

## ANY FRIEND OF GOD'S IS A FRIEND OF MINE

By Patrick Madrid

**E**VERY SUNDAY MILLIONS OF CHRISTIANS RECITE THE APOSTLES' CREED, professing their belief in the "communion of saints." Few realize the importance of this phrase, which is sandwiched between other deep mysteries of the faith.

The Catholic understanding is denounced by many Protestants as "unbiblical." It's a bitter irony that the very doctrine of Christian unity has itself become a barrier to unity. The controversy revolves around the question, "Is it biblical to ask the saints in heaven to pray (intercede) for us?"

Catholics say yes. Since Christians are united with each other through Christ, and are commanded to love and pray for one another, Christians on earth can ask Christians in heaven for their prayers. Protestants say no. They say that praying to saints undermines Christ's unique mediatorship, pointing to 1 Timothy 2:5: "There is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." They think asking the saints to intercede for us is in direct conflict with this verse. The Anglican Reformers, under the leadership of Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury, said, "The Romish doctrine concerning . . . [the] invocation of saints is a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but is, rather, repugnant to the Word of God" (39 Articles of Religion, article 22).

Vatican II gave the Catholic position: "By the hidden and kindly mystery of God's will a supernatural solidarity reigns among men. A consequence of this is that the sin of one person harms other people just as one person's holiness helps others. In this way Christian believers help each other reach their supernatural destiny. . . . This is the very ancient dogma called the communion of saints. It means that the life of each individual son of God is joined in Christ and through Christ by a wonderful link to the life of all his other Christian brethren. Together they form the supernatural unity of Christ's Mystical Body so that, as it were, a single mystical person is formed. . . ."

"The union of the living with their brethren who have fallen asleep in Christ is not broken; the Church has rather believed through the ages that it gains strength from the sharing of spiritual benefits. The great intimacy

of the union of those in heaven with Christ gives extra steadiness in holiness to the whole Church and makes a manifold contribution to the extension of her building. Now that they are welcomed in their own country and are at home with the Lord, through him, with him, and in him they intercede unremittingly with the Father on our behalf" (Sacrosanctum Concilium, 4-5). As Paul said, "We... are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another" (Rom. 12:5). Catholics believe membership in Christ's Body means a personal relationship with Jesus and, through him, with all Christians.

### "Me and Jesus" Christianity is not biblical

**A**LTHOUGH PROTESTANTS MAY AGREE WITH this in theory, in application most of them (this is especially true of Evangelicals and Fundamentalists) promote an individualistic "me and Jesus" version of Christianity, teaching that the only thing ultimately important is one's own relationship with Christ, independent of any relationship to anyone else. While it may pay lip service to the communion of saints, in reality most of Protestantism ignores the organic bond of unity between the Christian faithful, a bond which perdures beyond death.

Since most Catholics and Protestants agree the Bible is God's inspired, inerrant Word (some believe it is neither), the Bible is our common ground for dialogue. To be effective in explaining the communion of saints to Protestants, Catholics must know how to present the biblical foundations of the doctrine. (A Protestant sometimes remains unmoved in his objections even in the face of a thoroughgoing biblical defense of a Catholic doctrine. What the Protestant really disagrees with is the Catholic interpretation of verses, thus moving the argument beyond the "It's not in the Bible" category to the subjective "I don't agree

with your interpretation of these verses” category. This attitude stems from Protestantism’s fatal flaw, sola scriptura, the notion that the Bible is the sole rule of faith, independent of Tradition or the magisterium. Protestants demand that Catholics substantiate their beliefs in Scripture (the old “show me where it says that in the Bible” routine), yet when the demanded biblical evidence is produced, the Catholic conclusion is nonetheless rejected as “unscriptural.” Since they reject the concept of an infallible interpreter of Scripture, whether it be the Church or an individual, Protestants can only put forth their own opinions on what they think Scripture means. They have no way of knowing for certain if their interpretation of the Bible is correct.) The Catholic position rests on four pillars: (1) The Church is Christ’s Body; (2) Christ has only one Body, not one on earth and one in heaven; (3) Christians are not separated from each other by death; (4) Christians must love and serve each other.

### The Church is Christ’s body

**P**AUL’S USE OF THE BODY as an image to describe the unity Christians have with Christ and each other is particularly vivid: “For as in one body we have many parts, and all the parts do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another” (Rom. 12:4-5).

