

**Maintaining Integrity and Mission Focus in Anglican Funerals for Royal
Marines Killed In Action: The Recognition and Resolution of Conflicting
Civilian, Military and Christian Narratives.**

In memory of Marine Tom “Vinders” Curry

1986 - 2007

who set me on this journey.

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This dissertation is the product of my own work.

The work of others has been properly acknowledged throughout.

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Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

The focus for this dissertation is Anglican funeral ministry for Royal Marines killed in action. Such services take place all too often: even in the last six months 14 members of 40 Commando Royal Marines have been killed in Afghanistan. Each death is a prompt to the perhaps universally felt fear of death, which Davies argues to flow from a multitude of fears, and in particular the ultimate fear of life's meaninglessness.¹ 'Death, like the sun, is not to be looked at steadily' said La Rochefoucauld,² but it is not possible for the military or their families to treat death as 'ignorable'.³ The funerals of those killed in action offer particular challenges to those who lead them. Notably, so many poems, musical items and personal tributes may be requested that they threaten to displace elements of the funeral liturgy. Where Common Worship warns against tributes interrupting the flow of the bible readings and sermon,⁴ today's reality can appear to be that reading and sermon interrupt the flow of the tributes. When requested items are secular or even positively anti-Christian in content or tone further tensions arise: they may be felt as threatening clergy integrity or as introducing jarring inconsistency into the service.

¹ Davies, Douglas, *A Brief History of Death* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 141

² La Rochefoucauld, François duc de, *Reflections* (c. 1655) [Online]. Available from: <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/9105> [Accessed: 6 October 2010]

³ Davies, Douglas, *The Theology of Death* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 178

⁴ Horton, R. Anne, *Using Common Worship Funerals: A Practical Guide to the New Services* (London: Church House Publishing, 2000), 43

These funerals involve contact with people who are experiencing, invariably with immense courage and pride, deep grief and profound questioning. My aim is a critical theological analysis of the social and ministerial factors involved, leading to more effective Christian servant ministry to families and the military community.

I have restricted my focus to Anglican ministry with the Royal Marines: although somewhat artificial this recognises that the majority of such services are Anglican, and also keeps the scope of this dissertation manageable. I do not address post-funeral memorialisation, the Wootton Bassett phenomenon or (other than in passing) cremation/burial issues. There are currently no female Anglican chaplains in the Royal Navy, and I am not aware of female clergy who have taken funerals of the type I am considering, hence I could not interview any female clergy, and have not addressed issues of gender in ministry. The principles of analysis and ministerial response, if perhaps not the embodied practice, will apply to female clergy also.

1.2 Methodology

I have used a simple pastoral cycle: Experience; Exploration; Reflection and Action.⁵

Illustration 1: Pastoral Cycle



In chapter two (Experience) I list some of the features of funerals for those killed in combat: their high profile, media interest and size means that they make large demands on those who conduct them. Chapter three (Exploration) examines some of the current thinking of the social sciences and of theology in the areas of death and funeral ministry, and leads into the results of some research undertaken through an analysis of tributes on the Ministry of Defence web site and through interviews with clergy who have been involved in this ministry. Chapter four (Reflection) brings the various strands of research and exploration together in critical conversation around the discovered narratives: the process of

⁵ Ballard, Paul and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society* (London: SPCK, 2nd ed. 2006), 85-86

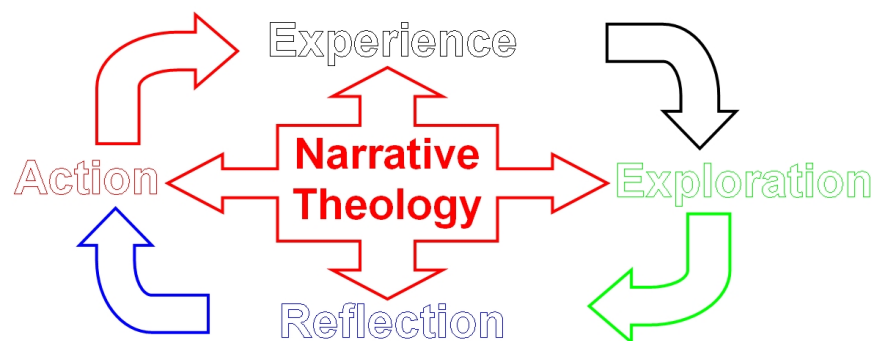
exploration was itself both reflective and indicative of



praxis, so there is some overlap between all the cycle's stages. Finally, recognising that 'everything is practicum',⁶ I turn in chapter five (Action) explicitly to praxis. Worsley criticises the pastoral cycle's tendency to activism, and I recognise that sometimes integrity arises from a 'new way of perceiving'⁷ existing praxis, but there are real challenges here and I therefore sketch some critically evaluated suggestions to help towards the delivery of mission-focussed ministry.

I use throughout the 'humanising, person-centred perspective'⁸ of Narrative Theology as the language of enquiry to examine the various narratives of bereaved families, the military, and both civilian clergy and military chaplains.

Illustration 2: Use of Narrative Theology



⁶ Schön, Donald A., *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*. (San Francisco: Jossey Bass Inc., 1987), 16

⁷ Worsley, C 'From Death to Life: Pastoral Integrity and Funerals', *Theology*, no. 102 (1999), 202-209, 203

⁸ Valentine, *Bereavement Narratives*, 19



A conventional approach to funeral ministry might ask

questions primarily in the areas of dogma and belief, whereas more radical approaches may focus on practice only. Neither is adequate: death rituals are intimately bound up with death beliefs,⁹ and it is through beliefs, as well as ‘thoughts, feelings, actions ... and events’,¹⁰ that the bereaved make sense of lived experience.

Issues of the conflict of narratives were expected to be significant, and this is indeed the case, but the conflict is not overt. Rather, conflict is implicit, and normally over quickly: “strong” narratives simply shouldering aside “weaker” ones. A constructive narrative method allows us to see how ‘people make sense of their experience’,¹¹ in this instance of bereavement. Rather than a pathology of medicalised grief (which is likely to be more familiar to clergy) it opens up an anthropology and theology of grief as a social and spiritual phenomenon. By questioning ‘the strict separation between life and death’¹² and giving the bereaved’s experiences ‘significance by allowing them to be seen as part of a larger canvas’¹³ a narrative approach creates an atmosphere less hostile to theological enquiry than that generated by a pathology of grief approach, where theology may be ignored or ‘reduced to therapy, [becoming] another instrument of secularisation’.¹⁴ The relationship between narratives is complex and fluid:

⁹ Davies, *Brief History*, 18

¹⁰ Valentine, Christine, *Bereavement Narratives: Continuing Bonds in the 21st Century* (London: Routledge, 2008), 92

¹¹ Valentine, *Bereavement Narratives*, 1

¹² Valentine, *Bereavement Narratives*, 3

¹³ Billings, Alan, *Secular Lives, Sacred Hearts: The Role of the Church in a Time of No Religion* (London: SPCK, 2004), 31

¹⁴ Billings, Alan, *Dying and Grieving: A Guide to Pastoral Ministry* (London: SPCK, 2002), 22



they ‘interweave, overlap, compete and evolve’.¹⁵

Accurate understanding must therefore include an analysis of the way they interact and negotiate with each other.¹⁶

1.3 Summary

The Narrative approach does have limitations: in particular the ideas it is often associated with, of the dead playing an active role in the lives of the living, may be theologically far from orthodox. Notwithstanding such limitations narrative is a ‘central ingredient for understanding’¹⁷ these complicated events, and so enables the development of the skilled and wise pastoral care they demand.

¹⁵ Valentine, *Bereavement Narratives*, 19

¹⁶ Valentine, *Bereavement Narratives*, 2

¹⁷ Anderson, Herbert and Foley, Edward, *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals: Weaving together the Human and the Divine* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass, 1998), 47

Chapter 2: Experience



2.1 The Military Funeral

Royal Marines are a unique grouping, and their deaths in some ways different even to other military combat deaths. All Royal Marine Commandos are male, and all have passed a gruelling training, demonstrating fitness and professional competence. Officers are almost universally graduates, and Other Ranks are generally intelligent and well educated: typically a third are qualified for university entrance, and a significant number, too, have degrees. Like all combat troops the Royal Marines have suffered significant numbers of battle deaths in recent years. Whereas in the past British military dead remained in 'some corner of a foreign field',¹⁸ today bodies are returned to the UK for burial or cremation. Unlike the Americans, who place their soldier dead in military cemeteries, we bury (it normally is burial) where the next-of-kin wish. Typically death occurs on the battlefield (more rarely a casualty dies of wounds later) and the body is 'whisked away'¹⁹ to a mortuary in theatre. In the UK a notification team of a Royal Marine officer and a chaplain inform the next of kin. There is normally then a delay of some days before, following a military vigil in Afghanistan, the body is returned to the UK. It is received in a ceremony at RAF Lyneham before being taken via Wootton Bassett to the coroner. Once released to the undertaker the

¹⁸ Brooke, Rupert, 'The Soldier' (1914) [Online]. Available from: http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/rupert_brooke/poems/4364 [Accessed: 3 October 2010]

¹⁹ Appendix 2.3.6



body is embalmed, unless the nature of the injuries

precludes this, allowing the deceased to be viewed by the family if they wish.

Meanwhile a Royal Marines Visiting Officer and a Funerals Officer have been appointed and have met with the family. A chaplain, commando trained if possible, is appointed to look after the religious side of the funeral: if a military funeral is requested the chaplain will take, or more normally work with the local clergy in taking, the funeral. There is considerable variation in who “leads” and in what proportion of the service is taken by which of the clergy. Invariably there will be a rehearsal a day or two before the service. At the service military bearers carry the coffin, which is dressed with a Union flag and bears tokens of the deceased’s military identity; typically his service cap and medals. A printed order of service is normally decorated with a photo of deceased in uniform. A senior Royal Marine officer represents the Commandant General Royal Marines, and as well as those who take part in the service (bearers, firing party, route liners etc) scores of other Royal Marines will attend in best uniform: typically this group will include some visibly wounded. Overall attendance of 600-1,000 is not untypical, so unless the church is very large there will be overflow facilities set up.

The service is an official public military event, so there will be police involvement and presence: local clergy are sometimes taken aback to find sniffer dogs checking their church for bombs before the service. The funeral itself may



include several eulogies plus poetry and prose readings,

and music enjoyed by the deceased. At the graveside the flag is removed from the coffin and folded. Volleys of shots precede the burial, and the bugle calls of Last Post and Reveille follow it. After the service is ended the folded flag is presented to the family, and invariably there is a post-funeral wake.

Chapter 3: Exploration



This chapter analyses current trends in death studies and in sociological and psychological views of death. Theologies of death and of funerals are examined through their differing concepts of hope, the narratives they are primarily concerned with, and their particular areas of interest. The narratives of families and of the military community are explored through an examination of published tributes, and the experience of clergy investigated through qualitative interviews.

3.1 Death in the Social Sciences

The sociologist deals with death as a problem for social analysis, exploring its 'diverse and profoundly social nature, including the continuing bonds forged between the living and the dead'.²⁰ Various analyses are offered to explain how a society (rather than an individual) carries on in the face of mortality. The use of ritual; a turning to religion; a denial of death or a removal of death from the public to the private sphere²¹ are all put forward on occasion, but the great diversity of cultures undermines attempts at systematising societal responses to death²² and problems exist with the theorised answers themselves.²³ The current context is a complex blend of modernism and post-modernism, allied with an interest in paganism in terms of a creation focus and attempts to reassert control over our

²⁰ Valentine, Christine, 'Contemporary Perspectives on Grief and Bereavement' in Peter C. Jupp, *Death Our Future: Christian Theology and Funeral Practice* (London: Epworth, 2008) 55-66, 55

²¹ Howarth, G., *Death and Dying: A Sociological Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 16

²² Howarth, *Death and Dying*, 18

²³ Howarth, *Death and Dying*, 34



lives by utilising and respecting nature,²⁴ for example in

green burials. This latter focus did not appear in my exploration of combat deaths and military funerals: the essentially modernist nature of military culture may be behind this absence.

