

*Christendom in the Raw: ‘Christian’
Last Rites for Unbelievers.
Disturbing Thoughts Prompted by
the Recent Church Farewell to
Stephen Hawking*

In this article I want to speak plainly. Some will, no doubt, say I have spoken bluntly. Some might well say I have spoken far too bluntly, even cruelly, callously – hitting people when they are down, attacking them when they are at their most vulnerable, snatching away their innocent morsels of comfort.

I disagree. I am not being unfeeling. I am not being heartless. Indeed, it is the love of souls which stirs me. Nor is what I write against ‘innocent’ or ‘harmless’. Far from it. So, while I want to speak the truth in love, I do want to speak the truth, however painful that may be. The issue I am dealing with demands absolute clarity. No fudging will suffice. Lies offer only false comfort. Nothing but the truth will do. As the Lord Jesus Christ himself announced:

The truth will set you free... If the Son [of God] sets you free, you will be free indeed (John 8:32,36).

Having said that in the positive, he was soon turning to the negative, and he issued a solemn assertion. Speaking of the devil, Christ declared:

When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44).

In light of this, as I say, nothing but the truth will do.

It is the recent death and funeral of Professor Stephen Hawking that has prompted me to put pen to paper. It has reminded me of the macabre fandango which followed the death of Thomas

Hardy in 1928.¹²⁶ And it has moved me to address an issue which has long disturbed me, and disturbed me more than I can say, one which I should have addressed long ago. I am talking about the way funerals, and associated rites, of avowed unbelievers are so often conducted and supported by true believers; or at least, by professing believers.¹²⁷

Stephen Hawking. Let's be clear about him and the point I want to make. Let's not beat about any bush. Stephen Hawking was a self-confessed atheist. He made no bones about it. Although I do not believe there is anybody who can truly be called an atheist,¹²⁸ for the sake of this article I will accept the terminology: Stephen Hawking was an atheist. Nevertheless, his funeral service was conducted by the Church of England at Great St Mary's, Cambridge, and (at the time I write, April 2018) his ashes are to be interred at Westminster Abbey. For obvious reasons, I was not present at the service at Cambridge, of course, but, according to press reports, the family 'felt a traditional Anglican service' would be the most fitting way for Cambridge to bid farewell to Hawking. And the *Cambridge News* announced the service thus:

Despite his avowed atheism, Stephen Hawking's funeral at Great St Mary's Church will be a traditional, Church of England service... His family is holding the customary service used many hundreds of times before at the Cambridge University Church, featuring hymns and prayers, among them the [so-called] Lord's Prayer... The Very Reverend Peter Judd, priest in charge at Great St Mary's, said: 'At the request of the

¹²⁶ In this article, I say more on Hardy than Hawking. As I write (April 2018) Hawking's rituals are not yet completed.

¹²⁷ Church weddings, too, are implicated, but I confine this article to funerals. Christenings, of course, are the *crème de la crème* in unscriptural grimness. See my *Infant*.

¹²⁸ I am sure that all men have a god, every man and woman worships something or someone – self, reason, science or whatever. Idolatry abounds, even in – especially in – the most 'sophisticated' circles. Sex, entertainment, money, possessions, food, drink, fame, power, reputation, self-esteem... the list is endless.

family, it will be a traditional service tailored to the family's requirements...'.¹²⁹

I take it that by 'traditional', we are to understand 'according to the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*', or something very like it, which is still the official liturgy of the Church of England. For those who are not familiar with an Anglican funeral service, the rubric is supposed to open by saying that only those who were baptised (that is, almost without exception, sprinkled as a baby) and did not die excommunicate may have the 'Office' done for them. I am given to understand, however, that the established Church does not enforce this rubric, even if it is still in place. In 2016, the following explanation was posted on the internet by those who should know:

In England almost one third of all deaths are followed by a Church of England funeral service. That equates to 2,800 funerals a week on average. Yet despite this popularity, many people still have misconceptions about the Church and how it can help them after a loved one dies.

We spoke to Reverend Canon Doctor Sandra Millar, head of project and development, and award-winning celebrant Reverend Juliet Stephenson about the reality of a Church of England funeral. Sandra and Juliet explained eight key things that people often don't know about Church-of-England-led funerals:

Anyone can have a Church of England funeral.

Not everyone realises it, but if you live in England, you are automatically living in a Church of England parish and its clergy will lead a funeral service for anyone living within their parish.

