

The Papal System – XVIII. Purgatory



Good news for Catholics: There is no such place as Purgatory!

Continued from [XVII. Catholic Justification](#).

By purgatory is understood the place where the souls of good men are purified by fire after death. In the very early Church, Christians had no conception of any such place; they knew nothing of any human abode where men could be cleansed from impurities but this world. Whately well observes: *“Long after the time of the sacred writers, a groundless notion gradually crept into the Church in days of ignorant superstition, concerning an intermediate state of purification of souls by suffering, from which they might be delivered by the prayers of survivors.”*

At an early day it became customary to pray for the dead; this practice was common at the end of the second, and throughout all subsequent centuries till the Reformation. But these prayers never hint that the departed are in a place of purification by suffering. They were offered up for all the Church triumphant, including the Virgin Mary; they were often thanksgivings for their deliverance out of the sorrows of this life; they were appeals to God for his mercy on account of the imperfections with which they left the world; they used these prayers as an expression of their conviction that the departed were in the enjoyment of an endless life; they were presented to God that he might have a special care over the faithful disembodied, and give them a glorious resurrection in the appointed time.

Most of the early Christians believed that martyrs alone entered heaven immediately after death; that the rest of the saints were in another place of “refreshment and joy,” where they anticipated more perfect bliss. And their prayers, doubtless, sought rich blessings upon them in this intermediate state. The conviction was common that there would be two resurrections, at different periods, and saints on earth plead for those in the spirit land, that they might enjoy the better resurrection, and reign with Christ a thousand years; and for these and other reasons, prayers were regularly offered for all the believing dead, without the faintest idea that one of them was unhappy or in any process of purification by pain.

While the idea of purification by fire was invented somewhat earlier than the sixth century, it was in that age, and from the Great Gregory of Rome, that it was started in life, and sent forth on a career of growth and conquest, never to terminate until its terrors should cover Europe with magnificent churches, and tenant them with myriads of priests whose most profitable occupation should be to lift souls out of the fiery horrors of purgatory. Purgatory in Italy is fitly called, “the priest’s kitchen,” because it

provides his living.

The Regions occupied by the Departed.

Beside heaven and hell, in the dark ages, purgatory was located; it was placed next to the abyss; the *limbus infantum*, or home of unbaptized children was near by; and not far off was the *limbus patrum*, the abode of the saints who lived before Christ: this was the scene visited by Jesus, when he preached to the spirits in prison. From early times it was called "Abraham's bosom" and Paradise.

The Comforts of Purgatory.

Venerable Bede tells about a man in Northumberland, A.D. 696, who died, and in a short time became alive again, and who gave an account of what he saw when he was out of the body.

"He that led me," says he, "had a shining countenance and a white garment; he brought me to a vale full of dreadful flames on the left; the side horrid for violent hail and cold snow; both places were full of men's souls, which seemed to be tossed by an angry storm from one side to the other; for when the wretches could no longer endure the violent heat, they leaped into the chilling cold, and finding no rest there they bounded back again into the unquenchable flames. It became densely dark, and my leader forsook me, and I observed frequent globes of black flames rising out of a great pit and falling back into it; and the flames as they ascended were full of human souls, like sparks flying up with smoke, which dropped down into the depths below when the vapor of the fire ceased.

"On a sudden I heard the noise of hideous lamentation, and the loud laughter of a rude multitude insulting captured enemies; it was a gang of evil spirits dragging the howling and lamenting souls of men, whilst they themselves were laughing and rejoicing. They went down into the midst of the pit of fire until I could no longer distinguish between the lamentation of the men and the laughter of the devils. Some of the dark spirits ascended from the flaming abyss, and beset me on all sides with their glaring eyes, and the stench of the fire which proceeded from their mouths and nostrils. They threatened to seize me with burning tongues, when my guide appeared and put them to flight, and took me into a scene of great light and happiness."

He then explained to him that the vale so dreadful for consuming flames and cutting cold is the place where they are tried who delay to confess and amend their crimes, and repent only at the point of death, but because there was a change at death they shall be received into heaven at the day of judgment. But many are relieved before the day of judgment by the prayers, alms and fasting of the living, and more especially by masses. Such was the purgatory of the English in A.D. 696.

