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

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

Prayer for the Departed

BY ARTHUR BENNETT

THE twentieth century has seen widespread development of prayers for the dead in public worship. They have appeared in the revised prayer books of South Africa 1920, England 1928, America 1929, and, under the 1966 Alternative Services Measure, have for the first time since the Reformation been legally included in the Church of England liturgy, albeit optional and experimental.

It is readily agreed that such prayers are ancient and have appeared in Christian literature from Tertullian's time (A.D. 180), that they are in all early liturgies, that they can be separated from a doctrine of purgatory (a view Roman Catholics find difficult to accept¹), that there is an Anglican tradition of their private use, that they have been included in semi-official forms of service, and that emotive concepts and philosophic pragmatism may offer grounds of support. But it is questionable whether their present use in the new forms of worship proposed by the Archbishops' Liturgical Commission can be historically and theologically justified. It must be asked, 'Do such prayers for the departed conform with Scripture and with the doctrine of the Church of England?' In its new Canons the Church has re-emphasised a classical and fundamental Anglican principle that its theology must be based on Scripture, and on the Fathers only insofar as their teaching accords with Scripture.² Further, the Liturgical Commission has admitted that prayers for the dead is 'the chief theological question involved' in the new Burial Service.³ It is therefore necessary to consider (1) the doctrine and practice of the Church of England since the Reformation, (2) the teaching of Scripture.

DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

The view is widely held that nowhere does the Church of England forbid prayer for the dead and that what is not condemned is allowed.⁴ The force of this argument is derived from the omission of a phrase in Article 22 when it appeared in 1553 and from the *BREEKS v WOODLEY* judgement of 1839.

Article 22 *On Purgatory* formed part of a Book of Articles which Edward VI in 1551 ordered Cranmer to compile. This he did with the help of Ridley, and possibly Latimer.⁵ In October 1552 they were examined and signed by six royal chaplains, including Grindal and Knox, and, after Cranmer's final revision, they received the king's mandate on 19 June, 1553. They never came before Convocation, and 'there was considerable resistance [to them] and the Archbishop's first attempt to impose them in May 1553 failed'.⁶ Article 22 of those signed by the chaplains had included the phrase *de precatioe pro defunctis* but this had disappeared when the Articles were authorised by royal writ. It has been said that 'the omission of the condemnation of prayer for the departed was deliberate and designed'.⁷ Gibson thought it 'highly significant, as it shows that the Church of England deliberately abstained from seeming to express any condemnation of the practice

of praying for the departed, and that it is impossible to strain the words of this article on Purgatory to indicate such a condemnation'.⁹

This is an unwarranted assumption, for the omission must be assessed by the Reformer's treatment of such prayer in other spheres, and it is impossible to know who deleted the phrase and for what purpose. The 1552 Prayer Book had by law already abolished prayers for the dead, so that the leading Reformers were committed to their non-use. If prohibition means condemnation, it is hardly possible that the deletion of the disputed phrase from Article 22 suggests that Cranmer condoned such prayers. It is more likely that the Council was responsible, either in the interests of popular devotion, or because the phrase was tautologous. The Articles had been considerably amended or reduced, and in his Oxford disputation, April 1554, Cranmer complained of the Council's interference.⁹ By witnessing the king's signature on the mandate Cranmer acquiesced in the omission of the phrase, but if thereby he thought public or private prayer for the dead legitimate why did he have to recant disallowing such a belief in his submission to Mary?¹⁰ Excising the words from the Article proves nothing.

Sir Herbert Jenner Fust fastened on this omission in giving his *BREEKS v WOODLEY* judgment in the Court of Arches in 1839. The case arose out of the erection of a tombstone in Carisbrooke churchyard on which were inscribed the words 'Pray for the soul of J. Woodley', followed by a quotation from 2 Maccabees 12: 45. The Rev. J. Brecks, Incumbent, took exception and entered an action in the courts. In giving judgment Sir H. J. Fust ruled 1. Prayer for the dead does not necessarily constitute part of the doctrine of Purgatory . . . if it did the court would have to order the removal of the tombstone and censure the donor. 2. Although the Church of England discourages such prayer, it does not prohibit it, and therefore there is no violation of Article 22.

Protagonists of prayer for the dead have made much of this judgment as a leading case but have ignored the serious criticisms to which it lies open. In the first place, the issue was concerned with words on a tombstone and not with public prayer. *The Solicitor's Journal* (16 January, 1875) fastened on this point and said, 'It is one thing to allow such an inscription to be placed on a monument in a churchyard, and quite another to allow prayers for the dead to be used during the services of a church. . . . Any advocate who should attempt to justify such prayers in the church service on the authority of *BREEKS v WOODLEY* would find he had undertaken a hopeless task.'¹¹

The judge must also have been aware of Sir Charles Bridges' ruling in *WEST v SHUTTLEWORTH* of 1835 that it is unlawful to will money to a Priest for prayer for the dead. That his judgment was restrictive was made clear in *EGERTON v ALL OF RODE* (26 October, 1893) when Chancellor Espin in Chester Consistory Court refused to use it in considering the placing of a similar inscription in the church of All Saints, Rode. 'It does not belong to a court of the first instance,' he said, 'to do what the formularies of the church have abstained from doing.' And he pointed out that Fust 'did not directly sanction the inscription before him, he only refused to order the tombstone which

bore it to be removed. It does not appear that he would himself have authorised the inscription if asked to do so.'

