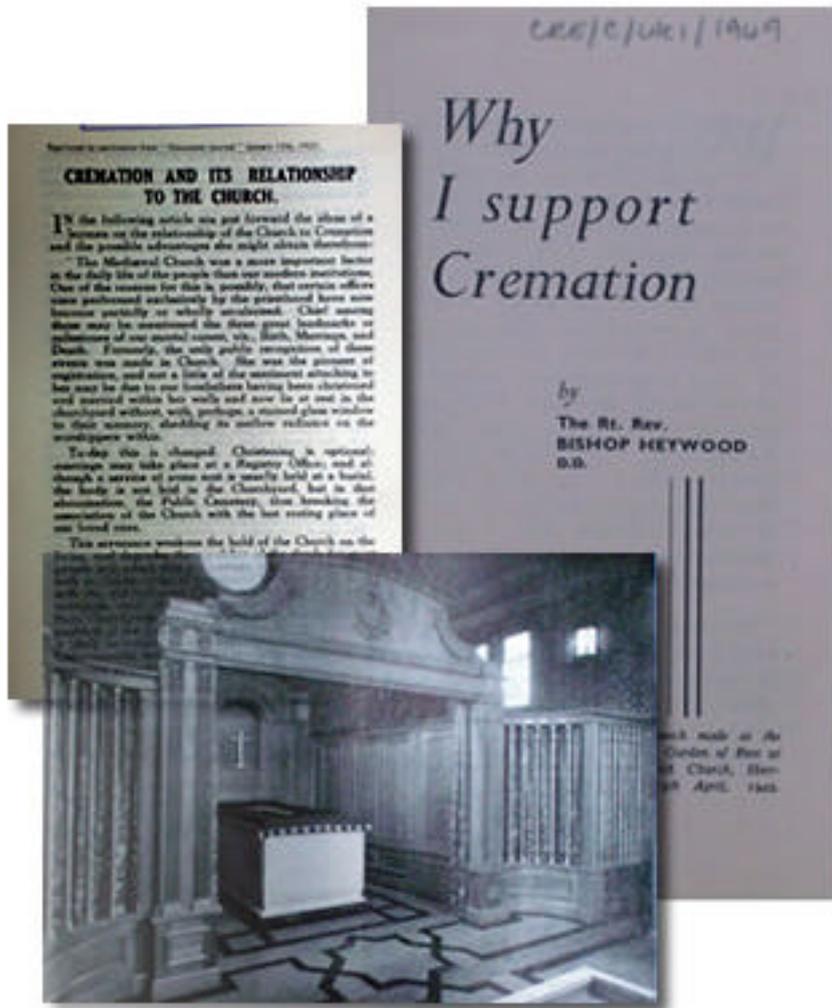


# Rites of passage: resurrection and cremation



Why did it take so long for cremation to become acceptable?

**Source 1: Extract from a paper entitled 'The Roman Catholic Attitude to Cremation' by Rev. Fr. Donald W H Dorsett published in Pharos, 1962.**

The Jews buried their dead invariably either in the earth or in a rock tomb (Genesis XV, xxiii, 19) and cremation was regarded with horror (Amos II, 1) and as a penalty for blatant immorality (Genesis XXVIII, 24).

In the ancient world the practice of burning seems to have arisen from the dislike of being buried in foreign soil. The idea of a dead body being maltreated was repugnant. The relatives of a dead warrior found at least some consolation in weeping over the urn which contained his remains. We cannot wonder at its gradual adoption in Greece and Rome alike. It was suited to the patriotic spirit of a warlike nation.

In Greece burning received the support of a philosophical theory which regarded fire as the principle underlying all existence and saw in this practice a ritual purification from sin and defilement.

In the case of Rome cremation is said to have been introduced from Greece. By the fifth century we read in the Laws of the Twelve Tables that no one is to be buried or burnt within the walls of the city. At the beginning of the Roman Empire cremation was universal.

