far as I can tell, seem to be retired or nearing retirement. This leads one to wonder whether what remains of the “moderate wing” of Missouri is slowly but inexorably fading away, and what that might mean for the future of theologi-

cal debate within Missouri.

But so it goes. Those of us watching from the outside mostly shake our heads. There are times, let’s be honest, when some of us in the ELCA have wished that synodical bishops might be a little more aggressive in dealing with rogue pastors (those, for example, who loudly proclaim their enthusiasm for goddess worship). It’s not that there shouldn’t be boundaries. Certainly there must be procedures for dealing with those in the church who repeatedly and willfully go outside of them.

In Becker’s case, however, the crime seems to be that he thinks certain synodical teachings ought to be reconsidered. I am, I say it again, an outsider. But when a church says, in effect, “This is what we believe, and it’s not open even for discussion,” it seems to me that it is veering dangerously close to sectarianism.

There are, of course, some matters on which a teacher or pastor might dissent that would call for strong action, even expulsion. But Becker hasn’t questioned the Chalcedonian definition or the doctrine of the Trinity. And there may be some logic in a church keeping a somewhat tighter rein on professors in its seminaries in terms of what they teach, but Becker teaches at a university not owned and operated by the Missouri Synod. So the obsession with him (and that isn’t too strong a word) in some quarters – including, it would appear, the International Center in St. Louis – appears simply mean-spirited and, frankly, discouraging to those of us who admire many things about Missouri.

– by Richard O. Johnson, editor

Book review: Praying the Psalms



Concordia Psalter (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2015) ISBN: 978-0758647696.

Reading the Psalms with Luther (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007) ISBN 978-0758613752.

The Psalms: A New Translation (Singing Version) (New York: Paulist Press, 1963) ISBN 978-0809116690.

I’m a big fan of the Psalms. As one who regularly prays the Daily Office, the Psalms are a hugely significant part of my spiritual life. Over the years I’ve accumulated a number of books to assist me in

“praying the Psalms,” and I’m always looking for resources that will open up some new vistas and at the same time be easy to use.

Concordia Psalter is a wonderful addition to my devotional library. Compact in size and beautifully printed, the book prints each Psalm (in easily readable type) along with two Psalm tones provided immediately above each Psalm. The tones are mostly those from the *Lutheran Service Book*, so are new to me; they are simple and lovely. (A few of them are *Lutheran Book of Worship* tones as well.) They are also generally well chosen for the text.

The translation of the Psalms used is that of the *English Standard Version* Bible. For one accustomed to the *LBW*, which uses the *Book of Common Prayer* translation, that takes a little getting used to. But in the end, it is another way of getting that “new vista”; the translation is fresh yet familiar, and it actually sings rather well (better, for example, than the *New Revised Standard Version*).

Praying for vengeance

With each Psalm there is a Psalm prayer, drawn from F. Kuegele’s *Book of Devotion: The Psalms*. That book was apparently first published in 1895, but the language has been modernized. On the whole, I have found the prayers less satisfying than the *LBW* Psalm prayers, and they sometimes have that rather hard edge that is difficult to pray, at least for those outside the Missouri Synod.

Take, for example, the prayer attached to Psalm 137 (admittedly a Psalm with its own hard edge). It asks God to “avenge Your Christian Church of her oppressors and mockers” and to “let them not go unpunished who, with the malice of Satan, go about to corrupt the innocent hearts.” That’s pretty strong stuff – though one might argue that in a world where Islamic extremists behead Coptic Christians, it may be an understandable prayer.

But compare the *LBW*’s prayer: “You willed to make us citizens of your country and singers of your mercy. Do not abandon us in the land of exile, but bring us to the heavenly Jerusalem, chanting your praise.” That picks up on other themes within the Psalm, and redirects the one praying away from the theme of vengeance; it seems a kinder and gentler way to pray a difficult Psalm.

I might mention here, too, a peculiarity that I find in many LCMS worship resources, which is an overly generous use of capitalization. That’s a stylistic issue, of course, and one must at least admit that their editors are consistent. But when one is accustomed to a different style, the incessant use of capital letters (for pronouns referring to God, for words like Law and Gospel, for images of Jesus like Light or Truth) are a tad distracting. Maybe this fondness of theirs has to do with the LCMS’ German roots.

Reading schedule

The book also offers three different “reading schedules” for using the Psalms in daily prayer. One

is the thirty day schedule which follows the *Book of Common Prayer*, dividing the entire Psalter into morning and evening prayer for each day of the month. There is another thirty day schedule which doesn’t distinguish between morning and evening prayer but simply lists consecutive Psalms for each day. I don’t quite see the point of this one, actually; it is slightly different from the bifurcated version, but one could obviously accomplish the same thing just by using both morning and evening prayer appointed Psalms for each day.