The Lord alluded to this unity when he prayed, “May [they] be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one” (John 17:22-23). He used the analogy of himself as a vine and Christians as its branches to illustrate the organic bond Christians share (John 15:1- 5). (The teaching that the Church is Christ’s Body is emphasized throughout the New Testament (1 Cor. 10:16, 12:12-27; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 1:22-23, 3:4-6, 4:4, 15, 25, 5:21-32; Col. 1:18, 3:15; Heb. 13:1-3).)



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### Jesus has only one body

**J**ESUS HAS ONLY ONE BODY - not one on earth and another one in heaven (Eph. 4:4, Col. 3:15). All Christians, including those in heaven, are members of that one body.

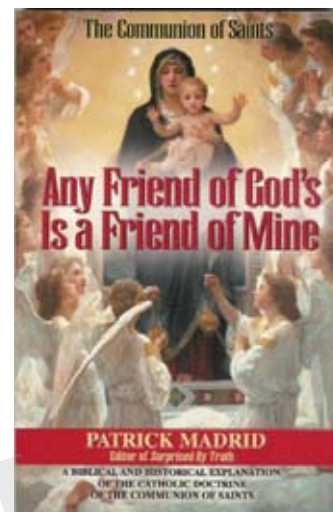
### Not separated by death

**B**ECAUSE OF CHRIST’S VICTORY OVER death, a victory in which all Christians share, (See 1 Cor. 15:25-26, 54-56; 2 Cor. 2:14; 2 Tim. 1:10.) natural death can’t separate Christians from Christ or from each other. That’s why Paul exulted, “What will separate us from the love of Christ? . . . I am convinced that neither death, nor life . . . will be able to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 8:35- 39). Since death has no power to sever the bond of Christian unity, the relationship between Christians on earth and those in heaven remains intact.

The Protestant animus toward the idea that saints in heaven can pray for us bespeaks a sort of “out of sight, out of mind” mentality: “Since I no longer can see and speak to departed Christians, they must no longer matter to me.” This myopic position is not scriptural. It clashes with verses that Protestants know by heart.

Paul chides Christians who think they don’t need other Christians: “God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as he intended. If they were all one part, where would the body be? But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I do not need you,’ nor again the head [say] to the feet, ‘I do not need you.’ . . . God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to a part that is without it, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy” (1 Cor. 12:18-20, 24-26). Catholics believe this applies to Christians in heaven too.

**Read Patrick’s book-length explanation of the biblical doctrine of the Communion of Saints!**



### Christians bound in charity

**T**HE FOURTH PILLAR IS CHRIST’S law of charity. Jesus said that loving one another is second in importance only to loving God (Matt. 22:38, Mark 12:30-31, 1 Cor. 13). This law of charity is emphasized in the New Testament at every turn, especially in the form of intercessory prayer.

Paul exhorts Christians to pray, supplicate, petition, and intercede for all people. He emphasizes that intercessory prayer “is good and pleasing to God our savior” (1 Tim. 2:1-4). Similar exhortations permeate the New Testament:

“I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in the struggle by your prayers to God on my behalf” (Rom. 15:30-32).

“In [Jesus] we have put our hope that he will also rescue us again, as you help us with prayer” (2 Cor. 1:10).

“We always give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, . . . we do not cease praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding to live in a manner worthy of the Lord” (Col. 1:4, 9-10). (See



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Acts 8:24; 2 Cor. 13:7; Phil. 1:9; Gal. 5:13, 6:2; Eph. 4:32; 1 Thess. 3:10-12, 4:9-18, 5:14-15, 25; 2 Thess. 1:3, 3:1; 1 Tim. 2:1-4; 2 Tim. 1:3-4; Heb. 3:19, 13:18; Jas. 5:16; 1 Pet. 1:22, 3:8; 1 John 4:7-21; 2 John 5.)

If, while on earth, Paul could say, “My heart’s desire and prayer to God on their behalf is for salvation” (Rom. 10:1) and “I remember you constantly in my prayers, night and day. I yearn to see you again” (2 Tim. 1:3), is there any reason to imagine that upon entering heaven Paul’s charity and desire for others’ salvation would be quenched and his prayers for others cease? Not at all. The Bible’s many exhortations to mutual charity apply to all Christians, so they must apply to Christians in heaven. Consider these admonitions regarding charity:

“Bear one another’s burdens, and so you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).

“Love one another with mutual affection; anticipate one another in showing honor. . . contribute to the needs of the saints” (Rom. 12:9-10).

