

NOTES AND COMMENTS

AN UNEASY ALLIANCE: DOCTORS OF GRIEF AND DOCTORS OF DIVINITY

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This article explores the role relationship of clergy and funeral directors from the perspective of the funeral director. Much of the conflict can be explained from a socio-historical perspective as the status of the funeral director has been enhanced and that of the clergy has become more tenuous. Funeral directors are moving boldly into the area of "grief counseling" which previously was the almost exclusive domain of the clergy. For their part, funeral directors see clergy involvement in funeral purchases as a particularly irritating role infringement. In a more positive vein, many funeral directors and clergy are engaging in open communication in a way that promotes "good grief" for the bereaved.

The charge that twentieth century American society is death denying has decreased in recent years, as large numbers of social scientists, stimulated by the works of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and others, have explored death with professional interest. This trend to open discussions of death is evidenced by many books, articles, death education courses, talk shows, and workshops. The topics covered in this "death education" movement include the stages of dying, the clinical management of the terminally ill patient, euthanasia, explaining death to children, the hospice, and the dynamics of grief. However, there is at least one area that has received scant attention from social scientists and that is the role performance of the clergy and funeral directors as they work together in the death setting.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There are several sociological studies on which this current study builds. In 1967, David Sudnow published *Passing On: The*

Social Organization of Dying. This is a study of the physical management of death related procedures in the setting of two hospitals. In 1975, Vanderlyn Pine published *Caretaker of the Dead: The American Funeral Director* which detailed, from a sociological perspective, the nature of funeral directing as a type of work. Both of these studies detail the professional and para-professional management of the newly dead. An article by Robert Fulton (1961) reported the results of his nationwide survey of clergymen and their attitudes toward and relationships with funeral directors. This present research builds on the lines of thought delineated in the above mentioned works and examines the changing roles of clergy and funeral directors as they are structured within our system of death behavior. Some other works, most of them polemical, should be noted as they address the issues of role conflict between clergy and funeral directors in a tangential manner.

In a dramaturgical analysis of contemporary American funeral practices, Turner and Edgley (1976) focused on how the actors (funeral directors) through their roles, language and preparations could stage a successful funeral. They noted that cast members, of which "one of the most potentially troublesome" (1976:385) is the minister, must be controlled. The minister must be "carefully managed" so he will not act in a way so "as to construct a counterreality" which can cast doubt (1976:386). The counterreality that may be established centers around the controversy between the secular and the religious. The family may be lead to believe that since the spiritual is most important and since the "soul" has departed, the funeral trappings are irrelevant. Turner and Edgley also noted that trade journals give help in how to control the minister.

Several instances of the conflict between clergymen and funeral directors are cited in the literature. In 1937, the Minister's Association in Middletown, New York, produced a set of guidelines to be followed at funerals. These were at odds with the usual habits of funeral directors and in retaliation out-of-town clergymen were called in to conduct funerals (Bowman, 1973:68; Harmer, 1963:147). In 1947, ministers of the Congregational Church in Elgin, Illinois, produced a set of ideal procedures to

be followed that were also at odds with the general practices and so aroused intense feeling (Bowman, 1973:68). The Social Action Committee of the first Congregational Church, Royal Oak, Michigan, drew up a funeral reform emphasizing the spiritual aspects of death (Harmer, 1963:149). In 1953, *Time* and Associated Press coverage was given to the Social Relations Committee of Holy Trinity Episcopal Church in Oxford, Ohio, when a study was made "of the increasing secular encroachment on the marriage and burial practices in the United States" (Bowman, 1973:68). A New York respondent included with his questionnaire a copy of a Funeral Guidelines Worksheet of the Medina Clergy Fellowship which stated that the term " 'funeral director' is a misnomer." It is further stated that "the clergyman/person is *actually* and most practically the logical person to be considered the 'funeral director.'" The practices which these churches opposed were "emphasis on delay of burial and on embalming and 'restoration,' showing the remains, display and expensive ('fine') funerals, planning with the family and control from that time by undertakers, lavish floral exhibits, and extensive use of funeral parlors" (Bowman, 1973:69-70).

