

CREMATION CHURCH VIEW

Until 1963, the Catholic Church not only preferred burial of the body in a tomb, but actually prohibited cremation. This responded to a prevailing attitude connecting cremation with denying the resurrection of the dead and the immortality of the soul.

Today's changing economic, geographic, ecological, and family factors have led the church to shift its position. The Catholic Church, while still preferring burial in a tomb, now permits cremation "in case of necessity" as long as that procedure is not chosen as a denial of Christian teaching.

The church prefers burial of the body in the ground or in a tomb for these reasons: It imitates the example of Christ. It emphasizes the dignity of the human body. It strengthens our belief in personal resurrection. It counters the current popularity and acceptance of reincarnation. It provides a foretaste of the transformation which takes place after the death and the resurrection of the body. It facilitates the grieving process.

When a family does select cremation, ideally the body should be present for the funeral rites and cremated afterwards. However, when that is not practically feasible, the cremated remains, enclosed in a fitting container or worthy vessel, should be present at the three burial services (the vigil prayer service or wake, the funeral liturgy, preferably in a church, and the committal rite). They are then reverently buried in a common grave at the cemetery or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium with an appropriate memorial statue or plaque recording the name of the deceased.

The church views the practice of scattering the cremated remains upon the sea, from the air or over the ground as contrary to a reverent disposition of the body. It takes a similar stand on keeping the cremated remains in the home of a relative or friend. The funeral Mass with the cremated remains present instead of the body is essentially the same except for several small and pertinent adaptations.*

National Conference of Catholic Bishops