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THE PRAYERS OF THE SAINTS: TWO SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY VIEWS

At the Mariological Congress in Saragossa in October 1979, it became clear in the course of the discussion in the Ecumenical Commission that the questions of the veneration and intercession of Our Lady need to be seen in the context of the whole doctrine of the Communion of Saints. Do the saints departed pray for us? May we ask them to pray for us? If so, in what way should we do it? All these were seen as questions which still demand attention in the dialogue between Protestants and Catholics. They are questions in which it is vital to see clearly what is at stake and to avoid simple misunderstandings over terms and words, as Anglicans, for whom they have at times been matters of sharp controversy, are particularly well aware. In our present situation of renewed dialogue on these subjects, it may be useful to look back to certain earlier treatments of them, which at least set out with an eirenic and reconciling intent. This account of the position of two seventeenth-century theologians from Great Britain is offered as a small contribution to the present discussion, not in the sense that their positions will be final or definitive for us, but with the conviction that their clarifications and distinctions may have a permanent value and be relevant even today. The two writers concerned, Bishop William Forbes (1585-1634) and Herbert Thorndike (1598-1672), are quoted not as being altogether typical representatives of the thought of their own day. They are cited as eminent and respected divines who, in this as in other matters, were prepared to go beyond the negative attitudes of many of their contemporaries in an effort to arrive at a positive and catholic point of view, consistent with Scripture and in harmony with the writing and practices of the Fathers of the Church.

BISHOP WILLIAM FORBES .

William Forbes was one of that little group of men who in the years between 1620 and 1635 made the name of the University of Aberdeen famous throughout the theological world of Western Europe. Under the protection

of Bishop Patrick Forbes, a group of scholars came together there, of whom John Forbes was the most voluminous writer and William Forbes the most daring thinker. All that we have from the pen of the latter are his *Considerationes Modestae et Pacificae*, of the various controversies which were then troubling the Christian world. This work was published only after its author's death, and is evidently incomplete and unpolished. It gives more the appearance of notes for a book than of a finished work. But even as it stands, it is an amazing monument to the width of its author's learning and to his indefatigable hope and belief in the possibility, not only of reconciling the different schools of Protestant theology one with another, but still more of bridging the gulf between the writers of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. Whatever its limitations, it must stand as one of the most remarkable attempts at peace-making made during the seventeenth century and, certainly, the most courageous eirenicon to have been produced in the British Isles.

One whole section of the work is devoted to what Forbes terms *A Consideration of the Modern Controversy concerning the Intercession and Invocation of Angels and Saints*. With what he writes about the Angels we are not directly concerned here, though it is worth noting that he considered it as a pious and probable opinion that to each Christian was assigned a guardian angel, and that the angels presented the prayers of the Church in the presence of God; though very typically he refrained from making either point into a matter of faith. On the intercession of the saints he begins as follows,

Whatever the more rigid Protestants may formerly have taught, or even teach today, that it is not certain that the saints departed pray for the living, not even in general, yet all their more just and sound divines are of the same mind as was James VI the ever to be praised King of Great Britain in his answer written by Isaac Casaubon to the letter of Cardinal Du Perron, "His Majesty venerates the Blessed Martyrs and the other saints now reigning with Christ, who is the head both of the triumphant and militant Church, and he does not doubt that they assiduously pray for the necessities of the Church, and firmly believes that their prayers are not profitless."¹

So much for the foundation stone, the belief that the saints in paradise do indeed pray for the saints on earth. Forbes follows this with a long discussion of the question as to whether or not the departed know in detail the needs and circumstances of all those who pray to them. And here

¹ William FORBES, *Considerationes Modestae*, L.A.C.T. 1856, Vol. II, p. 157.

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the writer feels that it is doubtful whether they do. To support him in this hesitation, he quotes at length not only from St. Gregory Nazianzen and St. Augustine, but also from St. Bernard and Hugh of St. Victor.

