

**PASTORS AND RELATIVES
ENACTING PROTESTANT AND CATHOLIC FUNERAL LITURGIES
IN THE NETHERLANDS**

1. Introduction

The role of pastors and relatives in Christian funerals has been transformed. Relatives' desires regarding funeral rites have become diverse, affected by postmodern social trends like individualization, secularization and pluralism. On the one hand individuals and families may ask for a traditional Christian funeral, on the other they may prefer a custom-made funeral to suit individual needs. Of course, continuity and discontinuity in religious traditions have always existed, as has dialogue between pastors and laypersons (cf. Swanson 1995, 235ff), but in contemporary society changes occur more rapidly. The next of kin have increasingly influenced funeral rites in recent times. Besides, those attending funerals no longer necessarily identify with the Christian religion (Quartier 2007a, 31). Relatives and other participants in the funeral are a heterogeneous group, albeit with the same or an even greater need to create meaning and memories (Frijhoff 2011, 81). This presents pastors¹ with a challenge. To help people cope with their loss and ensure that the liturgy is significant for all funeral participants they try to accommodate individual needs while remaining true to the religious requirements of their tradition.¹ The aim of this article is to gain insight into the roles of relatives and pastors in custom-made Christian funeral liturgies, and the religious and individual needs of both groups. Exploring these areas will improve our understanding of contemporary funeral rites and enable us to reflect on challenges facing the churches in contemporary Dutch society. So far most literature on Christian funeral rites has dealt with Catholic liturgy. The article starts filling the gap in academic literature by looking at Protestant rites.

To achieve these goals we first discuss what is meant by a custom-made Christian liturgy and how relatives and pastors play a role on three levels in these liturgies. We cite transformations that have occurred and examples of the role of actors in liturgical elements. At the same three levels where pastors and

relatives play a role their desire for personal and religious elements becomes visible, which is discussed in the second part of the article. Using Jan Assmann's concept of collective memory we indicate how Catholic and Protestant religious and individual needs have developed since the 1960s up to the present. In probing these aspects we adopt a ritual, liturgical approach (Quartier 2007b). Thirteen qualitative expert interviews with Catholic and Protestant intermediaries were conducted in and around Nijmegen, the Netherlands.² The key theoretical concepts we work with are applied to the data gathered during our fieldwork. The Protestant perspectives and experiences in the article are confined to The Protestant Church in the Netherlands.

2. Roles of relatives and pastors

To explore the roles of pastors and relatives in custom-made funeral liturgies we first need to determine what liturgy is. In ritual studies liturgy is seen as a religious ritual in a religious institution or tradition (Grimes 2006, 112). As such liturgy is characterized by structure (internal) and creates structure (external). In addition liturgy has meaning (internal) and refers to meaning (external) (Bell 1997, 23ff; Quartier 2011, 148). From these two viewpoints³ we define funeral liturgy as a set of ritual actions that possess both characteristics and together constitute the funeral ceremony, for example the *In memoriam*, funeral hymns and the ministry of the word. Custom-made means that at least some of these ritual actions are adapted or replaced to accord with relatives' wishes and frame of reference. The eucharist, for example, may no longer focus on both the presence of Christ and the sharing of bread and wine with the community, but only on the celebration of the community, more specifically the community of funeral participants. Other elements, for example new texts, CDs or children's paintings, may also be added. Traditional elements – that is, prescribed or customary acts – still play a major role, but a custom-made liturgy does not resemble the traditional one. Instead it reflects the actual ceremony, comprising both traditional and adjusted elements. Adjusted elements are seen as part of the religious ritual. The article concentrates on such liturgies. Of course, the pastors we interviewed also perform traditional funerals, but we confine ourselves to funerals where the relatives asked for a custom-made liturgy.

By the very nature of custom-made liturgies the roles and needs of pastors and relatives change. Their desire for religious and personal elements is inextricably intertwined with their roles and together they form a complex grid.

To illuminate this grid we first examine the roles of pastors and relatives, to which end we distinguish between three levels: an *active*, a *passive* and a *pre-passive* role.

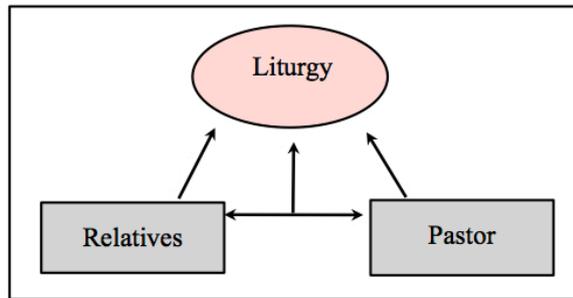


Figure 1: Active role
Participation during the
actual liturgy

The active role of relatives and pastors concerns the scope for active participation in the liturgy during the ceremony (figure 1), for example preaching, reading or playing a musical instrument. This active role is easily observable: one can see who performs a certain act. Do relatives get an opportunity to recall aspects of the life of the deceased? Who enacts the religious elements? Both relatives and pastors can perform ritual acts. In reference to the active role relatives can be defined as *close* family, friends and colleagues. The pastor mostly performs more traditional rites, for example the Eucharist or Lord's Supper. However, nowadays many churches offer more possibilities for active involvement by relatives. In the churches we explored both men and women can read Scripture, carry the body of the deceased into the church, and intercede in prayer. We do not consider the question whether God plays an active role in the funeral ceremony but confine ourselves to the manner in which people – relatives and pastors – co-create the liturgy.

Second, the passive role concerns the focus of the liturgical content (figure 2). To whom are the ritual acts addressed? Here we distinguish between three (groups of) actors: God, relatives and funeral participants, and the deceased. In addition the content of the liturgy includes relationships between these three groups. These relationships and actors intermingle in liturgical elements, hence the focus of the liturgy is constantly shifting.⁴ In the case of relatives and funeral participants they may be moved during the ceremony and experience the ritual actions intensely. For that to happen the liturgical content, which comprises profound earthly and heavenly images, has to be recognizable (Quartier 2011, 148). This is where custom-made liturgies are significant. Since

these images no longer have a uniform meaning for all funeral participants, ritual acts are designed to accord with diverse frames of reference.

