

“For your Faithful Lord, Life is Changed not Ended”

The Roman Catholic Funeral Rite in Flanders and the Paschal Mystery

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Abstract

Since Vatican II, the paschal mystery has become the focal point of all liturgy, a development that also has consequences for the Roman Catholic funeral liturgy. Celebrating the funeral in the context of the Eucharist underscores the concept of the paschal mystery very explicitly. Since 2011, a number of factors has led to the funeral liturgy without Eucharist becoming the liturgical norm in Flanders. This paper investigates this shift in light of the funeral liturgy being a memorial of the paschal mystery. It (1) sketches the shift that occurred in the revised funeral rite, (2) presents a detailed study of the new Flemish approach towards the funeral liturgy, using the diocese of Hasselt as an example, and (3) evaluates this new approach to the funeral liturgy, specifically from the perspective of the liturgy as a memorial of the paschal mystery. Finally, some conclusions regarding this case from a liturgical-theological and pastoral point of view are formulated.

Keywords

Funeral liturgy, paschal mystery, Vatican II, memorial

Introduction

In him the hope of blessed resurrection has dawned, that those saddened by the certainty of dying might be consoled by the promise of immortality to come. Indeed, for your faithful, Lord, life is changed not ended, and, when this earthly dwelling turns to dust, an eternal dwelling is made ready for them in heaven.¹

1) This Preface for the Dead I originated in the 1738 Parisian Missal and was added to the Roman Missal by Pope Benedict XV in 1919, the first such addition in more than eight centuries. See Anthony Ward and Cuthbert Johnson, *The Prefaces of the Roman Missal: A Source Compendium with Concordance and Indices* (Roma: Centro Liturgico Vincenziano, 1989).

This excerpt from Preface I for the Dead is a good summary of a Christian perspective on death, which in this case is also connected to the resurrection of Christ. In this paper, I will investigate a recent shift in the Flemish Roman Catholic funeral rite from the perspective of the paschal mystery.² Since the Second Vatican Council, the memorial of the paschal mystery has become the focal point of all liturgy, which also has had consequences for the Roman Catholic funeral liturgy. In recent years, however, the execution of this funeral rite has experienced some major changes in Flanders, resulting in a new liturgical reality: the celebration of a funeral liturgy without the Eucharist, led in many parishes almost exclusively by lay presiders. In order to understand this phenomenon better, I will first briefly sketch the shift that occurred in the revised funeral rite after the Council, focusing on the paschal mystery. Then, I will present a more detailed study of the evolutions in the liturgical prescriptions and the execution of the funeral liturgy in the Flemish dioceses using the example of the diocese of Hasselt. Finally, I will evaluate this new form of the funeral liturgy, specifically from the perspective of the liturgy as memorial of the paschal mystery, and I will draw some conclusions regarding this case from a liturgical, theological, and pastoral point of view.

1 The paschal mystery in the revised funeral rite of 1969

I will not present a complete historical overview of the many changes the funeral rite has undergone – this has been done elsewhere.³ I will, instead, focus on the paschal mystery. As R. Ferrone and many others have argued, “the paschal mystery is without a doubt the central theological concept of the liturgical renewal advanced at Vatican II”.⁴ *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC) has only two paragraphs on the funeral rite, one concerning the funeral rite for children, no. 82, and the previous one, which states that

the rite for the burial of the dead should express more clearly *the paschal character of Christian death*, and should correspond more closely to the circumstances and traditions found in various regions. This holds good also for the liturgical color to be used.⁵

2) This article was first presented as a paper at the Societas Liturgica Conference of 2019 in Durham, which had as its theme “Anamnesis: Remembering in Action, Place and Time”.

3) For a general introduction, see for example Richard Rutherford, *The Death of a Christian: The Rite of Funerals*, Studies in the Reformed Rites of the Catholic Church 7 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1990). Very useful from a theological, liturgical, and pastoral view is Thomas G. Long, *Accompany Them with Singing: The Christian Funeral* (Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2009). For an extensive empirical study on (Roman Catholic) funeral rites, see Thomas Quartier, *Bridging the Gaps: An Empirical Study of Catholic Funeral Rites*. Empirische Theologie, Bd. 17 (Wien: LIT, 2007) and Thomas Quartier and Chris A. M. Hermans, “Roman Catholic Funeral Liturgy and Human Finitude: Empirical Explorations of Life, Death and Afterlife in Connection with Liturgical Memory,” in *Discourse in Ritual Studies*, ed. Hans Schilderman (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 199-228.

4) Rita Ferrone, *Liturgy: Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Rediscovering Vatican II (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), 23.

5) SC 81, emphasis added. I have used the English version found on the Vatican’s website: www.vatican.va.