The second part of his treatment of the question begins with a chapter in which he quotes numerous modern Roman authorities to show that the invocation of saints is not regarded by them as something absolutely necessary. As we shall see, this is for him a matter of great importance. He continues with a chapter in which he shows both from Scripture and the Fathers that prayer and adoration in their strict sense are to be given to God alone:

For the honour and cultus of religious invocation, or prayer properly so-called for no reason whatever befits any creature, but God alone. For he alone knows the thoughts of all men, and can at all times discern the sincere prayer from that which is feigned. He is all powerful and omnipresent, in whom, to conclude, all the trust of the heart may be reposed.¹

Having thus stressed the honour due to God alone he continues,

The mere addressing of angels and saints, inviting them to pray with us and for us to God, in the same way that we ask good people during their life time here to intercede with God for us.... we with those Protestants who prefer to speak more clearly and carefully in this matter, call advocacy, rather than invocation, a calling unto, rather than a calling upon. For the word invocation, when used with regard to the saints, is generally almost unbearable to Protestant ears, because to invoke God, is strictly speaking to call upon him to help us, with a religious affection of heart, or even to call him into the heart as Jerome or rather Bede, and Augustine write: and this cannot be said of the saints.²

The point raised here is one of considerable importance, for it suggests that the words *invoke* and *invocation* had in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a rather different range of meanings from that which they commonly have today. For us the word invocation is more commonly used of requests addressed to the saints than of those addressed to God. At the time of the Reformation, its primary use seems to have been that of calling upon God. The following quotation from *The Institution of a Christian Man*, the Bishops' Book of 1537, is highly significant:

To pray to saints to be intercessors with us and for us to our Lord..... so that we make no invocation of them, is lawful and allowed by the Catholic Church.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 211-213.

Or again we may consider the words of Bishop Latimer,

For this is one apparent and great argument to make Christ God, if we call upon him as St. Stephen did, who said..... "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit"; for invocation declareth an omnipotency; so that when I call upon the saints, I make them omnipotent, and so I make them gods....¹

This change of meaning has certainly to be borne in mind in interpreting Article 22 of the 39 Articles and, indeed, throughout the Reformation controversy. Forbes himself, however, feels that the distinction between advocacy and invocation is somewhat artificial and has no objection to the word invocation as long as it is "used in a broad sense".

We come now to Forbes' discussion of the question of the authority on which we may base the practice of addressing prayers to angels and saints. In the course of their controversy with the extreme Protestants, the Aberdeen doctors had worked out a theory of authority similar to that of Hooker and their Anglican contemporaries. Like all Protestants, they held that Holy Scripture contains sufficiently all that is to be required of necessity to salvation. But they recognised that there are many questions of belief and practice which are not explicitly covered by Scripture, many questions which, while they are by no means trivial, are yet not of strict necessity to salvation. In these matters which they call technically indifferent, *adiaphora*, they held that the Church has authority to decide and should be guided by the tradition of the early centuries. This position becomes very clear in Forbes' approach to our particular question which he states in two theses. The first is "that there exists no command in Scripture, nor even a sufficient and formal example of this, or of any other sort whatever of advocacy or addressing of angels or saints (especially of the latter)" and this he adds "is frankly owned by many Romanists."² His second thesis is:

But yet, we are not on this account to reject as unlawful (as Protestants now commonly contend) the addressing of angels and saints, that with us and for us they should pray to God for us, in spite of the fact, that neither any command nor any formal example of this thing is to be found in Scripture.³

And here he at once takes issue with Lancelot Andrewes, "a man," he declares, "in other respects most learned," because he had been "carried so

¹ Hugh LATIMER, *Remains*, Parker Society Edn. 1844, p. 186.

² William FORBES, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

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far as to affirm that 'even though it were most certainly evident that the saints whom we address hear us; yet they are not to be invoked or addressed by us, since we have received no precept concerning this thing.'"¹

In other words, Andrewes had taken the position that because invocation was not ordered in Scripture it was therefore unlawful and, in doing so, had fallen into precisely the position taken up in other matters by his Puritan opponents, as Forbes is not slow to point out:

The Church of England herself retains and practices to the present day, many rites received from the Fathers as lawful and pious, of which you cannot find either any precept or any example in Holy Scripture; as the sign of the cross on the forehead of the baptized, kneeling at receiving the Eucharist, the fast of Lent, and other stated times of fasting, and many other such things, in spite of the protests of the Puritans continually objecting the precept, "Ye shall not add to that which I command you."²

