

Telling the Truth about Death and Life: Preaching at Funerals

Thomas G. Long
Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey

"Once we had a narrative of heaven and hell, but now we make our own narratives."
— Anatole Broyard, *Intoxicated by My Illness*

"I don't think people are afraid of death. What they are afraid of is the incompleteness of their life."
— thirty-year-old man, dying of leukemia

Lord, "If You Had Been Here, My Brother Would Not Have Died..."

If funeral preachers need a patron saint, and we probably do, we could hardly do better than to light a candle for a nearly forgotten Christian named Tutaswampe, one of a tribe of Indians converted to the faith in the early 1600s by New England Puritans.

Tutaswampe and his kin were not only schooled in a strict Calvinistic understanding of the gospel, they were also imbued with the austere Puritan attitudes toward worship and the Christian life, which included a fierce prejudice against funeral ceremonies. The Puritans found idolatrous many of the funeral customs they had seen in England — the expensive trappings, the ostentatious rituals, the doleful mourning, the long prayers, the eulogizing sermons, all of it — and they responded by denouncing the whole showy mess as blasphemous and attempting to eliminate funerals altogether from the Christian repertoire. The first Westminster *Directory for the Publique Worship of God* spoke well the Puritan mind when it noted that funerals "are in no way beneficiall to the dead and have proved many wayes hurtfull to the living." John Canne sang the Puritan tune in perfect pitch when he wrote in 1634, "[T]he best and right reformed churches bury their dead without any ceremonies of praying or preaching at them."

This, then is how it came to pass that, when a certain Indian died one day, Tutaswampe and other members of the tribe tramped out in silence to the burying place in the woods, intending to inter their friend with neither word nor ceremony, for that was what the Puritans had taught them was the Christian manner. The Indians were not alone as they made their way into the forest, since a visiting Englishman, Thomas Shepard, who was keeping a journal of his travels in America, clumped out with them just to see what would happen.

What did happen is that the Indians, after standing for a while obediently at the grave in mute sorrow, could no longer abide the barren wordlessness of the occasion. Their adopted theology dictated silence, but their hearts demanded something more. A word must be said to mark the moment. So, they broke the rules. They walked a little piece from the grave and gathered under a nearby tree, where, according to Shepard's journal, they asked for some words from "one Tutaswampe, a very hopefull Indian." In the face of death and grief, Tutaswampe opened his mouth to speak. What he said was not recorded, but we do know that his words finally moved toward prayer. "The

English,” Shepard observed, “do not usually...pray together after such sad occasions, yet it seems God stird up [the Indians’] hearts thus to doe.”¹

We who preach at funerals today stand with Tutaswampe. On the one hand, there is much in both our theology and our experience that compels us to silence before the mystery of death. The Puritans had a point; funeral words are too often vain, glib, and sentimental attempts to fill the unfillable void with presumption. Human words seem but frayed cords, unable to bear the weight of sorrow and wondering and awe. On the other hand, as Tutaswampe and those with him sensed, the Puritans were also wrong. The heart comprehends another truth. We discern a deeper wisdom that the gospel always involves human words being pressed beyond their knowing into the void of death to bear witness to a hope visible only through faith. As was the case with Tutaswampe and his companions, God continues to stir up our hearts to break the silence of death with a hopeful and prayerful word.

But what to say? When the preacher stands, like Tutaswampe, under whatever tree in whatever corner of a darkened wood, beside whatever grave in whatever cemetery, before the mourners wherever they may be gathered in the face of death, what can one possibly say?

There are many wise manuals about funeral sermons, guides that advise us on how to use images and narratives and good, psychologically congruent structures,² but long before the technical aspects of funeral preaching come into view, a more basic question should be asked: What in the name of God are we trying to do anyway? What, exactly, is the purpose of a funeral sermon? Toward what goals are our words flung? Before we can know what to say and how to say it, we must face the question of why we are up there in the first place trying to say anything at all.

Most ministers who have conducted many funerals over the years recognize that, at the level of actual practice, funeral sermons and homilies are so varied as to defy categorization. Sometimes in a funeral sermon we tell gentle stories we have heard from the family, and sometimes we explore an image from scripture, and sometimes we state as clearly and simply as we can the promises of God, and sometimes we search for the words that name what everyone is thinking and feeling, and sometimes we just stand there and give voice to the sorrow or the anger or the perplexity or the relief or the gratitude. But, drawing back to gain some wider perspective, underneath these mixed genres and varied themes, what are we trying to do in all this?

