

## **Summary:**

The ways in which members of a society treat their deceased is inseparable from their views on such significant subjects such as death, postmortal existence, the possibility of any afterlife and the destiny of a living being after the end of its biological existence. These are important themes of all the world's religions as well as of their non-religious opponents. In such a widely secularised society like that of the Czech Republic, the approaches to these topics are extraordinarily interesting (those who do not profess any religion or refer to themselves as non-religious represent 79.4% of the inhabitants according to the latest 2011 census). What do members of the Czech society feel when facing the loss of their beloved ones and what do they do for them?

This dissertation focuses on the changes in the funeral behaviour and related beliefs that have taken place in the last decades (although in order to understand the roots of these changes, it is necessary to also discuss the development in the past centuries, especially in the 19th).

This work is based on a field research of cemeteries, columbaries and temporary monuments from various places in the Czech Republic, as well as on in-depth interviews with 8 people from different religious (and non-religious) backgrounds. In order to document these changes, it was necessary to focus on several different religious, ethnic and social groups within the Czech society. In the last part, a chapter about the ways of commemoration and bereavement of pets was added as a comparison to the service held for human beings.

The most significant change in the funeral rites is undoubtedly the introduction of cremation which took place in the 1920's as a part of the secularisation in the then Czechoslovakian society (although in Slovakia it has never become so popular like in the Czech part of the country). Cremation as an anti-traditionalistic kind of funeral was supported by the Communist regime in the years 1948-1989, together with secularised "civil" funerary rites.

After 1989 the number of funeral rites, both religious and secular, has been continually on the decrease. Ever more deceased are buried (mostly via cremation) without any ritual. On the other hand, we can observe rising manifestations of individualistic funeral behaviour: There are gifts like toys (mostly stuffed animals), ceramic and plastic statuettes, stones, coins, letters, hand-written notes and sometimes even sweets, alcohol and cigarettes placed

on the graves, a phenomenon that did not start occurring before at least the mid-1990's. This seems to be closely related to the new trend reported from many parts of the Euro-American world, where the commemoration of deceased is manifested by placing various kinds of objects on graves, temporary monuments, sideroad monuments etc.

These objects have often a kind of a private message, which is not clear for the uninvolved passers-by. It makes the grave or monument a manifestation of private emotions and uniqueness of individual relationship to the departed ones, as well as an enclave of a personal, introverted grief in the mostly anonymous large cemeteries (mainly in the central cemeteries in big cities).

This situation creates a special dynamic tension between anonymity and personal commemoration, in particular on the grounds designated for anonymous scattering of ashes. Occasionally it even results in conflicts between the municipality as the place owner and the bereaved ones (as was the case in Jablonec nad Nisou in 2014).

In some cases, this individualised mourning involves private, individual and home rituals influenced by traditional religious rituals (mostly Christian) as well as new religious and spiritual movements and thoughts. As such, the contemporary ways of mourning and commemoration of deceased in the Czech Republic can be regarded as a part of so-called *Invisible Religion* (Luckmann, 1967).