**Source 2: Extract from a paper entitled 'The Roman Catholic Attitude to Cremation' by Rev. Fr. Donald W H Dorsett published in Pharos, 1962.**

Cremation also seems opposed to the sentiments of the thoughtful person who believes man was made in the image of God. The body after all is so mysteriously connected with the soul. The dignity and nobility of the body as companion to the soul clings to it even when the soul has departed; it has a kind of right to be treated with honour till time does its work.

Cremation may almost be said to encroach on the rights of the Creator and anticipate the work of destruction which belongs to Him alone.

But the argument from the dignity of man and consequent sacredness of his body becomes a thousand times more powerful in the case of the Christian dead.

The body has been redeemed by Christ and belongs to Him as His sacred property; it has been sanctified by the waters of baptism; it has been the temple of the Holy Ghost; it has been employed as the instrument of the supernatural work done by the soul for God.

**Source 3: Extract from an article entitled 'The Religious Aspect of Cremation' by Professor Dr G Van der Leeuw, published in Pharos, 1948**

Essential to the christian creed is the belief in life eternal. This is not the conviction of an immortal soul surviving to the perishing of the body, which is Greek. But it is the belief in a resurrection of man, body and soul : I believe the Resurrection of the body. Throughout the Bible, Old Testament and New, man is regarded as a Whole, he does not possess a body, but he is one, just as he does not own a soul, but is a soul. But, though christian faith does not owe anything to the Platonist conception of an immortal soul and a worthless body, however tainted with that conception some forms of christian theology may have been, neither owes it anything to those very old beliefs which seek for the incorruptibility of human life by preserving the body or parts of it, like the Egyptian belief, which found its expression in mummification and embalming. Resurrection means

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in the first place the complete acknowledgment of the fact of death, "There is no health in us," says the Anglican Confession of Sins, and this is literally true. There is nothing in man which is incorruptible, still less eternal or divine. Throughout the Bible death is admitted unconditionally.— In the second place Resurrection means

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the belief in God who has power to create, not to make something out of another thing, but to create from nothing. Christian belief in God implies that His power is not limited to life and does not retire before death. He creates a new life out of death, a new body and a new spirit.

**Source 4: Extract from an article entitled 'Cremation and Religion' by Sheba Hargreaves, published in Pharos, 1945**

The Roman Catholic Church has opposed cremation since Charlemagne issued his decree somewhere about the year 800. But many Catholic families cremate the bodies of their loved ones when the deceased had expressed preference for this method. Some literalists who believe in the resurrection of the physical body are against cremation. They argue that it might throw obstacles in God's way when collecting the particles of the body; but, viewed dispassionately, this is rather an audacious limitation of an omnipotent God. The fact that the raising of the body would be a miracle and that the atoms are just as widely dispersed in earth burial as by cremation has been completely overlooked.

**Source 4b: Extract from a leaflet written by Rt Rev Bishop Heywood entitled 'Why I support Cremation', 1949.**

No bearing on the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body is involved in cremation. The popular idea of the resurrection of the body is that the body is placed in the grave, and at the last day, perhaps ten million years hence, it comes

up from the grave and is revived. This is expressly contradicted in Corinthians, where St. Paul gives a very clear and reasonable account of the resurrection of the body. No one need have any qualms about any bearing the practice of cremation may have on the resurrection of the body.

**Source 5: Extract from a pamphlet entitled 'Cremation and the Resurrection', 1874.**

Few sensible men or women would insist on the Christian importance of their being let down with ropes into the ground as soon as deceased. Ninety-nine out of a hundred of the sensible would probably say it mattered nothing; but people are gratified in being able to render the "tender offices," etc., to those they have loved during life, and in this way, Sentiment, though it would be rejected as a rule for one's-self, still gets the upper hand, and everybody gets buried. Had Sentiment happened to be invited towards cremation instead of to burial, the condition of things would have been precisely analogous, and the notion of having one's wife, or parent, or child placed in the earth, would have become correspondingly repugnant.

## Images of William Price

