Religion, Mortality & COVID-19

- L3 TALKING TO THE DEAD MODULE
- PROF. GARY R. BUNT

1



2

Reading

- Heidi Campbell, Distancing Religion Online: Lessons from the Pandemic Prompted Religious Move Online
- Heidi Campbell, Religion in Quarantine: The Future of Religion in a Post-Pandemic World (open access e-book: Digital Religion Publications, 2020)
- 'A Good Death' During the Covid-19 Pandemic in the UKA Report of Key Findings and Recommendations (LSE Anthropology)
- Sujata Gupta, Why do we miss the rituals put on hold by the COVID-19 pandemic?, Science News, 14 Aug 2020
- The Conversation, Different faiths, same pain: How to grieve a death in the coronavirus pandemic, 1 June 2020

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Listening

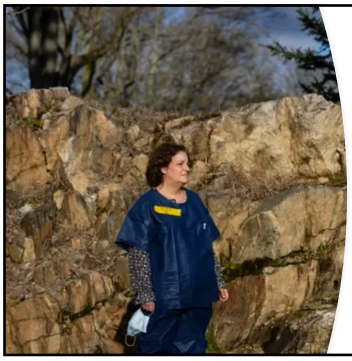
- BBC Heart & Soul, 'Will coronavirus change my faith?', August 2020
- BBC Heart & Soul, 'Will God protect me?', 23 August 2020

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Questions

- Closure of places of worship: mosques, churches, synagogues
- Ritual practices reconsidered: Hajj, Pesach, Easter, Diwali
- Are alternative approaches feasible to practice faith in the pandemic context?
- What are the different responses between and within diverse religious contexts – especially in relation to mortality?
- Does the Covid-19 situation make people *more* religious?
- Has the nature of religion changed?

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A pastoral view

"Everything feels so sacred right now," she says. "These little synchronicities assure me there's a force greater than myself out there at work."

"And she's learned to embrace the divine that moves through a Zoom chat, even as her hands can no longer touch. "We have to get used to seeing God differently," she says. "It's made me so grateful that we even have this technology. Because imagine if we didn't."" Rev Angela Maddalone, Hospital Chaplain, North Carolina

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Religious experience

Ritual:

Sensory experiences
Communal experience
Ideas of sacred space

How has this changed in the COVID-19 context?

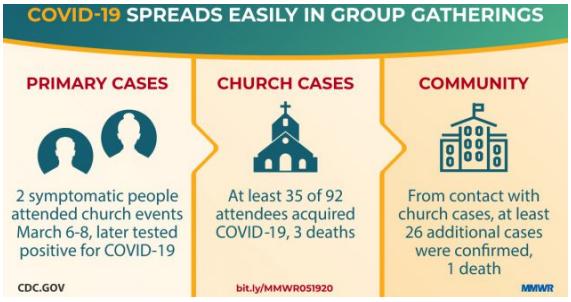


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Responses

- Some sought to ignore advice i.e. evangelical churches in USA

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Arkansas: CDC report, May 2020

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More US churches sue to challenge COVID-19 restrictions

Churches in California and Minnesota are challenging state pandemic restrictions in court, contending that they are violations of religious liberty

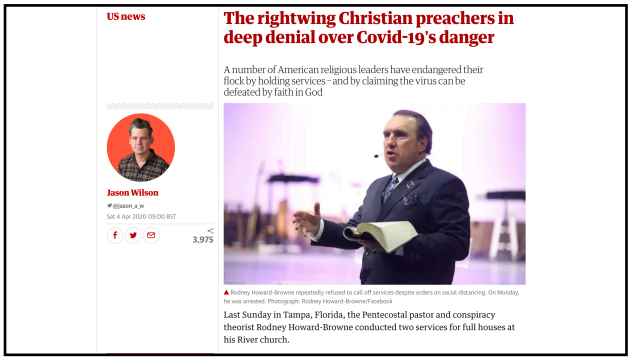
By DAVID CRARY AP National Writer

14 August 2020, 01:13 • 6 min read

The Associated Press

FILE – In this Sunday, April 5, 2020 file photo, a distance is measured as worshippers line up to take communion on Palm Sunday outside of Godspeak Calvary Chapel in Newbury Park, Calif. Churches in California and Minnesota, backed by a conservative legal group, have file lawsuits in August 2020 against the governors of their states challenging restrictions imposed due to the coronavirus outbreak that they contend are violations of religious liberty. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez, File)

