

PRAYER FOR THE DEPARTED IN THE FIRST FOUR CENTURIES.

To pray for the departed seems to be, in the last resort, an instinct of natural piety. Men who have grasped the continuity of human life before and after death, and believe in the efficacy of prayer, are moved by natural affection to remember in their prayers the souls of friends and relatives who, though dead to the world, are still alive in the sight of God. Thus when prayer for the dead first appears among the Jews, it is connected with faith in the Resurrection. The epitomist of Jason of Cyrene's lost work on the Maccabees points out that Judas Maccabaeus, in providing for a sin-offering to be made for certain Jews who had fallen in the war, 'took thought for a resurrection; for if he were not expecting that they which had fallen would rise again, it were superfluous and idle to pray for the dead.'¹

It might have been supposed that the Church, with her living hope of immortality, her fuller knowledge of the condition of the dead, and her strong sense of corporate union with departed members of Christ, would from the first have commemorated her dead, both in private devotions and at the Eucharist. Yet the first century has scarcely any evidence to offer upon the subject. The New Testament contains but one passage which can fairly be construed as a prayer for the dead.² Early post-canonical writers are equally reticent. The long liturgical context in the letter of Clement, based, as Bishop Lightfoot at once perceived, on the Eucharistic Prayer of the

¹ 2 Macc. xii 43 f. The epitomist proceeds: *ὁσία καὶ εὐσεβῆς ἡ ἐπίνοια· ὅθεν περὶ τῶν τεθνηκότων τὸν ἐμίλασμον ἐποίησατο, τῆς ἀμαρτίας ἀπολυθῆναι*, for which the Vulgate strangely gives: *sancta ergo et salubris cogitatio pro defunctis exorare, ut a peccato solverentur*. See Berger *Histoire de la Vulgate* p. 23.

² 2 Tim. i 18 *ὁφει ἀντιφῶ* (sc. τῷ Ὀνησιφόρῳ) *ὁ Κύριος εὐρεῖν ἔλεος παρὰ Κυρίου ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ*, where the context perhaps suggests that Onesiphorus was dead when the letter was written.

contemporary Roman Church, and containing petitions for all sorts and conditions of living men both within and without the Christian brotherhood, makes no reference of any sort to the Christian dead. Nor are they mentioned in the Eucharistic forms of the *Didache*, unless we may regard them as included with the living in the petitions: συναχθήτω σου ἡ ἐκκλησία ἀπὸ τῶν περάτων τῆς γῆς εἰς τὴν σὴν βασιλείαν . . . μνήσθητι, Κύριε, τῆς ἐκκλησίας σου τοῦ ῥύσασθαι αὐτὴν ἀπὸ παντὸς πονηροῦ καὶ τελειῶσαι αὐτὴν ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ σου, καὶ σύναξον αὐτὴν κ.τ.λ.¹

This lack of evidence continues until past the middle of the second century. But it would be easy to exaggerate its significance. The commemoration of the Christian dead is not a subject likely to have found a place in the letters of Ignatius, the apologies of Justin, or the polemics of Irenaeus. The letter of the Church of Smyrna on the martyrdom of Polycarp promises better things, and in one passage seems to be on the point of supplying the information which is sought. 'We laid his bones', the writers say, 'in a convenient place,' adding: ἐνθα ὡς δυνατὸν ἡμῖν συναγομένοις ἐν ἀγαλλιάσει καὶ χαρᾷ παρέξει ὁ κύριος ἐπιτελεῖν τὴν τοῦ μαρτυρίου αὐτοῦ ἡμέραν γενέθλιον, εἰς τε τὴν τοῦ προηθληκότος μνήμην καὶ τῶν μελλόντων ἄσκησίν τε καὶ ἐτοιμασίαν.² It is clear from this that the *natalicia* of martyrs were kept as early as A. D. 155; the mention of ἀγαλλίασις and χαρά suggests the anniversary *agape* and perhaps the commemorative Eucharist, but it would be unsafe to press either point.

Meanwhile the inscriptions on Christian tombs speak with a less uncertain voice. Early dated inscriptions containing prayers for the dead are rare, but De Rossi produces from the cemetery of Callistus one belonging to the year 268 or 289 which has the words MARCIANE VIBAS INTER SANCTIS.³ The cemetery of Domitilla yields the simpler and perhaps earlier ΖΗΧΗC ΕΝ ΘΕΩ, VIBAS IN PACE.⁴ Other forms which occur in the Roman

¹ *Did.* 9f. Both in their comprehensiveness and in their vagueness these petitions resemble the Anglican forms, 'that with them we may be partakers of thy heavenly kingdom': 'that we, with all those that are departed in the true faith of thy holy Name, may have our perfect consummation,' etc.

² *Mart. Polyc.* 18. It is instructive to compare the later Pionian *vita*, c. 20 *προσέφερον ἄρτον ὑπὲρ τοῦ Βαυκόλου.*

³ *Inscr. Chr.* i p. 16.