It is significant that the Bishops of that day did not regard the judgment (which was never appealed against) as permitting prayers for the dead. The high-churchman, Bishop Blomfield of London ignored it in his 1850 charge against such intercessions, and reprimanded the Rev. W. H. Bennett, who in 1849 had printed and circulated *private* forms of prayer including prayers for the dead, on the ground that 'prayer for the departed is put aside and not approved by our Church', and that *BREEKS v WOODLEY* had 'no weight' with him.¹³ Bishop Christopher Wordsworth commenting in 1873 on Fust's argument that 'prayers for the dead are nowhere expressly forbidden by the Church of England', added, 'But with due deference to those who hold this opinion, it may be replied that the *Silence* of Holy Scripture as to the use of such prayers, and the *Omission* of such prayers from the Litany of the Church of England, are tantamount to *Prohibitions* of them to us, who hold the sufficiency of Scripture, and are dutiful members of the Church of England.'¹⁴

In considering what substance there is in the claim that omission does not mean prohibition, attention must be given to the period in which the English Prayer Books arose. It has been stated that Cranmer and Udall in answer to the Western rebels distinguished between purgatory and prayer for the dead and agreed that the latter was allowable.¹⁵ But their words mean no more than that these prayers were retained in the 1549 Book, not that they assented to them. With other Reformers, they regarded the Book as an unsatisfactory compromise, and three years later excised every instance that could be construed in a Romish direction.

Capital has also been made out of the 1552 Act of Uniformity, 5 and 6 Edward c. 1., which declared that the liturgy of 1549 'was agreeable to the Word of God and the primitive church', and that it was the 'curiosity of ministers and mistakers' which cast doubts upon it.¹⁶ This would mean that prayer for the dead did not contravene Scripture. But it needs to be remembered that in the circumstances of 1549 changes in public worship had to be minimal, hence the apologetic language of the Act. Contextually, the phrase 'agreeable to the Word of God', does not refer to doctrine or practice but to divine service in the mother tongue as being 'a very godly order'. Its substance is almost identical with that of Article 24 and the first proposition of the parliamentary debate in Westminster Abbey (31 March, 1548). Further, the 'minister and mistakers' must refer to the Catholic bishops and the 'sesqui-conforming Romish incumbents who claimed the sanction of the reformed service book for as much Roman doctrine as their ingenuity could infuse into it'.¹⁷ For if the authors of the 1549 Book thought that prayers for the dead were agreeable to the Word of God, why did they delete them from the 1552 Liturgy? The text of the Act states, that the use and exercise of the 1549 Book had occasioned such doubts that a revision was necessary in order to make it more perfect.¹⁸

This motive was exemplified in the Eucharistic 'Great Intercession' where the most drastic changes were the omission of prayer for the

departed and the inclusion of the words 'militant here in earth'—'which thus restricted the prayer to the living'.¹⁸ This was added at Bucer's suggestion to counter the impression that the dead in Christ were not at peace and 'to show that prayer for the dead was intentionally excluded'.¹⁹ Bishop Jewel and others accepted the phrase in this light. 'It was designed expressly to exclude [such prayer]. It was the intention of the divines who made this alteration, to denote that prayers are not to be offered up for the dead, whose spiritual warfare is already accomplished.'²⁰ An attempt was made in 1662 to delete the words, and prayer for the dead was inserted in the revised book, but Convocation rejected both, and instead added a short commemoration of the dead in the prayer for the Church. Their proposals have found a place in most Prayer Books of the Anglican Communion, and are now part of the Intercession in the Series II Communion service. Modern revisers have thus triumphed where Elizabeth I failed, for it was her intention that prayer for the dead should be inserted in the restored book of 1559, and Cecil conveyed her wishes to Guest, later Bishop of Rochester. He replied that such prayers were 'of dangerous tendency' and in his *Explanations* argued that 'Ceremonies once taken away, as evil used, should not be taken again' of which 'praying for the dead in the Communion' was one.²¹

Attempts have been made to make ambiguous the plain language of the Liturgy. Dix argues that the phrase 'with them we may be' in the Church Militant prayer is 'a hesitant prayer about the dead . . . which just succeeds in being a prayer *for* them'.²² But the phrase is a statement about the departed and a prayer for the living. The prayer is not 'we *and* all they', as in 1549, but '*with* them we'. It is a prayer asking God that we may be gathered with them. The grace prayed for is for us, not for the departed.