And Forbes goes on,

When a thing is merely indifferent, it is enough if it be not repugnant to Holy Scripture, but is agreeable to it. The Fathers certainly "being led," to use the words of Cassander, "by the testimonies and examples of Scripture, from which it is evident that the prayers which just men offer for others are of great avail with God; and being moreover certainly persuaded that the righteous at their death do not cease to be, but joined to Christ, lead a blessed life," and that they pray for us now much more ardently than before, inasmuch as they are endued with greater love than formerly, and, as Cyprian says, "are secure in of their own immortality and anxious for our safety,"—the Fathers, I say, desired very greatly that during their pilgrimage in this life they might be aided by the prayers of those who were reigning in heaven (a thing which no-one will say to be unlawful), and even asked it, so far, namely, as the saints have knowledge of our condition. For although it be altogether uncertain whether they have an *ιδιοπάθεια* (to use the expression of some Protestants), that is, a particular acquaintance with our necessities and distresses, yet, who in his senses would deny to them a *σμπάθεια* or general knowledge, derived from the word of God and their own experience? And the Fathers declared this their wish and desire, by calling upon them, either all in general, or even some particular individuals by name, both in their public and in their private prayers, as being present in spirit and soul. Not that they made them chief and propitiatory mediators with God, but that by their prayers which they believed to be of great avail with God, joined also to their own prayers, they might

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*, p. 229.

the more easily obtain their desires from God the Father through Jesus Christ, the only Mediator and propitiator.¹

This conclusion is not to be disturbed by the fact that Forbes considers that

among the Fathers who preceded the first Council of Nicea, that is those of the first three centuries, we read nothing from which the invocation of direct addressing in prayers of either Angels or saints can be certainly and clearly proved.²

For it is well known that many lawful and profitable rites were brought into the Church by the Fathers and Councils of subsequent centuries, especially of the fourth and fifth, about which we read nothing in the writers of the earlier period. For the Church of the fourth century had the same right to institute lawful and profitable ceremonies, as of the three which preceded it. No one in their senses, will I suppose deny this.³

One of the most interesting features of Forbes's lengthy discussion of the question, is provided by the quotations from the early reformers which he produces in favour of his position. He writes,

The candour of Bucer on this matter is pleasing when he writes thus, "Assuredly, all the saints pray for us in that manner and degree which is suitable to their heavenly life. But whether they do that peculiarly for those who invoke them, or pay honour to their memories. . . or whether in general terms for all as being the elect of our Lord Jesus Christ, was a thing which St. Augustine owned to be unknown to him, since Holy Scripture says nothing in regard to it."⁴

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 229-231. It is interesting to compare the position of a modern Greek writer. "The saints pray and intercede with God for their living brethren and for the whole militant Church, but their intercession in no way strikes against the mediatorial work of the one and only Mediator. For indeed 'there is one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ, who alone is able to mediate directly between the Father and ourselves,' while the saints in contrast 'we do not call mediators, but ambassadors and suppliants for us to God,' and 'intercessors', calling upon them, 'that they should make their requests to God for us,' and 'as our brethren and the friends of God would seek the divine assistance for us their brethren . . . not that they should help us themselves by their own strength' nor 'by any debt which God might owe them, for God is debtor to none, by their boldness with God, which he himself has given them.'" (John KARMIRIS. *A Summary of the Dogmatic Teaching of the Orthodox Catholic Church*, 1957, pp. 106-107; in Greek). The quotations which Professor Karmiris makes are from various seventeenth-century Orthodox writers who were facing the same series of problems as the Aberdeen doctors.

² *Ibid.*, p. 231.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

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And he goes on to assert that some of the leaders of the Protestants had thought better and more modestly on this subject at the beginning of the Reformation, and he quotes with approval Cassander, as saying, "If they had continued in that opinion which at the beginning they held in common with the ancient Church, and had confined themselves to the censure of abuses, they would have consulted better for the authority and peace of the Church."¹ J. Ecolampadius in his notes on the Sermons of Chrysostom upon the martyrs, Juventinus and Maximus, printed at Basle in 1623, [but written almost a century before] says;