⁴ Wilpert *Ein Cyclus christolog. Gemälde* p. 40.

catacombs are *vivas in Spiritu sancto, spiritus tuus in refrigerio* (or *in pace et in Christo, or requiescat in Deo*), *spiritum tuum Deus refrigeret*.¹ In the catacomb of Priscilla there is the epitaph:—

‘ vos, precor, o fratres, orare huc quando veni[tis],
et precibus totis Patrem Natumque rogatis,
sit vestrae mentis Agapes carae meminisse
ut Deus omnipotens Agapen in saecula servet.’

Another person who is commemorated ‘Meruit titulum inscribi, ut quique de fratribus legerit roget Deum ut sancto et innocenti spiritu ad Deum suscipiatur’.² This may not be very early; but the epitaph of Avircius Marcellus, written by himself within the second century, contains a similar appeal for the prayers of the passing Christian, which was meant to bear fruit after the death of the writer:—

ταῦθ' ὁ νοῶν εὐχαιθ' ὑπὲρ [αὐτοῦ] πᾶς ὁ συναφδός.³

Avircius had visited Rome, and may have borrowed from a Roman monument this form of request to survivors. It is certainly remarkable that nothing of the same kind occurs among the numerous inscriptions on Christian tombs in Phrygia collected by Sir W. M. Ramsay.⁴ But if monumental testimony is scarce in the East, the literature of the time supplies evidence of the use both of prayers for the departed and of commemorative *agapae* or Eucharists. In the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*,⁵ Queen Tryphaena is solicited by her deceased daughter in a dream to beg the prayers of Thecla for her removal to the abode of the just (ἵνα μετατεθῶ εἰς τὸν δίκαιον τόπον). Upon this Tryphaena calls Thecla and says, Τέκνον μου δεύτερον Θέκλα, δεῦρο πρόσευξαι ὑπὲρ τοῦ τέκνον μου, ἵνα ζήσεται εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, and Thecla, without hesitation (μηδὲν μελλήσασα), prays for Falconilla's salvation. The *Leucian Acts of John* represents the Apostle as celebrating the Eucharist at a tomb on the third day after death: τῇ δὲ ἑξῆς ἡμέρας ἔωθεν . . . παραγίνεται εἰς τὸ μνήμα τρίτην ἡμέραν ἐχούσης τῆς Δρουσιανῆς, ὅπως ἄρτον κλάσωσιν ἐκεῖ.⁶ Thecla's prayer for the unbaptized dead finds a remarkable parallel in the prayer of Perpetua for her little brother Dinocrates, who is brought by her

¹ *Op. cit.* p. 35.

² *Op. cit.* p. 50.

³ Ramsay *Cities and Bishoprics of Phrygia* ii pp. 723, 728.

⁴ No. 387 (*Cities* ii p. 534) is scarcely an exception, as Ramsay points out.

⁵ Lipsius-Bonnet ii 1 p. 186.

⁶ Lipsius-Bonnet i p. 255 f.

intercessions from a state of misery into one of comfort and enjoyment : ' Dinocratem [video] mundo corpore, bene vestitum, refrigerantem . . . et satius accessit de aqua ludere more infantium gaudens.'¹

It is at Carthage, the scene of Perpetua's martyrdom and perhaps the home of her childhood,² that prayers and offerings for the faithful dead are first seen to take a recognized place in the services of the Church. Whether in North Africa Montanism helped to mature a movement which in other provinces of the Empire was still at its beginnings, must remain uncertain ; but our knowledge of Carthaginian practice in this matter comes from the later writings of Tertullian, which were composed under Montanistic influence. Thus in the *De Anima* we read of the dead being, in the interval between death and burial, 'laid to rest by the presbyter's prayer' (c. 51 'cum in pace dormisset et morante adhuc sepultura interim oratione presbyteri³ componeretur'); in the *De exhortatione castitatis* it is urged as an argument against second marriages that the prayers and annual Eucharists, which affection requires the widower to offer for the soul of a deceased wife, will create an impossible situation if he takes a second (c. 51 'duae uxores eundem circumstant maritum, una spiritu, alia in carne; neque enim pristinam poteris odisse, cui etiam religiosiorem reservas affectum ut iam receptae apud Dominum, pro cuius spiritu postulas, pro qua oblationes annuas reddis. Stabis ergo ad Dominum cum tot uxoribus quot in oratione commemoras, et offeres pro duabus et commendabis illas duas per sacerdotem'). The same objection is raised to the second marriage of widows in the *De Monogamia* (c. 10 'pro anima eius orat et refrigerium interim postulat ei et in prima resurrectione consortium, et offert annuis diebus dormitionis eius').

In an earlier number of this JOURNAL⁴ I have called attention

¹ *Texts and Studies* i 2 p. 72 f. (*Passio S. Perpetuae*, 7, 8). Dinocrates 'no doubt had died unbaptized'; Augustine, who denies this (*De anima ad Renatum* i 10), 'was blinded by the desire to dispose of a disagreeable objection' (*ib.* p. 29). On *refrigerantem* see below p. 513, note.

