

Cremation-Can We

Upon the death of Sarah, Abraham purchased a cave as a family burial site. (Gen. 23:2-20; 49:29-32) He didn't just want a space there, nor to have it given to him but he wanted to purchase it, and indeed he did, for a very great sum. Was God trying to show us what should be done with a dead body? Does it mean we should all spend large sums to bury our dead or that we should always choose whole body burial? Or could it have been an illustration of some other principle?

Jacob and his son Joseph while in Egypt also requested their bodies be buried in Caanan. Heb 11:22 says, "By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones." The scripture says, "by faith Joseph gave commandment..". He also requested embalming. Why? Was it to show us that the body should be embalmed? Or was it to make sure his posterity remembered the promise that they would inherit the promised land -some 400 years later? (Gen 28:13-15)

Upon examination of our own spiritual and cultural ancestry we may discover whether our motivation for certain funeral, burial or mourning practices are based in our faith or our fears.

40 years after John Wycliffe died, the Papal council of Constance ordered his bones, which had been buried in consecrated ground, be dug up, burned and scattered. They wanted to disgrace him because he had translated the Bible into the language of the common man. Did these churchmen actually believe that the condition or location of the remains of a body could determine what becomes of a soul? Do you?

God cursed King Jehoiakim, prophesying that the king would receive "the burial of a he-ass," that is, his corpse would be dragged outside the city and left unburied (Jeremiah 22:18, 19; see also Jer. 25:32, 33; Isaiah 14:19, 20). So we see that it was considered disgraceful either for someone to be refused burial or for the corpse to be burned up as trash. In connection with some crimes, under the Law of Moses, it was required that the criminal be killed and his body burned. (Lev. 20:14; 21:9; Josh. 7:15, 25) During Jesus day the Valley of Himnon, south of Jerusalem's wall, was a garbage dump where fires were kept burning to destroy refuse. Often bodies of dead criminals viewed as unfit for a decent burial were cast there.

In contrast, the body of a criminal might be disposed of by burial as well. Deut. 21:23 says that the body of a man executed and hung on a stake should not be left overnight, "but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day."

Or not at all: The body of Moses was not present to view nor to hold a ceremony for. In fact God did not even allow the burial place to be known to anyone. (Deut 34:5,6,8) This occurs in the Book of Mormon as well.

There is also an instance of praise in The Bible for the performance of a decent cremation. Out of love and despite personal peril the men of Jabesh-gilead retrieved the bodies of King Saul and his sons (from the Philistines who had abused the corpses) and cremated and buried them under a tree at Jabesh (1 Sam. 31:12, 13) David, who held no animosity for Saul and his sons, obviously considered the action as part of a respectful disposition of the dead; "...And David sent messengers unto the men of Jabesh-gilead (who had done it), and said unto them, "Blessed *be* ye of the LORD...because ye have done this thing." (2 Sam. 2:4-7).

During the centuries of the first millennium Christians associated cremation with pagan superstitions. Shunning cremation showed rejection of pagan ideas (such as burning is the only way for the soul to be released). Today, our desire to avoid offence before God has extended to include \$6-12K of special products and services. Some people still consider cremation as desecration of the body. They lump it into the same category as tattoos and body piercing and the burning garbage dumps of Gehenna. Upon closer examination though, embalming is more like tattoos and body art (which are invasive to the body and predominantly about display). Contrast that with cremation which is a form of body disposition for those who desire or require simplicity and frugality.

So don't let fear of man dictate what you do with your dead. Trust in God to raise the dead whole, if you think he is able. And if you believe it is the life one lives and not the mode of decomposition that offends or delights God then feel the courage to follow your conscience.

LDS QUOTES CONCERNING CREMATION (*Catholic quotes follow below. Email FCA of UT to add your religion's views*)

Joseph Fielding Smith in Answers to Gospel Questions 1957 Vol 2, pp.99-102 "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has never taken a definite stand on this [cremation] question. Presumably no edict in relation to it will ever be taken. The matter of burial of the dead, as far as the Church is concerned, is an individual or a family matter. If any member of the Church should state in his will, or make any general statement, that he wished to be cremated, the Church authorities would not step in and interfere but would consider it something with which they had no official concern."

