

WHY DO CHRISTIANS FIND IT HARD TO GRIEVE? by Jeoff Walters,
Paternoster Press 1997. 203 pages. no price marked. pbk

The death of Diana, Princess of Wales has transformed the geography of modern grief. Somehow people expect and demand more from both pastoral care and ritual. During my monthly stay as duty minister at the local crematorium, families come with tapes of personalised music and with an individual prepared to share their own memories of the deceased. Amidst these wholly acceptable expectations, one is challenged to construct an appropriate framework of Christian meaning and hope.

It is against this background that Walters explores the issue of how the Christian faith might be a source of comfort to bereaved believers. He argues that for many the Christian belief can impose an additional burden of denial and guilt. Funerals become "celebrations", and deep grief evidence of a lack of faith. The central argument of this book is this: that many Christians' negative views of death and bereavement reflect the idea of the immortality of the soul, which owes more to the philosophy of Plato than the bible, while the more Christian concept of resurrection in the mercy of God after a real death, actually allows a proper place for grief for the one who has been lost within a context of hope and trust in God. The book is well-written and draws upon case studies from the Old and New Testaments, modern psychological theory and popular Christian literature on grief. Throughout Walters maintains that what is most biblical is most therapeutically effective.

This is a useful contribution to the growing literature around grief and will serve to stimulate reflections on theory and patterns of pastoral practice. Paternoster have not served the text well with an appalling cover design. I hope that this will not detract from the book's use in this important area of human experience.

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