

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](https://paypal.me/robbradshaw)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

PRAYER FOR THE DEAD

I

UP to a generation or so ago exponents of the Tractarianism which has reintroduced among us supplication on behalf of the departed used solemnly to insist to any objector that the only proper and intended beneficiaries in regard to such prayer were the godly, righteous dead. These throughout "the intermediate state", the entire period between death and the Judgment Day, would be unceasingly developing in their already attained holiness, and they could not fail to be helped forward in this process of sanctification by the prayers of their brethren here below. The brother-love, indeed, which is enjoined under the Gospel upon believers demanded and compelled the rendering of such intercessory service.

Does Bible doctrine, then, lend any countenance whatever to such supplication? The answer is in the negative.

What of this quasi-Darwinian evolution in holiness in the hereafter from the Scriptural standpoint? The usual Bible passage to be adduced in support of it is Phil. i. 6: "He that hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." It is a sample of the culling of texts out of their context. "A good work" throughout the N.T. is invariably altruistic, done to or for others. This holds for a variety of cognate forms of the idea in the Greek. There is no suggestion in them of an egoistic or merely self-related holiness. And what was this altruistic "good work" here? It was their co-operation in the Apostle's evangelising labour—see previous verse. That aid had been given from his first arrival "until" the date of writing, and he is confident that God who inspired it (ch. ii. 13) will never allow it to flag, but will bring it to, and maintain it at, the pitch of perfection (R.V. "perfect" for "perform") "until" the Advent. The Apostle is also speaking to a community, not to individuals severally: "in you", or "among you", not "in each one of you". Moreover, true evangelistic work and witness performed here on earth does not die with the successive

evangelists. It was explicitly promised to such by Christ that fruit would "abide" (John xv. 16).

To the ordinary mind it is impossible to attach any meaning to an increasing holiness except an increasing disengagement from sinfulness. Do the righteous dead go to a sphere tainted at all with sinfulness or temptation? They are "with Christ", "present with the Lord" (2 Cor. v. 8; Phil. i. 23), where the devil, the world, and the flesh, are shut out. Do they enter upon this new estate still tainted themselves with their own former sinfulness? The "purchased ones from among men", that figure in the Apocalypse (xiv. 5), are, like their Purchaser (Heb. ix. 14; 1 Pet. i. 19), "without blemish". They are "spirits of just ones perfected", as was He also in a sense peculiar to Himself (Heb. xii. 23; v. 9; vii. 22).

Even here and now believers are in God's sight, as He views them in Christ their Ransomer and their Head, accredited as being entirely righteous, "as though they had fulfilled all He commanded" (Hooker). They are declared to be already "complete in Him" and "clean every whit" (John xiii. 10; Rom. viii. 33; Col. i. 12; ii. 10; Lev. xvi. 30). And, in keeping therewith, Christ's words in John xiv. 2, 3, and xvii. 24, appear, as Hastings' Bible Dictionary observes (I, 752), to point to the immediate entrance of the just dead into bliss. "Perfected" in that Hebrews passage, according to the expositors, signifies "brought to completeness" (Speaker's), "to the goal of consummation" (Meyer). "All is accomplished," says Alford, "their probation, their righteousness; . . . they are lacking nothing, except communion with us." May they not be instantly divested of past moral incompleteness as, it is promised (1 Cor. xv. 50f.), they will be of terrestrial animality? Mozley, with reference to a dying infant, is satisfied that it is "in the power of God, in the act of admitting him to eternal life, to bestow such supplementary qualifications as are necessary for that new state of existence".¹ Think of the rapid, instant enlightenment of the penitent thief; of the immediate immense transformation that the disciples underwent on the Day of Pentecost! Why may we then not confidently concur with the Shorter Catechism's statement that "the souls of believers are made perfect in holiness and do immediately pass into glory", or with the anticipation respecting each one of them expressed in the Prayer

¹ *Baptismal Controversy*, p. 58.

Book Office for Communion of the Sick, that "whosoever his soul shall depart from his body, it may be without spot presented unto Thee"?