LDS Cremation view (as reported in a Utah County paper The Provo Daily Herald Aug 2, 1999)

"There is a strong LDS culture here", Sundquist (a local funeral home owner) said, noting that the perception is that the church seems to frown on cremation.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints may be more understanding of cremations than people realize. Dale Bills, a spokesman for the LDS Church said, "For Latter-day Saints, normally cremation is not encouraged. However, in some countries the law requires it. The family of the deceased must decide whether to cremate the body, taking into account any laws governing burial or cremation." In other words, it's not encouraged, but it's not viewed as a sin, either. If an LDS person is cremated or has a member of their family cremated, **the church maintains a nonjudgmental stance.** "There is not anything in cremation that would cause a member of the church to be looked upon in disfavor in any way," Bills said. And it won't hurt that person's chances in the afterlife, either. Some people may die in fires. Some may be lost at sea. Some may be cremated or buried. In all cases, LDS theology has the same view about the remains. "Our faith is that through Christ the blessings of the resurrection will be universal," Bills said. "Body and spirit will be reunited for all who have lived."

General LDS Church Handbook (as of 2000) #1 p 156 Normally cremation is not encouraged. However in some countries the law requires it. The family of the deceased must decide whether to cremate the body, taking into account the laws governing such. Where possible the body of a deceased member who has been endowed should be dressed in temple clothing before the cremation. A funeral service may be held.

Elder Packer 1988 Conference talk on Funerals: "Except where burial is prohibited by law, we are **counseled** [means: not doctrinal] to bury our dead. There are important symbolic references to burial in the ordinance of baptism and elsewhere in the doctrines of the Church."

FCA of Utah notes: One must wonder if burial of the ashes takes care of fulfilling the symbolism of burying the body in the grave. The first modern cremation was conducted in England in 1885. That new technology as part of a descent and respectful body disposition has had strong competition since it was born at the same time as the modern commercial funeral (spring boarded in America by embalming during the Civil War). In the U.S. the modern commercial funeral has dictated funeral culture of religious peoples in America ever since.

I Have A Question Ensign Article 1991: Cremation is a custom in various parts of the world. Do Latter-day Saints practice it? By Roger R. Keller, associate professor of Church history and doctrine at BYU [Note: Article excerpts]

Ultimately, after consultation with the Lord and with priesthood leaders, the family must decide what to do. If the person has been endowed, some special instructions are available for the family from local priesthood leaders. Even if a body is cremated, a funeral service may be held... [12]

... In the end, however, we should remember that the resurrection will take place by the power of God, who created the heavens and the earth. Ultimately, whether a person's body was buried at sea, destroyed in combat or an accident, intentionally cremated, or buried in a grave, the person will be resurrected.

No clearer picture of God's restorative powers can be found than Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones (see Ezek. 37), in which he sees the bones gathered together and clothed with sinews and flesh by the power of God. Nothing that is done to the body will in the end prevent the purpose of our Lord from being fulfilled. Our bodies and our spirits will finally be reunited in the resurrection of the dead. 9. Kaplan, p. 172. 10. Robert Fulton, "Cremation," *The World Book Encyclopedia*, 22 vols. (Chicago: World Book, Inc., 1986), 4:904- 11. *General Handbook of Instructions*, March 1989, 1-5. 12. *Ibid.*

CATHOLIC QUOTES CONCERNING CREMATION

On April 18, 1997 Bishop Anthony Pilla informed the bishops of the United States that he had received a letter from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments to allow the presence of the cremated remains of a body at the Funeral Mass. The Church provides that the cremated remains of bodies be treated with proper reverence: The remains of cremated bodies should be treated with the same respect given to the corporeal remains of a human body. This includes the manner in which they are carried, the care and attention to appropriate placement and transport, and the final disposition. The cremated remains of a body should be entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium; they may also be buried in a common grave in a cemetery. The practices of scattering cremated remains on the sea, from the air, or on the ground, or keeping the cremated remains in the home of a relative or friend of the deceased are not the reverent disposition that the Church requires (U.S. Appendix to the Order of Christian Funerals, no. 417).

Also "Autopsies can be morally permitted for legal inquests or scientific research. The free gift of organs after death is legitimate and can be meritorious. The Church permits cremation, provided that it does not demonstrate a denial of faith in the Resurrection of the body.[Cf. CIC, can. 1176 # 3.] "

301. In all matters concerning funerals the Church has one thought uppermost, that we be honest about death as about life. ...The official Roman Ritual states very beautifully that, "Bodies of the faithful, which were temples of the Holy Spirit, should be shown honor and respect, but any kind of pomp and display should be avoided." Witnessing to simplicity and directness is the most reverent way a family can celebrate Christian death, and give witness to the larger community concerning our belief that "Life is not ended, but changed."