Even though the myth that death is taboo is ‘absurd’²⁵ death is not easily engaged with, albeit that it is ‘hidden rather than forbidden ... irrelevant rather than repressed’.²⁶ Close contact with death normally forces a realisation of its reality and inevitability²⁷ but here this is not the case: those at the funeral are not themselves in danger of death in action; and the highly personalised services, by focussing on ‘the individual case of bereavement, [hide] death as *conditio humana*’.²⁸

3.1.1 The Sociological “Good Death”

Military deaths, being highly public, break the ‘conspiracy of silence’²⁹ about death, hence military funerals are of particular significance to the living³⁰ and important to society. Howarth argues that the Christian “good death” of the past has been displaced by a sociological “good death”, requiring two elements.³¹

One is to do with the physical quality of the end of life. Ideally death should be

²⁴ Howarth, *Death and Dying*, 95

²⁵ Howarth, *Death and Dying*, 109

²⁶ Walter, Tony, *Funerals and How to Improve Them* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990), 33

²⁷ Valentine, *Bereavement Narratives*, 111

²⁸ Franz, A., ‘Everything is Worthwhile at the End? Christian Funeral Liturgy amidst Ecclesial Tradition and Secular Rites’, *Studia Liturgica* 32 no. 1 (2002) 48-68, 66

²⁹ Howarth, *Death and Dying*, 123

³⁰ Howarth, *Death and Dying*, 27

³¹ Howarth, *Death and Dying*, 135



physically peaceful and pain free; if not this, then at least

instant. This is not the case here. The context of these deaths however, where a Marine dies surrounded by colleagues, doing the job he loved, and perhaps in a self-sacrificial way, can annul such concerns. A further area of unease in terms of the physical quality of the death relates to the generalised public unease about the current conflict in Afghanistan. This again counters the idea of combat deaths as “good deaths”, and it is possible that some of the military ceremonial and the more bullish tributes are a somewhat strident attempt to neutralise, or at least drown out, such concerns. The second element of a “good death” is to die prepared: in this area the military’s pre-deployment training helps, and in particular the encouragement to personnel to write wills; not only encouraging a consideration of the possibility of death, but also allowing people to exercise agency after they die, which again helps re-define the death as “good”.³² Such preparation also benefits the bereaved: it allows them to respect the deceased’s wishes³³ and reduces their loss of sense of ‘the self, constructed in relation to the identity of others’;³⁴ in this case the deceased. For the military community the dead may continue to exist in terms of social presence³⁵ by naming buildings or prize funds after them. Together these elements reduce the toll on individual and societal wellbeing and subvert the sense that these are ‘offending deaths’.³⁶

³² Valentine, *Bereavement Narratives*, 48

³³ Valentine, *Bereavement Narratives*, 136

³⁴ Howarth, *Death and Dying*, 169

³⁵ Howarth, *Death and Dying*, 189

³⁶ Davies, *Brief History*, 45



3.1.2 Disposal of the Body

Reverent disposal of the bodies of the dead is as old as humanity, driven sociologically by the body's centrality 'to the construction of self-identity'.³⁷ Two basic forms of formal removal of the dead from the living have evolved: cremation and burial.³⁸ Western culture, partly informed by Christian theology, treats the dead bodies of service personnel with great dignity. This marks both the (today ever deepening) respect owed to the person when alive as a service-person and the value of the life that has been lost.³⁹ a value highlighted in contrast to the perceived cheapness of life in Afghan society and by the untimely nature of these military deaths. The (post-Falklands War) practice of returning the dead to the UK allows the body to contribute to the 'continuing narratives and biographies of the deceased as constructed by others'.⁴⁰ To counteract its power as a sociological signifier of mortality, pollution and disorder⁴¹ the body is if possible embalmed, though an uncomfortable reality of combat deaths is that the body may be so badly damaged as to preclude embalming. Increasing the dignity and ceremonial of the funeral is then one way to restore the lost dignity of the dead: this may be one reason for the preference for burial, as opposed to cremation, of Royal Marines. Cremation may also be seen as 'inappropriate because it adds a further degree of "removal" of the dead'.⁴² Sledge, from a secular US context, highlights the value of burial: 'Proper burial is important not

³⁷ Howarth, *Death and Dying*, 180

³⁸ Davies, *Brief History*, 49

³⁹ Davies, *Brief History*, 60

⁴⁰ Howarth, *Death and Dying*, 188

⁴¹ Howarth, *Death and Dying*, 186

⁴² Davies, *Brief History*, 103



to the dead but to the living',⁴³ giving the deceased a new social (post-death) identity, stripped of pain and evil.⁴⁴ Sledge also notes a recurring theme of family dissatisfaction with the military's efforts to care for the dead:⁴⁵ this is notably absent in my experience in the UK. I do not address memorialisation, but note here the power of the buried military dead, because of their death for the nation, to consecrate the location of their burial.⁴⁶

3.1.3 Grief

For anthropologists grief is a social phenomenon, making social demands on the funeral and associated rituals;⁴⁷ demands met through the creation and enactment of powerful rites of passage. Psychological approaches also remain important, exploring ways in which the bereaved adapt to the loss of attachments.⁴⁸ Grief is seen through death's double face, looking back at the bereaved and forwards to some ultimate destiny.⁴⁹ Grief itself has been extensively analysed over the past century, and a number of schemes of grief identified.⁵⁰ There are dangers here of imposing supposed universal patterns of grief from particular contexts onto very different ones, or of defining grief as an illness, to be overcome through treatment.

⁴³ Sledge, Michael, *Soldier Dead: How We Recover, Identify, Bury, and Honor Our Military Fallen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 17

⁴⁴ Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 23

⁴⁵ Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 171

⁴⁶ Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 234

⁴⁷ Sheppy, Paul, *Death, Liturgy and Ritual: Volume I - A Pastoral and Liturgical Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2003), 44

⁴⁸ Davies, *Brief History*, 19

⁴⁹ Davies, *Brief History*, 25

⁵⁰ eg: Kübler Ross, Worden.



Current work on grief tends to emphasise “continuing

bonds”: a continuity of relationship with the deceased rather than discontinuity.

The end of grief work is therefore the reformulation of a relationship rather than reconciliation to its loss: ‘one kind of relationship with the deceased ends and another begins’⁵¹ as stories of the deceased help in the continuing task of forming the narrative. This narrative then provides hope that the future is bearable:⁵² a hope that looks back to draw its strength. Such secular expressions of hope may use photographs to represent both ‘anticipated hope’ of a lost future, and the ‘recall of past mutual experience’;⁵³ however viewing photographs (or indeed the body) may paradoxically signify the loss, evoking ‘a powerful sense of absence’.⁵⁴ This relationship with the deceased may be a form of reification.

3.1.4 Personalised Funerals

The past 20 years have seen significant changes in societal approaches to death in general and funerals in particular; with a move from ‘a concern with collective norms and expectations’ to a greater concern with ‘personal goals’.⁵⁵ This highly personal emphasis has fed, with the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales, as a seminal moment in the process, the growing and now almost universal popularity of tributes by friends and family to the deceased. Funerals which use the liturgy as a ‘ceremonial cookie cutter [forcing] every human situation into [its] mould’⁵⁶

⁵¹ Anderson, *Mighty Stories*, 113

⁵² Anderson, *Mighty Stories*, 114

⁵³ Davies, *Brief History*, 104

⁵⁴ Valentine, *Bereavement Narratives*, 151

⁵⁵ Howarth, *Death and Dying*, 88; 100

⁵⁶ Anderson, *Mighty Stories*, 133



are rejected, and mourners encouraged to choose from a series of options drawn increasingly from the category of 'life in life'⁵⁷ rather than life after death. The dramatic increase in the participation of the bereaved in funerals, alongside a focus on the celebration of the life of the deceased,⁵⁸ has turned the funeral into a highly personalised celebration of the life of the departed, with their body hidden, even though present.⁵⁹ Orders of service are increasingly called "Celebrations" rather than "Funerals"; reinterpreting the service to derive meaning in death.⁶⁰

3.1.5 Summary

The social sciences have generally rejected medicalised ideas of death in favour of a social approach. There is little interest in the deceased as such; but an emphasis on their continuing presence in the world through memory and effect on the bereaved. The body is seen as a critical signifier of a web of relationships and meaning: a web that is to be renegotiated in light of the death.

⁵⁷ Davies, *Theology of Death*, 61

⁵⁸ Davies, *Theology of Death*, 58-59

⁵⁹ Davies, *Theology of Death*, 155

⁶⁰ Howarth, *Death and Dying*, 263



3.2 The Theological Context

Death beliefs vary almost as widely within churches as within society as a whole. These varying beliefs encounter each other⁶¹ in the 'ambiguities of meaning and significance among those present'⁶² at funerals, where even those without faith are required to engage with death.⁶³ Following Davies in considering that the prime function of a funeral is to bring hope to bear upon the hopeless,⁶⁴ I examine below four views of hope as indicators for differing theological approaches to death.

3.2.1 What a Funeral does

First however I consider what is required of a funeral. Within its overall task of signifying the event of a death⁶⁵ Walter lists five elements: physical disposal of the dead; support for the bereaved; spiritual aspects, psychological aspects and economic questions.⁶⁶ These elements need careful balancing, if only for practical reasons. To consider how different services meet these needs I have unpacked Walter's list somewhat, and plot at Table 1 the various elements by their position in time. This allows us to consider in which temporal direction the funeral is looking: past, present or future. Consideration is also given as to whether the service is focussed primarily on the deceased or on the bereaved.

⁶¹ Davies, *Theology of Death*, 93

⁶² Sheppy, *A Pastoral and Liturgical Theology*, 45

⁶³ Davies, *Theology of Death*, 57, 98

⁶⁴ Davies, *Brief History*, 12

⁶⁵ Walter, *Funerals*, 111

⁶⁶ Walter, *Funerals*, 39



Table 1: The Purposes of a Funeral

<i>The Past</i>	<i>The Recent Past</i>	<i>Now</i>	<i>The Immediate Future</i>	<i>The Long Term Future</i>
Christ's death and resurrection	The past life of the deceased	The death of the deceased	Disposal of the body	The future of the deceased
		The grief of the mourners	Motivation to Christian praxis	The future of the mourners

3.2.2 Hope as Bodily Resurrection: The Narrative of Christ

“Hope as bodily resurrection” is exemplified in the Book of Common Prayer funeral. I note that ‘soldiers under fire’⁶⁷ today share its social context, that ‘in the midst of life we are in death’.⁶⁸ The service can be viewed as canonical narrative theology; rehearsing the narrative of Christ and bringing the believer, and the deceased, ‘into alignment with’⁶⁹ that narrative. Hope is drawn from the freeing of the deceased from Earth’s pains and the miseries of sin, to be with God⁷⁰ through judgement and resurrection:⁷¹ a fresh living embodiment of the individual⁷² with the soul (*psyche*) replaced ‘as the animating principle for the body ... with the Spirit’.⁷³ Sheppey integrates resurrection with rites of passage concepts, seeing separation, transition and return in the pattern of the Easter mystery, culminating

⁶⁷ Walter, *Funerals*, 30

⁶⁸ The Book of Common Prayer, *The Order for The Burial of the Dead* (1662) [Online]. Available from: <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/worship/liturgy/bcp/texts/23-burial-of-the-dead.html> [Accessed: 4 October 2010]

⁶⁹ Davies, *Theology of Death*, 63

⁷⁰ Davies, *Theology of Death*, 61-62

⁷¹ Sheppey, Paul, *Death Liturgy and Ritual: Volume II: A Commentary on Liturgical Texts* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 33

⁷² Wright, N. T., *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (London: SPCK, 2003), 31

⁷³ Wright, *The Resurrection*, 346



in 'a new order of life'.⁷⁴ In general this hope is

expressed in services which focus on the future and on the deceased.

