

NEWS RELEASE

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WLU professor looks at manhood, ritual in powerful, personal book

Waterloo, Ont. (May 5) — "I am not a 'sweet man,' " says Ronald Grimes, a professor of religion and culture at Wilfrid Laurier University.

Grimes is, in fact, a man who rages. And loves. And mourns. And grieves, and is bewildered, happy, sad and mad. He's a lot like other men, in fact, except that he is also a noted scholar in the field of ritual studies, and he is doggedly honest.

In his seventh book, *Marrying & Burying: Rites of Passage in a Man's Life*, Grimes examines significant rituals in his life and in the contemporary culture of the past 30 years.

"It's a book about how I work and how I play with my kids. It tells what my family and I do on holidays and at birthdays, what we do when somebody dies, graduates, or gives birth. And it is about the role of ritual in domestic, religious, and public life."

Noted feminist writer Carolyn G. Heilbrun says the book is "profoundly moving and important; there is no fear of femininity (the real article, not the media version), and it is full of original ideas about both manhood and rituals."

Theologian Tom Driver says, "*Marrying & Burying* is very personal and pure Grimes . . . This is a book for men who are not looking for escape but for a grainier kind of wisdom in touch with everyday life."

Grimes, one of the founding editors of the *Journal of Ritual Studies*, writes powerfully about the death of his 12-year-old son, and how the boy's funeral ceremony became a turf battle in the aftermath of another rite of passage, divorce.

(more)

Of birth Grimes writes, "Men badly need vocabulary and images for what fathers can do at birth. God the father is a bad example. Jesus had no children. Buddha abandoned his. And Abraham would have sacrificed Isaac. We need human examples. The mythic ones offer little that I care to emulate."

Grimes reflects, "You are not supposed to write about such things, particularly if you are a man. And white. And a liberal academic. And a teacher in a religion department."

Ritual "is like putting an exclamation mark on an event," Grimes says, quoting his own brother. "A rite of passage is how we negotiate big transitions in our lives," he says. "It's how we mark events, make memories, and cultivate values."

Grimes argues that many of us in North America "exist in a state of ritual deprivation.

"We have no serious experience with ceremony, and so when we encounter it, we either become gushy, romantic, and uncritical about it, or we consider it exotic — the product of some other culture, age, or people."

"Yes," he admits, "rituals can be boring or exploitative, but they are also vital to personal and social health."

"My book is a troubling one," Grimes confesses. "Readers' reactions to it are polarized. One day I received a letter saying, 'Thank you, your book changed my life,' and the next week I got one that declared, 'Your book drove me crazy.' "

In a review, *The New York Times* said, ". . . there is much of interest here both for men and women. Mr. Grimes intuitively understands the generic human need for inclusion within a community through some commemorative process He poignantly describes the longings that have occasioned his own quest."

Marrying & Burying: Rites of Passage in a Man's Life is published by Westview Press of Boulder, Colorado. The soft cover is priced at \$18.95 (U.S.); the hard cover at \$59.95 (U.S.).