There are persons who wish to hear nothing of the saints; but that they sleep and rest in Christ, waiting for the revelation of the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, when they are to receive at once their double robe; now, they assert, they neither intercede for us, nor if they do intercede, which they admit unwillingly, are they to be invoked. They say that the duty of interceding belongs to Christ alone etc. and that the Scripture nowhere exhorts us to implore the saints in our prayers.... This opinion has grounds which are not to be despised, and which it is not right to neglect, but yet I cannot altogether assent to it. For neither will I go against the intercession of the saints, nor would I assert with them that to implore their patronage is the act of wicked or idolatrous men. But I pray with all earnestness, that passing beyond all the hosts of saints and angels, and all things which can come between us, we should stretch with the greatest faith and eagerness to the King of Angels, and the Creator of the heavens himself. . . . The saints in heaven who are aflame with love, do not cease to intercede for us. What harm therefore is it if we beg that that be done, which we believe God wills, even though he has not enjoined it? What harm, indeed if we commend to men the advocacy of the saints, so long as it be done circumspectly, opportunely, and in moderation, according to the capacity of our hearers? It is a thing which Chrysostom does in this passage, and Nazianzen in his sermon in praise of Cyprian. And almost all Churches, both of East and West, observe this practice.²

The universality of the custom had not been missed by Forbes himself, who observes that

for many centuries now, in the East no less than in the West, and indeed in the North among the Muscovites, the Litany has been sung, as for example, "Saint Peter, pray for us". To despise and condemn the consensus of the whole Church, is a thing dangerous to the highest degree.³

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 265-267.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 267-269.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

But though Forbes stresses strongly the positive value of the practice, he does not leave the abuses of the Roman system unnoticed, and the last chapter of his work is devoted to a brief, and, by the standard of his days, temperate refutation of them. He objects against the certainty with which some Roman theologians maintain the view that the saints are aware distinctly of all requests made to them. He objects to the way in which many writers, and still more preachers, urge the matter as one of absolute necessity; and he maintains that the saints are to be called mediators only in a secondary and subsidiary sense. As to the prayers of the Roman rite in which God the Father is addressed, asking that we may be aided through Christ by the prayers and the merits of the saints, he has clearly no objection to them. But those anthems and prayers in which the Blessed Virgin and the Saints are asked, not only for their prayers but also for heavenly and earthly blessings, he finds it impossible to approve. In particular, the tendency to make of the Mother of the Lord a milder or more attractive advocate than her Son, he finds impious and idolatrous:

Certainly, the Collyridians in the age of S. Epiphanius scarcely sinned more grievously in the adoration and worship of the Blessed Virgin, than do today not only the unlearned but even many of the theologians of the Roman Church.¹

And he gives examples from a contemporary Jesuit author who, in a poem addressed to our Lady of Halle, hesitates between the wounded side of the child Jesus and the breasts of his Mother.

But to conclude at length this dissertation. Let God alone be religiously adored: Let Him alone be prayed to, through Christ, who is the only and sole Mediator between God and man, speaking truly and strictly. Let not the very ancient custom received in the universal Church, as well Greek as Latin, of addressing the angels and saints, in the manner we have described, be condemned or rejected as impious, nor indeed as vain and foolish, by the more rigid Protestants. Let the foul abuses and superstitions which have crept in, be taken away. And so may peace be easily established and settled between the parties to this controversy. Which may the God of peace, and all godly concord vouchsafe to grant us for the sake of his only begotten Son.²

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 305.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 313.

HERBERT THORNDIKE

When we turn from William Forbes to Herbert Thorndike, we are conscious of coming from an age still full of possibilities to one in which outlines seem to have hardened. Although the two works of Thorndike's in which most reference to this subject are made were written only twenty or thirty years after the *Considerationes Modestae* (that is to say at the end of the Commonwealth period and at the beginning of the Restoration) they bear the marks of the struggle which had taken place both in England and Scotland between "the more rigid Protestants" and those who took seriously the authority of the Fathers of the Church. In Scotland, the taking of the National Covenant had brought to an end the activities of the school of Aberdeen and scattered its members; while in England, it was the downfall of the Church which moved Thorndike to write his monumental *Epilogue to the Tragedy of the Church of England*, first published in 1659. It must be admitted that the somewhat rigid spirit of Thorndike's work, coupled with its excessively difficult style make it much less attractive than the open and eirenic efforts of William Forbes. But at the same time it is not to be denied that the *Epilogue* contains one of the fullest and most systematic treatments of the doctrine of the Church ever to be made in the Church of England.