How about *the quick*, those who shall then be found living here, at the last trump? They are to be rapt into eternal bliss, we are told, simultaneously with those resurrected (1 Cor. xv. 52; 1 Thess. iv. 17). Yet obviously there will have been no intermediate state, no sanctifying evolution, in their case. Nor is there any hint given of any after-school provision for them: the pleaders for this practice themselves stress and underscore the aforesaid "until" of Phil. i. 6; so, if we must not stop short of it, we are equally debarred from going beyond it. On the contrary, it is said: "When He shall appear, we"—the quick as well as the rest—"shall be like Him" (1 John iii. 2); and "The righteous"—the quick as well as the others—"shall then shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father". And cannot the non-quick be believed to be or to have been each "perfected" instantly, if the quick will be?

II

What warranty or what room or scope is there then for prayer from us on their behalf? Anything of the kind is plainly calculated to detract from the entire sufficiency of the Saviour's redemptive work—calculated to superinduce some measure of misgiving where full thankful confidence should reign. So far as prayer is a sacrifice, it is here as truly derogatory to Christ's finished work as is or ever was the Sacrifice of the Mass. "Grant them peace"; "may they rest in peace"; surely any such petition sheds a dubiousness on the Gospel promise of a solid peace with God to be enduringly possessed and enjoyed here and now. It is suavely broached as a factor of sanctification, but in a moment is seen to trench upon Justification. Has Christ done anything at all for us? If He has, is it anything that was decisive? According, indeed, as trust in His atoning merit and imputed righteousness is either wanting or waning, Christ fades out of the picture of an advocate of this sort of prayer, and a resultant aching void is felt, however many be the man-devised offsets. And, as in the case of Æsop's fox that had suffered caudal privation, the anchorless soul longs to gain and to multiply companions in its misfortune—*solamen miseris socios habuisse doloris*. Hence

the inevitable propaganda in furtherance of such prayer. A letter, for example, of nearly 300 words, written to the Press a while ago by a canon and cathedral rector of the Church of Ireland, was devoid throughout of the faintest hint that a Christ had ever existed!¹

But that is not the only way in which the honour of Christ suffers compromise. The notion of a purgatory of pain has normally (not invariably) followed in the wake of this error. Cardinal Wiseman contended that "the two doctrines go so completely together that if we succeed in demonstrating the one, the other necessarily follows". And, despite all their dialectical subtilty, Romish exponents have ever been singularly unconvincing in their attempts to show how their purgatory can be other than a detraction from the full effectualness of our Lord's redemption. Yet "middle-minded" people will often venture on the plea in palliation of this practice, that, if it does no good, it can do no harm!

It is a primary canon of prayer, moreover, that we must ask in faith. "Faith cometh by hearing", Rom. x. 17—"it can only come from the message heard" (Sanday). A warrant, explicit and divinely given, is essential for faith to rest upon. And we have here a fatuous or pretentious effort to relate one's prayer to an unimaginable world. It is quite impossible to conceive anything definite and intelligible to pray for, on behalf of those who have passed into it. It is impossible to "pray with the understanding" (1 Cor. xiv. 15). We have to excogitate all sorts of "maybes" for which to pray. The conventional formula, "Grant him light perpetual" or "light, peace, and refreshment", only shows up the helpless nebulosity of the case. In a different connection, when they want to appear moderate-minded relative to the question of the nature of hereafter retribution, theologians of the type that promote this praying are ready enough to emphasise our utter ignorance as to the conditions which will then and there obtain. "It is wiser, surely, to leave all blindly in His hands", is what Pusey says on that subject.²

Then, what of the asserted impulsion upon us of Christian brother-love towards this supplication for the dead? Sorrow for our loss of a brother or sister believer is, of course, a phase of that brother-love (the Greek N.T. *philadelphia*). And we have

¹ *C. I. Gazette*, 3/1/36. Similarly Bp. Moule's semi-retractation during wartime, in his *Christus Consolator* (96), gives not a hint of redemption.

² *Eternal Punishment*, pp. 23, 280; similarly Gore, *Holy Spirit*, p. 308.

the highest precedent for entertaining such sorrow (John xi. 35; Acts viii. 2; xx. 38; Phil. ii. 27). Happily "we sorrow not even as others which have no hope". As Ben-Sirach says, we can "weep sweetly" for departed believers. We are assured of their safety and bliss. We can gratefully look back to the spiritual help and inspiration they were instrumental in affording to us. We look forward to our reunion with them at the Lord's Return, and, with that in view, we enfold them all (without individual specification) with ourselves in the God-given prayer, "Thy kingdom come".