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US news

The rightwing Christian preachers in deep denial over Covid-19's danger

A number of American religious leaders have endangered their flock by holding services – and by claiming the virus can be defeated by faith in God

Jason Wilson

@jason_a_w

Sat 4 Apr 2020 09.00 BST

3,975

▲ Rodney Howard-Browne repeatedly refused to call off services despite orders on social distancing. On Monday, he was arrested. Photograph: Rodney Howard-Browne/Facebook

Last Sunday in Tampa, Florida, the Pentecostal pastor and conspiracy theorist Rodney Howard-Browne conducted two services for full houses at his River church.

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'The rightwing Christian preachers in deep denial over Covid-19's danger'

- " …Howard-Browne is just one of the most prominent religious leaders on the Christian right who are endangering their flocks and the rest of America by claiming the virus is a hoax, or that it can only be defeated by supernatural means, rather than solid healthcare policy."

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Pastor who refused to close church due to coronavirus killed by outbreak

A PASTOR who refused to close his church due to COVID-19 has been killed by the deadly virus.

By REBECCA NICHOLSON



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Pastor who refused to close church due to coronavirus killed by outbreak

- "Bishop Gerald Glenn, a prominent evangelical pastor in a community near Richmond, Virginia, died on Saturday evening from COVID-19. The news comes a month after Bishop Glenn told his congregation: "I firmly believe that God is larger than this dreaded virus." In a video of the sermon, Bishop Glenn told those who gathered: "Just imagine if the government had the authority to say, you and me, we can't go to church. Aren't you glad you were free to get up and come?" Religious leaders in other parts of the country have also dismissed the idea of staying home during this pandemic."

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Morning Mix

Megachurch pastor who held no-mask services misses hearing after refusing to wear mask in court





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Tony Spell, a pastor of a Pentecostal megachurch in Baton Rouge

- "Spell has been outspoken about his disdain for masks. In the Aug. 5 video, the pastor claimed that masks are the "precursor" to the Antichrist and said that a vaccine would "have the ability to track all of humankind.""

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Responses to mortality in the COVID-19 situation

- Usual communal rituals cannot be observed i.e. limited funerals, burial approaches, funerals as the liminal event
- Impact on pre-death religious mediation
- Bodies treated differently (numbers)

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Practical considerations and recommendations for religious leaders and faith-based communities in the context of COVID-19

Interim guidance

7 April 2020

World Health Organization

Background

Religious leaders, faith-based organizations, and faith communities can play a major role in saving lives and reducing illness related to COVID-19.[1] They are a primary source of support, comfort, guidance, and direct health care and social service, for the communities they serve. Religious leaders of faith-based organizations and communities of faith can share health information to protect their own members and wider communities, which may be more likely to be accepted than from other sources. They can provide pastoral and spiritual support during public health emergencies and other health challenges and can advocate for the needs of vulnerable populations.

By sharing clear, evidence-based steps to prevent COVID-19, religious-inspired institutions can promote helpful information, prevent and reduce fear and stigma, provide reassurance to people in their communities, and promote health-saving practices. Religious leaders are integrated into their communities through service and compassionate networks and are often able to reach the most vulnerable with assistance and health information and identify those most in need. Religious leaders are a critical link in the safety net for vulnerable people within their faith community and wider

- Ensuring safe faith-based gatherings, ceremonies, and rituals when they do occur
- Strengthening mental and spiritual health, well-being and resilience, through individual contact (while observing appropriate physical distancing) and through social and other communications media
- Ensuring that a human-rights-based approach to advocacy, messaging, and service delivery is systematically upheld
- Addressing stigma, violence, and the incitement of hate
- Promoting ecumenical and interfaith collaboration, and peaceful coexistence during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Ensure that accurate information is shared with communities; counter and address misinformation.