At the outset of the chapter on the various other sacraments and sacramentals, the Council fathers state that “the paschal mystery of the passion, death, the resurrection of Christ, [is] the font from which all sacraments and sacramentals draw their power”.⁶

In several ways, this new orientation is reflected in the revised funeral rite. The Belgian liturgist J. Lamberts has shown how the new liturgical ordo stresses death more as an Easter-event in comparison to the Tridentine rite.⁷ In the latter, hymns and responsories such as the *Dies irae* and the *Libera me* are exemplary of a perspective on death that stresses the fear of judgment and subsequent punishment for one’s sins. The former is sung as the sequence during the Tridentine requiem mass, while the *Libera me* is used as part of the Absolution of the Dead after the conclusion of the requiem mass and before the burial. The perspective on death of the *Libera me* is clear from its first two stanzas:

Deliver me, O Lord, from death eternal on that fearful day:
when the heavens and the earth shall be moved,
when thou shalt come to judge the world by fire.

I am made to tremble and fear, until the judgment will come, and the coming wrath.
When the heavens and the earth shall be moved.⁸

A very different perspective is evident in the first paragraph of the introduction of the revised funeral rite, in which the paschal mystery becomes the horizon against which the entire rite has to be interpreted:

The Church confidently celebrates Christ’s paschal mystery in the funeral liturgy of her children, that they who through baptism are united to Christ, who died and was raised, can pass with Him through death into life.⁹

6) SC 61.

7) Jozef Lamberts, “De rooms-katholieke uitvaartliturgie,” in *Levensrituelen. Dood & Begrafenis*, eds. L. Leijssen et al., KADOC-Studies 31 (Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 2007), 119-35. Also compare Rutherford, *The Death of a Christian*, 115 ff, and the somewhat older A Goumans, “Hopen op verrijzenis. Grenzen en ruimte van deze thematiek in het vernieuwde romeinse rituale van de uitvaartliturgie,” in *Tijdschrift voor Liturgie* 64 (1980): 209-27.

8) S. Sedis Apostolica et Sacrorum Rituum Congregationis Typographi, *Graduale Sacrosanctæ Romanæ Ecclesiæ. De tempore et de Sanctis* (Paris, Tournai, and Rome: Desclée, 1961). “*Libera me, Domine, de morte æterna, in die illa tremenda:/ Quando cœli movendi sunt et terra,/ dum veneris iudicare saeculum per ignem.// Tremens factus sum ego, et timeo, dum discussio venerit, atque ventura ira./ Quando cœli movendi sunt et terra.*”

9) My translation of the Latin *praenotanda*: “*Paschale Christi mysterium in filiorum suorum exsequiis fidenter celebrat Ecclesia, ut illi, qui Christi mortui et suscitati per Baptismum concorporales facti sunt, cum ipso per mortem transeant ad vitam.*” Like the Flemish version, the English version is also not a literal translation, although of course the same ideas are evident. For the *edition typica* I have used Cuthbert Johnson, *Christian*

According to Lamberts, this paschal dimension of the funeral liturgy is expressed by celebrating the rite in the context of a Eucharist.¹⁰ This is, however, not a requirement. The paschal mystery is further expressed by the presence of the paschal candle and the use of the liturgical color that – according to the introduction – should testify to the Christian faith in light of the paschal mystery.¹¹ There is a sprinkling with the water of baptism, first at the entrance of the church, secondly during the final commendation at the end of the rite, and a third time at the location of burial. Likewise, in the prayers, hymns, and Scripture readings, the memorial of the paschal mystery in the revised Roman Catholic funeral rite is one of the main themes.¹² For example, in the rite of final commendation, an important rite within the entire funeral service, this change of perspective becomes very clear. There are several prayers for absolution and redemption during the *Absolutio* in the Tridentine rite, whereas the revised rite starts with the following invitation:

Our brother/sister N. has fallen asleep in Christ. Confident in our hope of eternal life, let us commend him/her to the loving mercy of our Father and let our prayers go with him/her. He/she was adopted as God's son/daughter in baptism and was nourished at the table of the Lord; may he/she now inherit the promise of eternal life and take his/her place at the table of God's children in heaven. Let us pray also on our own behalf, that we who now mourn and are saddened may one day go forth with our brother/sister to meet the Lord of life when he appears in glory.¹³

Here, one can definitely conclude that the paschal mystery is at the heart of the revised Roman Catholic funeral rite.

Burial: The Ordo Exsequiarum 1969 with Related Liturgical Texts, Indexes and Bibliography, Bibliotheca Ephemerides Liturgicae. Subsidia. Instrumenta Liturgica Quarreriensia 2 (Roma: CLV - Ed. Liturgiche, 1993). For the English ordo see the Bishops' Conference of England Wales Liturgy Office, *Order of Christian Funerals: Approved for Use in the Dioceses of England and Wales, and Scotland*, Study edition (London: Chapman, 1991). Some excerpts, such as the introduction, can be found online at <https://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/OCF/index.shtml>. For the Flemish ordo, I refer to Interdiocesane Commissie Voor Liturgische Zielzorg (ICLZ), *Orde van dienst voor de uitvaartliturgie* (Brussel: Licap, 1993).

