CREMATION AS AN EMERGING CULTURAL SYSTEM

by

CECELIA DANNA COLLIER

(Under the Direction of Linda Grant)

ABSTRACT

Because the number of cremations per year in America has dramatically increased, from approximately three percent of deaths annually in the early 1960s to approximately twenty-five percent at present, this research analyzes the cultural implications of this trend for American society. There is no previous research that takes a sociological look at cremation in the United States. Since funerary practices serve as a cultural system, as a model *of* and model *for* present social life, I evaluate cremation as an emerging cultural system in U.S. society. As a starting point for this analysis, my research is grounded in the state of Georgia, which is a middle-of-the-road state, among the fifty states, in the use of cremation. An analysis of state survey results, cremation gardens, professional input, state law, and industry data contributes to an understanding of the practices and meanings associated with cremation in American culture. Throughout this study, cremation practices are contrasted with burial practices, in order to understand how funerary systems are evolving. Secondary analysis of national sample surveys provides contextual data for this research. Data analysis focuses on how cremation guides and reflects contemporary social life for individuals and the larger culture, including trends such as postmodernism. Compared to burial, cremation, as a form of disposition and memorialization,

embodies multiple social patterns, such as the increasing value placed on nature, the decreasing value of the body, the decreasing social ties between the living and the dead, the increasing individualization and personalization of memorialization, the increasing secularization of American society, and the decreasing sense of the sacred in social life, according to Durkheim. With over fifty percent of Americans choosing cremation in state and national surveys, the rise in cremation in the U. S. is a social trend that can be expected to continue well into the future.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents. My mother, Dr. CeCelia B. Collier, has supported me in every possible way. Her benevolent guidance and confidence has made all the difference. She is a wonderful, beautiful example, for me, as a professor and as a person.

My father, Capt. Thomas C. Collier, has supported me diligently all along. The combination of his pride, praise, excitement, and love has been a constant source of encouragement. He has always let me know how much he believes in me.

My parents taught me early to believe in myself. They are, each, accomplished and talented individuals. But, they are also great people. Without each of them, I would never have been so successful. I love you both, for always.

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CHAPTER 1

CREMATION AS AN EMERGING CULTURAL SYSTEM

The Rise of Cremation in America

The number of cremations per year in America has risen dramatically in the last 40 years. The Cremation Association of North America (CANA), 2005b, the national business and trade association which compiles statistics annually from each of the fifty states' Vital Statistics Department or State Health Department, and the District of Columbia, confirms the number of cremations in the U.S. to be 29% of deaths in 2003, with 71% of deaths ending in burials. While cremations still lag behind burials, what is striking is the increasing percentage of cremations conducted in the United States. Through the middle of the twentieth century, CANA reports the percent of deaths cremated in America remained around 3%, but between 1960 and 2000 CANA reports a change from 3.5% to just over 26% of deaths cremated (CANA 2005c). Thus, the proportion of Americans being cremated has risen by 22 percentage points in 40 years and is still climbing. By 2010, CANA projects cremations to result from 36% of deaths in America (CANA 2005a). Since cremation has historically been considered unchristian in our largely Christian society (Quigley 1996), and since the percentage of deaths ending in cremations did not change much for so many decades, this dramatic increase in the use of cremation over a relatively short period is impressive.

The intent of my research is to analyze the significance of this dramatic trend for

American culture and society. The handling of death is one of the most distinctive features of a

culture (Richards 1987). The way in which people deal with death is an important aspect of the

way in which they relate to and make use of their culture (Tuchman 1994). For instance, religion,

a fundamental part of a culture, makes death comprehensible, understandable, and interpretable,

although not easier, for the mourners (Geertz 1973a). Since people use funerary customs because

they are imbued with cultural significance, it is also possible to read those customs for insight

into a society (Leveillee 2002; Oestigaard 2000). Historically, burial has been the dominant mode

of disposing of the dead in America (Coffin 1976). The process of burying the dead, the

sanctioned tradition for both Christians and Jews, has long guided individuals in knowing what

to do when a relative dies (Aries 1974; Puckle 1926). Burial in cemeteries has provided a place

to keep the loved one among the community and a place to go to learn about the individuals

interred there and about the community as a whole (Jupp 1993). When the sociologist Lloyd

Warner analyzed cemeteries in his 1950s examination of Yankee City, he recognized that, "the

cemetery as a collective representation repeats and expresses that social structure of the living as

a symbolic replica; a city of the dead, it is a symbolic replica of the living community" (1959:

286-7). Burial in cemeteries has served, and still serves, as America's dominant cultural template

for framing the process of disposing and memorializing the dead (Coleman 1997). It tells us how

to handle the dead and tells us a lot about our past and present selves as we do. But over the last

few decades, more and more Americans are abandoning their primary cultural template for the

treatment of the dead and turning instead to cremation. Because the current treatment of the dead,

which Warner noted is a reflection of the present society, has implications for understanding the

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social relationships between the living and the living, such as you and me, as well as between the living and the dead, an analysis of the behavioral trends in cremation is important to understanding what is happening in contemporary American culture and society. Therefore, I wish to know more about how cremation is, or is not, functioning as a new cultural template, as a new social frame for disposing and memorializing the dead.

By focusing on the increasing acceptance of cremation in American culture, this study extends Clifford Geertz's interpretive approach to culture into the realm of contemporary American funerary practices. Geertz recognized the importance of culture as fundamental in the treatment of the dead when he studied a dysfunctional Javanese funeral (Geertz 1973b). In Java in the 1950s, Geertz observed that, "the complex of beliefs and rituals which had for generations brought countless Javanese safely through the difficult postmortem period suddenly failed to work with its accustomed effectiveness" (p.146), because an incongruity had developed between the rural cultural framework of meaning which the workers had brought into the cities with them from the countryside and the new everyday patterning of social interaction, along contemporary urban, political, and ideological lines, by which they were living (p.169). Consequently, when a young boy died in his uncle's urban home, political discord halted the religious course of his funeral, leaving the mourners dismayed over what to do. Historically, culture, through religion, had guided funerary behavior, but its failure to do so in this case proved sociologically insightful, as it reflected the social organizational and cultural incongruities burdening that section of 1950s Javanese society. Similarly, the rise of cremation in America is indicative of change, not of change in social organization, but of cultural change evident in changing funerary practices. Increasing numbers of Americans are leaving the traditional "complex of beliefs and rituals"

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governing postmortem care in favor of a new symbol system for the dead. An analysis of what particular insights into contemporary culture that specific practices of cremation indicate is the goal of my research. In the process, I will be analyzing our new funerary "complex of beliefs and rituals" surrounding cremation, how that symbol system has evolved from burial, and what the new symbols and practices mean to individuals.

In Geertz's evaluation of certain aspects of culture as cultural systems, "Religion as a Cultural System" (1973c:87-125), "Ideology as a Cultural System" (1973d:193-233), "Common Sense as a Cultural System" (1983a:72-94), and "Art as Cultural System" (1983b:94-120), Geertz defines culture as "as an organization of symbolic patterns on which people rely to make sense of their experience" (Geertz 1973a). Barry Schwartz also borrows Geertz's definition of culture when he articulates "Memory as a Cultural System" (1996). By demonstrating how commemorative images of Abraham Lincoln have been programmatically used to guide Americans during World War II, and other periods of national concern, Schwartz articulates how collective memory works as a social frame. Similarly, by examining a new symbolic pattern for the treatment of the dead, I analyze the degree to which cremation functions as a cultural system. Although Geertz insists on generalizing within cases, I analyze across cases. By evaluating Americans' opinions of cremation, use of cremation services, creation of memorial sites for cremated remains, and establishment of laws governing the disposition of the dead, I assess how people come to rely on a new symbolic framework, a "complex of beliefs and rituals" from their culture, in order to bring them through the postmortem period when a social member dies and to make sense of the experience.

This analysis has implications for understanding how a new cultural frame is created, when cremation practices become more and more widely chosen in contrast to burial, and for assessing the present cultural era, often theorized as more postmodern, than modern, with a characteristic lack of interest in history and tradition. As death practices change so does the culture in a reciprocal relationship of mutual influence. Consequently, the more people choose cremation, the more our society builds and establishes a pattern of beliefs and rituals for that practice. Around cremation, then, a new system of meanings is developing that frames the experiences of individuals as they select cremation as an option for the disposal and memorialization of the dead. In my analysis, I seek to identify what the new system of meanings is that is developing as a new cultural frame for cremation. In the process, I will also evaluate what the symbolic framework surrounding cremation says about our present turn-of-the-century culture in order to evaluate how individualistic or postmodern our society has become, possibly typified by weakening social ties and diminishing or transforming connections to once sacred beliefs and practices in our culture. In this chapter, in order to introduce these issues, I will examine the history of cremation in America, consider existing sociological research on death, discuss how funerary practice serves as a cultural system, and begin a sociological assessment of the case of cremation in contrast to burial.

Funerary Practices: Past and Present

History of Cremation

The push to make cremation popular in America actually began in the 1870s (CANA 2005d; Prothero 2001; Rosen 2004). Although there had been two recorded cremations prior to

this time (Prothero 2001), cremation was introduced to Americans during the Victorian age as a means of sanitary reform (CANA 2005d). Concerns over pollution and the spread of disease, along with the advent of modern technology, that allowed for enclosed indoor cremations, precipitated a movement simultaneously in Europe and North America to promote cremation as cleaner, safer, and purer than the filthiness of earthen burial and decomposition (Leaney 1989; Prothero 2001; Puckle 1926; Rosen 2004). Initially, nineteenth century English and American proponents of cremation were often eccentric "free thinkers" from the political and theological left, but cremation also garnered a small number of advocates among mainstream ministers and physicians with an interest in sanitation (Davies 1990; Prothero 2001; Rosen 2004).

However, the rise of germ theory and bacteriology by the end of the 1800s undercut much of the justification for cremation on the basis of sanitary reform by revealing that buried corpses are not a significant source of bacterial contagion for the living (Prothero 2001). Still, by 1900, cremation had established a tiny presence as an alternative to burial in the United States with 2,414 deaths resulting in cremation (CANA 2005c) in newly built crematoria, out of 343,000 deaths total (U.S. Census Bureau 2003). But at only less than 1% of total deaths in the U.S., cremation had not yet entered mainstream American culture as a widely accepted choice (Kubasak 1990).

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, from 1900 to 1960, cremation continued to often be seen as a cheaper alternative for the poor and/or as a strange, prohibited, exotic, radical, and extremely final thing to do to the deceased body (Aries 1974; Puckle 1926). As a ritual belonging primarily to other peoples of the world, such as Hindus in India or primitive peoples who may burn their dead on outdoor funeral pyres, cremation remained foreign to most

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Americans (Davies 1990; Leveillee 2002; Richards 1987; Rosen 2004). But because nineteenth century efforts had been successful at establishing cremation as a minor alternative, it persisted through the middle of the twentieth century as a very small, minimally growing portion of the funeral business in the United States (Prothero 2001; Rosen 2004). Cremation hardly grew at all through the progressive era, the Great Depression, and the two world wars. While the percentage of deaths cremated in America only rose past two percent by the 1930s, the percent stagnated in the 1940s and 50s at around three percent of deaths in the U.S. (CANA 2005c). Throughout this time, cremation never caught on in mainstream American culture as a widely accepted cultural practice in caring for the dead.

As in most other Western countries, opposition to the burning of the corpse has run deep in the American culture (Quigley 1996). Traditionally, Christianity, along with Judaism, has viewed burning the body as desecration of the body (Davies 1990; Riemer 1995). Each religion considers it important to keep the body whole and to bury it (Brandes 2001; Raphael 1994). For Christians, the body and the soul are linked such that the deceased is a combination of the two. Consequently, to Christians, cremation demonstrates a lack of respect for the sanctity of the body as the temple of the spirit, challenges the doctrine of bodily resurrection, and threatens to overturn nearly 2,000 years of Christian custom of the burying of the dead (Prothero 2001; 40). Likewise, Jews have historically forbid cremation, seeing it as an unlawful mutilation of the body (Lamm 1969). In contrast, Buddhists and Hindus have long used cremation as did the Greeks and Romans (Oestigaard 2000; Puckle 1926; Rosen 2004). Since cremation is a millennia-old practice evident in many cultures (Canine 1999; Irion 1968), Christians encountered it and distinguished themselves from it by favoring burial fairly early on in the development of the

religion (Davies 1990). In addition to the theological grounds for rejecting the practice, Christians deemed cremation unnatural, since Jesus' body was buried, and anti-Christian, due to its association with heathenism and paganism (Puckle 1926). As Christianity spread throughout Europe and European empires, Christians brought their customs with them to North America, forming the dominant group and culture (Irion 1968). Their anti-cremation views, then, dominated American beliefs and funerary rituals for centuries (Canine 1999).

In light of the dominant religious opposition to the practice in the culture, the recent rise in the number of cremations in the United States is especially striking. In the late-twentieth century there has been a break in burial as the only accepted form of bodily disposal for Americans. Since, as Durkheim noted, death is a time when culture becomes especially relevant in helping guide people's actions (Geertz 1973a), a change in behavior at this time of devastation and loss is meaningful (Durkheim [1912] 2001). The increasing use of cremation reflects just such a change, a change that may have significant implications for how living Americans relate to one another and how the living relate to the dead in American society. The marked increase in the use of cremation in America, from the 1960s forward, is a trend whose impact on American culture must be assessed.

Sociological Analyses of Contemporary Funerary Practices

No sociological analyses have yet been conducted to assess the use of cremation in contemporary American culture. While the study of mortality has long been part of sociology, for example, Durkheim's work on suicide ([1897]1951), sociological research on death has grown most rapidly since the 1950s (Owen, Markusen, and Fulton 1994). Specifically, the social and

cultural orientations toward mortality have been examined by looking at the patterns of mourning in England (Gorer 1965), the reciprocal social interaction of patients, family, and medical staff dealing with terminal illness (Glaser and Strauss 1965), the temporal organization of medical work surrounding the trajectory of death in hospitals (Glaser and Strauss 1968), the variations in treatment of terminal cases in emergency departments based on social inequality (Sudnow 1967 and updated in Timmermans 2005), and the attitudes toward practitioners of death-related occupations such as funeral directors (Fulton 1971). Sociologists such as Talcott Parsons (1967), Ivan Illich (1977), and Norbert Elias (1985) have discussed death in their theoretical works. Central to these discussions is the question of the meaning of death in a society and its implications for the social order.

The more contemporary research in the sociology of death and dying, focuses on dying, bereavement, and/or attitudes toward death in general (Dickenson and Johnson 1993; Fulton and Bendiksen 1994). Examples include research on the ways in which gender and ethnicity shape the experiences of dying and bereavement in England (Field, Hockey, and Small 1997), the effects of grief on the loss of the self (Charmaz 1997), the study of how social bonds are organized and maintained in the face of dying and bereavement (Seale 1998) and the analysis of modern scientific views on death in Europe (Prior 1997). In fact, the sociology of death and dying is a much better developed subfield in England than in the United States with most of the contributors to edited volumes in this area working in England (Houlbrooke 1989; Clark 1993; Howarth and Jupp 1996; Jupp and Howarth 1997).

What has been less studied in sociology, however, is what happens after a death occurs. Although there have certainly been a few studies, including analyses of cleanliness, beauty and

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the corpse (Davies 1996; Foltyn 1996) and of the development of the funeral industry in England (Howarth 1997), less research in the U.S. has addressed the disposition and memorialization of contemporary individuals who have died. Little sociological research has been done since Warner's 1950s examination of New England cemeteries on how dead social members are treated and remembered in America. Collier, 2003, in "Tradition, Modernity, and Postmodernity in Symbolism of Death," examines contemporary changes in funerary memorialization practices by looking at the images on headstones selected by the deceased and/or the family with which to remember the dead. The use of new iconography, such as recreational symbols of golf clubs, fish and game, or a guitar and sheets of music, are deviations from the traditional icons, such as praying hands, crosses, military insignia, and wedding rings, which indicate an identification with social institutions as a fundamental part of what is meaningful in one's life. The new recreational icons, therefore, denote a deinstitutional identification of what has been meaningful in the life of the recently deceased and appear on the gravemarkers of individuals who were predominantly born near or after World War II and who only died in or after 1960. The new iconography, which became most common in the 1990s, signifies a shift away from involvement with formal social institutions and toward a more personalized, individualized form of living consistent with postmodern cultural trends in which tradition, history, and overarching cultural themes and belief systems in the form of metanarratives are disregarded. But evidence from Collier (2003) shows that tradition and the past have not wholly been abandoned. In fact, half of the new recreational icons were displayed alongside the traditional institutional icons and all were manifest on traditional style headstones over graves in cemeteries, following the traditional custom of burial in the United States.

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Thus, the analysis of contemporary funerary practices indicates the coexistence of increasingly individualized memorial practices along with many of the customary traditions of burial. Collier (2003) is one piece that helps us sociologically understand what is happening to Geertz's "complex of beliefs and rituals" (1973b) that guide funerary behavior, in terms of which customs are persisting and which are transforming at cemetery gravesites. Changes in the treatment of the buried dead reflect larger individualizing cultural processes, but this research only raises questions about what is happening with cremation's rise in American culture. If contemporary funeral practices at burial sites reveal evidence of increasing individualization in American culture, what does it mean for American culture if individuals abandon the custom of burial altogether in favor of the use of cremation?

Only one sociological analysis of cremation exists. In 1949, an unpublished M. A. thesis focused on the nineteenth century modern cremation movement. Habenstein (1949) focused on cremation advocacy's social reform elements and connections to the general public health movement. Like Habenstein's work, most writings that touch on cremation deal only with the history of cremation, from ancient times through the nineteenth century in Europe and the U.S., in addition to covering other death and dying topics. Paul Irion wrote a small book titled *Cremation*, in 1968, prior to the dramatic rise in the use of cremation in America. He deals with the subject from historical, theological, and psychological perspectives. In 1990, J. Douglas Davies, a scholar in theology in England, wrote *Cremation Today and Tomorrow,* in an effort to address changing theological issues surrounding religious services over cremations in Britain. In America, Stephen Prothero, Chair of the Department of Religion at Boston University, wrote *Purified by Fire: A History of Cremation in America,* in 2001, and Fred Rosen, a former

columnist for the *New York Times*, wrote *Cremation in America,* in 2004, a non-academic book that includes a popular history of the subject, sample forms for arranging a cremation, and appendices listing celebrities who were cremated. Therefore, a contemporary sociological analysis of the recent rise in cremation and its impact on American culture and society has yet to be written. Such a project will contribute to an understanding of cremation in America, to the subfield of the sociology of death and dying, to the broader study of death in sociology, to an assessment of the extent and prevalence of the postmodern trend toward rising individualism in American culture, and to a theoretical understanding of how culture transforms by examining changes in the complex of beliefs and rituals that govern contemporary funerary behavior.

An Interpretive Study of Cremation

Funerary Practice as a Cultural System

Funerary practice models society by giving us a frame in which to act that says a lot about ourselves and our social world. Our set of traditions for postmortem care and memorialization, which we practice when a social member dies, provides us a cultural template to follow that both reflects and guides our social behavior, beliefs, values, and mores. It is that "complex of beliefs and rituals" that functions as a cultural system and that we use to see us through the delicate postmortem period. As a cultural system funerary practice is comprised of "an ordered system of symbols that makes experience meaningful" (Schwartz 1996:910). As Geertz wrote, in his analysis of a cultural system (1973c:89), culture "denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and

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attitudes toward life" and, I add, toward death. We lean on our traditions as inherited products of

our own society to make sense of life and death when a social member dies. Typically when a

death occurs, we memorialize the individual by including what is meaningful about the person's

life, tellingly revealing and reflecting what is meaningful to us from our culture, and do so in a

way that conforms to the traditions of our culture and consoles us, encouraging and guiding

others by example to do the same. As a result, cultural practice in death, like other cultural

systems, serves both as a model *of* and a model *for* society. As a model *of*, funerary practice

reflects social reality. As a model *for*, it guides it. Reflection and guidance exemplify two sides

of the relationship between a cultural system and social life. These two sides can be analytically

distinguished, but occur simultaneously in experience. Hence, upon death, funerary practice

symbolically models social life by simultaneously reflecting it and guiding it.

To further examine the model *of* side of funerary practice as a cultural system, we can

consider several examples of the ways in which burial practices reflect the larger society, since

the process of burying the dead is our traditional cultural template for postmortem care. In

American cemeteries during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for instance, women

were listed on their headstones as "wife of" their husbands (Colman 1997). However, as

women's social roles and identities broadened beyond their relationships with their husbands,

they were no longer memorialized in death primarily by familial status. Gaye Tuchman, in her

essay "Historical Social Science" (1994), noted that the inscriptions on tombstones are socially

significant, because the choices family members make for remembering their relatives are meaningful, expressing both group norms and attitudes toward death.

A similar change in group norms was modeled in the cemetery when the nineteenth century practice of erecting tall obelisks as a manifest display of wealth gave way to the more uniform erection of shorter rectangular headstones regardless of class stratification (Collier 2003; Warner 1959), as democratizing trends affected America in the twentieth century (Boorstin 1973). With the characteristics of nineteenth century headstones reflecting both the status of women as property of their husbands and the obvious display of manifest class differences, we see how, over time, individual memorialization builds a model *of* the history of the community represented in the graveyard. As Warner put it, "Cemeteries reflect in miniature the past life and historic eras through which the community has passed, so contemporary graveyards symbolically express the present social structure" (Warner 1959:287).

In the early 1800s, shifts in the use of graveyards as a whole reflected the contemporary cultural changes of the time when, with the advent of industrialization and the concurrent decreased use of church graveyards, burial in park-style cemeteries symbolized the secularization of the romantic era with their landscaped lawns providing for a pastoral afterlife (Brown 1994; Howett 1977). Yet, even when funerary practices fail to function, they still reflect the current society. Geertz's 1950s case study of how a breakdown in cultural ritual halted the funeral of a Javanese boy proved to be insightful for revealing the breakdown in social organization along political and ideological lines caused by ongoing large scale sociocultural changes at the time (1973b). Just as the process of memorializing the individual dead symbolically embodies the present cultural era so does the process of memorializing the war dead. For example, the

embodiment of cultural pluralism in war memorials is evident in the images that comprise the

Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., which are overtly inclusive of race and

gender, symbolizing the erosion of once rigidly exclusive social boundaries (Schwartz and

Bayma 1999). Our traditional funerary practice of burying the dead provides a symbolic model

of social life for each cultural era because the "memorial of the living for the dead has been

created in their own image" (Warner 1959: 287).

The model *for* side of funerary practice as a cultural system fits with what Geertz

described when he wrote of "the complex of beliefs and rituals" that has brought people over the

generations through the difficult postmortem period (1973b: 146). Having a pattern of values and

behaviors to follow when a social member dies is essential for a society, so that the group may

maintain the social order and avoid chaos in the threat of death (Kearl 1989). Shils stated that

rituals are "part of [society's] systematic response to crisis" (1975:158). Without funerary ritual

to follow in order to know what to do and how to survive the breach, the loss of social members

would threaten the very stability of a group (Durkheim [1912] 2001). A cultural system,

therefore, serves a programmatic function in difficult times that "orients our intentions, sets our

moods, and enables us to act" (Schwartz 1996:921). Providing a model *for* how to think, feel,

and act is the social function of a symbolic structure in the face of crisis. In death, it is

traditionally religion that functions to tell us the sacred means of how to care for the dead person,

which for Christians and Jews is by means of burial. The practice of burial in cemeteries supports

our view of the world and our sense of order by symbolically keeping the dead among the living,

by maintaining a physical place for them in the social world so that they literally occupy a space

in death just as in life. In the process, the deceased's social personality is perpetuated beyond

death through memorialization which reestablishes the missing relative with a monument and a grave and thereby maintains the social life the survivors had with the deceased. Summing up the life of the deceased in a memorial service and on a memorial stone helps justify and rationalize the loss with the value and importance of the life. "For the survivor to see and feel himself still living in, and related to, the dead life of the other it is necessary for him to reconstruct his image of the other" (Warner 1959:285-6). In the face of everyone's mortality, an afterlife of continued social identity, individually in the grave and collectively in the cemetery, unites the whole social group by reassuring all of a collective future by negating their fears of personal annihilation.

Burial practice, as a model *for* the continuation of social life in the face of death, guides us in how to think and feel about the dead on a national level as well. The burial of soldiers in dedicated national cemeteries instructs us to honor the war dead and the national cause for which they died (Mosse 1990). In one extreme example, the German erection of Totenburgen, fortresses of the dead, around World War II, which look like big forts with thick walls around an open space with the war dead in a mass grave below a center patriotic altar, symbolically guided the observer to think in terms of the dominance of the nation over the individual (Mosse 1990:85-6). Postsocialist European societies have also used the importance of a "proper" burial to reestablish their nations and communities, by demoting the corpses of leaders prominent during socialism with evictions from mausoleums, and by promoting the remains of others as national icons via parades and new ceremonial interments (Vedery 1997). Thus, burial functions as a cultural system on a national level when it serves as a model *for* how to think about the individual war dead, the leaders of the country, and the nation itself, and when it serves as a model *of* the current values and ideals of the nation.

In caring for the individual dead in America, funerary practice functions as a cultural system in the form of burial. The model *of* aspect of burial as a cultural system reflects, expresses, symbolizes, reveals, embodies, manifests, and displays the social roles, statuses, identities, relationships, social and institutional participation, group norms and conflicts, and sacred values and ideals of the lives of the individual social members collectively buried in the cemetery, as the whole society is symbolically replicated there. Over time the cemetery becomes a city of the dead (Warner 1959). As such it creates a symbolic image of social stability and social change, including historic transformations in religious attachment with the secularization of industrialization and the romantic cultural era, in gender roles with the increasing independence of women, and in displays of democracy with lessening manifestations of wealth.

On the model *for* side, burial as a cultural system guides, orients, motivates, instructs, informs, organizes, supports, reassures, and consoles us as it provides a model for what to do with the deceased, with the loss, and with the task of living after a death. When we care for the dead through the burial process, we are guided in how to properly care for the body of the dead, where to put the deceased, how to memorialize and remember that person, how to go on living with them, how to think of our own death as never fully gone, and how to relate to our fellow survivors with whom we will always have a relationship, because the dead are literally kept among us, retained in the cemetery as symbolic citizens of the community. As a cultural system, then, burial both *reflects* meaning and *gives* meaning.

However, while scholars have illuminated how burial as a cultural system has provided a lens through which the cemetery has served as a social record of the history of the society, less research explores more contemporary funerary practices as a means for understanding the present

society. Schwartz and Bayma's (1999) war monument research documents the use of racially and sexually inclusive images in the characters that comprise the Korean War Veterans Memorial, which reflect a transformation in social boundaries with the rise of cultural pluralism. Collier's (2003) funerary monument work shows how the advent of the use of recreational symbols, along with traditional symbols, on gravestones reflects a transformation in institutional involvement with an increase in postmodern sociocultural trends that place greater emphasis on the self and personal interests in the present and less emphasis on tradition and the past. Nevertheless, these studies only look at contemporary American society through monuments to the buried dead. Neither evaluates the significance of the rise of cremation in America. Since funerary practice serves as a cultural system through which to analyze transformations in the larger society, my research seeks to examine what cultural transformations are embodied in the practice of cremation in comparison to the practice of burial. This research will expand our understanding of the most recent changes in the treatment of individuals at death reflecting not only transformations in relationships between the living and the dead, but in relationships between living social members as well.

The Case of Cremation

　　Cremation is "the process of using heat to reduce a corpse to bone fragments" (Coleman 1997:194). Modern, indoor cremation, as distinguished from outdoor burnings on open air funeral pyres, is usually done in a cremator, a furnace machine built just for the purpose of incinerating human remains. The corpse, and possibly its container, is exposed to extreme heat to turn it into smokeless flames and reduce it to gray ashen matter and bone fragments. The

resulting remains, from the hour or hours in the cremator, are then put into a grinder and ground into even finer matter, referred to in the industry as cremains, with the color and texture of gray sand. Upon completion, the cremated remains are returned to the family usually through the funeral home or cremation society chosen to provide funerary service. The family may then select how to memorialize the person and where to place the ashes, if the deceased has not previously made these selections.

While most Americans are unaware of the precise process of cremating the deceased, they do have an idea of cremation as burning the dead and do have opinions and attitudes toward the practice and whether or not it is acceptable or preferred for themselves or their loved ones. The process of cremation serves both sacred and profane functions (Durkheim [1912] 2001) and bears considerable symbolic value of traditional and contemporary cultural concerns as the individuals involved attempt to deal with the loss of a social member and close the gap left by the death, the goals of all funerary practices. In this research project, I assess the process of cremation, from attitudes toward and preferences for individual disposition, to practices surrounding the disposition of the body, including the participation of religious, business, and governmental organizations, to varying forms of memorialization, in contrast with the tradition of burial, in order to bring together resemblances and differences under a single analytic framework, analyzing how cremation does or does not function, like other funerary practices, as a cultural system.

As a study of funerary practice, a study of cremation involves more than just a study of memorialization practices. The difference between burial and cremation is greater than differences in practices of memorialization and the social behaviors they symbolize. The primary

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difference between burial and cremation is the difference between one form of disposal and another. Burial and cremation are two different forms of disposition of the dead. Both are forms of disposing of the dead body, and both are accompanied or followed by forms of memorializing the dead person. Therefore, any study of the recently increasing practice of cremation in comparison to the standard funerary practice of burial must take into account a comparison of forms of disposition as well as a comparison of forms of memorialization (Davies 2003; Hertz [1905-06] 1960). Thus, my research undertakes to include the symbolic value of the disposition of the body as well as the symbolic value of the memorialization of the person in my comparison of the new funerary practice of cremation to the traditional funerary practice of burial.

Historically, Americans have buried their dead for many reasons related to the meaning of the human body and its value to both the deceased and the survivors. It has long been important, traditionally, for the body to remain intact for Christians and Jews (Prothero 2001; Rosen 2004). In Christianity, the body is sacred as a vessel, like a holy temple, for the sacred soul. To many Christians, burning the body equals the destruction of the body, the destruction of the sacred, and cremation worries some that the intact body won't be available for reuniting with the soul upon resurrection for judgement (Prothero 2001). Consequently, cremation has been taboo. Rabbinical views in Judaism also hold a close connection between the body and the soul, expecting the intact body to be reunited for resurrection when God gives the soul back to the body so they will be judged together (Bemporad 1989:207). Additionally, an intact body has social psychological value in that the corpse continues to look like the living person, under the acceptable guise that he or she is just resting or sleeping. An intact body helps maintain identity if the embalmed corpse in the ground still resembles the person one once knew. Thus, a body that looks like a

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person remains as close as possible to the living, able to be preserved as a citizen of the community. Burial, embalmed and in a vault, also takes care of the secular need to dispose of the potentially hazardous and offensive decaying corpse in a manner acceptable to the state when interred sufficiently underground in accordance with the law.

The rise of the use of cremation, however, raises questions in relation to these traditions. Since burial of the whole body has been *the cornerstone* of our funerary care of the deceased in America, what does it mean to deviate from this practice by cremating the dead? Do religion and tradition still guide individuals in their decisions? How has the state responded to the rise in cremation when burial has been the convention to regulate for so long? Are cremated social members still as sacred to us as the buried? What does cremating the body reflect and signify about our relationships with each other, before and after death, as a model *of* social life? As a model *for* social life, what does it prescribe or instruct us to think and feel about our bodies, our selves, and our fellow kind? What might the specific characteristics of cremation users indicate? What might people's particular attitudes towards their own bodies' postmortem care reveal?