² *Texts and Studies* i 2 p. 22 ff.

³ The *oratio presbyteri* in Tertullian's time was perhaps not a precomposed form, but it is interesting to compare the *orationes post obitum hominis* of the Gelasian and the *orationes in agenda mortuorum* of the Gregorian Sacramentary.

⁴ *J.T.S.* iii p. 167.

to the special stress laid by the Carthaginian Church of the third century on the sacrificial character of the Eucharist, adding, 'It is in keeping with this deepened sense of the reality of the Eucharistic commemoration that the Church in North Africa was the first Christian community, so far as we know, which offered the Eucharist for the benefit of the departed.' Even if the practice began with the Montanists, it must soon have become general among the Christians of Carthage, for Tertullian writes elsewhere in terms which imply that the Eucharist was offered as a matter of common custom at Christian burials and on the anniversaries of a death (*De corona* 3 'oblaciones pro defunctis, pro nataliciis, annua die facimus'). Cyprian, again, speaks of the offering of the Christian Sacrifice for the departed as having been regulated, and therefore approved in principle, by his predecessors.¹ In Cyprian's own time to be remembered at the altar was evidently a highly valued privilege, and the discipline which withheld this privilege from offenders had become a formidable weapon in the hands of the bishop and presbyters of the Church. Such phrases as *offerre pro aliquo, sacrificia pro aliquo* (or *pro dormitione alicuius*) *celebrare, apud altare Dei nominare in prece, deprecationem alicuius in ecclesia frequentare*,² are familiar to the readers of Cyprian, and present to the mind a picture of one side of Church life in Carthage during the third century which is impressive and well defined. We see the clergy and people surrounding the primitive altar: we hear the name of the deceased read out by the deacon, and the intercession offered for him by the bishop; we see the mourners go back to their homes comforted by the knowledge that their brother rests in the unity of the Church and in the peace of Christ. And when the *anniversaria commemoratio* of a martyr comes round, we catch the note of triumphant joy with which the Sacrifice is offered at his tomb.

¹ *Ep.* i 2 'quod episcopi antecessores nostri religiose considerantes . . . censuerunt ne quis frater excedens ad tutelam vel curam clericum nominaret, ac si quis hoc fecisset, non offerretur pro eo nec sacrificium pro dormitione eius celebraretur'. See Hefele *Councils* (E. tr.) i pp. 86, 92; Benson *Cyprian* pp. 45, 92.

² See *Epp.* i 2, xxxix 3. On *deprecatio* cf. E. W. Watson in *Studia Biblica* iv pp. 281, 283, and on *deprecari* = *orare* *ib.* p. 265. The term was afterwards used in the Gallican and Celtic rite; see F. E. Warren *Liturgy and Ritual of the Celtic Church* p. 105 f.

It would be of great interest to know whether other Churches had by this time followed in the steps of Carthage. A passage in the Latin interpretation of Origen's commentary on Romans¹ excites the hope that we have his testimony to a similar commemoration of the martyrs by the Church of Caesarea towards the middle of the third century. Rufinus represents him as refusing to decide between the readings *χρειαίς* and *μυρταίς* in Rom. xii 13, since both subserve the purpose of edification: as to the latter, 'meminisse sanctorum sive in collectis solemnibus, sive pro eo ut ex recordatione eorum proficiamus, aptum et conveniens videtur.' But it has been doubted whether it is Origen who speaks here or Rufinus,² and the question cannot be answered with certainty. The Latin commentary on Job which will be quoted further on, though perhaps Ante-Nicene, is not Origen's.³ Considering the speculative character of Origen's writings, 'his silence as to the prayers of the living for the dead is most remarkable,'⁴ especially when taken in connexion with the fact that he repeatedly alludes to the belief that the dead pray for the living.⁵ Yet Origen's silence is shared, so far as I have observed, by other writers of the third century, with the exception of those of North African extraction. To the witness of Tertullian and Cyprian I can add only a single sentence from Arnobius,⁶ who a few years before or after the end of the third century protests against the destruction of the churches on the ground that prayer is offered in them both for the living and for the dead ('cur immaniter conventicula [meruerunt] dirui? in quibus summus oratur Deus, pax cunctis et venia postulatur, magistratibus, exercitibus, regibus, familiaribus, inimicis, adhuc vitam degentibus et resolutis corporum vincione'). This reference to the intercession for the living and the dead in the liturgy compels us to believe that by the time of the last persecution the commemoration of the departed in the Eucharist had become so

¹ Lommatzsch vii 314 f 'memini in latinis exemplaribus magis haberi: *memoriis sanctorum communicantes*; verum nos nec consuetudinem turbamus, nec veritati praeiudicamus, maxime cum utrumque conveniat aedificationi'.

² Sanday and Headlam *Romans* p. 362. I do not share the doubt, but it must be noted.

³ See below, p. 506.

⁴ Westcott in *D.C.B.* iv 135.