10) Lamberts, "De rooms-katholieke uitvaartliturgie," 126-28.

11) *Praenotanda* nr. 22.6. See Cuthbert, *Christian Burial*, 29-30.

12) According to the word index of the liturgical texts in Cuthbert, *Christian Burial*, the revised rite has a form of *resurgo* or *resurrectio* twenty-nine times.

13) For the Latin original, see Cuthbert, *Christian Burial*, nr. 183, 89. I have used the English translation found in the International Committee on English in the Liturgy (ICEL), *Order of Christian Funerals: Rite of Committal. The Roman Ritual* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1989), 91. For the Flemish version, see ICLZ, *Orde van dienst voor de uitvaartliturgie*, nr. 33, 67-68.

2 The revised funeral rite in Flanders, specifically the diocese of Hasselt

The first Flemish version of the revised funeral rite was published in 1971, and a second one in 1993.¹⁴ Both of these mainly follow the first of the three possible models of a Roman Catholic funeral, which has three stages: a short rite in the house of the deceased, the Eucharistic funeral liturgy in the church, and a rite at the cemetery.¹⁵ It also contains liturgical forms for a vigil on the evening before the funeral and prayers that may be said at the crematorium, if appropriate.

Until a decade ago, almost every funeral in Flanders was performed in the context of the Eucharist. Moreover, the introduction of the approved English funeral rite states that “the Mass, the memorial of Christ’s death and resurrection, is the principal celebration of the Christian funeral.”¹⁶ The *praenotanda* of the *editio typica* stipulates, however, that the Eucharist is not allowed on certain solemn liturgical days, such as the Paschal Triduum, and that it can be left out due to pastoral reasons. If possible, however, a Eucharistic celebration should follow on another day.¹⁷ As we shall see, this stipulation is quite important for the new model developed in Flanders beginning in the year 2000. Already in the 1993 version of the Flemish *ordo*, this small stipulation on the funeral and the Eucharist is pointed out in two different paragraphs of the introduction, stressing the particular situation of the deceased and his or her family and their wish regarding a Eucharistic celebration.¹⁸

In 2007, 68 percent of Flemish people who had died still received a Roman Catholic funeral. In the diocese of Hasselt, this proportion was as high as 75.2 percent.¹⁹ Almost all of these funerals took

14) For this case study, I limit myself to the Belgian diocese of Hasselt. Although a comparison with adjacent church provinces, e.g. France, Germany or the Netherlands would be very interesting, this goes beyond the scope and intention of this study.

15) See: ICLZ, *Orde van dienst voor de uitvaartliturgie*.

16) Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales Liturgy Office, *Order of Christian Funerals. General introduction*, nr. 5.

17) *Praenotanda* nr. 6. See Cuthbert, *Christian Burial*, 24: “*Si vero, rationibus pastoralibus suadentibus, exsequiae in ecclesia celebrentur sine Missa (quae tamen alia die, quantum fieri potest, opportune celebranda erit).*” The two other models for the Roman Catholic funeral rite presented in the *Ordo exsequiarum* do not foresee a Eucharist in the funeral rite. The so-called second model has a prayer service with final commendation in the chapel of the cemetery and a rite at the grave. The third model – mainly applied in African countries – has only one ritual moment: in the house of the deceased. However, these two models are not present in the official Flemish rite of 1993.

18) ICLZ, *Orde van dienst voor de uitvaartliturgie*, nr. 20-21, 13-14.

19) Prayer services at the crematorium, although possibly led by a Roman Catholic minister, are not included in these figures. For the number of deaths, see <https://statbel.fgov.be/>. The number of funerals can be discovered upon request from the diocesan administrative office. Also see table 1 *infra*. Compare also Havermans Nele and Marc Hooghe, “Kerkpraktijk in België: Resultaten Van De Zondagstelling in Oktober 2009,” (Leuven: K.U. Leuven Centrum Voor Politicologie, 2011), <https://docplayer.nl/15567162-Kerkpraktijk->

place in the context of a Eucharistic celebration. This was, and is, a huge burden for the rapidly declining number of priests, whose pastoral territory has become larger and larger. In 2008, the liturgical commission of the Flemish bishops (ICL, former ICLZ) published a brochure on the funeral rite entitled *Beyond Death: When Christians Celebrate Farewell. Orientations for the Funeral Liturgy*.²⁰ In recognizing several shifts both in society and in the church, the bishops mainly address two topics: how to deal with questions surrounding cremation and how to celebrate the funeral liturgy in a non-Eucharistic setting. Although the first issue is of great interest, here I focus on the second question dealt with in this document.

