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SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

Instruction Ad resurgendum cum Christo regarding the burial of the deceased and the conservation of the ashes in the case of cremation, 25.10.2016

The following is the full text of the Instruction of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "*Ad resurgendum cum Christo*", regarding the burial of the deceased and the conservation of the ashes in the case of cremation, published today and signed by Cardinal Gerhard Ludwig Müller and Archbishop Luis Francisco Ladaria Ferrer, respectively prefect and secretary of the dicastery.

1. To rise with Christ, we must die with Christ: we must "be away from the body and at home with the Lord". With the Instruction *Piam et Constantem* of 5 July 1963, the then Holy Office established that "all necessary measures must be taken to preserve the practice of reverently burying the faithful departed", adding however that cremation is not "opposed per se to the Christian religion" and that no longer should the sacraments and funeral rites be denied to those who have asked that they be cremated, under the condition that this choice has not been made through "a denial of Christian dogmas, the animosity of a secret society, or hatred of the Catholic religion and the Church". Later this change in ecclesiastical discipline was incorporated into the Code of Canon Law (1983) and the Code of Canons of Oriental Churches (1990).

During the intervening years, the practice of cremation has notably increased in many countries, but simultaneously new ideas contrary to the Church's faith have also become widespread. Having consulted the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts and numerous Episcopal Conferences and Synods of Bishops of the Oriental Churches, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has deemed opportune the publication of a new Instruction, with the intention of underlining the doctrinal and pastoral reasons for the preference of the burial of the remains of the faithful and to set out norms pertaining to the conservation of ashes in the case of cremation.

2. The resurrection of Jesus is the culminating truth of the Christian faith, preached as an essential part of the Paschal Mystery from the very beginnings of Christianity: "For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures; that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve".

Through his death and resurrection, Christ freed us from sin and gave us access to a new life, "so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life". Furthermore, the risen Christ is the principle and source of our future resurrection: "Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep [...] For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive".

It is true that Christ will raise us up on the last day; but it is also true that, in a certain way, we have already risen with Christ. In Baptism, actually, we are immersed in the death and resurrection of Christ and sacramentally assimilated to him: "You were buried with him in baptism, in which you

were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead". United with Christ by Baptism, we already truly participate in the life of the risen Christ.

Because of Christ, Christian death has a positive meaning. The Christian vision of death receives privileged expression in the liturgy of the Church: "Indeed for your faithful, Lord, life is changed not ended, and, when this earthly dwelling turns to dust, an eternal dwelling is made ready for them in heaven". By death the soul is separated from the body, but in the resurrection God will give incorruptible life to our body, transformed by reunion with our soul. In our own day also, the Church is called to proclaim her faith in the resurrection: "The confidence of Christians is the resurrection of the dead; believing this we live".

3. Following the most ancient Christian tradition, the Church insistently recommends that the bodies of the deceased be buried in cemeteries or other sacred places.

In memory of the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord, the mystery that illumines the Christian meaning of death, burial is above all the most fitting way to express faith and hope in the resurrection of the body.

The Church who, as Mother, has accompanied the Christian during his earthly pilgrimage, offers to the Father, in Christ, the child of her grace, and she commits to the earth, in hope, the seed of the body that will rise in glory.

By burying the bodies of the faithful, the Church confirms her faith in the resurrection of the body, and intends to show the great dignity of the human body as an integral part of the human person whose body forms part of their identity. She cannot, therefore, condone attitudes or permit rites that involve erroneous ideas about death, such as considering death as the definitive annihilation of the person, or the moment of fusion with Mother Nature or the universe, or as a stage in the cycle of regeneration, or as the definitive liberation from the "prison" of the body.

Furthermore, burial in a cemetery or another sacred place adequately corresponds to the piety and respect owed to the bodies of the faithful departed who through Baptism have become temples of the Holy Spirit and in which "as instruments and vessels the Spirit has carried out so many good works".

Tobias, the just, was praised for the merits he acquired in the sight of God for having buried the dead, and the Church considers the burial of dead one of the corporal works of mercy.

Finally, the burial of the faithful departed in cemeteries or other sacred places encourages family members and the whole Christian community to pray for and remember the dead, while at the same time fostering the veneration of martyrs and saints.