“No one should seek his own advantage, but that of his neighbor” (1 Cor. 10:24).

“On the subject of mutual charity you have no need for anyone to write you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another. . . Nevertheless, we urge you, brothers, to progress even more” (1 Thess. 4:9-10).

“Encourage one another, and build one another up, . . . We urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, cheer the fainthearted, support the weak . . . always seek what is good both for each other and for all” (1 Thess. 5:11, 14-15; see also 2 Cor. 1:10-11).

### We can only to Christians here below to pray for us?

**A** PROTESTANT MIGHT OBJECT, “THESE VERSES refer to Christians on earth only. They say nothing about those in heaven.” But where in the Bible do Protestants get the notion that God’s

commandment of charity is restricted to those on earth? Aren’t the commandments of the Lord eternal, established in heaven as well as on earth? Although the saints in heaven are not explicitly mentioned in these verses, their participation is implied.

The book of Hebrews gives us a compelling vision of the communion of saints in action. Chapter eleven extols the heroism of Old Testament saints, mentioning Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Joseph, Moses, and even Rahab the harlot.

Chapter twelve reminds us that it’s now our turn to run the race toward salvation. The writer encourages us to observe and imitate the heroic virtue of our Old Testament brothers and sisters and follow in their footsteps: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us, while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith” (Heb. 12:1-2).

Notice the Old Testament saints are called witnesses who surround us, as though they’re cheering us on to victory as we run the race, following in their footsteps. (This metaphor is derived from the Hellenistic foot race, a popular first-century spectator sport. The writer likens mortal life to a spiritual race which we must run, striving to win the crown of salvation (see 1 Cor. 9:24-27). His didactic purpose in extolling the virtues of those who have run the race before us is twofold: first, to remind us that the saints are spectators of our race and, second, to urge us to imitate their examples. “Remember your leaders who spoke the Word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith” (Heb. 13:7). See also: 1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17, 4:19; 1 Thess. 1:6-7.) The saints aren’t mere bystanders, devoid of compassion for us their fellow Christians still struggling on earth. Because of their love for us they earnestly intercede on our behalf before the throne of God. (If they didn’t intercede, could it be said they in fact love us?)

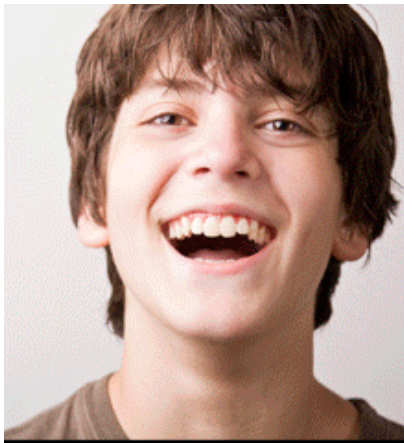
Jesus alludes to this fraternal compassion of departed Christians in

his parable about Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-30). Notice that, although the rich man was in a place of torment, he showed charity toward his brothers: “I beg you, Father [Abraham], send [Lazarus] to my father’s house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they too come to this place of torment.” Even in his fiery sufferings, his thoughts were turned lovingly toward his family on earth. (While it’s true the rich man received a negative answer to his request, it can’t be denied that he was interceding for his relatives on earth. I believe this passage is very likely a glimpse of purgatory (see 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 1 Pet. 3:19, 4:6), since the damned are incapable of charity and the rich man was exhibiting charity (which suggests he was not in hell). Protestants will contest this interpretation, arguing that the rich man was not in purgatory (since, they believe, there is no purgatory), but in hell. But this argument actually strengthens the Catholic position on the communion of saints, because if even the damned can intercede for those on earth, it follows a fortiori that the blessed in heaven can.)

### Two common Protestant objections

**T**WO COMMON PROTESTANT OBJECTIONS ARE that there is no biblical evidence of the saints interceding for us and that those in heaven are oblivious to earthly affairs. These notions are biblically untenable.

In Revelation (the book which gives the clearest view of what the saints in heaven are doing) we find cases of the saints’ intercession, and we consistently see that they’re very much aware of what’s happening on earth. (See Luke 15:7 and Revelation 19:1-4.) Two such examples: In Revelation 5:8 (see also Rev. 8:3-4) the saints stand before the throne of the Lamb, before the gold altar in the heavenly sanctuary. They sing hymns of praise and offer up the prayers of the saints on earth, prayers which rise like billowing clouds of incense. In Revelation 6:9-10 the martyred saints are praying impetratory prayers against their murderers,



#### QUESTION

How did *this* nice Catholic boy become ...

urging the Lord to avenge their deaths.