⁵ See *hom. in Num.* xxvi 6; *hom. in Jos.* xvi 5; *de orat.* 14.

⁶ *Adv. Nationes* iv 26.

general in the churches of the empire that an appeal could be made to it before the heathen world.

We must now retrace our steps in order to examine a group of witnesses by which more light may be thrown upon details of Church life and worship in the third century than we have been able to gain from the literary remains of the time. Reference has been made to the earliest of Church orders, the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*.¹ The *Canons of Hippolytus*² are scarcely less disappointing than the *Teaching*; the directions which they give for the celebration of the Eucharist contain no form of intercession for the living or the dead. One paragraph, however, recognizes the use of the memorial *agape*: c. 33 1,³ 'If an *anamnesis* is held for the dead, let them receive the mysteries before they sit down; and let it not be held on the first day [of the week]. After the offering, before they sit down, let the bread of exorcism be distributed to them.'⁴ More is to be learnt from Hauler's Verona fragments of the *Didascalia*, c. 61: 'in memoriis congregantes vos, et sacrarum scripturarum facite lectiones et ad D(eu)m preces indesinenter offerite, et eam quae secundum similitudine(m) regalis corporis Chr(ist)i est regalem eucharistiam offerte tam in collectis vestris qua(m) etiam in coemiteriis et in dormientiu(m) exinitione; panem mundum praeponentes qui per ignem factus est et per invocationem sanctificatur, sine discretionem orantes offerite pro dormientibus.' Even in its Greek original, this order may not have been earlier than the middle of the

¹ See above p. 501.

² According to Funk the *Canons* belong to a much later period. See *J.T.S.* viii p. 307 ff.

³ Achelis p. 106; cf. p. 200 f.

⁴ The interesting passage in the Commentary on Job printed among the works of Origen (Lommatzsch xvi p. 238) may be cited here at length, as shewing the mind of the ancient Church in its memorial festivals: 'nos non nativitatē diem celebramus, cum sit dolorum atque tentationum introitus; sed mortis diem celebramus, utpote omnium dolorum depositionem atque omnium tentationum effugationem. Diem mortis celebramus quia non moriuntur hi qui mori videntur: propterea et memorias sanctorum facimus, et parentum nostrorum vel amicorum in fide morientium devote memoriam agimus, tam illorum refrigerio gaudentes quam etiam nobis piam consummationem in fide postulantes. Celebramus nimirum religiosos cum sacerdotibus convocantes, fideles una cum clero, invitantes adhuc egenos et prosperos, pupillos et viduas saturantes, ut fiat festivitas nostra in memoriam requiei defunctis animabus quarum memoriam celebramus, nobis autem efficiatur in odorem suavitatis in conspectu aeterni Dei.' Whoever the writer of this Commentary may have been, his view of the *memoriae* is surely in the best spirit of the third century.

⁴ P. 85 f.

fourth century¹; but these directions may well represent, like the Hippolytean Canons, the practice of the third.²

With the peace of the Church and the conversion of the Empire the evidence, both literary and liturgical, becomes abundant. Eusebius³ tells us that the obsequies of Constantine were the occasion of a great act of intercession for the Emperor who had put an end to persecution. As his body lay before the altar, priests and people with many tears poured forth their prayers for his soul (λεῶς δὲ παμπληθῆς σὺν τοῖς τῷ θεῷ ἱερωμένοις . . . τὰς εὐχὰς ὑπὲρ τῆς βασιλείας ψυχῆς ἀποδίδοται τῷ θεῷ). Eleven years after Constantine's death, Cyril⁴ bears witness to the permanent commemoration of the departed in the Liturgy of Jerusalem: εἶτα καὶ (i. e. after the commemoration of the saints) [προσφέροντες] ὑπὲρ τῶν προκεκοιμημένων ἁγίων πατέρων καὶ ἐπισκόπων καὶ πάντων ἀπλῶς τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν προκεκοιμημένων, μεγίστην δῆσιν πιστεύοντες ἔσσεσθαι ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὑπὲρ ὧν ἡ δέησις ἀναφέρεται, τῆς ἁγίας καὶ φρικωδεστάτης προκειμένης θυσίας. Perhaps at the very time when Cyril was instructing his neophytes at Jerusalem, in the Delta Bishop Serapion was engaged in compiling the office-book which a happy discovery put into our hands some eight years ago. Here at length we find the actual words of a fourth-century liturgical intercession for the departed:⁵ § I παρακαλοῦμεν δὲ καὶ ὑπὲρ πάντων τῶν κεκοιμημένων, ὧν ἔστιν καὶ ἡ ἀνάμνησις.⁶ ἁγιάσου τὰς ψυχὰς ταύτας, σὺ γὰρ πάσας γινώσκεις· ἁγιάσου πάσας τὰς ἐν Κυρίῳ κοιμηθείσας καὶ συγκαταρίθμησον πάσαις ταῖς ἁγλαῖς σου δυνάμεσιν, καὶ ὁδὸς αὐταῖς τόπον καὶ μοῦνην ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ σου. Still more interesting is the prayer which the Egyptian bishop provides for the burial of the dead.⁷ A short extract must suffice here: § 18 δεόμεθά σε περὶ τῆς κοιμήσεως καὶ ἀναπαύσεως τοῦ δούλου σου τοῦδε

¹ Wordsworth *Ministry of Grace* p. 29.