It is likewise difficult to see how two Archbishops could inform the Pope that the words in the oblation prayer 'we and all Thy whole Church' included the Church Expectant.²³ Seventeen years later Archbishop Davidson took an entirely different view when in a war-time sermon he said, 'It cannot be said that in their context they necessarily have that meaning.'²⁴ In any case, the 'Church' is limited by the earlier phrase 'militant here in earth'.

That the compilers of the Prayer Book were not designedly ambiguous in framing prayer is clear from the alteration of a phrase in the Burial service. In 1549 the words ran, 'both we, *And* this our brother departed'. In 1552 they were altered to 'that we, *With* this our brother'. The preposition change is very significant. But to remove all ambiguity the phrase was altered in 1662 to 'that we, with all those that are departed'. This is commemoration not commendation, but in general, not precise terms. Like the limiting words 'militant here in earth', it was designed 'to show that the Church not only did not practise intercession for the dead; but carefully excluded it'.²⁵

Elizabeth's 1559 Primer is said to have authorised prayer for the dead. It is well known that the Queen desired a more Catholic worship than her advisers were prepared to allow, and that her wish to reintroduce prayer for the dead in the public liturgy was not granted.²⁶ But Primers were different. As books of private devotion they gave

greater liberty of expression. Yet her Primer contains no direct prayers for the dead. It goes beyond that of Edward VI, but its petitions are quite different from the 1545 Primer, prayer for remission of sins and the purification of the departed being displaced by entreaties that the deceased might 'be graciously brought into the joys everlasting' and that God would 'bestow (their souls) in the country of peace and rest'. The prayers are general, not particular. It is sometimes held that the *Dirge* was used publicly in St. Paul's on the death of Henry II of France (1559), and on that of Emperor Ferdinand (1564), thus giving official sanction to public prayer for the dead. But as to the former the Records of State Funerals record the service as one of praise not of prayer for a dead king, and in the latter Grindal mentioned in his sermon that some complained 'here was no prayer for the soul of Ferdinandus'.²⁷

An examination of Bidding Prayers carries much force. There is a significant change in Latimer's prayer before sermon. In a Convocation sermon (9 June, 1536) he bade prayer for the dead. But in his Stamford sermon (9 November, 1550) he commended to the congregation (not to God) 'the souls departed this life in the faith of Christ', and urged praise for God's goodness shewed unto them; a Bidding Prayer quite different from that of Gardiner, preaching before the king the same year who said, 'And I shall desire you to commend unto God with your prayers the souls departed unto God in Christ's faith . . . most especially for our late Sovereign Lord King Henry VIII.' A change was also seen in Elizabeth's Bidding Prayer of 1559 from that of Edward's in 1547 in that praise for the dead displaced prayer. This was retained in the 1603 Canons and in the new Draft Canons.²⁸

The Homilies not only cast light on the mind and intention of the English reformers but also together with the Thirty Nine Articles establish the doctrine of the Church of England.²⁹ The Homily on prayer is a direct condemnation of prayer for the dead. The author, assumed to be Bishop Jewel, has been charged with confusing such prayer with purgatory and that he is really condemning the latter. But there is no evidence that he was bedevilled by this connection. He, with his fellow reformers, knew the Fathers, the ancient liturgies, the custom of the Eastern Church, and the medieval doctrine of purgatory, and in his Homily he makes a clear distinction between the two objects of prayer. He isolates prayer for the dead from that of purgatory and bids men 'not to dream any more that the souls of the dead are anything at all holpen by our prayers'. In his view prayer is 'for the saints of this world . . . and for all men living'!

If the Homilies contain 'wholesome and godly doctrine' (Article 35) and one of them condemns prayer for the dead, is not the reintroduction of such prayer in public Liturgy indicative of a departure from the doctrine of the Church of England? It seems surprising that the Established Church can strongly disapprove of these prayers by withdrawing them from its public worship, disclaim against them in its Homilies, and condemn them by its Reformers and yet be thought to allow them as of godly order. The matter is not as open a question as the Lambeth Conference of 1958 assumed, for how can the Church

tolerate that which it has declined? In the Parliamentary Debate of 1548 all parties recognised the principle that omission meant prohibition. Even Pusey agreed in connection with prayer for the dead that a practice withdrawn after having been once used had no need of express prohibition, and that it was not to be 'rashly and indiscriminately revived'.³⁰ To argue otherwise would justify anything a clergyman could do.