But back of all true Christian brother-love is Christian love towards God. The first is simply the reflex of the other, as the moon is related to the sun. "Our love for our human friends," we are taught by that notable philosopher-divine Illingworth, "is bound to become degenerate unless it is combined with love of God", the latter of which "comes first in the order of thought", and "must carry with it the obedience of our whole being, must be the one motive which colours, not only all our affections, but the entire course of our reason and will".¹ Our Lord enjoined that even love for one's closest kindred must be subordinated to love for Himself (Luke xiv. 26), nor can we doubt but it is transfigured and purified in and through that subordination.² His apostle John likewise says: "By this we know that we love the brethren when we love God" (1 John v. 2). And Peter similarly teaches that brother-love is the outcome of obedience to the truth, and a coping-stone of the character-structure based on faith (1 Pet. i. 22; 2 Pet. i. 7). Invariably faith in God, of which love to Him is one aspect, takes precedence of our brother-love, in Scripture (Ephes. i. 15; Col. i. 4; 1 Thess. iii. 6; v. 8; 2 Thess. i. 3; 1 Tim. i. 14; ii. 15; 2 Tim. i. 13; Tit. iii. 15; Philem. 5).

When we turn to this kind of prayer in question, it is clear, as we have already partly seen, that faith in God, with its constituent, love and obedience to His Word, becomes of little or no account. To Scriptural practice also as well as doctrine such prayer is entirely alien. In the Levitical code, among all its minute directions as to all kinds of sacrifice, there is not a word about sacrifices for the dead, though these were a familiar

¹ *Christian Character*, pp. 83-95.

² Compare, on a less supernal plane, the kindred principle enshrined in the poet Lovelace's lines:

*I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honour more.*

element in the heathen religions. The patriarch Job offered burnt-offerings for his sons while they were living, but on hearing of their death simply expressed his resignation to the Divine will and blessed the Lord. David prayed fervently for his child's recovery till death supervened; then he changed to calm, assured anticipation (2 Sam. xii.). When the Apostle Paul was comforting his Thessalonian converts respecting the destiny of their deceased brethren, how apposite might a suggestion that they should meanwhile pray for them have seemed, yet it was not made, although in the third verse preceding he had been applauding their abounding brother-love. No post-mortem prayer is offered for any N.T. brother or sister.

III

The attempts made at qualifying the non-Scripturalness only serve to show up the more the nakedness of the land. The Apostle prays that Onesiphorus may find mercy of the Lord in the Advent day (2 Tim. i. 18). No notice is taken of the intermediate period so crucial to the advocates. And, among others, Chrysostom, the great Greek Father, in his exposition, assumes that Onesiphorus was alive at the time, whilst historian Fabricius (1731) even cites a tradition of how he later became a bishop.¹ Warrantly also for the practice has been sought for through a movement from the rear—by an endeavour to find proof that the Jews' present-day recourse to such prayer was traceable back to and behind our Lord's time, but the effort has now been abandoned. And another buttress is the Apocrypha dictum, the "holy and wholesome thought", propounded by the Egyptian Jew schismatic who wrote 2 Maccabees. This writer definitely disclaims inspiration, and no Jew has ever utilised the passage in disputation. The present Bishop Hunkin (*Expositor*, April, 1916) argues that the context suggests the direct contrary to the usual view that is taken of the passage.

The sub-Apostolic or primitive Church doctrine and practice, likewise, as a derived reflex of the Scriptural (however waning and shortlived the correctness of the reflection proved to be), is utterly unfavourable. It is not that the extant writings happen at all to have been confined to subjects remote from this point at issue. Clement's Epistle contains liturgical petitions of

¹ *Lux Evang.* p. 117.

all sorts, but no reference to the dead. The apologist Aristides (A.D. 117-138) informs the heathen Emperor that "whenever any just person among them passes away, the Christians rejoice and offer thanks to God"—but says no word of prayer on such a one's behalf. Athenagoras (177) writes a whole treatise on the resurrection of the dead, but fails to mention prayer of this kind. Irenaeus (178) speaks at length of the soul's state after death, as does also his disciple Hippolytus (225), yet neither hints at prayer for the dead. And so on. "Lack of evidence continues until past the middle of the second century," is the admission of the noted Dr. Swete who himself favoured such prayer.¹

Thus it becomes completely obvious that, in prayer for the dead, Christian love and obedience to God and His Word must get relegated to a very secondary place indeed, whilst the primary place is accorded to a professed Christian brother-love. True Christian brother-love becomes an impossibility in such a posture of things, as much so as rain without previous evaporation. More than that, it is not even an ordinary and natural inter-human love in its full rational compass that here comes into exercise. It is the mere animal groundwork of that love—the physical-mental, the more physical than mental, sensibility which we share with the lower creation.