Traditionally, burial in a grave allows one to be memorialized on site, with individual identity and place in a social community maintained in a specific location with a headstone over a plot. Burial in a graveyard perpetuates the dead as a group of citizens who are still part of the community, when the cemetery becomes a collective city of the dead reflecting the social structure of the whole living community (Warner 1959). But the practice of memorialization in cemeteries has changed overtime, reflecting and perpetuating larger societal changes. The change from church graveyards to pastoral park style cemeteries reflected the secularization of the romantic era during industrialization (Howett 1977). Changes in gravestone iconography from

icons identifying social ties to family, churches, civic organizations, and the nation to icons

identifying personal pastimes reflects the increasing individualization, decreasing institutional

participation, and disregard for tradition of a postmodern society (Collier 2003). What then does

the change from memorializing the buried with a detailed gravestone to other forms of

memorialization with cremation indicate? Is the shift from burial to cremation also indicative of

secularization much like the shift from burial at church graveyards to burial in park cemeteries?

Does the trend toward cremation equal a second secularizing shift in the history of American

funerary practice? What choices are cremation users making for remembering the cremated?

How are we identifying the dead? Are the cremated dead memorialized in such a way as to

identify them as members of families, churches, civic groups, and other social institutions? Or

are the rememberances of the cremated more personalized, privatized, individualized, and

secularized than the buried, following postmodern cultural trends? As a model *of* social life, what

does the memorialization of the cremated dead reflect? What do gardens, and other places, for

the cremated dead symbolize? Are the cremated being kept among the living as visitable citizens

of the community? As a model *for* social life, what thoughts, feelings, or actions does it guide us

to have toward our fellow social members? What specific attitudes and preferences do people

have for their own, and their loved ones, physical and social afterlives?

To date there has been no comprehensive empirical examination of concrete data sources,

such as Americans' opinions of cremation, stories of personal experiences with cremation, use of

cremation services within the funeral industry, creation of tangible memorial sites for cremated

remains, and establishment of laws governing the disposition of the dead, in order to compare

cremation with burial in the present postindustrial cultural era, the era in which the dramatic rise

in cremation has occurred. This study will provide such an analysis. In the process, I will address

the theoretical issue of how a cultural system evolves. Since the shift from burial to cremation is

a *fundamental* shift in the treatment of the dead, what does it mean behaviorally when people

abandon the use of a cultural system such as burial? What model *for* do they use? How do they

orient themselves? What motivates this change? What is gained and lost? What does this change

reflect about themselves and their world, from the family to the larger society - what model *of*

social life is it? How is this change, this deviation, accepted, justified, and rationalized? How do

they make sense of death? What is expressed along the way to aid in finding meaning in a new

cultural form and to reassure the users that they are taking good care of the dead, of their fellow

social members like themselves? What can we learn from this new system rapidly forming

among us?

As Geertz once wrote, "Sacred symbols function to synthesize a people's ethos - the tone,

character, and quality of their life, it's moral and aesthetic style and mood - and their world

view," including their very picture of reality and ideas of order (1973c:89). Since sacred symbols

capture the character and time of a people, the *sacred*, or *secular*, treatment of the contemporary

dead is well worth evaluating for in roads into our present society and culture. An examination of

the meaning of cremation and its ever common use in America today should reveal answers to

questions of the importance Americans place on their dead, their bodies, their disposals, their

memories, and their connection with each other. I expect cremation represents some significant

differences in contrast to burial, such as a secularization of our treatment of the dead, though

likely not a complete transformation. Just how differently we are handling death these days and

how fundamental these differences are to our ideas of our selves and our traditions we must

assess. What significance does cremation have to our relationship with nature, to the meaning of the body, to patterns of secularization, and to our social ties with each other both before and after death? Since "the method of body disposal offers important insight for understanding both tangible and intangible aspects of cultural systems" (Jacobi 2003), the rise in cremation in the U.S. is a clear pattern whose cultural interpretations must be examined in order to know how we are endowing our new actions with the dead with value and meaning.

Funerary practice as a cultural system has been sacred (Durkheim [1912] 2001). Burial as a cultural system has been sacred, but is cremation as a cultural system sacred? What is sacred about cremation? Where are we locating the sacred in the process of cremation? Could it be that we are seeing a turn in which a whole new cultural system emerges but is one that is not as sacred as previous cultural systems which served the same social and cultural functions? One may wonder, in a postmodern society, if even the import of the sacred, as Durkheim conceived it, may be diminishing in society. If the treatment of the dead becomes less sacred, so does the value we place on individual social members (Warner 1959) and the collective significance of what we each and all mean to each other, affecting what sense we have of our lives having a meaning together that is greater than ourselves. How collectively sacred our funerary cultural system is, as represented by and affected by the change from burial to cremation, tells us how collectively and individually sacred we are to each other. At death we rely on a sacred set of symbols that guides and reflects human behavior at the loss of a social member (Geertz 1973a), but as we transform that cultural system, that set or structure of symbols, what is happening to the sacred? What are we finding sacred? In what are we finding value and meaning that shapes and demonstrates our

lives? How does cremation as a cultural system reveal sacred, or not so sacred, meaning in our society?

In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, [1912] 2001, Durkheim conceived of the social group as dividing the universe into the sacred and the profane. Mourning rites, he said, are sacred duties that reinforce the social link between the individual and the social group because having mourning duties reinforces the individual as a social member. "When an individual dies, the family group to which he belongs feels diminished, and in order to react against this diminishment, it assembles" (Durkheim [1912] 2001:296-7). Mourning is an obligatory, sacred social rite that affirms the vitality of the group and comforts the social members.

> The origin of mourning is the impression of diminishment that the group feels when it loses one of its members. But this very impression has the effect of bringing individuals together, putting them into closer contact, making them participate in the same state of the soul. And all this releases a sensation of comfort that compensates for the initial diminishment. They weep together because they value one another and because the collectivity, despite this blow, is not damaged. Of course, in this instance they share only sad emotions; but to commune in sadness is still to commune, and every communion of consciousness, of whatever kind, increases the social vitality. ... The group feels its strength gradually return; it begins to hope and to live again. Mourning is left behind, thanks to mourning itself (Durkheim [1912] 2001:299).

As Durkheim put it, death bruises social feeling and sacred funerary rites restore it. Because social membership is a sacred status, "the dead person is a sacred being" (Durkheim [1912] 2001:290). Historically, burial rites have served as a funerary cultural system of sacred beliefs and practices that has met the needs of the group at the loss of a social member. Burial rites have guided individual social members through the loss of another, because the survivors attachment to the social group is affirmed by participation in the mourning rites of burial. Social

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feeling, bruised by the breach of a loss, is restored when the social group comes together and affirms itself.

> When the individual is firmly attached to the society to which he belongs,
> he feels morally compelled to share its joys and sorrows; to remain a disinterested
> observer would be to break the ties that bind him to the collectivity, to give up
> wanting the collectivity, and to contradict himself (Durkheim [1912] 2001:297).

The social link between the individual and the group is reinforced by mourning rites that care for the dead and the living. As the deceased is laid to rest so is the living. The reaffirmation of the ties that bind the group to itself affirms the connectedness of the members in the collectivity and bridges the loss caused by death. But what of cremation? What does it mean when social members start to tinker with and alter those sacred mourning rites, even abandoning the very old rite of burial? What does it mean for society and its social members when we start to change the primary social rite of mourning? Are we keeping it sacred? What about the dead? Is the deceased still cared for in a way that honors the loss of that individual's sacred link to the collectivity? Is cremation as an emerging cultural system meeting the elementary needs of society historically served by the sacred cultural system surrounding burial's mourning rites? Because we have kept burial sacred in our society, to leave burial behind is to leave the sacred behind. Therefore, in leaving the sacred, we meet the profane. Could it be, then, that, at present, burial is sacred and cremation is profane? Surely we must investigate, sociologically, the social significance of changing our funerary rites. According to Durkheim, mourning the dead is fundamental to the maintenance of the society. Therefore, I seek to carefully examine a rising fundamental shift in

this method of social maintenance, because cremation is suddenly and dramatically on the rise in

America.

CHAPTER 2

THE SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF CREMATION

Research Design

Since the cultural implications of the rise in the use of cremation are multiple, this project requires a multifaceted research design. I, therefore, use Geertz's method of thick description in the course of this research, as I attempt to describe, as thickly as possible, how people are thinking about and using cremation in caring for the dead. Geertz wrote of culture as the kind of context in which social events are only truly intelligible when *thickly* described in research (1973a:14), so that we can then think *with,* not just *about*, the meanings we analyze (1973a:23). Further, according to Glaser and Strauss, "*comparative analysis* of data drawn from diverse substantive areas is the most satisfactory method" (1971:11). Hence, because drawing from a variety of sources enriches the analysis (Draper 2003), I have sought out as many sources as possible for information on cremation. But Geertz also wrote that it is important to "keep the analysis of symbolic forms as closely tied as [possible] to concrete social events and occasions" (1973a:30). Thus, my data are drawn from sources that are concrete as well as diverse and comparative. As a result, I have collected data from surveys, consults, memorial sites, newspaper reports, laws, and law review articles, all of which are contextualized, for comparative purposes, with national historical and statistical data and published industry surveys.

By drawing from diverse sources, I am specifically able to access people's thoughts and ideas on cremation, people's actions in caring for the ashes and the memories of loved ones, and people's beliefs and meanings associated with proper and improper contemporary treatment of the dead. In the context of historical and statistical data that reveal the patterns of use of cremation over the past 130 years (CANA 2005c) and the relative trends across all fifty of the United States (CANA 2005b), I am able to best understand the cultural views and behaviors associated with the present rise in cremation. Since this research has not been conducted before, I have grounded my data in the state of Georgia as a starting point for understanding how cremation is developing in the United States. Because Georgia has neither the highest nor the lowest percentage of deaths resulting in cremation, it represents a middle-of-the-road state, just below the national average, in its development of the use of cremation (CANA 2005b). In percentage of deaths cremated, Georgia is comparable to middle-Atlantic states such as Virginia and North Carolina, and midwestern states such as Missouri, Indiana, Iowa, and South Dakota (CANA 2005b). The data I have collected, from both the state and national levels, has been grouped into three substantive areas or types - survey data, symbolic data, and legal and industry data, each of which I will describe in turn.

Survey Data

I have collected data on cremation and burial from a state-wide random sample telephone survey of Georgia residents. The use of a telephone survey allows me to proceed with my analysis by knowing what Georgians actually think about cremation (Frey 1989; Miller and Salkind 2002). Both closed and open ended questions concerning cremation and burial were

included on the Georgia Poll, a survey which was administered by the Georgia Survey Research Center at the University of Georgia in the summer of 2001. Respondents were first asked whether or not they would consider using cremation. Those who answered yes were asked why they would use cremation, and those who answered no were asked why they would not. For comparative purposes, questions were structured to address both support for and opposition to both cremation and burial. For example, a yes answer to the question of whether one would choose cremation can yield explanations for preferring cremation when asked why he or she would choose it, and a no answer to the use of cremation might entail reasons in favor of burial, or in opposition to cremation, when asked why not. Respondents who stated they would choose cremation were further questioned as to what they would want done with their ashes. To these questions, I have a total of 403 respondents. Additional questions gathered data on the characteristics of the respondents including age, ethnicity, gender, marital status, income, educational level, and residence in a metropolitan statistical area.. Answers to the cremation questions have been crosstabulated with the demographic information.

The collection and analysis of survey data is important because it allows me to examine individuals' beliefs directly. An examination of survey responses permits an assessment of the ideas, intentions, associations, and attitudes about the disposal options of cremation and burial that exist in the minds of Georgians (Rossi, Wright, and Anderson 1983). Altogether, respondents informed me of their thoughts, feelings, and actions regarding cremation and burial. Thus, the surveys addressed both the internal and external components of behavior. Knowing the internal beliefs, meanings, and decision making processes that frame the external actions of individuals affords a fuller understanding of human social behavior with regards to the

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contemporary disposal of the dead. Consequently, this knowledge provides for *thicker*

description in my sociological analysis of the cultural changes surrounding cremation, in which

individuals are experiencing and participating (Geertz 1973a; Gubrium and Holstein 1997).

Symbolic Data

      I have conducted two in-depth analyses of cremation memorial sites, specifically gardens

created just for cremations, in order to evaluate symbolically how people are caring for the

cremated dead. People who are cremated are often being memorialized differently than those

who are buried. The memorializations of the cremated range from burial to scattering in

unmarked, unidentified locations. Cremation gardens provide a specific memorial option for

cremated remains that is most comparable to cemetery burials and allow assessment of the

similarities and differences between the memorialization of the cremated dead and the buried

dead. Because garden sites provide us with insight into the meaning and behaviors associated

with remembering the cremated dead, I have chosen them for an in-depth analysis of cremation

memorialization. Each garden was analyzed visually and spatially. Over repeated visits to each

cremation garden, I recorded the site with photographs and sketches. In addition, I drew detailed

maps of each garden and of each of the properties on which the gardens are located.

      In particular, I have examined two fieldsites, one located within a public cemetery,

Decatur City Cemetery, and one located within the grounds of a private church, Covenant

Presbyterian Church. The first of these two fieldsites, Decatur City Cemetery, is located in

Decatur, Georgia. Decatur City Cemetery is a public cemetery, greater than 150 years old, that is

still in use with new plots available for both burial and cremation. Here, the cremation garden

was built on request of the community and is located in the middle of one side of the cemetery, privately situated out of sight of all burial plots, as a garden dedicated solely for the placement of cremated remains. My second fieldsite is located at Covenant Presbyterian Church in Athens, Georgia, a 40 year old church with approximately 400 members of a typically White, professional, and middle-aged makeup. Covenant built its garden, set secluded off to one side of the church and dedicated only for the cremated dead, on request of the members of the church. This occurred only after a ten year debate over the Christian theology of cremation. In each of these two cases, I analyze the landscape as text for the visual presentation of symbolic meaning (Collier n.d.), looking at the layout and content of each fieldsite for the behaviors and meanings we associate with cremation.

I use case studies for in depth study, by analyzing the fieldsites for symbolic patterns observed within the individual cases and between the two cases (Patton 1987:147). The focus of a case study is a full story of some phenomena in social life (Strauss and Glaser 1970; Bradshaw and Wallace 1991; Stake 2000), and the two cases of cremation gardens, one public and one private, allow further insight into what is going on symbolically with cremation in Georgia. My two case analyses of cremation gardens, by analyzing in depth the landscape as text (Collier n.d.), help us understand the visual symbols that frame individual experience with regards to the funerary practices surrounding the memorialization of the cremated dead. Specifically, I interpret the features of the cremation gardens for patterns of information involving the value of the place, the identity and relationships of the deceased, the meaning of the ashes, the connections between the living and the dead, and any ties between the dead and social institutions. Each of these substantive categories for analysis are looked at in comparison to the customs of memorializing

the buried dead. The purpose of a case study is to allow for descriptive comparison, to specify and elaborate processes that impact social life (Bradshaw and Wallace 1991). In the case of cremation gardens, the design and use of the gardens represents what people are actually doing socially and culturally with cremation, in those locations, in contrast to burial (Stake 2000).

While there are many alternatives for the final disposition of ashes, the placing ashes in a dedicated outdoor space is most similar to burial. Other memorialization methods, such as scattering at sea or inurnment on the family mantle, comprise further deviations from burial, all more difficult than cremation gardens to access for purposes of research. Contrasts of cremation gardens and burial grounds, therefore, comprise an excellent comparison for understanding how people enact or deviate from the traditions of burial when memorializing the cremated dead.

The analysis of sites of memorialization tells us what people are doing with the dead when memorial sites are read for behavioral actions. Since culture is a symbolic universe in which acts are signs (Geertz 1973a:13), behavior is symbolic such that reading symbols equals reading behavior (Rubin 1987). Therefore, analyzing the gardens tells us symbolically what meanings are connected with what people using cremation actually do with the dead. "Social actions are comments on more than themselves" (Geertz 1973a:23); "small facts speak to large issues ... because they are made to" (Geertz 1973a:23). The meanings observed in the gardens dedicated to cremated remains are tied to the meanings people associate with cremation at large. The meanings are not solely limited to the particularity of a case study (Bradshaw and Wallace 1991; Stake 2000). Families' use of cremation gardens is not a social phenomenon isolated to just the two fieldsites I analyze. Newspaper articles I have further collected bear out that the practice of creating cremation gardens is going on in other locales as well, in Georgia and

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beyond. Since cremation is about both the memorialization of the dead as well as the disposition of the dead, the meaningful actions associated with memorializing the cremated dead, which can be read in the gardens, deepens our understanding of the attitudes and actions regarding cremation, that have been gained from survey responses about disposing of the dead.

Legal and Industry Data

In the course of my research, I have examined the laws concerning burial and cremation in Georgia to consider the state's interest in the recent changes in funerary practices. The state government has been concerned with changes in funerary customs in Georgia recently for two reasons. The first is the increase in the public's use of cremation in Georgia, and the second is the legal and moral scandal surrounding the Tri-State crematorium. First, cremation has risen in Georgia from being part of the national average of 3.5% in 1960 (CANA 2005c) to 18.5% in Georgia alone in 2003 according to the Cremation Association of North America (2005b). Further, based on the present rate of increase in use, the use of cremation in Georgia is expected to rise to 31% of all deaths by 2010 (CANA 2005b). To best understand how cremation is forming as a new cultural system in Georgia, it is important to analyze governmental response to this social trend in addition to my analysis of people's attitudes, meanings, and behaviors about this increasingly common form of disposal and memorialization. Therefore, I have examined all of the laws in the Official Code of Georgia, the O.C.G.A. (Georgia Code Annotated 2003), the primary set of law volumes on State laws, that concern the practices of cremation and burial in Georgia. Specifically, I have looked at the laws on the establishment and maintenance of crematoria and cemeteries, the care and handling of dead bodies, and the regulation of funeral

directors and the funeral industry in order to analyze the types of funerary concerns that require

institutional, governmental level response in a society. Since social behavior functions in the

context of social institutions, an analysis of the laws in the O.C.G.A. allows me to know what

funerary behavior in particular concerns the State of Georgia as the use of cremation climbs.

The second reason the State of Georgia has focused on the recent changes in funerary

practices is the Tri-State crematory scandal. The Tri-State crematory case broke in the winter of

2002 when it was discovered that the Marsh family, the owners and operators of the Tri-State

funeral home, in the northeast corner of Georgia bordering Alabama and Tennessee, had not been

cremating bodies for years (Pearson 2002). Instead, literally hundreds of bodies had been stashed

all over the property and left to decay while the families of the deceased had been given other

materials passed off as the real ashes of their loved ones (Arey 2004; Judd 2002). Following the

investigation, some of the dead bodies were identified and returned to their families while others

were no longer identifiable (Arey 2003). Regarding this scandal, I have collected and examined

four years of Atlanta Journal Constitution articles, as well as articles from the New York Times,

focusing on the public's social reactions and the legislature's legal response. The laws in Georgia

were underdeveloped for the prosecution of such a case (Stanford and Pearson 2002). Initially,

Marsh was charged with business fraud as the business laws were the primary laws already

prepared that could be used (Arey 2002a: Arey 2004; Firestone and McFadden 2002). The

Georgia legislature had to meet to rapidly bring Georgia law up to date on cremation, for both the

regulation of the rapidly growing industry and the prosecution of the Tri-State case (Brown 2003;

Stanford 2002). Following the creation of new laws on cremation, the Georgia State University

Law Review published an article describing and summarizing the new State laws from 2002

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(Kinney and Hamrick), outlining, in the process, the state government's legal response to the Tri-State scandal and identifying which aspects of cremation and the handling of corpses have changed.

Governmental response to the recent funerary changes institutionalizes certain social behaviors, establishing the boundaries of what is normative and what is not. The examination of the changes in the O.C.G.A. laws together with the Georgia State University Law Review and newspaper articles on the Tri-State case reveal how a deviant case accentuates the norms (Durkheim [1893]1933, [1895]1964), highlighting the newly emerging, newly formed norms in the case of cremation in Georgia. State laws have been modified to meet public outcry over the Tri-State case, to create a legal offense where a moral offense already existed, thus proving there is a morality to cremation. There is a sense of right and wrong in the handling of the dead to be cremated which has now been institutionalized. Therefore, my analysis of legal data demonstrates the meanings Georgians associate with a dead body slated for cremation or for burial, the value and the legitimacy of cremated ashes as greater than a matter of business fraud, and which behaviors are now institutionally permitted, or prohibited, with regards to the dead. Governmental response is part of the social response to the rise of cremation in Georgia. How cremation serves as a cultural system is embodied in the laws of the State of Georgia. An examination of those laws as data provides for a *thicker* description of the specific ways in which cremation serves as a model *of* and model *for* the Georgia society (Geertz 1973a).

My final category of data is data from sources within the funeral industry. In addition to surveying people for their thoughts, feelings, decisions, and actions regarding cremation, and an in depth analysis of two cases of cremation gardens for their symbolic meanings, I have

contextualized my research with consultations with professionals in Georgia and the United

States as a whole, with statistics from the national level, and with surveys conducted with a

national sample, for insights on the meanings and behaviors associated with cremation, as well as

using the contextual data on the laws on cremation and burial in the state of Georgia. Funeral

industry data allows me to proceed with my analysis by having the perspective of the

professional who deals with cremation and the perspective of national data on crematories and

crematory users. These data have been gathered both by me and by industry organizations, the

latter of which I am able to use for secondary analysis.

Overtime, I have consulted with multiple professionals who provide services to people

seeking cremations, including funeral directors, cremation society directors, ministers, and

cemetery sextons. All of these contacts have been conducted with professionals in Georgia with

the exception of my conversation with Jack Springer the head of the Cremation Association of

North America in Chicago, the national trade organization that funeral homes and cremation

societies rely on for information about cremation. Since cremation societies function like the

equivalent of funeral homes but only provide cremations, either a funeral home director or a

cremation society director can arrange a cremation. Consultations with funeral directors and

cremation society directors addressed the services provided, including the retrieval of the body,

the arrangements with crematoriums and/or embalming, the sales of caskets or containers for

cremains, the provision of other in-house funerary services such as viewings, the use of package

deals, and the increasing push for selling memorialization (Kubasak 1990; Springer 2001).

Conversations with ministers and sextons addressed other issues such as the prevalence of

cremation they see in their congregations and communities, the requests for cremation as an

alternative within their churches or cemeteries, the provision of options for final resting places for ashes with which they have assisted, the counseling ministers have done on final disposition options, the concerns they have had to address over the theological validity of cremation, and the rituals and services they have performed. My contacts have provided insight, detail, and perspective on cremation from the professional's point of view. Additionally, I have examined numerous documents including pamphlets, brochures, and advertisements for diverse funerary and memorial services and products such as body retrieval, caskets (for burial or use on en route to the crematorium), cremation, ashes delivery, urn sales and supply, columbaria, and even sales of cremators (the machine for cremations). In the process, I have also examined numerous websites that provide these and other sales and services.

I have further contextualized my data from Georgia with historical and contemporary data at the national level. Historical statistics obtained from the Cremation Association of North America (CANA) report the number of Americans cremated in the United States by year from 1876 to 2003 confirmed (CANA 2005c). While CANA also reports the total number of deaths in the U.S., and the percentage of those deaths resulting in cremation, from the 1930s forward, I have supplemented these statistics with U.S. Census data on the total number of dead in the U.S. from 1900 to the 1930s (U.S. Census Bureau 2003) and calculated the percent cremated for those years. Contemporary statistics from CANA report the number of dead cremated by state for all fifty states (CANA 2005b). These data allow me to compare the number for the total percent of dead cremated in Georgia to the total percent cremated in other states. Other statistics provided by CANA include data by state for the year 1999 (CANA 2005b), information on the history of cremation in general (CANA 2005d), and future projections of the percentage of cremations in

the U.S. as a whole to the years of 2010 and 2025 based on the recent rate of increase in use over the past five years (CANA 2005b). An examination of all these statistics permits me to consider regional, historical, and state versus national differences in my analysis of the use of cremation for Georgia and the U.S.

In addition, I have examined the published results of two industry surveys. The results to both the "Survey of American Attitudes toward Ritualization and Memorialization," conducted in 1999 and 2004 by Wirthlin Worldwide, and the "Cremation Container, Disposition and Service Survey," 1996/1997, handled by Smith, Bucklin and Associates, have been published by CANA in detail listing the wording of each question and the breakdown of answers by percent (CANA 2005a; CANA2005e; The Cremationist 2000). "Secondary analyses when data collected for one purpose are reanalyzed for a different purpose" provide opportunities for the analysis of trends in attitudes, opinions, and behavior (Sudman 1983:157; Martin 1983; Miller and Salkind 2002; Patton 1987; Rossi, Wright, and Anderson 1983). Included in these two national surveys are questions about whether or not the respondent would choose cremation, why or why not, what he or she would like done with the ashes, and preferences for ceremonies or permanent memorials. The data also include data on the ethnicity, age, gender, religious affiliation, income, and education of respondents. In the "Survey of American Attitudes toward Ritualization and Memorialization," some of the respondents had already made the decisions concerning the final disposition and memorialization of their bodies while others were discussing the choices they expect to make. The results of this survey have been crosstabulated. In the "Cremation Container, Disposition and Service Survey," all cases were about the behaviors regarding the

memorialization of the ashes of people who had actually decided on cremation. Both surveys are useful in assessing people's beliefs and provide comparative frames for my research

Taken together, all these forms of data do permit as *thick* a description as possible of what is happening with cremation in Georgia (Geertz 1973a). These materials yield data that can be used to paint a careful and thorough picture of cremation practices. Since there are limits to the information available through each type of data, however, I support the data I gather through each kind with information from the other forms of data. Knowing that a study of the contemporary increase in interest in cremation in America would require data from multiple sources, I have grounded this research in the state of Georgia for a starting point, sought out as many data sources as possible, and structured them as coherently as possible, for the sake of the analysis (Glaser and Strauss 1971). In the end, I can clearly say I have reached a point of theoretical saturation with this qualitative study, after which any and all additional information I have uncovered, from any source, has continued to repeat and reinforce the topics already identified without yielding anything new (Charmaz 2000; Miller and Salkind 2002; Strauss and Corbin 1990). Consequently, I am confident of the *thickness* of description that this data will support in this multifaceted analysis of cremation (Geertz 1973a). Altogether the data is sufficient for an exhaustive and comprehensive picture to emerge of how cremation is functioning, or not functioning, as an emerging cultural system in present day American society.

CHAPTER 3

OPINIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD CREMATION

Because of the dramatic rise in cremation over the past few decades (CANA 2005c),

cremation is a subject no longer as rare and obscure as it once was when it was initially

introduced to America in the 1800s (Prothero 2001). The increasing prevalence of the practice

has been the subject of numerous newspaper articles (Conners 1994; Duffy 2002; Kunerth 1996).

Other articles have dealt with instances of specific individuals being cremated (Donovan 1996;

Powell 2005). Consequently, many individuals have heard of the recent rise in the use of

cremation and/or have heard of someone who has been cremated. Thus, because of the common

awareness of cremation created by a combination of experiences, through media coverage and

one's own personal social networks, it is likely that many people have thought about their own

opinions on the subject. However, few have been asked just what those attitudes and opinions

are. Most Americans have not been polled or interviewed as to what they think. Therefore, I have

surveyed and interviewed people in order to determine the nature of the discussion individuals in

America are having over cremation.

Cremation and the Georgia Poll

The Georgia Poll is a telephone survey of adult residents in Georgia conducted by the

Survey Research Center (SRC) at the University of Georgia. The purpose of the study was to

learn the attitudes and opinions of respondents towards several key sets of questions, including a set of questions on cremation. Questions were programmed into the SRC's CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interview) system. The design of the study called for conducting a total 400 telephone interviews from a random-digit dialed (RDD) sample of households in Georgia. The procedures used were intended to ensure that all adult residents in the sample had an equal chance of being selected for inclusion in the data collection. Sampling procedures produced a random sample of the population of interest. Of the eligible respondents contacted, 403 interviews were completed in the 2001 Georgia Poll.

The Selection of Cremation

When asked, 50 percent of Georgians sampled in the Georgia Poll say they would consider choosing cremation. In contrast, 45 percent said they would not choose cremation. With such a small portion of people answering as undecided, less than four percent, this survey shows that cremation is a subject most people have thought about. In addition, these results are consistent with the statistics of the Cremation Association of North America (CANA). CANA reports cremation is on the rise in Georgia just like it is for all other states and the nation as a whole. For Georgia, CANA reports almost 19% of all deaths resulted in cremation in 2003 and estimates that figure to rise to 31% of all deaths by 2010 (CANA 2005b). While my figure of 50 percent of Georgians willing to consider choosing cremation when asked is greater than CANA's numbers, it is consistent with the rising percentage of Georgians being cremated. CANA reports the actual percent of cremations per year, while the Georgia Poll is reporting the number of Georgians willing to choose cremation now or in the future. Not all of my survey respondents

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have actually made cremation arrangements, since the Georgia Poll surveys people 18 and over

across Georgia. As those responding to the Georgia Poll grow old and die, their preferences for

cremation should, over time, be reflected in the statistics CANA collects. Thus, the Georgia Poll,

like CANA's statistics, reflects the rise in cremation that is expected to continue well into the

future. In fact, based on the Georgia Poll's results of 50 percent selecting cremation and 45

percent not selecting cremation, cremation may out-strip burial someday as the preferred method

of disposal after death for Georgians.

The age of Georgians responding to the Georgia Poll is one of several respondent

characteristics with which the results of the Georgia Poll have been crosstabulated (see Table

3.1). Georgia Poll respondents break down by age, ethnicity, gender, marital status, education,

income, and residence in a metropolitan statistical area. All Georgia Poll respondents were

residents of the State of Georgia at the time of the survey, but half were not Georgia natives.

Those born outside of Georgia include at least one person from all fifty of the United States and

the District of Columbia, with ten respondents having been born outside of the U.S. Regarding

ethnicity, white respondents selected cremation more than non-white respondents. Regarding

education, college graduates showed more interest in cremation than people with only a high

school diploma or less. It is not surprising that more educated individuals tended to prefer

cremation, since education opens people up to accepting new ideas. Similarly, non-whites, with

less education, tend to hold fast to traditional ideas including the long-standing cultural

preference for burial.

In Table 3.1, of the respondents who are age 65 or older, a bit fewer people chose

cremation than did not. But of the bulk of adults, those in the 25-44 and 45-64 age groups, more

favored cremation than did not. In terms of income, more respondents in three of the four groups

selected cremation than did not. Only slightly more in the $25,000 to $34,999 range opted not to

select cremation. Although cremation is slightly cheaper than burial [a price gap that the funeral

industry is actively closing (Kubasak 1990)], the Georgia Poll did not show those in the lowest

income group favoring this option over those in higher income groups.

It is curious that although cremation may be cheaper, but it was not more common among

the poorest income group. Further, cremation did not even rise dramatically during the Great

Depression of the 1930s (CANA 2005c), when so many individuals' level of income dropped so

significantly. In neither case, then, has cremation corresponded well with income. Nor do we see

burial, at present, as the more expensive and thus potentially higher status alternative, selected

more often among the more affluent income groups. Therefore, while cremation may be cheaper,

its selection is not strictly a matter of money. While "cheap" is a meaning associated with

cremation, economics does not appear to be a driving force behind the contemporary rise in the

selection of cremation over the last few decades. Consequently, there must be something else to

the story of the reason for the selection of cremation, other than the commonly held notion of

cheapness. Once even, in the past, prior to the present increase in cremation, cremation was a

shamefully cheap alternative, only for the poorest of the poor who could not afford a *normal*

burial.