² It is interesting to compare the form which these directions receive in the *Apostolical Constitutions* (vi 30): ἀπαρατήτως δὲ συναθροίεσθε ἐν τοῖς κοιμητηρίοις τῶν ἀπ' αἰῶνος ἁγίων, καὶ τῶν ἀδελφῶν ὑμῶν τῶν ἐν Κυρίῳ κεκοιμημένων, καὶ τὴν ἀντίτυπον τοῦ βασιλείου σώματος τοῦ χριστοῦ δεκτὴν εὐχαριστίαν προσφέρετε ἐν τε ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις ὑμῶν καὶ ἐν τοῖς κοιμητηρίοις, καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἐξόδοις τῶν κεκοιμημένων ψάλλοντες προπέμπετε αὐτούς, ἕαν ᾧσι πιστοὶ ἐν Κυρίῳ.

³ *V. C.* iv 71.

⁴ *Catech. myst.* v 9.

⁵ *J. T. S.* i pp. 106, 112.

⁶ Here followed the recitation of the names, for the next clause is preceded by the rubric μετὰ τὴν ὑποβολὴν τῶν ὀνομάτων. See Brightman, *ad. loc.*

⁷ *J. T. S.* i pp. 268, 275.

(ἢ τῆς δούλης σου τῆσδε) τὴν ψυχὴν, τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ ἀνάπαυσον ἐν τόποις χλόης, ἐν ταμείοις ἀναπαύσεως . . . τὸ δὲ σῶμα ἀνάστησον ἐν ἡ ὥρισας ἡμέρα.

Another half-century brings us to the probable date of the *Apostolical Constitutions*. The liturgy of the eighth book, which may be taken to represent on the whole the liturgy of Antioch, recalls Cyril's account of the Jerusalem liturgy, but with the noteworthy difference that the great saints and the martyrs are included in one petition with the faithful generally, the Sacrifice being offered equally for all (c. 12 ἐτι προσφέρομέν σοι καὶ ὑπὲρ πάντων τῶν ἀπ' αἰῶνος εὐαρεστησάντων σοι ἀγίων, πατριαρχῶν, προφητῶν, . . . λαικῶν, καὶ πάντων ὧν ἐπίστασαι αὐτὸς τὰ ὀνόματα.¹ Explicit mention is made later in the same book of any person lately deceased who was to be commemorated: c. 41 ὁ διάκονος προσθήσει καὶ ταῦτα . . . ὑπὲρ τῆς κοιμήσεως τοῦδε ἢ τῆσδε δεηθῶμεν, ὅπως ὁ φιλόανθρωπος θεὸς προσδεξάμενος αὐτοῦ τὴν ψυχὴν ἀφήσῃ αὐτῷ πᾶν ἁμάρτημα ἐκούσιον καὶ ἀκούσιον καὶ ἴλεως καὶ εὐμενῆς γενόμενος κατατάξῃ εἰς χώραν εὐσεβῶν ἀνεμμένων.² The bishop then offers a prayer to the same effect, and the form ends with a direction to solemnize with psalms, lessons, and prayer the third, ninth, and fortieth days after death, as well as the anniversary (ἐπιτελεισθω δὲ τρίτα τῶν κεκοιμημένων . . . καὶ ἕνατα . . . καὶ τεσσαρακοστὰ . . . καὶ ἐνιαύσια ὑπὲρ μείλας αὐτοῦ). It is added that such celebrations are of service only to the faithful; to give alms to the poor on behalf of others is futile; their condition remains what it was before death (ὃ γὰρ περιόντι ἐχθρόν ἦν τὸ θεῖον, δῆλον ὅτι καὶ μεταστάτι). Lastly, the sixth book of the *Constitutions* repeats the directions of the Didascalia about cemetery commemorations and Eucharists.³

The fourth century yields an abundance of literary evidence upon the subject of prayer for the departed. A few examples must suffice. In the picture of contemporary Church life which concludes the *Panarion*, Epiphanius writes⁴: ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν τελευταίων, ἐξ ὀνόματος τὰς μνήμας ποιοῦνται, προσευχὰς τελοῦντες καὶ λατρείας καὶ οἰκονομίας. More than once, both in his earlier

¹ Lagarde p. 257 f. Yet a little further on, in the deacon's proclamation, a distinction seems to be drawn: τῶν ἀγίων μαρτύρων μνημονεύσωμεν . . . ὑπὲρ τῶν ἐν πίστει ἀναπαυσάμενων δεηθῶμεν.

² Lagarde p. 274 ff.