How is it that the emotional impulsion to engage in prayer of this kind proves so short-ranged in its outgoings, both as regards personal objects and duration? Why do we so rarely hear of a person who has been dead a thousand—a hundred—no more than forty—years being still prayed for? Does not the alleged evolutionary process in holiness go on "until the Day"? Why do we hear so exclusively of the loved mother just called away? How does the grandmother come to be so completely overlooked? The latter's development in the intermediate state is and will be still proceeding, forsooth, and it may be stringent and exacting, and therefore her more protracted case should be

¹ The frequently mentioned "commemorations" of the dead convey no evidence in this regard, and the "oblation" feature in them can be shown to mean charitable contributions. (Comp. Vulgate rendering of Acts xxiv. 17, and Pope's *Roman Misquotations* [1840], p. 199.) The ancient "liturgies", which used to be sometimes cited in support, are now admitted to be only very partially primitive and to have undergone wholesale interpolation. The straits to which advocacy is reduced could be well gauged from the proud peacans which sounded forth when discovery was made in the 'nineties of an epitaph-inscription of a Phrygian ecclesiastic, named Avircius, dating from the eve of the third century, wherein prayer for himself is asked for. He may quite possibly have simply meant the familiar "commemorative" thanksgiving; moreover, the portion containing the request depends for authenticity on the dubious evidence of a fifth century hagiography.

the more appealing. Is this the apostolic Christian "love out of a pure heart" (1 Tim. i. 6)?

The natural flush of sensibility, of tender emotion, in fresh bereavement chooses many and varied forms in which temporarily and transiently to give vent to itself. Newman lying all night in bed alongside the corpse of his friend Ambrose St. John is one extreme sample. A normal one is that of the new widow starting, flower-laden, to make visits to the grave which are meant to be regular and unceasing. We think no scorn of her if we observe a slackening as time passes: the procedure, within due limits, has been harmless, aye, relieving to an aching heart; but we might feel less kindly if she had been ascribing it to a holy impulse. Our general temporary observance of the maxim, *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*, is a similar thing.

We do not, needless to say, condemn natural sensibility, "tender emotion" (as the psychologists term it), blood affection, or marital or comrade affection, that which the Apostle honourably calls "love in the flesh" (Philem. 16). When Cardinal Cullen protested against Protestants: "They have given up all prayers for their departed friends, and seem to look upon their fate with a cold indifference not very consistent with Christian charity",¹ we should have inquired of him to which Church belonged Aquinas who forbade a mother to pray for her unbaptised dead child.² And, equally, in response to the affectation on the part of Tractarians to-day of being endowed with love emotion so exceeding that which possesses the rest of us that they simply cannot discontinue their previous prayers for a relative who has died, we ask why they in particular are so ready to shoot out the lip at "emotional" revivalism and evangelism.

But it should not be needful to insist that the tenderness feeling, emotional affection, is no safe guide or motive force in either the moral or the spiritual domain. David's tenderness with Absalom cost Israel tens of thousands of men. Eli had to be Divinely rebuked: "Thou honourest thy sons above Me." Christ made it plain to Salome that affection can cause misdirection in prayer (Matt. xx. 21). The Cana nobleman was hindered for the moment by anxious affection from putting implicit trust in the Lord's mercy (John iv. 49). True prayer cannot assuredly

¹ Pastoral, Nov., 1871. Doubtless the Jews also seemed to the Canaanites very unfeeling in so far as they obeyed the order of Deut. xiv. 1.

² *Summa*, 9, lxx. ; art. 7.

be regulated and governed by the freshness or otherwise of an affectionate emotion.