Reasons for the Selection of Cremation

Following the question of whether the respondent would choose cremation, Georgia Poll

respondents were asked one or two open-ended questions. If the person selected cremation, the

individual was first asked, "What do you think of cremation that would make you choose this option?" and afterwards asked, "If you choose cremation, what would you want done with the ashes to memorialize yourself?" Alternately, those not choosing cremation were asked, "What do you think of cremation that would make you not choose this option?" In each case, all responses were recorded as people said them, expressing their opinions in their own words. In some instances, more than one answer was given and recorded. Therefore, I coded all answers by response, in order to code each of the reasons given for selecting or not selecting cremation and each of the preferences given regarding the memorialization of ashes.

The coding categories of reasons for selecting cremation are (in descending order of frequency) cost, land conservation, anti-burial sentiments, simplicity, body unimportant, preference (for cremation or for ashes to memorialize), and other (see Table 3.2). Interestingly, the fact that cremation is cheaper than burial is the reason most commonly cited by Georgia Poll respondents (35%), even though, as we have seen, cremation did not correspond with income in the crosstabulations. Cremation has been cheaper than burial ever since it was introduced to America in the 1870s, but it never caught on just for economic reasons (Quigley 1996; Rosen 2004). Historically, cremation has never been frequently selected until the last four decades (CANA 2005c). Therefore, although cremation has always been cheaper than burial, for a very long time people still would not choose it, holding fast to the tradition of burial. Consequently, other changes had to take place before Americans would deviate from the tradition of burial. Further, while cremation may still be a bit cheaper than burial, it is not in fact that inexpensive anymore, as the funeral industry has responded to the increased demand for this service with pricier packages of services (Kubasak 1990). Although there is some variation in pricing, for

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items such as caskets for example, burials in Georgia with a funeral service can roughly run around seven to eight thousand dollars while a comparable cremation package, provided through a funeral home, runs roughly around six thousand dollars. Cremation societies are less costly to use than funeral homes, but most people have never heard of cremation societies. However, my survey reveals that inexpensiveness continues to be associated with cremation in the minds of Georgians. Individuals reported selecting cremation because it is "Cheaper" or "Low cost." What is to be learned is that "cheap" is something people associate with cremation; it is a *meaning* associated with the selection of cremation over burial. As a meaning, inexpensiveness continues to have some symbolic social significance. In addition to inexpensiveness, respondents also expressed a concern for land conservation. The second most common reason given for selecting cremation is land conservation (29%). Respondents reported they wanted cremation because it "Saves space" or because "It conserves land." In several instances, both land and cost conservation were mentioned together as reasons for cremation in the thoughts of Georgians.

The next most frequently cited reasons for selecting cremation are anti-burial sentiments (12%), simplicity (9%), and body unimportant (9%). Regarding simplicity, respondents said cremation was "Easier" and "More efficient." In some cases, individuals considered cremation to be easier on the family, and, in others, cremation was thought of as a more efficient way to deal with the body. More intriguing reasons revolved around the anti-burial sentiments, most of which express concern for the body. One individual expressly wanted cremation "Because I don't want to rot in the box." Others stated, "I don't like the idea of being put in the ground." A couple of people expressed that they, "Just don't want to be eaten up by worms." Lastly, several respondents felt their bodies could be cremated, because after death the body was not important

anymore. These individuals stated that the body was "Not important to have preserved" or that the "Body is useless." Although Christians often believe the body has value because it is the sacred host of the soul (Prothero 2001), a few respondents, in a reinterpretation of traditional Christian belief, considered the belief that the body is a shell to be a reason *for* choosing cremation. Individuals exemplifying this point of view reported that the "Spirit is the only part of you that matters after death," that due to "Religious beliefs, body is just a shell," and that "God says our bodies are nothing but dirt."

The body that was once considered a sacred vessel of the soul, in our Christian based Western culture, is now not so sacred. One of the reasons individuals are free to select cremation for the disposal of their bodies is that the body itself has become secularized. The body is no longer the sacred host of the soul, rather it is increasingly regarded as refuse. When cremation is associated with cheapness, when degree of value is associated with expense, and when individuals are increasingly willing to have the deceased body cremated versus preserved and buried because it is cheaper, then individuals are thus more willing to have the body treated cheaply rather than revered in terms of cost. The question this reasoning raises, when care of the dead has been sacred for so long in Western culture, is why would someone want to do something cheap with his or her body? The answer evident in the survey respondents' comments is "Your spirit is gone" and the "Body is waste." The body that has traditionally been defined as sacred because of its connection to the soul as its sacred vessel, and its possible need to be available for resurrective purposes in Christianity (Rosen 2004), has now been redefined as secular waste. In the course of the switch in funerary practices toward cremation and away from burial, the very meaning of the body is changing. Regardless of whether or not sacred funeral

ceremonies take place around the cremated ashes, the meaning of the corpse is one of waste. While it is possible to see cremation as a sacred process which liberates the soul through the burning of the body, as the Hindus believe (Coleman 1997), this Eastern view also sees the body as profane refuse from which the soul needs liberation. Most importantly, though, it is in the words of those who have considered cremation that the reinterpretation of the body is evident.

Once the body is redefined as refuse, cremation can be regarded as a matter of purity, an avoidance of the polluting influences of contact with the profane waste of the body. "Cremation is cleaner." "Cremation reduces disease." Mary Douglas wrote of, "dirt as matter out of place (1966:35)," because untidiness threatens order with disorder. Likewise, death threatens to pollute our social order with the disorder of the loss of a social member and the disorder of the threatening presence of his or her remaining, and no longer sacred, body. Based on the way we are reinterpreting our funerary practices with the rise of cremation in America, the profanity of the intact dead body now becomes "matter out of place". For the dead body to be in place, and order to be restored, it must be cremated. Cremation is linked to nature with a sense of nature as pure and a sense of the body returned to nature as simple and efficient. There is an economy of extravagance associated with cremation. The expense and expenditure of resources is reduced. A desire not to spend resources on the dead is consistent with seeing the deceased body as waste. To spend money or take up land burying the dead is thus to waste the money or the land. Therefore, whether financial or environmental, support for cremation often favors not spending as many resources on the dead anymore. Cremation has a natural, back-to-nature, feeling associated with it, as in the saying "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust" from The Book of

Common Prayer of the Church of England (1969), but cremation no longer has a feeling associated with it in support of the sacred preservation of the whole body as a person.

Not all of the individuals who volunteered to talk to me decided on cremation because of the attributes of the disposal process itself. While burial was opposed for several reasons, it is clear that there is a pattern of anti-burial sentiment evident in the shift toward cremation in America. Tradition is being reinterpreted. The very meaning of burial is changing within our culture, from a revered and sacred cultural practice to something that is problematic and unsettling. In the United States, based on Christianity, the body has been preserved after death because it is the sacred host for the soul (Prothero 2001). As a temple for the soul during life, it has long been important to take care of the body after death as well as during life (Colman 1997). Embalming was invented to protect the dead and keep them looking as much like the living as possible (Davies 1996; Foltyn 1996). But revering and preserving the corpse, as a way of maintaining the social person among the living (Warner 1959), is being reinterpreted in our transforming death practices as a distasteful or even an abominable thing to do. The embalmed, preserved body no longer represents death as safe slumber. One respondent said, "Embalming is pretty horrible," and another said, "Don't want to be eaten up by worms." From this perspective, the idea of burial holds no meaning and becomes pointless. "Burial costs are pointless." The shift in value associated with burial is part of the decreased desire to spend money on it. The reasoning goes, why spend money on something that is meaningless? The attitude that "I do not want to rot in a box" indicates that the corpse has become merely rotting flesh, no longer a culturally sacred object representative of the person and the host for the soul that it once was. When the dead body is reinterpreted as messy refuse, there is a decreased value placed on saving the body. Thus,

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cremation becomes increasingly valued as cleaner, easier, and simpler. All three of these reasons,

and an overall sense of reducing resources devoted to the dead, were reasons given in support of

cremation by the respondents of the Georgia Poll.

Reasons Against the Selection of Cremation

In contrast, the reasons Georgia Poll respondents cited for *not* selecting cremation form

the categories of religion, opposition to the destruction or the burning of the body, anti-cremation

sentiments, tradition, preference, pro-cemetery sentiments, a desire to have a viewing, and other

(listed from most frequent to least frequent). Percentages are listed in Table 3.3. While some

reasons given, across categories, are secular, religion is the most commonly reported reason

overall (28%). The religious beliefs expressed were predominantly Christian. The religious

affiliation of respondents is fifty-six percent Protestant, eight percent Catholic, less than one

percent Jewish, and twenty four percent other. When asked why they would not select cremation,

individuals said cremation was "Against my religion" or "I don't believe that's what the Bible

intended." Other Christian reasons cited include Jesus Christ's burial as an example and the need

for an intact body in order to be resurrected when Christ returns. These views are consistent with

the various reasons Christians give for upholding the Christian-based Western tradition of burial,

even though there is no one *single* Christian prohibition against cremation (Aries 1974; Prothero

2001; Puckle 1926). Burial became associated with Christianity early in the history of the

religion (Puckle 1926). Over most of the next 2000 years, people were buried in cemeteries

beside churches (Colman 1997). In the early 1800s, burials switched to pastoral landscape style

cemeteries in a secularization that corresponded with the romantic cultural era of the times

(Howett 1977). At present, these pastoral cemeteries, be they owned by a church, a public community, or a corporation, represent our traditional way of disposing of the dead against which cremation is set as the newest trend.

Even though no one has found a clear edict in the Bible against cremation, many people believe the Bible is clearly against cremation and in favor of burial. There are three reasons most commonly given in Christianity in support of the tradition of burial. First, some Christians practice burial because "Jesus was buried" as an example of what to do. Second, because Christians are taught to regard the body as the sacred temple of the soul. Christians feel, "The body is a temple." The third reason Christians most often give to support burial is the belief in the resurrection. At the resurrection, the body will be reunited with the soul and ascend into heaven, when Jesus returns to Earth and takes up his believers, both dead and living (Prothero 2001).

The Christian belief in the resurrection, as well as the belief that the body is a temple, support the traditional view that the body is sacred and should not be destroyed. It is very important that the body remain intact, or one person felt, "I would have no soul." Another feared, "The Lord couldn't find me." Traditionally, the self and the soul are tied to the body." In our traditional Christian based beliefs, the deceased body is clearly, and absolutely, sacred. To have the deceased body resting somewhere also gives the person a place to be after death. The grave in the cemetery traditionally provides a sense of place for the person, the self, to reside along with the body after death and be visited (Quigley 1996). Whether religiously, as a vehicle or as a host for the soul, or secularly, as a social self after death, the body, its placement, and its care are

historically very sacred in our culture. In our tradition, the dead are sacred. Thus funerary practice in our society has long functioned as part of a sacred cultural system.

Another reason Christians cite for not desiring to be cremated is a belief that the body should not be burned. This reason was cited so often in the Georgia Poll survey that it could be coded separately. Opposition stated was to the destruction of, or specifically the burning of, the body (21%). As a sacred vessel of the soul, Christians said "Burning the body goes against my beliefs" and "I'm a Christian and I don't want to burn on earth or in hell." One person said, "I don't want to burn twice." This individual may equate the use of cremation with an automatic trip to hell. Other respondents disagreed with destroying the body by fire because they "Disagree with burning the body" or, in a more clearly secular sense, just feel "I don't want to be burned up." Traditionally, for Christians the soul and the body are connected and, by extension, the traditional secular belief is that the self and the body are connected. The response "I don't want to burn" reflects a concern that if my body burns *I* will be burning too. The Western view of fire and the body holds negative associations with burning. Unlike the Eastern, Hindu, belief that fire purifies and frees the sacred soul of the profane refuse of the corpse (Quigley 1996), Westerners believe burning means pain or hell or as one respondent summed it up "Burning is scary." Westerners do not historically associate fire and burning with good, as in the good sun. The respondents who oppose the destruction of the body by fire are confirming the meanings associated with the beliefs of Western culture.

Because Western culture does not take as revered a view of cremation as Eastern culture, in which cremation is a rite of ritual purification for the soul (Colman 1997; Puckle 1926), many people still find cremation upsetting. Since cremation is not our cultural tradition, it continues to

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have a foreign, unnatural feel to it. "Cremation is not natural." "I am not accustomed to the idea." Because we negatively associate burning in Western culture with fire and hell, several people had decided on burial because they could not understand why someone would want to burn his or her body. "I just don't want to burn." "I don't want to burn." One firefighter, understandably, said that because of his occupation he didn't want to be burned. All of these people still consider burning the body to be something you do to your self, consider the body to be valuable, and consider burning to be negative. Further, it's hard for some people to find meaning in the ashes that remain after cremation. "It's just ashes; nothing left." Ashes equal nothing. Our culture does not have strong positive associations with fire or ash. "I would rather keep my body whole after I pass away." It has only been the whole intact body that has any definite value after death.

Other respondents to the Georgia Poll held rather general anti-cremation sentiments (18%) or rather general tradition based sentiments (10%). These individuals, expressing general anti-cremation views, opposed cremation because "I just don't like it." Those expressing a concern for tradition opposed cremation because it's "Not traditional" or it's not "Family tradition." Interestingly, family was not mentioned as a reason for opposing cremation more often than it was mentioned as a reason for supporting cremation. Both the 185 respondents who selected cremation and the 165 respondents who did not select cremation mentioned family only ten times. While religious beliefs and funerary traditions are handed down across generations within families, the value of the family was not more frequently expressed by those who said no to cremation than those who said yes. Family may have been indirectly felt in other reasons given, but was only directly mentioned an equal number of times. Although tradition is a reason given for not selecting cremation that often involves both family and religion, it was stated often

enough by itself to be coded separately. Respondents reported that they wanted to not be cremated because of "Tradition" or the "Tradition of the South," and because cremation is "Different from what I'm used to." Lastly, five percent of respondents gave pro-cemetery reasons, such as "Would rather have a resting place for family to visit at gravesite," for not wanting to be cremated, and two percent didn't want to be cremated in order to have a viewing. Comprising the category of other, three individuals would not consider cremation because they want to be organ donors, while two plan to donate their body to science. (Although respondents may not realize it, all four of the medical schools in Georgia have body donors cremated afterwards at the expense of the medical school.) Only five respondents gave no reason for selecting or did not know why they selected not to be cremated. Given that the other 95% of the responses were definitive, however, funerary preference is indeed something most people have thought decidedly about in their lives.

Choices in the Disposition of Ashes

Additionally, those who did select to be cremated were asked what they wanted done with their ashes (see Table 3.4). The majority, 52% wanted to be spread somewhere, while only a small number wanted to be kept with family (15%), stored (9%), or buried (8%). Sixteen percent had no preference or wanted no memorial. Clearly, the disposition of one's ashes is something most people have also put thought into. Of those who want their ashes spread, most said they wanted them scattered somewhere in a beautiful, a nice, a special, or a favorite place. Some respondents were more specific, saying they wanted to be "Scattered over the Smoky Mountains," or "Spread in an area I enjoy like the Appalachian Trail." The associations people

have with where they want to be spread were so tied to nature that the responses could be coded

by type of natural setting, dividing the spreading preferences into water, land, mountains, or air.

These results reveal that ashes are associated with nature in the minds of Georgians. Ashes are

seen as part of the scenic landscape, part of the natural world and no longer part of the separate

human world. Scattered ashes aren't even designated as the remains of a person the way buried

bodies are when put in a cemetery with a headstone. Ashes do not carry the same meaning as a

corpse. Ashes are so much a part of nature that scattered ashes are expected to just blend into the

natural world, completely undistinguished. The respondents who said they wanted to be used to

"Fertilize the rose garden" or help the "Compost pile," considered their ashes to even be part of

the actual cycle of nature. In this case, the body as ash that is good for compost is a body that is

refuse, but still a useful form of refuse in a secular sense. Like the secularizing move in the early

1800s away from church cemeteries toward natural, romantic, pastoral cemeteries (Howett 1977),

cremating and scattering is another secular deviation in our funerary practices. This time, it is a

secular move away from our standard traditional sacred custom of burial in a church or pastoral

cemetery. Wanting oneself "Spread on a football field" is not a sacred funerary custom in

Western society. To say "I want to be spread on the beach" is not to follow the sacred tradition of

burial in a cemetery. However, while cremation marks a secularization in disposition and

memorialization, individuals report very strong sentimental feelings about how the cremated

dead are treated. Once a location becomes invested with one's remains, it becomes valuable.

While cremation is a secular shift away from our religious based Christian traditions, it is one

imbued with value and meaning for the individual participants.

Other responses in the spreading category were coded as other or unusual. The unusual cases (15% of the spread cases) were primarily single requests including such ideas as being "Put in a snare drum in a glass case," "Put in a baseball field," "Mixed in paint to use in wife's bedroom," "Thrown on a bonfire at a party," or "Made into a guitar." Some of the unusual requests preferred to have their ashes travel after death, specifically to Belize, Germany, the Grand Canyon, London, and outer space. It is worth noting that most of these spreading preferences are leisure and recreation oriented which is consistent with the increased use of recreational symbols on gravestones in cemeteries (Collier 2003). Recreational imagery, used in cremation or burial, does not reflect personally significant involvement with social institutions during one's lifetime such as religion or the military. The increased use of recreational associations in one's options for one's final disposition, whether one is being buried with a picture of golf clubs on his headstone or being spread on the Appalachian Trail or a baseball field, reflect our increasingly personalized and individualized society.

These preferences also recognize that a multiplicity of options are possible with cremation, and individuals can get creative. When one dies the body can be reduced to ashes now, and multiple containers and services can be used now and later. In my interview with Jack Springer, the head of the Cremation Association of North America, he emphasized the multiplicity of memorialization that is possible with cremation (2001). He stressed having more than one ceremony at different times or in different places, or dividing the ashes into multiple containers, as beneficial to the bereaved. It is also good for business.

Not all respondents, however, did choose to be spread into nature. Fifteen percent of responses mention wanting to be kept with family. Family social ties are mentioned more with

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the disposition of ashes question on the Georgia Poll survey than with the disposition of the body

questions. Family or the needs of the family were mentioned 33 times by those choosing what to

do with their ashes. Just as some individuals prefer to be buried with family, family is not

forgotten by all who choose cremation. Some want their families to scatter their remains, and

some want their ashes to be kept by their families. Six percent of responses even dealt with being

buried, as one individual said she wants her ashes to be "Buried with my husband" and another

prefers to be "Buried with parents." These individuals are choosing to mix old traditions with

new trends at the end of life, but their numbers are relatively small. Over half of the responses

were for spreading. Often, though, most people seemed to hold some value with a place once

one's remains were put there. It would seem, then, that place still has meaning imbued by social

ties.

Most interesting, in the Georgia Poll survey responses, however, is that people are

making individual decisions about the end of their lives, even if they still value family. Their

choices are not being made as families or as any other form of a social group. These are

individual decisions not family decisions. The choice over how we want our bodies disposed and

our lives memorialized appears to be becoming less of a group decision. Once, people were

buried in family plots, and where you were all going to end up after death was decided for the

members of a family by the family. Now such decisions are far less likely to be made

collectively. This is a further move away from tradition. It used to be that our Christian based

traditions told us what to do when someone dies. Religion, as the guide for how to manage the

death of a social member (Geertz 1973a), no longer ties us together in death as it once did. The

individualization of end of life decisions is another form of secularization, because it is a

departure from sacred religious based customs, including family decisions, as in the use of family plots. While this marks a change in funerary practices in the southeast, it isn't the first observed in America. The sociologist Lloyd Warner (1959) noticed cultural changes in funerary practices in his research of a town in the northeast in the 1950s. He observed a decline in attendance at Memorial Day functions, a decline in burials in church cemeteries, and a decline in summons for ministers at the time of death. With the rise of the use of cremation in all parts of America since the 1960s (CANA 2005c), we are seeing a further individualization and secularization in our present funerary practices as more people make their choices of disposition and memorialization separately and individually. While their decisions may still be meaningful to the individual participants, they are meaningful on an individual rather than a collective basis. It is a change that is affecting burial as well as cremation.

In effect, the Georgia Poll shows that most people are taking their preferences for the end of their lives seriously even if traditions are changing. Very few people were uncertain or simply did not know what they thought about whether or not they wanted cremation, why or why not, and what they wanted done with their ashes. Nor did they seem to hold their ideas in isolation. Patterns were evident in the data, allowing for the categorization and coding of responses. The meanings people associate with death, at present, are clear in their responses. The Georgia Poll is a survey that reveals the specifics of the contemporary trends that are happening with cremation. Our funerary traditions do form a cultural system, but one that is changing, changing in certain ways that the Georgia Poll reveals can be typified and understood. While all of the 403 survey respondents have resided in Georgia at the time of their response to this project, they have been born and socialized in many places around the United States and beyond. In the process of

contributing to this research, they have shared the reasons, the meanings, and the associations

that they have with cremation and burial. Their beliefs form the core and the backbone of the new

funerary cultural system surrounding cremation that is emerging in our society. A society is made

up of individual actors, and it is by accessing the beliefs and meanings that they use in their

thinking about cremation that one is able to fully understand on the level of a new cultural system

as it emerges. As Geertz wrote, culture is the kind of context in which social events are only truly

intelligible when *thickly* described in research (1973a:14), so that we can then think *with,* not just

about, the meanings we analyze (1973a:23).

TABLE 3.1 NUMBERS OF GEORGIA RESPONDENTS SELECTING CREMATION BY AGE,
ETHNICITY, GENDER, MARITAL STATUS, EDUCATION, INCOME,
AND METROPOLITAN RESIDENCE, 2001

| | Cremation | | |
	Yes	No	No Answer
Age			24
18-24	23	27	
25-44	88	74	
45-64	67	45	
65+	24	31	
Ethnicity			24
White	167	131	
Non-White	32	49	
Gender			18
Male	80	63	
Female	123	119	
Marital Status			18
Married	121	104	
Div/Sep/Wid	28	38	
Single	54	40	
Education			19
≤ High School	44	65	
Some College	74	63	
College Graduate	84	54	
Income			103
≤ 24,999	26	18	
25,000 - 34,999	21	26	
35,000 - 74,999	74	49	
75,000 +	48	38	
Metropolitan Residence			18
Metro	146	126	
Non-Metro	57	56	

N = 403

TABLE 3.2 GEORGIA RESPONDENTS' REASONS FOR SELECTING CREMATION

Reason	Percent
Cheap	35%
Land	29%
Anti-Burial	12%
Simplicity	9%
Body Not Important	9%

Preference
  for cremation or for ashes
  to memorialize
	2%

Other	4%

TABLE 3.3 GEORGIA RESPONDENTS' REASONS FOR NOT SELECTING CREMATION

Reason	Percent
Religion	28%
Oppose Destroy/Burn Body	21%
Anti-Cremation	18%
Tradition	10%
Preference	10%
Pro-Cemetery	5%
Want Viewing	2%
Other	6%

TABLE 3.4 GEORGIA RESPONDENTS' PREFERENCES FOR MEMORIALIZATION OF ASHES

Preference		Percent
Spread		52%
General/Nice Place	32%	
Water	26%	
Land	18%	
Mountains	7%	
Air	2%	
Other/Unusual	15%	
Family, with		15%
Stored, urn/box		9%
Buried		8%
No Memorial		4%
No Preference		12%

CHAPTER 4

THE MEMORIALIZATION OF THE CREMATED

During the course of this research, I stopped to wonder where are all the dead. Where were *all* the people who had preceded me in life and death on this planet? I could not find them all in the cemeteries I knew. As I conducted my research, I came to realize my question was a product of my socialization into a very specific cultural way of caring for the dead, namely that of landscape burial. I grew up, as have many generations around mine, with the normative custom of embalming the dead and burying them in pastoral cemeteries. If this had been the norm for the millennia of people who have preceded me, then the expectation of my question would be valid. Indeed, there would be almost innumerable hosts of lawn style pastoral cemeteries containing all the dead that have gone before me. But there is not, because park style cemeteries have only been in fashion for about 200 years (Linden-Ward 1989a). Before then, the dead in the West were buried near churches, and before that, the dead around the world have been treated in numerous different cultural forms for millennia (Coleman 1997). However, answering my question has taught me much about my societal era's norms of landscaped cemeteries and the changes we are making for the cremated.

In order to consider how the dead have been treated within the current societal era, it is important to note that the patterns of memorialization of the dead within a society can be read for insight into a society's culture (Carmack 2002). For example, cemetery monuments reveal aspects of popular culture and social beliefs (Mytum 2003:806), and the status of children and ethnic groups can be read in the structure and iconography of cemeteries (Snyder 1989; Tashjian and Tashjian 1989). Consequently, the cemetery itself serves as a social and cultural institution within a society (French 1975), with pastoral landscaped

cemeteries serving that function today. The meanings associated with death in our culture, both past and present, are evident in the symbolism embodied in the structure and landscaping of the pastoral cemeteries. Therefore, in Western societies, pastoral cemeteries can also be read for historical insight, since they are the product of an earlier period of cultural change (Collier 2003). Let us first consider how the norm of landscaped cemeteries came into being, and the historical meanings associated therewith.

Park style cemeteries came into vogue in the early 1800s with the advent of the rural cemetery movement (French 1975). Mortuary reform followed the Enlightenment at a time when the centuries-old Christian tradition of church burials had led to church graveyards overflowing with the dead within the city (Coleman 1997). As a result, people felt the design of a park like cemetery, or rural cemetery, on the edges of town, would be a refreshing and morally uplifting change (Linden-Ward 1989b). Large cemeteries of carefully landscaped lawns full of trees and shrubs and sculptural mortuary art at entrances and at family graves were created. The first of these in the United States was Mount Auburn in Boston in 1831 (Linden-Ward 1989b). "The creation of Mount Auburn marked a change in prevailing attitudes about death and burial. It was a new type of burial place designed not only to be a decent place of interment, but to serve as a cultural institution as well" (French 1975:70). "The combination of nature and art in the rural cemetery and the acquisitions of time would create 'legacies of imperishable moral wealth' which would provide a strong improving influence on all members of society" (French 1975:84). Specifically, "the restorative character of living trees and plants was thus to provide a vehicle for transforming the turbulent emotions of loss into a more fixed hope in renewal and regeneration" (Francis, Kellaher, and Neophytou 2005:41).

Since a society's method of body disposal can be read for insight into cultural systems (Jacobi 2003), the still dominant park style rural cemeteries can be analyzed for the historical significance and cultural meanings they embody. For instance, both the romantic and the classical styles of thought that corresponded to industrialization and the advent of modernism following the Enlightenment can be seen in the landscaped lawn cemeteries (French 1975). The utilization of the belief in the uplifting value of nature

in the landscaping of the cemeteries is consistent with the romantic era created in reaction to the harsh and austere effects of industrialization. At the same time, however, the cemeteries were laid out in an ordered rational fashion with the use of classical revival iconography of urns, arches, and columns, fashionable in the post-Enlightenment modern world, present in the mortuary art. The heavy use of landscaping is consistent with the rational view that we can conquer and manage nature for our own uses and purposes, and the later advent and subsequent prevalence of the use of embalming helps feed our denial of the obliteration and finality of death (Aries 1974; Coleman 1997). Overall, though, the rural cemetery movement was a romantic movement, complete with the secularization of romanticism that glorified and deified nature above the traditional religious funerary mores of bringing the dead to be buried at the church, in order to bring the dead to God.

If landscaped park cemeteries, in use today as the dominant method of body disposal, can be analyzed for historical insights as cultural institutions, then current social and cultural death practices can be analyzed for insights into our current cultural systems. Over time many societal changes have been marked in the cemeteries. For example, the rich plantings and elaborate monuments of the Victorian era signified the Victorian culture's elaborate, celebratory approach to death (Francis, Kellaher, and Neophytou 2005), and the ornate gates, fences, and statues marking the graves of the Gilded Age's wealthy were the product of manifest class differences in the industrial era (Collier 2003). By the middle of the twentieth century, however, gravemarkers bore more uniform similarities for the rich and the poor in the manicured lawns of the cemeteries marking a change to a more egalitarian approach to death (Collier 2003; Francis, Kellaher, and Neophytou 2005). At present, by the turn of the millennium in the United States, the iconography on headstones in American park cemeteries has changed from the traditional Christian crosses, praying hands, and wedding rings, that signify ties to the social institutions of religion and marriage, to the nontraditional icons of golf clubs, ballet slippers, and guitars, which signify a lessening of ties to social institutions in life and death (Collier 2003). Across the Atlantic, in England, the use of

"contemporary 'green' burials in a woodland of native trees commemorate life and death as partners with nature" (Francis, Kellaher, and Neophytou 2005:30).

Such cultural analyses of cemeteries raise questions when it comes to cremation. If one departs from burial to choose cremation as one's method of body disposal, then what does the memorialization of the cremated signify about our present society and culture for both the living and the dead? After evaluating what people say about cremation through surveys and interviews, it is important to consider what people *do* with cremation. Although the cremated dead may be buried in a cemetery plot, more often than not they are not. What is there to note about cremation's methods of body disposal and memorialization that "offers important insight for understanding both tangible and intangible aspects of cultural systems" (Jacobi 2003:810)? Preferences for the disposition of ashes, stated by telephone interview, range from the few who want burial in a traditional grave in a cemetery, to the placement of ashes in a cremation garden, to the dispersement of ashes on one's own land, to the scattering of ashes in nature at large such as at sea. In terms of memorializations compared with burial, these options can be seen as ranging along a continuum from similar to quite dissimilar to burial. Not all of these options are the same; the memorialization of the cremated dead is clearly deviating from the tradition of the memorialization of the buried dead. Therefore, for analytical purposes, an in depth analysis of memorialization for the cremated that first departs from burial would be the most likely to yield the first cultural insights into the directions in which the care of the cremated is differing from, and not differing from, the care of the buried.

Cremation Gardens

The value of locating the cremated, with ashes intact in a physical space, can be further examined in relation to the cremation garden. Cremation gardens mark the point of first departure from burial along the continuum of options for the dispersal of ashes, suitable for a first analysis of the memorialization of

the cremated. In addition, gardens dedicated to the placement of cremated remains are more accessible and tangibly available for analysis in comparison to other methods of final disposition for ashes. It is especially important to start with the option for the care of cremated remains that is most like burial, because an analysis of like kind underscores the similarities and differences between the final outcomes for the cremated and the buried. All other final options, such as scattering in various places, can be regarded as further cultural and social modifications from this starting point. Consequently, in order to examine cremation gardens thoroughly, I have conducted in-depth case studies of two cremation gardens.

Case studies contribute to the fullest understandings of social phenomena through dense specification and elaboration (Bradshaw and Wallace 1991; Strauss and Glaser 1970). Detailed comparison allows the study of the particular to inform the general (Stake 2000), because "the significance of a case relates to what it tells us about the world in which it is embedded" (Burawoy 1991: 281). "The importance of the single case lies in what it tells us about society as a whole rather than about the population of similar cases" (Burawoy 1991: 281). Therefore, in order to understand what is happening with the memorialization of the cremated compared to the memorialization of the buried, I provide a detailed comparison between the two cremation gardens and the norm of the landscaped cemetery. Just as it is possible to read the changes in the characteristics of park style cemeteries to understand larger historical trends in views on death in society, it is also possible to read the features of the cremation gardens in contrast with pastoral cemeteries in order to assess the present changes in the treatment of the dead and the regard for death in contemporary culture. The landscaped qualities of the gardens dedicated to the cremated can be read as a symbolic text of cultural meaning just as the landscapes of rural cemeteries can, because the content or meanings of the symbols, that make up the landscapes, lie in the culture (Schwartz 1991). Thus to read the landscapes of the two cases of gardens is to read the meanings associated with cremation in the culture.