Two elements of resurrection are important for Wright. First is that resurrection belongs to the final stage of a process: the dead first, but only temporarily, rest in Christ before then being resurrected to judgement.⁷⁵ Second is that resurrection is physical. This is the 'ultimate affirmation that creation matters, that embodied human beings matter'.⁷⁶ Death is thus linear⁷⁷ rather than cyclical, and the goodness of the created world is affirmed⁷⁸ as it will be reclaimed in the new creation.⁷⁹ The corpse is therefore treated with respect from a physicalist view of the person as embodied; body-and-soul; brought to a period of resting in peace before the resurrection.⁸⁰ This physical resurrection hope leads to Christian activism;⁸¹ a 'readiness to live in the light of eternity',⁸² in contrast to beliefs in disembodied immortality⁸³ or "Eastern" religious views of death as release leading to transcendence,⁸⁴ both of which may lead to a lack of interest in this world.

⁷⁴ Sheppy, *A Pastoral and Liturgical Theology*, 82

⁷⁵ Wright, *The Resurrection*, 336

⁷⁶ Wright, *The Resurrection*, 730

⁷⁷ Wright, *The Resurrection*, 463

⁷⁸ Wright, *The Resurrection*, 544

⁷⁹ Wright, *The Resurrection*, 737

⁸⁰ Davies, *Brief History*, 52

⁸¹ Wright, *The Resurrection*, 583

⁸² Horton, *Using Common Worship Funerals*, 45

⁸³ Wright, *The Resurrection*, 310

⁸⁴ Davies, *Brief History*, 6-9



Table 2: Hope as Resurrection - Funeral Emphases

<i>The Past</i>	<i>The Recent Past</i>	<i>Now</i>	<i>The Immediate Future</i>	<i>The Long Term Future</i>
Christ's death and resurrection	The past life of the deceased	The death of the deceased	Disposal of the body	The future of the deceased
		The grief of the mourners	Motivation to Christian praxis	The future of the mourners

“Hope as bodily resurrection” may be criticised. Even within the church it is not a universally held belief,⁸⁵ and within large swathes of society at large ‘to be dead is to cease to exist. Period’.⁸⁶ For Anderson funeral liturgies which reflect resurrection hope therefore fail to connect: ‘the human story has been eclipsed by God’s story’.⁸⁷ Unable to convey God’s presence⁸⁸ they are ‘ceremonies without stories ... disconnected from people’s lives’,⁸⁹ and from their pain.⁹⁰ Certainly the Book of Common Prayer service has little interest in the past life of the deceased or the grief of the bereaved: it is not until the arrival of Common Worship that the therapeutic needs of the bereaved are fully recognised.⁹¹

⁸⁵ Davies, *Theology of Death*, 2

⁸⁶ Billings, *Dying and Grieving*, 27

⁸⁷ Anderson, *Mighty Stories*, 53

⁸⁸ Anderson, *Mighty Stories*, 40

⁸⁹ Anderson, *Mighty Stories*, x

⁹⁰ Anderson, *Mighty Stories*, 34

⁹¹ Churches’ Funerals Group, *Guidelines for Best Practice of Clergy at Funerals* (Churches’ Funerals Group, 1997), 5; Horton, *Using Common Worship Funerals*, 34-5

3.2.3 Hope as Soul Survival: the Narrative of Heaven



Hope for life beyond death is widely defined in terms of soul survival (sometimes expressed as remembrance by God)⁹² rather than bodily resurrection; views motivated in part by a recognition of the horrors of war⁹³ and thus of particular relevance here. Soul survival has found a place in Christian thought and liturgy: even Common Worship in places expresses, through what Wright calls a distorted understanding of resurrection,⁹⁴ such a single-stage post-mortem destination theology.

Death here is no longer disruptive evil flowing from Adam's sin, but entry to eternal life:⁹⁵ a natural part of the life-cycle,⁹⁶ falling doctrinally in the areas of creation-redemption rather than fall-salvation. This concept of hope is rooted in dualist ideas of people as bodies and souls rather than embodied beings.⁹⁷ Even Wright, who argues for the latter as orthodox, recognises that variations of the former, leading to the idea that beyond death is the journey of a disembodied soul 'with a claim to eternity',⁹⁸ are overwhelmingly the most popular.⁹⁹ They are not necessarily comforting to the bereaved: 'If he's out there somewhere in spirit form [then seeing him would be] actually quite frightening'.¹⁰⁰

⁹² Davies, *Theology of Death*, 100, quoting Edwards, 1999

⁹³ Sheppy, *A Commentary*, 74

⁹⁴ Wright, Tom, *Surprised by Hope* (London: SPCK, 2007), 33

⁹⁵ Davies, *Theology of Death*, 7

⁹⁶ Davies, *Theology of Death*, 8

⁹⁷ Wright, *The Resurrection*, 209

⁹⁸ Davies, *Theology of Death*, 32

⁹⁹ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 6

¹⁰⁰ Valentine, *Bereavement Narratives*, 146



Looking generally forwards in time, this approach may, with the radical/secular hope discussed below,¹⁰¹ offer a narrative of continuing bonds with the deceased. Praxis links them: in each case the funeral's task is to 'maintain a real, though altered, relationship' with the dead.¹⁰²

Table 3: Hope as Soul Survival - Funeral Emphases

<i>The Past</i>	<i>The Recent Past</i>	<i>Now</i>	<i>The Immediate Future</i>	<i>The Long Term Future</i>
Christ's death and resurrection	The past life of the deceased	The death of the deceased	Disposal of the body	The future of the deceased
		The grief of the mourners	Motivation to Christian praxis	The future of the mourners

The challenge for a soul survival approach is to engage with evil: a challenge particularly acute here as combat deaths are indeed seen as 'supernatural evil to be countered by a supernatural good'.¹⁰³ Soul survival hope is focussed primarily on the future but has no place for judgement: without such engagement, says Wright, it is at risk of being mere emotional padding; able (partially) to *describe* death but unable to offer hope of its *defeat*.¹⁰⁴ The language of resurrection is used, but the meaning distorted into "our souls will spend eternity in heaven with God". Wright comments that the bereaved need a victory, not just a score-draw where death takes bodies but God gets souls.¹⁰⁵ From the table above it is also clear that there is little present hope or challenge offered to mourners. Finally, soul survival views may lend support to a further, if unhelpful, way of relating to

¹⁰¹ Section 3.2.5

¹⁰² Kelly, Ewan, *Meaningful Funerals: Meeting the Theological and Pastoral Challenge in a Postmodern Era* (London: Mowbray, 2008), 37

¹⁰³ Davies, *Theology of Death*, 9

¹⁰⁴ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 22

¹⁰⁵ Wright, *The Resurrection*, 727



the dead: Spiritualism makes the dead proximate and even some Christians attend briefly after a death.¹⁰⁶

3.2.4 Hope as Therapy: The Narrative of Grief

Therapeutic views of hope tend to flow from pastoral approaches to ministry,¹⁰⁷ sometimes motivated by a belief that traditional Christian narratives are no longer credible,¹⁰⁸ or at least by an agnosticism about the future of the deceased.¹⁰⁹ They are expressed in services which address the mourners and the present grief-filled moment, employing psychological insights to generate therapeutic effects. Bereavement and the ‘contemporary emphasis on ... emotional well-being’¹¹⁰ become the focal issues and the funeral’s role is to help people deal with their grief.¹¹¹ Despite reservations about the ‘turn to self’¹¹² Billings commends such an approach as it connects with people’s felt needs; and such engagement with people’s experience is a prerequisite for mission.¹¹³ In this constructive narrative theology the bereaved are theologians¹¹⁴ whose narrative is the defining factor imposing coherence on the death.¹¹⁵ The imposition of

¹⁰⁶ Davies, *Brief History*, 44-46

¹⁰⁷ Carr, Wesley, *Brief Encounters: Pastoral Ministry Through the Occasional Offices* New Library of Pastoral Care (London: SPCK, 1985), 119-121

¹⁰⁸ Doctrine Committee of the Scottish Episcopal Church, *Death and Resurrection – New Life in Christ*, Grosvenor Essay No. 6 (Edinburgh: Doctrine Committee of the Scottish Episcopal Church, 2010), 8

¹⁰⁹ Anderson, *Mighty Stories*, 116

¹¹⁰ Billings, *Secular Lives, Sacred Hearts*, 22

¹¹¹ Kelly, *Meaningful Funerals*, 2

¹¹² Billings, *Secular Lives, Sacred Hearts*, 25

¹¹³ Billings, *Secular Lives, Sacred Hearts*, 19

¹¹⁴ Kelly, *Meaningful Funerals*, 35

¹¹⁵ Kelly, *Meaningful Funerals*, 113



liturgical resources or dogmas from the Christian tradition is inappropriate,¹¹⁶ indeed it is the church which needs ‘to receive the Good News of God from those who mourn’.¹¹⁷ Even when traditional elements are used¹¹⁸ they and the minister¹¹⁹ may well be redefined in non-religious terms.¹²⁰

Such “co-construction” of funerals has genuine therapeutic value,¹²¹ and the promotion of a continuing psychological relationship with the deceased will resonate at military funerals where the motif of Remembrance, emphasising sacrifice and redemption,¹²² is often heard.

Table 4: Hope as Therapy - Funeral Emphases

<i>The Past</i>	<i>The Recent Past</i>	<i>Now</i>	<i>The Immediate Future</i>	<i>The Long Term Future</i>
Christ's death and resurrection	The past life of the deceased	The death of the deceased	Disposal of the body	The future of the deceased
		The grief of the mourners	Motivation to Christian praxis	The future of the mourners

The danger of the “hope as therapy” approach is that the narrative of grief may pull the service adrift from the church’s theological and confessional foundations;¹²³ threatening the integrity of the clergy and of the service.¹²⁴ Anderson defends

¹¹⁶ Kelly, *Meaningful Funerals*, 52, 80
¹¹⁷ Worsley, ‘From Death to Life’, 205
¹¹⁸ Kelly, *Meaningful Funerals*, 59
¹¹⁹ Carr, *Brief Encounters*, 111
¹²⁰ Kelly, *Meaningful Funerals*, 115
¹²¹ Anderson, *Mighty Stories*, 49
¹²² Davies, J. (1994) ‘Introduction: Ancestors – living and dead’, in J. Davies (ed.), *Ritual and Remembrance. Responses to death in human societies*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 155
¹²³ Graham, Elaine, Heather Walton and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 76
¹²⁴ Horton, *Using Common Worship Funerals*, 145



against this by ‘weaving the human and the divine

stories’.¹²⁵ Other issues are that the body becomes little more than a visual aid to ‘make the death explicit’,¹²⁶ and that mourners may be forced, in the name of empowerment, into unwanted involvement in the ceremony.¹²⁷ It may represent an instance of the church being feminised, since mourning has often been gendered; placed with emotion and grief in the feminine sphere.¹²⁸ Carr finds the whole therapeutic approach unhelpful, seeing it as a defensive isolationism by the minister.¹²⁹

3.2.5 Hope as Celebration: The Narrative of the Deceased

In its purest forms, “hope as celebration” flows from a rejection of ontological survival beyond death. At best agnostic about belief in an afterlife¹³⁰ it rejects any separation between mind and body in favour of its own, biologically reductionist,¹³¹ view of ‘embodiment ... the centrality of the body in social experience’.¹³² Heaven is merely ‘an optimistic way of speaking about the enduring nature of human relationships’¹³³ and hope lies in continuing to exist in the memories and lives of loved ones:¹³⁴ “I just think she’s around in people’s experiences and

¹²⁵ Anderson, *Mighty Stories*, 118

¹²⁶ Kelly, *Meaningful Funerals*, 110

¹²⁷ Krech, Hans H., ‘Funerals – Dealing with the End in the Middle of Life? Consequences for the Ritual in View of a Publically Tabooed Death’, *Studia Liturgica* 32 no. 1 (2002), 76

¹²⁸ Howarth, *Death and Dying*, 225

¹²⁹ Carr, *Brief Encounters*, 107

¹³⁰ Davies, *Brief History*, 39

¹³¹ Sheppy, *A Pastoral and Liturgical Theology*, 40

¹³² Howarth, *Death and Dying*, 176

¹³³ Davies, *Brief History*, 58

¹³⁴ Davies, *Brief History*, 109



memories of her”¹³⁵ It is this which enables mourners to live courageously and with integrity even in the face of death.¹³⁶ The narrative is that of the deceased,¹³⁷ thus tributes and prose or music that were significant to the deceased are important and will be used in funerals which look back to the life of the deceased and have ‘little to say about the present or the future’.¹³⁸ Death is ignored or hidden and spiritual references subverted by redefinition ‘not in supernatural terms [but in terms of] life transformation’.¹³⁹ Such life beyond death understood only in terms of fame,¹⁴⁰ is far from any theological orthodoxy¹⁴¹ and its expression in highly participative and individualised services shares many features with secular funeral rites,¹⁴² becoming in effect simply a memorial service with the body present, where only one of the funeral’s proper tasks¹⁴³ is undertaken.