Then there is a third schedule that allows one to read the entire Psalter over a two week period. Using this one, the Psalms are not read consecutively, but the schedule is divided into Psalms for seven daily offices (including Compline, but combining Vigils and Matins). There is some repetition; Psalms 4 and 91 are always appointed for Compline, for instance. One wonders how many users of the book will actually utilize this schedule, which requires a rather vigorous discipline to make it work.

Disappointments

What is disappointing is that the book does not contain the seasonal schedule that was provided in the *LBW*. That one was included in the *LSB*; one wonders whether omitting it here was yet another deliberate “backing away” from anything that the Missouri Synod might appear to have in common with other Lutherans.

My other disappointment is that the Psalter does not include suggested antiphons for the Psalms. One might solve that problem by marking a verse or two that one could use, but it would have been nice to have antiphons printed (preferably in a musical setting).

A companion book

Reading the Psalms with Luther was published a few years back, but it is an alternative that might be particularly useful for those who are disinclined or unable to sing the Psalms. In most respects it is quite similar to *Concordia Psalter*; the translation is the same, and Kuegele’s Psalm prayers are also provided. The Psalms are pointed for singing, but the Psalm tones are not printed along with the Psalms (though several from *LSB* are printed in the front of the book).

What is added is Luther’s preface to each

Psalm – a paragraph for each, generally putting the Psalm in a Christological context. Apparently these prefaces haven't appeared in the American edition of *Luther's Works* (at least I can't find them). Luther also connects many of the Psalms to portions of the *Catechism*; again, "new vistas."

An old favorite doesn't wear well

The Psalms: A New Translation isn't so new anymore, but it is back in print. This is the book popularly known as the "Gelineau Psalms," after the French priest Joseph Gelineau who composed the tones several decades ago. The Gelineau settings were my first experience in singing the Psalms back in the 1970s at Yale Divinity School, so I have had a sentimental fondness for them. I also had a nearly disintegrated copy which I probably had "borrowed" when I left YDS, so I was pleased to find that there is a revised edition in print.

I'm afraid, however, that the Gelineau Psalms haven't worn that well for me. It may be that most of them are just too complicated for easy devotional use. Each tone has measures that might be included or excluded, depending on how many

lines are in the Psalm, and it's never quite predictable. There are some Psalms where the pointing just seems to be incorrect, so matching it up to the tones is almost impossible. To make matters worse, the tones are printed in the back rather than with each Psalm, and unless one has them committed to memory, there's a lot of flipping back and forth which isn't conducive to prayer.

It should also be said that the translations here probably go too far in the direction of making the Psalms "singable." Sometimes they work, and sometimes they end up being a little wooden and not closely enough tethered to a more accurate translation.

All of that being said, I think the Gelineau settings can work, with a lot of practice. I've visited a monastery where they are in regular use, and the monks seem to manage quite nicely. A few of the Psalms that I learned years ago singing Compline in the basement chapel at Yale are committed to memory, and I enjoy singing them. But trying anything unknown is a steeper learning curve than I really want to tackle, at least while trying to pray.

– by Richard O. Johnson, editor

The trouble with church meetings

by Raymond J. Brown



I have attended many council and committee meetings in several parishes over many years and in various capacities.

There have been good ones. There have been sleepy ones. There have been inconsequential ones. There have been bitter and angry ones.

Now, let me confess that in both the church and the world, I prefer meetings that are necessary and short. When I was senior enough in the U.S. Coast Guard to set some meetings, I established a rule that no meeting would go over 50 minutes, and that the meeting would start on time (and woe be-tide someone tardy). Pastors and churchmen, I know, seldom possess such draconian authority.

But the truth is that parish meetings often suck. What are the reasons? I would offer three explanations: (1) they are held when people are tired; (2) most people are unprepared for the meeting; and, (3) most participants do not yet own theological minds.

Most church meetings are in the evening

Well, people need to earn money, and that is usually in the daytime. So unless you rely entirely on retirees, the temporal business of the parish will usually be addressed collectively at an evening meeting. Attendees will probably be tired. This is simply a reality of modern life. Yet the pastor and the chair would do well to ensure that most staff work is accomplished ahead of time by personal conversations, phone calls, and email. And the chair would do well to be able to keep folks on topic – though I know from personal experience that, while most folks admire this, there will occasionally be someone who tends to take offense.

Solutions? There are none, other than to be prepared for fatigue and to know when to quit.

Most people are unprepared for the meeting

Okay, that is an indictment. So be it. Such has at least been my experience.