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To this end, I present a densely detailed case analysis of two cremation gardens in comparison with pastoral park style cemeteries. The result of these case analyses is a better understanding of the symbolic significance we place on cremation as a an emerging cultural system in our society. With burial as our cultural template for the treatment of the deceased, people are customarily choosing cremation in contrast to burial. Therefore, when one chooses to locate the cremated remains in a garden, the dead is then being treated in some ways similar to burial and in other ways different than burial. In order to understand the particulars of the similarities and differences, I have evaluated one publicly owned, city located cremation garden and one privately owned, church located cremation garden. The first is Decatur City Cemetery's garden for cremated remains in Decatur, Georgia, and the second is the garden for ashes at Covenant Presbyterian Church in Athens, Georgia. Taking these two cases together, I sort out below their similarities with burial and their differences with burial.

Similarities with Burial

The most important similarity between a cremation garden and a cemetery is the benefit of a tangible spot for one's remains within the community. This is the purpose for which they are built. Most cremation gardens do not exist as separate places all their own. They are usually constructed within an existing cemetery, either private or public, or church property. Most burials, too, are in formally designated areas. Isolated family graves constructed on family property in rural areas are an exception, but this type of burial is no longer common. Today, most people are buried in cemeteries established jointly with churches, cities, or corporations. Church cemeteries usually adjoin the building itself. City and private cemeteries are free standing graveyards but adjacent to the active roads within the community. Just as burial sites do not exist in isolation, but are placed in collective settings, so too are cremation gardens. The two gardens that I have examined are both associated with established organizations within their respective communities. The cremation garden fieldsite in Decatur, GA, exists within the larger public cemetery. The second fieldsite is

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situated on the private grounds of Covenant Presbyterian Church, which adjoins commercial and residential areas. Figure 4.1 shows the location of the garden in Decatur within the larger cemetery. Decatur City Cemetery is a large public cemetery with several thousand graves. Surrounded by metropolitan Atlanta, Decatur is an urban city. Those interred in the cemetery vary by race, class, religion, and national origin, though most are white, middle class, Christian, and American born. While people have been buried in the cemetery, located within the town, since the mid-1800s, the cremation garden began in the 1990s. According to the cemetery manager, the garden was created in response to many requests from the public for such a place, rather than initiated by anyone in the city government.

What the garden at Decatur offers the public is a chance to be part of the cemetery after cremation (see Figure 4.2). Customers get a one foot square plot in which to inter the cremated remains in a container. In this way, the remains end up buried like those in graves. The plots are marked off within a 10 by 10 foot grass covered area within the garden. Decatur has four of these 100 square foot sections in its garden, which line the right side of the garden as one enters (see Figure 4.3). On the left runs a low stone wall and benches are provided along the pebbled walkways. At this garden, the family also owns the land in which the loved one resides, just as in traditional burial in a grave. As a business, a cemetery with a garden must have something to sell the customer. Since real estate is at the heart of the transaction, the one square foot plot is what is sold paralleling the sale of a gravesite. About 40 plots have been sold and ashes interred within. With the garden located within the cemetery, the relatives of the deceased not only own the plot, but have a well groomed place for visiting the dead. One can visit both buried and cremated loved ones at the same place and in much the same manner. Use of the garden for a deceased relative, just as in traditional burial, provides for the permanent remembrance of the dead and a permanent place for the deceased in the community.

Covenant Presbyterian Church's garden, located in the small university town of Athens, Georgia, provides many of the same functions as Decatur Cemetery's garden does. According to the minister at

Covenant, the church is over 30 years old with a congregation consisting of about 170 mostly middle and upper middle class households. The membership is on average more educated than the county population, drawing many members from the nearby university. Though predominantly white, the congregation is racially mixed with some African American members, too. In addition, a separate Korean Christian congregation uses the church after its regular hours. The decision to build a garden, adjacent to the church on the property (see Figure 4.4), was not an easy one, according to the minister. The idea originally came from a congregant who had returned from Florida and seen cremation gardens built at churches there. But, the possibility of building a garden for cremated remains was not well received at first. Members questioned whether cremation was acceptably Christian. Questions arose over beliefs about death, and the church started classes at the church about death and funeral practices, covering theological issues, preplanning for death, financial planning, and organ donation. After receiving reassurance from the minister, a garden was built in the 1990s, though 10 years after the idea was initially proposed. At present, congregants accept the garden as a normal part of the church (see Figure 4.5).

The garden consists of a circle of brick with a small tree in the middle and two benches on either side (see Figure 4.6). Behind the circle is a shrubbery covered embankment. The garden is located on the far side of the building away from the parking lot and recreation areas. It is on the quieter side of the building, near the sanctuary, in what was an little used part of the property. In the garden, ashes are scattered on the embankment, among the shrubbery. Two individuals have been scattered there, with a third one planned at a yet to be determined date. Since it is a church, there is no need to sell a product, and nonreligious, nonmember relatives of members can also be placed in the garden.

Like the Decatur Cemetery garden, users of this site have a tangible and permanent final resting place for their loved ones. They are afforded a sense that the one they care about exists in a certain spot within the community. Keeping one's remains at a church follows old customs for the dead that predate the now traditional separate pastoral cemetery (French 1975). Like burial at the community church, keeping

the cremated dead at church reinforces one's religious faith that the dead are with God (Coleman 1997). The dead are, at least, honored and placed by the sacred house of worship, even if the deceased was less religious than the caretaking relative. Like the city government, the church is an institutional part of the community, and placement of the cremated remains in the church's garden includes a level of involvement within the community. The deceased is placed in an organized setting provided by a larger organization. Further, the location is public and the memorial site can be visited by those who knew the deceased and by others as well. The presence of the benches, along with the proximity to other social activity at the church, reinforces the belief that the living will continue to interact with the dead, and the dead will remain part of the community of the living. Construction of cremation gardens by a city or a church helps maintain a social setting for the cremated dead just as cemeteries do for the buried dead.

Since we all want our lives to mean something, so we too want our deaths to mean something (Fulton and Bendiksen 1994). The two are intertwined. A meaningful life is still meaningful after death. A place that concentrates the memory of the individual, becomes proof of the value of the individual. If a person is important enough to have a site reserved for him or her permanently, then he or she was an important person, at least to someone. Validation of one's life, then, is a primary reason for having a fixed place for one's remains (Warner 1959). This practice not only benefits the deceased, who may have planned to be remembered with a specific place for the ashes, but also benefits the family and friends of the deceased (Coleman 1997). Keeping the ashes together in an urn, and placing them in a niche in a columbarium or in a cremation garden, meets the needs of those who are grieving. Selecting a site, then, not only allows the one planning to be cremated to feel significant and remembered with an enduring identity after death, rather than insignificant and forgotten with one's identity annihilated after death, but to also feel that loved ones are being taken care of by providing them a place to go in their grief. If the site is selected after death by the family, it still serves the same purposes of validating the deceased and

immortalizing him or her with a tangible place in the community that can be visited. Thus, the deceased remains a member of the community with a fixed, literal place within it (Warner 1959).

The organization of cremation gardens, that provide a meaningful place for the dead and the living to interact, is also consistent with burial. The layout of the gardens at Decatur and Covenant is one of well ordered and deliberate landscaping. Corresponding with the revival of classical thinking following the Enlightenment, which influenced burial (French 1975), the gardens are laid out in a rational orderly manner. Such planning, consistent with modernism following industrialization, is evident in both the landscaped cremation gardens and in the landscaped cemeteries. The use of landscaping in the gardens also serves a restorative function, as it does in the park style cemeteries, revealing the romantic dimensions of modern thought following the austere effects of industrialization (Mytum 2003). The presence of living trees and plants provides a view of the continuation of life for the bereaved as nature serves an uplifting purpose (Francis, Kellaher, and Neophytou 2005). In the cremation gardens, just as in the rural cemeteries, life, not death, is emphasized in the landscaped setting of nature. Before landscaped cemeteries, church graveyards used to include warnings on headstones about death for the benefit of the living. But in pastoral cemeteries, "the lives and successes of the deceased should be celebrated, remembered, and contemplated in an appropriately designed setting" (Mytum 2003: 802). "Celebrating life," instead of death, is something one hears today when someone dies. It is a view symbolized in the landscaping of the new cremation gardens that is borrowed from our dominant cultural template of burial in landscaped park style cemeteries.

Differences with Burial

While cremation gardens provide some of the same functions for the cremated dead that cemeteries do for the traditionally buried dead, there are also marked differences between the two forms in the memorialization of the dead. At Decatur City Cemetery, the garden is not well integrated with the surrounding cemetery (see Figure 4.7). It is not as though the garden was placed openly in the middle of

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the cemetery with nearby graves visible and landscaping that blended the two types of interment sites. Instead, the Decatur garden is to one side of the cemetery and secluded in its landscaping. From the sections of graves that border the garden, it is not apparent that anything has been developed within the grove of trees that surround the small garden. From inside the cremation garden, the graves of the larger cemetery are not visible. The garden is quite secluded visually making it its own little place in the world, clearly defining cremation as a separate matter from burial that must be handled differently. Reinforcing the distance and separateness of the garden from its surroundings is the fact that the garden is not marked. There is a small black sign on a pole that identifies the number of its section within the cemetery. This sign is the standard one for all sections in Decatur Cemetery. But, other than the section marker, there is nothing to identify the place as a cremation garden. It would be easy to assume there is nothing in the grove of trees, despite the presence of a sidewalk going in, and not be inclined to venture in and discover it on one's own. I myself, having been before, had trouble locating it upon returning to the cemetery until I had been there repeatedly. The entrances to the gravesites are labeled clearly with signs stating Decatur City Cemetery, but the entrance to the garden is only designated a number.

The separateness designed into the landscaping of the garden in Decatur emphasizes the idea of cremation as natural. In America, cremation symbolizes a hastened return to a natural state. The cremated have returned to ashes, to nature, instantly rather than slowly as will those interred as an intact corpse. From outside the garden, it appears the cremated individuals are left to rest in a grove of trees as if they either died there or were blown there on the wind. From inside the garden, the obstructed view of everything else, including most of the sky, leaves one feeling as if nothing else matters or exists (see Figure 4.8). The garden is self contained. It is a peaceful, idyllic setting removed from time for eternity. The landscaping inside keeps all reminders of life beyond a garden to a minimum. There are no individual markers over the one square foot plots. All names are placed on a metal plaque on the low stone wall that runs the length of the four 100 square foot interment areas. The name plaques are beside the respective 10

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x10 area in which the deceased is located, but there are no grids with which to find the exact 1 foot square spot of the deceased within the 100 square foot area. Instead, one looks at four bright green flat and unbroken grassy squares on one side and a stone wall with a list of names and dates on the other. What one sees on the two sides of the garden are not associated with each other on any one to one basis. Only the immediate family knows exactly where their deceased relative is interred. A sense of nature in a beautifully landscaped garden is preserved, as if the dead are not even present (Lynch 2005).

In Decatur, then, the gardens are considerably different than the burial sites in the memories they evoke of the dead. In the cemetery, the graves are out in the open and are clearly and individually marked. A headstone is erected over each one with names, dates, and often more. One can learn of the deceased via inscriptions and images carved into the stone as well as flowers and other memorabilia that may be left at the site. For the cremated, names and dates provide the only clues to whom the person may have been. Where the headstones in landscaped cemeteries permit the use of iconography, from the early use of classical Greek revival pillars and urns to the recent use of recreational golf clubs and football symbols, cremation gardens have no overt icons or symbols accompanying the names of the dead. Further, if the person is faithfully remembered by someone, rules of the garden restrict displays. Individual sites are not marked, and relatives and friends are strongly discouraged from trying to place flowers or letters or photos on the individual site. The manager reported to me that they have had many people leave items by the interment site though the mourners know they are not supposed to. Sympathetically referring to the families, he said, "They certainly remember *exactly* where the containers are. " The bereaved place the flowers and other commemorative items they bring along the outside of the grassy square on the pebbled walkway as close to the actual spot of the deceased as possible. Even though the gardens offer a more communal type of resting place, some mourners desire to individually memorialize the cremated remains as closely to the precise place of the dead, just as it is in burial. Decatur Cemetery has come to recognize that the loved ones will continue to bring items into the garden for the dead and does not enforce the

prohibitive rule constantly. The cemetery allows the objects to remain for a few days, then clears the site

and discards the items. The garden with its abundant symbolism of life uniting with nature as we all return

to it, is designed to display nature over the lives of the deceased. Pastoral cemeteries, in contrast, lay out

the dead to be remembered distinctly, each with their own headmarker on the grave (Coleman 1997).

Pastoral cemeteries create space for the individual dead and their mourners to cohabitate with nature

(Linden-Ward 1989b), but cremation gardens are socially created spaces in which nature dominates over

both the dead and the living.

While designed differently than the garden at Decatur, the garden at Covenant Presbyterian

Church reflects most of the same features as the Decatur cremation site. At Covenant the garden is also set

apart (see Figure 4.9). Its location on the far side of the building, away from most traffic, makes it distinct

and isolated. Just visiting the church, or passing by on the road, one would not be aware of its existence.

Further, sitting in the garden one is only aware of the quiet side of the building and the landscaping.

Isolating the site in this way makes it more meditative and pastoral rather than urban. Although Covenant's

design is more open than the tree sheltered design at Decatur, it nonetheless has the same naturalistic

removed-from-the-world feeling.

Like the Decatur site, Covenant's garden is also unmarked. There is no sign to identify it as a

cremation garden containing human remains. There is no sign at all. In talking with the minister, he

insisted that I let people know it is a *real* final resting place for the dead. Although I had no doubt of its

validity, he seemed to be concerned that people would not recognize the garden's purpose, given its

extremely natural appearance that blends in with the rest of the landscaping around the church building.

Covenant's site is in fact not as clearly defined as Decatur's. There are no indicators of its purpose. Unlike

Decatur, there is no section marker, no neatly separate grassy squares, and no names listed anywhere. The

possibility of putting names on some of the brick in the circular walkway had been discussed by the

congregation, but never resolved. Those interested in using the site expressed an interest in having their

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loved one's names written somewhere so that people would know that they are there. However, others were especially concerned that any inclusion of names not interfere with the natural look of the place. As a visitor, then, I had no idea whose final resting place I am attending. As with Decatur, there is no extensive individual memorialization of the dead beyond the immediate family's knowledge of their loved one and his or her placement. Only at Decatur, one at least knows their names.

At Covenant church, the natural components of the garden are taken even further than at Decatur. The sidewalk linking the inside of the church to the road around the building passes by the garden with no connection between the sidewalk and the brick circle (see Figure 4.10). There is no visual route to the circle in the garden; one has to cross the grass to get there. In this way, the garden is enveloped in nature without any pathways leading in and out of it. More significantly, the cremated remains are not interred, but are scattered in a shrubbery covered embankment behind the wooden benches in the brick circle. Each individual's remains then become completely part of the landscaping and the land of the church. Those deposited there no longer remain distinct from one another. Final disposition is at its most communal. In Decatur, the location of the container is not separately identified, but at Covenant the remains are not even separate. Consequently, the deceased become one with nature completely. Here the natural world transcends any personal identity. Therefore, compared with burial, cremation gardens are a considerably individualized and personalized form of disposition for the dead, but one that still ties the deceased to a tangible location in the world.

A Compromise with Nature

Cremation gardens are but one option for the permanent placement of cremated remains, but, when compared to burial, an analysis of such places reveals the emerging issues tied to cremation as a method of final disposition. Like cemeteries, gardens provide a tangible dimension to the intangibility of death. The friend or relative is not gone, but is located in one spot. Thereafter, all who knew the deceased still know

where to find him or her. Whether traditionally buried or cremated, once placed in a valued location, one feels the dead are neither gone nor forgotten. By using a gravesite or a garden site, the living get a sense of permanence for the lives of those dear and for their own lives as well (Shimron 1996). In Decatur, the families know precisely where the deceased are, whether interred in a grave or in a garden plot. At Covenant church, mourners have a place to visit their relatives, too. In all gardens, the dead remain with the living, kept in a sacred place in the community. When we value each other, where we place our dead is sacred to us. Thus, the gardens may be sacred socially, if not religiously. When we place our dead together, communally laid to rest in the garden, we keep them in the community. In this way, cremation gardens, like cemeteries, help protect social ties.

Yet, in another way cremation gardens also transform social ties. Cremation hastens the removal of the body from life, turning it back to nature. The symbolic message designed into these gardens reflects this dimension of cremation. Cremation reminds us of the common prayer spoken over the body, "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust" (*The Book of Common Prayer* 1969: 395), that reminds the living of the impermanence of life and the inevitable return to nature. Gardens in their very design emphasize the triumph of nature over the remains of the living. The memorialization of the deceased is subordinated to, more than cohabitated with, the pastoral holistic serenity of the natural world. Nature triumphs over death. As it does, the dead are further removed from the living. They become more intangible, less permanent, less identifiable. Visitors to the gardens at Decatur City Cemetery and Covenant Presbyterian Church can learn little about those remaining there due to the few individual identifiers permitted. Only the families know of their lives in detail and of the exact whereabouts of the ashes. Thus, the lives of the dead become more distant to the community; only what is left of their bodies remains. Unless one knew the person when alive, one does not know if he or she went to church regularly, served in the military, or liked baseball. There is no lasting record of personal involvement with social institutions or social activities. There is no

record of marriage or means by which to designate spouses or families. One only knows that there are people here who once lived.

Cremation, then, modifies the ties between the living and the dead. It weakens them by altering our methods of memorialization. The use of a garden for storing the cremated remains is a compromise between trying to keep the deceased intact as if still alive, as in burial, and allowing the dead to disappear from our midst all together. In these gardens, the deceased stay among us, though a little more vaguely than the buried dead. As mourners, we remember the cremated dead personally and let others know they were here, but still honor their wishes not to have their bodies so carefully preserved. In this way, we can preserve our connections with them, even if transformed a bit. They become closer to nature, but seemingly not totally removed from us.

Cremation gardens, with the benefits and limitations they provide, are not just isolated to the two cases of Decatur City Cemetery and Covenant Presbyterian Church. Such gardens are being constructed in other locations as well. The town of Durham, North Carolina has had to make plans for the city's cremated (Donovan 1996), and many churches have created places for the cremated dead (Shimron 1996). Whether a garden allowing for the scattering of ashes or a garden providing for the inurnment of ashes in a columbarium, the cremated dead, as at Decatur and Covenant, have less identification than the buried (Shimron 1996). Provision for the listing of the names of the dead on a garden wall, walkway, or 13 x13 inch columbarium niche door do not provide as much information about the dead as a headstone. For instance, "Cemeteries have 'scatter gardens' landscaped with paths and planted with roses or other flowers" (Santoro and Bilodeau 1998: 80). The City of London Cemetery has created a garden for the strewing of ashes complete with a sundial, seats, rosebushes, and shrubs, but set away from the formal chapels and main avenues within the cemetery (Francis, Kellaher, and Neophytou 2005). In London's garden, a small memorial plaque, placed by rosebush or a shrub, can be dedicated with only the name of the cremated deceased but without any epitaph. One Episcopal church in Spartanburg, South Carolina, has

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a garden design for cremated remains that is heavily landscaped with symbolic meaning embodied in the design of nature, using evergreens to signify eternal life and a low rising wall to signify the upward journey of faith, for example (Batkin 1999). The dead, though, in the church's design, are interred in one square foot grassy plots without name plaques. Just as it does at Decatur and Covenant, nature, in these examples, dominates the dead and the living in the places where they can meet.

In sum, then, cremation gardens are a useful example of the memorialization of the cremated dead. They are similar to burial in that they provide a permanent place for the dead within the community, an ordered and set aside locus of memorialization where the living can visit. Cremation gardens differ from cemeteries in that the gardens are isolated, often unmarked, with the deceased minimally known if at all. In these gardens the ashes of the dead have gone back to nature almost completely. As landscaping takes center stage, nature dominates the dead and the living, and the dead are less identified, personalized, and individualized than the dead buried in our normative park style cemeteries. As a visitor, I perceive that the differences with burial are more striking than the similarities. Accustomed to landscaped cemeteries, it is alien to have the dead nearly or completely unidentified. Such locales are more gardens than burial grounds and, as such, are less of an established social institution within the community than are cemeteries (French 1975). But, given the many possible final resting places for ashes, cremation gardens provide a quality comparison and contrast with burial. As a point of first departure from burial, along a continuum from burial in landscaped cemeteries to the scattering of ashes at random in the wild, memorial gardens for the cremated show us how the contemporary care of the dead is deviating from old norms, to remove the dead from being kept like the living to the egress of the dead far into nature instead.

The Anonymous Dead

Absent Customs of Cremation Memorialization

When evaluating the memorialization of the cremated dead, whether in cremation gardens or not, it is just as important to consider what we are *not* doing, as a society, as it is to consider what we are doing. After cremation, the ashes may be taken to a cremation memorial garden, or scattered somewhere near or away from home, as many individuals express a preference for in surveys. Such options are our current ways of memorializing the cremated. But there are also options that we, as a culture and society, are not selecting or using. These options, as possible alternate customs of cremation memorialization, are absent from our culture. They are just as important to analyze as the options we choose, because examining what we are not doing clarifies the value, import, and meaning associated with what we are doing to memorialize cremated individuals.

For example, we could have possibly chosen to bury all the people in our society who choose to be cremated. We could take all containers of ashes and inter them in our currently traditional landscaped park style cemeteries, just as we do those who have not been cremated but kept intact and embalmed. In this case, cremation would not mean alternate forms of both disposition and memorialization but only an alternate form of body disposition. Then, all of the dead would be memorialized in the same way, by burial in a plot with a standard size headstone in a traditional cemetery. Figure 4.11 exemplifies this alternative. Cemeteries could be designed with the burial plots for intact bodies set a little father apart than they are customarily set now. Between the plots for traditional body length caskets and vaults, one foot square plots could be laid out for the interment of cremated remains, along with the erection of normal sized headstones over the plots for the cremated as well as over the plots of the non-cremated. Cemeteries would thus be filled, over time, with the cremated and the traditionally buried kept side by side. Both kinds of burials would be integrated throughout the pastoral lawn type cemetery.

But we are not interring and erecting headstones over all of the cremated. If cremation meant the same thing to us as burial, we *could* treat the two like. But we do *not*. With cremation, we have not kept all our burial customs and applied them to the cremated. We could have kept all our traditional customs of burial in cemeteries and just interred ashes and bodies alike. But the treatment of ashes, as compared to the treatment of bodies, changes the whole game of memorialization. We, as a culture, feel *obligated* to treat ashes differently. It is evident in the customs we have for the cremated compared with the customs we do not have. We must memorialize differently, because to us ashes are different than bodies. They do not mean the same thing. According to our customs, the dead are not the same when in the form of a whole body as when in the form of a container of ashes. They are not equal. Therefore, we are not erecting headstones over all of the cremated. We are not taking care of them and identifying them in the same way we do a deceased body.

As a second example, we could possibly use the creative idea of a cremation garden, but place it in the middle of a cemetery. We could design a cremation garden in the middle of graves. Figure 4.12 exemplifies this alternative. The cremation garden could be comprised of a brick walkway to a center brick circle. The circle, in this design, has a central opening with grass and a tree in the middle and includes two benches located on the brick circle on either side of the tree. Ashes could be scattered into the grass under the tree with the first ring headstones outside the circle being erected to memorialize those who have been scattered there. Subsequent rings of headstones are erected over standard sized plots for the interment of deceased bodies in caskets and vaults. In this way, the cremated and the traditionally buried are interwoven within the cemetery. As space requires, more gardens, of the same open and interrelated design, could be constructed throughout the cemetery, possibly with computer stations within the gardens to view memorials of the cremated and the buried, instead of headstones, if one prefers. In the design in Figure 4.12, the cremated in gardens are not kept separate and isolated off to one side, as they are in the Decatur City Cemetery and at Covenant Presbyterian Church. In this design, all of the dead are integrated with one

another, the gardens are open, and the cremated are as identified as the traditionally buried with equal sized headstones, to be filled in with the normal names, dates, and inscriptions.

It is also worth noting that cost is not the issue why we separate out the cremated dead into small, less identified gardens and columbaria. A small garden created open in the middle of the cemetery is equal in cost to the exact same small garden set secluded and off to one side. The construction of a cremation garden in a cemetery was cheaper in the past, in terms of labor and materials, but cremation did not catch on then. Also, the same columbarium can be placed in an open and central location, such as by a road, by an entrance, or by the sexton's office, just as affordably as it can in a separate, secluded, and unmarked garden within the cemetery. Further, selling cremation plots between burial plots can actually provide a cheaper alternative for customers and cemetery owners alike, because cremation plots are smaller allowing for a greater number of spaces sold per acre than in a cemetery of traditional burial plots alone.

However, we are not creating cremation gardens in central and integrated locations amid traditional burials in cemeteries. The absence of the custom of locating cremation memorial gardens openly within the cemetery's graves underscores the sense of separateness that we bring to our treatment of the cremated dead. There is nothing inherent in ashes that requires their separation from traditional burials, just as there is nothing inherent in burial that requires the degree of memorialization we give it. Separating ashes from burial, and a lack of identification on par with the buried, are customs we *bring* to our care of the dead. "Commemoration of cremated remains has taken a number of forms, but most cremations are not marked with a memorial" (Mytum 2003: 806). By examining what we are not doing, we learn more about the customs we are creating. Absent memorialization customs help us see that culture is much of the reasoning behind the current behavior of humans in the treatment of their cremated dead, when differing treatments do not automatically entail differing practices and costs, but differing meanings. In the City of London Cemetery, "Lawson cypress and arbor vitae were planted to screen off the distinct landscapes of

burial and cremation - two contrasting views of the meaning and practices of death and memory" (Francis, Kellaher, and Neophytou 2003: 44).

Present Customs of Cremation Memorialization

All of the present customs of memorializing the cremated dead, along a continuum from the less common to the more common, ranging from burial in a traditional cemetery plot, to the use of cremation gardens, to the scattering of ashes in a known location, to the scattering of ashes at random in the wild, must be taken into account when evaluating what we are doing with the cremated dead (Hatch 1993). The continuum of present options can, in fact, be looked at as a range of selections from that in which the dead are most preserved to that in which the dead are completely returned to nature. The preservation of identity as well as the preservation of ashes as a set ranges from the most known and detailed to the least known and obscured or absorbed by nature. As surveys have shown, very few people who plan to be cremated plan to be buried in cemetery plots while most plan to be scattered in some manner or another. Cremation gardens have shown us a point of first departure from the customs of burial along the continuum. Therefore, the scattering of ashes ranges even further along the continuum from the customs of burial. Thus, when understood as a continuum of present customs of cremation memorialization (Hatch 1993), the more common option for the final disposition of the cremated, scattering, leaves the dead less intact, less preserved, less identified, and less available to the living than the other alternatives. As a result, when compared to burial, the present customs of memorialization for the cremated not only keep the dead looking less like the living, but take the dead far away from the living.

When we return to the question that began this chapter of where are all the dead, the cremated dead are the more anonymous dead. Given that cremation is on the rise in the West (Ansaldo 2005), the question of finding, identifying, and visiting the dead may not be as easy a question for future generations to answer as it is for me. At present, I can find the Western dead in cemeteries, mostly pastoral, landscaped

ones, though with a few at church still, in ossuaries, and in the catacombs of Europe for the people before that. These places may stay, but the more newly dead will become harder to find. There are many implications to this new pattern in our current customs of memorialization, which include, but are not limited to, a decreased presence of the dead, a decreased sense of social ties, a decreased means by which to trace genealogy, and a decreased sense of security from social and physical annihilation. Where are all the dead? It is a question of considerable concern, because the implications of how this question is answered affect all of the living, not just all of the dead.