In the introduction, on the meaning of the funeral liturgy, the paschal mystery is again clearly the main theme. Apart from some of the sources already mentioned, the bishops also refer to the Catechism of the Catholic Church.²¹ Furthermore, when discussing the funeral liturgy, they unambiguously state that “we have the celebration of the Eucharist as the most penetrating memorial of the paschal mystery in which the deceased has entered”.²² When they tackle the question of the funeral liturgy with or without Eucharist, they begin by re-emphasizing this even more elaborately. I quote at length:

Until very recently, the funeral liturgy in our regions almost exclusively took place in the context of a Eucharistic celebration. There are many good reasons for this: being the central memorial celebration of Christ’s death and resurrection, the Eucharist is, indeed, at the same time a strong expression of the hope in the resurrection and of the permanent bond between the living and the dead. The meaning of the Eucharist and that of the funeral liturgy are a very good match.²³

Nevertheless, the bishops continue, the official ordo also regulates the performance of the funeral rites during a service of Word and prayer in the church. In this case, as the bishops explicitly state, the bond with the Eucharist is made by celebrating it on behalf of the deceased “at a later moment”. The bishops see two causes for this evolution: first, the lack of priests and, second, the ignorance of the deceased and/or his or her family of the Eucharist and the church. In 2008, these are, according to the Flemish bishops, the pastoral reasons mentioned above in the *praenotanda*. Although the bishops hope that whether or not to celebrate the Eucharist in the case of a church funeral can remain a free

in-belgie-resultaten-van-de-zondagstelling-in-oktober-2009-rapport-ten-behoeve-van-de-belgische-bisschoppenconferentie.html.

20) ICLZ, *Voorbij de dood... Als christenen afscheid vieren: oriëntaties bij de uitvaartliturgie* (Brussel: ICLZ, 2008).

21) ICLZ, *Voorbij de dood*, 4. They refer to the Catechism of the Catholic Church §1681-82: “The Christian meaning of death is revealed in the light of the Paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ in whom resides our only hope. The Christian who dies in Christ Jesus is ‘away from the body and at home with the Lord’. For the Christian, the day of death inaugurates, at the end of his sacramental life, the fulfillment of his new birth begun at Baptism, the definitive ‘conformity’ to ‘the image of the Son’”.

22) ICLZ, *Voorbij de dood*, 5.

23) ICLZ, *Voorbij de dood*, 11.

option, they foresee the reality of local communities without a priest and, therefore, without the option of a Eucharistic funeral liturgy.

The same ideas are also present in the first policy publication on funerals of the Diocese of Hasselt in the year 2009.²⁴ Here, the double option is presented as the norm, although individual parishes can decide, in light of their situation, to present the funeral liturgy in the context of a prayer service as a general norm for their territory. This can only be done, however, under strict conditions: the entire pastoral team must agree, good communication is required, and when people with a sincere faithful motivation strongly request a funeral liturgy with a Eucharist, this should be made possible. Five years later, however, an adjustment of this funeral policy was needed, due to the rapidly changing circumstances.

Table 1: Key figures for funerals in the diocese of Hasselt²⁵

	2007	2012	2018
Number deceased	6352	7205	7736
Number of Roman Catholic funerals	4778	4888	2967
Percentage (%)	75.20	67.80	38.48
Number of active priests	185	177	117
Number of parishes	312	312	308
Number of deacons	75	75	81
Number of leaders of the funeral (only authorized from 2010 onwards)		/	100

In 2012, the 177 active priests of the Hasselt diocese had 312 parishes and presided over 4888 funerals, which is still 67.8 percent of the funerals held in this region. In the years between 2012 and 2018, the number of priests decreased by 60, while the number of parishes remained the same.²⁶ The propor-

24) The recent funeral policy documents of the diocese of Hasselt have been grouped together and can be found online: Bisdom Hasselt, “Vernieuwde beleidslijn. Uitvaartliturgie en- pastoraal. Aanpassing 2013-2015,” 9-13, https://www.bisdomhasselt.be/files/parochieopbouw/Beleidsdocumenten/Liturgie/Uitvaartliturgie_2013_volledige_bundel.pdf.

25) For the number of deceased, see <https://statbel.fgov.be/>. The other figures can be requested from the diocesan press office. Prayer services at the crematorium, although possibly led by a Roman Catholic minister, are not included in these figures. In 2007 there was no response from 27 parishes, in 2012 no response from 11 parishes and in 2018 no response from 21 parishes.