¹³⁵ Valentine, *Bereavement Narratives*, 147

¹³⁶ Davies, *Theology of Death*, 106

¹³⁷ Davies, *Theology of Death*, 64

¹³⁸ Thewlis, J., ‘The Difficult Funeral. Sensitive Issues in Liturgy. A Personal View’, *Theology*, no. 94 (1997), 2-8, 6

¹³⁹ Davies, *Theology of Death*, 73

¹⁴⁰ Wright, *The Resurrection*, 34

¹⁴¹ Davies, *Theology of Death*, 72

¹⁴² Franz, ‘Everything is Worthwhile?’, 60-61

¹⁴³ See Walter, *Funerals*, 39



Table 5: Hope as Celebration - Funeral Emphases

<i>The Past</i>	<i>The Recent Past</i>	<i>Now</i>	<i>The Immediate Future</i>	<i>The Long Term Future</i>
Christ's death and resurrection	The past life of the deceased	The death of the deceased	Disposal of the body	The future of the deceased
		The grief of the mourners	Motivation to Christian praxis	The future of the mourners

This can engender frustration in clergy:

The Rev Ed Tomlinson, 35, said he wondered why he bothered as mourners listen to ear-splitting songs and bad poetry during cremations. He feared that his presence at funerals was “pointless” and said he had a hundred better things to do with his time. [He complained that] “Tina Turner is played as the bodies of people with no hope of resurrection are ‘popped in the oven’”.¹⁴⁴

3.2.6 The Theological Context: Conclusions

It is fascinating to plot together the areas of interest of the different forms of hope:

Table 6: All Forms of Hope - Funeral Emphases

<i>The Past</i>	<i>The Recent Past</i>	<i>Now</i>	<i>The Immediate Future</i>	<i>The Long Term Future</i>
Christ's death and resurrection	The past life of the deceased	The death of the deceased	Disposal of the body	The future of the deceased
		The grief of the mourners	Motivation to Christian praxis	The future of the mourners

A simplistic conclusion from the above is that together they provide all that is required for effective ministry to those who grieve. But “hope as resurrection”

¹⁴⁴ Gledhill, Ruth, ‘Vicar fed up with Tina Turner songs and “Nan's poetry” at funerals’, *The Times*, 20 October 2009



(yellow), and “hope as soul survival” (green) are in overt theological opposition. The at-heart secularism of “hope as celebration” (pink) will, if unchecked, threaten to undermine either of them. Meanwhile “hope as therapy” (blue) seems amenable to working alongside any of the other concepts of hope, but claims compete primacy¹⁴⁵ and risks losing its theological foundations along with any ability effectively to address death itself. I suggest therefore that clergy need to recognise these varieties of hope and then to *choose* and *use*. Against Crossan who holds that whether resurrection is literal or metaphorical is irrelevant as both lead to the same praxis response¹⁴⁶ clergy need to *choose* between soul survival and bodily resurrection theologies. They must then *use* both “hope as therapy” and “hope as celebration” to ensure their ministry is effective in meeting the needs of mourners. If choosing “hope as resurrection” they will face challenges in addressing the future of the deceased; and I note a general unwillingness of clergy to speak to this area: ‘Ultimately we have to leave that to God’.¹⁴⁷

Table 7: Choice of bodily resurrection theology - Funeral Emphases

<i>The Past</i>	<i>The Recent Past</i>	<i>Now</i>	<i>The Immediate Future</i>	<i>The Long Term Future</i>
Christ's death and resurrection	The past life of the deceased	The death of the deceased	Disposal of the body	The future of the deceased
		The grief of the mourners	Motivation to Christian praxis	The future of the mourners

¹⁴⁵ Jupp, Peter C, ‘The Context of Christian Funeral Ministry Today’ in Peter C. Jupp, *Death Our Future: Christian Theology and Funeral Practice* (London: Epworth, 2008) 7-19, 13

¹⁴⁶ Stuart, Robert B., *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N.T. Wright in Dialogue* (London: SPCK, 2006), 29

¹⁴⁷ Appendix 2.3.2



If choosing “hope as soul survival” multiple areas the funeral should engage with are liable to be left unaddressed; there will also be tension between the dualism of soul survival beliefs and the more embodied ethos promoted by tributes.¹⁴⁸

Table 8: Choice of soul survival theology - Funeral Emphases

<i>The Past</i>	<i>The Recent Past</i>	<i>Now</i>	<i>The Immediate Future</i>	<i>The Long Term Future</i>
Christ's death and resurrection	The past life of the deceased	The death of the deceased	Disposal of the body	The future of the deceased
		The grief of the mourners	Motivation to Christian praxis	The future of the mourners

3.3 Narratives of Family and Colleagues

Tributes from family and colleagues of Royal Marines killed in action are published on the MOD web site.¹⁴⁹ Such tributes enhance the personhood of the deceased and strengthen the bereaved’s continuing bonds with them.¹⁵⁰ I have analysed the themes of those published in the past two years, separating out the comments of spouses/partners; families; commanders and colleagues. The texts are at Appendix 1. As ‘cultural scripts ... adopted selectively and adapted to the social context and lifeworld of the individual’¹⁵¹ they give access to their authors’

¹⁴⁸ See section 3.4.8

¹⁴⁹ Ministry of Defence, *Operations in Afghanistan: British Fatalities* (2010) [Online]. Available from: <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/FactSheets/OperationsFactsheets/OperationsInAfghanistanBritishFatalities.htm> [Accessed: 6 September 2010]

¹⁵⁰ Valentine, *Bereavement Narratives*, 135

¹⁵¹ Howarth, *Death and Dying*, 102



Table 9: Word Counts¹⁵³ - Partners

proud	9	family	5	heart	4	mate	3	forever	2
love	9	always	4	words	4	wonderful	3	fantastic	2
life	6	best	4	dad	4	most	3	live	2
man	5	lived	4	laugh	3	ever	3	hero	2
husband	5	never	4	soul	3	partner	2	miss	2

The narratives are those of pride in the deceased, of relationships (“family”, “dad”, “husband”), and of loss. The words “never” and “always” are equally prominent, demonstrating ‘closely intertwined “narratives of loss” and “narratives of rediscovery”’,¹⁵⁴ thus ‘life ... will never be the same’¹⁵⁵ is balanced by ‘we will carry your heart with us always’¹⁵⁶ as the bereaved negotiate the ‘competing discourses [of] “letting go” and “keeping hold”’.¹⁵⁷ There are notes of sacrifice: ‘It was so hard to share him with the Marines’.¹⁵⁸ The prominence of “man” and other masculine words (“husband”, “dad”, “hero”) is significant, and will be seen again in the narratives of colleagues.

3.3.2 Wider Family

For wider family, themes of continuity of relationship dominate those of loss: “always” outnumbers “never” by over 2:1, and even “never” can indicate a continuing relationship: ‘... never going to leave us and will be in our hearts and

¹⁵³ Common words and names have been removed; in some cases similar words (eg “loved” and “love”) have been added together.

¹⁵⁴ Valentine, *Bereavement Narratives*, 85

¹⁵⁵ Appendix 1.1.1

¹⁵⁶ Appendix 1.1.1

¹⁵⁷ Valentine, *Bereavement Narratives*, 91

¹⁵⁸ Appendix 1.1.1



souls forever’.¹⁵⁹ Family words are prominent (“family”, “brother”, “son”) and “loved” affirms the strength of these relationships. Pride in the deceased, linked to his being a Royal Marine, is again a significant theme: ‘We are so proud of Anthony; he lived and breathed the Royal Marines’.¹⁶⁰

Illustration 4: Word Weightings - Families

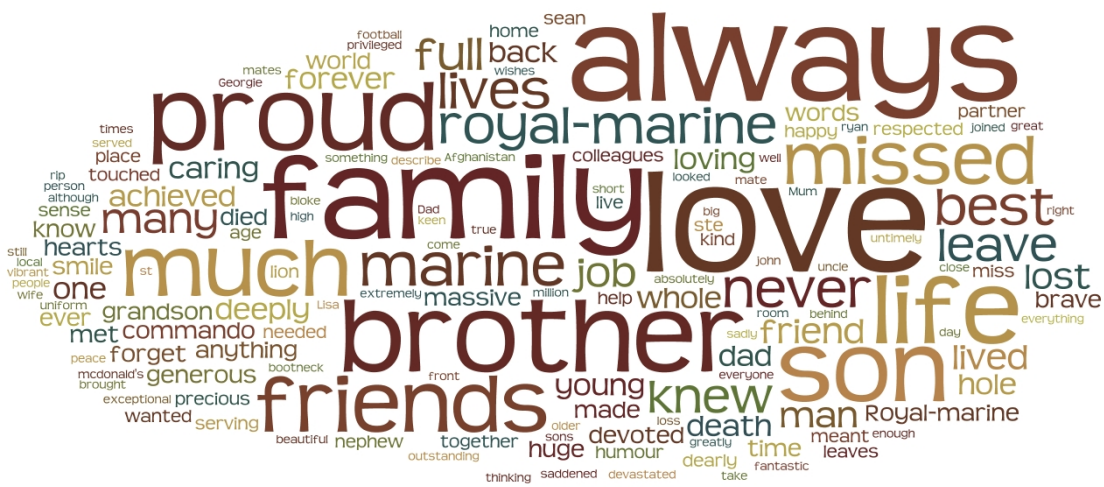


Table 10: Word Counts - Family

loved	22	life	17	royal-marine	9	full	8	friend	6
always	22	son	16	never	9	job	7	death	5
family	21	friends	14	lives	9	lived	6	forever	5
brother	18	missed	12	best	9	man	6	caring	5
proud	17	marine	10	leave	8	lost	6	loving	5

Family are able to confront the reality of death (mentioned five times) in a way impossible for those closest to the deceased: ‘He ... will be greatly missed’.¹⁶¹ Themes of positive and rounded (rather than patriarchal or exploitative)

¹⁵⁹ Appendix 1.2.1
¹⁶⁰ Appendix 1.2.3
¹⁶¹ Appendix 1.2.2



masculinity are present, if secondary to those of friendship: 'a true man's man'.¹⁶² Humour, though occasionally in evidence alongside a sense of heroism, is more likely to appear in spoken tributes: 'The Royal Marine's brother ... paid tribute to the hero [replacing] tears of sadness with tears of laughter'.¹⁶³ There is little of religious belief in the published tributes, but tributes at funerals may have an element of real, if ill-defined, faith: 'His light will shine so bright that a day will not pass that we do not think of him'.¹⁶⁴ The belief that the dead become stars is an ancient one.¹⁶⁵

3.3.3 Military Superiors

The relationship between Marines and their officers is perhaps unique in the armed forces, with deep bonds founded on mutual respect. There are, nonetheless, inevitable differences between relationships with superiors and those with "oppos" – friends of similar rank. In dividing the tributes I looked for the change in name used for the deceased: "oppos" generally use nicknames throughout. Although there was a subjective element in making the division where I did, it is possible to see very different narratives in the two collections of material:

¹⁶² Appendix 1.2.1

¹⁶³ Fleetwood Today, *Funerals held for two Marines* (2010) [Online]. Available from: <http://www.fleetwoodtoday.co.uk/latest/Funerals-held-for-Marines.6409946.jp> [Accessed: 11 July 2010]

¹⁶⁴ Fleetwood Today, *Funerals held for two Marines*

¹⁶⁵ Wright, *The Resurrection*, 54



The emphasis on saving others, for example by detecting IEDs,¹⁶⁶ affirms and preserves personhood,¹⁶⁷ and masculine personhood in particular. This is closely linked with professionalism since work is the ‘central source of masculine identity, status and ... power’.¹⁶⁸ Also prominent is continuity of relationship: here “never” is out-voted by “always”. Religion makes an appearance, and although the language of ‘our thoughts and prayers are with his family’¹⁶⁹ is formulaic it should not be dismissed: Unit Chaplains will have led formal and informal prayers in theatre. Life and death are also significant themes: a verb (“died”) is generally used rather than the noun (“death”) which is typically used by families, and this may reflect a military narrative of activism.

