



Worship that Honors Death

IWS Worship Seminar, 2024

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"We live today in a death-denying culture. This is clearly seen in the unobtrusive appearance of the ordinary funeral home, in its attempt to look like all other houses. In such a way that one will not notice that one is sad; and such a way that one will not notice that one is dead. . . Christianity has 'adjusted' itself to these attitudes, accepted them as its own."

Alexander Schmemmann,
For the Life of the World,
1963.

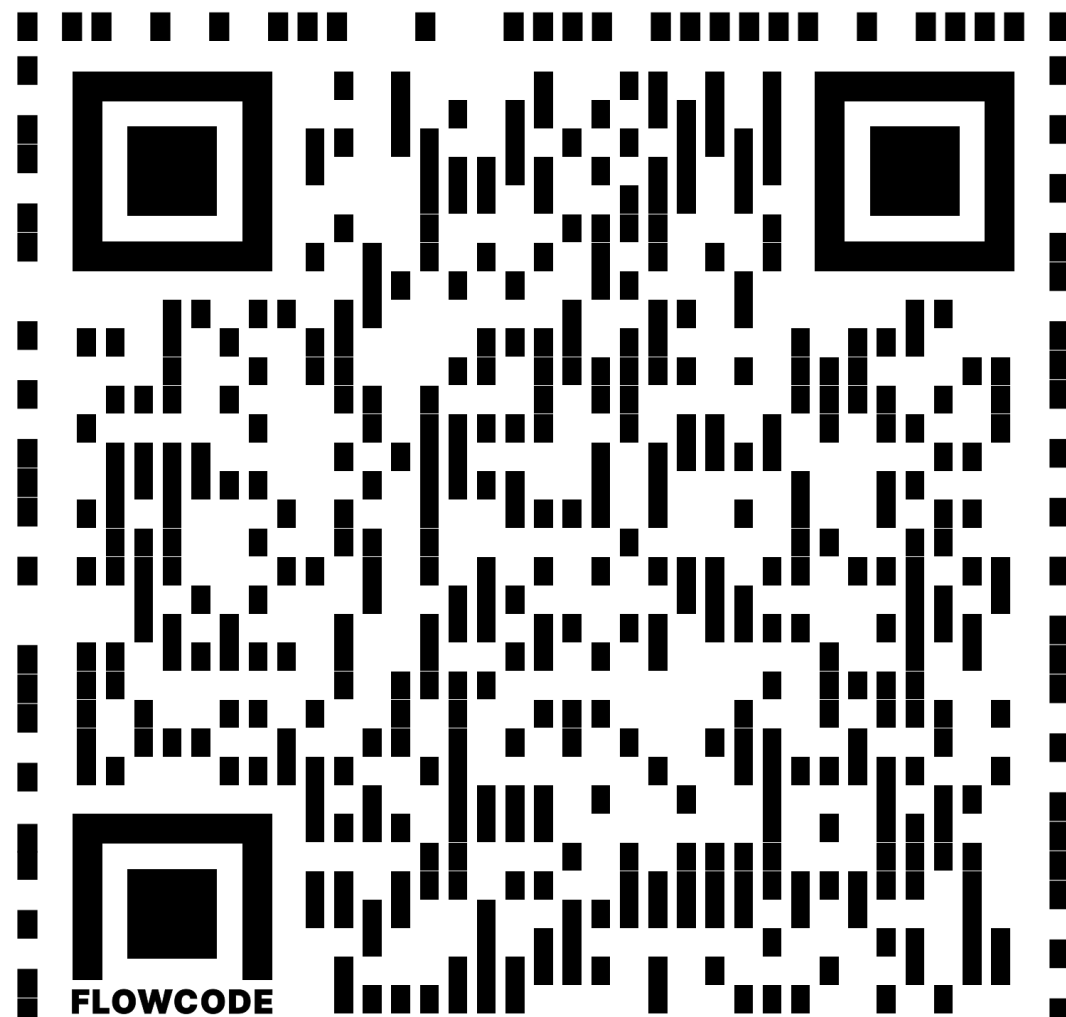
“We rarely think of death. Almost never. Even our language tries to make death less visible and less frightening. We often turn to euphemistic phrases and linguistic cosmetics by saying ‘they departed from this life,’ ‘they passed away,’ ‘they are no longer with us’, or ‘they were taken to God’ instead of ‘they died.’ We have exiled death to the outskirts of our existence.”

~ Marija Girevska, "Care for Departed for the Benefit of the Living,"



A black and white photograph showing the interior of a hearse. A wooden casket is positioned in the center, resting on a metal track. The casket is covered with a large, elaborate arrangement of white flowers, including daisies, lilies, and roses, with green foliage interspersed. The hearse's interior is dark, with polished metal trim and hinges visible on the open side panels. The background is blurred, showing some foliage and a building.

Are Protestants also death-denying?



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What Happens When We Deny or Ignore Death in our Worship?

- We worship youth
- We ignore the aged rather than honor them
- We may facilitate a growth of the fear of death because its absence in discourse does not negate its real presence
- We shortchange the healing power of expressing grief and being corporately comforted



Death-Denying & Grief-Denying



Psychology of Grief

- Strobe and Schut's Dual Process Model of Grief involves going back and forth between Loss Orientation (LO) and Restoration Orientation (RO).

Psychology of Grief

| Worden's Four Tasks of Grief | Counteracts Negative Habits (Hutcheon) |
|---|--|
| "To accept the reality of the loss" | Denial |
| "To process the pain of the grief" | Supression |
| "To adjust to a world without the deceased" | Clinging |
| "To find a way to remember the deceased while embarking on the rest of one's journey through life." | Stagnation |

Psychology of Grief

- Attachment Theory states that maintaining relationship with deceased loved ones promotes flourishing and new relationships



Ritual Mitigates Grief

- Decreases Grief
- Increases a sense of agency
- Alleviates anxiety
- Helps regulate emotions
- Offers structured performance
- Creates an alternative world



The background of the image is a dense arrangement of numerous lit candles. The candles are of various sizes and colors, including white, red, and yellow. They are placed in glass holders, some of which are decorated with small figurines or designs. The overall effect is a warm, glowing light that fills the frame, with the flames creating a soft, out-of-focus bokeh effect in the background.

Christianity has historically
practiced rituals for the dead
in addition to the funeral



Early Christian Post-Funeral Memorials for the Dead

- Related to
 - Jewish Mourner's Kaddish
 - Greco-Roman Refrigeria
- Attestation from the early 2nd Century and onward, in writings, catacombs, and most clear in *The Apostolic Constitutions*
 - Timing: 3rd, 7th, 40th day, one year
 - Content: prayer for rest, forgiveness, grace, community with the saints and others who have gone before

According to Origen (3rd Century):

“We devoutly make memorial; [memories] of thy saints, and of our parents and friends, who die in the faith, as well as to rejoice in their refreshment, as to desire for ourselves a pious consummation in the faith.”

Why?

“... in order that we may benefit ourselves by the recollection of their doings.”

The prayers neither referenced purgatory nor implied that these prayers changed the departed person's eternal fate.

Christian Orthodox and Death

- Memorials at any time after the person has died
 - Recognizes Mourners & allows all to comfort them
- Divine Liturgy: Great Entrance, before Anaphora
- Lazarus Saturday
- “Saturday of Souls”
- (Every Saturday)



What Might We Do

- Talk about Death more
- Incorporate Lament
- Speak of our departed loved ones as living
- Remember the dead by name on Founder's day, Good Friday, Blue Christmas
- At Communion, can we do something like a mourner's kaddish?



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