

A Prayer for Youth

Father of all, in whom we live and move and have our being, we present before Thee this day the youth of the Advent Movement. The future of Thy cause on earth belongs to them, and this is their day of preparation. May Thy blessing attend those who are toiling through the heat of the summer in order to continue their education. And when the doors of academy and college open again a few weeks from now, may they all find entrance to these halls of opportunity, where Christ is honored as the author of true wisdom and knowledge. Amen.

In Death a Testimony

When Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru of India died recently, widespread publicity was given to the fact that he was cremated, not buried. Pictures of his funeral pyre were printed in color in a number of magazines. The preparation of the wood, the lighting of the fire, the collection of the ashes—all were shown in grisly detail. Attention was called to a statement by Mr. Nehru in which he asked that his body be cremated and that his ashes be scattered over his beloved India, some in the river and some over the land. He asked, further, that no religious services be held.

Soon after the prime minister's cremation, when the attention of the world had been focused on the event, the Roman Catholic Church announced that canonical penalties would no longer be imposed in connection with cremation. Some Catholics apparently felt that the church, by this act, was taking a backward step, but others saw it as another effort at *aggiornamento*, updating church practices to conform with current attitudes and cultural patterns.

Is Cremation Scriptural?

From time to time Seventh-day Adventists inquire whether cremation is scriptural. They wonder whether God approves of this practice. For those who are interested in this matter, we offer a few general comments.

The Bible nowhere contains an injunction against cremation, probably because no divine principle is violated by the practice. Whether the process of disintegration is swift, as accomplished by fire, or gradual, as is inevitable in burial, the final result is the same. To guilty Adam, God said, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return to the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3:19).

In Old Testament times the practice of God's people was to bury their dead. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Miriam, Sarah, Rebekah, David—all were buried. In general, people were burned only when their lives were out of harmony with the divine will. Cremation was probably symbolic of final destruction in the lake of fire. Thus when Achan's disobedience brought defeat to God's people at Ai, "all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones" (Joshua 7:25).

In the New Testament, Jesus was buried in Joseph's new tomb, and the early Christians, following ancient Jewish custom and the example of Jesus, buried rather than cremated their dead. When pagans, who practiced

cremation, were converted, they adopted the Christian custom of burial to show that they had broken with the customs of their unconverted life. Burial was practiced almost universally from that time forward, except under special conditions, such as when plague or war necessitated rapid disposal of bodies.

In the nineteenth century, however, certain materialistic groups advocated cremation. Their purpose was clear: they wanted to lodge a symbolic protest against the Christian doctrine of the resurrection. If church members, under these circumstances, had expressed a preference for cremation, they might well have been misunderstood. Thus, while it would have been lawful to be cremated instead of buried, it might not have been expedient. One's choices and actions must always be thought through in the light of how they may be interpreted.

Death always has been somewhat of a mystery, a fear-filled mystery. It has also been an enemy, the last enemy that shall be destroyed. In His love for His followers Jesus sought to remove both the mystery and fear by referring to death as a sleep. Thus the Christian who dies is represented merely as a weary person who, exhausted by the struggles and trials of life, lies down to sleep, to be awakened to immortality at the coming of Jesus.

Cremation is doubtless no less acceptable than burial from the standpoint of principle, but the almost universal preference of Christians has been for burial. Symbolically, it has more to offer. Somehow it says that death is only a sleep; that the resurrection is not far away; that the tired pilgrim soon will be awakened by the voice of the archangel. Thus the Christian who falls asleep in Jesus seems to say even now, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" His death joins his life in bearing witness to the bright hope of sharing eternity with his Redeemer.

K. H. W.

From the Editor's Mailbag

A brother writes: "I have just read in an Adventist book that faith alone is all that is necessary to our salvation. If this is so, then I don't have to do any work, such as keeping the Ten Commandments, and the popular churches are right—just believe and thou shalt be saved."

Our Reply

Your difficulty arises out of a misunderstanding that has troubled many people, namely, a failure to understand rightly the meaning of the word *saved*. That word is used in two different senses in the Bible. We read in the Holy Scriptures: "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9). Now the word *saved* as here used doesn't allow for any works whatever; that's plain. But then, again, we read in the Scriptures: "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matt. 24:13; Mark 13:13). But there is no contradiction here, for the word *saved* is used here with a little different meaning. That is true of many, many words. The context has to determine the meaning