Bishop T. W. Drury well sums up the evidence when he says, 'All direct and explicit prayers for the dead have been deliberately excluded from our public services since 1552, and the proposal to restore such prayers in 1662 was rejected. The statement that such prayers are *Nowhere Forbidden* is a very partial one, and the assertion that they were publicly used in Elizabeth's reign has been disproved.'³¹ He might have added that during her reign some divines set their face rigidly against any suggestion that even *private* prayer for the departed was legitimate. Archbishop Grindal, for example, in his 1571 Injunctions for his York Province, and in those of 1576 for Canterbury condemned them as 'superstitious ceremonies', and in his Visitation Articles limited the use of the passing bell to move people to pray for the dying person, and to cease at his death except for a short peal before and after the burial, thus suggesting that prayer is of no avail once death has occurred.³²

This is not to deny that Anglicans have used such prayers outside the Acts of Uniformity.³³ But a distinction has been made between public worship and private devotion. Bishop Andrews *Form of Dedication of a Church and Churchyard* is no exception, for his prayer is for those who are to rest in that place (the living) and not for those already dead. In 1900 the Bishops were unanimous that prayer for the dead must not be allowed in the public services of the church.³⁴ As in 1897 and 1898, forms of prayer, including one for the fallen, were in that year issued for the South African War, and Bishops, like Creighton, had produced their own. But their sensitiveness to this issue may be gathered from Archbishop F. Temple's nervous reply to Lord Kinnaird in the House of Lords (9 March, 1900) and to Randall Davidson's hot denial that he had prayed such prayers privately with Queen Victoria.³⁵ When Davidson, as Archbishop, was later taken to task by Bishops Chavasse of Liverpool and Knox of Manchester for issuing similar prayers in 1917 he replied that he could not sanction them for liturgical use, and that nothing must depart a hair breadth from the Prayer Book.³⁶

That Anglican Bishops, including evangelicals like Moule and Pollock, have used forms of prayer for the departed in private devotion, and that popular books of prayer (as that of the well known evangelical, Canon F. Colquhoun's *Parish Prayers*) set them forth is granted. But all these are devoid of statutory authority, and it would have been well for the Church had it heeded Bishop Stubbs' warning that clergy using their legal freedom should use it lawfully, and strictly confine themselves to the language of the Prayer Book 'which is amply sufficient for public utterance'.³⁷

On historical grounds it may therefore be taken that prayer for the dead indicates a departure in the doctrine and practice of the Church

of England in that all along it has been prohibited from the public liturgy and has not been officially authorised for use in the services of the church.

PRAYER FOR THE DEAD CONTRARY TO SCRIPTURE

Supporters of prayer for the dead rarely appeal to Scripture. Ancient liturgies, early Christian literature, Anglican divines from Andrews to Temple, the Liturgical Commission, all largely bypass the Word of God. Yet in prayer, as in other Christian duties, that must be its substance which is revealed and declared by the divine will. 'It belongs to God,' says Calvin, 'to prescribe what He wishes us to ask, (and) since the whole Law and Gospel do not contain one syllable which countenances the right of praying for the dead, it is a profanation of prayer to go one step farther than God enjoins.'³⁹ It is one thing to say such prayer is primitive, it is another to say it is scriptural. 'If we cleave only to the Word of God,' say the Homilies, 'we have no commandment so to do.'⁴⁰

As there is no commandment in canonical scripture to pray for the departed so there is no example. It is argued that 'remembrance in a prayer to God follows abundant biblical precedent'.⁴¹ Hence the Convocations' acceptance of the prayer 'Remember those who have died in faith and grant us with them a share in Thy eternal kingdom'.⁴² It is true that there are many prayers in Scripture in which God is asked to remember a person or a situation either by recalling to mind, keeping in mind, or doing something on behalf of, as the case of Samson or the dying thief, but in every instance the object prayed for is mundane. There is no example of a prayer asking God to remember a departed soul. There were situations, as at Thessalonica, where, in face of bereavement and perplexity, prayer for the dead would have been natural. But Scripture is silent.

Further, it is a wholly false assumption that Christ must have used such prayers in Synagogue worship. There is no conclusive evidence that in His day prayer for the dead formed part of the Jewish liturgy, though 'they were a widespread feature of late Judaism'.⁴³ If He used them why did He not give command or example in the Gospel? He taught much about His Second Coming, and gave many hints of the nature of life after death, but He is silent about prayer for the deceased. The one case of misguided zeal (2 Macc. 12: 43-45) could hardly have created a liturgical pattern for Palestinian Judaism, for orthodox Jewry (as the Church of England) regarded the Apocrypha uncanonical and 'of no authority in establishing doctrine' (Jerome). If a distinction must be made between prayer for the dead and purgatory the action of Judas Maccabeus may be pressed into the service of the latter and not the former.

Is Paul's pious wish for Onesiphorus (2 Tim 1: 18) prayer for the dead? To Mandell Creighton and his fellow Bishops 'this was the only passage in Scripture which can be held to bear upon that point'.⁴⁴ But Bishop Walsham How had earlier warned that the text can 'only by the most forced construction be cited as a prayer for the dead. . . . To build a whole system on this passage is to build a pyramid on a point'.⁴⁵ That Paul's friend was dead is only a probable assumption.

