

Evangelical concern arises from the impression that certain Catholic practices not only lack any Scriptural warrant but appear to contradict fundamental doctrine. It is notoriously difficult to draft a document without its being misconstrued, either as a statement of disagreement where perhaps both sides were much closer to each other than realised at the time (eg., the polemical Reformation writings on Justification), or as an expression of agreement where it did not really exist (eg. William Temple's experience with Lutherans & Orthodox over the visible and invisible nature of the Church).⁽¹⁾ It is equally the concern of Evangelicals that liturgical language should not be misleading for the ordinary Churchgoer (eg., the clause "we offer Christ" in the Eucharistic prayer). Liturgy and devotion profoundly mould the mind of the worshipper. Hence the importance of the subject. If Evangelical anxieties are simply misinformed, then let a clear reassurance be given. Otherwise the claim to substantial agreement will be met with suspicion, if not rejection.

That Catholic practices were opposed by the Anglican Reformers is abundantly clear. Article 22 lists "Purgatory, Pardons, Worshipping & Adoration, as well as of Images as of Reliques, and also invocation of Saints". They are rejected on 3 grounds:-

- (a). That they are a fond thing vainly invented.
- (b). That they are grounded upon no warranty of Scripture.
- (c). That they are repugnant to the Word of God.

It is the last expression here that indicates the prime concern. Of course there are practices in our Churches that do not originate with Scripture, but, if so, they must not be held to be obligatory and they most certainly must not contradict the plain teaching of Scripture. It is in this area too that Richard Hooker is most stringent in his critique of 'the Romish doctrine of grace and justification'. After elaborating the way that mortal and venial sins are overcome and grace conferred anew, he concludes, "This maze the Church of Rome doth cause her followers to tread, when they ask her the way of justification".⁽²⁾

(1) "William Temple", F.A. Iremonger, pp. 400-01.

(2) Sermo II, para. 5.

Purgatory.

There is no explicit reference to such in Scripture, either as a place or as a process beyond death. Evidence in the Early Church of prayers for the dead, from Tertullian onward, does not presuppose Purgatory. Indeed, since they include the nobles of saints and an eucharistic element, they regard those prayed for already at rest and in peace. Passages, such as 1 Cor. 3, are inapplicable: the reference is to the assessment of the Christian's service at the day of judgement, not a process of moral purging. Augustine says in De Civitate Dei, concerning a further purging by fire after death, "I will not argue against it, for perhaps it is true".⁽³⁾ But he does not declare it to be an article of faith. All the emphasis of Scripture is on the side of assurance that the believer, when he departs, departs to be with Christ. That is the prospect that inspires the martyr and comforts the dying. It is the desire to be "away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8), "to depart and be with Christ" (Phil. 1:23), described as "better by far". There is no suggestion of a transitional period (even though the resurrection of the body is not till the Parousia) before entering into the Lord's presence. To interpret John 14:2 as "many resting-places", stages on the journey, as William Temple does⁽⁴⁾ runs counter to the confident expectation of glory. In the nature of the case, how can the $\sigma\upsilon\lambda\lambda\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$ conflict (Gal. 5:17) continue after death? The use of the word $\sigma\upsilon\lambda\lambda\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$ in this special sense must have some bearing upon the subject. The Visio Dei at the Parousia will effect this radical change into his likeness (1 John 3:2). If that immediate transformation will happen for all those alive at that time, why not for those who died beforehand? Whether or not there is a soul's 'sleep' between death now and the Parousia has no bearing on the idea of Purgatory, which must involve some kind of conscious cooperation on the part of those being purged. Now it is doctrine that Article 22 condemns, that which is taught, which underlies and affects what is practised. Thus devotional habits cannot be divorced from their doctrinal implications. It was anxiety at this point that led the Reformers to exclude several such practices. If they are to be restored, endorsed, retained, then Evangelicals want assurance about

their doctrinal significance, especially in relation to 'justification' in the stricter, Pauline sense of that term.

(1) Prayers for the dead.

There is no Scriptural evidence for this practice. 2 Tim. 1:18 is a very doubtful peg on which to hang such a claim. Only in the Deutero-canonical writing of 2 Mac. 12:43-45 do we find commendation of prayers for the dead together with offerings on their behalf. The Reformers removed such prayers from the Communion and Burial Services. The commemoration of the departed, together with the element of thanksgiving, has been retained in the spirit of what the early Fathers taught. (5)

Of course there is a natural desire to continue in some way our links with those we have known and loved on earth. There is a Koinonia that spans the gulf of death and links the Saints of God past and present, as vividly presented in Hebrews 12:22-24. Interestingly they are called "the spirits of righteous men made perfect". There is no call to pray for such. We may praise God together: we may give thanks for them. We are in a very speculative area when we start to pray for them, since this must imply that there is an incompleteness about their condition. The only area in which we know there is some incompleteness is that the day of resurrection lies ahead (unless time be meaningless in eternity). Thus the command to hasten the day of the Lord's coming (2 Peter 3:12).

