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Instruction on Handling of Ashes After Cremation

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

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, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith says in a new instruction. 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 Gerhard Müller,

“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.”

prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, said that church law had not specified exactly what should be done with cremains, and several bishops’ conferences asked the congregation to provide guidance. 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.” The instruction, “Ad Resurgendum cum Christo” (“To Rise With Christ”), approved by Pope Francis after consultation with other Vatican offices and with bishops’ conferences and the Eastern churches’ synods of bishops, was released by the Vatican Oct. 25. It follows.

1 To rise with Christ, we must die with Christ: We must “be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Cor 5:8). With the instruction *Piam et Constantem* of July 5, 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.”¹ Later this change in ecclesi-

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