But apart from such explicit passages one can deduce that saints pray for us because we know that in heaven the saints are perfected in the virtue of charity that we on earth strive imperfectly to practice. They can love us and intercede for us with a single-minded intensity and efficacy they never could have had on earth.

John tells us that “God is love” and that “Whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God. . . . This is the commandment we have from him: Whoever loves God must love his brother” (1 John 4:16, 20-21).

### God’s friends are our friends

**F**AR FROM BEING EXCLUDED FROM John’s teaching, Christians in heaven best exemplify it. Since they see God face to face and are eternally bathed by his burning love, they can’t help but love all those whom God loves. They’re imbued with God’s passionate love for his people. How could they not be? Because they love God they love and intercede for us. In heaven they perfectly fulfill the biblical mandate: “Since you have purified yourselves by obedience to the truth for sincere mutual love, love one another intensely” (1 Pet. 1:22).

Heaven would be a very strange place indeed, and God a very strange

Father, if Christians in heaven were prohibited from intercessory prayer. Protestants must grapple with the question, “Why would God command intercessory prayer by Christians on earth but prohibit it by Christians in heaven?” (Even Martin Luther, when preaching on 1 John 3:13-18, reasoned his way very close to the Catholic position: “Such is the right interpretation and understanding of John’s expression, ‘We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brethren.’ Here, in clear, decisive words, the conclusion is expressed that no man may boast of life unless he has love. . . . One who knows the wretchedness and misery of death from experience, but has entered upon life with its solace and joy, blessings he seeks to maintain, such a person will desire for others the same blessing” [emphasis added] (Sermons of Martin Luther, ed. John Nicholas Lenker [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988], vol. 8, 52-54).

### The “one mediator” argument

**N**OW WE MUST STILL DEAL with several common Protestant objections, the first of which is the “one mediator” argument: “Since Christ is the one mediator between God and man, asking the saints to intercede for us constitutes a gross infringement on his unique role. This is impermissible. We should just pray to God directly, period.”

Actually, Catholics do both—and so do Protestants. Catholics and Protestants both pray directly to God and also ask their fellow Christians to pray for them. The difference is that Catholics don’t restrict the term “Christians” to mean “only Christians on earth.”

It must be made clear that the Catholic Church in no way teaches that the saints are mediators in the special sense used in 1 Timothy 2:5. Because of the Incarnation, Jesus has a unique role as mediator. Since he is the only one who is God and man, the only contact point between us and the Father, only he is capable of bridging the chasm of sin that separates us from

God. No saint can take Christ’s place as mediator. The Catholic Church does not teach that any Christian is a mediator in the sense used in 1 Timothy 2:5. It teaches instead that all Christians are intercessors who, because of Christ’s mediatorship, are able to pray for each other. (The official Catholic position on this issue appears in Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent (Rockford: TAN, 1978), Session V (“Decree on Original Sin”), 25-28, Session XXV (“Decree on the Invocation of Saints”), 214-217.)

If asking Christians in heaven to pray for us conflicts with Christ’s mediatorship, asking Christians on earth to pray for us conflicts for the same reason. If 1 Timothy 2:5 eliminates intercession by the Christians in heaven, it eliminates intercession by Christians on earth.

But this would be a serious misreading. Far from excluding Christians from a share in Christ’s mediatorship, Paul is actually emphasizing that we share in it through intercessory prayers. Our intercessions are effectual precisely and only because Christ is the one mediator.

### “Mini-mediators”

**W**HEN HE COMMANDED THAT “SUPPLICATIONS, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone . . . for this is good and pleasing to God our savior” (1 Tim. 2:1, 3), Paul was calling all Christians to exercise a “mini-mediatorship” through and in Christ. After all, someone who prays, supplicates, and petitions is a go-between—a mediator who goes to God on behalf of someone else and who asks the Lord to grant blessings or healing or strength or forgiveness or salvation.

Christian mediatorship through intercessory prayer is qualitatively different from the mediatorship of Jesus, and it is only possible because Jesus is the mediator between us and the Father. By his death on the cross we can go boldly into the presence of the Father and pray, intercede, petition, and supplicate on behalf of others

(Eph. 2:18, 1 Tim. 2:1-4, Heb. 4:16).