Gatherings (where permitted)

Local and national health authorities are the primary source of information and advice about COVID-19 in communities and can provide information about locally mandated restrictions on the movement of people, whether gatherings

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World Health Organisation: Infection Prevention and Control for the safe management of a dead body in the context of COVID-19

- *The dignity of the dead, their cultural and religious traditions, and their families should be respected and protected throughout;*
- *Hasty disposal of a dead from COVID-19 should be avoided;*
- *Authorities should manage each situation on a case-by-case basis, balancing the rights of the family, the need to investigate the cause of death, and the risks of exposure to infection.*

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World Health Organisation: Funeral home/ mortuary care

- *Health care workers or mortuary staff preparing the body (e.g. washing the body, tidying hair, trimming nails, or shaving) should wear appropriate PPE according to standard precautions (gloves, impermeable disposable gown [or disposable gown with impermeable apron], medical mask, eye protection);*
- *If the family wishes only to view the body and not touch it, they may do so, using standard precautions at all times including hand hygiene. Give the family clear instructions not to touch or kiss the body;*
- *Embalming is not recommended to avoid excessive manipulation of the body;*
- *Adults > 60 years and immunosuppressed persons should not directly interact with the body.*

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Religious Responses to Funerals

L3 TALKING TO THE DEAD MODULE

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Iraq

- "In Iraq, relatives participate in washing the bodies of their loved ones and preparing them for burial. The dead are buried the same day wherever possible. For both Muslims and Christians, deaths are normally followed by three days of condolences held in large tents or mosques or church halls. With the family surrounded by relatives, friends and neighbors, outpourings of grief are expected and often encouraged."

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Hinduism: India

- "Funerals are now limited to 20 or fewer attendees. Gone are the big, public funeral processions that are a key part of mourning for adherents of many faiths across South Asia."
- "Many of India's majority Hindus believe that being cremated next to the Ganges, or having ashes submerged in its waters, ensures salvation. But with limited public transportation and travel curtailed under lockdown, families are unable to transport the bodies or ashes of their loved ones to the river, and there are reports of ashes piling up in crematoriums because families can't come to pick up the ashes."

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Islam: Pakistan

- " …the most populous province, Punjab, issued guidelines requiring those performing the ritual Islamic washing of bodies to wear appropriate protective gear. A prominent clerical council also called on Pakistani Muslims to practice social distancing as they undertake traditional communal prayers to honor the dead."

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Islam: Pakistan



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Islam: Turkey

"In Turkey, close farewells have been replaced by distance burials. Only those physically involved in the burial are allowed at the pre-burial body washing ritual normally attended by close family members, and only the closest relatives can attend the burial, with the imam praying from a safe distance away, speaking through a mask. Authorities have forbidden mourners from approaching the coffin for a last look or word."

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Islam: Turkey



Coronavirus: Funerals held in Istanbul | AFP, 1 Apr 2020

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Islam: Canada



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Judaism: Israel

"Burial officials restrict funerals to 20 guests and forbid the custom of passing around a shovel for attendees to scoop dirt into the grave so participants don't touch the same shovel. At some funerals, participants insist on keeping the tradition to honor the dead by scooping up dirt with their bare hands. Coronavirus victims' bodies are wrapped in two plastic body bags to protect those who handle the body, since coffins are not typically used in Jewish burials in Israel and bodies are lowered directly into the grave, wrapped in shrouds."

