New Phenomenon: Roadside Memorials

Abstract:

Roadside memorials have become a common feature in the Czech landscape over the last couple of decades. Such memorials are usually erected as permanent structures intended to remind travellers of both the accident and the deceased, the majority of whom are young men. Roadside memorials provide a relatively new and personalised form of expressing grief that extends private mourning into the public domain. However, this approach to coping with the death of a friend or family member is in sharp contrast with the otherwise impersonal and minimised last rites practised in contemporary Czech society. A hundred roadside memorials were examined in the course of the research and almost all of them were adorned with flowers and candles, and more than two-thirds featured the symbol of the cross which is surprising when one considers the generally very low level of religiosity in Czech society. The role played by religion (Christianity) in this phenomenon is, therefore, not easily explained. In many cases the cross is not meant or perceived as a Christian symbol, it merely represents death and its tragic dimension. However, if roadside memorials can be considered "graves without a body", then why should they not display "crosses without Christianity".

Keywords: *roadside memorials, Czech Republic, last rites, traffic fatalities, death, and mourning.*