Another reason there's no conflict between asking fellow Christians for prayers and believing that Jesus is the one mediator between God and man is that Jesus shares his other unique roles in lesser ways with Christians.

Jesus is the Creator of all things (John 1:1-3, Col. 1:16-17, Heb. 1:1-2), yet when it comes to creating human life Jesus shares this role with men and women, mediating his creatorship through us via sexual intercourse. The human soul is created by God, out of nothing, at the instant the marital union produces a new body. The Lord could have chosen to create human life, body and soul, directly and unilaterally, but he didn't, preferring instead to make his role as Creator dependent in a way on human action.

Jesus is the shepherd of his flock the Church (John 10:16), yet he shares his shepherdhood in a subordinate way with others, beginning with Peter (John 21:15-17) and extending it later to others (Eph. 4:11). (After saying he's the Good Shepherd, Jesus says he's the only shepherd (John 10:11-16), yet this seemingly exclusive statement doesn't conflict with him making Peter shepherd over the flock (John 21:15-17) or with his calling others to be shepherds as well (Eph. 4:11). Peter emphasizes that Jesus shares his role as shepherd with others by calling Jesus the chief shepherd, thus implying lesser shepherds (1 Pet. 5:4). Note also that the Greek construction of John 10:16 ([there is] one shepherd, heis poimen) is the same as 1 Timothy 2:5 ([there is] one mediator, heis mesites.) The apostles and their successors, the bishops, are truly shepherds also.

Jesus is the high priest of the New Covenant, eternally present before the Father, mediating his once-for-all sacrifice for our redemption (Heb. 3:1, 4:14-15, 5:5-10, 7:15-26, 8:1, 9:11). But the Bible also says

Christians are called to



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share in Christ's priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5-9; Rev. 1:6, 5:10, 20:6).

Jesus is the supreme judge (John 5:27, 9:39; Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim 4:1), yet Christians are called to share in Christ's judgeship. They will be judges in heaven, even judging the angels (Matt. 19:28, Luke 22:30, 1 Cor. 6:2-3, Rev. 20:4).

Jesus is the sovereign king of the universe (Mark 15:32; 1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 15:3, 17:14, 19:16), but he shares his kingship with all Christians, who in heaven will wear crowns, sit on thrones, and reign as kings alongside Jesus—but always subordinate to him. Our Lord says, "I will give the victor the right to sit with me on my throne, as I myself first won the victory and sit with my Father on his throne" (Rev. 3:21). (See also Matt. 19:23; Luke 22:30; Rev. 1:6, 5:10).

Jesus forgives our sins and reconciles us to the Father (2 Cor. 5:18-21), but he calls us to share in various ways in his ministry of forgiveness and reconciliation (Matt. 9:5-8, 18:18; John 20:21-22; Acts 2:38; 2 Cor. 5:18-20; James 5:14-15).

Clearly, no Christian can usurp Christ's unique roles as Creator, shepherd, priest, king, judge, and reconciler, but each Christian is called to share in these roles in subordinate ways. The principle of sharing in Christ's roles extends, in the form of intercessory prayer, to Christ's mediatorship as well.

## Praying straight to God

**A**NOTHER COMMON ARGUMENT AGAINST PRAYERS to saints is the objection, "Why pray to the saints when you can go straight to God?"

Protestants argue that verses such as these imply we should go only to God for our needs: "Through [Jesus] we both have access in one Spirit to the Father" (Eph. 2:18); "Let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help" (Heb. 4:16); "We have one who speaks to the Father in our

defense, Jesus Christ, the righteous one" (1 John 2:1). They feel that asking the saints for prayer is superfluous since, through Jesus, we now have a direct line to God. No "helpers" are necessary.

Sometimes this argument takes the form of an analogy: "If you had complete, unrestricted access to the President of the United States and could see him whenever you had a complaint or needed a favor, why waste your time going to see the Secretary of State or the Chief of Staff when you could go directly into the Oval Office and get what you want from the man who makes the decisions?"

In other words, why ask the saints to pester God for you (as though they can convince him to do things and you can't), when God loves you and wants to give you good things if you just ask him?

This is an incredibly obtuse line of reasoning. Of course God wants us to ask him for things directly - and we do - but he also wants us to ask each other for prayers (1 Tim. 2:1-3). What Protestant, when asked for prayer by a fellow Christian, would whirl on his heel and snarl, "How unbiblical! Why ask me to pray for you when you can go directly to God and ask him yourself?" Protestants realize that sharing in Christ's mediatorship on earth by intercessory prayer is no more "unbiblical" than sharing in Christ's priesthood or kingship or judgeship.