Because of the profundity of earthly and heavenly images in the liturgy, God and the deceased must be listed among the actors. Without at least an indirect focus on God and tradition the liturgy cannot be characterized as Christian. Furthermore, the deceased must feature in the liturgy, for she is basic to the event. Hence both God and the deceased are closely related to the content and influence the experience of relatives. Because our study centres on the relatives we look into the focus on God and the deceased inasmuch as they affect relatives during the ceremony. In addition we are interested in the liturgy's focus on God, relatives and the deceased as a need of relatives and pastors. The reference to God as an actor should therefore be put into perspective. Although the pastor does not feature in figure 2, since the ceremony does not focus on her as an individual actor, she does have certain wishes regarding the focus of the ceremony. This will be discussed at the pre-passive level.

When it comes to relations between relatives, God and the deceased in the content there has been an interesting transformation. Relatives have a stronger desire to focus on themselves and the deceased (Van Tongeren 2007, 12) rather than directly on God. This does not mean that God becomes less important, only that the focus on personal and religious elements has changed. Addressing God indirectly, for example, does not necessarily diminish his effectiveness during the ceremony.

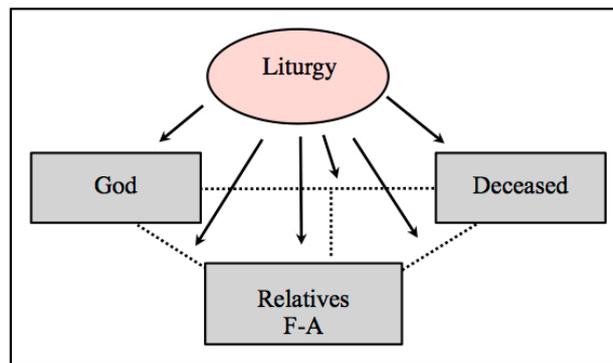


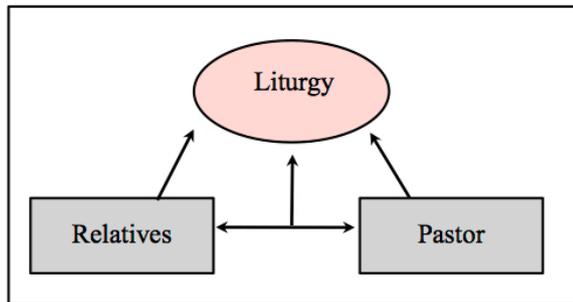
Figure 2: Passive level
Whom is the liturgy, the ritual acts, focused upon?
God, relatives & deceased
Triangular relations between actors

Although we confine ourselves to relatives, other funeral participants should be included in the passive role, for the liturgical content originally focused on, and was adapted to, their frame of reference as well. However, concentrating on this group has become problematic because of its growing diversity (Quartier 2007a,

31). Also, the difference between relatives (family, friends and colleagues of the deceased) and funeral participants (mainly parishioners) is no longer clear-cut. People form part of many networks besides the church and their bond with the community of parishioners has become one of many (Polspoel 2007, 142-143). Among the smaller Nijmegen churches we studied that are still of major importance for the community, parishioners attend the funerals of close church members and Sunday services. This appears to be less common in amalgamated churches or churches that are not closely connected with a specific neighbourhood.⁵ According to pastors of such churches parishioners do not participate in the funerals of unknown church members. Besides, when the deceased was intimately involved with the community other parishioners may just as well be viewed as relatives. Consequently the community of parishioners is not a major focus. The group of relatives has become the main audience.

Third, the pre-passive role concerns the influence of relatives and pastors on the content. This influence is limited to the preparation for the funeral and concerns liturgical roles and elements. Although actors actively contribute to the content, their influence is defined as pre-passive, for its outcome – the funeral itself – is passive. The distinction between preparation and the actual funeral is important. Being a ‘back region’, to use Erving Goffman’s term, pastors and relatives fulfil a different function in the preparation than during the funeral itself. Suppressed facts emerge (Goffman 1971, 114) and there is scope for intimate dialogues, grief, debate, and practical and emotional matters. A quotation from Goffman that forms an apposite parallel illustrates the difference between the preparation and the actual funeral as the ‘front region’ where the performance takes place: “Since the vital secrets of a show are visible backstage and since performers behave out of character while there, it is natural to expect that the passage from the front to the back region will be kept closed to members of the audience [...]” (Goffman 1971, 116).

During the preparation for the ceremony relatives and pastors express their wishes and discuss the ritual acts. What elements – texts, music, candles – do relatives prepare? What elements does the pastor prepare? What characteristics of the deceased may be described during the funeral? At this level structure and meaning are discussed. In some cases the deceased may have influenced the liturgy, but we confine ourselves to the work of relatives and pastors. However, it must be noted that the features of the deceased (e.g. a child, an adult, relations and social involvement) and the cause of death (e.g. old age, sickness, suicide or a traffic accident) always affect relatives’ and pastors’ influence on the content.



**Figure 3: Pre-passive level
Influence upon the content**

This pre-passive role has also changed. The desire of relatives to influence the liturgy has increased, as well as the scope allowed for influencing the content. This is not confined to custom-made liturgies, since in many cases the request for a traditional Christian funeral also comes from relatives.

3. Communicative and cultural memory in funeral liturgies

What makes the roles of pastors and relatives so interesting is that at all three levels of action their individual and religious needs are involved. The term ‘individual needs’ refers to the desire for personal elements. Religious needs, on the other hand, concern the desire for religious elements. Relatives’ influence has grown and conflicts have arisen in their demands for religious and personal elements. Who directs the service nowadays, the relatives or God? Different answers to this question are to be found in academic literature. For example: “[...] because the emphasis has shifted to relatives, the funeral liturgy may stand at odds with the religious tradition [...] [our translation]” (Van Tongeren 2007, 12), or: “The correct answer, of course, for most Christians is that God is first to be worship[p]ed” (Hogue 2006, 3). In Dutch practice this latter view not always seems to apply when a custom-made liturgy is asked for. In the liturgical roles and elements both religious and individual needs are considered important, and both have transformed in recent times. What kind of needs is seen as urgent, and how has the desire for religious and individual elements changed? Also, how does it affect the roles of relatives and pastors?

