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1-24-2016

### January 24, 2016: Secular Rites

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Title: Secular Rites

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1/24/2016 – – I attended a memorial service yesterday. It was billed as a kind of wake. But it turned out to be a small religious service in a VFW Hall. The event was presided over by an Episcopal priest who was a cousin of the wife of the deceased. It was surprising how orthodox the small service was. The liturgy was taken directly from regular Episcopal rites. It was particularly surprising given that, as far as I know, the deceased was not a churchgoer. The memorial service reminded me of the three things I have noticed in death related matters along more or less secular people. First, no one knows how to do these things except the clergy. And this was shown again yesterday. The presence of the priest lent a real solemnity to the event. He handled it very well and was very satisfying to everyone. So, the clergy do not impose themselves on non-churchgoers. Instead, they are sought out. This is one of the great failures of secular civilization. Second, once they are installed, the clergy go into their usual liturgy. I don't know why I would think otherwise, but how many of the people in the room believe in or understand anything about the resurrection of the dead? About a third of the room knew the responses that the service requires. A VFW Hall is just not a church. However, as my wife says, this bothered no one but me. No one else was listening. Finally, I am struck by how the Christian clergy move immediately to life eternal. It is as if the whole purpose of life is to inherit eternal life, which from a certain point of view you might say is the case. But it is such a peculiar theology. Here you expect something about living. And all you get is this proposal that death is not what it seems. The deceased is now with God and the Saints. To me, this theology of the afterlife is the best reason of all to be secular. If there is a memorial service for me I hope someone says, well, Bruce is dead. You soon will be too. Better get moving.