3.3.4 Military Colleagues

Continuity of relationships is the predominant theme in tributes from colleagues, the word “always” greatly outweighing all others, though themes of professionalism are certainly present. The close relationships possible between men in such an environment are signified by words such as “lads”, “mate”, “friend”, “loved”, “smile” and “humour”; the studied use of informality even in this formal context affirming the value of such friendships.

¹⁶⁶ Improvised Explosive Devices

¹⁶⁷ Valentine, *Bereavement Narratives*, 16

¹⁶⁸ Collinson, David and Jeff Hearn, 'Naming Men As Men: Implications For Work, Organization and Management' in *The Masculinities Reader* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), 146

¹⁶⁹ Appendix 1.3.15



A further key element of a “good death” is the presence of close others.¹⁷⁶ Here the others are military colleagues, and the sense of the “Royal Marines family” is therefore an important positive element of the death. The deceased’s formal rank is recognised but secondary. In these tributes humour and integrity, both fundamental parts of Commando Ethos,¹⁷⁷ are expressed: ‘His dancing style was definitely all of his own ... causing havoc on the dancefloor’.¹⁷⁸ Integrity may here replace piety¹⁷⁹ as an element of a “good death”. Where commanders are likely to mention thoughts and prayers, thoughts alone predominate in this group; ‘Our thoughts go out to his family and friends’;¹⁸⁰ however the phrase “rest in peace” is a repeated theme, and much more common, even allowing for a greater quantity of material. If there is theological rather than sentimental meaning to this it is language of eternal soul survival.

3.3.5 Web Tributes: Conclusions

There is a shift towards continuity from the views of partners (loss and continuity in balance) to those of oppos (continuity is dominant); and a replacement of concepts of pride (from family) with those of professionalism (by the military). All drive a narrative of honouring the deceased, but religious language is used predominantly by Royal Marines, with the more overt language of prayer used by commanders; that of thoughts and resting in peace by oppos. Two further

¹⁷⁶ Valentine, *Bereavement Narratives*, 30

¹⁷⁷ Royal Marines, *History & Ethos* (2010) [Online]. Available from: <http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/royalmarines/history-and-ethos/> [Accessed: 20 August 2010]

¹⁷⁸ Appendix 1.4.33

¹⁷⁹ Walter, *Funerals*, 221

¹⁸⁰ Appendix 1.4.36



notable themes are masculinity and family – actually two

families; the deceased's biological family, and the family of the Royal Marines.

Disbelief, anger and outrage are normally evoked by untimely death¹⁸¹ but anger and outrage are notably absent, and even disbelief is muted: the considered and public nature of these tributes may lie behind this absence.

3.4 Analysis of Interviews with Clergy

I undertook qualitative interviews, four with Naval Chaplains and two with parish clergy, all of whom have taken funerals for Marines killed in action. The interviews took about an hour each and explored perceptions of appropriate Christian narratives for funerals; the narratives of the military and of mourners; and any conflicts that had arisen. The initial questions and interview transcripts are at Appendix 2. I am most grateful to those I interviewed and struck by the immense care and professional skill that goes into these services: it is clear that in general congregations are helped by them and appreciate them. That said, it was most instructive to hear of two services which interviewees felt had gone badly, as well as of areas of potential difficulty in other services. What I did not hear – somewhat to my surprise – was of narratives in open conflict. I had anticipated finding overt conflict between grief narratives (of family and military) and reason narratives (of military and clergy): grief and reason, like rationality and spirituality,¹⁸² being 'poison to each other'.¹⁸³ I did not find this. Rather, a

¹⁸¹ Valentine, *Bereavement Narratives*, 33

¹⁸² Valentine, *Bereavement Narratives*, 146

¹⁸³ Davies, *Theology of Death*, 49



picture emerged of clergy managing a complex

interweaving of narratives in an attempt to allow them all to speak. Failure

occurred when important narratives went unheard, and I explore below why this might happen.

3.4.1 Theologies of Death

The interviews revealed a great variety of theologies of death: all perhaps agreed that it meant 'being close to God in some way'¹⁸⁴ but various very different beliefs are held:

- 'A *physical body*? I don't think so'.¹⁸⁵
- 'The body is reduced to a bunch of chemicals [and then we] rise with a physical body'.¹⁸⁶
- 'We return to God [but don't] retain our individual identity in death ... heaven is being almost part of God'.¹⁸⁷

There is agreement that this is 'a grey area'¹⁸⁸ and the reluctance to judge noted above.¹⁸⁹ In all these respects my interviewees match other clergy and

Christians in general. Wright says that in the early church there was a marked unanimity of belief¹⁹⁰ but Davies points out that in popular thought today the issue is not settled, and that varying and even contradictory ideas may 'co-exist in any

¹⁸⁴ Appendix 2.1.1

¹⁸⁵ Appendix 2.7.2

¹⁸⁶ Appendix 2.5.1

¹⁸⁷ Appendix 2.3.1

¹⁸⁸ Appendix 2.2.1

¹⁸⁹ Section 3.2.6

¹⁹⁰ Wright, *The Resurrection*, 209



single church [and even] within the same individual at different times'.¹⁹¹

3.4.2 Civilian and Military Clergy in Partnership

Partnership between military and civilian clergy is greatly valued: their ministries seen as complementary. Chaplains provide civilian clergy with 'a good understanding of the [military] community that [is] about to invade their church',¹⁹² yet recognise that 'local clergy are going to be ... continuity'.¹⁹³ Clergy look to empower the bereaved;¹⁹⁴ an empowerment which is likely to be greatly valued¹⁹⁵ in the face of not only profound grief but also the overwhelming, even though desired, military juggernaut of ceremonial, rehearsals, video overflows and VIPs.

3.4.3 The Funerals Officer

There was ambivalence about the role of the Funerals Officer. They have an unenviable task, and carry it out, in my experience, with great dedication and skill. They run a complex military and civic event, often involving over a thousand participants, costing considerable sums and involving issues as diverse as media, security and catering. Families appreciate them, greatly valuing the way the death is highly individualised: this humanises their loved one's dying.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹¹ Davies, *Theology of Death*, 2

¹⁹² Appendix 2.3.8

¹⁹³ Appendix 2.7.13

¹⁹⁴ Kelly, *Meaningful Funerals*, 81

¹⁹⁵ Kelly, *Meaningful Funerals*, 93

¹⁹⁶ Valentine, *Bereavement Narratives*, 16



There are perceived dangers in the role however.

Funerals Officers can sometimes plan things which clergy see as inappropriate,¹⁹⁷ and there is a suspicion that some see the clergy as having a purely functional role. Denying the clergy's relational role may reflect a sense that clergy (and by implication Christian hope) are other worldly and impractical,¹⁹⁸ and so subverts their pastoral task. Clergy reject such role-limiting definitions:

*My job is to [give the] broad Christian context of what's going to be happening ... I have an interest in everything that goes on on the day.*¹⁹⁹

Clergy seek to support the bereaved over against Funerals Officers if it is felt that, like undertakers,²⁰⁰ the Funerals Officer has disempowered them: this may involve simply saying to the family 'Hang on; you don't *have* to do this'.²⁰¹

3.4.4 Saying the Unsayable

Where others may hide the death in activism or euphemism, clergy seek to bring the reality of the death to the fore, through their ability to 'say the unsayable':²⁰²

'I always always always talk about someone having been killed, or they have died';²⁰³ 'Sometimes you do have to be quite blunt and say, "He is dead"'.²⁰⁴ The counterpart to this is that clergy seem willing to challenge – in a pastorally appropriate way - the idea that the funeral service is just celebration: 'It's not just

¹⁹⁷ Sheppy, *A Pastoral and Liturgical Theology*, 7

¹⁹⁸ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 5

¹⁹⁹ Appendix 2.7.3-2.7.5

²⁰⁰ Howarth, *Death and Dying*, 245

²⁰¹ Appendix 2.4.4; see also Appendix 2.6.4-2.6.5

²⁰² Walter, *Funerals*, 190

²⁰³ Appendix 2.7.9

²⁰⁴ Appendix 2.2.5



a party ... there has to be an element of recognition of mortality. Gently'.²⁰⁵ Such challenge also counters the idea that everyone is 'an expert ... when it comes to funerals':²⁰⁶ 'The military ... seem to think that clergymen have never taken a funeral before in their life!'.²⁰⁷

3.4.5 Family and Military Needs

The clergy I interviewed refused to take sides between the role of commending the deceased to God and that of providing comfort to the bereaved: both are seen as important and clergy balance those elements of the service relating to the deceased with those which meet the pastoral, intellectual and theological needs of the family and the military. Walter points out that for the military, a military funeral may be directed primarily at shoring up the official ethos, and hence not address theological concerns, not address the grief of the family and not reflect the unique personality of deceased.²⁰⁸ In the face of this tendency clergy seek to emphasise the importance of spiritual elements of the funeral and to protect the family from the military steamroller: 'In the church building the military ... come under my command!'.²⁰⁹ One interviewee movingly describes a failure to balance these needs:

... the most appalling funeral I've ever attended in my life ... it didn't even voice the family of the bereaved [sic] as part of it. It was military from beginning to end.²¹⁰

²⁰⁵ Appendix 2.7.9

²⁰⁶ Appendix 2.6.12

²⁰⁷ Appendix 2.7.15

²⁰⁸ Walter, *Funerals*, 119

²⁰⁹ Appendix 2.5.4

²¹⁰ Appendix 2.4.2



3.4.6 A Christian Funeral

Clergy are adamant that families have asked for a Christian funeral²¹¹ and thus should receive one. This echoes *Guidelines to Best Practice*:

If a Christian funeral has been requested it is presumed that there is a desire that the funeral be conducted according to the fundamental traditions of the Christian community.²¹²

This is perhaps somewhat disingenuous: a Christian funeral is still the default setting, and if a chaplain is involved it will be a Christian chaplain. That said, a strong case was made for an implicit desire for a Christian service:

No matter how much a family protests at not being “religious” ... without doubt there is an enormous sense of spirituality and God’s presence at these funerals. Even when they’ve really tried to “un-church” it, it just doesn’t work ... I genuinely believe that the people there are touched by God. They might not articulate it in that way, [but] that’s how important the funeral is.²¹³

All those I interviewed insisted on services including a bible reading.

