

# CREMATION STILL A BURNING ISSUE



By Cherie del Rio

It seems that the human decision-making dilemmas do not end with death. Even after one passes, choices still need to be made in determining their final resting place. There are people, however, who have thought far ahead into the conditions after their demise and have made arrangements pertaining to their funeral services. But for the departed who, either by choice or chance, have not taken the liberty of making funeral arrangements, the question of whether they will be buried traditionally or be cremated is one that their family must answer.

The traditional burial practices have been honored and observed by generations after generations. There was simply no choice but to pick out a casket, buy a lawn lot wherein to bury the dead, and pay the necessary maintenance fees or whatever related expenses there may be in memorial parks. But when modern cremation services were introduced into the country, there came another practical option.

Cremation services are allowed in the Philippines by both the Catholic Church and the state. The Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), however, had expressed its preference for the conventional method of burial. The CBCP, through Monsignor Pepe Quitoriano, said that “Filipinos especially in rural communities still find this [cremation] unacceptable.” Monsignor Quitoriano revealed that the cremation process still has “significant repercussion” in our culture. Many opt to stick to what tradition dictates, to continue doing what has been practiced for centuries in their families. There are also people who are not comfortable with the idea of burning their beloved dead’s body.

## **Process of cremation**

The process of cremation is fairly simple. Most funeral homes that provide cremation services likewise offer packages inclusive of the actual cremation fee, the urn within which the ashes will be placed, the transportation of the corpse from the venue of passing to the funeral home, the viewing services at the memorial chapel, and the acquisition of permits.

Securing permits is an important aspect of the service. A death certificate as well as a request for cremation obtained from the City Health Office must be submitted to the funeral home before cremation may occur. Since the coffin is combustible, the body is then burned along with it. An industrial incinerator is normally used in burning the body and the cremation container or casket.

The average time for cremation typically runs for two to three hours, depending on the weight of the corpse. The ashes are then placed in either a wooden ash box or an urn, which can be made of materials such as marble, steel, or brass. These urns containing the ashes are stored in columbaries in private cemeteries. Some urns are stored in bone chambers in memorial parks and properties. The process is simple and generally cheaper compared to the traditional burial rites.

### **Cost of dying**

A report from the US Embassy has listed the following estimated cost of mortuary services in Metro Manila:

- Cost for preparation and burial – \$2,400
- Cost for cremation and disposition of ashes – approximately \$1,200

In the provinces, the cost for cremation is cheaper. There are crematoriums that offer services for as low as P30,000. Traditional burial packages, on the other hand, have a price range of P80,000 to P130,000 or even higher.

Lavish funerals can even cost as much as a million pesos. These six-figure costs can cover the funeral car services, wake services, mass and ceremonies, food and refreshments served during the wake, viewing in the family rooms of memorial chapels, and beautification of the lawn lot where the coffin will be buried in.

The cost of the lot is not yet included in the package. This will be an extra expense for the family, although more and more people have taken to acquiring insurance packages that include memorial plans.

### **Advantages of cremation**

If we are to compare then the cost of cremation and traditional burials, then cremation would be the better option for our countrymen who barely have enough money to get them through life — and much lesser in death.

Considering the growing cost of traditional funerals, an increasing number of Filipinos have resorted to the cremation of their dearly departed. The lack of burial lawn lots also add to the factors that push cremation as the more practical option.

In 2006, a GMANews Research report revealed that Metro Manila is running out of lands that will accommodate the dead. This prompts more sales for ash vaults, not just burial lots, in cemeteries. Over the last decade, memorial parks and services have devoted areas in their property for bone chambers and columbaries. Even parish churches have bone chambers within which the urns may be deposited. There are some requests made that ashes be scattered in the sea — this is allowed in the Philippines for as long as the necessary permits are secured.

Despite the practicality of cremation, a significant percentage of Filipinos still choose to lay down their beloved dead in their final resting place by means of conventional funeral rites — with

tombstones and epitaphs. They honor the practice of visiting memorial parks during All Souls' Day. They value tradition and family customs.

### **Practicality vs tradition**

Cremation, despite the notion of a seemingly discomfiting process of burning one's body, has a number of advantages. It still allows the performance of traditional funeral rites such as the display of the coffin during a wake where people can pay their respects. The process will, in fact, only do away with the expense and hassle of purchasing a lawn lot and maintaining it. In this day and age where family members are scattered around the world, cremation presents an attractive option. Loved ones will no longer feel the pressure of flying to a specific funeral park just to visit a departed one who is six feet under the ground.

At the end of the day, the choice of whether to bury or to burn will have to depend on what the family values more (or the departed one's prior preferences): their regard for customs or their financial capacity. After all, to bury or to burn is more of a debate between practicality and tradition.

Ref.: <http://planetphilippines.com/lifestyle/cremation-still-a-burning-issue/>

**Look more here: [www.cremation.catholicchurch.ph](http://www.cremation.catholicchurch.ph) and [www.cremation.philippineculture.ph](http://www.cremation.philippineculture.ph)**