Figure 4.1 Map of Decatur City Cemetery

Stone
Wall

Grassy
Areas

Plaque
of
Names

**Ashes
Interred**

Bench

Pebbled
Walkway

Shrubs
and
Trees

Section
Marker
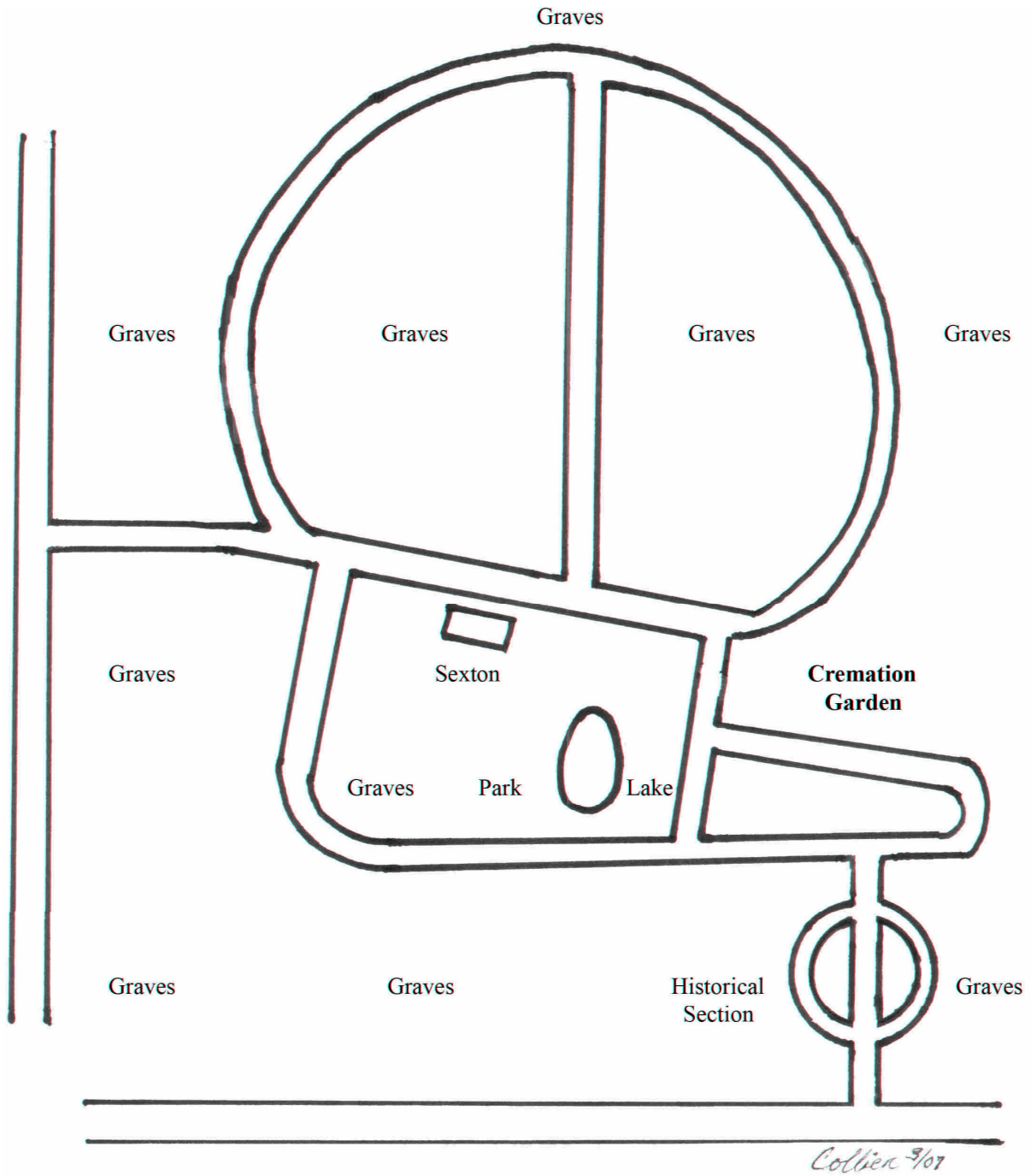
Entrance
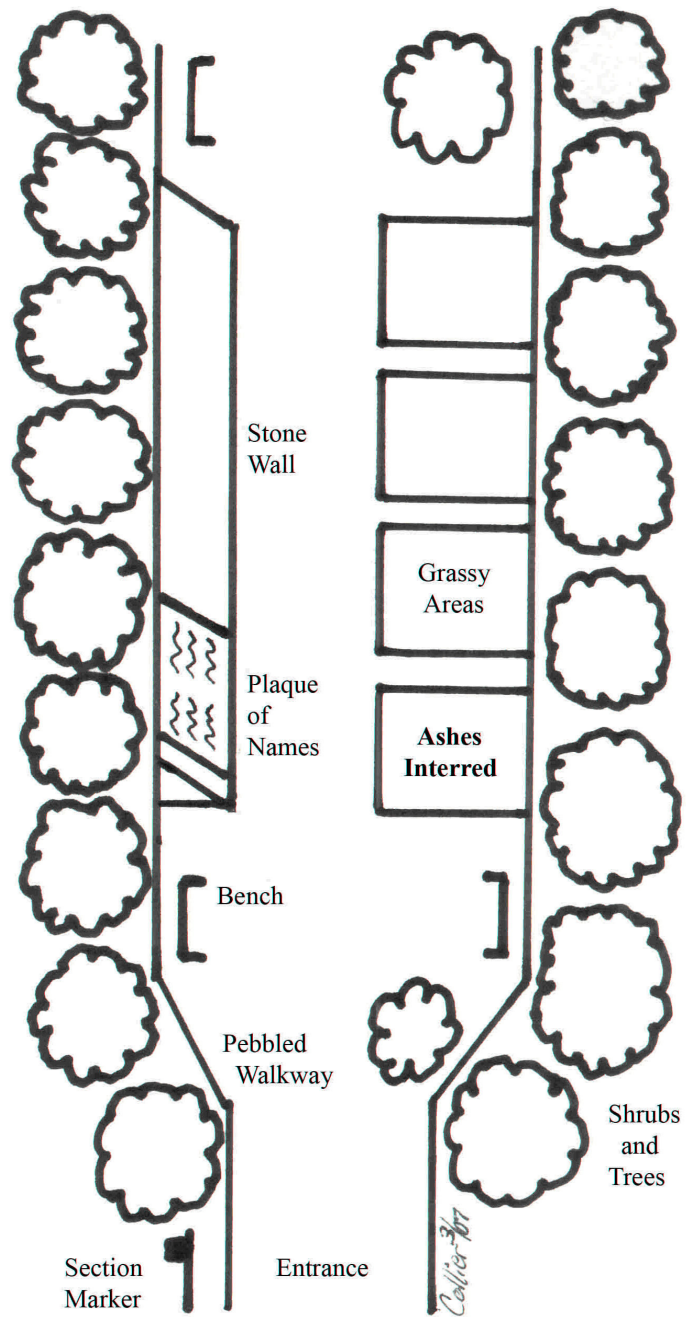
Figure 4.2 Map of Decatur Cremation Garden

Figure 4.3 Front View of Decatur Cremation Garden
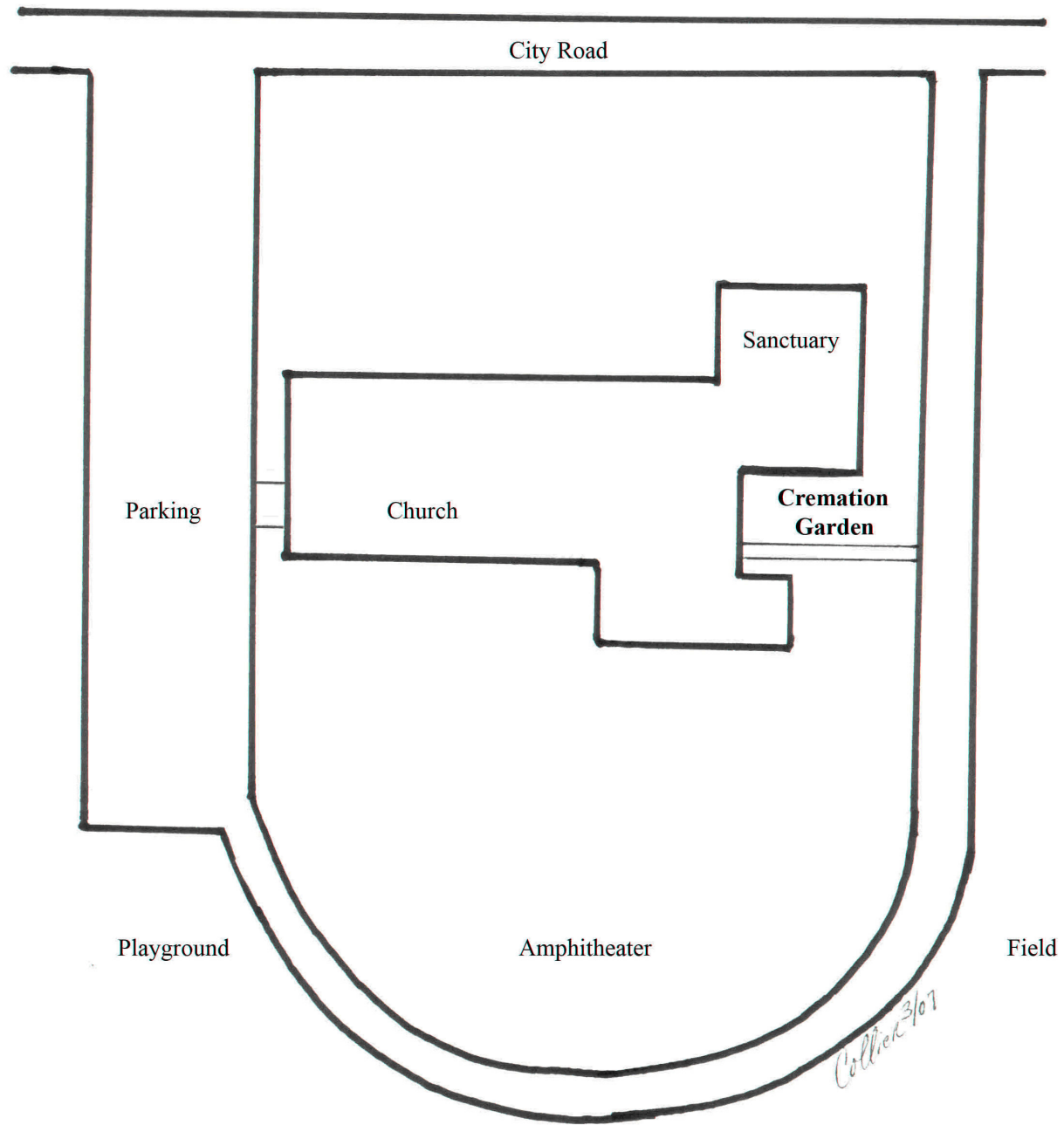
Figure 4.4 Map of Covenant Presbyterian Church

Sanctuary

Ashes Scattered

Shrubbery
Wall
Bench
Tree
Brick Circle
Grass
Driveway
Sidewalk

Church
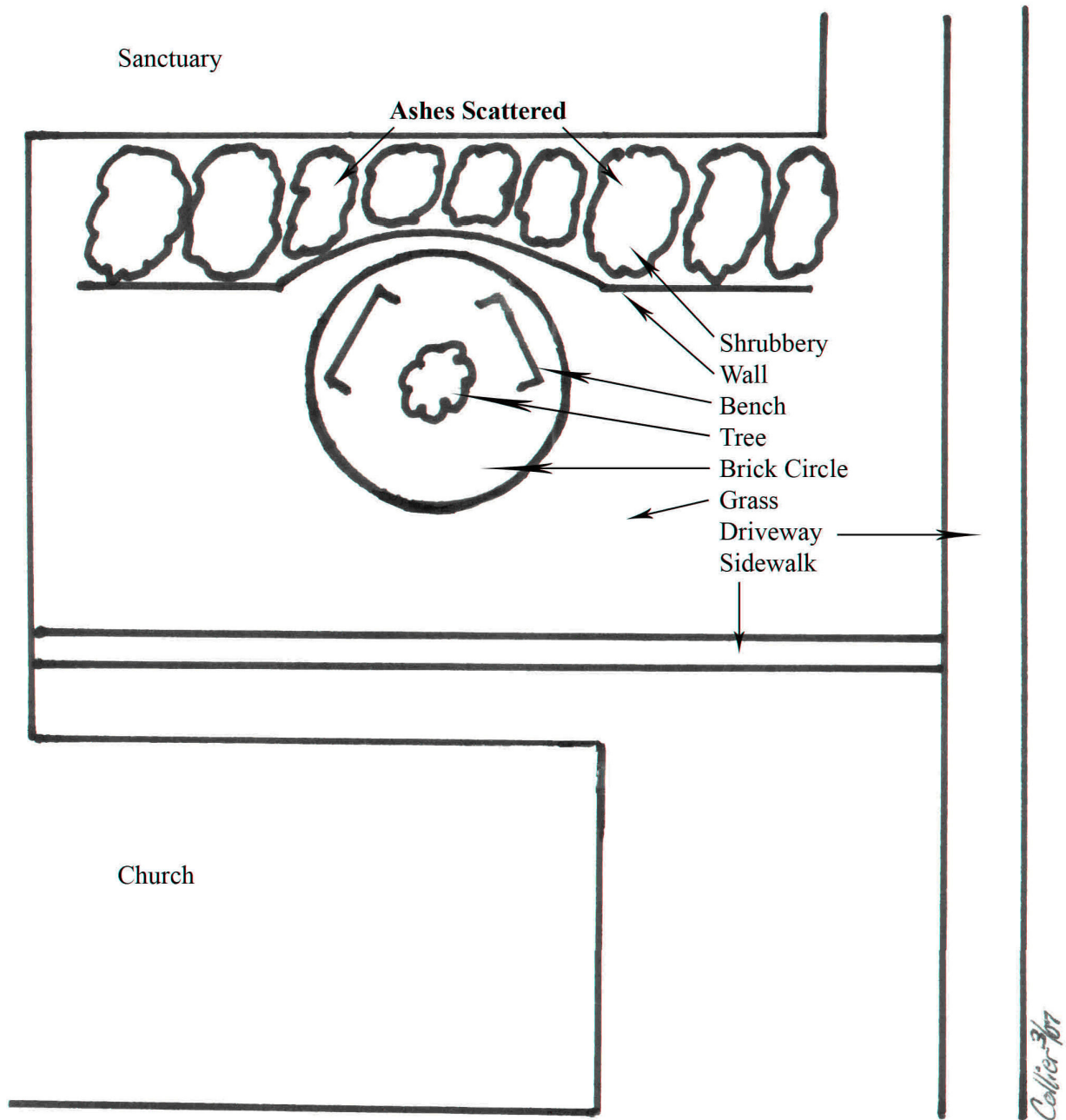
Figure 4.5 Map of Covenant Cremation Garden

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Figure 4.6 Approach to Covenant Cremation Garden

Figure 4.7 Entrance to Decatur Cremation Garden

Figure 4.8 Rear View of Decatur Cremation Garden

Figure 4.9 Close-up of Covenant Cremation Garden

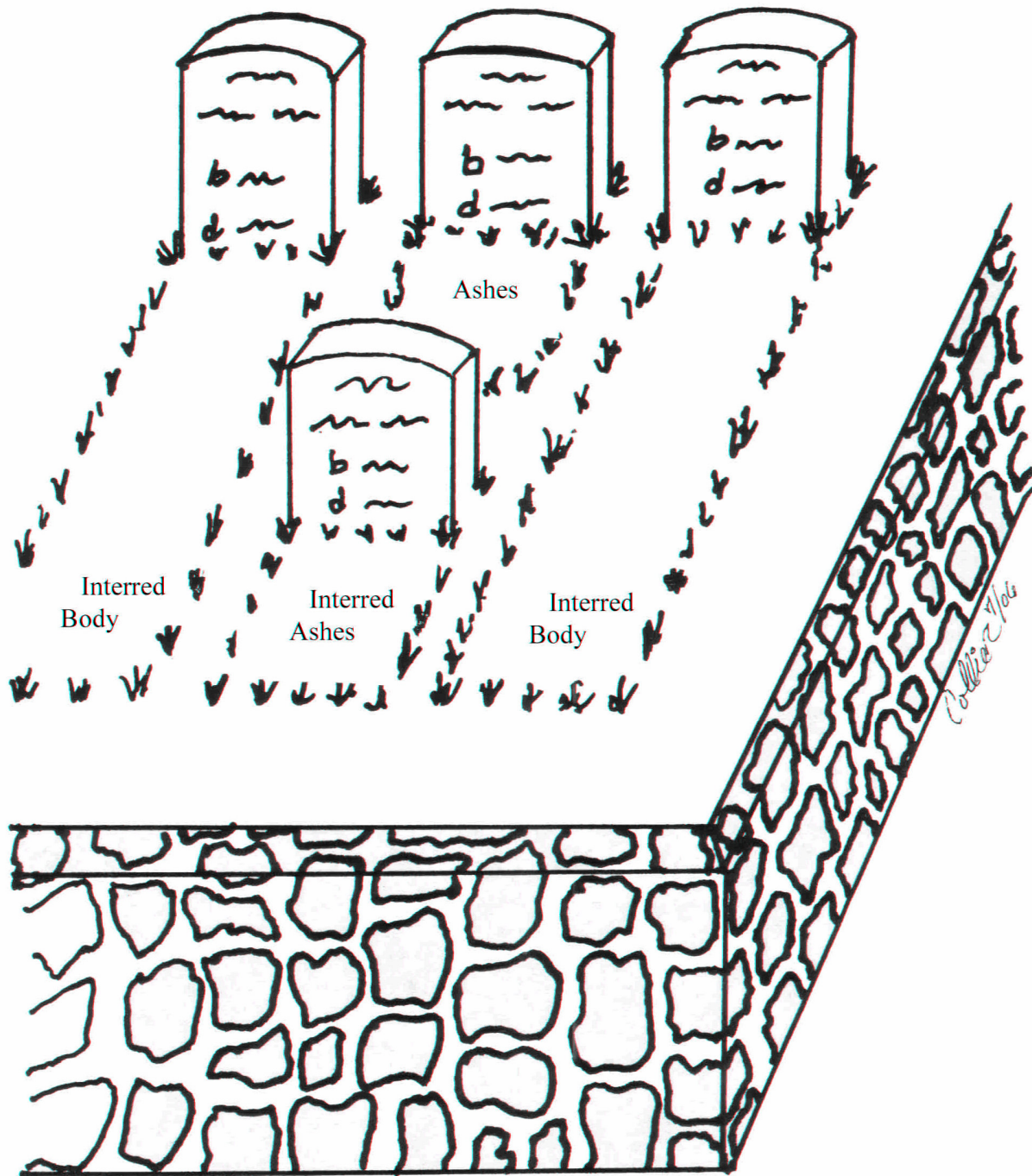Figure 4.10 Rear View of Covenant Cremation Garden

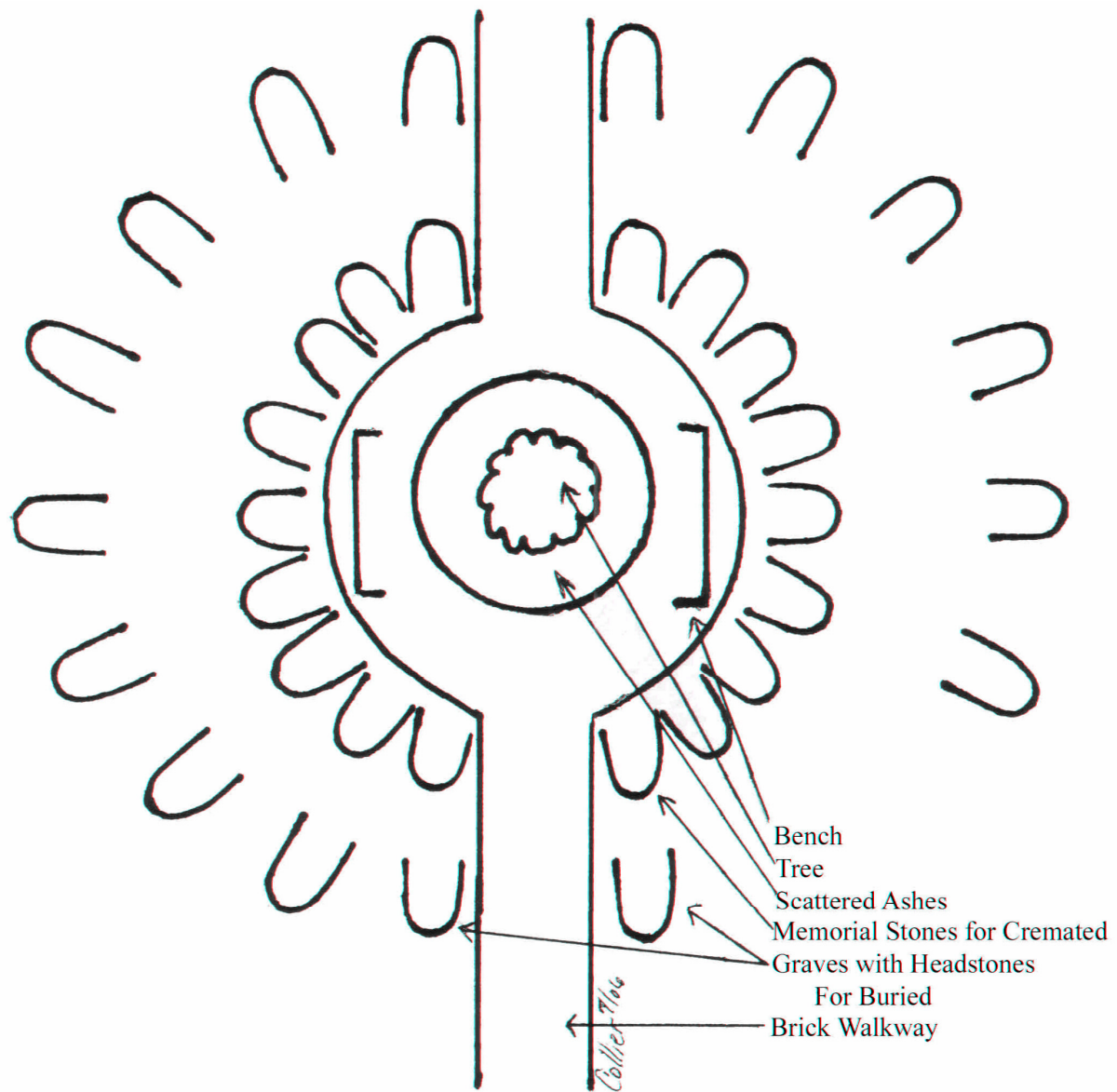Figure 4.11 Theoretical Design of Cremation Interments Traditional Burials

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Figure 4.12 Theoretical Design of Cremation Garden Blended into Cemetery

CHAPTER 5

PROFESSIONAL, LEGAL, AND NATIONAL RESPONSES TO CREMATION

In addition to examining what people say about cremation and what people do with cremation, it is important to examine the context in which these thoughts and actions occur. Surveys provide information on what people think about cremation, and an analysis of the experience of cremation gardens has given us an understanding of the new memorialization practices. Together these sources have revealed the meanings surrounding cremation as a new system of funerary practice. But society's response to the emergence of a new cultural system, such as that forming around the dramatic rise in the people's use of cremation, occurs in the context of the response of its social institutions. It is the function of institutions to maintain cultural values (Schwartz 1996: 914). Thus, social institutions must also change and adapt as the culture changes. Consequently, in my analysis of cremation, I have consulted professionals, examined changes in the laws, investigated the interests of the state, considered the response of the funeral industry, and evaluated national funerary statistics and surveys in order to understand the institutional context (governmental, legal, religious, and economic) in which cremation presently exists. To this end, I will present my findings in three sections within this chapter. The first is the results of my discussions with professionals, then my findings about laws and the state, and lastly an assessment of national cremation statistics and surveys.

Consultations with Professionals

Institutions are made up of people. Therefore, over the course of my research, ministers, sextons, monument makers, funeral directors, and cremation society directors have spoken with me in order to share their experiences with and responses to the rise in cremation in contrast to burial. For example, as I

conducted my research, sextons and ministers would follow me around and discuss issues in cremation that

they had experienced over the course of their work. In total, I have been involved in sixteen consultations.

After talking with these individuals, it is clear that the dominant theme in their experiences with cremation

is innovation. The prevalence of cremation is new, and their responses as agents within institutions has had

to be improvised, because no pattern, recipe, or cultural template has previously been available to follow. I

found that the concerns and difficulties these professionals have faced, in the process of dealing with

cremation, fall into the four thematic areas of ritual, theology, memorialization, and mobility. Below is a

description of each of these areas and the specific dilemmas that comprise them. Following these

descriptions, I present the multiple innovations that professionals have devised in order to deal with the

dilemmas associated with cremation.

Ritual

Cremation is technically only the transformation of the body into ash. However, ministers, sextons,

funeral directors, and cremation society directors show that the cremated are not being ritualized in the

same way as the buried, because a transformation of the body is also a transformation of meaning. That the

body is very meaningful in Western societies is reflected in the traditional funeral service. For example,

ministers presiding over the funeral service of an embalmed person about to be buried address the

congregation with the service centered over "the body here today." But with the rise in cremation,

ministers who had never presided over a cremation service found themselves having to make changes in

the language of their services at several key points throughout the service. For instance, they could no

longer talk of "the body of Fred Smith here today" when there was no body present. As one church

minister noted, "You can't have a traditional committal service when there is no body to commit to the

ground." Even the degree to which the person of the deceased is present at the service is affected by the

transformation of the body into ash. Keeping the body whole leaves those attending the funeral with a

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feeling that Fred is present, at least in body. Yet, once cremated, the service becomes more of a memorial service with Fred absent and less of a funeral service with Fred present. Thus, ministers, sextons, and directors report feeling a need to change the language they use with cremation in contrast to burial. In addition, cremation presents other concerns in effecting a ritual remembrance of the dead. In one case, the deceased was cremated and readied for a service but the family was not ready. Therefore, there was a long delay of months that dragged on into years as the family members waited until everyone could get together for a service. The ashes that were to be scattered in a cremation garden were simply held by one family member and the minister placed on standby until the family was ready. Only years later did the ceremony take place.

The sexton at Decatur City Cemetery, in Decatur, GA, pointed out another dilemma posed by changes in the ritual care of the dead with cremation as opposed to burial. With both cremation and burial people bring flowers, notes, holiday items, and other commemorative objects to the interment site. But for the cremated, who are, in this case, interred in one foot square plots without headstones, there is virtually no room for such commemorative memorabilia. Nevertheless, the cemetery found people insisted on remembering the cremated in this way, and the sexton and his staff had to find a way to accommodate them. A change in the form of disposition of the dead, then, requires a change in the rituals surrounding the deceased. In certain specific situations, ministers, sextons, funeral directors, and cremation society directors have found that the cremated cannot be ritually commemorated in exactly the same way as the buried.

Theology

Ministers report finding that some members of their congregations have a hard time accepting cremation on theological grounds, since Christians have traditionally been buried. Congregants feel cremation is unchristian, because there would be no body ready for the Resurrection, because as the temple

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of the soul it is a sin to destroy the body, because Jesus was buried as an exemplar, and because cremation

is not explicitly mentioned in the Bible even though fire and dust are (Gowan 2003; for a Biblical

reference on returning to dust see Genesis 3:19). All of the ministers who spoke to me reported having to

spend some time theologically reassuring church members about cremation. One church minister said,

"Family members usually do not choose cremation without the express knowledge of the deceased's

wishes." Although part of the congregation seemed to accept cremation more readily, others did not. While

the ministers, sextons, funeral directors, and cremation society directors all reported being comfortable

with cremation from the start, they also reported that it was different for the lay public. This was not just a

matter of language. This issue went to people's very beliefs about their religion and their own bodies. In

one case, at Covenant Presbyterian Church, in Athens, GA, the minister said theological reassurances

about cremation were needed for many members for over ten years. There was a ten year interval between

the initial proposal of creating a cremation garden at the church and the actual construction of one. With

such a garden bringing cremation directly to the church, so that ashes would actually be scattered on

church property, it was necessary to quell any fears the congregation had. Ministers and others involved in

funerary practices have found that the rise in cremation is not a simple matter for Christians, who, like

Jews, have opposed it for so long. Rather, cremation has proven to be at times a delicate subject that brings

with it its own theological dilemmas that require innovative solutions.

Memorialization

Historically, there have been two kinds of cremation, which are direct cremation and cremation

with memorialization. Direct cremation is a matter of having the body cremated without any

memorializing, such as a viewing, a service at a church or funeral home, or a place to bury the ashes with a

gravemarker. In the past, before cremation caught on in America, direct cremation is what was done for

those too poor to opt for traditional burial. In this form, direct cremation served the needs of disposing of

the corpse and nothing more. Much of the historical criticism of cremation, then, was criticism of direct cremation. A cremation society director commented, "I feel people make too much out of cremation as a cheap, throwaway option." Referring to direct cremation, another funerary professional, a cemetery sexton, said, "There are a lot of trends in what we do with the dead, but not all are for the better." Critics feel that direct cremation is an inadequate form of caring for and remembering the dead. Consequently, as cremation has risen in popularity among the public, options for memorialization have also expanded. Professionals have seen the need to encourage cremation with memorialization in order to counter the limitations of direct cremation. From a viewing, to a memorial service at a church or a funeral home, to a placement in a cremation garden, to a scattering service at sea, memorialization in its many forms allows for more recognition of the person who has lived. As a result, ministers and sextons report a higher comfort level, for themselves, for cremation with memorialization than for direct cremation alone. Funeral directors and cremation society directors also support cremation with memorialization, but for an additional reason. Memorialization allows for additional sales beyond the single service of cremating the corpse for a customer. The funeral industry has regarded cremation as limited in the income it can bring in, but that thinking is changing (Kubasak 1990). At present, for a funeral director to provide cremation only, he or she misses an additional potential point of sale in the business transaction with the customer. Selling cremation with memorialization means selling an urn, a plaque, or a funeral service in addition to the service of cremating the body.

Mobility

A fourth theme brought out by professionals is mobility. Professionals report they have encountered the issue of mobility in two forms. First, ideas for what to do with the cremated have traveled from place to place in our increasingly mobile society. Second, as family members have moved around, they have seen the need for a more portable means of remembering their deceased relatives than interment

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in a specific geographical place. In the first instance, people on the move have shared ideas, of how to treat the cremated, with those in their new location that they have first seen where they lived before. For example, the idea of creating a cremation memorial garden at Covenant Presbyterian Church in Athens, Georgia came from a congregant who had seen one where he lived in Florida. Memorial gardens have been an appealing idea to those in retirement communities in Florida, because many individuals are no longer tied to family homes and family burial plots in the North. As a result, they have felt open to considering new ways of disposing of their bodies and caring for their remains. This idea traveled from Florida to Athens, Georgia when one congregation member of the church moved back to Athens. As the church's minister recounted, "Our society is more mobile now, less tied to place, and cemeteries have become more secular, less tied to churches. But burial is returning to churches with cremation when ashes are buried in a church's cremation garden." In other instances, people have requested ways of caring for and remembering the dead that are more portable should they move away from the area where the loved one died. The sexton at Decatur City Cemetery recalls customers who had a loved one cremated and bought a plot for the interment of the cremated remains in the Cemetery's memorial garden. However, when the survivors moved to other areas, they asked the sexton if it was possible to disinter the ashes in the container and sell the plot back to the cemetery. The first time this request was made, the sexton had never encountered it before. But, over time, the sexton encountered more requests for the same need for portability of the deceased and had to innovate a solution posed by this dilemma of mobility.

Innovations

To all the problems and dilemmas with cremation posed by ritual, theology, memorialization, and mobility, professionals who work with death have had to innovate solutions. In terms of ritual, ministers dealing with funerals have had to make accommodations when adapting a service for a cremation from a traditional service for a burial. Without a separate institutionalized tradition to follow for cremation,

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professionals have borrowed from our cultural traditions for burial. Specifically, ministers report that their cremation services borrow from burial services some of the same prayers for the deceased and some of the same old and new testament scripture. However, the language changes for a cremation service specifically at the beginning of the service, at the committal, and at the benediction. Ceremonies for the cremated are reported to be longer than a gravesite service, but shorter than a traditional funeral. One minister said that at his church there are no bulletins or programs for the cremation memorial ceremonies, like there are for those being buried. The improvisations that these ministers have reported to me are consistent with the increasingly common practice of personalizing and individualizing cremation ceremonies. In fact, without a tradition for cremation services, which establishes boundaries, people have become very creative in developing novel forms, from services which emphasize the secular hobbies of the deceased (Kilborn 2004) to celebratory parties as fun funerals (Gadberry 2000), all of which focus the ritual on life, not on death (Kearl 2004). The commemorative objects mourners bring to graves and cremation gardens, such as flowers, letters, photos, and flags, are becoming increasingly common and creative, too. At Decatur City Cemetery, an unofficial policy had to be created because mourners of the cremated kept repeatedly bringing and leaving objects, even though there is not as much room to place items over the one square foot plots as there is over graves. The small plots, in which cremated remains are interred, are part of larger whole grassy sections wherein the dead are not individually identified and comprise part of a scene of the garden as a beautiful whole. Therefore, in this case, the innovation is that commemorative objects are not officially allowed in the cemetery's cremation garden but are unofficially tolerated for a short period of time then later removed.

Ministers and funeral directors have also had to work hard to help those who feel confused by theological concerns about cremation. Efforts to help the theologically unsure has required innovations in church practices. For example, at Covenant Presbyterian Church, the minister has conducted classes, written Sunday school lessons, and held discussions with the congregation over how cremation can be

accepted as Christian. While the default form of disposition is still burial, and the family only cremates a loved one if he or she expressly wished it, the congregation at Covenant has come to accept cremation and the building of a cremation garden at the church. Acceptance came slowly, though, as the idea for the garden arrived ten years before the congregation became fully ready on theological grounds to have one built. The minister afforded this analysis: "People are accepting cremation because churches are becoming more secular, people are thinking more individually, and the culture has changed." At present, the church has completely accepted cremation says Covenant's minister.