26) In the future, the decline in the number of priests is likely to continue at the same rate, when one takes into account the reversed age pyramid of the ordained. On the other hand, Flemish bishops are very reluctant to close parishes, mainly due to the financial state-church construction in Belgium, which is still largely based on the 1801 concordat with Napoleon. This puts many people, both ordained and not, in a tough bind.

tion of Roman Catholic funerals, however, also declined drastically, from 67.8 to 38.5 percent. This last evolution will be addressed below. Even with a lot of help from emeritus priests, more and more parishes were simply no longer able to celebrate the Eucharist at every funeral. Moreover, experience from the year 2009 onwards shows that when people had two options, people choose to have a funeral with a Eucharist in almost every occasion.²⁷ These developments caused the diocese of Hasselt to adjust its policy as other Flemish dioceses had already done. Since 2013, the funeral liturgy in the context of a prayer service, that is without the celebration of the Eucharist, became the general norm.²⁸ Today, a Roman Catholic funeral in the diocese of Hasselt, and in most of the parishes in Flanders, has two or three separate liturgical moments: first, there is a vigil on the evening before the funeral (which, although in decline, is still common in many places); second, there is the funeral liturgy in a service of Word and prayer followed by the burial or cremation; and third, there is a memorial in one of the coming Sunday parish Eucharistic celebrations, usually within a month of the funeral.

This new form of the funeral rite has liturgical consequences, both for the funeral liturgy and for the Eucharistic celebration. I will discuss these in the next section. The new regulations also have consequences for the presider. Already in 2009, it was announced that, if the priests and deacons were unable to preside at every funeral in combination with their other pastoral work, trained laypeople could be delegated to lead the funeral liturgy. In most cases, these *leiders van de uitvaart* (funeral officiant, literally ‘leaders of the funeral’) are parish volunteers and are presented by the local pastoral team to the bishop. After completing the training program, they are commissioned as a ‘leader of the funeral’ for three years, which can be renewed after evaluation. These people can be catechists, but in many cases they are those laypeople who already led the vigil on the evening before the funeral, which has been customary for almost four decades in the Diocese of Hasselt. Apart from a general training for leading prayer services, these lay ministers have to take a liturgical-theological course on the funeral (seven meetings) and, if necessary, undertake training in homiletics and bereavement skills. As part of this training, the Christian perspective on death and the funeral liturgy in relation to the paschal mystery is an important topic. Currently, there are exactly one hundred laypeople in the diocese who have received this training along with the episcopal commissioning to lead the funeral liturgy. Not everyone, however, who has received the training has had the opportunity to lead a funeral service. In the context of the Roman Catholic Church, it is important to note that this lay ministry is open for both men and women, the latter forming the majority of funeral leaders.²⁹ Although the practice had already been introduced in 2010, when in 2018 a famous Flemish artist died, headlines in the national media

27) Bisdom Hasselt, *Vernieuwde beleidslijn*, 6.

28) In very exceptional cases, it is still possible, however not at all encouraged, see Bisdom Hasselt, *Vernieuwde beleidslijn*, 7.

29) Unfortunately, I have no figures. This statement is based on observation of the annual training day they hold.

declared “Woman leads funeral!”³⁰ This shows not only how unaware the press in a secular society is of ecclesiastical matters, but also how deeply engrained certain traditions in Flanders are when it comes to church funerals: it is still commonly expected among the broader population that a funeral should be in a church with the Eucharist and led by a priest.

3 The liturgy and the paschal mystery in today’s Flemish funeral rite

In the funeral liturgy in a service of Word and prayer, as published by the liturgical commission of the Flemish bishops, the traditional elements that refer to the paschal mystery of Christ remain: for example, the sprinkling with holy water in reference to baptism, the introductory rites, the Scripture readings, the final commendation, etc.³¹ Each of these express the hope that the deceased may share in this paschal mystery. Noticeable, however, are some new elements introduced in this liturgical ordo that are not present in the approved ordo of 1993. Where it is a custom, or if the leader of the funeral chooses so, this new ICL ordo proposes two small rites immediately after the word of welcome. The first is a rite of the cross (*kruisritus*), in which a small wooden cross with the name of the deceased is laid on the coffin in silence or accompanied by the following (or a similar) prayer:

Lord Jesus,
 You gave up your life for the world
 and saved us from death.
 Your cross has become our hope:
 let it also be a sign of your love
 for N. and for each of us.³²

The second rite, immediately following this rite of the cross, involves lighting the candles around the dead body (*lichtrit*). For this, light is taken from the paschal candle and used to light the candles that are standing around the coffin and, sometimes, candles held by close family members. Different prayers are possible, but all of them refer to the paschal mystery: e.g.,

30) See https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/nl/2018/02/08/vrouw_leidt_uitvaarttanteterry/.