Traditionally, it seems that the conflict has existed primarily among Protestant ministers and funeral directors (Bowman, 1973:64; Harmer, 1963:149; Pine, 1975:38). However, in 1961 Catholic and Jewish clergy reacted to the high cost of dying. The funeral industry "responded with nervous alarm to any attempt to impose what they call 'church dictation of funerals'" (Harmer, 1963:151-152).

Harmer noted that funeral directors have responded to these accusations by emphasizing that the clergymen "resent their 'loss of status' and have suggested they are as much concerned with material things as any funeral director" (1963:156). In 1961, the managing director of the National Foundation of Funeral Services who was also director of National Selected Morticians, Inc. implied that "clerical protest is un-American and materialistic" (1963:156). A 1962 trade journal editorial "accused the clergy of being power hungry and materialistic and of encroaching on human freedom in a bureaucratic and sinister way" (1963:

157). Also, a 1980 article suggested that many clergy use the funeral service for evangelical purposes. "At times it is almost as if it is more important to gain parishioners into one's church than it is to comfort the bereaved" (Wolfelt, 1980:11).

In a chapter titled "The 'Nosy' Clergy," Mitford (1963) identifies much of the conflict as centering around finances. While clergymen advocate moderation in making funeral arrangements, funeral directors tend to encourage extravagance. She further observes that many articles in trade journals instruct funeral directors in techniques for dealing with clergymen who interfere with making funeral arrangements. Mitford identified an additional source of contention stemming from families who have no regular minister. In some instances, it seems the ministers are "hired" as 'props' by the funeral director" who in these circumstances is totally in control (1963:247).

As indicated, much of what has been written about funeral directors has been polemical. It is, therefore, rather difficult to assess the social scientific import.

A brief look at the socio-historical development of the role relationship between clergy and funeral directors is instructive in understanding the contemporary situation. Traditionally, in the United States, clergy held much of the responsibility for the care of the dead along with family members and friends. In many cases, they had the responsibility for making all of the major decisions about burial as well as providing comfort for the survivors. In other words, they had both instrumental and expressive roles in the death setting. With the progress of industrialization and urbanization, with the church's authority over life and death changed, with embalming becoming more popular, with legal matters to be taken care of, the role of the undertaker expanded. Funeral "parlors" replaced the home as the locus of the preparation of the body for burial. Pine (1975:18) explains that "... a combination of the need for a large parlor, a special laboratory, and a chapel like facility evolved into what we know today as a funeral home." Many funeral directors began to develop a view of themselves as "professional personal service practitioners," or expanded their roles as Mitford (1963) labeled them, to become "doctors of grief." As a result of these developments

the social status of the funeral director has increased. People report holding funeral directors in high esteem as businessmen and/or professionals, even though many persons are uncomfortable in the presence of people who make their living from death (Pine, 1975; Fulton, 1961). As a general rule, they are active in their community and hold church and organizational memberships. This effort to establish good community relations is sound business practice and may compensate for some of the social stigma often associated with their roles. This type of community involvement, combined with their relatively high incomes, has made funeral directors well respected in their communities. Black funeral directors, in particular, are noted for their community leadership. The role of the clergy, on the other hand, has taken a different turn. While clergy retain a great deal of respect, many do sense a historical loss of status when compared to doctors and lawyers. Clergy are concerned that the increased status of funeral directors has been achieved by the process of role infringement. They see funeral directors as not only taking over the instrumental role in the death setting but also as moving into the expressive role with a growing emphasis on "grief counseling." Such shifts in occupational prestige and in duties performed has resulted in overlap, confusion, and concern on the part of some members of the clergy. Funeral directors, on the other hand, complain that some clergy interfere in their work with families in the death setting. The purpose of this research is to explore the current attitudes held by the funeral directors toward clergy and how they view their working relationship with them.

METHODOLOGY

Questionnaires, interviews, and extensive reading of several funeral service trade publications were the three data gathering techniques used in this investigation. Questionnaires were sent to 290 directors nationally and 30 regional directors were interviewed.

The questionnaire and interview schedule were developed based on several sources: review of the literature; informal conversations with local directors; and insights from previous research (Bradfield and Myers, 1980). The resultant questionnaire and interview schedule contained both open and closed questions. Trade publications were read extensively as to how they presented the "appropriate" role of funeral directors in such areas as "grief counseling." Some of these are quoted later in this article.