While spiritual acceptance is a theological concern, memorialization is more of a social concern. From a social standpoint, memorialization is the living recognizing the value of the person that the lost social member once was. However, from the standpoint of the funeral industry, memorialization means more to sell and the solution to the dilemma of the problem of direct cremation. According to Jack M. Springer, Executive Director of the Cremation Association of North America (CANA), CANA is there to promote memorialization to the funeral industry. CANA is a trade organization that serves the needs of businesses that supply cremation services. For the industry, memorialization equals the sales of services and objects, from the sales of memorial services to the sales of urns and columbaria. As Jack Springer says, "Cremation is not the end. Cremation is preparation for memorialization." There are many opportunities to memorialize the dead after cremation. Springer even encourages multiple memorializations in which a memorial service at a funeral home can be held, and a monument to the deceased erected in a memorial park, for relatives in one state and the same thing done again in another state for other relatives, for example. Consequently the industry can create packages of sales and services, such as embalming and viewing, use of the funeral hall, and a memorial service presided over by a funeral director, before cremation, and an urn, columbaria niche, and monument, after cremation. Embalming is not usually sold as part of cremation. But, one funeral director pointed out that, "in order to have a viewing or closed casket visitation prior to cremation embalming is required by law." Further, sales come from many sources, a

cremation society director said, "A lot of our customers are referred to us through word of mouth advertising." Nowadays, packages of services for cremation can nearly equal packages for burial in cost and activity. The multitude of options for memorialization are only limited by the imagination of the family, and/or funeral director, and the pocketbook(s) of the relatives. CANA, furthermore, is not the only one within the industry advocating cremation with memorialization over direct cremation. Michael Kubasak, 1990, has written a book, *Cremation and the Funeral Director: Successfully Meeting the Challenge*, to teach funeral directors what they can get out of cremation and how to do it. Batesville Casket Company, an old standard in the industry, has also had web pages posted on its website for funeral directors and ministers on how to serve and preside over cremation events. Innovation is the key to solving the dilemma of direct cremation. "Without memorialization, you are only doing disposals. Scattering is for the deceased; memorialization is for the living," said a cremation society director. Socially, professionals are innovating ways to memorialize the person at memorial services, and, commercially, businesses are innovating greater and greater ways to sell memorialization to the cremation consumer.

The solutions to the problem of social mobility are also innovative. At Decatur City Cemetery, where customers who have interred ashes in plots and later wanted to take the ashes with them when they moved, cemetery authorities have had to figure out how to allow for the portability of cremated remains. Initially, these relatives had to purchase a plot in the cemetery's cremation garden in which to bury their relative's urn, or otherwise durable box, of ashes. Originally, a plaque of names of those whose ashes were buried in the garden was provided by the cemetery. The plaque was secured to a low stone wall that runs along the opposite side of the walkway from the grassy plots. As each person was interred, his or her name plate, with years of birth and death included, was welded on to the permanent plaque. Yet, when relatives started to move and to take the deceased with them, the authorities not only had to create a policy for disinterring the urn and selling back the plot, but they had to decide what to do about the welded name plates. The solution improvised, said the sexton, was to make the name plates temporary. A new plaque

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replaced the old one, with name plates of the people who are interred there screwed into the plaque. Now the names of the dead are temporary, and name plates can be unscrewed and removed as the dead depart with the living.

Other matters of mobility have been similarly creatively solved. In a busy world, cremation is very accommodating. It allows people to gather for a memorial ceremony months after the death, when schedules of relatives and friends permit. This advantage was mentioned by ministers, sextons, and funeral and cremation society directors and is a selling point not overlooked by those in the industry. The benefit of having a delayed cremation and ceremony is additionally used to full advantage by the medical schools in Georgia. Collectively, the schools take those who donated their bodies to science and have the cadavers cremated and interred together in a cremation garden with a service for the families, all at the universities' expense. Mobility is also heightened by the product of cremation. Ashes can be divided, reports Jack Springer, such that a portion of the cremated remains are present in services in different cities at different times, with even another portion later taken to a favorite resort location meaningful to the deceased. As one church minister put it, "Compared to a full sized cemetery with old family plots, a cremation garden saves cost, space, and meets the needs of a mobile society." Creativity with cremation is further allowed for in cemeteries these days. "You can bury cremated remains in a cemetery plot for a casket with the ashes two feet underground above a vault four feet underground with a casket in it," said a cemetery sexton. This is because the old cemetery rules and laws are changing too. "You no longer have to bury everyone six feet under as long as the container is securely underground," reported one funeral director.

Given these changes, cremation and innovation seem synonymous. My goal is not to say that any of these particular innovations are universal, but rather to highlight that cremation requires the improvisation of the professionals in our institutions of which the above solutions to the issues of ritual, theology, memorialization, and mobility are examples. The professionals I have consulted have been dealing directly with the increase in the prevalence of cremation. The cases, dilemmas, and solutions they

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have handled are all real. Therefore, their input is valuable to an understanding of the institutional context in which the social and cultural significance of the rise of cremation in America is increasing.

Laws and the State

An examination of the institutional context in which cremation beliefs and actions occur must consider the governmental response to the recent rise in cremation, along with the institutional innovations of professionals such as ministers and funeral directors. Governmental response is part of the social response to the rise in cremation. Therefore, it is important to analyze the types of funerary concerns that require institutional, governmental level response in a society. State response is primarily conducted through the government's legislative and judicial branches as funeral practices, including new ones, are governed and regulated by law. How cremation serves as a cultural system is embodied in the laws of society, since laws are enacted to institutionalize cultural beliefs and values. Consequently, laws can be read, in turn, in order to illuminate exactly what those formalized beliefs and values are with regards to burying or cremating the dead.

Law and the Dead

The dead do not have the same legal rights and protections as the living, because society does not hold the same cultural regard for the dead as for the living. The living are responsible for the dead, but the fulfillment of that responsibility is full of inconsistencies. Our concept of human rights only partially extends to the dead. The bodies of the dead are part persons and part objects. Yet, although the corpse is objectified, the dead do not really belong to anyone. "No one actually 'owns' a dead human body" (Aiken 2001:192). Furthermore, according to the federal Social Security Administration, "a deceased person does not have any privacy rights" (Social Security 2005). For instance, a copy of one's application for a social security card can be given out after one's death, but access is much more limited for the living. While this

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is beneficial to anyone researching the deceased, such as genealogists, it underscores the differences in how our society and culture treat the living and the dead. The distinction extends beyond the institutional regard for a corpse to the governmental, legal management of those hired to care for the dead in the death care industry. As one author observed, in relation to the state of Ohio:

> The dead don't have the law on their side. Regulation of the death industry is shoddy and spotty, with crematories low on their list of priorities. It wasn't until 1998, for example, that Ohio passed a law requiring crematories to be licensed and inspected (Rosen 2004:21).

If the laws for burying the dead do not form a coherent and consistent whole, then the laws for cremating the dead have lagged even further behind. This is true not only in Ohio but in Georgia as well. The most dramatic example of the need to upgrade cremation legislation in Georgia came in February 2002, with the exposure of the Tri-State crematory case. In this case, literally hundreds of dead bodies had been delivered to the Tri-State crematory for years for cremations that were never performed (Pearson 2002). In Georgia, if not nationally, the Tri-State crematory case was pivotal in defining the role of the state and the law in the regulation of crematory practices. It is an instance in which funerary practice has driven the evolution of the law, not the reverse.

The Tri-State Case

On February 15, 2002 federal environmental officials of the Environmental Protection Agency received an anonymous tip about problems at the Tri-State crematory in the northwest corner of the State of Georgia (Tucker 2002). By Saturday the 16th investigators from the Environmental Protection Agency and more than 100 law enforcement officers were at the site uncovering hundreds of bodies from all over the property that the proprietors had not been cremating (Kinney and Hamrick 2002). Dead bodies had been stacked in buildings, stashed in a lake, and, in one case, left to rot in a hearse with four flat tires in the woods. Families had been given powdered concrete, cement, and wood chips in lieu of their loved ones'

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ashes (Arey 2004; Judd 2002). In the end, authorities counted 339 bodies, some of which could be identified and returned to the families while others could not be identified (Arey 2003; Brown 2003). Because the laws in Georgia were insufficient for addressing crimes involving dead bodies and cremation (Brown 2003; Stanford and Pearson 2002), the present owner, Ray Brent Marsh, was arrested and charged with numerous counts of business fraud, theft by deception, and abuse of a corpse (Arey 2002; Arey 2004; Firestone and McFadden 2002). When the trials were over by 2005, Marsh was imprisoned for twelve years with the possibility of parole in four years or less (Markiewicz 2005). However, as the case began in 2002, "people asked how such a tragedy could have happened and calls went out for government regulation" (Kinney and Hamrick 2002: 202). The first drafts of remedial legislation in Georgia were completed less than one week after the case broke. A bill was introduced into the house on February 18, 2002 and signed into law by the Governor, after some revisions, on May 9, 2002 (Kinney and Hamrick 2002).

Georgia Law Revised

Specifically, the remedial legislation in Georgia that followed the Tri-State crematory case addressed the abuse of a dead body, the abandonment of a dead body, the duration for retaining medical records, the definition of a crematory, and the license, inspection, and reporting requirements for crematories. The laws were revised in the Official Code of Georgia (O.C.G.A.), the primary volumes of Georgia law, also referred to as the Georgia Code. Section 31-21-44.1 was amended by further defining the abuse of a dead human body and making it a felony, punishable by imprisonment of at least one year and not greater than three years. To the offense of abuse of a dead body was added "the failure to inter, cremate, or refrigerate the dead body within 72 hours after taking custody of the body" (Kinney and Hamrick 2002:205). Prior to the Tri-State case, abuse of a dead body was illegal, but it was not a felony. As a result of the Tri-State case, it also became illegal to abandon a dead body which was not in the

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Georgia Code before. The offense of abandonment of a dead body was created such that the new Code section, 31-21-44.2, reads "any person who throws away or abandons any dead human body or portion of such body shall commit the offense of abandonment of a dead body" which is a felony. Further, in order to aid investigations of crematory practices, medical providers are now required to keep medical records for at least ten years.

Loopholes in the legal definition of crematories had allowed the Marsh family to avoid state inspections. Previously, a crematory subject to inspection had been defined as part of a funeral home that was open to the public, but since the Marsh family's operation was not part of a funeral home and not open to the public, it was not subject to existing regulations. The Marsh crematory was a separate business, independent of any one funeral home business, and it received bodies from other funeral homes that dealt directly with the families in making arrangements. Therefore, in the post-Tri-State case revisions of state law, the definition of a crematory became, in the Ga. Code § 43-18-1, "any place where a cremation is performed," so that all crematories could be regulated. The regulations of crematories have been changed to require inspections at least once a year, in Ga. Code § 43-18-75, licenses for all crematories in which all operators must submit to the State Board of Funeral Service the names of all the people they cremate, in Ga. Code § 43-18-72, and a written statement given to all people picking up containers verifying that the container actually contains the remains of the deceased, in Ga. Code § 43-18-8. (For further details of these legislated changes see the review by Kinney and Hamrick of the *Georgia State University Law Review,* Fall 2002.)

Social Implications

The legislated legal changes, resulting from the Tri-State case, reveal our social opinions about cremation, norms about what one can and cannot do with the dead as a body or as ashes, and the meaning the living associate with and imbue the dead with in our regard for people no longer alive, in addition to

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our government's institutional response in a crisis to a newly rising cultural practice. Social response to the Tri-State case illuminated public opinion about cremation and the dead. A review of such opinions highlights the feelings and beliefs people had at the time of the Tri-State case and prior to the ensuing legislation. The Marsh family's actions brought out in people a strong sense of right and wrong in the treatment of the dead. Neighbors, friends, and families in Walker County, Georgia, where the Tri-State crematory was located, and around Georgia, were bewildered about why and how the Tri-State scandal could have ever happened. They labeled the mistreatments of the dead "violations of human decency" (Tucker 2002: A16). Pat Higdon, for example, whose husband wanted cremation because his body was eaten up by cancer, was not given her husband's real ashes after his body went to Tri-State. When the scandal broke, she reported feeling the grief over his death all over again. A newspaper columnist wrote: "Higdon herself felt angry. Then depressed. And by Sunday, just sad. 'Like it was when he first died,' she said" (Judd 2002:A4).

Rabbi Harold Kushner, who wrote *When Bad Things Happen to Good People,* was quoted as saying of Marsh and his family, "The nature of the offense and the number of discarded bodies offend the conscience so much that we don't want these people to say 'I'm sorry, we all make mistakes'" (Staples 2002:B3). Georgia's Chief Medical Examiner at the time, Dr. Kris Sperry, called the Tri-State scandal "an incredible transgression of the universal respect for the dead that we have" and "a horror" wherein we treat our trash better than Marsh treated the dead (Arey 2002b:C5). What these lay and professional reactions reveal is that there is already a morality about cremation, even though it is a newly common practice. The subsequent laws created by the government, especially those making the abandonment of a dead human body a felony, made what was already a moral offense to the people into an institutionalized legal offense. Durkheim ([1893]1933, [1895]1964) noted that the deviant case underscores the norms, and the deviance of the Tri-State case underscored the moral norms that had been forming around the rise in cremation in America, which were soon to be legal norms in the State of Georgia. Although it was remedial legislation,

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in which there was a cultural lag (Ogburn [1932] 1961) between the social changes in funerary practice and our legal institution, with the increasing prevalence of cremation not yet having been responded to by the legal branch of the government, right and wrong became institutionalized with regards to cremation when the legislation was signed into law. Only after a highly publicized deviant incident were evolving norms codified into law.

Although Marsh was initially charged with business fraud, because those laws were already available, the legal response to the Tri-State case showed that cremation is more than a matter of business fraud. Further laws attest to what one can and cannot do with the dead when the body has been reduced to ash. Georgia Code section 31-21-4 requires that a burial at sea by the scattering of ashes in the ocean must be done at least three miles out to sea, with the ashes taken out of a container, and within fifty days of the death. A statement must be filed with the name of the cremated deceased, the time and place of death, and the place where the ashes are off shore. The statement is filed with the local registrar of births, deaths, and other vital records. In addition, if the ashes of a cremated person are not claimed from the crematory or funeral home, which happens, funeral directors tell me, because not every individual has a loved one who cares enough to take care of him or her after death (which in some cases may have been earned), then the ashes are taken by government officials and buried with the indigent. It is also legally prohibited for individuals to cremate a dead body on a self-made funeral pyre instead of a proper cremation machine called a retort in a licensed facility (Ga. Code § 31-21-5 (2003)). Despite the laws just mentioned, laws for cremation are still skimpy compared with laws for burial. For example, the law says very little about the scattering of ashes, other than at sea, in spite of the increasing creativity with which people are finding diverse final resting places for the cremated. Regulation seems to be more a matter of controlling the business of the industry, and that only after a case or scandal breaks, rather than addressing the concerns the public have for the dead.

More laws pertaining to burial predated the Tri-State case than did laws pertaining to cremation. What one can and cannot legally do with the dead is more regulated for the dead who still have intact bodies than for the dead who have become ash. Laws pertain to dead bodies both before and after internment. For instance, a death must be reported within six hours (Ga. Code § 31-21-44.1 (2003)). Even the very definition of death is a legal matter in a technological age (Blank 2001; Rodabough 2003; Santoro and Bilodeau 1998). Further, legislation has been passed governing the transportation of dead bodies (Ga. Code § 31-21-24 (2003)), making it unlawful to traffic in dead bodies (Ga. Code § 31-21-41 (2003)), and establishing terms of medical use and organ donation for the dead (Ga. Code § 44-5-140 (2003)). Legal regulations exist for cemeteries both active and abandoned (Voorhies 2003). For example, it is unlawful to disinter bodies (Ga. Code § 31-21-42 to 44 (2003)). or to disturb or destroy human remains (Ga. Code § 31-21-6 (2003)). Many laws can be grouped around the prohibition and prosecution of crimes such as murder, the permission and regulation of medical practice, and the establishment and maintenance of businesses. Few laws are aimed primarily at respecting and valuing the dead for themselves, and those that do objectify the dead as bodies, stripping them of personhood. Thus for these reasons it is often said, "the dead do not have the law on their side" (Rosen 2004:21). Sometimes lawmakers have tried to use burial law to help invent cremation law, but if there is not enough law respecting dead bodies to be buried, then there cannot be enough law protecting ashes and the person they once represented.

An examination of funerary laws means is that the dead are less of a human being with less of a social place in society than the living. The dead are less of a social member, less of a person, and more of a body as an object. The dead are partially, inconsistently, and inadequately respected by law, denoting an ambiguous social status. The Tri-State case is a strong example of the inadequate laws for the dead, of the disregard for the dead allowed by law, and of the inadequate institutional and governmental response to the dead in the absence of a crisis. Such legal negligence cannot be equated with moral negligence though, since the social offense taken to the Tri-State case was clearly a moral offense. The living were morally

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offended at the clearly wrong ways the Marsh family mishandled the bodies sent to their crematory. But the morality that makes up cremation as a cultural system, cremation as a cultural template of what to do and not do with the dead, is more focused on how to care for the dead before actual cremation takes place. The Tri-State case indicates that while we are beginning to develop norms about what is right and what is wrong with cremation, we are mostly understanding that in terms of dead bodies not in terms of cremated ashes. The beliefs and values associated with the dead when taking them to be buried have been transferred to the dead when taking them to be cremated. The development of cremation as a cultural system is not providing for any greater, and possibly less, protection for the dead under the law.

The bodies of the dead are only partially sacred to the living. If the dead and their bodies were truly sacred, there would be more legislation for more laws to protect the dead. If the dead were more revered and more special, as a body or as a person, then there would be more care dictated by more laws. Instead, the law, as an institutional governmental response, indicates a mixed regard for the dead. The law shows our opinions of the dead as a body. The body as past person is sacred, but the body as object is secular, with a value like refuse. This view embodied in the laws is actually consistent with the Christian view of the body embodied in our culture. Christians see the body as mixed, part secular physical refuse but with some sacred value as the host of the soul. Our legal protections reflect our mixed Christian based view of the bodies we have been burying. Yet U.S. society seems to be switching from burial, the presently dominant mode of disposing of the dead, to cremation, perhaps a future dominant mode of disposing of the dead. Based on the treatment of cremation under the law, it appears the dead who are cremated are even less protected than the dead who are buried. It took remedial legislation and the Tri-State case to get this far. While we may have borrowed cultural beliefs and values in order to know how to regard and care for the dead on their way to the crematory, we have done little to nothing to legally protect the dead once they are ash. Cremated ashes seem to have less value and be less sacred than a dead body. They are even less a person and less institutionally regulated by the government. After all, it is both legally and morally

acceptable to put ashes in a shoe box, but it raises social pity and moral offense to put a dead body in a mere cardboard box. We do not have the same laws for ashes as we do for dead bodies, therefore, we do not have the same laws for the cremated that we do for the buried. Consequently, it will be interesting to see just what cases and laws arise for cremation in the future. Ideally, cremation could eventually mean the dead have the law more on their side than before, but not so far.

The National Cremation Industry

The final context in which I consider my data is a national context. This allows me to further evaluate my research on people's thoughts, feelings, and actions concerning cremation in Georgia with regards to historical and contemporary national statistics and surveys. It is valuable to make comparisons with data collected at the national level, because it allows me to proceed with my analysis by comparing my informants' responses with what has been happening with cremation in other states and across time. Obviously, the rise in cremation is not unique to Georgia but has been happening on a national level as well. Across America people are increasingly willing to consider and select cremation as an option for the final disposition of themselves and their loved ones after death. The national statistics collected by the Cremation Association of North America (CANA), and the national random sample surveys of people who have decided in favor of cremation reported by CANA, bear out that the data I have collected on the selection of cremation compare very similarly to the thoughts and behaviors of other Americans around the country.

National Statistics

CANA maintains historical statistics of the number of Americans cremated in the United States by year from 1876 to 2003 confirmed (CANA 2005c). Interestingly, the United States government does not keep records of cremations. Vital statistics are kept of the number of births and deaths per year, but not of

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the number of cremations per year. The only available information is collected and reported by the

Cremation Association of North America for the purposes of serving businesses in the industry. Their data

show that the rise in cremation that these businesses have seen occurred primarily during and after the

1960s. Historically, the percentage of deaths cremated in the U.S. each year did not rise until the 1960s,

but the increase did not begin exactly in 1960. Between 1960 and 1966 the percentage slowly increased

between 3.5% and 4%. It was in 1967 that the rate of use of cremation exceeded four percent of all deaths

in the U.S. It was in 1973 and 1974 that the rate rose above five and six percent respectively. The amount

approached ten percent in 1980 and exceeded fifteen percent in 1987. In 1994, the rate passed 20% and

climbed to almost 29% in 2003, the most recent year for which confirmed statistics are available.

Contemporary statistics from CANA report the number of dead cremated by state for all fifty

states (CANA 2005b). These data allows me to compare the number for the total percent of dead cremated

in Georgia to the total percent cremated in other states. The top five states, by percentage of deaths

cremated, in 2003 are, from first to fifth, Washington (63%), Hawaii, Nevada, Oregon, and Arizona (57%).

Cremation is more popular in the West, and in Alaska and Hawaii, than in other regions. The bottom five

states, by percentage of deaths cremated, in 2003, beginning with the lowest, are Tennessee (3%),

Alabama, Mississippi, Kentucky, and Louisiana (13%). Cremation is less popular in the Southeast than in

other regions, with the exception of Georgia. With the large Atlanta metropolitan area included, Georgia

compares more favorably to states that are in the middle, by percent of deaths cremated. Comparable states

to Georgia (18.5%), then, are the middle Atlantic states of Virginia (23%) and North Carolina (20%) and

the Midwestern states of Indiana (17%), Iowa (19%), South Dakota (18.5%), and Missouri (20%). Georgia

is part of the broad range of states that are neither high nor low on the percent of deaths cremated.

Therefore, the use of cremation in Georgia compares favorably to the use of cremation in other parts of the

country. Future projections of the percentage of deaths that will be cremated in the U.S. as a whole to the

years of 2010 and 2025 are based on the recent rate of increase in the use of cremation over the past five

years (CANA 2005b). By 2010, it is estimated that 36% of all deaths in the U.S. will be cremated. By 2025 that estimate climbs to 46%, approaching the point where half of all deaths in the country will result in cremation. Only the national percent of deaths cremated is estimated to 2025. Future projections for each state are calculated to 2010. For Georgia, it is expected that 31% of all deaths will be cremated, based on the rate of increase between 1999 and 2003. The percent of deaths cremated in Georgia in 2003 of 18.5% is lower than the national average of 29% for that year. However, the estimated percent cremated in Georgia in 2010 of 31% is closer to the national average of 36%. In 2010, Georgia will remain part of the middle range of states using cremation, like the middle Atlantic and Midwest regions, but with a closer approximation of the average of the nation. Taken together, then, an examination of all these statistics permits me to consider regional, historical, and state versus national differences in my analysis of the use of cremation.

National Surveys

Looking at other surveys about cremation and burial from around the country can provide a comparison to my own research. I have found that national sample studies tend to relate very similarly to my own research findings. The following four studies all have in common a concentration on cremation with a national focus. For example, a survey research study of the "Differences in Final Arrangements Between Burial and Cremation as the Method of Body Disposition," published in *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying* in 1990, was conducted, through the University of Notre Dame, with a national sample of respondents. In the study, the same survey was given to a first sample of close survivors of decedents who were cremated and to a second sample of close survivors of decedents who were buried. The authors, Grace D. Dawson, John F. Santos, and David C. Burdick, found that respondents in their cremation sample tended to be Protestant rather than Catholic with less religious activity, higher education levels, higher income levels, and higher employment levels than respondents in the burial sample. The same

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characteristics applied to the deceased as well. These characteristics are also consistent with my survey and interview findings. The final arrangements study further found that respondents using burial were more likely than those in the cremation sample to follow the traditions of viewings, embalming, and other religious and family customs. Both burial and cremation groups rated cost as having little influence on final arrangements despite the common assumption of a link between cost and cremation. For the cremation sample, innovativeness, social cohesiveness, and the preference of the deceased were more important factors. Interestingly, the authors point out an important change in roles between the funeral industry and the clergy. They wrote:

> Results support the notion that the funeral industry is becoming as involved as the clergy in carrying out final arrangements, and that the funeral home is taking the place of the church for an increasing number of final arrangement activities. ... Both the church and the funeral home were used more with burials than with cremations, suggesting traditional funeral services and ceremonies are more likely to occur when burial is the form of disposition (p. 142).

The findings of Dawson, Santos, and Burdick are largely consistent with my research. In their study and mine, tradition is more commonly associated with burial, and innovation and education are more frequently tied to cremation.

"Project Understanding: A National Study of Cremation" conducted by the National Research and Information Center, at the University of Notre Dame, Joe A. Adams, Director, regarded deaths that occurred in 1983 and 1984 and focused on factors influencing a person's selection of cremation in comparison to burial. Research findings indicate that those who select cremation tend to be Protestant, more educated, have higher employment levels, and be less active in religious affairs. No significant differences were found between the cremation and burial groups with regards to age, gender, and income. Further results indicate that cremation was only selected when it was known to be the preference of the deceased. Cost was not related to the selection of cremation or burial. Interestingly, funding for the university-based research came from several trade organizations in the funeral industry, and results often

included directions for funeral directors on how to better sell to cremation customers. They found that, "Cremation is not selected as the inexpensive alternative. ... The service options are only limited by the imagination of the funeral service professional. The selection of cremation does not necessarily mean an inexpensive funeral" (p.11). As for the disposition of ashes, those in the cremation sample most often chose to have ashes buried and second most often chose to have ashes strewn. While most of the findings in Project Understanding are similar to my own, cost is less often cited by people as a motivating factor in the selection of cremation in Project Understanding when compared to my results. In addition, although in Project Understanding it is listed as the second most common choice after burial (which may include earthen burial and/or scattering as burial at sea), scattering or strewing is a top choice in the disposition of ashes in both my research and in Project Understanding.

In the "Cremation Container, Disposition and Service Survey," 1996/1997, handled by Smith, Bucklin, and Associates (CANA 2005e), a survey was mailed to crematory operators in the United States and Canada. Cremation operators were asked to report on the cremation cases they performed in 1996 and the first part of 1997. The cremations these operators performed were done for people who were primarily Protestant, Caucasian, and around 70 years of age. The difference in gender between males and females was about equal. In about half of the cases cremated remains were returned in a purchased urn. Two thirds of the cases had no service prior to cremation, while just over half had a service after cremation. Lastly, in the disposition survey the top three choices for the final disposition of ashes were to be taken home, to be buried, and to be scattered over water or land. But this survey has a lot of overlap in its categories. Some in the ashes to be buried category include burial at sea by scattering ashes over the ocean. The ashes that operators reported as initially taken home will eventually be scattered, buried, or placed in a columbarium according to the survey. Thus, when all categories that include scattering are taken together, scattering becomes the most common option for the final disposition of ashes. This finding, from a national sample, supports my own finding that scattering is the most frequent option selected by people for ashes.

The most thorough of the national studies is the "Survey of American Attitudes toward Ritualization and Memorialization" conducted by Wirthlin Worldwide. Short named the Wirthlin Report, this national random sample telephone survey of 1,000 adults has been conducted every five years in 1990, 1995, 1999, and 2005. In the 2005 survey, 46% of Americans have decided on cremation. In 1999, 45% of Americans wanted cremation, with 39% in 1995, and 31% in 1990. The primary reasons people gave in 2005 for choosing cremation were to save money (30%), to facilitate convenience and simplicity (14%), and to conserve land (13%). In 1999 and 1995, 27% of respondents wanted cremation because it saves money, while 19% gave that reason in 1990. In all four years saving land and trouble (simplicity) were other prominent reasons for choosing cremation. Whites were more likely to select cremation than African Americans. While Protestants favored cremation over Catholics, Baptists were the least likely Protestant group to choose cremation because it destroys the body. Just as in the other surveys above, those selecting cremation in the Wirthlin Report tended to be better educated with higher household incomes. Sixty percent of the survey respondents were female, with forty percent male, since the survey shows "women are known to be the primary decision-makers regarding remembrance and memorialization" (CANA 2005f). I expect the fact that women tend to outlive men bears on this statistic as widowed women make decisions to carry out their husbands' preferences for final arrangements. Of those selecting cremation, 89% in 2005 say they want some type of service, compared to 89% in 1999, 83% in 1995, and 80% in 1990. Of those in 2005 wanting a service with their cremations, 32% still wanted a traditional funeral, 26% wanted a private service, and 25% wanted a memorial service. In previous years, those wanting a traditional service were 32% in 1999, 33% in 1995, and 45% in 1990 (The Cremationist 2000). Those wanting a private service were 26% in 1999, 23% in 1995, and 32% in1990, and those who favored a memorial service were 25% in 1999 and 23% in 1995 (n/a in 1990).

Following the cremation, 56% of the 2005 Wirthlin Report respondents plan to buy an urn. When asked what they plan to do with the ashes, 39% preferred scattering, and 24% would take the ashes to a

cemetery. Most people also wanted to be memorialized with a monument, a marker, a donation, or a living memorial such as planting a tree, compared with those who wanted nothing at all. The earlier surveys also bear out the dominant preference for scattering ashes, with 59% in 1999, 44% in 1995, and 15% in 1990 (The Cremationist 2000). Respondents preferences for the disposition of ashes in the Wirthlin survey were put into one of only five categories of scattering, burying, placing in a columbarium at a cemetery, or at a church, and taking home. More details to answers were not recorded. The "2005 Wirthlin Report, Survey of American Attitudes toward Ritualization and Memorialization" was commissioned by the Funeral and Memorial Information Council (FAMIC). Therefore, this was a survey by and for the funeral industry with CANA and other trade organizations as members of the FAMIC.

State and National Comparisons

Overall, the preceding review of national statistics and surveys shows that the Georgia sample cremation and burial respondents are very similar to the national sample respondents. Taking the most recent and comprehensive random sample survey for a specific comparison, the 2005 Wirthlin Report, one can see that about half of all Americans, whether they reside in Georgia or elsewhere around the country, have decided to use cremation. Financial savings tend to be a meaning associated with cremation even though it is more often selected by people with higher education and income levels. Other reasons given for the selection of cremation, in both the Wirthlin Report and the Georgia Poll, is the saving of land and the perceived benefit of simplicity and convenience. For the final disposition of ashes, Georgians and other Americans primarily favor scattering when asked. The Georgia Poll respondents in my research, however, were given the option to be more specific about their preferences through the collection of responses to open-ended questions (see Chapter 3). Yet, in sum, when my survey answers are looked at in the context of national data, Americans are found to be nearly the same in Georgia and around the country on the subject of cremation.

CHAPTER 6

CREMATION AS A CULTURAL SYSTEM

> Leaves have their time to fall,
> And flowers wither at the north wind's breath,
> And start to set - but all,
> Thou hast all seasons for thine own, oh! Death!
>   - Mourning quilt, 1847

> While researching funeral dirges for my thesis, the
> main thing I have learned is that death is no big deal.
>   - Masters student in music, 2003

Each of these quotations reflects differing views or attitudes taken toward death. The first is from the nineteenth century, when death was regarded as romantic. During this period, people "exalted it, dramatized it, and thought of it as disquieting and greedy" (Aries 1974: 56). It is easy to look back on this period and regard their approach, of emphasizing death so much, as wrong. But since no one cultural era has moral authority over the other, we must take an equally strong look at ourselves. The second quote, which says "death is no big deal," is from our present era. These two views on death represent opposite ends of the spectrum. Separated by time, one era takes death seriously and dramatically, while the other doesn't at all. People scoff aloud at the nineteenth century romantic, rhetorical perspective on death, while not realizing that their own approach is both the reflection of and product of the cultural influences of their own time, in an era when cremation is on the rise and people are increasingly abandoning their own traditional cultural template of death, burial. By looking carefully at cremation as a cultural system, in a modern and postmodern era, we can examine our own cultural time's perspectives on death more

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thoroughly. Thus, it is important to specify exactly how cremation is and is not functioning as a new cultural system for people, to clarify what the system is based on the evidence, and, in the process, to return to the questions posed at the beginning of this research.