I once heard in my Fellowship of Christian Athletes misspent youth what I thought was a wonderful presentation entitled, "The Only Ability God Wants From You Is Your *Availability*." Well, for the temporal business of the church, this is dead wrong. Showing up ignorant (which does not mean stupid) really is a sin of omission. Participants should make every effort to know the agenda and should have thought and prayed about important decisions to be made. The pastor and chair should assist in this, making clear the salient items to be discussed. Extra work, I know, but the most important staff work is always accomplished *before* and *after* official meetings, not during the meeting itself.

The concept of real commitment to an assignment, project, or ministry is not only underrated in our parishes, but often ignored. I knew a man who'd been an Army ranger and was decorated for heroism numerous times. He stated that on every hill he took, it was always the same three or four guys in his company on the ground next to him at the summit. The church needs to develop more of that type commitment.

Unformed theological minds

I recall reading Harry Blamires' book *The Christian Mind* many years ago. Around the same time I went to a presentation by Os Guinness on "Thinking Christianly." I also heard C. S. Lewis' secretary Walter Hooper speak of Lewis' thought and how he was "the most converted man." I was not yet thirty years of age and not sure what it was to think as a Christian. But in parish meetings over the years, I have observed considerable non-Christian thinking.

Now of course the temporal work of the church requires financial acumen, property management, and occasionally construction knowledge. There is no specifically confessional thinking with respect to a plumbing problem or snow removal. I

recall a Coast Guard Academy classmate, a committed Christian, who as a junior officer made some poor seamanship decisions in ice and fog and hazarded his ship. The captain queried him on his decisions and my classmate's response was that he was sure God would get him through; thus did he end his short career.

No, we should never be so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good. But in any controversy (and they are inevitable in any congregation), people tend to revert to type. The academic wants an academic framework. The businessman thinks bottom line. The lawyer goes off into his own legal world. A techie always seems to see some digital solution. Moms usually have the most common sense. In a parish, reversion to type should be a reliance on Scriptural and Confessional principles, personally absorbed over time. Too seldom is this the case.

Selection criteria for church officers

"Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty." [Acts 6:3 RSV]. Of course, that is how the first parish servants were chosen (and this was to wait on tables!). That is a tough set of requirements, being full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom. It reminds me of the joke about why the Savior could not be born in Washington DC: one could not find there three wise men and a virgin. Yet those desirable traits for church office are in the Word of God and occurred in a church which knew about fulfilling the Great Commission.

With all our warts, we are the people of God, his saints. I think we can do better than we do at church meetings.

Raymond J. Brown is a member of the board of directors of the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, and a participant in the Lutheran Coalition for Reform.

Omnium gatherum



Misinformed bishops • A couple of months back, I mildly tweaked the United Methodist Church for comments that appeared on their web site (one of which

was penned by a bishop) saying things about the ecumenical creeds which were, well, wrong. Alas, I now have to similarly chastise an article on the Athanasian Creed on the ELCA's Northwestern Ohio

Synod, written by Bishop Marcus Lohrmann. Let me say first that Lohrmann's explanation of the difficult *Quicumque vult* is admirably pastoral. But he begins by saying that "Athanasius was one of the 'fathers' of the Church who lived in the fourth century and who played an important part in the formulation of the Nicene Creed which was developed at the Council of Nicaea in 325AD." That's not quite right. Athanasius did attend the Council of Nicaea, but at the time he was a mere deacon, the assistant to Alexander of Alexandria. As such, it is unlikely that he "played an important role" in the development of the Nicene Creed; if he did, it was all behind the scenes and we can't really know about it. That Athanasius played a vital role in defending and advocating for the faith of Nicaea cannot be doubted, but it was, shall we say, an "after the fact" role. It is, of course, a relatively minor point, but historical accuracy is important. At least to us historians.

Equal opportunity critic • Of course that wasn't quite as seriously incorrect as an offhand remark made by my pastor recently when he alleged that Athanasius wrote the Athanasian Creed. I corrected him (privately, of course, and gently), and as a result I was assigned to teach a Lenten class on the creeds. In the future I'll try to keep my mouth shut.

As if it were a nuisance • There was a great exchange recently on *Forum Online*. One poster, an ELCA pastor, argued that the early church developed doctrines and traditions that were inimical to the simple teaching of Jesus. In his words, those doctrines and traditions were "created by men too conditioned by their own culture to adequately follow the teachings and practices of Jesus." Another poster, a former Lutheran who is now a member of the Orthodox Church, responded beautifully: "Because they preserved what they received as if it were a treasure, and you depart from what you received as if it were a nuisance. Not to mention they were quite counter-cultural. Rather than being influenced to change the faith by the culture, they preserved it through horrific persecution, including persecution brought about by their refusal to worship false gods of the culture." Amen to that.