But even if he were deceased it is dangerous logic to argue from the particular to the universal. There is here no reference to an intermediate state, or growth, or well-being. It is not a direct petition for Onesiphorus, and it would be, says W. F. Boyd, 'an undue pressing of the text to regard [it] as more than a pious wish.'⁴⁵

Use has sometimes been made of the Corinthian practice of baptism for the dead (1 Cor 15: 22), but Stauffer goes beyond the evidence in holding that Paul conceived it as an act of intercession for the dead analogous to the Jewish *Oblatio Pro Defunctis*.⁴⁶ It is not clear whether Paul agreed with the practice or whether at that time the Jews practised oblation obsequies. Far from being a vicarious baptism of an *opus operatum* kind, there are about thirty explanations of the expression 'baptised for the dead'.⁴⁷ To single out one in an act later practised by the heretical Cerinthians and Marcionites and to make it a plank of Christian prayers for the dead is to rest a doctrine on a leaf. It is safer to admit that 'The darkness which rests on this passage can never be entirely cleansed away, because the reference is to a custom of which no account is extant.'⁴⁸

It remains to ask, If Scripture has neither command nor example of prayer for the dead may not such prayer be agreeable to the Word of God? This is a justifiable Anglican principle, as in the baptism of infants (Article 27) or in ceremonies (Article 34). But it needs to be shown that such intercession does not run counter to the main thrust of its teaching on the after life. It is often argued that prayers for the dead are prayers of ignorance, for no one knows the state of the departed. It is true that Scripture is more concerned with the Second Coming of Christ than with life after death. But the New Testament has a good deal to say about the state of the deceased. Its teaching divides into two broad streams, 1. at death the soul enters the sleep of rest to await the resurrection day, 2. at death the souls of the faithful are transformed by supernatural grace in order to be with Christ in conscious perfection and felicity. The weight of Scripture is behind the latter view—the soul is 'absent from the body . . . present with the Lord', 'with Christ,' 'to-day, with Me in Paradise,' 'blessed *Are* the dead which died in the Lord.' The soul's privilege of being present with Christ after death does not depend upon some future resurrection when soul and body are reunited. It was this hope that made Laud pray on his scaffold, 'Lord, I am coming as fast as I can.'

In spite of the third century appearance of prayer for the dead this was the drift of thought in the early church. 'The faithful departed Possess the region of the godly' (Clement of Rome). They are in 'a certain better place' (Justin Martyr). Paradise is 'a place of divine pleasantness' (Tertullian). And Cyprian adds, 'It is for him to fear death who is unwilling to go to Christ'.⁴⁹ That at death the soul enters the heavenly state where Christ is (Hebrews 11: 13-16, Phil 3: 20, 1 Pet 1: 4, Acts 7: 55, 59), is in constant sight of Him (John 17: 24, 1 Cor 13: 12, Matt 5: 8) and dwells in the same blessed state with Christ and His angels (Matt 22: 30) is the teaching of the Homilies and the 1662 Prayer Book. The latter holds the doctrine that there is an immediacy of bliss and perfection at the moment of death. In the Visitation of the Sick it is prayed that the soul being washed in

the blood of the Lamb, its sin 'purged and done away, it may be presented pure and without spot before Thee'. It is 'after this painful life ended' that the soul 'dwells with Thee in life everlasting'. Christians live with God 'after they are delivered from their earthly prisons'. When the soul departs from the body it is 'without spot presented unto Thee'. The Burial and other services express the same thoughts.⁶⁰

These biblically rooted truths stem from four main principles.

1. Eternal issues are determined in the sphere of earthly life.
2. At death the soul's destiny is irrevocably fixed.
3. Christ alone is sufficient for salvation.
4. Christian assurance rests upon the doctrine of justification by faith.

It is chiefly at the latter point that prayer for the dead violates Scripture. This doctrine is offensive to protagonists of such prayer and their unwillingness to accept the plain teaching of Articles 9 to 18 commits them to views of progress and purification in an intermediate state. It is surely naive to suggest that to forbid prayers for the dead foists on the Church of England 'a particular doctrine of salvation which has never been part of the official teaching of the Church of England.'⁶¹ The same speaker admitted that the doctrine of assurance is at stake, of which, he said, at the present time there is no agreement in the Church. Once grant the Johannine and Pauline teaching that eternal life as a realised gift is unaffected by death, it is difficult to see what purpose there is in praying for that the soul already possesses, or for growth in conformity to Christ if at death the soul enters its glorious blessedness.

To argue as did the 1958 Lambeth Conference that Scripture is inconclusive on this subject, and that its silence leaves room for prayer for the dead, or to hold as does the Liturgical Commission that such practice is not obnoxious to Scripture is to fly in the face of evidence. It is true that the Bible never says 'Thou shalt not pray for the dead', but its teaching on justification and on the after life robs the negative argument of positive force.