Burial and Cremation as Cultural Templates

This study set out to understand what is cremation as a cultural system. Cremation as a cultural system is a set of symbols or concepts that people think about when they think about cremation. Geertz writes, "In the study of culture, the signifiers are ... symbolic acts or clusters of symbolic acts, and the aim is ... the analysis of social discourse" (1973a: 26). Individuals in groups are carriers of collective views on cremation. Their beliefs and opinions reflect cremation, the cultural system. People use the meanings associated with cremation to guide their actions when someone dies, meanings in the form of patterns that govern social discourse and interaction. When one initially thinks about burying or cremating the dead, one imagines and follows a patterned set of events, all imbued with social significance, that take place after death. The results from individuals through surveys, both at the state and national levels, bear out that there exists a symbolic pattern for body disposal via burial. Now a similar system is in place for cremation. Some of these events are similar for burial and cremation and some are not. Figure 6.1 shows both patterns, one for burial and one for cremation. In the pattern for burial, we are accustomed to someone dying, then having a funeral home prepare the body, then taking the body to a cemetery and burying it. In the new pattern for cremation, we imagine someone dying, then being cremated, then taking his or her ashes somewhere. These are the elemental sequences of the cultural templates, for burial and cremation, around which there are multiple meanings and cultural associations that reflect and guide our society at the time of death.

However, some of the steps in these socially significant cultural templates are more fully articulated than others. Both burial and cremation begin with dying. Statistically, in the United States

today, most people die in hospitals. "One dies in the hospital because the hospital has become the place to receive care that can no longer be given at home" (Aries 1974: 87). For those engaged in modernity, it is inconvenient to die at home (Aries 1974). Once someone has died, though, the family is called on to have the body disposed of through burial or cremation. With burial, the funeral director is usually called on to clean, embalm, and dress the dead. In America, at the wishes of the dead and the family, the funeral director may provide rooms for visitation and/or a service, allowing for the streamlining of tradition. Alternately, and more commonly in the past, the prepared body may be taken to a church for a service before being taken to a cemetery. It is the funeral director who makes arrangements with the cemetery for the opening and closing of the burial plot, at which there may or may not be a graveside service. While there is some variation in the course of a burial, most of the steps in this cultural pattern are comprised of a long standing cultural tradition in Western society.

To choose cremation is to deviate from burial as the form of body disposition. After the death, likely at the hospital, the body is taken to a crematory. Cremation societies, who serve in lieu of funeral homes, can make arrangements, but more often this is the task of funeral directors. Most people do not know exactly where the body is cremated when they buy this service. This may be at the funeral home, or the body may be sent out to be cremated with ashes or cremains then returned to the funeral director. Then, in the least articulated step in this template, the ashes are disposed of. Interestingly, my research has revealed that almost no one is cremated without this being the expressed wish of the deceased. This is testament to the newness of this cultural system, that it is still foreign, or unconventional enough, that one would not impose it upon another unless expressly asked to do so. Cremation is taking place in about one quarter of all U.S. deaths, while in state and national surveys about half of the adults expect to use cremation when they die (see chapters three and five).

As a cultural template, cremation is still less well defined than burial, ending in more of a process than a product. The pattern of death care for the buried begins with the process of dying followed by the

process of embalming and services, and ending in the product of burial. The state also has an interest in the disposition of the dead for health and social reasons. With burial, the state's interest ends when the body is interred in a sealed grave. Thus, burial is a pattern of process, process, product. The open portions of activity following the death, the processes, have a clearly defined goal and end product of a closed grave in mind to work for. Cremation, in contrast, follows the pattern process, product, process. The process of dying is followed by the final disposition of the body in the form of cremation, the product. In addition, the state's interest in the dead ends with cremation, which means that governmental concern ends earlier in the course of caring for the dead with cremation than it does with burial. The state considers the case of how to dispose of the deceased closed sooner with cremation than with burial. This point is mirrored in the public's behavior with cremation as well. Like the state, people consider cremation finished earlier than burial. The disposal of the cremated body is over with after only two steps (see Figure 6.1) and, unlike burial, does not incorporate the process of memorialization along with the completion of disposition.

Consequently, what to do with the ashes and how to memorialize the dead becomes a question after cremation and a new process to resolve. Although the response to scatter ashes is becoming typical, the ambiguity of this step, in part because it is thought of as a process not a product, further indicates how new and less culturally institutionalized cremation is. Let it be observed, then, that it is significantly harder to end the disposing of the dead in an open process of memorialization, as in the case of cremation, than it is to end the final disposition of the dead after the process of memorialization, as in the case of burial. As a result, cremation as a cultural template is still being defined, since the end of the process is not so clearly scripted. My evidence bear out all of these observations, and more, in the delineation of cremation as a cultural system. In fact, having now defined the skeleton of the cultural system people follow in caring for the cremated dead, further insights from this study can be grouped into four thematic areas that deepen the social significance of cremation as a cultural system and answer in more detail the issues posed by the questions at the beginning of this research. These four areas are nature, the body, social ties, and

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secularization. Cremation as a cultural system has implications for each. Depth in symbolic significance lies in the implications cremation has for nature and the body and in the decreasing social ties and increasing secularization in the society. The symbolic ways in which the template of cremation is created has both positive and negative effects on ourselves as a society. The symbolic value of cremation as a cultural system, the analysis of which is the goal of this research, is greater than just the steps in the course of disposal. Symbolic import lies in the layers of meanings and associations surrounding the acts of cremation.

Four Sociocultural Themes

Nature

Cremation is changing the relationship between the dead and the natural world. Cremation gets the body back to nature faster than burial. The surveys and interviews discussed in this research indicate that ashes do not carry the same meaning as a corpse. Ashes become part of the scenic landscape, part of the natural world, and no longer part of the separate human world. Ashes are not inherently different, rather we bring distinction to them. The most common option for the disposal of ashes, scattering, takes the dead far from the living, because the dead who are cremated and strewn are less intact, less preserved, and less available to the living. Ashes are associated with a return to nature. Nature is such a strong theme associated with cremation that the responses people gave when surveyed could be coded by the domain of nature in which the respondent wanted to be placed: land, air, water, or mountain. But where the presence of the buried dead in nature once exalted and consecrated the land or sea, the presence of the cremated dead does not exalt, make sacred, or consecrate nature through the location of the ashes. This is a fundamental difference between burial and cremation in the relationship each creates between nature and the dead.

Instead of the dead sanctifying nature, as in the case of a cemetery or a battlefield site in which the dead are buried, such as at Gettysburg or after the two World Wars (Lincoln [1863] 1953; Mosse 1990), rather, in the case of cremation, nature takes over the dead. Whether scattered or placed in cremation gardens, the cremated dead are given wholly over to nature. There is no identification with cremation similar to a headstone for the buried. Those placed in a cremation garden are merely named, if at all, and the locations of those scattered are not likely to be marked in any way. Scattering sites are often known to and only valued by the immediate family members. Ashes are not even designated as the remains of a person; instead, they are expected to blend in to the natural world completely undistinguished. The landscaped garden or the undisturbed wood or the natural ocean, with no outstanding marker to identify the dead, represent perfect nature as if the dead are not even present. In this way, nature triumphs over death, not just symbolically but literally. The memorialization of the deceased is subordinated to the pastoral holistic serenity of the natural world. Further, nature dominates the living as well as the remains of the living. Any visitors to the dead are not in the presence of the intact dead, as when visiting a cemetery, but are immersed in and dwarfed by the larger-than-life world of nature.

Consequently, nature both represents and signifies life in a postindustrial society. The modernist impulse for people to dominate nature, managing it for their own purposes, with the creation of landscaped cemeteries is giving way to a postmodernist relationship with nature. In a postmodern world, cremated ashes are returned to blend in with nature, following the green movement (Francis, Kellaher, and Neophytou 2005), in an anti-modernist, anti-triumph of people over nature kind of move, elevating the import of nature in a reaction to the waste of industrialization and modernization. The environmentalist green movement has encroached on burial in the form of green burials in Great Britain, where in one is buried in a rapidly biodegradable coffin, with a tree instead of a headstone over the grave, and in an all-green woodland cemetery (Kaufman 1998). The green movement is also represented by cremation when ashes are scattered or interred in urns along a reef by the *Eternal Reefs* company (2004) in "one

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meaningful permanent environmental tribute to life" (p.1). For some, cremation symbolizes the body's return to nature to the extent that it becomes part of living plants, returning to the earth to be part of the natural life cycle. In a postindustrial world, the dead become one with nature, and the living are left to accept nature as dominant and representative of life. Thus, both the relationship between nature and the dead and the relationship between nature and the living are affected by and reflected in cremation.

The Body

With cremation, the meaning of the body has changed. In surveys, people referred to the body as waste or refuse in a justification for the selection of cremation. When the dead body is reinterpreted as messy refuse, there is a decreased value placed on saving the body. If the body is "not important to have preserved" or the body is regarded as "useless," then the body is seen as just a shell. Informants selecting cremation "don't value the preservation of the body" and do not regard it as sacred as is the case with traditional burial. Those preferring burial value the maintenance of the intact body as a sacred object, because it is tradition, because the body is the sacred vessel of the soul, and/or because the body must be preserved for the resurrection. In the shift to the use of cremation, away from burial, the body has become a solely physical, not spiritual, thing. In the process, the traditional meaning of burial has also become reinterpreted as individuals selecting cremation say, "I do not want to rot in the box." Cremation was once a shamefully cheap alternative to burial, but the stigma has now been removed. If cremation is associated with cheapness, and the body is regarded as a valuable whole, then one might ask why do something cheap with your body? The answer lies in the transformed meaning associated with the body. It is acceptable to choose the once lesser, cheaper alternative, cremation, because the body as waste after the death of the person is no longer sacred and, therefore, does not require preservation through the embalming and burial as a whole in a vault and coffin. The body is secularized. Cremation equals incinerating trash (thus a

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frequent choice of patients ravaged by cancer). As one individual from the Georgia Poll survey put it, "The body does not matter after death."

The law reflects the social and cultural values placed on the body. Human rights, created for persons, extend to the dead only partially. The Tri-State Crematory case in Georgia revealed that cremation law lagged behind burial law. As cremation laws were updated, the case clarified and institutionalized the role of the dead in society. Bodies, for example, do not really belong to anyone. Dead bodies are not owned by living individuals. The body, objectified, stands alone without ownership by the living. Still, it is illegal to abuse or abandon a dead body, showing that there is a morality surrounding cremation as a cultural system. But the laws following the Tri-State case were written for bodies, not for ashes, because the dead, once cremated, are less of a body and thus less of a person. What little regard there is for bodies with regard to cremation applies to intact bodies on the way to the crematorium. At this point, as intact bodies, they are most like the whole bodies preserved through burial. The outcome of cremation is the turning of the body into ash. What people can do with ashes is less legally regulated than what people can do with whole bodies, because ashes are even more like waste than intact bodies that might be buried. The cremated body is more thoroughly disposed of than the buried body. Ashes are the waste that bodies going to be cremated are to become. Consequently, according to the law, it is almost unimportant what is done with ashes. Cremation of the body leads to waste to the point of legal irrelevance.

Social Ties

Cremation creates a decreased presence of the dead among the living thus decreasing social ties and decreasing the sense of security from social and physical annihilation given by burial. What we do with the dead affects the living (Warner 1959). A cemetery, and to some extent a cremation garden, provides a place for the living and the dead to visit and helps with grieving. The dead are kept together. The place for the dead is part of the community with a cemetery in the city or at the church. Consequently,

the dead are part of the community with a tangible, fixed place in it. An individual's life is valuable, at least to someone, if put somewhere after death, because having a place for one's remains equals the validation of one's life (Warner 1959). However, while burial supports the relationship between the living and the dead, the lack of identity of the cremated when put in nature, even in a cremation garden, separates the living and the dead. Interviews bear out that frequently only the most immediate relatives who spread the ashes know where the dead are. Other relatives and community members cannot visit the dead and be with the deceased or know anything about them. The memory and the relationship between the living and the dead are truncated. Without a place with identity, such as a grave with a headstone, there is no knowledge of whether or not someone was married or had ties to any social institutions or social activities. Without the presence of a name, one may never know there is a person there or even know that someone ever existed. Identity at place is fundamental to the preservation of a relationship between the living and the dead.

Without a body, the cremated dead are less of a human being with less of a social place in society than the living. Being less of a social member, they are less of a person and more of an object. Objectified, the body as waste, to be cremated and turned into ash, affects social ties. The corpse is tied to the person, and, as the dead are devalued, so is the person. As the corpse is waste, just to get rid of, so is the person. The intact body, the sacred body, looks more like the living and is kept more among the living. The body is associated with the person such that the preservation of the body equals the preservation of the person, the social member among us. But the ties between the living and the dead are weakened now, because the dead are not sacred. Thus, this relationship is not maintained by keeping the dead as symbolic social members identified among the living. We are getting rid of the dead, so the living can focus on the living social members versus preserving the body to preserve the relationship between the living and the dead. In burial, the dead are symbolically living social members, as if just asleep, yet in cremation, the ashes no longer represent a social member. The dead are too far removed from the living.

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The living are responsible for the dead, but the fulfillment of that responsibility is full of inconsistencies. The living's obligation to the dead became institutionalized when it became a felony to abandon a dead body following the Tri-State case. But the fact that there are fewer laws for cremated ashes than for intact human bodies means that the treatment of the ashes of the cremated is less like the treatment of a fellow social member than the care of the bodies of the buried. It is true that memorialization helps solve the problem of cremation alone, called direct cremation, because cremation without memorialization equals disposal only. But memorialization is for the living. If the living do not do it for the dead, through ceremonies and monuments that record the life of the dead, then the living have not fulfilled their responsibility to the dead to keep them among us as a social member. Memorialization in the form of a ceremony may take place just before or after the cremation, but memorialization for the final placement of the ashes is weak, diminishing the way the living are remembering and caring for the dead. What to do with the ashes is not even clear in the cultural template or recipe for what to do with the dead in the case of cremation.

Even the mobility of the society threatens social ties. Cremation for mobility reflects the weaker social ties. In Decatur City Cemetery, the dead can be disinterred and move with the living from one cremation garden to another. But, while this is a form of maintenance of the social tie between the living and the dead, it is not as deep or as permanent as keeping the dead with all the living of the family, and all the previous dead, in a family plot in one town in which everyone lives. The same goes for dividing the ashes between relatives in different cities. In such instances, cremation accommodates the individualistic separateness of the living. What to do with the dead, then, follows the cultural system that best fits with the increasing individualization and personalization in the society.

It is no wonder, therefore, that the relationship between the living and the dead reflects the atomization between living social members. The value of the living is proportionate to the loss of the social member at death. Our value is measured by and proportionate to how great is our loss. Weaker social ties

mean less important lives. Valuing each other less when we die equals valuing each other less when living. When we lose a social member, we can be no closer to that person in death than we were in life.

Secularization

Perhaps the most significant consequence of the emerging cultural system of cremation is its role in the process of secularization in the society, the loss of the sacred in the culture. Along with the implication for social ties, secularization is of special sociological import. Traditionally, burial, through the cemetery and the grave, cares for the body as a temple, regarding the body as sacred for religious reasons and, additionally, cares for the social self/person that the body represents. The social self is secular, not traditionally sacred in religion. But there is also a social sacredness as well as a religious sacredness to the body. Preserving the body in a grave in a cemetery preserves the social member, a sacred function of funerary cultural systems. For both religious and social reasons, the dead have been sacred in Western societies. But times are changing. From the Georgia Poll survey, we know that some Christians are even adapting and secularizing traditional beliefs, seeing the spirit as sacred and the body as waste versus the body as the sacred former host of the soul. With this secularization of the body from sacred to profane, it becomes acceptable to burn the body, because the spirit is gone.

The presence of the ashes further secularizes the cremated body and person. Scattering is a secular move away from our traditional sacred custom of burial at church or in a pastoral cemetery. Being "dropped from an airplane" or "spread on a football field" do not equal sacred funerary customs. Ashes are meant to stand for the self in memorialization, but how successfully they do this varies widely as the disposition of ashes remains an open process. In some instances, the final disposition of ashes can be socially sacred, but most alternatives are not tied to religion. Scattering does not require a minister. But it is a shrinking social sacredness, because the final disposition of ashes is not usually sacred to the group or community the way a cemetery is. For example, scattering on one's own land or property is sacred only to

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immediate family members in memory, for only one generation. Memory is not the same thing as memorialization, and memory as memorialization does not last beyond those who knew the deceased. With ashes the boundary between the sacred and profane is even less clear than it is with the body. If anything, ashes seem to be more profane than the inanimate body. Ashes are the residual refuse of the cremation process. We have borrowed cultural beliefs and values from burial in order to know how to regard and care for the dead body on the way to the crematorium, but we have done little to nothing to protect the dead once they are ashes. Laws help institutionalize the boundaries of the sacred, the person, and the object/refuse quality of each step in the burial and cremation cultural systems. As it is, ashes do not even legally represent the dead, which is a greater matter than the fact that ashes do not equal the living or ashes do not equal the person.

What is appearing in this research is the possibility of three levels at which funeral customs may be sacred - the religious, the social, and the personal. The religiously sacred is institutionally sacred, which is what burial has been, especially burial at church. The socially sacred is subinstitutional, not representative of ties to the institutions of society such as religion, the military, or the economy. That which is socially sacred is socially valued within an area, but not necessarily as organized as a community. That which is personally sacred is sacred to the individual alone, such as when a daughter alone scatters her father's ashes in the woods. However, these levels of sacredness, in descending order, reflect increasing individualism. The individualization of end of life decisions is another form of secularization, because it departs from sacred customs. Once how to take care of the dead was a family decision, and the dead were placed in family plots. Religious guidance was consulted at death, resulting in collective funerary decisions and practices for all members of the family and society to follow. At present, decisions may be meaningful on an individual, not collective, basis. There is little to no collective meaning now. Death has become so individualized that the dying are choosing how they want to be cared for more than the family, with a greater number of choices with which to personalize and individualize the funeral plans. Pre-planned and

pre-paid funerals further encourage individuals to make their own personal decisions. As a result, some choices, including where to scatter the ashes, may be only meaningful to the deceased. Then, as that individual departs, taking the meanings away as that person passes, the significance of where the dead is scattered is gone, too. Consequently, surveys bear out that the survivors may feel almost no special connection to the location of the dead. The secularization and individualization of cremation as a cultural system means that the treatment of the dead is only partially socially sacred and often only personally sacred anymore.

Cremation equals another secularizing turn in death beliefs and practices like the rural cemetery movement that led to the advent of pastoral cemeteries in the early 1800s. The rural cemetery movement was a response of romanticism to industrialization. With the movement, burial left churchyards and organized religion. But it was a secularizing cultural turn in which the new pastoral cemeteries were still socially sacred as in set apart and revered. Pastoral cemeteries, like the old church cemeteries, are legally protected as sacred places that cannot be disturbed, with further restrictions affecting what can be built nearby. While cremation may be, to some extent, set apart, the locations of ashes are customarily not revered and, with a few exceptions, usually not part of organized religion. In fact, cremation as a cultural system to follow was originally conceived of as independent of religion. Cremation in America was secular born. Among funerary cultural systems, we believe religion says to bury. The earliest associations with cremation was the burning of rubbish, waste for the destitute, which is the Western view, not purifying the spirit, which is the Eastern view (Coleman 1997). Old Western ideas of cremation were adopted along with old Western ideas of burial. However, contemporary postmodern ideas of cremation as a cultural system involve shallower expressions of emotions with services that celebrate life, turning away from religion,

death, and grief (Davies 2005). As the British scholar, Douglas Davies, in *The Encyclopedia of Cremation*, puts it,

> One significant, but not entirely unintended, consequence of the emergence
> of modern cremation involves secularization. Understood as a process in
> which established religious influences cease to be formally effective in the
> public life of a society, secularization has been clearly evident amongst
> some cremation groups (2005: xxiii).

Thus, the rise in the popularity of cremation is a further secularizing cultural turn in death practices and beliefs and the first major one since the advent of the rural cemetery movement. In the case of the latter, burial moved away from the church. In the case of the new cultural turn, the dead move away from both burial and religion, abandoning millennia of sacred tradition.

A Continuum Between Life and Death

To conclude this discussion of cremation as a cultural system, it is apparent that the cremated dead are deader than the buried dead (see Figure 6.2). Death can be looked at along a continuum from those fully active among the living to those most removed from us after death. Beginning with disability, social involvement in life is often limited by the prejudicial way others treat the disabled, by not relating to them, not including them in activities, and not building accessible structures that allow for full involvement. As a result, the disabled, like the chronically ill living in nursing homes, can experience a social death (Goffman 1961). Social death occurs at the point when an individual is thought of as dead and treated as if dead by family, friends, and professionals, although he or she remains medically, biologically, and legally alive (Glaser and Strauss 1965; Kalish 1966; Sudnow 1967). The dying pull even further away from social activity in all aspects of life as they feel life slipping away from them as their conditions worsen. Once death occurs, social and physical life end completely. Care of dead bodies to be buried, then, involves embalming and make-up to preserve the dead as close to life as possible (Coleman 1997; Foltyn 1996). The whole person, represented by the body, is kept looking as if just asleep. In burial, the person we lived

with is tied to the body. In cremation, however, ashes no longer represent the person who was once alive. Thus, the cremated dead are farther from the living than the buried dead.

Cremation hastens the removal of the body from life by turning it back to nature. In cremation, the body is treated as waste, because it is acceptable to do so when it is soon to be turned over to the natural world. Christianity says we begin as dust and to dust we shall return. This view is central in Western culture, even for nonbelievers of religion. Turning the body into ashes is the equivalent of turning the body into dust. A body that has become dust is not a sacred body kept to look like the living thus preserving social connection as social ties. How this is happening is a function of how we are handling cremation. Cremation memorials could be more elaborate than burial memorials, symbolically working to keep the cremated alive in the absence of the corpse. But in cremation, even the memory, along with the identity, of the deceased is less well preserved on site, corresponding to the state of the body. Ash and bone fragment remains signal that these people are more dead and gone than the buried. Therefore, the cremated dead are deader than the buried dead. That is the primary cultural meaning that separates the treatment of ashes from the treatment of buried bodies. In our culture and society, we feel strongly that cremation is a separate matter from burial that must be handled differently. Consequently, we have developed a separate, emerging funerary cultural system for cremation, with its own meanings associated with it about the process of cremation, nature, the body and ashes, the sacred, and the relationship between the living and the dead.

Burial:

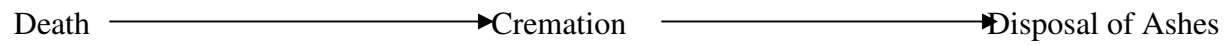Death ————————————▶Funeral Director ————————————▶Burial in Cemetery
                        and Services

Cremation:

Death ————————————▶Cremation ————————————▶Disposal of Ashes

Figure 6.1 Two Cultural Templates for Caring for the Dead

Disability → Social Death → Dying → Death → Burial → Cremation
| |
Most like   Least like
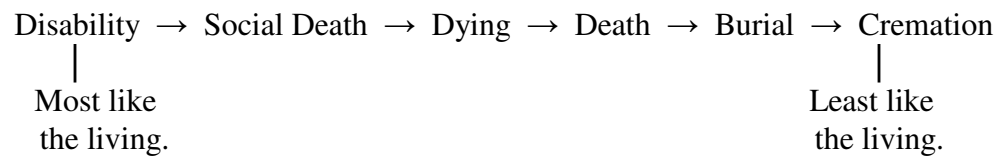the living.   the living.

Figure 6.2 Death Along a Continuum

CHAPTER 7

CREMATION IN A POSTINDUSTRIAL SOCIETY

I will return now, in more detail, to the questions posed at the start of this research. As a result of the analysis of surveys with people selecting, and not selecting, cremation, the evaluation of how people are using cremation gardens, the examination of laws surrounding cremation, the investigation of consultations with professionals, and the comparison with responses to national surveys, it is possible to answer the questions that initiated this study. By grouping the questions together and considering the evidence provided by the results of the investigations in this research, we can put together, in sum, a total picture of how the rising use of cremation is, or is not, functioning as a cultural system for Americans today. Thus, the questions guiding this study and their subsequent answers can be considered by first looking at how cremation contrasts with burial, then examining what people are saying and doing with memorializing the cremated. Next, cremation as a cultural system can be assessed by considering how it serves as a model *of* social life, how it functions as a model *for* social life, how that compares with life in a postmodern society, and, lastly, following Durkheim, how sacred is cremation as a cultural system in our society. Since, as Durkheim said, the performance of mourning rites is essential to the collectivity in the event of death, it is important to conclude with whether or not the cremation of individual social members is preserving the sacred through the social ties that bind individuals to the larger society in which they must exist. In this way, we can see just how cremation is or is not functioning at this most basic level for the social maintenance of collective life in a postindustrial society.

Deviating from Burial

Let us revisit the first set of questions raised in chapter one. These questions are posed to consider how cremation initially contrasts with burial. Thus, what does it mean to deviate from burial? In the process, do religion and tradition still guide individuals? Is the shift from burial to cremation a form of secularization in the society? What might specific users of cremation indicate? What do people's attitudes toward their own postmortem care signify? How has the state responded to these changes in terms of regulation? In American culture, to deviate from burial is to choose cremation. Leaving burial means leaving behind centuries of religious tradition. Evidence gathered in the course of this research bears out a decreased connection between religion and cremation compared with burial. In a statement exemplifying this weakened relationship, one informant said, "He wasn't particularly tied to any religious group, so cremation was right for him." This disconnection between religion and death, especially with regards to cremation, has been observed by other scholars as well. "In the *Handbook of Death and Dying*, 2003, Bryant, Edgely, Leming, Peck, and Sandstrom note that, when it comes to death, people are no longer living as secure in their religious beliefs as they once were.

> Until the twentieth century, most Americans could face death secure in the
> knowledge that their religious faith, with its attendant eschatological scenarios
> of heavenly existence, would comfort them in transcending death. By the
> mid- to late-twentieth century, however, events began to erode traditional religious
> beliefs while enhancing the level of anxiety about and fear of death (p.1035).

These authors believe this decreased relationship between religion and death to be a continuing trend, lasting well throughout the twenty-first century. Douglas Davies, in the *Encyclopedia of Cremation*, 2005, considers the weakened association between religion and death to be greater for cremation than for burial. "Although many countries with protestant and Catholic backgrounds would still, in the early twenty-first century, see a close bond between religion and burial, that link is less strong with cremation" (p.xxii). Therefore, what it means to deviate from burial by choosing cremation often means to have a weaker bond with religion when facing death and caring for the dead through disposition and memorialization.

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Consequently, since it does involve a turn away from connections to religious traditions, the recent increase in cremation, and decrease in burial, is a form of secularization in postindustrial American society.

In further assessing what it means to deviate from burial by opting for cremation, we can also look at the answers provided by survey respondents. On average, these individuals are characteristically white, Protestant, and educated people, both male and female. These characteristics indicate that it is people who have had more opportunity to explore new ideas through education and fewer ties to strict religious traditions, such as Catholicism, that are selecting to break with funerary tradition and go with cremation. Cremation is new to Americans and it takes a certain freedom of ideas to be open to choosing it. The attitudes individuals opting for cremation have toward their own postmortem care tells us that cremation carries with it an appealing set of associations such that it is less expensive than burial, simpler, and saves resources such as land. Respondents who maintain a connection to burial primarily cited religious support for burial and opposition to the burning or desecration of the body in a crematory fire. Therefore, survey respondents, at both the state and national levels, own personal reasons given for their own funerary care bear out that burial is still connected to religion and that cremation largely is not. To those choosing cremation, the new ideas they are open to may, thus, mean a positive concern for reducing funerary fuss in the form of a reduction in financial and environmental costs. For them, what it means to deviate from burial is to be relieved to find death simpler and secular through the use of cremation. Overall, cremation involves a streamlining of resources for our treatment of the dead.

How the state has responded to the rise of cremation in terms of regulations has been inconsistent. Part of the process of cremation has been regulated and part has not. The legal obligation of the living to care for the dead, in such terms as not abandoning a dead body, has been reinforced in the state of Georgia. But legal care for ashes, in any manner comparable to the care and protection of burial sites, does not exist. With cremation, protection for dead bodies on their way to the crematorium has increased but protection for ashes on their way from the crematorium has not. The Tri-State Crematory scandal, in northwest

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Georgia, in which hundreds of dead bodies were not cremated, but strewn all over the property and left to rot, resulted in the tighter legislation mandating the care of dead bodies and the inspection of crematories. Yet, the legal rights and care of ashes did not get legislative attention. Scattering sites are not concentrated and organized like cemeteries. Places where ashes are scattered are not treated as sacred under the law. The presence of the dead in the form of ashes, unlike the presence of the dead in the form of bodies in cemeteries, does not sanctify the location religiously, socially, or legally. Culturally, ashes do not represent dead individuals the way bodies do. Legally, it seems ashes are not people. Therefore, to deviate from burial, by choosing cremation, means to legally care for the dead as long as they are bodies, but not to treat the dead the same once they are ashes.

Memorializing the Cremated

How the cremated dead are memorialized can be addressed by answering several questions posed in chapter one. What choices are cremation users making for remembering the cremated? How are we identifying the dead? Are we maintaining their identities as social members of families, churches, or other social institutions? What does abandoning the use of headstones indicate? What specific attitudes and preferences do people have for their own and their loved one's physical and social afterlives? The "continued association of the dead with the living may be demonstrated by memorials" (Francis, Kellaher, and Neophytou 2005:xix). But while memorial options with cremation are diverse, memorialization of the cremated is too often left vague. With cremation, "there is no 'body' [mourners] can visualize when tending the grave or niche. It is instead only a pile of ashes" (Hatch 1993:77). Like the legal clarity associated with dead bodies and not with ashes, people too are more clear about what they want done with their bodies after death than with their ashes. Only a tiny percentage of Georgia Poll respondents were unsure when asked what they want done with their bodies after death. In both state and national surveys, people know if they want burial or cremation. But when cremation choosers are asked what they want done

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with their ashes, the percentage of people who are unsure rises. Uncertainty was expressed in other ways as well. Some respondents choose scattering as a sort of default option that has become customarily associated with cremation. But when pressed to state where they want their ashes scattered, many could only say "somewhere" or "somewhere nice." The lack of specificity in these responses, indicates that these respondents do not have a clear idea in mind of what they want done with their ashes. People are more sure of their choices for disposition than for memorialization. Ashes are more of an unknown quantity than dead bodies. Ashes are vague, as are expressed memorialization choices sometimes. Further, among those survey respondents choosing to take ashes home are those doing so because they do not really know what they want to do with their or their loved one's ashes. If memorialization choice was as clear as disposition choice, then we could say cremation is as established a funerary cultural system as burial. But we cannot. Cremation, therefore, at present, is a less clear, less socially and culturally institutionalized option for funerary care than burial.