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Judaism: USA

- *"I'm broadcasting funerals online and coordinating shiva visits through Zoom, but technology will never approximate the comfort of a home full of people. During shiva, our community holds us in our grief until we discover ways to move forward alone again."* **Rabbi David A. Schuck**

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Shiva.com

When a Public Funeral, Burial and Shiva is not permitted.

There are a number of unprecedented measures taking place as a result of COVID-19 that will restrict and limit certain gatherings which includes funerals, burials and shivas. Consequently, mourners will now experience a new type of grief, when the traditional and common practices observed surrounding end-of-life are abruptly changed.

When a Jewish individual passes away, notwithstanding the level of religious observances, a mourning family receives emotional and physical support from their extended family, network of friends and the community during the funeral service, internment, shiva and beyond. Generally, this expression of sympathy is received by physical embraces in the form of a hug at the funeral, burial and shiva. The shiva provides a structured period of mourning for individuals to grieve and mourn a loss. In general, the attendance of a shiva by friends and the community helps to lift the spirit and deliver support. It is important to realize there will be a new grief felt with an absence of the physical interaction most commonly experienced.

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Ultra-orthodox Jewish New Yorkers protest new coronavirus restrictions as Cuomo threatens to close synagogues

Community activists call for 'civil disobedience' as state begins implementing limits on religious inst

Chris Rietta New York | @chrisriota | Wednesday 07 October 2020 15:42



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Judaism: USA

WORLD NEWS APRIL 29, 2020 / 7:19 PM / UPDATED 7 MONTHS AGO

New York police break up massive crowd at rabbi's funeral that defied virus shutdown

By Nathan Layne, Maria Caspani 4 MIN READ

NEW YORK (Reuters) - New York police broke up a massive crowd of ultra-Orthodox Jews who took part in a rabbi's funeral in defiance of a statewide coronavirus shutdown, and the mayor walked back comments on the gathering that some Jewish leaders called discriminatory.

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Judaism: USA



NYPD Break Up Crowded Street Of Orthodox Jewish Community Having Rabbi's Funeral | NBC News NOW. 29 Apr 2020

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Judaism: UK

'My rabbi's tools now include a phone': UK Jewish burials changed by Covid-19

Mourners not able to observe usual rituals, as figures suggest community being hit disproportionately

Coronavirus - latest updates

See all our coronavirus coverage



Harriet Sherwood and Helen Pidd

Thu 9 May 2020 11.49 BST

Mourners before the rabbi started intoning funeral prayers over a shrouded coffin, his phone rang. The dead man, 90 years old, a victim of coronavirus, had been lying in a morgue for a

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Judaism: UK



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Christianity & Islam: Philippines

"In the Philippines, a government edict has decreed that the remains of a COVID-19 victim should be cremated within 12 hours, with an exception if a religion forbids cremation. If the deceased is a Muslim, for example, the body of the deceased should be placed in a sealed bag and buried in the nearest Muslim cemetery according to Muslim rites, also within 12 hours."

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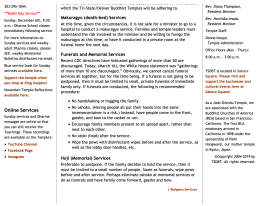
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Buddhism



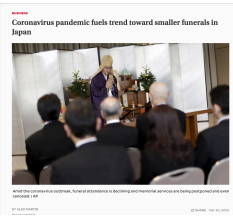
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Buddhism



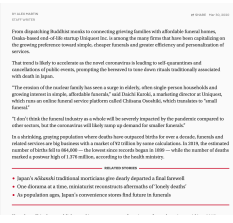
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Buddhism



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Buddhism



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Buddhism

Uniquest, which partners with over 4,000 funeral parlors nationwide and has mediated over 300,000 funerals to date for as cheap as ¥118,000, released a new service earlier this month that allows its clients to receive the customary *kōden*, or condolence money, via online payments. While the service is aimed at mourners who are physically or geographically incapable of attending funeral ceremonies to pay their respects, Kuroki said it may also become useful during pandemics when social gatherings are frowned upon, or even prohibited.