Through the practice of burying the dead in cemeteries, in churches or their environs, Christian tradition has upheld the relationship between the living and the dead and has opposed any tendency to minimise, or relegate to the purely private sphere, the event of death and the meaning it has for Christians.

4. In circumstances when cremation is chosen because of sanitary, economic or social considerations, this choice must never violate the explicitly-stated or the reasonably inferable wishes of the deceased faithful. The Church raises no doctrinal objections to this practice, since cremation of the deceased's body does not affect his or her soul, nor does it prevent God, in his omnipotence, from raising up the deceased body to new life. Thus cremation, in and of itself, objectively negates neither the Christian doctrine of the soul's immortality nor that of the resurrection of the body.

The Church continues to prefer the practice of burying the bodies of the deceased, because this shows a greater esteem towards the deceased. Nevertheless, cremation is not prohibited, "unless it was chosen for reasons contrary to Christian doctrine".

In the absence of motives contrary to Christian doctrine, the Church, after the celebration of the funeral rite, accompanies the choice of cremation, providing the relevant liturgical and pastoral directives, and taking particular care to avoid every form of scandal or the appearance of religious indifferentism.

5. When, for legitimate motives, cremation of the body has been chosen, the ashes of the faithful must be laid to rest in a sacred place, that is, in a cemetery or, in certain cases, in a church or an area, which has been set aside for this purpose, and so dedicated by the competent ecclesial authority.

From the earliest times, Christians have desired that the faithful departed become the objects of the Christian community's prayers and remembrance. Their tombs have become places of prayer, remembrance and reflection. The faithful departed remain part of the Church who believes "in the communion of all the faithful of Christ, those who are pilgrims on earth, the dead who are being purified, and the blessed in heaven, all together forming one Church".

The reservation of the ashes of the departed in a sacred place ensures that they are not excluded from the prayers and remembrance of their family or the Christian community. It prevents the faithful departed from being forgotten, or their remains from being shown a lack of respect, which eventuality is possible, most especially once the immediately subsequent generation has too passed away. Also it prevents any unfitting or superstitious practices.

6. For the reasons given above, the conservation of the ashes of the departed in a domestic residence is not permitted. Only in grave and exceptional cases dependent on cultural conditions of a localized nature, may the Ordinary, in agreement with the Episcopal Conference or the Synod of Bishops of the Oriental Churches, concede permission for the conservation of the ashes of the departed in a domestic residence. Nonetheless, the ashes may not be divided among various family members and due respect must be maintained regarding the circumstances of such a conservation.

7. In order that every appearance of pantheism, naturalism or nihilism be avoided, it is not permitted to scatter the ashes of the faithful departed in the air, on land, at sea or in some other way, nor may they be preserved in mementos, pieces of jewellery or other objects. These courses of action cannot be legitimised by an appeal to the sanitary, social, or economic motives that may have occasioned the choice of cremation.

8. When the deceased notoriously has requested cremation and the scattering of their ashes for reasons contrary to the Christian faith, a Christian funeral must be denied to that person according to the norms of the law.

The Sovereign Pontiff Francis, in the Audience granted to the undersigned Cardinal Prefect on 18 March 2016, approved the present Instruction, adopted in the Ordinary Session of this Congregation on 2 March 2016, and ordered its publication.

Rome, from the Offices of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 15 August 2016, the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

[Joint Press Release of the Argentine Episcopal Conference and the Holy See](#)
[Presentation of the Instruction Ad resurgendum cum Christo regarding the burial of the deceased and the conservation of the ashes in the case of cremation](#)
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Final resting place: Vatican releases instruction on burial, cremation

By Cindy Wooden Catholic News Service

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CNS/Paul Haring

Cardinal Gerhard Müller, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, speaks at a Vatican news conference Oct. 25. Cardinal Müller said that while the Catholic Church continues to prefer burial in the ground, it accepts cremation as an option, but forbids the scattering of ashes or keeping cremated remains at home. (CNS photo/Paul Haring) See VATICAN-LETTER-ASHES Oct. 25, 2016.

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- Professing belief in the resurrection of the dead and affirming that the human body is an essential part of a person's identity, the Catholic Church insists that the bodies of the deceased be treated with respect and laid to rest in a consecrated place.