'Because you live in a Church of England parish, there are certain things that you can access', Reverend Canon Sandra Millar explains. 'For example, you can get married, you can have your baby christened in your parish church, and you can have a funeral led by a Church of England minister'.

'The church will not turn anyone away', says Reverend Juliet Stephenson, 'however religious or irreligious they are. Everyone gets the exact same treatment'.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ '8 things you may not know about Church of England funerals'.

The 'Office' opens with the minister processing before the coffin, calling out the following scriptures:

I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die (John 11:25-26).

I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another (Job 19:25-27).

We brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world (1 Tim. 6:7).

Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord (Job 1:21).

And so the service goes on.

At the interment at the graveside (or at the equivalent in the cremation ceremony), these words are to be said by the minister:

Forasmuch as it has pleased Almighty God of his great mercy to take unto himself the soul of our dear brother here departed, we therefore commit his body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body, that it may be like unto his glorious body, according to the mighty working, whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself.

This is the sort of thing that is said during the 'traditional' burial (or cremation) service of the Anglican Church, conducted for all and sundry. Hardy and Hawking were each afforded such a service by the Church of England.

As for Thomas Hardy, virtually nothing about his 1928 funeral and interments (yes, the plural is right) was as he had wished. His heart was buried in the graveyard at Stinsford Church, Dorset, while the rest of his remains were cremated privately at

Woking crematorium, and the ashes were later interred with pomp and immense flummery¹³⁰ at Westminster Abbey.

Objections to the interment at Westminster Abbey were raised on the grounds that Hardy was an atheist. Which he undoubtedly was. He had been an atheist since his early manhood, having from that time abandoned any thought of real faith in Christ, abandoned real acceptance of the gospel and the Scriptures, and so on. He certainly liked hoary tradition, yes, and he retained a strong affection for the old habits of his village childhood, and he was willing to go along with the externals of Anglicanism. But that is all.¹³¹ All gospel meaning for him had long since been sucked out of such rituals. He was no believer.

These were the grounds on which the aforesaid objections were raised. The Dean of Westminster, very anxious and wanting to stave off the objections, appealed to the vicar of Fordington, R.G.Bartelot, seeking some sort of assurance from him. This was readily forthcoming. But the assurance Bartelot was able to offer the Dean was weak in the extreme. In fact, weighed in the balance of Scripture, it was no justification at all.

As Claire Tomalin reported it:

Bartelot wrote back at once testifying to Hardy's having been 'at heart a Christian and a Churchman', although he had not actually attended his Church once in twenty-one years. His grounds for saying so were that he gave donations to Church funds, had been observed joining in the Lord's prayer and the Creed on occasion, had never formally recanted the Christianity conferred by christening, and had lived a life of absolute moral rectitude.

¹³⁰ The ten pall-bearers for the urn were the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, the leader of the Opposition, Ramsey MacDonald, the heads of Magdalen College, Cambridge, and Queen's College, Oxford, A.E.Houseman, Rudyard Kipling, George Bernard Shaw, J.M.Barrie, John Galsworthy and Edmund Gosse. In a letter to T.E.Lawrence, describing the performance, Charlotte Shaw commented: 'The clergy came first and shocked me. All except one looked full of worldly pomp and disdain, self-conscious jacks-in-the box' (Tomalin pp373-375).

¹³¹ Vera Brittain was cast in a similar mould, as she made clear in her *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925*, Fontana Paperbacks (in association with Virago Ltd.), 1979.

As Tomlin wryly observed: '[This] testimonial would have made Hardy smile'.¹³² Hardy lived and died an unbeliever.

Even so, writing in 1989, Timothy Hands was determined to defend the interments:

The dual ceremonies, though contentious, were, symbolically, not altogether inappropriate... Thomas Hardy never entered the Church, but it is generally agreed that the Church most assuredly entered Thomas Hardy.¹³³

Once again, weak in the extreme.

Even more recently – in 2006 – Pamela Dalziel,¹³⁴ calling on Hands' work, tried to argue that Hardy remained 'profoundly Christian' all his days. This will take some proving! George P.Landow, Professor of English and the History of Art, Brown University, probed her claim. Summarising her work, Landow presented her 'evidence' for Hardy's 'Christianity' thus:

His family's associations with the established Church... 'his lifelong love of Church music and the language of the Bible and the *Book of Common Prayer*'... his continued attending religious services... his poetry's occasional expression longing for belief (for example, 'The Oxen')... 'his conviction that the Church was and should remain – the social, ethical, and educational centre of a community'.¹³⁵

As with Hands, the evidence Dalziel garnered to support her claim is weak in the extreme. She was trying to argue black is white; or at the best, grey. But it cuts no ice. Rather, it shows that she herself has no concept of what real Christianity is. I readily admit that Hardy hankered after what he had lost, yes; see my 'The Unbeliever's Lament'. And in his young days

¹³² Claire Tomalin: *Thomas Hardy: The Time-Torn Man*, Penguin Books, 2007, pp375-376.

