

I know she's still with us. (She's sitting right over there.)

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I found [this June NYT article](#) a bit disturbing: some funeral home directors have been placing dead people in lifelike, meticulously personalized poses for their own funerals.

It's easy enough to see this as just a continuation of the standard individualistic funeral treatment, honoring people's hobbies and interests. Instead of lying in a racecar-shaped coffin, the deceased appears to be actually driving a racecar! It's whimsical and particular and "so him."

But if you're a mainliner who keeps up with your reading, it's hard not to read such a piece through Tom-Long-colored glasses. [Long articulates theological concerns about the move toward "memorial services,"](#) among other reasons because the person who died doesn't tend to be invited. At first glance, dressing up a body and propping her up to play cards or whatever may look like the other extreme: here she is, the guest of honor.

Yet this practice shares with the cadaver-less memorial service an inclination to deny death rather than ritualize it. She looks so alive! He's sitting right here with us, listening to what we're saying about him! The Christian funeral Long and others seek to recover insists on commending a dead human being to God in the hope of the resurrection. If it's hard to do that without a body, it's pretty weird to do it if every detail aims to distract from the body's deadness.

At [the Ekklesia Project gathering](#) last week, [Ben Stewart](#) made the observation that the liturgical renewal movement hasn't really touched Christian funeral practices in anything like the way it's reshaped baptism and Eucharist. Long's book, now almost five years old, has prompted much conversation. I'm very interested to see what takes root in our churches.