

Committee on Doctrine United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *On the proper disposition of bodily remains*, 20 March 2023

(ecclesiastical funerals – alkaline hydrolysis – human composting – United States Conference of Catholic Bishops)

With the [statement *On the Proper Disposition of Bodily Remains* of 20 March 2023](#), the Committee on Doctrine of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (“USCCB”) denied the compatibility with the Christian religion of alkaline hydrolysis and human composting, two practices of disposition of the bodily remains that are legalised in some federal states, alternatives to burial and cremation.

More specifically, in the assessment of the USCCB’s Committee on Doctrine both alkaline hydrolysis and human composting do not show the due respect for the last remains and are not suitable for testifying to faith and hope in the bodily resurrection, since at the end of the process of decomposition of the corpse there remain elements destined for a use other than deposition in a sacred place where the faithful can go to pray and remember (points 10 and 11 of the document in question).

In relation to the above-mentioned funeral practices, therefore, it does not appear possible to re-propose the distinction between an evaluation of an objective and a subjective type, used with regard to cremation, which, as is well known, is prohibited by the Church only when it is chosen for reasons contrary to Christian doctrine (cf. can. 1176, § 3, C.I.C.; can. 876, § 3, C.C.E.O.; CONGREGATION OF THE HOLY OFFICE, *Instructio De cadavere crematione: Piam et constantem*, 5 July 1963, in [Acta Apostolicae Sedis](#), 56 (1964), pp. 822-823).

Definitively, the declaration *de qua* - although, as also specified by the *Litterae Apostolicae motu proprio datae De theologica et iuridica natura Conferentiarum Episcoporum: Apostolos Suos* of JOHN PAUL II (in [Acta Apostolicae Sedis](#), 90 (1998), pp. 641-658: in particular, point 23 and Art. 2 of the *Normae de Episcoporum Conferentiis completivae*), cannot be considered the expression of an authentic Magisterium - it assumes considerable importance due to the susceptible universal relevance of the issues dealt with, placing itself in the line of the principles affirmed by the Instruction of the Congregation (at present, Dicastery) for the Doctrine of the Faith *Ad resurgendum cum Christo* of 15 August 2016 (in [Acta Apostolicae Sedis](#), 108-11 (2016), pp. 1288-1292; see on the subject ANNA GIANFREDA, *La disciplina della cremazione nell'ordinamento canonico: prime riflessioni a proposito dell'Istruzione della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede Ad resurgendum cum Christo*, in [this Review](#), 2, 2016, pp. 53-80), in which it highlights the need to counter attitudes and rituals involving misconceptions of death and the importance of remembrance and prayer for the deceased on the part of family members and the entire Christian community (cf. point 3 - Instruction *Ad resurgendum cum Christo*).

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