Thorndike commences his consideration of the matter with the characteristic comment,

As concerning prayer to saints: I must suppose, that the terms of prayer, invocation, calling upon, and whatsoever else we can use, are or may be in despite of our hearts equivocal; that is, we may be constrained, unless we use that diligence which common discretion counts superfluous, to use the same words in signifying requests made to God and men.¹

This equivocation, as he later points out, is particularly clear when we speak of "praying" to the saints to "pray" for us, for in this case the word is evidently used in two different senses. But for the moment, he leaves this point and turns to establishing the fact that the saints do pray for us.

Now the militant Church necessarily hath communion with the triumphant: believing, that all those who are departed in God's grace are at rest, and secure of being parted from Him for the future; though those, who have neglected the content of this world the most for His service,

¹ Herbert THORNDIKE, *Theological Works*, L.A.C.T. 1854, Vol. IV, Pt. II, pp. 759-760.

and are in the best of those "mansions" which are provided for them till the day of judgement (whom here we call properly saints), enjoy the nearest access to His presence.¹

It is interesting to notice the care with which here, and earlier in his treatise, Thorndike maintains that there are degrees of blessedness among the departed who await the general resurrection. He repudiates the medieval doctrine of purgatory, but at the same time argues that there are some among the departed whose prayers we may especially desire, while there are others who may stand the more in need of our prayers. But with reference to the honour due to the saints he writes:

I must come to particulars, that I may be understood. He that could wish, that the memories of the martyrs, and other saints who lived so as to assure the Church they would have been martyrs had they been called to it, had not been honoured, as it is plain they were honoured by Christians, must find in his heart by consequence to wish, that Christianity had not prevailed. For this honour depending on nothing but the assurance of their happiness in them that remained alive, was that, which moved unbelievers to bethink themselves of the reason they had to be Christians.²

Neither is it to be doubted that the saints in happiness pray for the Church militant, and that they have knowledge thereof; if they go not out like sparkles and are kindled again when they resume their bodies, which I have shewed our common Christianity allows not. For is it possible to imagine that knowing any thing (that is, knowing God and themselves) they should not know, that God hath a Church in this world, upon the consummation whereof their consummation dependeth? Or, is it possible that, knowing this . . . they should not intercede with God for the consummation of it and the means thereof?³

The care and affection of the saints and angels towards us, are insisted on by Thorndike at some length:

But he, that saith the saints and angels pray for us, saith not, that we are to pray to saints or angels; nor can he say it without idolatry, intending that we are to do that to them which they do to God for us. On the other side, though that which we do to them, and that which they do to God, be both called praying, yet it will be very difficult for him, that really and actually apprehendeth all saints and angels to be God's creatures, to render both the same honour; though supposing, not granting, the same Christianity to enjoin both.

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 760-761.

² *Ibid.*, p. 762.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 763.

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But to come to particulars, I will distinguish three sorts of prayers to saints, whether taught or allowed to be taught in the Church of Rome.

The first is of those, that are made to God, but to desire His blessings by and through the merits and intercessions of His saints. I cannot give so fit an example, as out of the canon of the mass; which all the Western Churches of that communion do now use. There it is said: "*Communicantes et memoriam venerantes N.N. et omnium sanctorum Tuorum, quorum meritis precibusque concedas, ut in omnibus protectionis Tuae muniamur auxilio.*" — "Communicating in and reverencing the memory of such and such, and of all Thy saints, by whose merits and prayers grant that in all things we may be guided by Thy protection and help."¹

And Thorndike gives other examples of this type of prayer:

The second is that, which their litanies contain: (that is to say the simple request "Ora pro nobis"). The third is, when they desire immediately of them the same blessings, spiritual and temporal, which all Christians desire of God. There is a psalter to be seen, with the name of God changed everywhere into the name of the Blessed Virgin.²

Thorndike gives other examples of this sort of devotion:

Of these, then, the first kind seems to me utterly agreeable with Christianity: importing only the exercise of that communion, which all members of God's Church hold with all members of it, ordained by God for the means to obtain for one another the grace, which the obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ hath purchased for us, without difference whether dead or alive. . . . Neither is it in reason conceivable that all Christians from the beginning should make them the occasion of their devotions, as I said, out of any consideration but this.