31) ICLZ, *Uitvaartliturgie in een woord- en gebedsdienst* (Brussel: ICLZ, 2012). At the time of publication, the liturgical commission, which published this ordo, was presided over by the now cardinal and since 2015 Metropolitan of Belgium, Mgr. J. De Kesel. I am not familiar with a similar official ordo in the Netherlands, but the Flemish ordo seems to be inspired by already existing French material; however, consistent comparison would lead us too far.

32) ICLZ, *Uitvaartliturgie in een woord- en gebedsdienst*, nr 3, 10.

In the Easter night,
 the light of Christ has vanquished the darkness.
 Our *brother/sister N.* has entered the night of death:
 may the light of the redeemer rise for *him/her*.³³

After this prayer, a song or acclamation may be sung, for which this new Flemish ordo suggests a selection of Dutch hymns (e.g., *Licht dat ons aanstoot*), the traditional *Lux aeterna*, and even some Taizé songs (e.g., *Christe lux mundi*).

Lastly, the ordo explicitly ends, immediately before singing the *In paradisum*, with this dismissal and announcement:

We will bring *N.* to *his/her* last resting place
 but we will still commemorate *him/her* in our prayers.
 Also during the Eucharistic celebration of our parish community
 on *Saturday/Sunday ...*
 we shall mention *his/her* name and pray for *him/her*.³⁴

As seen in this prayer, with its reference to the upcoming Eucharistic liturgy of the community, the new norms concerning the funeral have repercussions for this Eucharistic celebration. In 2013, the Diocese of Hasselt, in its latest policy document on the funeral, stated that

it has to be stressed that faith in the resurrection is central and, because of this, a funeral liturgy with a prayer service always takes place in connection to the Eucharist. Therefore, a Sunday Eucharist following the funeral liturgy will be offered for the deceased. This Sunday Eucharist is also an explicit moment of memorial.³⁵

The Eucharist remains central in connecting the funeral liturgy with the paschal mystery. Some possibilities for this Sunday Eucharist memorial are mentioned and are nowadays, in some form or another, adopted in almost every parish.³⁶ At the beginning of the mass, the family and loved ones of the deceased are welcomed. His or her name is mentioned in the prayer of the faithful and sometimes in the intercessions for the dead within the Eucharistic prayer. The small wooden cross with the name of the deceased, which was also present during the funeral rite, can be displayed near the altar. When the mass is ended, the priest or one of his assistants – sometimes the leader of the funeral, if he or she is

33) ICLZ, *Uitvaartliturgie in een woord- en gebedsdienst*, nr. 4, 10-11.

34) ICLZ, *Uitvaartliturgie in een woord- en gebedsdienst*, nr. 20, 30.

35) Bisdom Hasselt, *Vernieuwde beleidslijn*, 6.

36) Unfortunately, there are no figures available of this practice. Based on personal experience and conversations, these Sunday memorial services have become common in all parishes that adopted the new model and are well attended by first- and second-degree relatives of the deceased.

present – process together with the family to the memorial place in the church. Here, accompanied by a short prayer, the small wooden cross mentioned earlier is added to the crosses of the other deceased of that year, displayed in the memorial place. This cross will be given to the family in a prayer service or mass on All Souls' Day. Sometimes an icon of the resurrection is displayed near the small wooden cross at the altar or alongside the paschal candle. All of these are relatively subtle adaptations; nevertheless, the Sunday Eucharistic memorial truly becomes the framework of the commemoration of the faithful departed.

4. The paschal mystery and pastoral practice

Since Vatican II, there has been an increased emphasis on the paschal mystery within the funeral liturgy in the Roman Catholic rite. This remains the case in the more recent changes to this liturgy in the Flemish dioceses, which have had to deal with both a rapidly collapsing church organization and the continuing demand for ritual support at significant moments in life. In these new liturgical forms and regulations, the paschal mystery remains a main focus. The general norm of celebrating the funeral liturgy together with the Eucharist, as preeminent celebration of the paschal memorial, was abandoned. Nevertheless, the connection between the Eucharist, the paschal mystery, and the funeral rite remains. It might even be argued that holding on to the Eucharistic memorial but separating it in time from the funeral liturgy itself makes this bond even clearer. Whereas before the Eucharist was something that simply belonged to the ritual of a Christian farewell, it is now a separate ritual moment with its own particular and very clear meaning: a Sunday, community commemoration of the paschal mystery with an integrated memorial of the dearly departed. Moreover, the funeral liturgy itself is enriched with several small ritual actions that clearly frame the passage from life to death of the deceased into the passage from life through death into new life in Christ. Although at first glance letting go of the Eucharist as the immediate context of the Roman Catholic funeral rite might seem to weaken its connection to the paschal mystery, we may discover that in its present Flemish form, it actually reinforces this bond. Apart from this, I would like to add some further remarks, both from a liturgical and a practical-theological perspective.