A sequential sampling procedure of the 1978 NFDA membership yielded two hundred and ninety names. This was the approximate number of respondents in the previous clergy research (Bradfield and Myers, 1980). Five of these were returned undelivered by the postal service. The return rate was twenty-nine percent with respondents from thirty states. The rate of return for the previous clergy survey was forty-four percent. One of the interviewees explained that in a time of adverse funeral director publicity he was reluctant to give information other than in the person-to-person situation.

The sampling procedure for the thirty interviews was a convenience sample. Larger firms were over-represented due to their under-representation in the questionnaire returns. Table 1 illustrates this. While the basic format of the questionnaire was used for the interview schedule, the person-to-person situation provided an opportunity to pursue some questions in greater depth. The procedure also made it possible to visit a variety of firms in Ohio (8), West Virginia (3), and Virginia (19) and meet directors personally. Letters of introduction were sent to the prospective interviewees indicating that appointments would be made later by telephone. All of the interviews requested were completed. Follow up letters of appreciation were sent to all of the interviewees.

The questionnaire and interview data was coded using the procedure outline by Oppenheim (1966). Due to the exploratory and descriptive nature of the investigation, it was not felt that the data warranted more extensive statistical analyses than that presented in the accompanying tables.

Table 1
Profile of Respondents
(N = 110^a)

Age	Percent			Years in Profession	Percent		
	I	II	III		I	II	III
24 - 34	15	23	17	Less than 10	7	13	9
35 - 44	25	23	24	10 - 19	25	13	22
45 - 54	20	37	25	20 - 29	20	57	30
55 - 61	25	17	23	30 - 39	34	17	29
62 - 74	15	0	11	40 +	14	0	10

Other Directors in Family	Percent			Education	Percent		
	I	II	III		I	II	III
Yes	60	47	56	Less than B.S.	65	60	64
No	39	53	43	B.S. +	35	40	36
No Response	1	0	1				

Location Funeral Home	Percent			Number of Funerals Yearly	Percent		
	I	II	III		I	II	III
Rural or Small Town	44	10	35	15 - 29	1	0	1
City 10,000 - 49,000	27	27	27	30 - 50	19	10	16
City over 50,000	29	63	38	51 - 75	22	0	16
				76 - 150	36	23	33
				151 - 200	15	7	13
				201 - 300	4	7	5
				300 - 500	3	17	6
				500 +	0	30	8
				No Response	0	6	2

^a Column I - Questionnaires N = 80
Column II - Interviews N = 30
Column III - Total N = 110

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Clergymen and funeral directors work together and often do have overlapping responsibilities in the death setting. Thus, the possibility of conflict is created. The perception of the funeral director's role by the clergyman and the clergymen's role by the funeral director point to areas of conflict. Clergy believe that funeral directors should perform only an instrumental role while reserving for themselves the expressive role. Directors, on the

other hand, see themselves as having both an instrumental and expressive role. The greatest difference of opinion centers around grief counseling. Recent literature as well as this research indicates that funeral directors are being encouraged to expand their services to incorporate grief counseling.

Table 2 indicates that most of the directors questioned indicated that they did engage in procedures which could be regarded as grief counseling such as discussing non-funeral matters with the family when making arrangements and conducting follow-up contacts with families.

Table 2

Talk to Family About Deceased Concerning
Non-Funeral Matters
(N = 110^a)

Talk to Family	Percent
Yes	82
No	15
Other	3

^a Questionnaires N = 80
Interviews N = 30
Total N = 110

Grief counseling is one area that the clergy feel is undisputably theirs. The trade journals that the investigators have been reviewing during the past year indicate, however, that this is an aspect of service that funeral directors are being encouraged to develop (Bates and Hast, 1979:5+; Hausman, 1979:48; Porter, 1979:13; Wolfelt, 1980:13+). Talking with the family about the deceased is regarded as a form of grief therapy. "... I believe that counseling, that helping human beings work with their feelings, that talking with people in such a way that the funeral becomes a more therapeutic experience... that's what our future's about" (Bates and Hast, 1979:5).