Many Protestants delight in being asked for intercessory prayer, (Isn't it reasonable to imagine the saints are just as delighted when asked for their prayers?) and they actively encourage it in others, especially in those they consider "prayer warriors," righteous Christians renowned for the efficacy of their prayers. ("The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful" [James 5:16]). Christians in heaven are perfected in righteousness. Should their prayers be discounted? To ignore their role as "prayer warriors" makes no scriptural sense.

## Boettner's argument

**L**ORRAINE BOETTNER, THE GODFATHER OF modern anti-Catholicism, takes a different tack in his argument: "How dishonoring it is to Christ to teach that he is lacking in pity and compassion for his people and that he must be persuaded to that end. . . . When he was on earth it was never necessary for anyone to persuade him to be compassionate. (This is untrue. There are a number of biblical cases in which Jesus was persuaded to be compassionate. A particularly striking example is the Canaanite woman who had to beg Jesus repeatedly for mercy (almost to the point of arguing with him) before he would agree to cure her daughter (Matt. 15:21-28).) Rather, when he saw the blind and the lame, the afflicted and hungry, he was moved with compassion for them and lifted them out of their distress. He had immediate mercy on the wicked but penitent thief on the cross, and there was no need for intercession by Mary although she was there present.

"His love for us is as great as when he was on earth; his heart is as tender; and we need no other intermediary, neither his mother after the flesh, nor any saint or angel, to entreat him on our behalf. Thus Christ, because he is both God and man, is the only Savior, the only Mediator, the only way to God. Not one word is said about Mary . . . or the saints as mediators. Yet Romanism teaches that there are many mediators." (Roman Catholicism (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962), 147-148. While Boettner's pseudo-scholarly brand of anti-Catholicism is an embarrassment to better-educated Evangelicals, Roman Catholicism is widely used as a source for anti-Catholic arguments. His arguments must be reckoned with.)

This argument is a contrivance. Note that Boettner never engages the Catholic position. He argues against a straw man by insinuating that Catholics believe that God needs Mary or the saints to intercede for us or else he won't act. No Catholic believes it's "necessary" for anyone to persuade God about anything.

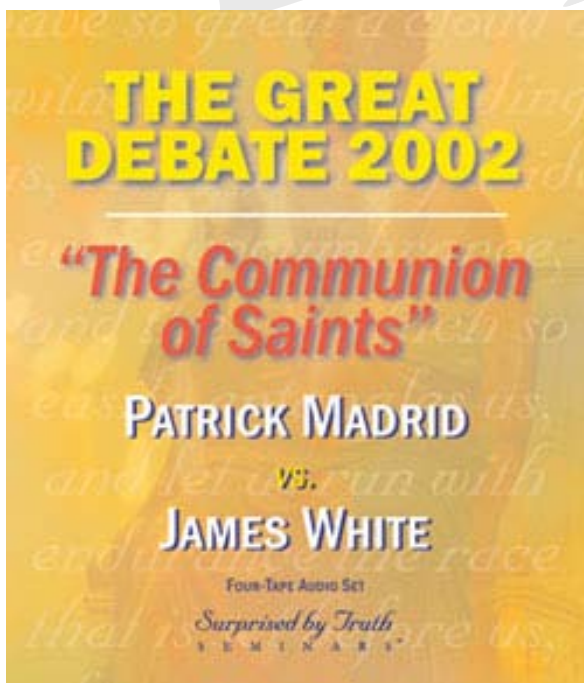
## Boettner ignores the Bible

**B**OETTNER CONVENIENTLY IGNORES THE FACT that the Bible says God is pleased by intercessory prayer (1 Tim. 2:1-4) and that sometimes, for his own inscrutable reasons, the Lord intervenes only as a result of intercession. Paul emphasizes that God frequently grants gifts "through the prayers of many" (2 Cor. 1:10-11).

Boettner neglects to mention the biblical example of Mary's intercession with Christ in the relatively mundane matter of the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-10), nor does he deal with the fact that the martyrs in heaven intercede with God, beseeching him to avenge their deaths (Rev. 6:9-11).

The Bible is full of examples of angels and saints interceding with God on behalf of others. Abraham intercedes on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:16-32). Moses intercedes for the people of Israel, begging God not to destroy them, and God relents (Ex. 32:7-14). An angel intercedes on behalf of Jerusalem (Zech. 1:12). Paul intercedes on behalf of the Church (Col. 1:9-12).