First, adding an extra liturgical moment and inviting the family and loved ones to the Sunday parish Eucharist can have several positive effects. In some cases, it can function as a reintroduction into the Sunday liturgy and community. It could also provide a rediscovery of the formerly very popular votive masses for the departed, if this is pastorally and theologically explained in a sound and accessible way. This might mean not emphasizing or lending credence to the idea that one's time in purgatory can be shortened by giving a certain amount of money for the saying of a mass, but rather the idea of memorial and reconnecting with the deceased in and through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, who opened heaven for all. Furthermore, this new liturgical sequence contributes to a certain trajectory the church has to offer for the dying and the bereaved. This trajectory starts

with the anointing of the sick and possibly the viaticum (last communion), the latter unfortunately becoming very uncommon. When the person has died, there is the vigil, the funeral liturgy, and the memorial Eucharist. Later on, other memorial Eucharistic celebrations are possible: anniversaries of the birth and/or death of the deceased, the wedding days, a patron saint's feast day, and of course a commemoration on All Souls' Day. All of these moments should also correspond with the necessary pastoral guidance and conversation. This is a broad offering of pastoral care and counseling that no funeral director can address.

More important, however, are the practical-theological implications of the paschal mystery, which are at the heart of Roman Catholic liturgy but are certainly not addressed by a 'neutral' (commercial) funeral director. In what way can the suffering, death, descent into hell, resurrection, and ascension of Christ in which Christian faithful liturgically participate provide a framework for dealing with death?

Fully developing the possibilities and opportunities of the paschal mystery in view of pastoral practice would be the task for another article with a different research question. Nevertheless, I want to offer a few thoughts on this important question. Quartier and Hermans have shown how even people who have given up on God still "want consolation and look for it in funeral liturgy".³⁷ According to them, people experience the funeral liturgy as providing a perspective beyond a nihilistic idea in which death is the 'final exit'. Although Quartier explicitly connects this to the paschal mystery, more empirical research is needed to fully understand the connections between the religious content of the liturgy and the notions and ideas people have of mortality.³⁸ Other research has shown how, in the context of personal eschatologies, both the promise of the resurrection, and the pain and suffering inherent to human life (Good Friday experiences) play an important role.³⁹

These conclusions reinforce the need for the paschal mystery to be part of the pastoral-liturgical content for the trajectory the church has to offer, which I described above, in view of the pastoral care for both the dying and the bereaved. According to empirical research, and the experience of many pastors, people seem to long for a transcendent perspective beyond death.⁴⁰ A Christian answer to this longing should relate not only theologically but also pastorally to the paschal mystery of Christ.⁴¹ Being pastorally and liturgically connected to Christ's passion, death, and resurrection can be a source of consolation and reassurance for both the dying and the bereaved. As dark and painful as a particu-

37) Quartier and Hermans, "Roman Catholic Funeral Liturgy," 221.

38) Quartier, *Bridging the Gaps*, 184-85.

39) See Albert Gerhards, "Eschatologische Vorstellungen und Modelle in der Totenliturgie," in *Die Grössere Hoffnung Der Christen: Eschatologische Vorstellungen Im Wandel*, eds. Werner Berg and Alberts Gerhards, *Quaestiones Disputatae* 127 (Freiburg: Herder, 1990), 147-58.

40) Compare, for example, the conclusions of Quartier and Hermans, "Roman Catholic Funeral Liturgy," 218-22.

41) See also Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 143.

lar instance of suffering and death may seem, Christ has traveled this road before, even into hell, but eventually vanquished death and opened life with God for all. This is what the Christian ritual, also in its new form, proclaims and offers for both the deceased and the bereaved.

The texts, symbols, and rites referred to above can not only help Christian faithful to become aware of the paschal mystery but also, as liturgical ritual does, enable their participation in the paschal mystery of Christ. That is the core of what these rituals express and even hope to realize, as is, for example, sung and enacted during the *In paradisum*. The paschal mystery stresses the funeral rite as a rite of passage, from this life into the next: life is changed, not ended, as the phrase from the preface quoted in the title of this contribution expresses it.⁴² Through the cultural, symbolic, and theological communication of the funeral rite, the content of Christian faith and the actual life of concrete people celebrating the liturgy are connected.⁴³ It is a rite of passage for both the deceased and the bereaved. In focusing on the paschal mystery and the resurrection, this Christian rite of passage offers a perspective of hope.

At the same time, the paschal mystery is not exhausted by, and should not be narrowed down exclusively to, the resurrection. The paschal mystery also includes Christ's passion, and we have seen how central the symbol of the cross is during the funeral rite. Referring to the paschal mystery does not mean putting forward the resurrection as the only perspective while neglecting the passion, the descent into hell, and all the sorrow and misery, which for many people equally form part of death. Pastors and funeral leaders can, and perhaps should, use the liturgy and its symbolic representations of the paschal mystery in all its depth as an opportunity to present this hope-giving perspective in their pastoral counseling, but may also use it to allow sorrow and grief.