¹³³ Timothy Hands: *Thomas Hardy: Distracted Preacher? Hardy's Religious Biography and its Influence on his Novels*, Palgrave Macmillan, St Martin's Press, Inc., New York, 1989, p1.

¹³⁴ Pamela Dalziel: 'Strange Sermon: The Gospel According to Thomas Hardy', *Times Literary Supplement*, 17th March 2006, pp12-23.

¹³⁵ George P.Landow: 'Thomas Hardy's Religious Beliefs'.

Hardy had come close – perhaps very close – to evangelicalism, but for the bulk of his life all that remained but a dim and distant dream, a faded memory, the reality of which, from time to time, he almost wished he could regain. But such feelings were fleeting. He never was willing to turn to Christ in saving trust and repentance.

Hardy's true position can be distinctly heard in an epitaph for G.K.Chesterton which he dictated to his second wife, Florence, as he (Hardy) lay dying. As Tomalin says, the short verse was 'ungrammatical, but clear in its intentions'. Too right! From his deathbed Hardy spoke in highly dismissive terms of 'the literary contortionist' who refused to accept 'Darwin's theories'. Tomalin explained:

It was his [that is, Hardy's] final word against Church doctrine and in favour of rational thinking, exemplified by Darwin.

Tomalin offered her own opinion of this dying Hardy thunderbolt. It was, she said, 'a magnificent blast from the sickbed',¹³⁶ that is, in her (and Hardy's) terms, a defiant tirade in death against Christ, against the gospel, the Scriptures, and the like, an exaltation of human reason and science over submission to the revealed word of God. Hardy lived and died an unbeliever.

Landow again, in part quoting Dalziel:

Despite [his] lifelong connections with the Church of England – connections much firmer and more numerous than most Victorian authors who lost their belief – 'Hardy repeatedly articulated both his conviction that the Cause of Things must be unconscious, "neither moral or immoral, but unmoral", and his hope that this Unconscious Will was evolving into consciousness would ultimately become sympathetic'. Nonetheless, Dalziel argues that however far Hardy moved from his evangelical sermon of 1858, its three main points remain the 'central preoccupations' of his life: the emphasis 'on the law as curse, on suffering, and on the saving force of love'. She therefore argues that Hardy the atheist remained 'profoundly Christian' in many ways.

¹³⁶ Tomalin p369.

How vague can one get? How thinly must the barrel be scraped? Yet again, the evidence proffered is not worth the paper it is written on. This 'Christianity' is nothing but philosophical Christendom-speak, nothing to do with Christ, far removed from Scripture. Dalziel argued in vain. Hardy was no believer.

Landow was much more cautious. Even so, he ventured only the weakest of observations on Dalziel's verdict:

The question remains, of course, if one retains some of the cultural, emotional, and even ethical attitudes of Christianity, as so many Victorian non-believers did, but does not have any faith in a personal god, much less in the divinity of Christ and salvation through him, can these attitudes still be considered Christian? Wouldn't it be less tendentious and a lot more convincing simply to state that Thomas Hardy might have wished he could have remained a Christian, but that he didn't, or that he always retained many ideas and attitudes associated with Christianity (and, of course, with other religions as well) but not the fundamental beliefs that grounded them? Such a characterisation of Hardy would seem more true to the Victorian frame of mind than would overemphasising Hardy's Christian-ness. For me the point remains not that, like so many other Victorians, he retained habits of mind associated with Christianity after he abandoned it, but that he abandoned it for a belief in some Unconscious Will.

Well, as my father used to say to me and of me when commenting on my time at school: 'If you're one of the best, don't show me the worst!'¹³⁷

¹³⁷ For another vague endorsement of Hardy's 'Christianity', see Yasir Allawi Abed: 'Desperate Faith: A Study of Selected Poems by Thomas Hardy'.