³ C. 30 (Lagarde p. 124 f). See above p. 506.

⁴ *Panar.* iii 2. 21.

homilies delivered at Antioch and after he went to Constantinople, Chrysostom warmly commends prayers and offerings for the dead. Thus, in preaching on 1 Corinthians,¹ he urges : βοηθῶμεν τοῖνυν αὐτοῖς (sc. τοῖς κεκοιμημένοις), καὶ κόπον ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν ἐπιτελῶμεν. εἰ γὰρ τοὺς παῖδας τοῦ Ἰῶβ ἐκάθαιρεν ἢ τοῦ πατρὸς θυσία, τί ἀμφιβάλλεις εἰ καὶ ἡμῖν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀπελθόντων προσφέρουσι γίνεται τις παραμυθία; . . . μὴ δὴ ἀποκάμωμεν τοῖς ἀπελθοῦσι βοηθοῦντες, καὶ προσφέροντες ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν εὐχάς. Similarly, in the later homilies on Philippians²: οὐκ εἰκὴ ταῦτα ἐνομοθετήθη ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀποστόλων τὸ ἐπὶ τῶν φρικτῶν μυστηρίων μνήμην γίνεσθαι τῶν ἀπελθόντων ἴσασω αὐτοῖς πολὺ κέρδος γινόμενον, πολλὴν τὴν ὠφέλειαν. In the case of catechumens who die before receiving baptism, he recommends almsgiving: ἐνεστί πένησι ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν διδοῖναι ποιεῖ τινα παραψυχὴν τὸ πρᾶγμα καὶ γὰρ παρ' ἀλλήλων ἡμᾶς ὠφελείσθαι βούλεται ὁ θεός. The *Historia Lausiaca* has several instances of the use of a commemorative *agape* or Eucharist in the Egyptian monasteries, e. g. § 16 ἄρτους ἀποφέρω, ἐπειδὴ ἀγάπη³ ἐστὶ τοῦδε τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ, καὶ αὔριον σαββάτου διαφαίνοντος χρεῖα τῶν προσφορῶν; § 22 συνέβη τοῦ μὲν τὰ τεσσαρακοστὰ⁴ ἐπιτελεῖσθαι, τοῦ δὲ τὰ τρίτα, παρὰ τῆς ἀδελφότητος. Such commemorations are forbidden in the case of two nuns who have committed suicide (§ 33). An interesting passage in the 'Canonical Answers' attributed to Timothy of Alexandria⁵ regulates the practice of the Egyptian Church in this matter, directing that the Sacrifice shall be offered only where the suicide can be definitely traced to insanity.

In the West the evidence comes chiefly from Milan and Carthage. About 387 Ambrose writes to a friend who is mourning the loss of a sister⁶: 'non tam deplorandam quam prosequendam orationibus reor, nec maestificandam lacrimis tuis, sed magis oblationibus animam eius Domino commendandam arbitror.' No one who has read the *Confessions* will have for-

¹ *Hom. in 1 Cor.* xli 5.

² *Hom. in Phil.* iii 4.

³ E. C. Butler *H. L.* p. 193: 'it may be questioned whether the Agapè in the present passage be not identical with the Eucharistic Celebration.'

⁴ Τρῆσσοστά is the reading of important MSS, but Abbot Butler prints τεσσαρακοστά, partly for textual reasons, partly because 'the Greek practice, ancient and modern, seems to have been to commemorate the departed on the fortieth day, the Western and Oriental on the thirtieth' (*H. L.* p. 100).

⁵ *Resp. Canon.* 14. The question runs: 'Ἐάν τις μὴ ἔχων ἑαυτὸν χειρίσθαι ἢ ἐπιμήσθαι ἑαυτὸν, εἰ γίνεται προσφορά, ἢ οὐ;'

⁶ *Ep.* i 39 4. Cf. *de obitu Valentiniani* 78.

gotten the touching references which Augustine makes to the belief entertained upon this subject by his mother and himself;¹ how Monnica on her death-bed 'tantummodo memoriam sui ad altare fieri desideravit'; how Augustine and his friends fulfilled her last wish 'in eis precibus quas tibi fudimus cum offerretur pro ea Sacrificium pretii nostri, iam iuxta sepulchrum posito cadavere priusquam deponeretur, sicut illis [at Milan] fieri solet'; how, finally, the reader of the *Confessions* is besought to carry on the chain of prayer: 'ut quotquot haec legerint, meminerint ad altare Tuum Monnicae famulae Tuae.' It is pleasant to learn from Possidius that when Augustine's own time came, the same pious care was bestowed upon himself. Of Augustine's judgment on the efficacy of prayers for the dead more than one explicit record remains in his works; the following from the *Enchiridion*² may be cited here: 'Cum ergo sacrificia sive altaris sive quaecunque elemosynarum pro baptizatis defunctis omnibus offeruntur, pro valde bonis gratiarum actiones sunt, pro non valde malis propitiationes sunt, pro valde malis etiamsi nulla sunt adiumenta mortuorum, qualescumque vivorum consolationes sunt; quibus autem prosunt, aut ad haec prosunt ut sit plena remissio, aut certe ut tolerabilior fiat ipsa damnatio.'