In this present time prayer for the dead is proving to be the first of two stepping stones for perverts to the modern bane, Spiritualism, the second being what is called *comprecation*, the reciprocal praying of the living for the dead and of the dead for the living. The sole Bible passage employed to make this *comprecation* notion plausible is the "cloud of witnesses" one in Heb. xii. 1. A host of expounders (including not a few of the sentimental Evangelical sort, careless of implications) have fascinated themselves with the idea of a cloud-amphitheatre with beatified onlookers filling the tiers and viewing the Christians below as they run their heavenly race. Oddly, however, the writer fails to introduce the, now so hackneyed, "loved relatives" touch. He even disregards the varying conditions of time and place. What great stimulus does it impart for one to know that hosts of deceased persons from Turkestan or Paraguay are looking on—or hosts of departed ones that lived in the ninth and tenth centuries? Are they invested with omniscience, more or less equally with the Romanist's Blessed Virgin? Besides, the thing must cut both ways. Are they spectators of all unchristian doings by and among us here below? Can we associate that with being "with Christ" in Paradise? Has "turning in one's grave" any analogue there? Did Hezekiah or Jotham gaze from above on his son's villainies? or Gustavus Adolphus on his daughter Christina's aberrations? Sin is understood to grieve God Himself, and is it to be part of the heavenly bliss of His home-called ones to be endowed with the supernatural faculty of surveying from there the world's sin in all its fulness and foulness? 2 Kings xxii. 20 does not read like that. On the other hand, *martus*, translated "witness", never means onlooker, spectator; the Greek Fathers consistently interpret it as "testifier" (by word or deed). "So numerous", *iosouton*, is the opening word of the Greek verse, and matches "these all" of the last verse but one preceding. Assuming that they of the previous chapter are meant, whose former faith-victories should fortify the faith of the godly in the present, then the more of them the better, and their date or location makes no difference. "Cloud" would suggest mental, though non-physical, visibility. "Does the Book tell about any more thieves?" asked a dying burglar of a city missionary. It is we that behold those past Faithfuls, not

they us; "looking back on their career", we are to "imitate their faith", ch. xiii. 7 (compare also Isaiah li. 2); we, not they, are the subject of all the active Greek verbs of the verse. *The Anglo-Catholic Congress Handbook*, 1933, be it noted, cites this passage to bolster up prayer for the dead.

A Master of one of our Oxford Colleges, since deceased, at the close of the Kaiser War, in a sermon propounded comprehension and Spiritualism conjunctively.¹ He was soon followed by a prominent Anglican Dean who crowned a previous prolonged and noisy public championship of prayer for the dead with a pronouncement from the pulpit of his acceptance of Spiritualism.² The former Bishop of London, who was very fond of booming comprehension in order to popularise prayer for the dead, admitted not so long ago that Spiritualism had been espoused by some of his *leading* clergy. This is what comes of playing with fire.³ During war and invasion, in calamity and danger, many people are only too disposed to have recourse to necromantic modes of inquiry. See the prophet's scornful exposure, and then his thunderous appeal so apposite to this whole topic: "To the law and to the testimony!" (Isaiah viii. 19, 20).⁴

How comes the practice to subserve the interests of Anglican sacerdotalism? For, at first glance, as with Mariolatry, the service rendered does not make itself apparent. Well, it would never do for priestism if a soul should, through trust in Christ alone, feel assuredly reconciled with God—without priestly aid. And where this prayer is broached and gains lodgment, that trust in Christ's merit becomes duly modified and reduced at least, if it has not been wholly annulled or non-existent already. There will be or have been a casting about for supplementary or contrary resources of trust and merit, something one can perform for himself or can be performed by another. Priestism will complaisantly go forth to meet one half-way. The average propagandist at the present stage will not push the commonplace established Roman modes—he will not press you to inscribe on a tombstone, "Of your charity pray for the soul of X"; he will not interject "God rest him" at any casual mention of someone recently deceased. He prefers, for the time being, just to work

¹ *Church Times*, 3/1/19.

² Nov. 16, 1919.

³ *Record*, 12/7/35.

⁴ The Creed phrase, "the Communion of Saints", which has been pressed into service here, did not exist in the earliest forms, and has all along been interpreted in a variety of ways. The Puseyite Dean Luckock owned that its sense is "vague and indefinite."

the "loved relative" sophism. And primarily and at the outset it is the pious *lay* survivor's own personal prayer, forsooth,¹ that is being solely thought of. The lay person, if amenable, will in his turn modestly adjudge that the ordained functionary, being presumably more holy than he or she is and so a more influential supplicator, should have the direction and control of all the recommended supplication committed to him. This means fresh and additional support for the steady and progressive introduction into, and enforcement upon, congregations of these prayers in liturgical form. It means that the "priest" now is accounted the paramount factor in the safety and security of departed souls. And thus priestism safely and securely mounts the throne. Moreover, just as Rome unscrupulously takes advantage of the sweet-heart affection to push her *Ne Temere* decree, so do her Anglican imitators take advantage of the sorrows of war to push this particular practice.