While the Catholic Church continues to prefer burial in the ground, it accepts cremation as an option, but forbids the scattering of ashes and the growing practice of keeping cremated remains at home, said Cardinal Gerhard Müller, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

"Caring for the bodies of the deceased, the church confirms its faith in the resurrection and separates itself from attitudes and rites that see in death the definitive obliteration of the person, a stage in the process of reincarnation or the fusion of one's soul with the universe," the cardinal told reporters Oct. 25.

In 1963, the congregation issued an instruction permitting cremation as long as it was not done as a sign of denial of the basic Christian belief in the resurrection of the dead. The permission was incorporated into the Code of Canon Law in 1983 and the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches in 1990.

However, Cardinal Müller said, church law had not specified exactly what should be done with "cremains," and several bishops' conferences asked the congregation to provide guidance.

The result, approved by Pope Francis after consultation with other Vatican offices and with bishops' conferences and the Eastern churches' synods of bishops, is "Ad resurgendum cum Christo" ("To Rise with Christ"), an

instruction "regarding the burial of the deceased and the conservation of the ashes in the case of cremation."

Presenting the instruction, Cardinal Muller said, "shortly, in many countries, cremation will be considered the ordinary way" to deal with the dead, including for Catholics.

Cremation, in and of itself, does not constitute a denial of belief in the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body, the instruction says. Nor does it "prevent God, in his omnipotence, from raising up the deceased body to new life."

However, the Catholic Church wholeheartedly recommends continuing the "pious practice of burying the dead," Cardinal Muller said. It is considered one of the corporal works of mercy and, mirroring the burial of Christ, it more clearly expresses hope in the resurrection when the person's body and soul will be reunited.

In addition, he said, when a person is buried in the ground -- and, at least to some extent -- when the urn of the person's ashes is placed in a columbarium or tomb, the final resting place is marked with the person's name, the same name with which the person was baptized and by which the person is called by God.

"Belief in the resurrection of the flesh is fundamental," he said. "A human cadaver is not trash" and an anonymous burial or scattering of ashes "is not compatible with the Christian faith. The name, the person, the concrete identity of the person" is important because God created each individual and calls each individual to himself.

In fact, when asked if there was any way to rectify the situation when a person's ashes already had been scattered, Cardinal Muller suggested making a memorial in a church or other appropriate place and including the name of the deceased.

What is more, he said, labeling an urn or tomb in a public place is an expression of belief in the "communion of saints," the unending unity in Christ of all the baptized, living and dead.

"Other believers have a right to pray at the tomb" and to remember deceased members of the Catholic Church on the feast of All Saints and All Souls.

Keeping ashes at home on the mantel, he said, is a sign not only of love and grief, but also of not understanding how the loved one belonged to the entire community of faith and not just to his or her closest relatives.

"Only in grave and exceptional cases," the instruction says, local bishops may give permission for ashes to be kept in a private home. Cardinal Muller said it was not up to him, but to local and national bishops' conferences to determine what those "grave and exceptional" circumstances might be.

Placing the ashes in a sacred place also "prevents the faithful departed from being forgotten or their remains from being shown a lack of respect," which is more likely to happen as time goes on and the people closest to the deceased also pass way, the instruction said.

Asked specifically about the growing trend in his native Germany of "forest burials," where people pay to have their ashes in urns interred at the base of a tree in a designated forest burial ground, Cardinal Muller said the German bishops were not thrilled with the idea, but accepted it with the proviso that the tree be marked with the name of the person buried at its base.

In the United States and other countries, a growing number of Catholic cemeteries set aside sections for "green burials" for bodies that have not been embalmed and are placed in simple wooden caskets that eventually will biodegrade along with the body.

"We believe in the resurrection of the body and this must be the principle of our understanding and practice," Cardinal Muller told Catholic News Service, noting that there is a difference between allowing for the natural decay of the body while protecting the environment and seeing the body of the deceased primarily as fertilizer for plants and trees.

Editors: The English text of the instruction can be found at:

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20160815_ad-resurgendum-cum-christo_en.html

The Spanish text is here:

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20160815_ad-resurgendum-cum-christo_sp.html

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