"We didn't anticipate the virus when we were creating the system," he said.

Meanwhile, Tokyo-based funeral service startup Ventus Co. offers a limited-time option allowing the bereaved who are worried about COVID-19 to go ahead with the cremation of the deceased while postponing funeral and memorial services to a later date. While the plan was initially available for those applying between March 1 and this Tuesday, the company extended the period to April 30 considering the severity of the situation.

"We have been receiving daily calls from people worried about the virus and interested in the option," said Katsunoris Nakahara, an executive officer at Ventus, which works with around 800 funeral homes and 1,300 Buddhist monks.

Firms like Ventus and Uniquest have been offering more transparent fees and packaged services to address the complicated rituals and unclear pricing associated with traditional funerals in the aging nation. The population of those age 65 or older stood at 35.88 million in 2018, up 593,000 from a year earlier, and accounted for 28.4 percent of the population, according to the communications ministry.

A typical Buddhist funeral involves a wake over the deceased by the immediate family, followed by a funeral the following day. During these ceremonies, guests customarily offer money to the bereaved, and burn incense at temples and other venues as hired monks chant sutras before an altar.

The cremated body of the deceased is then carried in an urn-laden hearse to a crematorium. Family and close friends collect bone fragments for a cinerary urn, and the event wraps up with a reception. Funeral fees, however, vary widely depending on the funeral home, with surveys putting the price tag at a general range of ¥1 million to ¥2 million.

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Buddhism



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Buddhism

Much online worship is organized by Buddhist devotees and believers independently of the temples. One of the mos popular is a global prayer service under the banner "one mind action to dispel the plague" that is held twenty-four times a day at 13:30 in every time zone around the world. [107] It is run by the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, the global Buddhist philanthropic society based in Taiwan, and the only foreign religious organization permitted to operate nationally in China. Another independent form of online worship is among young people who are increasingly turning to Buddhism in this difficult time. They are using existing Buddhist networks on WeChat and other social media platforms for the fellowship of synchronous worship and concentration of spiritual energy. These social media networks operate without state approval and oversight, and so are not encouraged by SARA and the BAC.

Online rituals that enable social distancing to slow the spread of coronavirus disease may also be muting possible criticisms of the state for mishandling its outbreak. This can be seen in the sensitive matter of funeral rites for the dead. Temple are enabling bereaved families to commission an online synchronous ceremony. At the appointed time, family members worship from home while as clerics chant at a temple. These online death rituals preclude physical gatherings of bereaved family members whose strong emotions could turn into a critical feeling towards the state.

Other possible political implications for mourning those who died by Covid-19 are apparent in the Tomb Sweeping Festival (Qingming jie). This is a traditional custom of ancestor worship in China in early April when families visit cemeteries and halls housing the ashes of their deceased kin in Buddhist temples. This year, even as the national lockdown eased, the state has restricted access to sites, and the number of visitors has reportedly fallen sharply as compared to previous years.[72] While the state justifies the restriction by the need to maintain social distancing, it does avert large gatherings of people who may blame the state for the loss of their loved ones. At the same time, on April 4, the day of the Tomb Sweeping Festival, the state declared a nation-wide silence for three minutes to mourn the dead. This is a moment of the state taking the role of popular custom and belief in grieving and remembering those who died in a national public health crises.

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Buddhism

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SIKHISM

Responses to Bereavement and Mortality

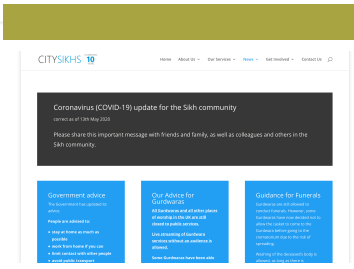
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Sikhism



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Sikhism



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