It is doubtful, too, whether a valid distinction can be made between public and private prayer for the dead. For if a Christian duty is prohibited in one sphere, it is surely disallowed in the other, as the case with public and private morals. This is accepted by some who press for prayer for the dead in public worship on the ground that prayer should not be divided. It is held that the consciences of those who engage in such private prayers would be eased if they were given statutory force in the church's services. But if the Church pronounced against prayer for the dead many people would be given a sense of guilt when they prayed in these forms, and consciences would be hurt.⁶² A good deal of sympathy is aroused by this view. But it is questionable whether objective truth can be based on subjective pragmatism. This holds true of public worship. If it is not to be an empty show, it must express doctrine. Emotive judgments are an insecure foundation on which to legitimise liturgical practices that are outside the categories of Scripture. Both private and public prayer for the departed must be justified by the Word of God. If that cannot be done, there is no room for division. Theologically they stand or fall together.

This argument is a new dress for an old fact. The origin of prayer for the dead as it emerged in Christian literature and liturgy in the third century A.D. is to be found in men's fancies inflamed by pagan and Jewish rites. They were a christianising of the pagan sacrifice of the dead transmuted into a eucharistic anamnesis of the departed. Their Jewish influence is traced to the pictorial representations of Old Testament deliverances on Christian tombs.⁵³ At first they were no more than simple prayers that the soul might be a partaker of the first resurrection, and were more a commemoration than a commendation. Particularisation came later with the development of martyrology and Diptychs of the dead. That such prayer was not always readily accepted is evident from Cyril of Jerusalem's apology in his Liturgy of A.D. 348. Many people, he says, ask, 'if a man leave this world in sin, what is the good of remembering him in prayer?' He meets this by the case of a king who has banished men with whom he is angry, but is appeased by gifts from their friends. So prayer for the dead propitiates God on their behalf.⁵⁴ This sentiment is far removed from the catacomb inscriptions at Rome where the phrase is invariably *Quiescit* (he rests), not *Requiescat* (may he rest). The earliest have *Dormit in Pace* (sleeps in peace). The Christian dead are said to 'live in God', to be 'a sweet soul in refreshment', to 'sparkle in Heaven'.⁵⁵ The catacombs state a fact; they do not deprecate. Deference to public custom, rash credulity, and ignorance carried the Church of the Fathers into error.⁵⁶ And it is to this church rather than to Scripture that the supporters of prayer for the dead turn.

Two further points are to be noted. 1. Prayer for the dead is said to be bound up with the doctrine of the Communion of Saints and failure to use such prayers weakens this article of the Creed, while it opens the door to spiritism. Intercession for the departed receives fresh impetus during war time, though generally such prayers depart from those of the early church in that they embrace all the fallen, not the faithful only.⁵⁷ Spiritism, too, takes a leap forward. But it cannot be assumed that failure of the one leads to success of the other. If that were so, why was spiritism quiescent during the centuries after the Reformation when prayer for the dead was little practised? At a time of bereavement it is human to pray 'for those we love but see no longer'. But naturalism is no ground of truth. Further, the phrase 'Communion of Saints', need not be understood as fellowship between the Church Triumphant and the Church Militant; in fact, the 1662 Prayer Book uses it of the latter. Earlier, Edward VI Primer defined the Church as 'an assembly of men called to everlasting salvation . . . gathered and governed by the Holy Ghost . . . universal because it is bound to no one special place. For God throughout all coasts of the world hath them that worship Him.' Having one Spirit, faith, sacraments, forgiveness of sins, they are knit in love, held to each other, and built together in Christ. This is the Communion of Saints. It may be too narrow a mould for modern thought. But a wider view need not involve prayer for departed saints. Concern that deceased Christians should share in Christ's return was in one sense such a Communion at Thessalonica. It is legitimate to hold as did English Puritans and New England Divines, that the departed retain an intense

interest in the fortunes of the Church on earth.⁵⁸ This is a Communion of Saints from the other side of death. Neither view demands prayer for or from them.

2. Prayer for the dead is held to be no more than a continuance of the love held for them when living on earth. If, by implication, this means that those who cannot use such prayers have ceased to love their dear ones departed, it is an unworthy aspersion. Rather do they love them more, knowing they are with Christ. Praise displaces prayer. They agree with Hooker that nature requires such love to the deceased, but not necessarily prayer.⁵⁹

If prayer for the dead is an expression of love the difficulty is to know what to pray when they are seeing the face of Christ. It is a doctrine of determinism to say that prayer for the dead is only asking for God's good things that He has already promised to give, and need not be based on a sense of need. This narrows the purpose of prayer as it is known in Scripture. If God has decided to give that which He has promised, why pray? This is to confuse the ground of prayer with its function. Granted that 'prayer is not supplications of doubt, but acts of faith in God's love to do for them what He can do',⁶⁰ then intercession must give way to praise. In this case God is to be thanked for promising to give the faithful departed what He has decided. Prayer is based upon the providence of God. But it is necessary to distinguish between His general providence by which He acts through His laws, and His particular providence by which He can interfere with His laws. To say that prayer for the dead is only a loving acknowledgement of God's will, as William Temple held, leaves entirely aside the whole range of circumstantial prayer, and with it most cases of biblical intercession. It is precisely here that the thesis breaks down, for in but few cases prayer for the dead is particular, direct, and anticipatory. It is so to the Roman and Eastern Christians. It is not less so to the Church of England members who practise it.

