



National Council of Churches of Singapore

新加坡基督教會協會

சிங்கப்பூர் திருச்சபைகளின் தேசிய மன்றம்

05 December 2016

Protestant Attitudes Towards the Departed

This statement is a response to the Straits Times regarding Protestant attitudes towards the departed. NCCS would like to share it with member churches. Also see ST, 5 Dec, page B2.

The attitude of Protestants towards the dead does not differ substantially from that of Roman Catholics.

Both believe that the human being, created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27), is a unity of body and soul. This means that the body is integral to the human being and not just an empty receptacle animated by a living soul where personhood is thought to reside.

Both Roman Catholics and Protestants not only believe in the immortality of the soul but also the resurrection of the body (1 Corinthians 15:35-44). Salvation and eternal life, therefore, do not have to do only with the soul, but with the whole person – body and soul.

In addition, both maintain that the body of believers is the Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), and must therefore be treated with reverence and honour.

Christians from both traditions therefore have great respect for the human body. This fundamental respect is accorded even to the corpse, or the body of a deceased person.

Although the members of the National Council of Churches in Singapore represent diverse Christian traditions and denominations, including the Orthodox, they all have the same attitude towards the dead. Thus, even though each tradition or denomination has its distinctive funeral rituals and practices, they are all based on a shared understanding of human life and human death.

This common theology is informed and shaped by a common text that Christians from both traditions regard as authoritative, namely, the Bible.

Like Roman Catholics, Protestants either bury or cremate their dead.¹ The cremated remains of loved ones are usually put in an urn and respectfully placed in a niche in a columbarium. Others may bury the mortal remains of their loved ones sealed in an urn at sea, following a solemn committal service.

However, unlike Roman Catholics, Protestants do not have any serious objections to scattering the ashes on land or at sea, as long as this is done solemnly and respectfully. Neither do Protestants have any serious objections to keeping the remains of the dead in an urn at home, although this is a very rare practice.

The respect that Protestants have for the bodies of their departed loved ones suggests that some ways of disposing the remains are unacceptable.

For example, Protestants would regard turning the remains of the dead into wearable jewellery or any kind of commemorative object (like a figurine by mixing the ashes with clay) as unacceptable practices. In similar vein, Protestants would also regard distributing the remains to family members as being disrespectful to the deceased.

¹ Roman Catholics allow cremation only in 1963.