These remarks of Augustine, as well as those already quoted from Chrysostom, suggest that in the fourth century the question was being asked, 'To what purpose is this expenditure of prayer and Eucharist upon the departed members of the Church?' As a matter of fact, doubts were freely expressed upon the subject more than a generation before Augustine's time. Before A.D. 350 Cyril of Jerusalem had heard the point debated.³ 'I know many,' he tells his neophytes, 'who say, "What is a soul, leaving this world with sins or without them, profited by being remembered in the prayer?"' He replies that in offering the supplications of the liturgy we offer Christ sacrificed for our sins, and thus propitiate God both for the dead and for ourselves.⁴ But the

¹ *Conf.* ix 32, 36, 37.

² C. 29. Cf. c. 107, and *de civ. Dei* xxi 26. 4.

³ *Catech. myst.* v 10 οἷα γὰρ πολλοὺς ταῦτα λέγοντας τί ἀφελείται ψυχὴ μετὰ ἁμαρτημάτων ἀπαλασσομένη τοῦδε τοῦ κόσμου, ἢ οὐ μετ' ἁμαρτημάτων, εἰς ἐπὶ τῆ προσευχῆς μνημονεύεται;

⁴ *Ibid.* Χριστὸν ἐσφαγιασμένον ὑπὲρ τῶν ἡμετέρων ἁμαρτημάτων προσφέρων, ἐξιλευμένοι ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν τε καὶ ἡμῶν τὸν φιλόανθρωπον θεόν.

question needed a more complete answer than it received from Cyril. A few years later¹ the dissatisfaction which was felt came to a head in the outspoken words of Acrius of Pontus. Acrius condemned the practice of offering the Eucharist for the dead as at once irrational and mischievous: *τίνοι τῷ λόγῳ μετὰ θάνατον ὀνομάζεστε ὀνόματα τεθνεώτων; εὐχεται γὰρ ὁ ζῶν, ἡ οἰκονομίαν ἐποίησε· τί ὠφεληθήσεται ὁ τεθνεώς; εἰ δὲ ὅλως εὐχή τῶν ἐνταυθα τοὺς ἐκείσε ὤνησεν, ἄρα γοῦν μηδεὶς εὐσεβεῖτω μηδὲ ἀγαθοποιεῖτω, ἀλλὰ ποιησάσθω φίλους τινὰς δι' οὗ βούλεται τρόπου, ἥτοι χρήμασι πείσας, ἥτοι φίλους ἀξιώσας ἐν τῇ τελευτῇ, καὶ εὐχέσθωσαν περὶ αὐτοῦ ἵνα μὴ τι ἐκεῖ πάθῃ, μηδὲ τὰ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ γεγόμενα τῶν ἀνηκέστων ἀμαρτημάτων ἐκζητηθῇ.*² The retort of Epiphanius to this somewhat crude attack on the established practice of Christendom is temperate beyond his wont. The practice rests, he says,³ on the conviction that the departed members of the Church still exist, and live with Christ; to pray for them is not more futile than to pray for friends who are away upon a journey. And even if our prayers do not wholly cancel their sins, we may render service to them by praying. In the liturgy we name both the righteous and the sinful, seeking mercy for the latter, and honouring the former, while at the same time we distinguish between the relative holiness of the saints and the unapproachable purity and majesty of our Lord. In any case it is too late to attempt to change the inflexible rules of our Mother, the Church, who has ordained prayers and offerings for the dead (*ἡ μήτηρ ἡμῶν ἡ ἐκκλησία εἶχε θεσμούς ἐν αὐτῇ κειμένους ἀλύτους, μὴ δυναμένους καταλυθῆναι*).

Epiphanius knew himself to be on the winning side, and Acrius made so little impression on his own age that our knowledge of his name and opinions is perhaps due to the *Panarion*. If we can trust Epiphanius, he deserved to fail; in any case, there was

¹ Eustathius of Sebaste, whose appointment to that See was, according to Epiphanius, the occasion of the outbreak of Acrius, was consecrated about A.D. 356.

² Epiph. *haer.* 75, 2.

³ *Ibid.* 7 τί ἂν εἴη τούτου προϋργιαίτερον; . . . πιστεύειν μὲν τοὺς παρόντας ὅτι οἱ ἀπελθόντες ζῶσι . . . ὠφελεί δὲ καὶ ἡ ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν γενομένη εὐχή, εἰ καὶ τὰ ὅλα τῶν αἰτημάτων μὴ ἀποκόπτοι κ.τ.λ.