They derive no genuine support from the Book of Common Prayer for this sort of supplication. At their less matured stage one or two of the leading Reformers (who did not become ripe Protestants overnight) vaguely adhered to it, but later speak only of thanksgiving relative to the dead. In the fully reformed Prayer Book of 1552 such prayer was expunged from the two places where it had remained. At a later date under Elizabeth a "homily" which decisively reprehended it was sanctioned under the 35th of the 39 Articles. Modern advocates in their desperation make play with the phrase "the whole Church" in one or two petitions, as though it necessarily embraced departed saints any more than in Acts v. 11 or xv. 22! "Militant here in earth" was in 1662 added in one place as a qualification of "Christ's Church" with the express aim, according to Bishop Cosin, of excluding the dead from reference. The favoured modern idea of an intermediate development in holiness is utterly foreign to the book.

IV

There is a second grade, or more advanced section, of advocates of prayer for the dead. These concern themselves about another class of beneficiaries entirely. They promote this kind of prayer avowedly out of consideration for the ungodly,

¹ These are the people who look askance at prayer-meetings in which lay folk take a part.

unrighteous dead. They advance—or recede, if the reader will have it so—from the narrower plane of brother-love to the broader one of general humanitarian love. Their contention is that, if prayer in the *post-mortem* connection be warrantable at all, poor hapless, possibly tormented, souls should be thought of sooner than those that are serenely passing onward from one high state of bliss to a higher and on to a higher still. They have convinced themselves that all mankind—all actually or virtually—will at length attain to eternal felicity. Speaking from their cheap, popular conception of the elements entering into the Divine love, their slogan is: the Father's love cannot ultimately be defeated.¹ There is a beneficent evolutionary process awaiting those unrighteous ones equally with the righteous. It is assumed by most of them as a settled point that the reformation needed is effected by a course of painful, punitive, purgative discipline, the alleviation or the more speedy successful termination of which the prayers of the living must surely serve to obtain.

As has been said, the earlier exponents used to wax righteously indignant at the imputation of having any wider purview than that of the righteous departed, the holy dead, in their prayers. But when, tacitly on this point, as formally on others, the *Lux Mundi* school of sacerdotalists from the 'eighties onward, gradually arrived at an *entente* with advanced "broad"-Church and other rationalist spokesmen, those found a break-fall for themselves in the use of the phrase "the faithful dead", a category which some could restrict to the righteous episcopalian dead, whilst the growing majority could include therein not only all listed members of duly episcopal communions, but even of baptised Christendom at large, yea, potentially all mankind at large, inasmuch as in the intermediate state everyone might conceivably become a godly episcopalian as an outcome of the evolutionary process there.

Now the idea of a *post-mortem* spiritual recovery or rectification is clearly out of harmony with New Testament doctrine—with the Apostolic warning as to the decisiveness of the present life, which is followed by a judgment based on "the deeds done in (by means of) the body"; with the Apostolic specification of "the redeemed out of the earth"; with the Epistle to

¹ The Calvinistic doctrine of the final preservation of the once sanctified elect is, forsooth, in their view subversive of the principle of moral freedom of the will as well as of general morality, but no logical difficulty or ethical danger attends the teaching of the final preservation of the totality of mankind!

the Hebrews' heralding of a peremptory "To-day" (equivalent to Paul's duplicated "Now"), and its enunciation of judgment as the only known sequel to death (2 Cor. v. 10; vi. 2; Rev. xiv. 3; Heb. iii. 13; ix. 27). It is antithetical to the gracious Saviour's metaphors of the confiscated talent, the pulverising falling stone, the workless night, the fixed gulf, the shut door.

It conflicts with the explicit sentiment of the sub-Apostolic or Primitive Church. The martyr Ignatius (writing to the Magnesians, A.D. 107) and the so-called Second Clement (A.D. 140) assume that the soul's state is irrevocably fixed by death. And Aristides, above mentioned, states that his Christian contemporaries would grieve bitterly if they saw one of their number die in ungodliness, and would feel sorrow as for one going to his doom.