Those who reject prayer for the dead on scriptural, theological and historical grounds would press for the following:

1. Commendation of the faithful departed to the deleted from all forms of public services.

2. Commemoration of the faithful departed to be made compulsory in the Holy Communion 'Great Intercession', in the Burial Service, and in the Litany.

3. If it is desired to remember the dead, the phrase to run 'Let us remember by name before the Lord' . . . and not 'Let us commend to the Lord'.

4. Provision may be made in forms of prayer for a period of silence when the faithful departed are commemorated in order that any worshipper may particularise if desired. There is nothing new in such a pause between the bidding and the collect. It formed part of the 'prayers of the faithful' in the early liturgical synaxis.⁶¹

5. Modern preaching to give increased attention to the biblical theology of life after death.

¹ See *A Catholic Dictionary*, p. 705—Addis and Arnold 1916, and *The Controversial Discussion*, p. 375 between Cumming and French—1839.

² Draft Canon A. 5. cp., 'We should not therefore think it true because they (the Fathers) say so . . . but if they are able to prove their saying by the canonical Scriptures'. St. Augustine. Quoted by Latimer in his prison Conference with Ridley—*The Oxford Reformers*, by G. F. Bridges, 1908, and 'That is the very touchstone which must, yea, and always will, try all doctrine or learning, whatever it be, whether it be good or evil, true or false'. (Cranmer). Quoted in *Cranmer's Selected Writings*, 1961.

³ *Alternative Services*, Second Series, p. 106.

⁴ See W. Stubbs *Visitation Charges*, p. 322, 1904, *Memoirs of F. Temple*, Vol. II, p. 357 (1906), Bell's *Randall Davidson*, Vol. II, p. 830 (1935), and B. Pollocks, *A Twentieth Century Bishop*, p. 103 (1945).

⁵ R. Demaus, *Hugh Latimer*, p. 464 (1904).

⁶ P. Hughes, *The Reformation in England*, Vol. I, p. 135 (1963), and see J. Lewis, *The Reformation Settlement*, p. 128 ff. (1885).

⁷ Dr. P. Welsby in *Theology*, June 1966, p. 247.

⁸ *The Thirty Nine Articles of Religion*, p. 538 (1898).

⁹ A clause was omitted from Article 21 and Article 35 was modified.

¹⁰ 'It was the sovereign's command that made it almost impossible for Cranmer to refuse to sign the papers . . . the effect of "the recantations" depended on the meaning of the terms used, and everyone knew the meanings which he had attached to the words all throughout his public life.' T. M. Lindsay, *A History of the Reformation*, Vol. II, p. 380 f. (1907).

¹¹ Quoted in W. Walsh's *History of the Romeward Movement in the Church of England*, p. 128 (1900).

¹² For the BREEKS v WOODLEY judgement see C. P. S. Clarke, *The Oxford Movement and After* (1932), p. 141 ff., and W. Walsh, *The Romeward Movement in the Church of England*, pp. 125-132.

¹³ *Twelve Visitation Addresses* (1873), p. 124 f.

¹⁴ Liturgical Commission, *Alternative Services (Second Series)*, pp. 101, 105.

¹⁵ Dr. P. A. Welsby, *Theology*, June 1966, p. 245 f.

¹⁶ J. F. Tomlinson, *The Great Parliamentary Debate of 1548*, p. 19. For the Act of Uniformity 1552 see his *Articles and Homilies*, pp. 18-21 (1896).

¹⁷ cp., 'The Rebellions of 1549 were not inspired by theological passion. The theological controversies were difficult and obscure, beyond the mental grasp of country clergy and peasants.' Sir M. Powicke, *The Reformation in England* (1963), p. 96.

¹⁸ Lowther Clarke, *Liturgy and Worship* (1932), p. 324.

¹⁹ E. Daniel, *The Prayer Book* (1905), p. 359. See also C. Wheatley, *A Rational Introduction* (1845), p. 276 ff., and Bishop B. Pollock, *Ibid.*, p. 102.

²⁰ W. F. Hook, *Church Dictionary* (1864), p. 278.

²¹ E. Cardwell, *Conferences on the Book of Common Prayer* (1841), pp. 49 and 52. See also C. S. Carter, *The English Church and the Reformation* (1925), p. 199.

²² *Shape of the Liturgy* (1960), p. 660.

²³ *Doctrine in the Church of England* (1938), p. 215 f.

²⁴ Sermon on 2 November 1914 quoted in G. Thomas, *The Principles of Theology* (1930), p. 517.