Jan Assmann’s concept of *collective memory* helps to answer these questions. According to Assmann ritual actions that combine to form the liturgy provide a connective structure with a social and a temporal dimension. This structure connects relatives as members of a community with the past and future of the deceased, both culturally and communicatively (Assmann 1992, 16-17). Hence

we find elements of cultural and communicative memory in the liturgical content, which we link to religious and individual needs respectively. Through communicative memory the deceased is remembered by the community along with the recent, shared history of the group. Communicative ritual acts concern individual characteristics of the deceased, her legacy, and her importance for the survivors' future. Cultural memory, on the other hand, links the community with the deceased's past and future by connecting him with a mythical dimension in time, in this case the Christian tradition. The deceased's relation with God is remembered and hope is expressed of his future resurrection with Christ (Assmann 1992, 50-53; Quartier 2007a, 40-42). Cultural hope in particular expresses heavenly images and ideas of an afterlife.

Assmann's concepts are useful, for they enable us to distinguish between the desire for personal and religious elements, for communicative and cultural memory. These concepts are more than a theoretical framework, since they feature in funeral participants' and pastors' minds. In his study of Catholic funeral rites Thomas Quartier demonstrates that four forms of collective memory are observable in practice: communicative liturgical remembrance, communicative liturgical hope, cultural liturgical remembrance, and cultural liturgical hope (Quartier 2007a, 177). This entails two distinctions: between communicative and cultural, and between remembrance (recalling the deceased's life and belief) and hope (the deceased's future with God and the community). Quartier's four categories clarify the individual and religious needs of pastors and relatives, as well as the diversity and development of these needs. These concepts also facilitate comparison of Catholic and Protestant liturgies in respect of communicative and cultural memory. Lastly, they show how the roles we described in the first section relate to pastors' and relatives' emphasis on communicative and cultural memory.

4. Catholic religious needs

When one looks at the religious needs of pastors one recognizes their function as intermediaries between the Christian institution, tradition and relatives. The desire for cultural elements in the liturgical content always relates to wishes emanating from these groups. So when speaking of Catholic religious needs as a whole one must realize that in practice these needs are imprecise and invoked (Moore 1975, 236). Cultural elements are imposed by clergy, derive from the Christian tradition, or are requested by relatives. In present-day practice the

question of religious needs arises from relatives' desire for a Christian funeral. After all, they choose to have a Christian ceremony, although there is a rich funeral market outside the churches (Roukema-Koning 2007, 162; Venbrux, Bolt & Heessels 2008). There are many reasons for choosing a Christian funeral. The most obvious, of course, is that the deceased and relatives are believers and/or church members. Besides, people may fear for their salvation, or simply enjoy the Christian liturgical setting. A proper Christian ceremony can also be desired because, for example, the deceased mother was a devout Catholic or Protestant and would have wanted her funeral to conform to her sincere belief. Hence reasons to ask for cultural elements in a funeral are not always associated with intrinsic faith but are diverse.

In Catholic and Protestant liturgies two themes are crucial: salvation and resurrection. These themes, originating in the respective tradition(s), appear to be important for relatives. Quartier shows that 43.2% of his respondents agreed with cultural liturgical remembrance and 60.8% with cultural liturgical hope (Quartier 2007a, 167). This suggests that especially hope – related to God – can be seen as a religious need of relatives. In our fieldwork many pastors supported this idea. As one pastor put it, “Even when people no longer know the story of Christ or exactly what to believe in, the idea of resurrection, salvation, or just that the deceased is in good hands strengthens them.”⁶ Thus the afterlife emerges as an important theme, which relates to the roles of pastors and relatives in that it appears to be a major focus for relatives during the ceremony and, as became clear in our interviews, faith and doubt regarding the afterlife are discussed in the preparation for the ceremony.

Yet it is not that simple, for the desire for cultural elements also stems from the Catholic institution.⁷ During the second Vatican council the Constitution on Liturgy consulted to reform the existing Tridentine funeral liturgy. Greater emphasis was put on the paschal character of Christian death, so texts and psalms were chosen that accentuated not only the sorrow of the bereaved but above all the belief in resurrection and hope. In the content of the liturgy cultural liturgical hope regarding resurrection and salvation came to outweigh medieval anxieties. This new focus has become apparent in ritual elements: the prominent role of the Easter candle, the new liturgical colour (purple), and the greater importance of the eucharist, in which the church offers Christ's resurrection on behalf of the deceased (Hermans 2011, 60, 65).

Besides emphasis on resurrection and salvation, the Constitution on Liturgy required local traditions to be taken into account, for example the cus-

tom of having the service at the deceased's home or in the church hall. By creating three models for the funeral liturgy instead of one global model differences would be moderated (Hermans 2011, 62). However, this does not mean that one can interpret and adapt the liturgical content to one's native customs or to relatives' and pastors' wishes. The prescription reads: "[...] should the priest take into account the possibilities that are offered within this liturgical order" (*Nationale Raad voor Liturgie* 1976, 15). The internal structure and external meaning – the reference – of the liturgical order appear to be very important, and making more room for local variations in fact enhances the possibility of following the prescribed format. In the *Uitvaartliturgie* the ritual content and roles are largely appointed, and most subsequent publications on diocesan liturgy stipulate the roles of relatives and the priest. This does not mean that there is no scope for relatives' contributions in regard to cultural (and communicative) memory. However, it implies that, at least officially, these are subject to severe restraint. For example, a practical diocesan brochure lists possibilities for relatives to contribute to the liturgical content (*Bisdom Den Bosch* 2003, 10-11). The existence of this brochure suggests episcopal concern with the frame of reference of funeral participants while at the same time setting the limits allowed by the church. The following is an illustration of the prescribed pre-passive role of relatives and the priest:

“To choose appropriate texts from Holy Scripture in a translation approved for liturgy. The priest or deacon can help in this matter. Often there is debate on the use of non-biblical texts. However, these do not fit into the ecclesiastic liturgy, for they are not part of it. The Church asks that her choice in this matter be respected.” (*Bisdom Den Bosch* 2003, 11; our translation)

As for religious needs according to the Catholic institution, the funeral should be seen as worship focused primarily on the mystery of Easter. When it came to the content of the ceremony the priests we interviewed stressed resurrection and salvation. However, their attitudes towards the prescribed liturgy and the ways they expressed the main theme differed, and they made use of other liturgical formats, approved and non-approved by the diocese.⁸ Rites are also altered, as are texts and poetry written by priests or borrowed from Dutch authors like Huub Oosterhuis.⁹ They themselves redefine the meaning and structure of the ritual acts. In the preparation for the ceremony priests often choose liturgical elements according to their own views on faith and church, and according to the wishes of relatives and the deceased and their religious frame of reference. Prayer, the ministry of the word and absolution appear to be essential. These ritual acts reflect the tradition, satisfy religious needs of survivors and pastors,

are very often recognizable to relatives and funeral participants, and appear to comfort. Although the Eucharist can be seen as the highlight of the Catholic ceremony, the priests we interviewed decide whether to perform this rite depending on the wishes of the relatives and the deceased. "I prefer [...] to celebrate the Eucharist, but if the family does not want it, or when there are only a few church members among the relatives, we have a word and prayer ceremony [...]." ¹⁰ The religious needs of relatives are thus largely considered in practice. Because of their endeavour to create a meaningful ceremony for all participants priests play a greater pre-passive role in the preparation for the funeral than prescribed.

At this point it should be mentioned that the inclusion of religious elements also affects the active role of priests and relatives. However, the religious needs involved are of a different nature. What is at issue is not the mystery of Easter but the episcopal structure of the Catholic Church. In the church hierarchy priests function as intermediaries between tradition and relatives, institution and relatives, and God and relatives. Active roles are firmly regulated. For example, only a priest may perform the celebration of the Eucharist. The rest of the ceremony, too, with the exception of the *In memoriam*, should be performed by the priest or pastor. Relatives' desire to contribute, for example as scripture reader or in intercession, questions the episcopal structure and therefore the identity of the Catholic Church. In practice the scope allowed for relatives to perform ritual acts largely depends on the individual priest or pastor. It also depends on the relation between priest and institution.

Thus our respondents' answer to the religious needs of the Christian tradition and institution – regarding the content, preparation and roles during the ceremony – seems to be very individual. This might sound like a spontaneous development, but in fact it is very complicated, for one must not forget the mandatory nature of Catholic funeral liturgy. Besides, the episcopate's point of view has changed over the past 50 years. Since the 1950s liberation theology and church renewal have been alive among Dutch pastors and theologians and supported by the bishops (Verstraeten 2010, 435, 443). In the 1980s the *Bijzondere Synode van Bisschoppen in Nederland* was held at the request of Pope John Paul II to consider theological and pastoral matters in the Netherlands. Here the direction changed, which some saw as a punishment for the Dutch episcopate (Roorda 2006, 240). As a result of the synod new Catholic movements came into being – frequently not recognized by the episcopate, with an integral ecclesiological practice but a conservative theology (Verstraeten 2010,

445). Diverse views on liturgy, from conservative to liberal, emerged. Although in practice these views, especially the differences between those of the institution and the pastors, pose challenges, the struggle between the fixed, prescribed framework and adjustments is imperative for funeral liturgies, for they are a social construct. Moore's interpretation of behaviour in terms of two kinds of processes clarifies this. On the one hand the church leadership and a group of priests attempt to "crystallize and concretize" the funeral liturgy, on the other indeterminacies are exploited to reinterpret and redefine the prescribed rules (Moore 1975, 234). The priests we interviewed represent both processes simultaneously. They were all concerned to create a social reality that suited their own beliefs and purposes and those of relatives while remaining true to the Christian tradition.

Clearly the changed direction and religious needs of the diocese have a major influence on the tone of contemporary funeral liturgies. Opinions and implementations regarding the episcopate's approach to liturgy differ. Some adopt a conservative line, others have emancipated themselves, tried to build bridges, or are no longer recognized by the official church. "It is just a pity that the church imprisons the sacred and the mystery, which are given to people themselves, in rules and the priestly office" (Muth 2012, 19). This illustrates the conflict between religious needs in practice and official prescription. Today one must distinguish between many different views on liturgical content and the roles of pastors and relatives in the liturgy, depending on the nature of the Catholic group and priest. Although there is a clear theoretical framework, in practice religious needs are very diverse. The mystery of Easter is stressed, but the manner and degree depends on the individual pastor. The same applies to other Christian practices such as the choice of a text, music and prayers. It has also become clear that the question of religious needs is not confined to funeral liturgies but involves the whole church.

5. Protestant religious needs

As noted already, resurrection and salvation are the two major themes in Protestant funeral liturgies as well, although theological differences like justification through faith alone must be taken into account (Akerboom 1995). When one explores death rites among Protestants in the Netherlands differences among this group become apparent. The Protestant faith started out as a protest movement against Catholicism. Both in the 16th century and in its subsequent

history there were new protests that led to further divisions (Klass 2002, 129). Hence the Protestant spectrum is more differentiated than that of the Roman Catholic Church. In this article we confine ourselves to the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PKN), the largest Protestant denomination in the Netherlands at the moment. The PKN only came into being in 2004 through the unification of three Protestant churches, also known as the *Samen op Weg-kerken*.¹¹ There were objections to the unification, mainly from the *Gereformeerde Bond*. Not only did several Protestant groups reject the unification, but there was conflict within the groups as well, for each had its own meaningful history and theology (Blei 2006, 128-136).¹²