Several articles discussed the grief process and explained how the funeral director might help an individual experiencing grief (Wolfelt, 1979:12-14; Wolfelt, 1980:13+; Farris, 1980:3). An article on communication, a basic counseling skill, dealt with

listening ("listening should be second nature to a funeral director"), making the setting conducive to talking, positioning, and much more (Davis, 1979:13+).

Funeral directors seem undecided as to whether to change their role to incorporate counseling or to maintain the status quo. One journal article issued the following warning: "If you continue to maintain the status quo, you may very well become extinct" (Wolfelt, 1979:12).

Critics among the clergy see these recent attempts by funeral directors to do "grief counseling" as an effort to enhance their status by identifying with the therapeutic professions. Schools of mortuary science now offer courses in funeral service psychology as well as the standard courses in chemistry, anatomy, embalming and others. A major book on the subject by Raether and Slater (1977) is titled *The Funeral Director and His Role as Counselor*. The authors are, respectively, the executive director and educational consultant to the National Funeral Directors Association.

Seminars and programs are carried on throughout the country to help funeral directors cope with their own feelings about death, to improve their communication skills, and to counsel the bereaved. One seminar leader puts it this way, "The funeral director should be 'a facilitator, an advice giver, a provider of information, and a professional facilitator.'" (Bates, 1978:4). In this same article, he suggests that the funeral director must take on the role of death educator for his community, or the church or some other group will take it away.

The NFDA and its state affiliates are exploring topics at their annual conventions which are similar to programs scheduled by sociologists, psychologists, social workers, clergymen or death educators. Topics include the bereaved parent, children and death, community programs for the widowed, the hospice, and trends in disposition. Some of the literature within the funeral service field also sounds like manuals for pastoral training. This growing emphasis on counseling is summarized well by Bill Bates (1979: 5). He says, "... perhaps no part of the bundle of tasks presently performed by funeral directors is more important than the psychosocial care of the bereaved." All of this is disturbing to clergy

who see their expressive role in the death setting shrinking as funeral directors move boldly onto traditional clergy "turf."

There are other significant areas where there is real/perceived role conflict between clergy and funeral directors. An important one relates to the location of the funeral itself. There has been a shift in the location of the funeral from the home or the church to the funeral home. When the funeral is held in the funeral home there is a greater likelihood that the funeral director will be in charge, whereas, when the funeral is held in the home or the church the clergyman is more likely to be in charge. It would appear that the location of the funeral itself is a major factor in the amount of perceived/real role conflict between the funeral director and the clergyman.

Many clergy feel that funeral directors promote non-church funerals. While recognizing that funerals held in the funeral home are more convenient, the funeral directors in the sample were insistent that it was a matter of indifference to them as to where a funeral is held—they follow the wishes of the family. It was indicated that some funeral directors encourage church funerals, especially when the deceased has been an active church member. However, there does seem to be a strong correlation between the elaborateness of the funeral home itself and the percentage of funerals held there. This was found to be the case regardless of community size.

The majority of the funeral director respondents were aware of "inappropriate" practices on the part of the clergy as indicated in Table 3. The most irritating role infringement by clergymen as perceived by funeral directors is the practice by some clergy of accompanying families to the casket selection room and then giving them advice about the purchase of the casket. Table 3 indicates the strength of this view. This is seen as similar to the funeral director occupying the minister's pulpit and was illustrated by statements such as "He doesn't go with the family to buy a house or car why should he come here?" or "It's none of his business." Some clergy feel it is part of their responsibility to protect the family during this vulnerable time from the funeral directors "sales pitch." Needless to say such an attitude is resented

Table 3
"Inappropriate" Practices on Part of Clergy
(N = 110^a)

Awareness of "Inappropriate Practices"		Percent	
Yes			55
No			45
No Response			0
Object to Clergy Accompanying Family to Casket Selection Room		Percent	Object to Clergy Giving Advice to Family on Casket Selection
Yes	37	Yes	62
No	61	No	36
No Response	2	No Response	2

^a Questionnaires N = 80
Interviews N = 30
Total N = 110

by the funeral directors who feel it doesn't make good business sense to oversell.

Many clergymen felt that changes were needed in American funeral practices. They felt funeral directors placed too much emphasis on extravagant funerals. Funeral directors, on the other hand, felt that funeral practices were "just what the public demanded" and that changes have occurred in response to need.

