

19<sup>th</sup> September 2022

## Appropriate

**"Contemporary theories tend to portray ...  
history as efficient in reaching unique and appropriate outcomes."**

James G March and Johan P Olsen

*The new initialisation, (American political science review, 1893)*

My first parish, a large, peripheral Edinburgh housing estate, was high on any list of social-deprivation indicators in the city. The second, an inner-city parish, was populated by folk living in "good Edinburgh flats." The exercising of ministry, therefore, had to be appropriate to local circumstances.

The last funeral I conducted in the housing estate was the latest of several deaths in the one family. Three of the principal mourners arrived at the graveside in prison cars. Many in the crowd were "the worse for drink". Leaving the cemetery, a daughter took me aside. "Thanks for the service for grampa, son," she said. "You did him proud." She paused, looking for the right words. "In fact, the funeral was just dead brilliant."

A week later, in my new parish, I conducted the cremation service for an elderly lady. Her son, the earl-of-something, lived in Essex, and we'd arranged the funeral over the phone. Outside the crematorium the esteemed earl shook me by the hand. It wasn't *his* way to remark, "The funeral was just dead brilliant." Instead, he smiled and said, "Thank you, Reverend. That was ... a model of its kind." The ministry offered at both funerals was deemed to be appropriate. The thanks given was appropriate. The reaction was appropriate. The emotions and meaning were appropriate.

Today, some will find Queen Elizabeth's funeral "just dead brilliant". For many it will be "a model of its kind". But I pray that everyone will find it appropriate: a family at the funeral of a mother, grandmother, great grandmother and dearly loved relative; a nation on the loss of our longest reigning monarch; a Commonwealth, giving thanks for an exemplar of compassion, dignity and service; a world and its people, mourning the death of a significant figure in history. And I pray that each of us, in our different emotions, might find a meaning for ourselves today that's appropriate too.

In varied circumstances, ministry is offered to suit the needs expressed, *and* we reach "unique and appropriate outcomes" for every unique individual and family. I thank God that today can be one of those days.

### **A prayer for today**

*Go in Peace, Elizabeth, unique child of God. Well, done, good and faithful servant. Amen*

*An original reflection by © Tom Gordon*

Also available at <https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com>