# PATRICK MADRID vs. JAMES WHITE



**T**he debate was a great opportunity to contrast the Catholic and Reformed Protestant views on the nature and meaning of the communion of saints.

This debate concentrated primarily on the biblical and patristic evidence showing that the Church is the Body of Christ, that there is only one Body (not one in heaven and one on earth), that death does not separate the members of the Body, and that all members of the Body of Christ are commanded to pray for and spiritually assist one another, including the saints in heaven. Other focuses of the debate were the testimony of the early Church to show — especially through the words of St. Athanasius, St. Augustine, St. John Chrysostom, and other important early Church Scripture scholars and bishops — that the Christians universally venerated the saints and invoked their intercession.

In short, this is a debate you will really enjoy and benefit from seeing. The spectacle of two veteran apologist — Catholic vs. Protestant — go at it in a clash that kept the audience on the edge of their seats!

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## Not all prayer is worship

**T**HERE IS A MORE FUNDAMENTAL reason Protestants object to the invocation of saints. Many of them, especially Evangelicals and Fundamentalists, have a poor understanding of prayer. Since the highest form of worship Protestants have is prayer (they make no distinction between prayer and worship), Catholic prayers to saints seem blasphemous since we pray to saints. In fact, the highest form of worship is not prayer but the Mass — Christ’s own sacrifice on Calvary, re-presented for us in space and time.

Although all worship is prayer, not all prayer is worship. Prayers to saints are no more worship than is asking a fellow Christian for prayer. There’s no other way to ask those in heaven to intercede for us except by mental communication, and we call this communication “prayer,” but it should not be confused with the prayer of worship given to God alone.

## What about multiple prayers?

**T**HERE’S ALSO THE “MULTIPLE PRAYER” objection: “How can the saints hear all those millions of simultaneous prayers, in all those different languages? To be able to do that would require them to be omniscient and omnipresent, but only God is omniscient and omnipresent.” This is faulty reasoning on three levels.

First, since the saints are living in eternity they aren’t limited by time and space because they are beyond both. One might say it takes no time at all to hear all those prayers because the saints have no time.

Second, since there is only a finite number of people on earth, there is only a finite number of prayers at any one time. So, neither omniscience nor omnipres-



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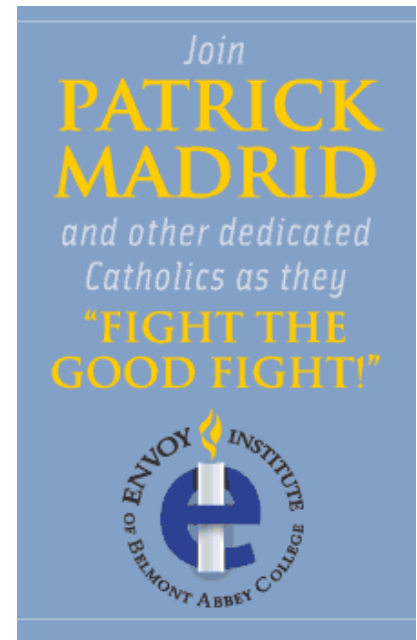
ence is required to hear all the prayers ever prayed at one time, no matter how great their number.

Third, it’s silly to think the abilities of the saints in heaven are as paltry as are ours. Our inability to understand how the saints hear so many prayers is hardly a reason to deny that they can hear them. In their glorified state the saints are capable of doing things we can barely imagine: “Eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, [nor has it] entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor. 2:9). Those in heaven rejoice over the repentance of even one sinner (Luke 15:7, 10), but we have no details about how they can know about individual repentances.

We know that in heaven we’ll be transformed into the image of Christ’s glorious, resurrected body. “We shall be like him,” Paul assures us (Phil. 3:20-21). John says, “We are God’s children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). In his resurrected, glorified body, Jesus did all sorts of incredible things, such as walk through walls (John 20:19). “So also is the resurrection of the dead. [The body] is sown corruptible; it is raised incorruptible. It is sown dishonorable; it is raised glorious. It is sown weak; it is raised powerful.” (1 Cor. 15:42-43). Heaven is an amazing place filled with people who, by God’s infinite grace, are capable of doing amazing things.

