

## He was deeply spiritual . . .

Ed Clark and J.C. Patel seem to have had very little in common in life. In death, that changed.

Mr. Clark, a father of five, died at 36. His obituary mentions a church affiliation in his youth but none as an adult. His memorial service was scheduled for the chapel of the National Cremation Service in Houston. The obituary includes these lines:

“Ed was deeply spiritual and appreciated the smallest and simplest things in life. He loved cooking, art, music, literature and most of all spending time with his family and friends. He was always excited to share new things he had learned and seen with others. He aspired to live the life of ‘the good Samaritan.’ Ed’s humor and wisdom touched all that knew him, his laughter and spontaneity will be missed.”

Mr. Patel died at 54. He was a Hindu and asked that memorial donations be given to his temple. His obituary, which appeared in the Houston Chronicle on the same day as Mr. Clark’s, includes these lines:

“Jay was deeply spiritual and appreciated the smallest and simplest things in life. He loved yoga, meditation, and literature and most of all spending time with his family and friends. He was always excited to share new things he had learned and seen with others. He aspired to live the life of ‘the good Samaritan.’ Jay touched all that knew him, he will be missed.”

Boilerplate spirituality may or may not provide comfort to loved ones in time of loss. Perhaps it does no harm (except to the language). When it is incorporated into Christian worship, however, it becomes a rather different matter.

Not long ago, I attended the funeral of an old friend who was in no discernible way “religious.” The pastor who officiated, who had been a friend of his before she was ordained in a mainline denomination, said that the man and his wife sometimes offered thanks to God before meals and that he had been baptized. She said that he was a good and decent man and that his many kindnesses shown her and others were evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in his life. Added up, she said, everything demonstrated that he was now with the Lord.

Shortly thereafter, I saw a friend who is a member of a church in a large denomination considered evangelical and conservative by virtually everyone. He said that in his church, people are asked at their baptisms to declare that they have received Jesus into their hearts. There is no mention of identifying with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ for the remission of one’s own sin. My friend wrote a note to the pastor who performs most of the baptisms asking where in the Bible he finds language about receiving Jesus into one’s heart. He received no reply.

Providing comfort to the grieving and celebrating joyfully with those who have found new life in Christ are admirable things, and biblical ones. Sowing confusion about what rebirth and commitment to Christ mean are not.