For as concerning the term of "merit" perpetually frequented in these prayers; it hath always been maintained by those of the Reformation, that it is not used by the Latin fathers in any other sense than that which they allow.³

But if Thorndike's approval of the first kind of prayer is wholehearted, his repudiation of the third is no less complete. He writes,

The third, taking them at the foot of the letter, and valuing the intent of those that use them by nothing but the words of them, are mere idolatries; as desiring of the creature that which God only gives, which is the worship of the creature for the Creator, *God blessed for evermore.*⁴

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 768.

² *Ibid.*, p. 769.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 770.

⁴ *Ibid.*

But, of course, Thorndike allows that we need not take them in this literal way, and can put an acceptable construction on them. He considers that Irenaeus, for example, had called the Blessed Virgin "the advocate of Eve" in this sense,

... because she believed the angel's message, and submitted to God's will and so became the means of saving all; though by our Lord Jesus Christ, who pleadeth even for her as well as for Eve. Ground enough there is for such a construction, even the belief of one God alone, that stands in the head of our Creed; which we have no reason to think the Church allows them secretly to renounce, whom she alloweth to make these prayers; and therefore no ground to construe them so, as if the Church by allowing them did renounce the ground of all her Christianity; but not ground enough to satisfy a reasonable man, that all that make them do hold that infinite distance between God and His saints and angels, of whom they demand the same effects; which if they hold not, they are idolaters, as the heathen were; ... How shall I presume, that simple Christians in the devotions of their hearts understand that distance of God from His creatures, which their words signify not? which the wisest of their teachers will be much troubled to say, by what figure of speech they can allow it?¹

It is only the fact of "the Church of England having acknowledged the Church of Rome a true Church, though corrupt, ever since the Reformation," which prevents Thorndike from concluding that these prayers are idolatry. "For if they were necessarily idolatries, then were the Church of Rome necessarily no Church; the being of Christianity presupposing the worship of one true God."²

As to the second sort of prayer, that is simple requests to the saints to pray for us, Thorndike admits that it originated

... in the flourishing times of the Church after Constantine. The lights of the Greek and Latin Church, Basil, Nazianzen, Nyssen, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustin, Chrysostom, Cyrils both, Theodoret, Fulgentius, Gregory the Great, Leo, more, or rather all after that time, have all of them spoken to the saints departed, and desired their assistance. But neither is this enough to make a tradition of the Church. For the Church had been three hundred years before it began.³

And on this point he parts company from Forbes who had thought it no bar to this kind of prayer that he had no witness to it from the pre-

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 771-772.

² *Ibid.*, p. 774.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 777.

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Nicene Fathers: "I grant it no idolatry, that is, not necessarily any idolatry to pray to saints to pray for us. The very matter implies an equivocation in the word "praying" which nothing hinders the heart to distinguish;"¹ but this is not in his view sufficient reason to allow the practice, still less to encourage it, for, he believes, it has manifestly led to something which is not easily distinguished from idolatry.

But if Thorndike shows himself less open on this particular question, there is no disguising the earnestness with which he desired the restoration of the first type of prayer into the usage of the English Church. He deals with the matter forcibly in his shorter work, *Just Weights and Measures*, published three years after the *Epilogue*, in 1662. This book is a plea that the Restoration Settlement should be used as the occasion for a new and juster Reformation of the Church on the basis of "Scripture interpreted by the perpetual practice of God's Church." Thorndike, it is clear, had little feeling for what was possible and opportune at the time; his suggestions for restoring the discipline of excommunication were particularly impracticable, and his proposals for the most part went unheeded. But among them, there is much that is interesting, and especially in his ideas for the revision of the services of the Church. It is in connection with the Eucharist that he brings in the commemoration of the saints, and what he writes here may be taken to sum up his whole attitude to the problem.