## The “necromancy” argument

**S**OME RAISE THE “NECROMANCY” OBJECTION: “The saints are dead, and the Bible forbids contact with the dead.” This is a misunderstanding of terms. Necromancy is an attempt to harness diabolical powers in order to, among other things, communicate with “familiar spirits.” The Bible condemns this occultic practice, which includes attempting to communicate with spirits through trances, séances, and incantations (Lev. 19:26, 31; 20:6, 27; Deut. 18:10-12; 1 Sam.



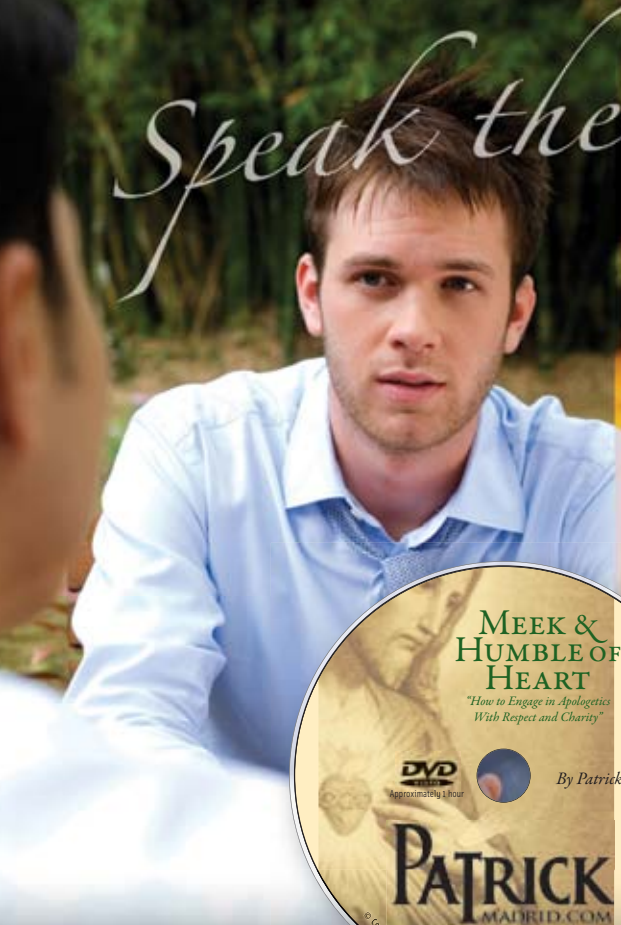
28:4-18; Is. 8:19; 47:12-14.).

Asking saints to pray for us is not necromancy. Aside from the method of communication, asking our fellow Christians in heaven to intercede on our behalf is no different from asking a fellow Christian here on earth to pray for us. Besides, the saints aren’t really dead at all. They’re far more alive than we are on earth. Jesus said, “Have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God told him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead but of the living. You are greatly misled” (Mark 12:26-27. See also Wisdom 3:1-3 and John 17:3). (When the Lord spoke these words to Moses on Mount Horeb, the three Patriarchs had been “dead” for over five hundred years.)

A final question. If Jesus didn’t want any contact between saints on earth (as Paul anticipatorily calls Christians) and saints in heaven, why did our Lord make a special point of appearing to Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration in the company of Moses and Elijah, two “dead” saints? (Matt. 17:1-8).

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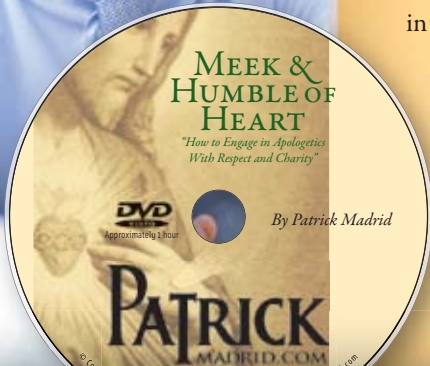
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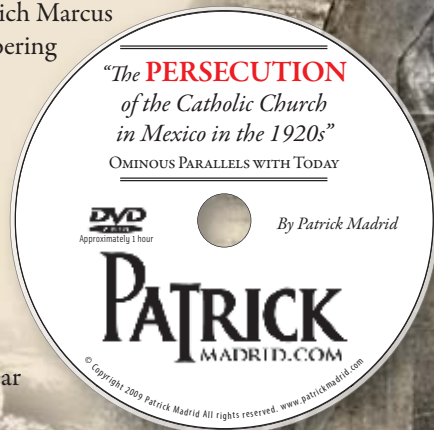
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