⁴ Acrius is mentioned also by the Latin heresiologists, Philaster (c. 72), Augustine (c. 53), Isidore (c. 39), Paulus (c. 18), Honorius of Autun (c. 54); but their information, so far as it refers to Acrius himself, was probably derived from Epiphanius.

need of a stronger man and one of more saintly character to begin a successful crusade against a practice which perhaps was coeval with Christianity, and certainly had been making steady progress in the Church for two centuries and a half. The Aerians seem scarcely to have survived their founder¹; any remaining tendency to call in question the offering of prayers and Eucharists for the departed was effectually checked by the authority of the great leaders of Christian thought and life who flourished during the next fifty years.

This brief examination of the evidence of the first four centuries points to some results which it may be well to collect here.

1. Although prayer for departed friends may have been occasionally offered by individual Christians from the very first, there is nothing to shew that the dead were commemorated by name, in *agape* or Eucharist, during the Apostolic and sub-Apostolic periods. Such commemorations probably began in the second century with the holding of memorial *agapae* at the tombs of the martyrs and afterwards at those of other Christian dead.² If the Eucharist was associated with the cemetery *agape*, whether it was held concurrently or immediately preceded the feast, the names of the dead may thus have found admission into the Eucharistic prayer. Early in the third century the Eucharist itself was, in North Africa at least, offered for the faithful departed, and before the end of the same century intercession for the dead seems to have been everywhere a familiar feature of the liturgy; while special celebrations of the Eucharist in memory of deceased individuals, in the cemeteries³ as well as in the churches, were advocated in contemporary manuals of Church life. The fourth century, with its assured freedom from persecution, its veneration for the martyrs, its growing sense of the greatness of the Mysteries and the unity of the Body of Christ, held still more firmly by

¹ He was alive when Epiphanius wrote (cf. § 1 οὗτος ἐστὶ καὶ δῆμος (ἢ ἐν σαρκί); his followers were numerous at first (§ 3 περιέλαυνε πολλὸν χρόνον ἀνθρώπων τε καὶ γυναικῶν) and, as Philaster seems to say, abounded in Pamphylia till near the end of the fourth century.

² Dr. Keating (*Agapé and Eucharist* p. 156f) suggests that the mortuary *agapé* 'was originally in all probability a grafting, so to speak, of the Christian Agapé upon the immemorial custom of funeral feasts'.

³ It was the first care of the tyrant Maximin in 311 to find a pretext for stopping the meetings of Christians in the cemeteries (Eus. *H. E.* ix 2 πρῶτον μὲν ἐγένετο ἡμῶς τῆς ἐν τοῖς κοιμητηρίοις συνόδου διὰ προφάσεως πειρώμεται).

these commemorations; and notwithstanding the opposition of malcontents such as Acrius, and the reluctance of the worldly to burden themselves with the spiritual care of their dead, the practice of offering prayers, Eucharists, and alms for deceased members of the Church thenceforward established itself as an important factor in the Christian life both of East and West.

2. It may be that at first no attempt was made to analyse the purpose of these prayers and offerings. It was enough that by means of them the Church kept alive the memory of her departed members, and commended their souls and bodies to the keeping of Almighty God. The precise benefit to be reaped by the departed themselves was not clearly indicated; even towards the end of the fourth century, Chrysostom is content to speak of an undefined help or profit which they would receive from the prayers of the living. On the other hand, Tertullian, with the Western love of definiteness, already counts up the principal advantages to be gained by the dead; the prayers of the Church will bring them *refrigerium*¹, refreshment and rest after the toils of life, such as Lazarus found in the bosom of Abraham, and a part in 'the first resurrection'. Forgiveness of sins was also expected to follow from these intercessions. No importance can be attached to the case of Falconilla or to that of Dinocrates; in both accounts we are dealing only with private speculations, which cannot be taken to reflect the general belief of the Church. The Church of the first four centuries was careful not to encourage prayer for any but such as had departed in the faith of Christ. But what of Christians who had passed away with sins committed after baptism? Might not prayers and Eucharists gain for them a remission more or less complete? The fourth century answered the question generally in the affirmative, attaching special weight in this connexion to the offering of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. Evidence to this effect has been found in the *Catecheses* of Cyril, in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, and in the *Enchiridion* of Augustine. Augustine works out the principle into a careful statement, in which the benefits received by the departed are graduated according to the class to which in the judgement of God they severally belong.

¹ On *refrigerium* in Tertullian see Roensch *Itala u. Vulgata* p. 321 f.; *Das N.T. Tertullians* pp. 217 ff, 645.

A middle course between this position and the vagueness of the early Roman *vivas in pace* is followed by the Egyptian bishop, Serapion. His petitions for a fuller sanctification of the soul after death, and its reunion with the body, will commend themselves to many who dare not be more explicit. One may be permitted to regret that so chastened and reasonable a form of intercession for the departed was not before the Reformers of the sixteenth century when they fixed the practice of the English Church. It is in great part the fear of over-definiteness, in regard to a sphere of life whose conditions are still so imperfectly known, which debars thousands of private Christians from the comfort of prayer for their dead, and whole communions from reciting the names of the faithful departed in the liturgy, after the example of the ancient Church.

H. B. SWETE.