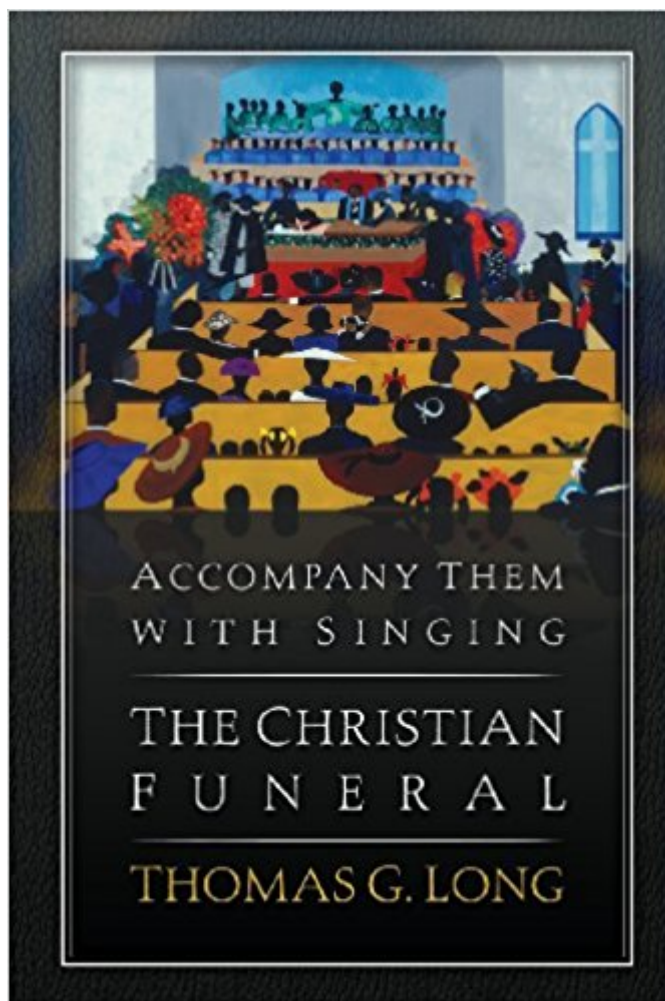


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# Accompany Them With Singing--The Christian Funeral



## Synopsis

Thomas G. Long, one of America's most trusted and thoughtful pulpit voices, provides a much needed theological and cultural critique of today's Christian funeral. Long begins by describing how the Christian funeral developed historically, theologically, and liturgically and then discusses recent cultural trends in funeral practices, including the rise in number of cremations and memorial services. He describes the basic pattern for a funeral service, details options in funeral planning, identifies characteristics of a "good funeral," and provides thoughtful guidance for preaching at a funeral. But Long also notes a disturbing trend toward funeral services that seem theologically right and pastorally caring but actually depart from the primary aims of the Christian funeral. Long argues that the proper Christian funeral should be constructed around the metaphor of the deceased as a saint traveling on a baptismal journey toward God, accompanied by the community of faith on "the last mile of the way." He cautions that the cultural conditions for maintaining this view are under stress and a new, less theological and less satisfying metaphor that focuses on the mourner has begun to erode the Christian view. He contrasts the ancient grand community drama with today's trend toward body-less memorial services that focus primarily on the living and grief management, arguing that this is a loss for the church and calling for the church to reclaim the classic metaphor.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Long, a homiletics professor and well-regarded preacher, argues that funerals have become spiritually impoverished and need revitalization. Providing a comprehensive review of the

history, traditions and theology of Christian funerals, Long notes that recent decades have seen both growing comfort with cremation and an increased preference for disembodied memorial services offering closure. In defiance of this trend, Long argues that just as bodies are present for baptism and weddings, they should be present for funerals. Long laments that eulogies celebrating individual lives often replace gospel preaching and advocates instead that liturgies emphasize a community's conveyance of a beloved's body to its final resting place, worshipping as they go. Delineating the purposes of a good funeral, Long urges clergy and congregations to embrace funerals as opportunities to act out one more time the great and hopeful drama of how the Christian life moves from death to life and from baptism to resurrection. This book promises to be a welcome theological resource and practical guide for pastors and others who care for the dying and officiate at Christian funerals. (Oct.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Thomas G. Long is Bandy Professor of Preaching at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, and one of the most popular preachers in the United States today. The author of many books, he is the coauthor with Thomas Lynch of *The Good Funeral: Death, Grief, and the Community of Care*.

Intellectually challenging book that forces you to take a hard look at today's various methods of handling the dead and dealing with various types of funerals and what they represent. Eye opening for most if they have not given considerable thought to funerals. Everyone should read this book if they are ready to purchase or think about the future and their own funeral or that of a loved one.

A very interesting read. Gives the history of funeral practices through the ages. I like Long's emphasis on the importance of the site of the funeral in a church for a believer/Christian and on the impact of music as part of the funeral or memorial service. After all, music comes the closest to expressing the inexpressible.

This is an excellent book for those who are interested in understanding the theology of the Christian funeral and for those who are working as funeral directors. It is a useful resource for ministers as it offers history overview of the funeral practices, theology behind the ritual, and suggestions about planning a meaningful Christian funeral. It has its limitations though. The book specifically deals with the Christian funeral practices as they relate to the popular culture in America. It has a more Protestant orientation. And it does not address the grief and trauma aspect of it very well but that

was not the purpose of the book anyways. All in all, it is a worthwhile read! I recommend it highly.

This book gives a careful explanation of the Christian basis for funerals, and a solid theological explanation of the purpose of the funeral. Contrary to wide-spread current practice, a funeral is not meant to be a component of grief management, nor is it appropriate to turn the funeral service into a "celebration of the life of..." someone who is eulogized beyond recognition. There is a Christian purpose for the funeral service, as a part of the baptized Christian's life. Reading this book at a time when the family is not under the stress of losing a loved one could be valuable preparation for thoughtfully dealing with the funeral preparation when the time comes.

I am a Roman Catholic cleric who has assisted and officiated at many funerals. I found Dr. Long's insights to be invaluable to me. Reading his book rejuvenated my imagination of my role in the funeral even within the limits of Catholic liturgical practice and has improved my preaching. He offers many multi denominational sources and examples as well as a very clear picture of his concepts. I recommend this volume to my colleagues: Catholic and non Catholic alike.

Essential reading for liturgists, ministers, and pastors for understanding, planning, and conducting meaningful and theologically sound funerals. A must read.

The generation of Christians now burying their parents and grandparents has generally attended church less often and in some cases not even practiced the faith of their parents, yet they want unprecedented control of their parents' funeral rites especially to introduce secular features. The thoughtful and prayerful issues raised in this book deserve to be discussed more widely in our culture. This book is a cogent critique of many of the current innovations at memorial services and our obsession with ourselves even in death.

Practical and thought-provoking, the author challenges several common and commonly unquestioned practices and philosophies of death and funerals. Well worth the read.

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