Returning to the case of the new Flemish regulations for the funeral rites, I want to make some final evaluative remarks that go beyond the scope of the paschal mystery. First, this situation can be considered as an advancement of liturgical and pastoral cooperation between ordained and lay ministers, much needed in the Roman Catholic Church. Many things can be learned here, both with regard to the necessary training, the liturgical capacity, the specific charisms of lay people, and the shared responsibility of all for the life of the church.

Of course, these new regulations also have difficulties and downsides. Since 2012, there has been a steep decline of the number of Christian funerals. This is due to many factors, including not only secularization, but also the commercialization of death by funeral directors who, for the last five to ten years in Flanders, are becoming big companies with large ritual facilities, replacing the older, mostly family-run funeral homes.

42) On the funeral rite as a rite of passage, see again Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 156-57.

43) For the relation between the funeral rite, the paschal mystery, bereavement, hope, and how this is experienced, see the study of Chris Hermans, Thomas Quartier, and Anton Scheer, "Remembrance and Hope in Roman Catholic Funeral Rites: Attitudes of Participants Towards Past and Future of the Deceased," *Journal of Empirical Theology* 17, no. 2 (2004): 252-80. For a more psychological perspective of the relation between hope, bereavement, and the paschal mystery, see Goumans, "Hopen op verrijzenis," 219-27.

Initially, having a funeral without a Eucharist as the general norm generated protest. For some people, the Eucharist was all that distinguished a church funeral from a service in a funeral home, a sentiment some funeral directors used to promote their own services. To counterbalance this, in holding on to the paschal mystery – as the new funeral rituals in Flanders do – pastors should make clear how the church affirms God as the source of life, while the funeral director’s parlor is a house of death. At this stage a thorough quantitative and qualitative study of causes for the recent decline in Flemish church funerals remains a desideratum. When it is undertaken, the new liturgical norms will certainly need to be taken into account.

The decrease in the number of church funerals also sheds light on a more serious problem. Though the Roman Catholic funeral rite provides various possibilities for personal remembrance, we have seen that Christ’s paschal mystery is the main ‘theme’ of the public and official funeral liturgy. For many contemporary Flemish people (and, we can easily say, Western Europeans), the entire notion of the paschal mystery remains an alien concept, even for those who still attend church services. It is easy to see, and empirical research shows, how the family’s principal desire to commemorate the life and person of the deceased can collide with the primary focus of the funeral liturgy: the memorial of the paschal mystery and the consoling perspective of life in Christ beyond death.⁴⁴ The official rubrics provide just one possibility for a short eulogy, and that is at the beginning of the final commendation. When it comes to the homily, it is explicitly stated in the Flemish 1993 ordo that “this is no eulogy but the proclamation of the Christian message on death and life”.⁴⁵ Although this paragraph stipulates that this homily should connect the biblical readings to the deceased and should be adapted to concrete circumstances, the rubrics of the same ordo repeat that the homily should not be a eulogy.⁴⁶ The introduction in the Flemish rite for funerals during a service of Word and prayer (2012) of an extra moment for an explicit eulogy by a family member – after the words of welcome by the leading minister – shows that church officials are aware of this desire. Nevertheless, the question remains as to how to deal with this tension between the memorial of the paschal mystery and the memorial of the deceased.

Other difficulties with the new regulations are mostly of a practical nature: some priests refuse to follow the general norm, which can be very confusing for the faithful. Some of the lay ministers turn out not to be the right woman or man for the situation, even after the training and commissioning. The training, however, has to be renewed every three years and provides a certain corrective. Another problem when the memorial Eucharist takes place is that sometimes the priest does not know whom to address because he was until that moment not involved in the pastoral process and is not familiar with the deceased and the bereaved family. In parishes that have no fixed Sunday for such a memorial,

44) This dilemma is also described, and with empirical data, in Quartier and Hermans, “Roman Catholic Funeral Liturgy,” 221.

45) ICLZ, *Orde van dienst voor de uitvaartliturgie*, nr. 16, 11-12.

46) ICLZ, *Orde van dienst voor de uitvaartliturgie*, nr. 24, 54.

the memorial can sometimes collide with other parish events like first communion, which may provide a very awkward liturgy. Or, when they have a significant number of church funerals, the memorial can become somewhat of a burden to the Sunday community's liturgical gathering. All of these, however, are practical problems for which solutions can be found. The theological, liturgical, and pastoral evaluations of these new Flemish regulations are positive and identify where the opportunities outweigh the challenges.

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