A second way in which the memorialization of the cremated is left vague is in terms of identity. With cremation, we are abandoning the use of graves and headstones and, in the process, not identfying the dead as clearly as is done with the buried. We could choose to handle death by burying the cremated dead in small cemetery plots and erecting standard size headstones, with standard information, over the graves of the cremated, treating them like the buried. But we choose not to. We treat cremation differently from burial, because we believe it is fundamentally different than burial. The associations we have with cremation are not like the associations we have with burial. Symbolically, we connect cremation with a return to nature much faster than with burial. The cremated are, after all, already ash like the product of decomposition that is just beginning with burial. Therefore, when we memorialize the dead by placing them in a cremation garden, the garden is designed to place a greater emphasis on nature than on the dead or their living visitors. In cremation gardens, there are many trees, shrubs, and grassy areas and few identifying markers for the dead. In Decatur City Cemetery, in Decatur, GA, the names, birth year, and

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death year are all that is known of the dead, and at Covenant Presbyterian Church, in Athens, GA, not even the names of the dead are identified in the cremation garden. In the Georgia Poll, as in national surveys, over half of the respondents choosing cremation said they wanted their ashes scattered. But when ashes are scattered, at sea or in the woods or off of a mountain, there is usually no marker or plaque to say, "Here lies... ." When there is no identification, there certainly is no acknowledgment of the dead as a social member of a family or a church or other social institution. The social connections the dead had when alive are not known. In memorializing the dead, we could identify the cremated like the buried. But, we do not, because we see the cremated as deader than the buried dead, long gone and returned to the cycle of nature.

All of these options, placement in a cremation garden, scattering at sea, or scattering on land provide for the cremated's social and cultural afterlives, but without the living as closely tied to the cremated dead as the buried. With cremation, the dead are not as known to the living and not as accessible as the buried in a cemetery. It is not so easy to visit someone who has been scattered. In fact, we do not think of ashes as a person anymore. Rather, they are a part of nature. We do not say, "John was scattered." We say, "John's ashes were scattered." Ashes are an object not a subject. Consequently, the cremated dead are more objectified than the buried dead. The object, the ashes, that we scatter into the wood, the garden, or out to sea, we little expect to keep company with as we might at a cemetery. Thus, the social ties between the living and the dead are attenuated in the case of cremation. These are our memorialization choices with cremation, and they symbolically reveal that to us cremation is inherently different than burial.

Modeling Social Life

Our next sets of questions take a look at cremation as a cultural system. Since a cultural system is a complex of symbolic beliefs and rituals (Geertz 1973a), it is a symbolic complex that models social life. More specifically, it serves as a model *for* social life, prescribing beliefs and rituals to use in caring for the

dead, and it serves as a model *of* social life, reflecting the beliefs and practices that constitute the larger society in which life and death occur. As a cultural system, then, cremation functions to both prescribe and reflect the social world around it. We can examine each of these functions more closely by considering how the evidence of this research addresses the questions, posed at the outset, about the manner in which cremation models social life.

Model For Social Life

Let us first consider how cremation serves as a model *for* social life. What cultural model do people use in caring for the dead when they abandon burial? How do they orient themselves? What is gained and lost? What motivates the change? As a model for social life, what thoughts, feelings, and actions toward each other does cremation guide us to have? What meanings are there for people who use cremation to assure them that they are taking good care of the dead and themselves? A funerary cultural template is a symbolic complex of beliefs and rituals that govern postmortem care. A successful model for society gives meaning, guidance, orientation, and motivation. It is essential to the maintenance of social order and the avoidance of chaos in the threat of death (Kearl 1989). Rituals are part of society's systemic response to crisis (Shils 1981). Without a guiding cultural system, the loss of a social member threatens the very stability of a social group. The halt of ritual in the death of a Javanese boy, studied by Geertz as a case of social reorganization, discussed in chapter one, is an example of the threat death brings to a society. The death of a member of a family and society brings about suffering over the loss, but the problem of suffering is not how to avoid the inevitable, but how to suffer along the way (Geertz 1973c: 104). Cultural systems, when they work well, place suffering in context and provide a vocabulary for experience.

The only cultural model available to Americans who do not want burial is cremation. But cremation as a cultural system is an emerging cultural system, not completely defined yet. Thus, as a model for social life, it provides guidance in some areas and leaves other matters undefined. Interestingly, the

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evidence from this research indicates that people who choose cremation frequently find it a happy choice. It is not a glum default option. Because it is still new, it remains a personal choice with burial as the default option for loved ones who have not made definite plans. Individuals who choose cremation are making an active choice to go with something different in body disposition that often has creative outcomes in memorialization. Over the course of this research, many people were genuinely excited to tell me their stories, because they had fanciful ideas for memorial options. They wanted me to know that they were thrilled to imagine their ashes being "scattered on the beach" or "launched in a fireworks display." Such highly positive ideas are not unique to my research. Other authors have written about the concept of "fun funerals" (Gadberry 2000) or other creative memorial options, such as having one's ashes carried as part of a Mardi Gras parade in New Orleans to the Mississippi river (Parker 2005). As a cultural model, then, cremation guides us to not think of the body as so sacred that we cannot burn the body and be creative with the ashes. Life is to be celebrated, even if that means death is to be denied (Aries 1974). What is typically gained in this model is creativity and individual self-expression as people are guided to orient themselves with cremation toward life and away from death. While the positives associated with cremation are part of what motivates the changes from burial to cremation, what also motivates this change are the negatives now associated with burial. In the Georgia Poll survey, sentiments such as "I do not want to rot in the box" and "no worms" were shared to express a cultural reinterpretation of burial that focuses more on the negative effects of bodily decomposition than the positive effects of bodily preservation.

Although cremation generates excitement for some, others find it not so easy to navigate the new, often ill-defined, funerary cultural model. Suffering, which challenges the order of the world, has traditionally been addressed through religion. Religion symbolizes the transcendent and sacred truths and inspires awe. Cremation, instead, is not as effective a cultural system as religion. Primarily secular, cremation helps as a model for suffering, but incompletely. Without clear institutionalized guidance and support for cremation, we can borrow from religion some, but we, including the clergy, are still pursuing

our own guidelines and meanings for cremation too. The family, the individual selecting cremation must do part of the work. They have to adopt and adapt some of the symbolism of cremation's meaning in order to know how to mourn and memorialize. In the process, they are likely to think of the body as waste, no longer the sacred vessel of the soul, that is being hastened by cremation in its return to nature. But while cremation users may think of the body as returning to nature, the meaning of ashes is less clearly defined in the cultural system. In the state survey in this research, it was clear that although creativity in memorialization is an opportunity for some, it is a source of possible confusion for others who are less likely to know what they want done with their ashes. Further, once their ashes are disposed of, their presence in society is greatly diminished, as usually very little identifying information is placed at or over their sites of final disposition. As such, cremation does not tell us to leave much of an enduring record of memorialization behind with which the living can continue to know the dead. In the relationship between a cultural system and social life, cremation as a model *for* social life is an emerging cultural system that is partly meaningful, partly vague, and in the process of being completely defined and articulated. For now, a degree of security is what is lost in the change between burial and cremation. What meanings that there are for people who choose cremation to assure them that they are taking good care of the dead and of themselves, such as beliefs about nature and funeral rituals more about life than death, are secular meanings. It has yet to be seen if individuals will find, as fully and as deeply, the same guidance in cremation's prescribed complex of funerary beliefs and rituals as they once did in burial through religion.

Model Of Social Life

The other side of the relationship between a cultural system and social life is the model *of* social life side. Through this, we answer questions such as what does the change from burial to cremation reflect? What does it reflect about the self, the family, and the larger society? How has this change, or deviation in

funerary beliefs and practices, been accepted, justified, and rationalized? What does the body reflect and signify about relationships as a model of social life? What does cremation tell us to think and feel about our bodies, our selves, and each other? What does the memorialization of the cremated reflect? What do gardens and other places for the cremated symbolize? Are the cremated kept with the living as visitable citizens like the buried? How do the users of this new cultural system make sense of death? When a cultural system serves as a model *of* society, it reflects social meaning and reality. Disposal practices symbolically embody larger cultural trends and beliefs (Stannard 1977). With the handling of each death, a picture of the present cultural era emerges. Thus, cultural systems embody both social stability and social change. As a result, cremation as a cultural system embodies some characteristics of social stability consistent with burial as a cultural system and reflects many features of society that have become manifest with the advent of a postindustrial world. In the case of the former, cremation continues to serve the funerary functions of a society that still cares for its dead. In the case of the latter, many social changes are evident in the survey, disposal, and memorialization options evaluated in this research, some of which are positive and some of which are negative.

Many individuals choose cremation, because it is a freeing, simpler option. For some, then, the weakened ties between the living and the dead is a positive that comes with cremation. In surveys, some people expressly wanted cremation, because it is "less of a burden on family." One individual stated, "I don't want my family to have to tend to my grave for years to come." Another respondent said, "Burial is a terrible thing to do to a person." "I don't want my family to have to watch them lower me into the ground," was also heard. For these individuals, cremation is a very positive option, free of the negative meanings they attach to burial. In such cases, burial is redefined. No matter how close these people have been to their relatives in life, they see burial with its concomitant ties between the living and the dead to be a burden. In fact, it is often because these individuals consider themselves close to their families that they want to protect them from the difficulties associated with burial.

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Thus, cremation reflects freedom from the dead for the living, reflecting a society where individuals believe that people should not burden one another but be allowed to be free of each other when possible. These sentiments fit with a highly individualistic and mobile society. If the living are tied down by the dead, they cannot move around as easily. As a result, cremation embodies a society on the move. In addition, cremation models a society that favors personal choice. The numerous options people have today to tailor their purchases to their lifestyles, they also want to have in their death care choices. Cremation permits a wide range of memorialization possibilities from scattering in a church garden to launching via a rocket into space. Therefore, A funerary cultural system that allows for freedom from the dead, for the mobility of society, and for a plethora of personal choices to accommodate different lifestyles is for many cremation users by far the best, most positive choice one could make. Such reasons are grounds for accepting, justifying, and rationalizing the choice to deviate from burial as a cultural system toward cremation as a cultural system, as a model of the contemporary world in which we live.

However, what is positive for some is negative for others. When death challenges the social order (Geertz 1973c), order is maintained by disposing of the body through burial or cremation and memorializing the dead. But locating the dead within society is less coherent and more disorderly with cremation, when the ashes are scattered at sea, for example, without a clear place to revisit and without much of a ceremony at the site. It is thus harder to regard the dead as still symbolic citizens of the society (Warner 1959), because of the weaker ties reflected in and facilitated through scattering, which is the most popular choice for the final disposition of ashes. Where for some this means freedom from the dead, so individuals can go on with their lives, for others, it means cremation reflects a weaker society with poor quality ties connecting social members to each other. A picture of cremation as increasing in a highly active and mobile society may mean optimistic convenience to some. But when the family plot in the town cemetery is no longer a meaningful place to rest the dead, because no one is "home" to visit and tend them, then cremation becomes more salient due to people being less connected and living in separate towns.

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While there are people who revel in a society of multiple choices for everything, there are also people who feel this leads to distraction, self-indulgence, and narcissism. For the latter, over-personalization symbolizes a society of individuals who no longer follow tradition, when burial has been a long-standing Judeo-Christian tradition in Western society. From this vantage point, cremation signifies a world in which people think and feel only about themselves and not about each other, only about the present and not about the past. Individuals who select cremation reflect a very different self image than do those who choose burial. Having the body thought of as waste and the ashes thought of as nothing but dust indicates a devaluation of the person after death. All that the cremated have to represent of the person, the self after death is the body on the way to the crematorium and the ashes that remain after. Ashes that are scattered are not preserved as the final resting place of a person. Even ashes that are interred in gardens, such as the gardens in Decatur City Cemetery, are over powered by nature where memory of mourners is absorbed by the natural world rather than reflecting on a world of valued social members. Thus, the memorialization of the cremated can reflect a world in which people make sense of death by letting individuals go and not maintaining the dead like living social members. Therefore, cremation as a cultural system serves as a model of society, a contemporary society that some people can find their place in more easily than others.

Modeling a Postmodern World

The contemporary society modeled by cremation as a cultural system has often been called a postmodern society. The rise in cremation occurs at a time when our culture has undergone radical changes, developing into a postmodern world (Rosenau 1992). Following industrialization, and forming an extreme manifestation of modernization, this is a time characterized by a devaluation of the traditions and teachings of social institutions, including religion (Denzin 1986). People have come to question the past and its practices (Jameson 1984), becoming more open to their own interpretations of what our lives and our selves mean to one another. Further, this postmodern world is constantly on the move, because it is less

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bound by tradition. Altogether, then, these cultural changes strain individuals' connections to social institutions and one another. Cremation as a cultural system reflects a postmodern society, because it tries to locate people in a highly individualized and atomized world.

Cremation symbolizes a postmodern world in many ways. To have a member of a family cremated and scattered in a place just meaningful to the deceased is indeed to personalize and individualize the experiences of death and mourning. Scattered ashes with little to no identification do not speak of social or institutional ties, and a society of atomized individuals is a hallmark of postmodernism. There are so many choices for memorialization that they cease to all be deeply meaningful, therefore shallowing experience. Even the clergy, lacking tradition related to cremation as a guide, has had to invent what to say during memorial services. A newly invented, shallower world is a very postmodernized world. People are turning away from death just to focus on life (Aries 1974), by having celebrations of life instead of funerals (Gadberry 2000). In this such a world, social, institutional, and religious ties are all weakened. In a postmodern world, the living want to focus on the living in life and not do the work of maintaining the dead among us as symbolic citizens of the society (Warner 1959).

Individualism, a primary characteristic of postmodernism, is evident in cremation through the individual decisions to be cremated, the private placement of ashes, the personalization of funeral ceremonies, and the multitude of choices for disposition and memorialization. Because increasing individualism means we are less tied to the dead and each other, individualism can threaten social cohesion. With cremation, each death stands apart without the cohesiveness of following tradition. Individuals are deciding for themselves what they want done with their bodies after they die. They are making these choices independent of, and sometimes without even consulting, their spouses or other family members. Over the course of this research, more than one person said, "Cremation is an individual personal decision," rather than a family decision. In one case, spouses made separate decisions, but the wife wanted their remains to be together. The husband chose to be buried, and the wife chose to be

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cremated. As a creative solution, she also plans to have her ashes scattered over his grave. Most people, however, reported they preferred to have their ashes scattered someplace personally special to them. But the private placing of cremated remains in sites of individual significance signifies a more individualized society. "The invention of tradition involved in the private placing of remains expresses something of postmodern secular society in which personal choice predominates over received tradition" (Davies 2003:771).

Individualization and secularization also extends to the funeral service itself. For instance,

> The fact that traditional religious services often use music and some form of eulogy on the dead, as well as some sermon on the place of death in life, has made it relatively easy for non-religious and secular forms of rite also to employ music and reflections of the deceased person but with wider options in terms of content. Playing the dead person's favorite music instead of singing hymns or using an appropriate reading from a favorite author or poet rather than sacred scriptures changes, and personalizes, the content while maintaining the continuity of cultural form (Davies 2005:xxii).

Individualization is manifest as the personal identity of the dead takes precedence over traditional religious liturgy. Consistent with the evidence in this research, further personalization, privatization, and individualization exists in the multitude of choices people can make in what they want done with themselves after they die. Nowadays, people can have their ashes placed in an urn personalized in any way you want (Ansaldo 2005), in a floating balloon or on a putting green (Rehfeld 2005), or in a colorful tomb with a contemporary design (Francis, Kellaher, and Neophytou 2005). Alternately, one can have his or her body encased in plastic via plastination (Walter 2004) or frozen via cryonics (Bryant and Snizek 2003). Cremated or otherwise, memorialization can be individualized with a memorial tattoo (Cohn 2005) or with an impromptu memorial at a roadside, gate, or home entrance (Reid 2003).

The association between death practices and individualism, seen in this research, is part of a larger pattern occurring not just in the United States but in other industrialized or industrializing nations. In Japan, for example, individual gravemarkers are increasingly distinguished from family markers. Full-sized

portraits are appearing etched onto the gravestones of slain Russian mafia members (Eskenazi and Kondakov 1997). In addition, like the increasingly inclusive war memorials appearing in the U.S. (Schwartz and Bayma 1999), the construction of monuments at Yad Vashem in Israel recognize groups, organizations, and individuals once excluded from the narrative of the Holocaust, revealing a change in Israeli culture toward a more pluralistic society (Brog 2004). In each of these instances, cultural turns toward individualization and democratization are recorded in memorials. Thus, the individualism evident in cremation in this research is also evident in the memorialization of the dead internationally. Even if we prefer to think positively about cremation, it clearly does reflect the increasing individualization of postmodern society.

Where cremation is reflective of postmodern society, traditional burial, especially in landscaped cemeteries, is better adapted to a modern society. Burial is better at fixing the dead within a community, in a world that is cohesive not fragmented, modern not postmodern. But there is no need to be nostalgic about burial. Burial in modern society has carried with it invidious distinctions of wealth, class, race, and gender. Such distinctions in the society have been replicated in the positioning of graves and in the style of monuments in the cemetery. The cemetery is a symbolic replica of the whole society (Warner 1959), good and bad. Funerary practices as cultural systems carry with them symbolic reflections of the larger society, for better or worse. Symbolism is meant to relate man's sphere of life to a larger sphere around him, a social world or a religious world, within which he can symbolically locate himself (Geertz 1973c). Traditionally, for the buried, this symbolic world has been religion. But, at least in theory, postmodernism, reflected in cremation, does not contain an organized coherent symbolic order with which one can connect oneself to something larger than oneself. Cremation, therefore, may have to be more pragmatic, as the ties to religion as an institution weakens and social ties continue to dissolve. Instead of relying on funerary ritual to unite life as lived to a symbolic order, people using cremation must work harder to fit the two together. People must be careful, optimistic, and hopefully successful in inventing further transformative

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symbolic meanings with which to affiliate with cremation. Perhaps the focus on life, evident in the ceremonies of people who choose cremation, is one of those meanings. We are pushing to make death meaningful again as cremation emerges as a cultural system. May we succeed on some level that is greater than what is merely personally meaningful and only personally sacred.

Modeling Larger Cultural Trends

In addition to modeling the larger postmodern culture of our postindustrial society, cremation serves as a model of social life that reflects other larger cultural trends and sociological concerns. For example, cremation reflects a collapse of boundaries in the larger social world. Invidious distinctions of race and class, common in a modern world, are disappearing in a postindustrial age (Zerubavel 1991). Severe social boundaries that once limited the opportunities of those on the bottom of society are vanishing in this increasingly egalitarian world. Where burial practices supported race and class distinctions in the location and construction of graves, cremation does not. Cremation practices, as a cultural system, provide more of an equal opportunity. As the identity of the cremated is not overtly preserved in our present memorialization practices, neither are distinctions of race and class. Horizontal social boundaries of gender and race and vertical boundaries of social hierarchy are not recorded in the memorialization of the cremated. Where it was once thought that culture evolved from nature (Levi-Strauss 1963), cremation shows the reverse pattern. Socially, culture is returning to nature with cremation. Our cultural beliefs and practices are absorbed into beliefs and practices with strong overtones of nature when it comes to cremation. Nature dominates the dead as they disappear into the natural world. Without a preserved body, ashes become dust, and the cremated dead are deader than the buried dead. Nature dominates the living when they go to visit the cremated in a heavily landscaped garden, or on an unaltered beach, and find it easier to commune with nature than to commune with the dead.

Immigration is another macro-societal trend that bears on cremation in America. The rise of immigration to the United States from non-Christian countries is facilitating the change in American society to a more pluralistic society. With increasing pluralism, there are fewer rituals that are shared by the whole of society. Traditional funerary ritual becomes secularized, sacred only to smaller numbers of people in smaller groups. What is sacred only to small pockets of immigrants is not sacred to the whole of society. This cultural trend is already manifest in cremation in the U.S. statistically. In many Western states, where immigration is higher and people are less traditionally religious than in Eastern states, cremation, which is less tied to Christianity and Judaism than burial, has already approached or exceeded 50% of deaths annually (CANA 2005b).

Technology also bears on commemoration. Evidence in this research shows that the cremated, to date, are not as memorialized as the buried. Some have said it is not as necessary to memorialize the dead nowadays as it once was, because changes in technology allows us to document our lives more. Photos, email, and home movie videos may mean that we can keep the image of the dead alive among us to the extent that we no longer need to bury a body preserved to look like the living person it once was. The dead live on through memory and technology, so that we can cremate almost without memorialization, goes the argument. Memory and commemoration, however, are two different things. The former is more private and individualistic, and the latter is more public and collective. Consequently, commemoration serves functions for collective social life that memory cannot.

Durkheim ([1912] 2001) said mourning rites maintain collective social life by reinforcing the social link between the individual and the group. People must come together, as a duty of social membership, when one member dies to bridge the gap left by the loss, to maintain that the social links between the individuals and the group are strong, and to assert that the group can continue. Commemoration, therefore, is still necessary in our advanced technological age and meets a social need that memory alone cannot. This is why the meaninglessness of ashes and the consequent inaccessible

memorialization of the cremated dead by the living is of concern. The increasing individualization and

personalization of funerary practices reflects that the family and community no longer take themselves

seriously enough to do the work with the dead for the social maintenance of the collective group. Burial,

too, is affected when funerals shrink in attendance and the focus is on the living not the dead, and when

weakening social ties are reflected in self-interested, personal, recreational-oriented iconography on

headstones (Collier 2003). Technology, then, does not absolve social members of the elementary need to

maintain collective life when someone dies. Since Durkheim considered collective life sacred, we must

consider what we are keeping sacred in postindustrial society and how we are maintaining the sacred

through funerary practices.

Cremation and the Sacred in Postindustrial Society

The sociological significance of this research can be further examined by looking at how

cremation affects the sacred in our postindustrial society. Questions posed at the outset of this research that

facilitate the analysis of cremation and the sacred include, what is sacred about cremation? Since burial as

a cultural system is sacred, is the cultural system surrounding cremation held sacred? Where is the sacred

located? In postmodern society is the import of the sacred diminishing? If the treatment of the dead is

becoming less sacred, then do we value individual social members less? And, do we have a decreasing

sense of social life and the collectivity? Since Durkheim said mourning the dead is fundamental to the

maintenance of society, is cremation as a cultural system meeting the elementary needs of society that

burial did? Is cremation good social maintenance? What is sacred to the group and not just to the

individual? Ultimately, in what are we finding value and meaning that shapes and demonstrates our lives?

What is meaningful to people in life is reflected in a society's death practices, because the citizenry

relies on culture to see them through the trauma of the death of a social member (Geertz 1973a). Since

what is sacred is what is most meaningful to the members of a society, it is important to answer these

questions about cremation and the sacred in order to see what it tells us about contemporary American society.

In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* ([1912] 2001), Emile Durkheim divided social life into two forms or two planes - the sacred, which is set apart and filled with awe and which is associated with the collective practices of the moral community, and the profane, which is associated with the utilitarian activities of individuals pursuing self-interest. Individuals in a society live on two planes. The first is the private, mundane and utilitarian plane, and the second is the collective, elevated, and moral plane. Thus, individuals experience the sacred versus the profane as the common life of the community versus the private life of the individual. In Durkheim's day, he worried over the waning of traditional society and the waxing of the new, largely unknown modern society. He saw nineteenth century changes uproot old institutions without putting new ones in place. As a consequence, Durkheim understood the world he observed as a between-time, as an occasion for both alarm and excitement for which he held dual regard. The switch we are observing now between burial and cremation, between one funerary system and another, reflects the cultural changes between modern and postmodern society. Consequently, it is also a between-time for which there is reason for both pessimism, in the form of worry over what is lost, and optimism, in the form of excitement over what is new. For Geertz, like Durkheim, "culture consists of socially established structures of meaning" (1973a:12), and, as it changes, new structures of meaning form and become established. Therefore, with regards to contemporary American funerary practices, one can say it is a time of social change from one set of funerary practices to another, and culturally speaking a time of symbolic change from one symbol system of meaning to another.

Durkheim's cause for alarm and excitement as he observed a between-time can shed light on our own cultural between-time. In examining culture through cremation, pessimism is not hard to come by. The symbolic complex of beliefs and practices, that make up a cultural system (Geertz 1973a), forming around cremation, does reflect increasing individualism, a hallmark of postmodern society (Elias 1985). If

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individuals make disposition decisions independent of their families, hold secular ceremonies that focus only on the self, and memorialize in ways that symbolize and foster self-interest, such as scattering in private, personally meaningful places and not maintaining the dead as visitable symbolic citizens of the community (Warner 1959), then cremation reflects, and may even facilitate, a society of atomized individuals with weak or broken social ties. When cremation is individualistic, atomistic in nature, when it ties us to ourselves and not each other, then the cultural system around it falls short of being a true social link between the individual and other social members of the collective society. For Durkheim, it was religion, as a form of authority and custom, that most powerfully linked the individual to society. However, with the advent of postmodernism, we have seen religion to be a weakening social institution as borne out in cremation practices. Durkheim wrote, "The dead person is a sacred being" ([1912] 2001:290). But, today, in the public's opinions and attitudes toward cremation, we have seen the Judeo-Christian belief in the dead body as the sacred vessel of the soul wane and the rise in the view of the body as refuse that is acceptable to burn. It would seem, then, that in answering our questions, that the dead are not as sacred. If so, then the treatment of the dead, through any emerging cultural system such as cremation, is not as sacred. If we value the dead less, then we value the person, the social member less and, in turn, consequently have a decreased sense of ourselves, of social life, and of the collectivity in which we exist. Durkheim considered mourning the dead to be fundamental to the maintenance of society, because mourning rites reinforce the social link between the individual and the group, affirming the ties that bind the group to itself and bridging the loss caused by death. But if caring for each other by caring for the dead is truly less sacred, then cremation as a cultural system is not meeting the elementary needs of society. It is not good social maintenance.

Burial rites have guided individual social members through the loss of another, because the survivors' attachment to the social group is affirmed by participation in the mourning rites of burial. An individual who feels firmly attached to a society feels morally compelled to share its joys and sorrows

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(Durkheim [1912] 2001). But, at present, the group of survivors that feels compelled to engage in this form of maintenance of the social link between the individual and the social group is shrinking. Frequently, the people deeply mourning the dead are just the immediate family members. The larger society or community is less tied together by mourning rites when the cremated dead are only commemorated through a small service and the ashes scattered in a manner meaningfully inaccessible to survivors beyond the family. Under such circumstances, commemoration is limited to a few separate individuals, and, as such, is only personally sacred. In this situation, the dead are only valued by individuals and not by members as a social group. Because the shift from burial to cremation is the second secularizing turn in funerary practices since the advent of modern society, it is a shift from socially sacred mourning rites to only personally meaningful mourning rites. Burial at churches involved religiously sacred mourning rituals. Then, the first secularization in funeral practices in the modern era, which is the shift from burial at churches to burial in pastoral, park-style landscaped cemeteries, left mortuary ritual at least socially sacred, if not religiously sacred, to the modern industrial world. But in the postindustrial world, with the increase in cremation, the secularizing turn in funerary rites marks a change from holding mourning socially sacred to leaving it only personally meaningful. Thus, the move from church cemeteries to park-style cemeteries to cremation has been a change from the religiously sacred to the socially sacred to the merely personally sacred mourning rites. Consequently, it is due to the loss of the sacred on religious and social levels that mourning rituals have become inadequate forms of social maintenance with the rise of cremation in America. When the disposal and memorialization of the dead is only personally meaningful one or another disparate individuals, then the care of the dead falls below Durkheim's elevated, moral, sacred plane of collective life.

However, the whole story of cremation is not in yet. It is an emerging system. Cremation, so far, is an incomplete institution (Cherlin 1978). Durkheim studied religion as authoritative yet dynamic social ideals, beliefs, and practices that shape life in a society's moral universe. "One finds religion wherever

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public normative concepts, symbols, or rites are employed" ([1912] 2001:viii). Therefore, we may find that cremation as a cultural system fits with Durkheim's concept of religion, after all. As this new symbol system becomes normative, cremation may become religious, in a Durkheimian sense, and so must have some aspects of the sacred on religious and social levels. We can also see the sacred in cremation in Durkheim's view on mourning. Mourning the dead equals a mutual duty of the members of a social group and having duties reinforces the individual as a social member. Thus as people, over time, come to embrace cremation as a meaningful cultural system of normative symbols, beliefs, and practices, then it may be not just an obligatory way to care for the dead but a sacred, valued act or duty, bringing with it a sense of the sacred, as Durkheim saw the sacred, as an elevated, moral source of joy, peace, and strength. If cremation becomes elevated to the sacred, then mourning the dead reinforces the individual as a social member, elevating both the member and the social group to the plane of the sacred. We are, after all, postmodern or not, still a society that cares for its dead. This has never been abandoned. As a result, cremation may become, once it is established, as sacred a cultural system as burial has been.

People mourn the dead both because they have to and they want to. Further, for Durkheim, the more sacred a moral rule becomes, the more the element of obligation tends to recede. As cremation becomes more established, and even eclipses burial, the beliefs and practices of the new cultural system may well become more sacred as the culture evolves and old beliefs about burial fall away. We are governed by and attracted to the sacred, so as cremation becomes more normative, which it is doing at a dramatic rate, more people may be attracted to it. In addition, Durkheim noted that the sacred is contagious. It spreads to things connected to it, such that any object, person, or gesture can become sacred. So as a new cultural system emerges, aspects that are sacred can spread to other parts and people in the forming complex of beliefs and practices. In this way, cremation creates social membership, and cremation can foster more than increasing individualism. However, to do this, cremation will need to be more than personally sacred to individuals only, so that individuals can be connected to something greater than

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themselves. But it is too soon to say for certain whether that will or will not happen. Additional pressures that may bear on cremation becoming an established cultural system involve the untidiness of change. Mary Douglas, in *Purity and Danger* (1966), notes that culturally people find change, such as the shift between burial and cremation, to be an unpleasantly untidy matter of disorder. Therefore, a new cultural system, as a structure of order, must emerge to control and deal with the untidiness of change. Cremation is already forming its own cultural system as its own structure of symbolic order. For example, while cremation may be an incomplete institution (Cherlin 1978), at present, aspects of it are already becoming institutionalized. In California, cremation art is becoming institutionalized, as part of an emerging personalized funerary art movement, with the opening in 2007 of a gallery devoted to urns and other personal memorial art for cremation (Brown 2007). As we resolve any dissonance between burial and cremation, as cremation becomes established, resolving the symbolic order, then it may become more sacred to the society with more individuals attracted to it.

Durkheim's view of the sacred helps us understand how a society that still values its dead can *potentially* elevate an emerging cultural system from the personal to the sacred plane as that system becomes socially and culturally established. Therefore, when faced with death, individuals *may* come together and find value and meaning, that shapes and demonstrates their lives, in the rituals surrounding cremation as a cultural system. Increasing individualism, social mobility, secularization, and decreasing social ties do threaten that, however. In Durkheimian terms, cremation is not yet a good form of social maintenance through mourning rites. American society, like Western culture on the whole, is moving toward a more homogenized, atomized world of personal choice. As a plus, invidious distinctions of race, gender, religion, and other potential sources of cultural animosity are disappearing. But, the cohesive family, the traditional seat of funerary care, is also on the wane as egalitarianism and pluralism are on the rise. As a result, cremation may become routinized but not institutionalized. Thus, cremation may remain on Durkheim's private, mundane, utilitarian, and profane plane of social life, not rising to the collective,

elevated, moral, and sacred plane. Only, time will tell. Yet, as Durkheim watched traditional society give

way to modern society, we can, as we watch modern society give over to postmodern society, meet the

cultural change in funerary practices, as in the society, with a sort of dual regard for our own between-time,

in an attempt to hold a modicum of optimism amid the pessimism.

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