Baltic Lutherans • *Religion Watch* recently cited an article about the developing reality of Lutheran-

ism in the Baltic nations. Prior to the Soviet period, Lutheranism was the majority faith in Estonia and Latvia. But Lutheranism declined in numbers during the years of Communist rule, largely because of the immigration of Russians; there are now more Orthodox Christians in these nations than Lutherans. At the same time, Lutheranism began moving in a more conservative direction. In the early 1990s, a new Lutheran archbishop in Latvia pushed the church to eliminate the ordination of women. A similar direction was taken in Lithuania, where no women have been ordained in the past twenty years. At the same time, both churches have moved into the orbit of the Missouri Synod, which is now in altar and pulpit fellowship with both churches. In Latvia, this has led to the secession of several congregations—some of which were more "liberal," others more "conservative." Meanwhile the church in Estonia has remained in closer fellowship with the larger global Lutheran community, and it continues to ordain women; on the other hand, it has protested the Church of Sweden's approval of blessing same-sex relationships. The new archbishop, Urmas Viilma, elected just a few months ago, seems determined to hold the conservative and liberal parties in his church together.

Pagan resurgence • Meanwhile in Iceland, the challenge to Lutheran dominance seems to be coming not from Orthodoxy, but from paganism. While still a small minority numerically, the "Asatru movement," founded in the 1970s to revive worship of the old Norse deities (you know, Thor, Odin, Frigg, etc.), is now erecting a temple in Reykjavik. There are about 2,000 of these neo-pagans in Iceland, but then it's a small country; those couple of thousand represent about 0.6% of the population. For the sake of comparison, that's about twice the relative size of the United Church of Christ in the United States.

Innovation • Not too many readers have responded to my search for a better term than "contemporary worship," but Margaret Stelhorn, the wife of a retired ELCA pastor, suggests "innovative worship." "All worship," she writes, "should include innovative elements within the Lutheran/Ancient Service format." That, of course, points precisely to the problem: what kind of "innovation" is

appropriate and what simply trashes the tradition for the sake of some passing fancy? So I thank Mrs. Stellhorn for her suggestion, but I guess I'm still waiting for a word to describe the kind of thing that others have called "contemporary."

Cremation • On the other hand, the cards and letters are still coming in regarding Pr. Minnich's piece on funeral customs (January *FL*) and Pr. Harwell's response to it (February *FL*). It's obviously a topic of some interest. Most of the disagreement with Pr. Minnich has centered on the question of cremation. "My salvation is not dependent on the nature of my body at its resting," writes Pr. Robert Byrne, "but on the nature of Jesus the Christ into whose resurrection I was adopted in Baptism. . . . Cremation is not the issue; rather poor liturgical understanding, sloppy pastoral care and a Church fails to see the distinctions between orthodoxy and *adiaphora* to its detriment." Pr. Gordon Beck, on the other hand, thinks Pr. Harwell doesn't take seriously enough the issues raised by Pr. Minnich about respect for the body: "Why were Jesus' legs not broken in insure death?" he asks. "Why was he not cremated? Why was his body so respectfully buried? Yes, over time an embalmed body isn't any more what it was than a cremated body, but that's not the point. It seems to me the urge to cremate is driven both by economics as well as a de-emphasis on the resurrection of the body. How do we uphold this essential Christian truth at a funeral/memorial service? The early church fathers got excited about the incarnation of God in flesh, as well as the incarnated Jesus' bodily resurrection." Luther Seminary Prof. Mark

Granquist framed the question somewhat differently: "I think that some balance on the issue is needed. The major concern here seems to be about the Christian understanding of death, especially as how it relates to modern funeral practices. There are legitimate questions here, especially because of the modern American tendency to deny the reality of death. But we need to separate this issue from an automatic assumption that this problem is related to one type of funeral practice or the other. Neither traditional embalming and burial nor cremation is at the root completely responsible for the American denial of death, though either could contribute to it. Last year I interviewed a number of funeral directors for an article in *Word and World* on contemporary funeral practices. When asked about the trend toward cremation, they tended to be most worried about how many of their clients seemingly used cremation in effect to deny death and short-circuit the mourning and grief process. They were concerned that the needs of family and friends to accept the death and to say their good-byes to the deceased were disrupted by an immediate cremation. Cremation can allow people to either rush or postpone funerals – to fit them into their "schedules" – and thus to make death "convenient." But death is disruptive, and should be; it should make us stop and think, stop our busy lives, and pay attention to the needs of mourning and grief. This is what should be our focus in funerals, whether traditional burial or cremation." Thanks to all of these readers for their thoughts, and now, unless somebody has something really new and interesting to say, we'll lay this topic to rest. – *roj*

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