The notion, again, that punitive discipline is bound to prove spiritually and morally transforming is devoid of corroboration whether in Scripture or in experience. In the appeal of Dives to Abraham horror or carnal fear is indeed exhibited, but no accession whatever of new spiritual enlightenment manifests itself; on the contrary, he is found casting doubt on the power and efficacy of God's Word, the Divinely appointed instrument of heart-conviction. To be chastised is not necessarily to be chastened. See Prov. xxvii. 22. Poignancy only too often results in moroseness, or else self-satisfiedness. "They blasphemed God because of their pains," Rev. xvi. 11. If punitive discipline be such an effective restorative, why was there ever redemption by Christ? are we to understand that the former succeeds where the latter has failed? And if it has been indeed Divinely designed, and is so truly calculated, to prove such a purgative, is it proper for us to seek with our ignorant prayers to interfere with the process?

Where in all Scripture doctrine or narrative can we find an atom of definite encouragement to proceed to prayer for the unrighteous dead? The more "natural" the advocates insist on its being, the harder becomes their task to explain its lack of Scriptural support. Aaron, for instance, "held his peace" when his loved sons were cut off in transgression (Lev. x. 3). In the stark poverty of their case the protagonists for this praying are reduced to seeking self-support from one of the barest of assumptions based on a highly debatable interpretation of one solitary and incidental passage (1 Pet. iii. 18, 19). To *one*, only one,

particular section of the deceased *Christ* is declared to have once *preached*: therefore for *all* sections and individuals of them *we* should *pray*! Amongst other expositors, Jerome, Augustine, Aquinas, Bede, Calmet, held that those preached to were living, in Noah's day; also "preach" is not the usual word in Greek for Gospel-preaching, and might more fairly be rendered "proclaim", the theme being perhaps His victory newly won over Satan and sin.

How comes it that we, the rest, must account ourselves bound to reckon those non-Romanists who promote this kind of supplication as, contrasted with our callous selves, paragons of pity, impelled from very tenderness to override in this concern all adverse considerations arising out of Scripture, history, or reason? The people who belaud Laud! The adepts at physical bullying who are again and again held up for glorification in the biography of the early Puseyite, "Father" C. Lowder!¹ Those whose legal advocate (afterwards a Lord of Appeal) before the Eccles. Discipline Commission of 1904-6, urged the propriety, whenever ideal conditions might supervene, of jailing laity who might disobey the directions of "the Church"!² The admirers of a late bishop of Zanzibar who bracketed "Dissenters" with "blasphemers", and pronounced it to be "God's will that no heretic should remain in my diocese unpunished"!³ The adorers of Newman who, according to Dean Inge, could show the cruellest spirit on earth!⁴ We need not either allow our own personal pity-emotion to be otherwise than Christianly regulated, or make capital out of that of others whether for power or pelf.⁵

V

In closing, let us bethink of how liable this kind of prayer must be to weaken (1) our sense of the jealousy demanded of us for the glory of God. The paramount motive in prayer is, as Scripture lays down, this concern for God's glory and honour (John xiv. 13; James iv. 3). We meet with the assertion that prayer for the dead is necessarily entailed as a consequence of Christ's promise in Matt. xviii. 19, "If two of you shall agree

¹ pp. 57, 241, 244.

² Ans. 1872.

³ *Holy Sacrifice*, pp. 12, 56.

⁴ *Outspoken Essays*, p. 178.

⁵ It may not be generally known that several, though as yet happily not a great number, of instances of monetary traffic in Masses for the dead, in Anglican connections, have been made public of late.