Looking at the religious needs and liturgical manuals of the PKN churches, differentiation appears to be a result of the different histories of the three churches. To understand roles and needs in contemporary liturgies we briefly discuss their liturgical history regarding funeral rites since the 1950s. Even in this period the Netherlands Reformed Church used a liturgical format, *Dienstboek voor de Nederlands Hervormde Kerk in ontwerp* (Generale Synode 1965). Following its Calvinist tradition, the 19th century Netherlands Reformed Church treated the funeral as a family event. This background still influenced the liturgy from the 1950s onwards. For example, the body of the deceased would be absent from the church funeral. Also, liturgy has a different connotation than it has in the Catholic tradition. It can be seen as a format for church ceremonies, but one must not forget that at that time many (Catholic) rituals were still foreign to the Netherlands Reformed Church. The Catholic liturgy was considered too opulent. There was no blessing of objects or lighting of candles. It was only from the 1970s onwards that the deceased's body was present during the funeral ceremony and ritual elements and acts started to play a more significant role. However, the inclusion of less sober ritual elements differed from one church board and minister to the next.¹³

While the Netherlands Reformed Church has a liturgical format and the funeral is held in church, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands are a somewhat different story. They also regarded the Catholic ceremony as excessive, but the funeral, again following Calvin, was in many places still a family occasion in the 1950s. The church's task was restricted to guiding the family and mourners and it played no role in the official ceremony. "The pastor would visit the home of the deceased, conduct a meditation and pray, accompany the family to the graveyard and say the 'Our Father'. That's it."¹⁴ If for whatever reason it was not possible to hold the ceremony in the deceased's home, the fu-

neral took place in a building close to the church or an associated building. However, it was not a church service and no elder needed to be present. Church ceremonies were reserved for highly extraordinary occasions, such as the funeral of a minister. Only later, influenced by the liturgical movement, was the funeral transformed from a family to a church service. As in the Netherlands Reformed Church, there was more scope for ritual acts and elements.¹⁵

The third PKN church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, again has a very different history. In fact, this church has not been particularly Lutheran in the Netherlands, for until the 1950s it was overshadowed by the dominant Calvinist churches. In the 1950s, when the Old Lutheran and Restored Lutheran churches reunited, its evangelical identity became visible. To mark the unification of the two Lutheran institutions a liturgy was compiled. Only then did the Lutheran notion of liturgy and ritual as meaningful and important become visible to outsiders. Their familiarity with liturgy -in the Catholic sense -is evident in the liturgical formats of the 1950s and 1970s. Thus the body of the deceased was present in the church and they celebrated the eucharist with the sick. Experience was more highly rated by the Lutherans than by the two Calvinist churches.¹⁶

From the 1970s onwards the three churches started to cooperate. The Calvinist churches were dubious about the church mentality and theological and pastoral differences between the churches (*Hervormd-gereformeerde werkgroep* 1972, 11-12). Besides, at first the Lutheran synod participated as a spectator only. In 1986 it became a participant as well (Wallet 2005, 117-118). The need for liturgical renewal and catechism was already felt (*Protestantse Kerk Nederland* 2007, 7), and in the course of the synodal meetings liturgy appeared to be an area for fruitful cooperation. In 1987 the first liturgical format of the *Samen op Weg-Kerken* was written: *Proeve voor de Eredienst*. This first volume was entitled 'Liturgy in days of mourning'. Since the Lutherans were familiar with (Catholic-style) liturgy, their influence on this volume was disproportionate, especially considering that they were the smallest group. Wide response to the volume led to revision and the new version was included in *Het Dienstboek, een proeve deel II* (2004), the first PKN liturgical manual for extraordinary pastoral occasions. This volume can be seen as the product of cooperation between the three groups.

During the *Samen op Weg* process all three churches had to reflect on their liturgical tradition and all had to make concessions. The unification undoubtedly led to common elements and religious needs in the liturgical practice

of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. Of course, some differentiation persists. The PKN liturgy is not an unalterable law and the PKN format is not always used, or at least not exclusively. Old liturgical forms still have an influence, although the appearance of certain ritual elements like prayer and the ministry of the word is structured. For example, in one of the Protestant churches in Nijmegen the funeral ceremonies of the two pastors – one from the Netherlands Reformed Church, the other from the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands – differ in approach because of the liturgy and theology in which they were raised and trained and their own religious needs. The first pastor uses liturgical formats he used long before the PKN existed, influenced by local customs and the liturgy of 1955. The second created his own format the moment he noticed that “the family and funeral participants want to hear about the deceased”.¹⁷ For him the family is still focal in the funeral. As in Catholic practice, the liturgical formats are both concretized and reinterpreted, and ministers are concerned to construct a liturgy that suits their own belief and purposes and those of relatives. These strategies entail a factor of indeterminacy, as Moore (1975, 234-235) calls it, since absolute ordering of these liturgies is impossible.

What religious needs in the PKN liturgy are important to all PKN churches? Like Catholic liturgy, it emphasizes the mystery of Easter. This is apparent in the first paragraph of the *Dienstboek*: “In the face of death, the church [...] desires to speak of life. Where a human life has ended, the church celebrates the mystery of Easter, in hope of eternal life (Titus 1:2)” (*Redactie Dienstboek* 2004, 879). In addition pastoral care is mentioned as an important task: “The pastor [...] finds words for what is happening to them [relatives], searches for hope that goes further than the inevitability of death, prays and comforts [...]. In this way pastoral care calls for liturgy” (*Redactie Dienstboek* 2004, 880). Thus the accent is on pastoral care combined with hope. This hope can be found in the mystery of Easter, but not only there. It also refers to the present: “[...] to arise from this moment of immense grief.”¹⁸ The importance of addressing both the earthly and the heavenly realms, and relating them to one another, opens up possibilities to adjust the liturgy in response to relatives’ religious frame of reference.