Notwithstanding one interviewee’s denial²¹⁴ I do feel there is a twofold perceived value in this: the bible reading is important both for its content, and for its witness that the church has authoritative teaching to offer, albeit dosed with an element of humility in addressing such weighty questions. Equally it is a common theme that the sermon, which may draw more or less heavily on the tributes, aims at heart to be a preaching of the gospel.

3.4.7 Symbolism and Ritual

²¹¹ Appendices 2.5.4; 2.7.4; 2.6.5

²¹² Churches’ Funerals Group, *Guidelines*, 6

²¹³ Appendix 2.3.4

²¹⁴ Appendix 2.7.4-2.7.5



The majority of services were held in churches, where

narrative meaning is embedded in the building's architecture and use.

Interviewees pointed to the sense of continuity of worship and community that a

church brings, and on occasion to architecture or furnishings that had particular

narrative meaning. Given that clergy recognise and value these narratives it is

unclear why they are not more often referred to in funerals. Further narratives

are implicit within the symbolism of ritual actions, such as the bugle calls or the

sprinkling of earth on the coffin, but are again not always made explicit. One

interviewee did note how not just overt symbolism ('... an image of Christ on the

cross, and the foot of the cross was rooted in the battlefield of the Somme')²¹⁵ but

also space can operate as catalysts to bring narrative meaning to the service:

after censing the coffin there was '... a pillar of smoke ascending to heaven'.²¹⁶

Some funeral rituals are easily associated with clear Christian narratives (Last

Post and Reveille as signalling death and resurrection for example); others seem

more multivalent;

²¹⁵ Appendix 2.2.7

²¹⁶ *ibid*



capable also of non-Christian narrative construction ('the volley of shots ... fires the soul into heaven';²¹⁷ 'Mum and Dad were ushered over to go and open these things and sure enough these white doves flew out').²¹⁸

3.4.8 Tributes

Spoken tributes, along with items of prose and poetry, are clearly not just popular but highly significant in these funerals: Crites says this is because such 'mundane stories ... orientate the life of people through time' by expressing deep 'sacred stories [which] cannot be told'.²¹⁹ Further, tributes promote the concept of the indivisible self (*contra* dualism): 'neither disembodied minds nor mindless bodies can appear in stories. There the self is given whole, as an activity in time'.²²⁰ Even poetry – not commonly given a place in modern culture – is widely accepted in this context as a 'medium of the heart',²²¹ that can express the inexpressible; proclaiming life in the midst of death by 'address[ing] the heart with imaginative fire'.²²²

In content funeral tributes reflect those placed on the Internet, though humour is more to the fore. Clergy seem to adopt one of two general approaches to them.

²¹⁷ Appendix 2.2.15

²¹⁸ Appendix 2.3.17

²¹⁹ Crites, Stephen, 'The Narrative Quality of Experience' in Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 1989) 65-88, 69-70

²²⁰ Crites, 'The Narrative Quality of Experience', 85

²²¹ Davies, *Theology of Death*, 51

²²² Sheppy, *A Pastoral and Liturgical Theology*, 19



In the more common approach clergy control the tributes

at least to some extent, reflecting Thewlis' wariness that tributes may push the funeral rite

in the wrong direction. Because there *are* right and wrong directions ... false statement[s] about what is permanent and what is not.²²³

Clerical control ensures not just that tributes cover the whole of the deceased's

life, but that timings are managed and that they are placed carefully within the

service. Elements drawn from the tributes are typically incorporated into the

prayers and the sermon: indeed this seems to be vital for the Christian narrative

to be heard. In the minority approach tributes are more or less uncontrolled:

those who give them are accountable for what they say, but to the community as

a whole rather than to the clergy. The risk to the integrity of the funeral is that of

discontinuity, as in the

stand-alone sermon totally apart from the eulogies [which was thereby] almost invalidated ... My incarnational theology wants to call the life celebrated holy as well: and I want to combine the preaching bit, preaching the resurrection, and tie it closely with the life lived. And there might be nice ties there *once you have listened to the stories*.²²⁴

In one extreme example of this tendency little liturgical material was left in the

service: clerical integrity here was in not forcing Christian narratives on those

who did not wish them: 'He felt there just wasn't any faith there at all, and

therefore why should he impose it ... he treated the family with utter integrity'.²²⁵

²²³ Thewlis, 'The Difficult Funeral', 6

²²⁴ Appendix 2.3.6, my emphasis.

²²⁵ Appendix 2.5.15

3.5 Summary



This long chapter has covered a great deal of ground: social science and theological views death and of funerals; the narratives of the bereaved; and the experience of clergy involved in this ministry. How then do these threads of meaning relate to each other?

Chapter 4: Reflection



I now turn to critical analysis of, and reflection on, the specific narratives that appear of most importance in these funerals, including those narratives implicit in the experience of clergy and explicit in their theology.

4.1 The Narrative of God

Notwithstanding the difficulties of using Christian funeral rites in a sceptical age clergy do wish to speak of God, and for the liturgy to speak effectively of God:

My only agenda is ... to preach the Word of God; to commend that soul to Almighty God, and through that to exercise a pastoral ministry to the people.²²⁶

Perhaps surprisingly the use of tributes is helpful, linking the human to the divine:

Stories create order and meaning out of the scattered fragments of human existence. They provide spaces in which to remember our past and rehearse our future.²²⁷

Tributes are part of a process of narrative creation,²²⁸ legitimising a narrative theology approach to death, and authorising further story telling in the service or at the post-service refreshments.²²⁹ The clergy, by their presence as people of faith, and by adding their own stories where possible, enable the divine narrative also to be remembered.²³⁰

²²⁶ Appendix 2.6.11

²²⁷ Lynch, D., and D. Willows, 'Telling Tales: The Narrative Dimension of Pastoral Care and Counselling' in D. Willows and J. Swinton (eds.), *Spiritual Dimensions of Pastoral Care* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2000) 181-7, 181

²²⁸ Anderson, *Mighty Stories*, 120

²²⁹ Anderson, *Mighty Stories*, 119

²³⁰ Anderson, *Mighty Stories*, 116



4.2 The Narrative of the Body

The narrative of the body, or corpse, came across strongly in the interviews, along with a sense that it is a narrative others reject: ‘This is where it upsets the Marines of course, but you bring the body in church, the night before’.²³¹ There is a tendency to keep the corpse out of mind as well as out of sight at a military funeral, and the circumstances of the death are not normally mentioned.

A Funerals Officer’s use of laurel leaves to throw on the coffin,²³² for example, was an explicit rejection of the liturgical narrative of the body (‘earth to earth’)²³³ for a quasi-religious narrative of Royal Marine heroism. Such rejection marginalises spiritual questions and, practical issues having been bought off with determined military efficiency, leaves support for the bereaved as the sole function of the service. The funeral, which in the past was for the deceased as deceased, and only in that sense a consolation to the living,²³⁴ is now typically focussed on the deceased’s past life and on the bereaved,²³⁵ so explaining the applause that puzzled Interviewee 2.²³⁶ But ‘corpses and souls don’t go away so easily’.²³⁷ The use of military bearers emphasises ‘the physical deadness of the corpse’,²³⁸ and eulogies, by evoking deceased person’s humanity, also evoke

²³¹ Appendix 2.4.14

²³² Appendix 2.3.16

²³³ The Book of Common Prayer, [Online]

²³⁴ Jupp, Peter C, ‘Changing Christian Beliefs about the Afterlife’ in Peter C. Jupp, *Death Our Future: Christian Theology and Funeral Practice* (London: Epworth, 2008) 67-81, 70

²³⁵ Billings, *Dying and Grieving*, 63

²³⁶ Appendix 2.3.17-2.3.18

²³⁷ Walter, *Funerals*, 91

²³⁸ Walter, *Funerals*, 14



their mortality’.²³⁹ The flag, ‘specially folded and then given ... to the family ... as a kind of symbolic baby’²⁴⁰ makes the body explicit, as does the undressing of the coffin where there is a burial. It is not so much that it is counterproductive to make “helping the bereaved” the main aim of the liturgy;²⁴¹ it is simply that ignoring the body is ultimately impossible.

4.3 Narratives of Honour

Narratives of honour are held by all parties to the funeral, however they hold *different* narratives of honour. The military honour the deceased as a Royal Marine: the coffin is saluted by all present, of whatever rank, and there is no higher accolade than ‘... was, and always will be, a true Royal Marine Commando’.²⁴² The military may also here be denying the death and protecting themselves from the dead. Civilians honour the deceased primarily as the member of a family and a civilian community, and honour the family who have sacrificed a loved one. The Christian narrative is of honouring a person made in the image of God and given dignity and value by being loved by God (‘the most loving situation they can be in is to be with God’).²⁴³ Not all these narratives will necessarily be heard: the Christian narrative was missing in one of the funerals

²³⁹ Valentine, *Bereavement Narratives*, 15

²⁴⁰ Marvin, Carolyn and David W. Ingle, *Blood sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 45

²⁴¹ Walter, *Funerals*, 37

²⁴² Appendix 1.4.25

²⁴³ Appendix 2.3.3



discussed in interviews,²⁴⁴ and at another only the military narrative of honour was heard.²⁴⁵

Confusion, if not conflict, is likely when the same term – “honour” – is used by those present to mean very different things. Issues in themselves unimportant may become proxies for narrative conflicts, as is perhaps occurring here:

They wanted a photograph of the guy, and I said “Let’s put it on the altar” ... “No they want it by the side, on two little stools”. And you think: why do they want it? Because the Visiting Officer said “Why don’t we put it either side on two little stools”.²⁴⁶

Here, as in an example Davies gives of dust sprinkled on the coffin,²⁴⁷ clergy face a ‘real homiletic challenge’²⁴⁸ to voice the Christian narrative. It is clearly impossible, at a military funeral, to silence the military narrative, so clergy adopt a twofold approach. First, recognising the pressures on the family, they

love them through it. ... The chap’s Mum said to me ... “I’m so glad that you were there in front of us doing that funeral because I could look at you and I knew that I could get through it”.²⁴⁹

Second, clergy balance the competing narratives, in particular by shaping the tributes and sermon into a three-fold pattern of the deceased as Marine, as family member and as made in God’s image:

The family’s tribute ... because they have the greatest understanding of the individual Then you’ve got the ... professional tribute ... I then ... bring a theology of the resurrection in, and the Christian hope.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁴ Appendix 2.5.15

²⁴⁵ Appendix 2.7.14

²⁴⁶ Appendix 2.3.10

²⁴⁷ Davies, *Theology of Death*, 119

²⁴⁸ Thewlis, ‘The Difficult Funeral’, 6

²⁴⁹ Appendix 2.3.10

²⁵⁰ Appendix 2.3.13



Clergy may also “shape” narratives by using their power

in leading the service: ‘contextualising each tribute ... I top and tail everything that’s said and try to make it all hang together’.²⁵¹ This is not easy: the various “honour” narratives, like the partnered concepts Davies examines,²⁵² compete to influence and even dominate each other. Powerful forces are at work: Carr says the minister’s theology and authority can be ‘swamped by the power of the emotion of grief and its social accompaniments’.²⁵³

4.4 Narratives of Hope

Given the role of a funeral in mediating hope, and the various forms of hope in the face of death discussed above, it is not surprise that narratives of hope are highly significant in military funerals. They again both share in being apparently narratives of the same concept, in this case “hope”, and differ radically in their conception of that narrative. From a secular point of view, and one which will be significant for many Royal Marines and families, celebration is a prime focus, with soul survival a secondary, more tentative, wish for the deceased to “rest in peace”. The military express their narratives of hope in the phrase “Always a Royal Marine” and in practical support around the funeral: “hope as therapy” becoming part of the mix. Future hope for the deceased is ill-defined (“always” and “never” are balanced) but seen in terms of continuity, either in memory and effect on others or post-death survival, probably understood in dualist terms.