²⁵ E. Cardwell, *Documentary Annals*, Vol. I (1839), p. 21.

²⁶ Harford and Stevenson, *The Prayer Book Dictionary* (1916), p. 275.

²⁷ 'Even Cox refused at one time to officiate in her private chapel because of its ornaments. Both Sandys and Jewel opposed her in this matter, to the point of nearly losing their bishoprics.' M. M. Knappen, *Tudor Puritanism* (1965), p. 171.

²⁸ For the history and content of Bidding Prayers see B. Harrison, *The True Interpretation of the Rubrics*, 190-228 and Archdeacon Sharp's *The Rubric and the Canons* (1753), pp. 169-195.

²⁹ Archdeacon Sharp, *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁰ Letter to the Bishop of Oxford, p. 132.

³¹ *Prayer Book Dictionary*, p. 275.

³² E. Cardwell, *Documentary Annals*, Vol. I, pp. 22 and 400. Cp., James I's reprimand of Bishop Neal, later Archbishop of York, for preaching popery in that he taught people to pray for his deceased predecessor. Quoted in *The American Puritans*. Ed. P. Miller, 1956, p. 233.

³³ See objection 7 of the committee of learned divines appointed by the House

of Lords in 1641 touching innovations in the doctrine and liturgy of the Church of England complaining that some ministers have introduced prayer for the dead in sermons and discussions. E. Cardwell, *Conferences on the Book of Common Prayer* (1841), p. 271.

³⁴ See *Life and Letters of Bishop B. F. Westcott*, Vol. II (1903), p. 348 f., *Frederick Temple*, Vol. II (1906), p. 357, *Life and Letters of Mandell Creighton*, Vol. II (1904), p. 435 f., and *Randall Davidson*, Vol. II (1935), p. 830.

³⁵ *Randall Davidson*, Vol. I, p. 440 f.

³⁶ Davidson, *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 829 f. and G. Thomas, *Principles of Theology*, pp. 517 f.

³⁷ *Visitation Charges* (1904), p. 322.

³⁸ *Institutes of Religion*, Vol. I (1949 edition), p. 582.

³⁹ Homily on *Prayer*, third part., (Homily Society 1852), p. 309.

⁴⁰ The Dean of Bristol (the Very Rev. D. E. W. Harrison) at the Liturgical Conference, 1967, p. 4.

⁴¹ Although the Joint Synod (April 1967) altered the prayer to 'Hear us as we remember etc', and authorised its use in Holy Communion, Second Series, it retained in the short Litany the petition, 'Let us pray for the faithful departed. Lord, have mercy'. Explicit prayer for the departed is also retained in Series One Holy Communion and the two new Burial Services.

⁴² E. Stauffer, *New Testament Theology* (1963), p. 299. See also C. V. Pilcher, *The Hereafter in Jewish and Christian Thought* (1940), pp. 84-90.

⁴³ Mandell Creighton, Vol. II, p. 436.

⁴⁴ *Memoirs of Bshop W. W. How* (1898), p. 466.

⁴⁵ *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, Vol. II, p. 112.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Godet, *Commentary on I Corinthians*, Vol. II, p. 383.

⁴⁸ H. Hodge, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (1958 edition), p. 338.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Harold Browne, *Exposition of the Thirty Nine Articles*, p. 493.

⁵⁰ See Jonathan Edwards, *Saints absent from the body present with the Lord* (funeral sermon on the death of David Brainerd), for a remarkably clear exposition of this stream of Scripture truth. *Works*, Vol. III, p. 624 ff. (Worcester Edition 1881).

⁵¹ Dr. P. A. Welsby in the Liturgical Conference, 1967, p. 29.

⁵² See Church Assembly, *Report of Proceedings*, Vol. XLVI (1966), No. 3, p. 738 f.

⁵³ Hans Lietzmann, *The Founding of the Church Universal* (1938 edition), pp. 177-187.

⁵⁴ Gregory Dix, *Ibid.*, p. 195.

⁵⁵ See Calvin, *Ibid.*, p. 581.

⁵⁶ B. B. Scott, *The Catacombe of Rome*, pp. 98-125.

⁵⁷ cp., G. K. A. Bell, *Randall Davidson*, Vol. II, p. 831 n. 'Few things were more remarkable than the great change effected during the first year of the war in popular opinion, and church practice, with regard to prayer for the dead. In 1914 such prayers were most uncommon: by 1918 their use was widespread.

⁵⁸ See Jonathan Edwards, *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book V., 75:2.

⁶⁰ B. Streeter, *Immortality* (1918), p. 479 f.

⁶¹ cp., Bishop Westcott's strong objection to the phrase 'The Holy Eucharist will be offered for . . .' and suggestion that it be altered to 'At the service of the Holy Eucharist A.B. will be remembered . . .' *Life*, Vol. II, p. 349 f.

⁶² Gregory Dix *Ibid.* p. 498.