While this (to me unknown) author on the Shodhganga website was outlandishly enthusiastic about Hardy's 'evangelicalism': 'Thomas Hardy's stand against the orthodox sacraments and his endorsement of reforms in the Church make him a true evangelical'. Really? This author's definition of 'evangelical' is way off target. Hardy must, in the colloquial sense, 'be turning in his grave'! Shodhganga is 'a reservoir of Indian theses... a digital repository of theses and dissertations submitted to Indian universities' (Wikipedia).

I want to call a spade a spade. Nobody should be offended by it. Hardy and Hawking were free-thinkers, men who gloried in free speech.¹³⁸ So let's have it here. They pulled no punches. They both spoke their minds when they had the chance. So may I. So must I. So will I. The blunt truth is both Hardy and Hawking lived and died atheists, avowed unbelievers. Notwithstanding, the Church of England was prepared to give them the last rites of a professing believer, and to justify it.

Why am I bothering? Why am I raising all this now? Because, as I say, Stephen Hawking's recent death and the subsequent rites of the Church of England have prompted me to action. I have been remiss in not speaking before. The time for silence is past, long past. So now to speak. That is what I want to do, what I feel I must do, what I intend to do.

These shenanigans are sinister. I say it with deliberation. I meant what I said in the title of this article: 'Christendom in the Raw: "Christian" Last Rites for Unbelievers'. I am talking about priestcraft, sacerdotalism, sacramentalism.¹³⁹ And not only for the so-called 'great' – famous authors, statesmen, royalty, and the like. The appalling farce is being played out day in, day out, for and by the relatives of countless unbelievers who have died. In the funeral service (whatever form it takes these days), the relations of almost every Tom, Dick, Harry, Mabel, Enid or

¹³⁸ Hardy hated the way he was restricted by editors and publishers acting in line with the *mores* of the day, and chafed against it.

¹³⁹ *Sacramentalists* believe that, under certain circumstances, spiritual grace is conveyed (or made effective) by an outward act.

Sacerdotalists believe that certain men have the ability, the gift, the power and the right to administer the actions in question, and thereby convey the grace, the gift or whatever inherent in those actions. Naturally, therefore, they happily delegate vital parts of their religion – even their spiritual life – into the hands of these men, who, they believe, because they have been consecrated or ordained, are better able, more qualified to carry it out for them. In such a system, worship and spiritual service is a specialised task best left to a special class – priests – who do it on behalf of the rest. Hence arose the unbiblical notion of the clergy and the laity – with all its attendant and well-documented curses of priestcraft.

Tracey – uncle Tom Cobley and all – want and are afforded the assurances which belong only to those who have lived and died trusting in Christ. And they are given these comforts by professing believers, those who ought to know better, often by those who do know better. The harvest of such a calamitous procedure will be dire, dire for all concerned.

Let me speak distinctly and to the point. I have more than the established Church of England in mind. Dissenters, nonconformists, evangelicals of every hue, the Reformed, Baptists, and the like – all are implicated. Many such are prepared to give 'Christian' last rites to the unbelieving dead, in order to comply with the requests of relatives of a deceased member of the family, even though the dead person lived and died an unbeliever.

Furthermore, this plays into Christendom's practice of 'churchifying the unchurched'; that is, evangelising unbelievers by attracting them to church attendance in the hope that they will be converted. This is something utterly foreign to the New Testament, completely contrary to new-covenant principles. And it comes with a very high price tag. Specifically for my purposes here, I suspect that when the fateful time comes, the vast majority of churches which welcome, and to a large extent assimilate, unbelievers in this way, are willing to play out the charade to its devastating conclusion; that is, they conduct the last rites for such unbelievers treating them as though they had been converted. Those who do not, will have to admit that (maybe even) for years they have been treating the person in question as a virtual believer, but now, at that person's death, they have to pull the plug and publicly own their mistake (I would use a much stronger word), and refuse to take the final step. Phew! If so, what an eye-opener for the other unbelievers who are being 'churchified' at the time! It seems to me that this must sound the death knell for the entire system. Does this catch-22 not make it almost inevitable that such churches will be willing to 'do the necessary' even for unbelievers?

As I have explained in several works, this basic, gut feeling for someone 'to do the necessary' is widespread. Indeed, the desire for the ministrations of a priest at vital stages in life and

death is endemic. It is ingrained in us. The natural man has an inbuilt craving for 'rites of passage' to be administered by a 'proper' person. Nowhere is this more true and evident than at death.

Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere,¹⁴⁰ God has written the need of a priest deep in our hearts. Sadly, however, instead of the one, the true, the only-effective priest – the Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Heb. 4:14 – 5:10; 6:13 – 10:18) – most people would rather trust a visible priest, a 'Minister', to, as they like to think, 'put it all right for them at the end'. And countless numbers of professional ministers are prepared to take the glorious words of the gospel, words which offer assurance and hope (that is, confident expectation) in and through Christ to believers, and only to believers, speaking of their eternal salvation, their resurrection to everlasting bliss, and apply those precious words of comfort and reassurance to unbelievers.¹⁴¹ They dare to prostitute the glorious words of Scripture, written to and for believers, and apply them to those who have lived and died without an atom of saving faith in Christ, even to those who have openly defied the faith all their life. What an appalling travesty! How tragic!

Travesty? Tragic? Yes, indeed. The consequences for those who engage in the abominable practice will be unspeakable. They cannot shuffle out of their responsibility. They carry the can for it now, and will have to carry the can after their own death. And for those who watch it all, those who try to fool themselves that all is well because some priest has mouthed some mumbo-jumbo over the corpse of their dead relative, the shattering of their delusions will be painful in the extreme. And those who die, not trusting in Christ, but trusting in the ministrations of some official to 'make it all right at the end', will find themselves grievously mistaken at horrendous cost.

¹⁴⁰ See my *Priesthood; The Priesthood*.

¹⁴¹ Often a fee is involved. Indeed, I have heard of an undertaker who got phone calls from irate ministers complaining if he had not called on their services recently.

When? When will these particular chickens come home to roost? At the day of judgment.

Nothing could be more apt than Paul's address to the free-thinkers of Athens. Although the event I speak of took place nearly two thousand years ago, the same is going on today. The first-century Athenians prided themselves on the clarity of their thinking, their sharpness of mind; they boasted of their rationality, their willingness to learn, their curiosity for ideas, their legendary thirst for knowledge. Sophisticated is the word! But professing themselves to be wise, they showed themselves to be nothing but fools (Rom. 1:22). Sophisticated? They were superstitious! So much so, among their countless gods, and the altars they erected for them – safety in numbers, you see – they even included an idol to 'the unknown god'. Think of that! Belt and braces! Fingers crossed! Just like men and women today. Today? Yes, today! Even though they have not believed a word of the gospel all their lives, when they die, many want some priest to send them safely on their way to what they are sure will be their everlasting bliss. And even if they say they are convinced that there is nothing after death, that 'when you die you snuff it', they still want to make sure... just in case. *And many believers are willing to fall in with the diabolical nonsense, and go along with the deception.* And in so doing, they confirm the world in its unbelief. A vicious circle if ever there was one.

For the fact is, when churches, pastors, ministers or priests provide comforting services to grieving relatives of an unbeliever who has died, services which speak of the comfort the gospel brings to true believers only, they cause immense harm. They confirm all and sundry that trust in Christ does not matter, that judgment is a myth – that talk of judgment is something to terrify the feeble-minded, but nothing more – that the biblical warnings which tell us that those who die without Christ will perish are meaningless, a laughable nonsense, nothing but old-wives' tales. Forget about such drivell!

Moreover, it does not matter what caveats are included in the service. That won't allow the participants to get off the hook. It may dull a conscience or two, but it won't make the pantomime

right. The officials have officiated and 'done the job'. And the grateful relatives can post 'a thank-you' in the local press to the official for his or her 'nice, lovely service'. It is what people perceive that counts. And, for those who take part in the charade, like the sprinkling of babies, the administration of funeral rites by a professional minister means that 'something has been done'.¹⁴² That is what they think. Or like to think. That is what they perceive to be going on. Reality? Don't worry about that! Perception rules the roost! In the day of judgment, however, all delusions will be stripped away.

If I am wrong, why do so few unbelievers have the courage, the honesty, to make it clear that when the time comes they want to have a funeral like the man I heard of who, living and dying an unbeliever, requested the congregation to sing 'Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye' as they stood to watch his coffin conveyed to his cremation? Which they duly did! I know that some believers who heard the story were horrified. I, on the other hand, was anything but! I was delighted. I remain so. I admire the man.¹⁴³ He was consistent. As he lived, so he died – trusting in luck. And so, as his earthly remains were disposed of, he wanted his friends to wish him luck. Luck in life, luck in death, luck in the final farewell.