If, at the close of a funeral, someone were to touch our elbow, pull us aside, and ask, “Pastor, what were you aiming for in your remarks?” off the top of our heads we may say that we were trying to comfort the grieving or attempting to say something that made at least a little sense out of the senselessness of loss and sorrow. Perhaps we would add that we hoped to bring a kind of holy order, a godly dignity, even a noble consecration to an experience of human ambiguity, unraveling, and loss (after all, the “Gettysburg Address,” with its proud cadences, bore the marks, as Gary Wills has reminded us, of a classical funeral sermon³).

But if we were to advance any of these as the main reason for our funeral preaching, we would be mistaken. When all is said and done, we do not preach at funerals primarily to provide comfort — though solace and support are, thank God, often given through the sermon. And we are not there to explain why all of this happened — though the hunger for meaning in the face of meaninglessness, thank God, is often addressed in what we say. What is more, we are not there to supply spiritual solemnity to an

already somber situation. What we *are* there to do is to unmask a lie.

Whether we are aware of it or not, there is another preacher present at every funeral, vying for the pulpit, and this preacher is a liar. I refer, of course, to Death, and Death is the preacher of evil's most convincing lie. Death claims persuasively that the God who promised to be present turned out to be absent, that the God who vowed to give and preserve life would not — or could not — keep that promise, and that all talk of steadfast loving relationships and enduring community is so much empty wind. What Death is trying to do is to commandeer the pulpit and gain control of the storytelling. When a person dies, Death plants a victory banner in the dust and summons everyone to gather around and listen up, and the narrative sermon Death speaks goes like this: "I, Death, am the Lord of all time, and no matter who giveth, Death taketh away. All time is contained between the ticking of the clock and the beating of the heart, and when the clock winds down and the heart stops, there is no more. Human life is fragmented and aimless, and its sad and confused wanderings all end up here — in loneliness, defeat, and sorrow. Relationships are destined to fail, community is an illusion, and human life is fragmented and aimless." Death preaches on the text "A mortal, born of woman, few of days and full of trouble, comes up like a flower and withers, flees like a shadow and does not last" (Job 14:1-2).

When Death's sermon is done, we are obliged to stand and confess the inescapable creed, "I believe that God, who promised to be with us, turned out, when the chips were down, to be missing in action. 'Lord, if you had been here, our brother would not have died.' But you were not, so, we relinquish these empty promises and turn toward the inevitable truth that life is swallowed up in Death. Death is Lord. O Death, here is your victory." What makes death's story so compelling is that it has all of the evidence on its side. Look at the lifeless body, the empty chair at the table, the unraveled narratives of hope and meaning.

Funeral sermons, then, are not merely gentle messages of comfort; they are words of combat. "Christian hope," maintains Amy Plantinga Pauw, "...requires a restless protest against death,"⁴ and no matter how tenderly we may speak, we should not forget that our task as preachers of the gospel is to engage Death's lies in pitched battle. What we are there to do is to uncover what Death tries with all of its might to conceal and distort, to name the truth that Death struggles to hide with falsehoods. The task of the funeral preacher is to stand and face the same harsh reality, the same seemingly irrefutable evidence, but to tell another story, the gospel story, to tell the faith story that is truer than our senses, deeper than our emotions, more real than the empirical evidence at hand.

This gospel story is, of course, many-sided, and funeral preachers would do well to have in mind as they prepare funeral sermons a theological checklist of the themes that can and should be sounded at a funeral.⁵ This checklist does not tell us what to say, of course, but it does give us ways to think theologically about each funeral situation. Every funeral is unique, and the theological emphasis in each funeral sermon will fall at different places depending upon the circumstances, but here are eight broad categories to consider in the creation of the funeral sermon:

1. Kerygmatic: "In the Valley of the Shadow of Death, You Are There..."

The first and overarching goal of a funeral sermon is to combat essential lies with basic truths, in other words to preach the gospel, the kerygma, the good news about

who God really is and what God is doing in this place. In this regard, funeral preaching is no different from week in, week out sermonizing. The preacher stands in a specific context, a particular moment in time, turns expectantly, attentively, and inquisitively to a passage of scripture, and then speaks the truth about what is heard there.

The context of a funeral sermon, of course, is death, and implied in this context are doubts about the presence, power, and goodness of God. Even the peaceful death of an aged saint raises these doubts because every particular passing is connected to the general human experience of death. Even “good” deaths remind us of other deaths — tragic deaths, infant deaths, painful deaths.