on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father." It is argued that, if parents have prayed for a son's conversion (or "spiritual welfare," as the latest exponent to hand prefers to put it) long and earnestly, as has many a time occurred, and he dies apparently unchanged, they *must* believe that this promise will be made good ultimately in the other world, and therefore they should continue with their praying.¹ But many a time the *primary* motive of a prayer is not the true, Divinely appointed one. The thing asked for may be one which it is perfectly proper to ask for and which God normally wills to give; yet the motive, though not by any means wrong or bad in itself, may not have risen to this Divinely required plane, may have been in the last analysis selfish, and so the prayer fails to be prevailing. We would so wish that our loved one should not be (whoever else may be) in the event of death, in danger of being "lost"; we would so wish him to be more in tow and sympathy with us here in life; yet we may never think of how God is being daily robbed of His due honour and service on that loved one's part. Christ's absolute prayer-promises are governed by this qualifying motive; they are also governed by the following qualifying condition of His; "If My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done" (John xv. 7). Do those words of His referred to above, about the fixed gulf, the shut door, etc., abide authoritatively in the mind of one who proceeds to pray for the dead; or are they anything other to him than ill-sounding bogeys? So, as the Psalmist says, the heart has first to be Divinely prepared for prayer, and then and only then God causes His ear to hear (x. 17). Yes, His sovereignty calls for some measure of recognition at our hands. The average promoters of this practice are attached to that school which would contend that God, the Almighty Maker of us all, must not elect or choose a soul known to Himself, for life eternal; it would be showing partiality and impairing morality; the privileged one would be almost certain to "live as he would list" down here. But a couple of humans are entitled to choose that a particular soul shall be saved (or have his "spiritual welfare" secured) for their mere asking—saved, after having lived as he listed here—saved, in another world where spiritual advance is so facile that virtually nobody fails of ultimate rectification! To put it all in a nut-

¹ C. I. Gazette, 30/8/40.

shell, the "loved relative", the stalking horse in this propaganda, fills the entire perspective, whilst God in Christ fades away into an abstraction.

Let us bethink of how liable it must be to weaken (2) our sense of responsibility for maintaining an outspoken testimony against ungodliness. In all true *bona fide* intercession for the souls of others, there is presupposed a concurrent personal endeavour to influence for good the person prayed for, through example and testimony. "I have given them Thy word," said our Lord, as He poured forth his great intercessory prayer of John xvii. The prophet Samuel likewise asserted this principle, 1 Sam. xii. 23. See also Ps. lxxi. 12-18. But it is an unpopular procedure, and apt to oust one out of the good graces of many, if and when things have to be said which are conducive to conscience-fear. Nay, those who are impelled to utter things thus unpalatable and unwelcome, however needful, will never be recognised as "spiritual" by the sentimental type of pietist, Evangelical or other—although the Apostle when he addressed Elymas so scathingly did so as an outcome of being "filled with the Holy Ghost" (Acts xiii. 8, 9). So it becomes vastly easier and smoother to let such a duty slide, and, should anyone to whom it has been owed slip out of life, to murmur or join in murmuring nebulous prayers then for his departed soul. In a duly sentimental atmosphere praying for the dead is likely to be reckoned much more "beautiful" and "impressive" than the commonplace and prosaic praying for the living. How rarely nowadays we hear preachers warning against trust in a death-bed repentance! And yet Scripture affords at least one definite and explicit instance of its efficacy, which is more than can be said for *post-mortem* prayer for "loved relatives" and friends. For that matter, we would know of the anti-Calvinist guardians of Divine equity what there is to be said regarding the poor spiritually ill-faring soul that has *no* loving and praying relatives and friends here, when he departs to where, to judge from Revelation, evangelistic witness hardly obtains.

And let us bethink of how liable it must be to weaken (3) the unrenewed sinner's (potential) sense of the urgency of the Gospel call to repentance and to self-committal and loyalty to Christ. Encouragement must be thereby afforded to careless livers to conceive that there are facile proxy ways and means whereby their position before a neglected God may haply be

rectified after gay life is over. There is the instance of the person who had openly and persistently co-operated in her husband's habitual non-attendance at the ordinary means of grace, sending, on the occurrence of his sudden death, for the local pastor, and, when he did not on arrival at once flop down on his knees to offer up prayer for the departed soul, upbraiding him in pious surprise and indignation. "Pray ye to the Lord for me," said Simon Magus, delegatingly, "that none of these things come upon me." (Acts viii. 24.) "Have mercy on the fallen" was the episcopally recommended formula in the Kaiser war and at the start of the Hitler war; if expedient, this could be represented as covering only those who "made the supreme sacrifice"; but it was well understood that wives, mothers, etc., considered that they could all naturally claim some share in the benison; and now, since air-raids developed, what individual may not blithely claim to be a potential participant in it and thoughtlessly lean upon it? People are being urged to pray vaguely for the dead in a day when they are praying less and less for their living selves and others, with all their many obvious and definite needs. Are they not, each of them, being encouraged thus to expect that somehow others will "give them of their oil" when their lamps go out?

J. WARREN.

Dublin.