²⁵¹ Appendix 2.3.6

²⁵² Davies, *Theology of Death*, 154

²⁵³ Carr, *Brief Encounters*, 104



This may become associated with some of the ritual

elements of the service, for example incense rising above the coffin in church²⁵⁴

or the release (against the wishes of the Incumbent) of white doves,²⁵⁵ apparently

symbolising the soul ascending to heaven (and a fascinating inversion of the

Christian narrative of the dove as the descending Spirit of God). In contrast to

these hope narratives my interviewees looked to an eternally dimensioned

Christian hope. The varying narratives of hope are hard to bring into

engagement, and it is easy to allow an unhelpful division:

the funeral really drew a line down the middle of it: let them do their secular bit, and I'll then do the theology and the holy bit.²⁵⁶

Clergy and mourners can have very different interests:

The Church's concern [is] for the death and resurrection of Christ ... the secular demand [is] for funerals which celebrate the life of the deceased.²⁵⁷

This offers particular challenges to clergy seeking to address death, because of

the clash with the body narrative: 'Part of me wants to shake them and say *Why*

the hell should you be happy?'.²⁵⁸

With the difficulty of assigning a meaning to the term "hope" it may end up

defined so broadly that it becomes almost meaningless, encompassing orthodox

or unorthodox faith, or angry protest,²⁵⁹ and people may even reject Christian

hope (and forgiveness) narratives as conflicting with an 'all consuming' agenda of

²⁵⁴ Appendix 2.2.7

²⁵⁵ Appendix 2.3.17

²⁵⁶ Appendix 2.3.6

²⁵⁷ Sheppy, *A Pastoral and Liturgical Theology*, front fly.

²⁵⁸ Appendix 2.3.18

²⁵⁹ Parkes, Colin Murray, 'Foreword' in Tony Walter, *Funerals and How to Improve Them* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990), viii



blame and claim.²⁶⁰ Nevertheless clergy need to communicate Christian hope, not simply 'because otherwise anybody could be doing the service',²⁶¹ but because only Christian narratives of hope can truly redefine the death as a "good death":²⁶² other narratives simply cannot bear the weight.²⁶³

To fail to testify to the resurrection is tragic failure,²⁶⁴ yet the challenge of allowing the liturgy's 'triumphant doctrinal proclamation'²⁶⁵ of Christian hope to speak to a congregation whose narratives of hope are so different cannot be overestimated. Clergy, in order that their 'words against death'²⁶⁶ are not thereby rendered impotent, must negotiate the conflicting narratives to release the power of embodied knowledge. Mere declaration of propositional truths will not be effective.²⁶⁷

Part of the problem clergy face is that Christian concepts of hope are expressed in religious language, whereas more naturally people express hope through the heroic actions of ordinary people and communities.²⁶⁸ This suggests that careful selection of bible readings and use of material from tributes is needed to communicate Christian hope effectively. Anderson argues that the human narrative is in itself enough: he draws from the New Testament narratives of

²⁶⁰ Sheppy, *A Pastoral and Liturgical Theology*, 5

²⁶¹ Appendix 2.7.9

²⁶² Howarth, *Death and Dying*, 212

²⁶³ Howarth, *Death and Dying*, 173

²⁶⁴ Jupp, 'The Context of Christian Funeral Ministry', 16

²⁶⁵ Davies, *Theology of Death*, 12

²⁶⁶ Sheppy, *A Pastoral and Liturgical Theology*, 57

²⁶⁷ Quoted in Davies, *Theology of Death*, 36-7

²⁶⁸ Howarth, *Death and Dying*, 110-111



‘divorcees, grieving parents and baffled clergy’ that

‘everyday stories become the vehicle for divine revelation’, and criticises liturgies

which become ‘rituals without stories’.²⁶⁹ His argument has some force: the

unique nature of these deaths emphasises the discontinuity between liturgy and

experience and means these deaths might be seen as ‘stories without rituals’.²⁷⁰

But liturgy is not necessarily as disconnected from reality as Anderson suggests,

and it is significant and helpful that Common Worship has included prayers

specifically for use in the event of a violent death.²⁷¹ Further, everyday stories of

today are not necessarily quite as powerful as Anderson believes. An approach

that connects the everyday stories of scripture to the stories of Royal Marine

death in combat seems to me to offer to energise the ritual inspired by the biblical

stories so that it can speak to those affected by today’s stories:

I will always refer to the reading [I] always draw connections.
Because for me it’s all about saying ... “God’s there. He’s there in your
experience ... in this awfulness, what I’m talking about is present”.²⁷²

In other words, a ‘coherent homiletic whole’²⁷³ is produced by closely linking the

gospel with ‘all the vivid bits of the dead person’s life’. Thewlis, who is surely

correct to say that ‘the only way I can make the Christian hope real ... is if I talk

about God’s mercy *in the context of the dead person*’²⁷⁴ finds that tributes leave

him trying ‘to build bricks without straw’.²⁷⁵ To me this is an odd view: tributes

²⁶⁹ Anderson, *Mighty Stories*, 153-4

²⁷⁰ Anderson, *Mighty Stories*, 157

²⁷¹ Prayers 43, 44; Liturgical Commission, *Pastoral Services (Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England)* (London: Church House Publishing, 2nd ed. 2004), 359

²⁷² Appendix 2.7.15

²⁷³ Thewlis, ‘The Difficult Funeral’, 4

²⁷⁴ *Ibid*

²⁷⁵ *Ibid*



precisely provide “straw” and therefore make the clerical brick-building task easier, not harder.

4.5 Narratives of Masculinity

Narratives of masculinity are present in these funerals; sometimes explicitly in tributes or poems; sometimes implicitly, for example in the prominence of humour,²⁷⁶ in narratives of the deceased as father or lover, or in humorous vignettes: ‘seemed to spend most of his adult leisure time naked after alcohol’.²⁷⁷ The opportunity to speak to these narratives is there at a funeral since death and masculinity are closely associated. ‘Some ritual of death – and resurrection – was the centrepiece of all male initiation’ says Rohr,²⁷⁸ and the affirmation Wright commends of Christian hope for the future and associated activism now should speak particularly to men, for whom faith is often ‘belonging without believing: [something they] do rather than something they are’.²⁷⁹ Nevertheless it is not a narrative that clergy seem to be particularly aware of, or to address: ‘it wasn’t taken on by the preacher it must be said’.²⁸⁰ This seems to me disappointing in general and specific terms, not least as a church perceived as feminised does not often have the opportunity to address such large numbers of attentive men.

A careful exposition of a narrative of masculinity integrated with Christian faith

²⁷⁶ Devaney, Kevin, ‘Mining - a world apart’ in Victor J Seidler (ed.) *The Achilles Heel Reader* (London: Routledge, 1991) 151-159

²⁷⁷ Appendix 2.2.10

²⁷⁸ Rohr, Richard, *Adam’s Return: The Five Promises of Male Initiation* (New York: Crossroad Press, 2004)

²⁷⁹ Wraight, Heather, *Men & the Church: The Role Men Play in Running the Church* (Swindon: Christian Research, 2003), 19

²⁸⁰ Appendix 2.2.10



and hope would seem highly appropriate in this context.

This may be easier for a commando trained chaplain, whose own masculinity is implicit in his green beret.

4.6 Narratives of Family

Narratives of masculinity may overlap with narratives of family. The Royal Marines narrative of family is immensely strong: recruits hear from day one of training that the Corps is a family, and they make lifelong friends within that family. In tributes however the Corps family is almost always implicit: the language of family diverted to biological families. It may be that the subtext here is that the biological family are being subsumed into the Royal Marines family. Such incorporation into the Corps family following bereavement is, however, generally a relatively short lived phenomenon, if an intense one. All this adds to the difficulty for clergy, who have their own narrative of the Christian family. The word “always” has very different meanings in: “As his family we will always love him”; “He will always be within the family of the Royal Marines” and “He will always be part of God’s family”.



4.7 The Narrative of Baptism

The narrative of baptism was mentioned by two interviewees, though in one case it was felt that bringing it symbolically into the funeral would be unhelpful as misunderstood: ‘People ... will think “*What’s he throwing water at our mate for?*” - if you don’t explain it’.²⁸¹ Yet reminders of baptism are especially appropriate when dealing with death in combat. Engagement with the question of evil is a topic which Davies says no sociology or theology of death can possibly ignore;²⁸² arguably in *these* funerals such engagement is utterly essential. Within the symbolism of baptism death is ‘aligned with evil and the devil ... and contrasted with the positive and salvation-focused goal of the ritual action’.²⁸³ Death in combat, too, is seen as the work of evil, thus providing a clear link to the sacrament’s starting point and offering the opportunity to follow through to its salvific conclusion.

4.8 The Narrative of Therapy

So pervasive is the narrative of therapy that it is rarely mentioned. Rather, it forms an invisible overarching narrative which threatens to collapse all other narratives into itself. “The family want it this way” is an unanswerable argument. The source of its power is hidden: those present are well aware both that nothing

²⁸¹ Appendix 2.7.13

²⁸² Davies, *Theology of Death*, 82

²⁸³ Davies, *Theology of Death*, 41



that is done will in fact make the bereaved “feel better”,

and indeed that grief is neither an inappropriate nor a purely negative emotion:

Sorrow is one of the finest of human emotions, especially when it stands for the love and respect we have for Such-and-such who has died.²⁸⁴

Van Tongeren may be correct to suggest that displaced death anxiety can lie at the very heart of the therapeutic concern for the bereaved;²⁸⁵ it would certainly be credible as an explanation for the overwhelming power of this narrative.

4.9 Summary

I am struck by the sheer number and variety of the narrative elements present in these funerals. Left to their own Darwinian devices it will be military narratives that dominate; to the detriment of the ministry undertaken. It is time to turn to praxis.

²⁸⁴ Appendix 2.3.19

²⁸⁵ van Tongeren, L., ‘Individualizing Ritual: the Personal Dimension in Funeral Liturgy’, *Worship* 78(2) (2004), 127

Chapter 5: Action



Although the analysis above is certainly not the last word on such services (in particular research on the implications for ministry of “hope as resurrection” views as opposed to “hope as soul survival” views would be interesting and potentially rewarding) it does have practical implications. I now attempt some critically evaluated suggestions towards ministerial outcomes; addressing the implications of the process of exploration and reflection above for particular areas of praxis, including construction of the funeral, tributes, bible reading and sermon. Thus what follows is not just “hints and tips”, though as Practical Theology it is indeed intended to be practical. It is also a recognition that there is great pressure on clergy to do these services well: it is doubly true here that ‘you should do everything in your power not to mess up at a funeral’.²⁸⁶ My hope is that it will be an aid to informed excellence in this ministry. The military desire excellence; the bereaved deserve it, and as clergy we are ‘compelled by Christ’s love’ (2 Cor. 5.14) to deliver it.