It is no coincidence, I think, that the Gospel of John, which is perhaps the Gospel most frequently read at funerals (primarily for its soothing rhythms of “many mansions” and “let not your hearts be troubled”) also has as a theological motif the apparent absence of Jesus in times of crisis. Over and again in John’s Gospel, just when the situation gets prickly, Jesus ducks out of sight and cannot be found (see, for example, John 5:13, 8:59, 9:12, 12:36). The crowds are “looking for Jesus,” who is nowhere in evidence (6:24). At the festival, the urgent question on people’s lips is, “Where is he?” — but no one knows (7:11). “You will search for me, but you will not find me,” taunts Jesus as he disappears over the horizon (7:34).

Interestingly, Jesus’ nonpresence comes to a dramatic focus in a funeral setting: the death of his friend Lazarus. Sisters Mary and Martha both point out that Jesus was absent when his presence was needed most: “Lord, if you had been here, our brother would not have died” (John 11: 21, 32). The question John wants us to ponder, of course, is, Was Jesus there or was he not? If we ask the grieving relatives, they would answer, “No. We kept waiting for him, but he came too late.” If we consult the calendar, we have to admit, Jesus tarried too long elsewhere and missed the crisis by several days.

John wants us to ponder the question of Jesus’ absence or presence for two main reasons. First, there is the candid acknowledgment that, by any normal standard of perception, Jesus was painfully, lamentably absent in moments of crisis and was not there to rescue us. It will not do to say, “There, there, loss and death do not hurt.” No, in the world of John’s Gospel, human beings really do get hurt, and Jesus is not there with a Band-Aid and a lollipop.

A woman whose sister-in-law died described the experience of taking her little grandson to the funeral. He had never been to a funeral before, and he went up to the open casket, peered in, and asked, “Grandma, who is that?” The woman, wanting to spare the child distress, replied, “That’s my sister-in-law, and she’s asleep.” The little boy looked again into the casket and said, “Looks to me like somebody killed her.”⁶ Just so, John’s Gospel will not gloss over human loss. People really do run out of wine at weddings, and people really do spend thirty-eight years paralyzed and alone, and children really are born blind, and parents really do abandon their children, and good friends like Lazarus really do get sick and suffer and die. The Gospel of John looks at such sorrowful facts straight on, and so can we.

But, second, John wants to call these narrow definitions of truth — our human vision, our tangible experience, our worldly timetables — into serious question. Such categories name a piece of reality, but not all of it. Over and again in John’s Gospel, while the world looks for a Jesus it cannot find, those who have faith have a deeper experience; they are found by him and see him (20:29). The Jesus who is absent in all

the ways we expect and want him is nonetheless present in all the ways we need him. He refuses to be trapped by our categories and definitions of truth; he is the Truth. Death swaggers, "I plan to take Lazarus in forty-eight hours. Show up by then or else." Jesus responds, "Before there was time, 'I am.' All time belongs to me. I do not march to your little calendar; I come to bring the deep treasure of eternal life."

As a hospice nurse, Carolyn Burns has had many experiences with dying people and their families. "I had a man who put his wife's makeup on her every morning," she said. In the initial stages of the wife's illness, Burns reported, the woman had been very concerned about her appearance, and she never got out of the bed without putting on her makeup. Then, as her illness progressed, she needed help, and her husband, though clumsy at it, would assist her. As she moved closer to death, she slipped into unconsciousness, but "even when she was in a coma, every morning he would comb her hair, put on her eyeliner and powder and lipstick and all that stuff. It was such an act of love. And bless his heart, it looked horrible. ...He said, 'Well, it's important to her.'"⁷

Now at this woman's funeral, the husband's inevitable questions must be faced: "Lord, were you there? Were you there everyday when I combed her hair and tried to preserve what was left of her dignity? Were you there when I touched her face with love and she could not respond? Lord, if you had been there..." It is the privilege of the funeral preacher to interrupt death's monologue and proclaim the good news that Jesus was indeed there and is present even now. The preacher announces the gospel truth that it is the way of God to be hidden, therefore, things are not altogether what they seem. When we look at this experience of death through the eyes of faith, what seems to be God's absence is in truth God's much more profound veiled presence. Time, which appears captured between tick and tock, in reality flows from creation to eternity. The fragmented story of human life, even this human's life, so frayed and broken, is woven into God's seamless tapestry, and the apparently lonely and restless human pilgrimage does not end up in a cemetery but in a place of Sabbath rest."