Besides these two key elements the liturgical format of 1987 has been amended. Since faith has come to be relegated to the individual sphere, minister and relatives are expected to create the format of the funeral together (*Redactie Dienstboek* 2004, 881). Both groups are assigned an active role in the preparation for the funeral and pastors and relatives discover meaning in this role. Both

groups also have tasks to perform during the ceremony itself. As in the Catholic Church, the extent to which relatives can perform ritual acts is influenced by the hierarchy of the church. However, the Protestant hierarchy differs greatly from the aforementioned episcopal structure. While the Lutherans have much the same structure apart from their non-recognition of the Holy See, in the Calvinist structure it is not the top leadership but the community or church board that decides. Hierarchical differences still exist between PKN groups, but they have grown closer together. Protestant liturgy displays a more democratic character. At the same time it is acknowledged that the minister should perform certain ritual acts. In this regard both Catholic and Protestant pastors express concern: “During some funerals I wonder why they want a minister to be involved. They would have had the same funeral if they had asked for a funeral company or ritual coach”¹⁹

Not only words but acts, too, are seen as important and meaningful for relatives: “language alone is not sufficient to convey the comfort of Jesus Christ’s resurrection” (*Redactie Dienstboek* 2004, 881). This idea, which was also expressed by our respondents, has promoted expansion of the austere Protestant ritual repertoire, in which Lutheran and Catholic ritual elements have become more accepted. Thus we not only find adjustment to and active contribution by relatives, but also transformation of the expression of cultural memory in Protestant funerals.

To sum up: the religious needs of pastors and relatives play a role at the three levels where the two groups act in both Catholic and Protestant liturgies. Regarding religious needs, cultural hope centring on salvation and resurrection is considered most important. In practice the internal structure of the liturgy is no longer constant, and the meaning of ritual acts is rediscovered by pastors and relatives. However, there are major differences between Protestant and Catholic attitudes. First, Protestant liturgy is non-mandatory. By its very nature the PKN format permits adjustment of the liturgy to the religious needs of relatives and the individual pastor, and therefore this occurs more freely in practice. Second, there is a hierarchical difference. In Protestant churches the role of church members and the church board is more important than the minister’s opinion. In Catholic churches the opposite applies, at least according to ecclesiastic rules. The third important difference concerns the nature of the funeral as a worship or memorial ceremony. These characteristics are considered important in both traditions. However, the focus of Catholic liturgy is more on worship, whereas a Protestant funeral concentrates more on the memorial aspect. This would sug-

gest that communicative memory plays a greater role in Protestant liturgies than in Catholic ones, as will be seen in the next section.

6. Individual needs: desires and challenges associated with personal remembrance

Besides religious needs, individual needs that call for communicative memory play a role in custom-made liturgies. In fact, funeral participants favour these more than religious needs. In Quartier's research 74.3% and 77.3% of respondents respectively agreed with communicative liturgical remembrance and hope (2007, 167). Not the afterlife but individual characteristics of the deceased and her meaning for survivors are paramount. The need to communicate these appears to be urgent (Assmann 2006, 6). We discuss individual needs at the three levels of roles explored in the first section.

In regard to active performance, relatives play a major role in the expression of communicative memory. Personal elements can be conveyed during the *In memoriam* or personal remembrance, located at the beginning of the liturgy. In this prescribed liturgical element relatives often read the story of the deceased's life or, if they are unable to read the text themselves, the pastor may assist them. "During the *personal remembrance* the deceased is marked as human on this earth" (*Redactie Dienstboek* 2004, 885; our translation). Relatives are permitted to enact this liturgical element and are encouraged to do so by both Catholic and Protestant pastors. However, more communicative elements are often desired during the rest of the ceremony. Relatives ask, for example, for grandchildren to draw pictures, or they want to read a poem. There are no explicit prescriptions to perform these additional communicative acts. As a result pastors are at a loss, since it is difficult to decide what, and how many, elements may be performed by relatives.²⁰ The structure of the funeral and the aforementioned question of church hierarchy enter into this decision.

Although there is no clear framework, the desire for communicative elements and active contribution by relatives is discussed by relatives and pastor during the preparation for the ceremony. Regarding the *In memoriam* or personal remembrance, relatives largely decide what story is to be told. Again the pastor plays a supportive role. However, when it comes to additional elements, pastors take the lead and decide whether or not to allow performance of these acts. Among the pastors we interviewed the Protestants and liberal Catholics opted for additional elements, depending on the meaning of these elements for the

family. Why do they ask to play father's favourite CD? Is it in keeping with the rest of the liturgy? The more traditional Catholic priests seek ways to add additional elements during the *In memoriam* in response to relatives' wishes, but without compromising the worship ceremony. All of them, however, stress that the funeral should be meaningful for relatives.²¹

In this 'back region' the relation between religious and individual elements also arises. Very often the values underlying religious elements are still significant for relatives, but – according to our respondents – need to be translated to be effective. In the dialogue between pastors and relatives this “process of situational adjustment” is considered (Moore 1975, 235). Adjustment of liturgical elements makes it possible to produce a satisfying funeral and still express Christian values, although these values feature in a different, often indirect or relational, manner. The question is whether by doing so the pastor is betraying the Christian tradition. This appears to be a major challenge for those involved, and clearly the growing insistence on personal remembrance and hope influences the content of the ceremony:

“Depending on the wishes of relatives, the funeral can focus more on worship [cultural memory] or on the deceased [communicative memory]. However, the deceased is always placed in the light of a thousand-yearold tradition.”²²

To respond to relatives' desires and express the significance of the deceased are primary concerns. Of course, each family has its own specific needs, for communicative elements in the funeral relate to individual characteristics of the deceased. Both pastors and the liturgy make it clear that personal remembrance is an important element in the content the ceremony:

“The remembrance of the deceased, the grief of relatives, the shock [...] or relief of death [...], are the principal themes in the funeral ceremony” (*Redactie Dienstboek* 2004, 897).