5.1 Funeral Construction

Some element of construction of the funeral is required; if only to add in tributes, music and prose/poetry readings, and to incorporate the elements of military ceremonial involved. Common Worship helpfully gives Anglican clergy the

²⁸⁶ Anderson, *Mighty Stories*, 122



opportunity to ‘make the funeral personal and relevant’²⁸⁷

within its many options. On the positive side, there is more notice than is normally the case for a funeral, and the luxury of a rehearsal. The advice to ‘get in quick’²⁸⁸ seems important: only by full involvement with family and the military can clergy balance their varying narratives and creatively incorporate Christian narratives into the service. Chaplains will find it important to work closely with local clergy and their congregations, recognising that it is the faith community which ‘absorbs grief and transforms it into hope’.²⁸⁹ All clergy need to recognise the power of the military narrative, backed by tradition and ceremony - and money – and exercise a “bias to the family”, following Kelly’s guidance ‘to co-create a funeral which respects and reflects their stories and that of their deceased loved one’.²⁹⁰

How then can the funeral be constructed to allow the liturgy to speak? In part this will mean finding ways to make explicit the meaning of Christian ritual, and perhaps to define a meaning for military ritual. Take, for example, the dressing of the coffin. Typically this denies the narrative of the body (by hiding the coffin) and, through the symbols on it (beret, medals, photos, etc), affirms a narrative of the life lived. A simple gesture, such as placing a hand on the coffin, may be all that is required to redefine the narrative here to one where the flag covered coffin honours, and so recognises, the body instead of denying it:

²⁸⁷ Sheppy, *A Commentary*, 34

²⁸⁸ Appendix 2.7.3-2.7.5

²⁸⁹ Anderson, *Mighty Stories*, 117

²⁹⁰ Kelly, *Meaningful Funerals*, 91

I ... just put a hand on the coffin to say that it's OK, we want to be in touch so that we can treasure this person; to have a bit of contact.²⁹¹



A further example might be during the Last Post and Reveille: rather than simply suggesting that people use the silence to think of the one lost and the past, clergy might suggest mourners move during the silence to thinking forwards, to Christian hope and its implications in terms of the challenge to live renewed lives now. The event is the same; the narrative changed from one of loss to one of resurrection. There is in both these cases scope also for carefully chosen words printed on the service sheet. It will be helpful to clergy to encourage the choice of hymns which express narratives of Christian hope. Given the difficulty of finding any hymns which are well enough known to be sung successfully this will not be an easy task, and for clergy who hold to “hope as resurrection” views the difficulties are exacerbated: Wright laments a paucity of suitable hymns.²⁹²

The construction of an authentic and coherent funeral service demands time and effort, but Davies encourages an expectation that such liturgy will evoke a strong positive response, even to unfamiliar theological ideas:²⁹³ in other words it will have missiological effect.

²⁹¹ Appendix 2.5.12

²⁹² Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 30

²⁹³ Davies, *Theology of Death*, 55



5.2 Tributes

In planning and delivering the service clergy need to value tributes: not simply because they are now invariably part of the event, but because, as noted above, they legitimise the divine narrative. The tributes also preserve the liturgy from itself; from simply imposing ‘stories from scripture or religious tradition ... on people’s experience in a way that denies them an authentic voice’.²⁹⁴ A further benefit is that tributes help in the important – and difficult – task of moulding those who attend into a congregation;²⁹⁵ creating that ‘incidental community’²⁹⁶ without which the ritual cannot be effective.²⁹⁷ In short, this ‘not secular, [just] not overtly religious stuff’²⁹⁸ is friend, not foe.

Some control over the tributes is useful. Apart from the practical difficulties of over-long tributes there is the question of their balance, and there is clear value in those who deliver them being rehearsed if possible. Military narratives will always be heard; if other narratives are silenced then those who hold them will feel disenfranchised and will cease to engage with the ritual, as described so clearly in Interview 3: ‘The Marine hope was there, but the Christian hope was not’.²⁹⁹ Clearly any intervention here needs a light and pastorally sensitive touch, at least as far as the family are concerned. A more direct approach is helpful with Funerals Officers: they need clergy to be professionally confident when

²⁹⁴ Kelly, *Meaningful Funerals*, 91 (quoting Lynch)

²⁹⁵ Horton, *Using Common Worship Funerals*, 8

²⁹⁶ van Tongeren, ‘Individualizing Ritual’, 128

²⁹⁷ Sheppy, *A Pastoral and Liturgical Theology*, 58

²⁹⁸ Appendix 2.7.11

²⁹⁹ Appendix 2.4.6



dealing with these things, and in my experience are very supportive. It is probably impossible to prevent entirely the “sainting” of the deceased in tributes, but in my experience Royal Marine ones are often pretty honest. This is important: turning the dead into plaster saints emphasises their difference – in role, and also in personality - to ourselves,³⁰⁰ thus silencing valid narratives of loss. In terms of position within the service the Common Worship guidance that they should be near the beginning seems appropriate. Placing them before the reading and sermon allows the tributes to set out a framework to which the gospel can be applied: ‘the human story [is] heard first; only then is the divine narrative invoked’.³⁰¹

5.3 Bible Readings

Bible readings need choosing with care, so that they ‘do not leave people feeling bewildered by talk of resurrection in terms that differ from their own expectations’.

³⁰² My suggestion would be that ideally they will connect with some of the narratives identified above. I am tempted to propose Acts 23:23-32, for example, (Paul being escorted to Caesarea), which arguably includes narratives of the body, honour, hope and masculinity, and is in a military context. In fact, however, everything depends on the circumstances. It is only in the context of a close relationship with the bereaved and with the military, and ideally some knowledge of what is to be said in the tributes, that clergy can find ‘the major

³⁰⁰ Howarth, *Death and Dying*, 79

³⁰¹ Anderson, *Mighty Stories*, 159

³⁰² James, H., *A Fitting End - Making the Most of a Funeral* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2004), 18



theme'³⁰³ which, when expressed, will enable the gospel

to be heard, not simply told. A suitable reading can be selected only once that theme is known. In very practical terms this may not be before the order of service is printed, in which case the desired reading can simply be read as the opening of the sermon.

5.4 The Sermon

'Following violent death one of the greatest difficulties, perhaps, is the sermon',³⁰⁴ says James, and he is right. Sheppey warns of the possibility of a loss of nerve caused by the widespread non-belief in any form of life after death,³⁰⁵ and it is probably true that many clergy are at least somewhat 'uneasy speaking about resurrection and eternal life'.³⁰⁶ One response to this vacuum of meaning has been not to preach.³⁰⁷ Carr says that the bereaved can take little in, hence a sermon is not required;³⁰⁸ Billings that they treat the words as 'not to be taken literally'.³⁰⁹ Worsley (to me astonishingly) believes it inappropriate to 'proclaim the Christian faith to those who do not have it'.³¹⁰ There may also be a concern not to distort the deceased's views: these are always to be respected.³¹¹ Yet surely Sheppey is correct in asserting that 'the reading of scripture without

³⁰³ Jacobs, M., 'The Use of Story in Pastoral Care (Part One: Hearing Stories)' *Contact* 95 (1988), 16

³⁰⁴ James, *A Fitting End*, 133

³⁰⁵ Sheppy, *A Commentary*, 30

³⁰⁶ van Tongeren, 'Individualizing Ritual', 138

³⁰⁷ Post, Paul, 'Silent Procession: Ritual Liturgical Perspectives of an Emerging Popular Dutch Ritual', *Studia Liturgica* 32 no. 1 (2002), 93

³⁰⁸ Carr, *Brief Encounters*, 121

³⁰⁹ Billings, *Dying and Grieving*, 72

³¹⁰ Worsley, 'From Death to Life', 205

³¹¹ Valentine, *Bereavement Narratives*, 37



explanation is not enough',³¹² and Billings right to say that

'we fail to minister to them if we do not make some attempt to say something ... about the Christian perspective'.³¹³ Certainly the clergy in my small survey recognise and wish to address the 'amalgam of superstition associated with the hereafter',³¹⁴ and to proclaim that 'because of Jesus Christ' this is no mere memorial.³¹⁵

What narratives, then, might a preacher most helpfully use to engage with mourners? Again, much will depend on the individual circumstances, but I suggest caution about undue further emphasis on the narrative of the body – already sufficiently addressed through the ritual and text of the liturgy as a whole – due to the circumstances of the death. Those narratives, such as narratives of hope, which seem to be concerned with the same concept but are defined differently by those at the funeral, will need to be addressed with care to avoid preachers speaking to their narrative, and the congregation hearing a different message in terms of their own narrative sharing the same name. A baptism narrative may be especially appropriate and will fit well with Common Worship, which explicitly links baptism to resurrection: 'through the gate of death we may pass to our joyful resurrection'.³¹⁶ Other not normally explicit narratives, such as masculinity or family, will also be good places to begin the task.

³¹² Sheppy, *A Commentary*, 54

³¹³ Billings, *Dying and Grieving*, 35

³¹⁴ Carr, *Brief Encounters*, 123

³¹⁵ Thewlis, 'The Difficult Funeral', 6

³¹⁶ Liturgical Commission, *Pastoral Services*, 242



Given the importance of narratives to the funeral, might

then a narrative or story based *form* of sermon be the most appropriate here? I suggest not. Eslinger says that a narrative form of sermon in such a context will ‘almost always abort’.³¹⁷ the addition of yet another narrative, even if the minister can credibly provide one, will simply confuse. As Interviewee 6 put it:

I don’t think it is the job of the chaplain to be telling lots and lots of stories. Clearly I didn’t know the young man so I couldn’t do.³¹⁸

Better is to interpret the narratives already present in the tributes, bible reading and liturgy to those present; to ‘bring near images and stories out of the lived experience of the congregation’.³¹⁹

You hope that you say at least one thing that moves them into the dimension of God.³²⁰

This will also help to meet Sheppey’s criticism of modern liturgies for their tendency to concentrate on how the faithful may get to heaven, rather than addressing the question “What happens when I die?”.³²¹ The sermon will still look towards the future, but the narrative of the body – of all our bodies - will be brought into focus. This in turn should bring a missiological edge to the service; as McGough puts it in his sharp edged poem:

Don’t dwell upon my past but on your future.
For what you see is what you’ll be,
and sooner than you think.
So get weeping ...³²²

³¹⁷ Eslinger, Richard L., *Narrative and Imagination: Preaching the Worlds that Shape us* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 158

³¹⁸ Appendix 2.7.10

³¹⁹ Eslinger, *Narrative and Imagination*, 98

³²⁰ Appendix 2.7.10

³²¹ Sheppey, *A Pastoral and Liturgical Theology*, 98

³²² McGough, Roger, 'I am not sleeping' in Roger McGough, *That Awkward Age* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 33

5.5 Summary



Funeral ministry along the lines indicated above may look superficially similar to any other. It will however, by recognising and engaging with the often hidden or taken-for-granted narratives present amongst mourners, clergy and the military, more effectively 'tell the story of the dead person honestly, and ... frame that narrative in the story of Jesus, whose death and resurrection assure us that our death is not God's last word'.³²³ As Davies says:

A collaboration between priest and the bereaved family and friends can yield a highly satisfactory rite in which elements from the "great tradition" of Christianity combine with local and personal items reflecting the desire of family and friends to mark the individuality of this particular dead person.³²⁴

³²³ Sheppy, *A Commentary*, 180

³²⁴ Davies, *Brief History*, 59

Chapter 6: Conclusion



The innate conservatism of the military's approach means that Christian clergy will retain their position in relation to military funerals: a position which is already weakened in wider society and could well, as Davies I believe presciently warns, be lost 'relatively quickly'.³²⁵ Such ministry is both a privilege whose retention must be earned, and a challenge: a challenge to help mourners move on both from the death and into greater understanding of God. A faith response cannot be guaranteed, since the same funeral 'may be experienced as deeply moving or else fail to evoke meaning',³²⁶ but funerals have real mission possibilities, because 'beliefs about life and death, both spiritual and secular [can] be challenged and reshaped by experience'.³²⁷ I have tried to sketch above some theological principles which will enable effective praxis and make available to the bereaved both comfort and hope in terms of renewed vision for living in the Kingdom in the light of Christ's, and of our own, resurrection. Or, as one of my interviewees put it simply and eloquently:

This guy was part of a family, whilst serving with the Royal Marines, has been killed; and we and God have something to say about that.³²⁸

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³²⁵ Davies, *Brief History*, 60

³²⁶ Valentine, *Bereavement Narratives*, 123

³²⁷ Valentine, *Bereavement Narratives*, 108

³²⁸ Appendix 2.4.7-8

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