Funeral directors reported that the majority of families they served had an active religious affiliation and therefore, had a minister they preferred. However, the investigators were interested in how clergy were selected when there was no active religious affiliation. Approximately half were selected based on family preference and half based on funeral director preference. In some instances funeral homes are employing clergy whose function it is to service families who have no active religious affiliation and to be generally available to any family making use of the funeral home. Such a trend may be regarded by clergy as further "usurpation" of the ministerial role.

As to the purpose of the funeral the responses ranged from seeing the funeral as a purely religious event to seeing it as a

psychological tool. A greater proportion of the funeral directors as opposed to the clergy saw the funeral as basically psychological rather than religious.

The psychological aspects of the funeral were seen as promoting "grief work" by the family. The religious emphasis was characterized by such phrases as "preaching the gospel" and "offering spiritual comfort." The clergyman is clearly in charge of the theological or religious aspects, but both clergyman and funeral director share in the other aspects of the funeral. The clergy role in the total death setting was seen by the funeral directors as basically psychological. Some directors felt that clergy often used funeral services as self-serving ends, such as evangelizing, or gaining new church members.

Most of the respondents indicated that they did not have clergy as close personal friends and that their non-funeral contact centered around civic activities, an occasional lunch and church attendance. Ministers tended to regard gift-giving by funeral directors as solicitation. Many directors also criticized this as openly soliciting business and, therefore, as unethical.

Funeral directors conceded that while they are becoming more "professional" there was a definite element of business in their work such as the selling of products, i.e., caskets and clothing. They emphasized "service" as the part of their work that was professional.

There is a mutual sensitivity to lack of consultation when making funeral arrangements. The clergyman may be sensitive when the funeral director makes all the arrangements and calls with the information, "If the funeral director calls me and says the family is here and we would like to have the funeral at 2:00 on Tuesday—that's pressure." Likewise, when the clergyman makes all the arrangements and calls the funeral director, it presents problems. "I may already have eight other funerals that day."

Funeral directors and clergymen felt that better communication was the key to preventing or resolving conflicts. Joint sponsorship of meetings in a given community by the local funeral directors and ministerial association could provide a means for the exchange of ideas. There are many areas which could be

explored in these forums, i.e., dynamics of grief. An educational program which purports to be "for" the clergy and sponsored by directors may be regarded with a great deal of suspicion. One solution is to set up a mutual mechanism in communities for workshops to be conducted by individuals in areas such as psychology or sociology.

It must be noted that a great deal of the potential for conflict is built into the roles due to their socio-historical development. However, this research has also indicated that open communication between these two principals in the death setting can produce an atmosphere conducive to "good grief" for the bereaved. This should be the ultimate goal of both clergy and funeral directors.

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NORMALIZATION OF A DEVIANT
SUBCULTURE: IMPLICATIONS OF THE
MOVEMENT TO RE-SOCIALIZE MILDLY
RETARDED PEOPLE¹

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In the 1950s and 1960s a growing school of politicians, social scientists, and high-level professionals in correctional, health, and social services began a serious enterprise to elucidate the disastrous effects of institutionalizing juvenile delinquents, criminals, mentally ill and mentally retarded people. A famous example of this critique is Goffman's 1961 book titled *Asylums*, which points out that the institution, rather than a patient's illness, is the most important factor in forming a mental patient. The "total institution" was discovered to be dehumanizing, brutalizing, and contributive to the acquisition and maintenance of deviant attitudes and behaviors.

Institutionalization also became an economic disaster. It became difficult to justify costly institutional versus community modes of control with many deviant populations deemed eligible for support by welfare programs. As the United States wrestled with fiscal pressures in the 1960s, deinstitutionalization and community treatment alternatives soared in popularity to be accepted as the most sophisticated social control practice (Scull, 1977). By the 1970s, the contemporary movement to reintegrate the mad, bad, and incompetent into society was well along its way.

Rehabilitating deviants within the community has been especially prominent with the mentally retarded population. This is due in part to the societal recognition of retarded people as first-class citizens with an ascribed rather than motivated deviance. Furthermore, due to the cognitive/behavioral limitations associated with mental retardation, this population requires