Let us get back to biblical reality. Paul, addressing the men of Athens, set out the stark truth. He put it like this:

Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the

¹⁴² After the sprinkling, most people think the baby has 'been made a Christian'. After all, he now has his 'Christian name'. Similarly, with funerals. The rites performed by the proper official have 'sent the deceased on his or her way to heaven'. This is what people like to think. This is what the official has 'guaranteed' for them. So they believe.

¹⁴³ As D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones, when he was in South Wales, would say to those who preferred to spend their Sundays at the Barry Island fun park instead of hearing the gospel, when they come to die, let them go to Barry Island.

Christendom in the Raw: 'Christian' Last Rites for Unbelievers

unknown god'. What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you (Acts 17:22-23).

Coming to the end of his discourse, he drew the proper application:

God... commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed [that is, the Lord Jesus Christ]; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31).

Of course, many, if not most, will dismiss this. I do not kid myself. I can hear the retorts, the snarls: 'Rubbish!' Some took that line in Athens (Acts 17:32). But Christ *has* been raised from the dead, he *will* return, and all of us *will* have to face him in judgment. You will! No last rites performed by a priest will avail on that day! Moreover, those who were prepared to take words written to believers and apply them to unbelievers will have to answer to Christ at that time. Above all, those unbelievers who die, clinging to the delusion that some priest will make it right with God for them, will be sorely disillusioned.

As for believers who go along with this sort of funereal performance, there is only one response. They should steer clear of it, cease being a party to the deceit. I am well aware that this will be painful and costly, but do believers fear men more than they fear God?

As for the personal, we all have to die. It is the one certainty of life. And if we have any sense, we will prepare for it, make sure we are ready for it, whenever the Reaper calls for us. People prepare for holidays, they make sure they are insured against all sorts of things that will never happen, and yet, when it comes to the one certainty of life, the fatal certainty, most men and women die utterly unprepared; they sleep walk into eternity. There is only one thing to say: Wake up, you sleepers! Repent and trust Christ. At once! If you will listen to his voice, that is what God is telling you even now, at this very moment. Hear the word of God. Heed the word of God. Act on the word of God:

Christendom in the Raw: 'Christian' Last Rites for Unbelievers

Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon (Isa. 55:6-7).

And that means now:

[I] appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain... Now is the favourable time; behold, now is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:1-2).

For as Samuel Medley put it:

*Great Judge of all! that day will come
When mortals must receive their doom;
Oh, hear our cry, and grant we may
Of you find mercy in that day!*

*The wicked [that is, unbelievers] tremble, saints [that is,
believers] rejoice,
One dreads, the other loves the voice;
The wicked fear, believers sing,
The coming of their God and King.*

*Think, O my soul, you must appear,
And pass the judgment at this bar!
What now does God and conscience say –
Will you find mercy in that day?*

*Do you, by faith, to Jesus flee?
Is his dear image stamped on thee?
If so, let nothing you dismay,
You shall find mercy in that day.*

*Eternal Judge! Almighty Lord!
Seal home and bless your solemn word;
And oh, that we poor sinners may
Of you find mercy in that day!*

William Gadsby penned some wise and salutary words on the subject:

*Pause my soul! and ask the question –
Art thou ready to meet God?
Am I made a real Christian,
Washed in the Redeemer's blood?
Have I union
Have I union
With the church's living Head?

Am I quickened by his Spirit;
Live a life of faith and prayer?
Trusting wholly to his merit;
Casting on him all my care?
Daily panting
Daily panting
In his likeness to appear?

If my hope on Christ is stayèd,
Let him come when he thinks best;
Oh, my soul! be not dismayèd,
Lean upon his loving breast;
He will cheer thee
He will cheer thee
With the smilings of his face.

But, if still a total stranger
To his precious name and blood,
Thou art on the brink of danger;
Canst thou face a holy God?
Think and tremble,
Think and tremble,
Death is now upon the road.*

I close with something a dear friend of mine, a believer in Christ, used to say while he was alive. Thinking of his funeral, he was clear: 'I don't worry what kind of exit I have, so long as I have an abundant entrance'. He was, of course, referring to Peter's words, addressed to those trusting in Christ, as rendered in the Authorised (King James) Version:

Christendom in the Raw: 'Christian' Last Rites for Unbelievers

There will be richly provided for you an [abundant] entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:11)

So, don't worry over-much about your exit. Think about your entrance. 'Prepare to meet your God' (Amos 4:12).