Fundamental to this whole area is the nature of God's justifying action in Christ. If it is a relationship into which we have entered already, contrary to all our deserving (Rom. 5:1,2), then we are accepted fully and completely into his family. How and what, then, can we pray for them? The difficulty with the suggestion of some purging process after death is that it conveys the impression that our justification is not complete and that we must add something more to it in order to be accepted (cf. Article XXXI).

(5) This is very fairly presented in E. Harold Browne, "An exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles." (1864) pp. 494-97.

(2) Penance and Satisfaction

In an extremely complex and sensitive area I wish only to speak of the element of 'satisfactions' in relation to penance. Since this is regarded in Catholic theology as a necessary ingredient of penance (vid. Trent), it cannot easily be left to one side. I take it to mean "an act of reparation for an injury committed". Now Scripture is perfectly clear that I cannot expect to be forgiven if I do not forgive others (Matt. 6:23,24) and that restoration should be made where applicable and possible (eg. Luke 19:8). In such cases the action clearly indicates the sincerity of the penitent: it is not a contributory factor per se to the forgiveness God offers, which is wholly free and unmerited. The finality and completeness of the sacrifice of Christ are not called in question (Heb. 9:26-28). It is the 'satisfaction' element in penance that appears to detract from our understanding of the full 'satisfaction' for our sins made by Christ. Where an offence has been committed against God that does not directly involve other people, there is no form of reparation possible - only the prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner".

(3) Pardons and Indulgences.

In the last resort we all agree that none can forgive sins but God alone (Mk. 2:7). The precise meaning of John 20:22,23 has long been in dispute. However precisely we understand ministerial authority, there is a world of difference between a declaratory authority (eg. the Absolutions/in the P.C.P. are either that - "to pardoneth and absolveth....." or a prayer - "But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us.....") and the treasury concept related to Peter (Denzinger 1026). Indulgences are said to exempt from temporal punishment, but that includes the conditions of Purgatory. Although the abuses were recognised at Trent and the office of indulgence-seller abolished, the principle remains. That it should have arisen again so recently with Pope John Paul II underscores Evangelical concern. I believe there is virtually no evidence for such a practice before Pope Alexander III in the twelfth century. There is no Scriptural warrant for anyone on earth to claim for himself that which is the sole prerogative of God.

* In the Visitation of the Sick "I absolve thee" follows a prayer to Christ to forgive. Against Puritan objections the words were retained as closer to the text of John 20.

(4) Invocation of the Saints.

It is explicit in Old and New Testaments that worship, including prayer, be addressed to God alone. Even angelic beings are not to be so approached (Rev. 19:10). On that all agree. Moreover the Old Testament explicitly forbade attempt to gain access to the departed by way of mediums or spiritists (Lev. 19:31, 20:6). When Saul sought to invoke the aid of saintly Samuel, it did him no good - quite the reverse (1 Sam. 28).

Clearly the "Invocation of the Saints" is on a different level, but again there is no Scriptural warrant for it. Is it part of the role of the faithful departed to pray for us? We do not know. One thing we can be sure of : Jesus Christ, at the right hand of God, is our High Priest and advocate to represent us (Heb. 4:14-16 ; 1 John 2:1). Can the faithful departed even hear our invocations? We do not know. One thing we can be sure of is that God hears us (1 John 5:14,15).

Here on earth it is right to invoke each other's prayers, for ourselves and for others (eg. 2 Thess. 3:1). Our sense of the Koinonia may well suggest that those who have passed beyond the grave pray for us. Men like Origen were convinced of this, but did not believe that they needed to be invoked to do so.⁽⁶⁾ Yet even this is still speculative.

The Reformers eliminated the invocation of the Saints, not only because they could find no Scriptural warrant for it, but also because they perceived how easily it could and had degenerated into adoration and worship (eg. Mariolatry). They wished to ensure that nothing should detract from the unique mediatorial role of "the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5).

Conclusion.

It will be seen that the practices listed above, together with the notion of purgatory, really form a single package. They are inter-related. I have omitted other

(6) Contra Celsum VIII, 64.

practices deliberately. All of the above have some bearing on our understanding of the unique and completed saving work of God in Christ, Christ's mediatorial role and the resultant justification by faith.

Were the Reformers wrong to reject such practices for lack of Scriptural warrant and, still further, the conviction that they were actually 'repugnant' to the Word of God? It all appears to be an elaborate frame-work built on a very scanty foundation that requires a high measure of eisegetical ingenuity to justify it. In the light of the revelation given to us about life after death, we need to exhibit a great deal of caution and reverent agnosticism. Or have things so changed and can the abuse of such practices be so safely excluded that they can now be universally accepted? If these fears about such Catholic practices are simply ignorant Evangelical hang-ups, then let them be exposed as such. If they have any validity, then something much more concrete must be said about them. They cannot be simply brushed aside. Otherwise our hoped-for 'substantial agreement' will not be seen to be such.

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