“To write the intercession, in which personal circumstances of the deceased and the family are addressed, is strongly recommended” (*Bisdóm Den Bosch* 2003, 12). “Religious matters must be expressed, but in relation to the deceased so that they are meaningful for all funeral participants. I am not leading the funeral to proclaim my own faith. I do not preach, that is part of the Sunday service. The proclamation you will hear is that of your mother's life, including religious elements.”²³

However, as described at the active level, personal remembrance presents a dilemma when communicative elements are desired not merely at the beginning of the ceremony, but during the rest of the service as well. The problem relates to the amount and location of personal elements, and stems from the nature of the funeral ceremony. The Protestant *Dienstboek* states that the deceased is the

main theme of the liturgy. The funeral should therefore relate to him, also when it alludes to God's effectiveness (*Redactie Dienstboek* 2004, 897). In the Catholic liturgy the deceased also plays a significant role, but the main focus is on God and worship. These attitudes are reflected in practice except in the liberal Catholic communities we investigated, where the deceased is seen as the major theme as well. By stressing the importance of the deceased God's effectiveness is not necessarily played down, as we explained in the first section. It is only referred to differently. Two quotations, from a Protestant minister and a traditional Catholic priest, illustrate the difference in the nature of the ceremonies:

"I would almost say that a funeral is not a worship ceremony but a pastoral service and therefore you move along with the family."²⁴

"You articulate their [relatives'] grief out of human respect: that they will miss him [the deceased]. However, I especially express the hope that he will be with God. That is the core of it. That is what I want to express, and what is expressed in the prayers. [...] I do speak freely about the resurrection, for if I were to compromise on that, the message is no longer clear. I would fail to convey the message."²⁵

The different views of the nature of the funeral among and between Catholic and Protestant pastors we interviewed are reflected in different attitudes towards the *In memoriam* and other communicative elements. Our Catholic respondents had three perspectives on these matters. The first, more traditional opinion is that the *In memoriam* must be placed at the beginning of the service, for it is not part of the worship ceremony and could impair the meaning of the liturgy as a whole. Relatives may influence later parts of the liturgy, for example the chosen text or content of the intercession, as long as they toe the episcopal line. This means they play no further role in the official proceedings. The second view places the *In memoriam* at the beginning, for the rest of the ceremony is conducted in light of the deceased. This is clearly a different perspective, in which worship and memorial elements are perceived as equally important. The third perspective also proceeds from the deceased's life. By creating possibilities to perform ritual acts or tell a story later in the service these pastors allow even greater scope for communicative elements. This last group is mostly concerned with relatives' frame of reference.²⁶

The three views on the role of relatives and personal remembrance found among Catholic pastors reveals that the subject is ambiguous. What is at issue? According to Quartier the funeral is both a memorial and a worship service. Cultural and communicative memory both play a role (Quartier 2007c, 122). Based on our interviews, we would say both need to play a role, without

contradicting each other, to respond to the desires of both relatives and tradition. In addition it has to happen in a religious setting, which is influenced by complex church politics and social trends like individualization and pluralism. Quartier uses symbols as a bridge between Christian tradition and individual frame of reference, and explains that the symbolic presence of faith is often expressed indirectly or vaguely (Quartier 2007c, 124). This vagueness is in fact the root of the problem, since for some pastors worship is the key element of the service and should not be addressed vaguely.²⁷ They fear that tradition may be eroded.

Our Protestant respondents see the dilemma differently. In the churches we explored there was some consensus on this matter and personal remembrance appeared to be less controversial. Considering the Reformed origin of funerals as family meetings and the characterization of the funeral as centring on the deceased (*Redactie Dienstboek* 2004, 897), this is not surprising. While the Christian tradition is always involved, the Protestant ministers we interviewed used relatives' or the deceased's wishes as a starting point. Cultural and communicative memories should be combined, for example during the ministry of the word. The choice of a text depends on themes that were important during the deceased's lifetime or in his family's life. Another example illustrates this intertwining:

“To the extent that religious matters arise, I explain what faith meant to the deceased. It means that, I keep talking about the deceased, and the content remains interesting for all participants.”²⁸

Note that we confine ourselves to custom-made liturgies where relatives ask for adjusted elements. Not all relatives desire a personalized funeral, and not all church members favour liturgical changes:

“Some people tell me before their death: ‘It should be a church ceremony, I don't want you to talk about me the whole time.’”²⁹

Clearly individual needs are considered important by both pastors and relatives. Regarding the *In memoriam* or personal remembrance as a ritual act, relatives are encouraged to perform liturgical elements and they decide to a large extent what story is to be told. However, when it comes to communicative elements in the rest of the ceremony our Catholic and Protestant respondents faced a dilemma: how much scope should be allowed for personal remembrance in a Christian liturgy? Interestingly, this decision appeared to be more difficult for the Catholic pastors we interviewed, and was easier for Protestant respondents. The bridge between tradition and individual needs seemed to be a natural con-

sequence of the nature and history of PKN funerals. However, both traditions face a challenge in contemporary Dutch society: how does one respond to relatives' needs without betraying the Christian tradition and one's own faith?

7. Conclusion

In custom-made liturgies, relatives and pastors enact ritual elements (*active*), and influence these elements in the preparation for the ceremony (*pre-passive*). In addition relatives are part of the liturgical audience: the content focuses on them (*passive*). Both groups have certain wishes regarding religious and personal elements, and at these three levels their needs are involved. The roles of pastors and relatives, in which relatives' influence has increased, thus relate to their desire for cultural and communicative memory.

As for the active role, in recent times relatives have secured greater scope for enacting religious and personal liturgical elements. The pastors we interviewed still perform the more traditional elements, but they strongly encourage active participation by relatives. In this regard problems arise and a distinction must be made between and among Catholic and Protestant views. Expanding the role of relatives questions the church structure and identity. For some Catholics the episcopal structure is important and active involvement challenges the priest's authority. This appears to be less problematic for Protestant and Catholic churches with a democratic structure. However, in both groups the indispensability of the pastor is questioned: if relatives can perform and choose the elements themselves, what is the unique role of the pastor, for instance compared with that of a ritual coach?