In Joseph Heller's classic *Catch 22*, there is a wonderful scene where Yossarian is complaining to Lieutenant Scheisskopf's wife about the sheer incompetence of God:

"Be glad you're even alive," she tells him.

"Be *furios* you're going to die," Yossarian retorts. "...And don't tell me God works in mysterious ways," he continues. "There's nothing so mysterious about it. He's not working at all. He's playing. Or else He's forgotten all about us. That's the kind of God you people talk about — a country bumpkin, a clumsy, bungling, brainless, conceited, uncouth hayseed. Good God, how much reverence can you have for a Supreme Being who finds it necessary to include such phenomena as phlegm and tooth decay in His divine system of creation?"

As his diatribe continues, the Lieutenant's wife finally has enough. "Stop it! Stop it!" she screams, beating Yossarian with her fists.

"What the hell are you so upset about?" responds a surprised Yossarian. "I thought you didn't believe in God."

"I don't," she weeps. "But the God I don't believe in is a good God, a just God, a merciful God. He's not the mean and stupid God you make Him out to be."⁸

Heller has captured the hidden struggle in every funeral. The God the mourners do not, at the moment believe in, is a good, just, and merciful God. It is the task of the preacher to lift the veil, to challenge the lies, and to announce the presence of this God, whom we know in Jesus Christ.

2. Ecclesial: “Such is the Company of Those Who Seek God...”

Another lie that Death tells is that we are alone; we die alone and Death teaches us the lesson that, consequently, we live alone since we are always facing Death. As the woman standing at the grave of her husband is supposed to have said, “All good marriages end up here.” Or again, a woman visiting a friend in the hospital was startled to find herself summoned by the woman in the next bed, a total stranger. Though the visitor could not quite decipher what the woman was saying, it seemed as though she was asking for something. When she drew close to the woman’s bed, she heard her request clearly, “Please hold me, I’m dying.” She did not say, “Get a nurse” or “Hurry, call the doctor,” or even “Help me” — just “Please hold me, I’m dying.” It was the loneliness she dreaded, the prospect of dying alone.⁹

In combating this lie of isolation, the preacher has no better text than the congregation itself. In Mary Lou Wiseman’s book *Intensive Care*, she reports that her fifteen-year-old son, just before he died of muscular dystrophy, asked his father to arrange him in “an impudent position” in the hospital bed.¹⁰ When faithful people gather to worship on the occasion of death, they are not just “honoring the memory of the deceased” or “paying their respects to the family.” They are the church, arranged in “an impudent position” before the threat of death, and one task of funeral preaching is to proclaim this truth in words. In an essay, Amy Plantinga Pauw describes the practice of some Latin American congregations who call out the names of members of the church who have died, some violently. As each name is read, the congregation vigorously exclaims, “*Presente!*” as a sign that the church refuses to accept death as the last and defining word about them. “As a part of the ‘great cloud of witnesses’ (Hebrews 12:1), they are declared present to the living community through God’s gift of life that triumphs even over the last enemy, death.”¹¹

In a recent funeral in New York City, when the benediction had been said, a crucifer moved into position at the head of the recessional and lifted high the cross. He was followed by the pallbearers carrying the casket and then the whole congregation, singing as they recessed,

Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
with the cross of Jesus going on before.
Christ the Royal Master leads against the foe;
Forward into battle, see his banners go.
...We are not divided. All one body we.
One in hope and doctrine, One in charity.

This was the church assuming “an impudent position” over against death, and it is a posture that the funeral sermon as well can name.

3. Oblational: “Bring an Offering, and Come into His Courts...”

Death, that lying preacher, always takes up a collection. Death moves through the pews with the collection plate and demands a toll. “Give me your hopes. Give me your memories. Give me your loved ones. I return nothing.”

The church, on the other hand, never takes up a collection but, instead, receives an offering. A collection is extorted; an offering is freely given. People come to a

funeral ready and needing to give, and one of the functions of the funeral sermon is to receive the offering in the name of God. People bring offerings of many kinds — their memories, their sorrows, their stories, the body of the one who has died, their anticipations of their own death — and the sermon is one of the places where those offerings can be named and placed in the loving hands of the God who preserves and saves.