But I must by no means leave this place, till I have paid the debt which I owe to the opinion which I have premised; and openly profess again and again, that we "weigh not by our own weights, nor mete by our own measures," if, believing one Catholic Church, and enjoying episcopacy and the Church-lands upon that account, we recall not the memorial of the dead, as well as of the living into this service. There is the same ground to believe the communion of saints, in the prayers, which those that depart in the highest favour with God make for us; in the prayers, which we make for those that depart in the lowest degree of favour with God, that there is for the common Christianity: namely, the Scriptures interpreted by the perpetual practice of God's Church. Therefore there is ground enough for the faith of all Christians, that those prayers are accepted, which desire God to hear the saints for us, to send the deceased in Christ rest and peace and light and refreshment and a good trial at the day of judgement and accomplishment of happiness after the same. And seeing the abating of the first form under Edward VI hath wrought no effect, but to give them that desired it an appetite to root up the whole: what thanks can we render to God for escaping so

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 783.

great a danger, but by sticking firm to a rule, that will stick firm to us, and carry us through any dispute in religion, and land us in the heaven of a quiet conscience; what troubles soever we may pass through in maintaining, that the reformation of the Church will never be according to the rule which it ought to follow, till it cleave to the catholic Church of Christ in this particular.¹

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We have been listening to the voices of two theologians of the seventeenth century. Their ways of doing theology, the presuppositions from which they start are in many ways different from ours. But their general conclusions are nonetheless impressive and instructive. Some of the points which they make have become almost standard parts of the Anglican approach to the subject. For instance, in the report on *The Commemoration of Saints and Heroes of the Faith in the Anglican Communion*, a document produced by a preparatory commission of the Lambeth Conference in 1958, the threefold distinction between prayers addressed to God to hear us at the prayers of the saints, simple requests to the saints to pray for us, and extended prayers made to the saints for benefits of various kinds, is again set out, and while the third form of prayer is rejected, the first is fully accepted. On the second, a difference of opinion is registered, a difference which is reflected in variations in Anglican practice.

More generally, we may say that Anglicans continue to work with a respect for the authority of the Scripture, but of the Scripture as interpreted by the tradition. Their thought still tends to be guided in this question by two considerations: first a determination not to run counter to the fundamental New Testament teaching that "there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (I Tim 2:5); secondly, not on this account to lose sight of the equally biblical doctrine of the unity of life and prayer which exists between all those who are in Christ, whether living or departed. As Archbishop William Temple emphasised in his essay on the Church in the volume called *Foundations* (1912), "The Catholic Church is universal not only in space but in time; the living and the dead alike are members of it," and Temple went on to stress the importance of this faith being expressed in the prayer of the Church at the Eucharist:

¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. V, pp. 248-249. The addition of the sentence, "And we also bless thy holy name for all thy servants departed this life . . ." at the end of the prayer for the Church militant, made by the revisions of 1662, went some of the way towards meeting Thorndike's request.

The prayers of the Saints

We have lost sight of a great part of this truth in England. Abuses and errors had become associated with parts of the full doctrine, and in the abolition of the abuses the truth itself suffered. Prayers for the dead dropped out of use; but they represent a spontaneous and generous impulse of the human heart, and the right to offer them is implicit in the doctrine of the Communion of Saints. The invocation of Saints passed out of use, because men not only asked the Saints to present their prayers, but prayed to the Saints instead of God; but if "with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of Heaven we laud and magnify God's glorious Name", why should we not ask that company to assist our prayers as much as our praises?¹

In the years since Temple wrote these words the practice of prayer for the departed has become much more common in the Anglican Communion, and many more Anglicans have come to feel free to commend themselves to the prayers of Our Lady and the saints. As contacts with Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox fellow Christians have multiplied, so they have become more confident in the realisation that exuberant and sometimes apparently extravagant expressions of devotion to Our Lady and the saints need not have a sinister interpretation, but can indeed be consistent with the true proportion and balance of faith. As it has become more and more clear that it is in the Eucharist that we find the heart of the prayer of the Church, *ad Patrem, per Filium, in Spiritu*, so too it has become clear that the ways in which the saints departed are associated in that prayer, in the traditional Eucharistic commemorations of East and West, are at the very centre of the Church's expression of its faith in the Communion of Saints. Here we see how a prayer which is at once Christocentric and Trinitarian may yet be enriched by a sense of the fullness of that communion in the life of God which is ours in Christ and the Spirit. There are here ways forward into a new and more confident sharing in the life of prayer and praise, as Christians of many different traditions seek to come together into one, not only in space but in time, and to unite their worship with that of Our Lady and all the company of Heaven.

A. M. ALLCHIN

¹ William TEMPLE, *Foundations*, ed. B. H. Streeter 1912, pp. 343 and 346.