Concerning relatives' and pastors' pre-passive role, relatives increasingly desire to influence the liturgy, as well as more opportunity to contribute to the content. The Protestant *Dienstboek* emphasizes that pastor and relatives should create the format of the funeral together (*Redactie Dienstboek* 2004, 881), and this idea was very much alive among the pastors we interviewed. Not only is the meeting before the ceremony seen as important to ensure that the liturgy is meaningful for relatives and other funeral participants. It also represents an important pastoral task. This is where dialogue between tradition and individual desires arises, which is diverse because of the context and the variety in beliefs of both pastors and relatives. However, when personal elements are desired during the actual ceremony some pastors find it problematic.

The dilemma concerns liturgical content, which involves both cultural and communicative memory. When a custom-made liturgy is asked for liturgical elements can no longer focus exclusively or mainly on God. Although on the whole the structure of the liturgical format remains intact and resurrection and salvation are major themes, these elements are no longer recognizable for all funeral participants. In addition relatives increasingly want to focus on themselves and the deceased. Relating to communicative memory at the beginning of the funeral during the prescribed *In memoriam* and personal remembrance is strongly encouraged. Relatives have considerable leeway to decide what story is to be told. However, when they want to focus on themselves and the deceased in the rest of the ceremony Catholic and Protestant pastors sometimes disagree. For those Catholics who regard the funeral as a worship ceremony, personal matters should be confined to the *In memoriam*. Attempts are made to add personal elements to this part of the ceremony, for they meet the needs of relatives and do not detract from the worship. When the funeral is characterized as a memorial service – a perspective to be found among both Catholic and Protestant pastors – there is more room for communicative elements during the ceremony. While the Christian tradition always plays a role, personal elements are more pronounced and an attempt is made to relate to religious and personal matters. In so doing religious values are recognizable for all funeral participants, and therefore meaningful. Hence the emphasis on communicative and cultural elements differs among Protestants, liberal Catholics and traditional Catholics. The mandatory nature of Catholic liturgy strongly influences the Catholic perspective. Undoubtedly all pastors experience problems in this regard: to what extent can they respond to relatives' communicative wishes without betraying the Christian tradition? Hence the challenge of creating a meaningful Christian funeral in contemporary Dutch society is very much alive.

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Notes

1 In the course of this article we use the term ‘pastor’ to refer to the person conducting a Christian funeral, usually a priest, minister or layperson. The terms ‘priest’ and ‘minister’ are used only with reference to specific Catholic or Protestant issues.

2 For the Protestant spectrum 6 interviews were conducted with ministers in the Nijmegen area: 2 respondents from the Netherlands Reformed Church, 2 from the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, and one from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the kingdom of the Netherlands, as well as one minister who is involved in all three churches. For the Catholic spectrum 7 interviews were conducted with priests and laypersons in the Nijmegen area. Three Catholic priests and one Augustinian were interviewed, as well as three laypersons – pastors or pastoral workers who conduct funerals but are not ordained by the papal office.

3 In the academic field the structure and meaning of liturgy are debated. These two perspectives on liturgy permit exploration of custom-made Christian liturgies. For more insight into the discussion on liturgy, see Quartier 2007b.

4 An example will illustrate this. When a text about Christ’s resurrection is read during the ministry of the word it is directed to all three actors. It refers to God, for he brings about the resurrection; to the deceased, since hope of his resurrection is expressed; and to relatives, for their faith is strengthened. It concerns the relationship between relatives and God, for their belief in God is invoked; the deceased’s relationship with God, for through God the deceased will rise; and the relatives’ relationship with the deceased, since in this particular case their faith relates to the deceased. Of course, the meaning of the text as described here is no longer recognized by all funeral participants. How to respond to this diversity is a challenge for contemporary liturgies.

5 Correspondence Catholic and Protestant pastors, Brenda Mathijssen, February-May 2012

6 Correspondence Catholic layperson, April 2012

7 Note that when we refer to needs or wishes of the institution and tradition we are speaking about personal authorities in that institution or tradition, since needs and wishes always relate to people.

8 Some make use of a volume published by the Vereniging voor Latijnse Liturgie MCMXCI, which gives a practical liturgical format with Latin influences based on the papal Ordo (1991). They also used the aforementioned practical brochure, *Kiezen voor een kerkelijke uitvaart*.

9 Correspondence Catholic priests and laypersons, Brenda Mathijssen, February – April 2012.

10 Correspondence Catholic priest, Brenda Mathijssen, February 2012.

11 “Together on the way-churches”: the Netherlands Reformed Church, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

12 Note that contemporary funeral liturgies of the more orthodox groups, whom we do not discuss here, differ from those of moderate Protestant churches.

13 Correspondence PKN minister, Brenda Mathijssen, March 2012.

14 Correspondence PKN minister, Brenda Mathijssen, February 2012.

15 Correspondence PKN ministers, Brenda Mathijssen, February, March 2012.

16 Correspondence PKN minister, Brenda Mathijssen, April, May 2012.

17 Correspondence PKN minister, Brenda Mathijssen, February 2012.

- ¹⁸ Correspondence PKN minister, Brenda Mathijssen, February 2012. Catholic layperson, Brenda Mathijssen, April 2012.
- ¹⁹ Correspondence PKN minister, Brenda Mathijssen, March 2012.
- ²⁰ Correspondence Catholic and Protestant pastors, February-May 2012
- ²¹ Correspondence Catholic priest, Brenda Mathijssen, February - March 2012. Correspondence PKN minister, Brenda Mathijssen, March 2012.
- ²² Correspondence PKN minister, Brenda Mathijssen, March 2012.
- ²³ Correspondence PKN minister, Brenda Mathijssen, March 2012.
- ²⁴ Correspondence PKN minister, Brenda Mathijssen, March 2012.
- ²⁵ Correspondence Catholic priest, Brenda Mathijssen, March 2012.
- ²⁶ Among the pastors we interviewed some settled for a middle way, and there are surely other perspectives in Catholic and Protestant churches in the Netherlands
- ²⁷ Correspondence Catholic priests, Brenda Mathijssen, March 2012.
- ²⁸ Correspondence PKN minister, Brenda Mathijssen, March 2012.
- ²⁹ Correspondence PKN minister, Brenda Mathijssen, March 2012.

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