To think of the funeral sermon as the receiving of the offering also allows the preacher to move from the prophetic role to the priestly, and to preach with prayerful arms extended. Sometimes preachers think of funeral sermons only as God's words addressed to the people. That puts the preacher exclusively in the posture of trying to speak God's thoughts, even to the point of making judgments. But sometimes the best funeral sermon comes when the preacher figuratively leaves the pulpit, stands in the pew, lifts up the offering plate, and cries, "God we loved this person. Please, O God, receive him and all that we remember of him good and bad as our offering to you."

4. Eucharistic: "O Give Thanks to the Lord..."

Another theme of funeral preaching is thanksgiving, but this is a theme that must carefully be distinguished from happiness. We give thanks for many things — from hard work to lessons learned in sorrow — that do not particularly make us happy. This is why the Lord's Table stands at the center of Christian worship. The eucharistic table is, after all, a place of death: We show forth here the Lord's death until he comes. At this table we discover in brokenness, sorrow, loss, and death — not apart from these things — the grace and saving mercy of God. When we get up from the Lord's Table, our vision has been altered. We now see what could not see before: all of life is the theater of the glory of God, and it is our duty and delight to say, "Thank you. Thank you."

So it is at a funeral — and in funeral preaching. We give thanks for the gift of a life — not the parts of that life that we found pleasing or that made us especially happy, but all of it. Every life is a gift of God's grace, and the fact that some lives are transparent to that grace and some are opaque does not prevent our giving thanks to God, even for what we have learned in suffering and loss. Isabel Allende, who fled Chile after the political coup of 1973, spent a year at the bedside of her daughter Paula, who was in a coma and suffering from a rare brain disease. When, after months of pain, Paula finally died at age twenty-nine, Isabel felt "it was impossible to conceive a greater pain." In the subsequent months of grieving, however, Isabel discovered that in the midst of pain there had been a gift, a reason for thankfulness:

If I had to summarize what I learned during the whole year of Paula's agony, the moment of her death and all the next year of grieving and writing, it would be: After you have lost everything, the only thing you have left is the love you have given.

...I understand so many things that I did not understand before. Now my way of loving is different. The way I love my husband, my grandchildren, my mother, my stepchildren, people in general — it's not based on expectations. It's just because I get so much from the loving. ...That was Paula's legacy.¹²

5. Therapeutic: “In the Day of My Trouble, I Seek the Lord...”

God’s presence is a healing presence, and another task of funeral preaching is to speak that healing word. In a therapeutic culture, it is important to discriminate between authentic gospel therapy of the gospel and the smaller, more psychologically defined tasks of “bereavement management” or “coming to terms with the emotions of grief.” The therapeutic task is larger than achieving psychic equilibrium; it is to recover the capacity to place the experience of this death into the fabric of the overarching story of God’s care for us.

“I don’t think people are afraid of death,” observed a young man dying of leukemia. “What they are afraid of is the incompleteness of their life.” This is why in the wisdom of the classic funeral liturgies, the life of the one who has died is always seen in the context of baptism. This is not because baptism somehow makes a person better than the next, but because baptism connects the brief, fragmented, episodic story of a human being to the larger and whole narrative of Jesus Christ. The theologian Irenaeus, troubled by the fact that Jesus died at age thirty-three, imagined that in some symbolic sense Jesus actually lived to be an old man so that he could walk through every human age and redeem every human experience. In other words, Irenaeus claimed that Jesus’ life, though chronologically brief, in reality stretched over the fullness of the human life span. The doctrine of baptism is the other side of Irenaeus’s coin, insisting that the arc of a single human life, no matter how brief or fragmented, is nonetheless incorporated through baptism into the full circle of Jesus’ humanity.

When the essayist Anatole Broyard was dying of cancer, he observed, “I would...like a doctor who enjoyed me. I want to be a good story for him.”¹³ In a world without religion, however, Broyard recognizes the sad truth that we have to fabricate our own stories. “Once we had a narrative of heaven and hell,” he states, “but now we make our own narratives.”¹⁴ No, counters the gospel preacher, we do not have to make up our own story. We are given a story, and the brief sentence fragment that constitutes any one life, bounded before and after by an ellipsis, is, by the grace of God incorporated into the full and rich narrative of Christ.

6. Commemorative: “Lord, You Have Been Our Dwelling Place in All Generations...”

The Puritans’ negative reaction to the funeral sermon came because many of the Anglican funeral preachments they had heard were short on gospel and long on eulogy, full of rhapsodies about the life of the deceased at the expense of descriptions of the life of God. It is a caution worth heeding, of course, not to preach the noble adventures of the dear departed deceased instead of the gospel of the eternally present Christ.

On the other hand, we do not know about any God who can be described apart from the stories of the people with whom this God chooses to get involved. Properly told, God stories are always human stories, and human stories are always permeated by the wonder of God. Good funeral sermons will be enriched by honest memories of the one who has died. The idea here is not to tell stories that act as showcases for the virtues of the deceased but rather as examples of how this life was a prism, refracting the grace of God.

The telling of these stories is, in part, how the Christian community is shaped over time in the identity of Christ. Appalachian playwright Ron Short once told of going to a country cemetery with his parents:

A few years back, I was going up the hill with my father and mother, going up the hill to the graveyard in Dickenson County where we used to live. They're getting old, and my father was resting, and he said to me, "You know, one of these days you're going to be coming up here alone." And it wasn't that he was telling me that he was going to die. He knows I know that. What he meant was that it was time for me to take the responsibility for the identity he'd carried all his life.¹⁵

The "identity he'd carried all his life" is, in the deepest sense, the identity of God's image, and it is a task of the funeral sermon to claim and narrate that identity.

7. Missional: "That I May Walk before God in the Light of Life..."

One of Death's boldest lies is that the Christian pilgrimage leads to a cul-de-sac. It is a common experience of grief to feel that life has come to an end, not only for the one who has died, but for everyone else as well. Death holds up a stop sign: "Go no farther. This is the end of the road."

The gospel, however, both warns us and reassures us that death, no matter how tragic, and grief, no matter how deep, are pausing places along the way, not stopping places. The people who come to a funeral will get up at the close of the service and go out from this place to serve Christ in the world. When the obituary says, "In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to...", this is one sign of a gospel truth the sermon can magnify. Death does not dissuade us from or incapacitate us for mission. Indeed, all Christian mission is a confident defiance of death.

8. Educational: "Teach Us to Number Our Days..."

Funerals are the worship of God's people in a public place, and there are often people present who do not know or share the Christian faith. The old technique of using the funeral sermon to evangelize people in the narrow sense was a misguided recognition of the presence of strangers in the household of God. A better, and more theologically sound, reaction is to show hospitality, and one sermonic form of that hospitality is to do some gentle, low-key teaching. The preacher can explain in simple terms why we say and confess and pray as we do on such an occasion. In the final analysis, it is the best evangelism of all to bring into view, as clearly as we can, how it is that we see life and death, humanity and God.

"The purpose of Christianity," wrote the great Orthodox scholar Alexander Schmemmann, "is not to help people by reconciling them to death, but to reveal the Truth about life and death in order that people may be saved by the Truth." So it is with funeral sermons. The preacher tells the truth about death and life. But this does not begin, Schmemmann reminds us, at the funeral. "It begins every Sunday as the church ascending into heaven, 'puts aside all earthly care' ... in the joy of Easter."¹⁶

Notes

¹ David E. Stannard, *The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture, and Social Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 109.

² Among the best are Robert Hughes, *A Trumpet in Darkness: Preaching to Mourners* (Philadelphia:

Fortress, 1985) and John Allyn Melloh, "Homily or Eulogy? The Dilemma of Funeral Preaching," *Worship* 67(1993): 502-518.

³ Gary Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words that Remade America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992).

⁴ Amy Plantinga Pauw, "Dying Well," in *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 170.

⁵ For many of the theological themes and categories that follow, I am indebted to the liturgical theologian Paul Waitman Hoon, whose seminal essay "Theology, Death, and the Funeral Liturgy," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, XXXI/3 (Spring, 1976): 169-181, remains the high water mark treatment of the topic.

⁶ Patricia Anderson, *All of Us: Americans Talk About the Meaning of Death* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1996), 196.

⁷ Carolyn Burns in Anderson, *All of Us*, 233-234.

⁸ Joseph Heller, *Catch 22* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1961), 176-178.

⁹ Anderson, *All of Us*, 22.

¹⁰ As reported in Anatole Broyard, *Intoxicated By My Illness* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1992), 24.

¹¹ Pauw, "Dying Well," 171.

¹² Isabel Allende in Anderson, *All of Us*, 150-151.

¹³ Broyard, 45.

¹⁴ Broyard, 42.

¹⁵ Ron Short in Anderson, *All of Us*, 29.

¹⁶ Alexander Schmemmann in *A Sourcebook About Christian Death*, ed. Virginia Sloyan (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1990), 119-120.