Charles, Monarch of the Roman Empire and King of the Franks, has a view of

Purgatory.

On the night of a Lord's day, in the year 885 A.D., this sovereign was taken away in the spirit to deep and fiery valleys, full of pits burning with pitch, sulphur, lead, wax, and tallow. There he found his father's bishops in torments, who soothingly informed him that he and his bishops were coming to the same place. Some of the blackest devils with fiery hooks tried to seize him and cast him into the pits, but the guide protected him. He passed hot streams and marshes, and all kinds of boiling metals, in which were innumerable-souls of the people and nobles of his father, some of them immersed to the hair, some to the chin, and some to the waist in these boiling streams and metals.

He beholds two casks, one with boiling and the other with tepid water, and his father in the hot water; but he was informed that every alternate day, through the prayers of St. Peter and St. Remigius, his father was put in the pleasant water. He farther received the assurance that two casks well supplied with hot water were waiting for him unless he did penance. He then heard the tidings from his uncle Lothaire, whom he saw surrounded with happiness and splendor, that his father would soon be delivered from pain as Lothaire and others had been. Such was the purgatory of the ninth century.

A Monk sees Purgatory.

In A.D. 1196 a monk of the convent of Evesham had a vision of purgatory. In it he beheld some leap suddenly forth from their place of torture and fly away as far as possible; then he saw them, dreadfully burned as they were, assailed by the tormentors with forks, torches, and every instrument of torture, and driven back to their punishments. Though burned, pierced to the entrails by lashes, and shockingly mangled, they were subjected to more tolerable pains. He saw some roasted before a fire; others were fried on pans; red hot nails were driven to the bone into some; others were tortured with a horrid stench in baths of pitch and sulphur, mixed with melted lead, brass and other metals; immense worms with poisonous teeth grawed some; others were transfixed on stakes with fiery thorns; the torturers tore them with their nails, flogged them with scourges, and lacerated them with dreadful agonies. The monk declares that if he had seen a man in that place, who had slain all his relatives and friends, he would suffer any earthly death a thousand times to rescue even such a wretch from pains so dreadful.

He saw others plunged in fire at one time, and cast at another into a place fearfully cold; devoured by volumes of flames, and rising up like sparks in the air, they fell among the whirlings of the tempest, the cold of the snow and the beatings of the hail. He saw others jammed together like olives in a press in the midst of the flames: incessantly. A goldsmith of his maintenance, who was occasionally dishonest on earth, told the monk that now he was frequently thrown on a heap of fiery coins and frightfully scorched; that often, with gaping mouth, he was compelled to swallow them and be burned in his stomach; and that he was frequently obliged to count them and have his fingers consumed.

Another punishment came from a multitude of worms covering a given space, as

the courtyards of houses were covered with rushes; and these were deformed and of monstrous size, with a dreadful gaping of the jaws; they sent out fire from their nostrils, and lacerated the crowds of wretches with a voracity not to be shunned; the devils seized the men and cut them in pieces with their fiery prongs, tore all the flesh from their bones, threw them into the fire and melted them as if they had been metals, and then restored them for fresh torture. Such was the horrible abode of which the priests were complete masters, and through which for many centuries the clergy became lords of the wealth and consciences of most Europeans.

Of the tenth century Mosheim says: "The fire which burns out the stains remaining on souls after death, was an object of intense dread to all, nay, was more feared than the punishment of hell. . . . The priests perceiving this dread to conduce much to their advantage, endeavoured by their discourses, and by tales and fictitious miracles, continually, to raise it higher and higher."

Elaborate and cunning fables devised by men of considerable imagination and intellect were these old visions of purgatory. And some of the leading features of these stories owe their origin to Mohammad; the description of the intense heat and shocking cold of purgatory is the account he gives of his hell. And the purgatorial inspection which paints a bridge, crossing the pit of purifying fires, as excessively narrow, is evidently borrowed from Mohammedan's bridge, spanning the center of hell, by which the righteous reach heaven, which is as narrow as the edge of a sword. The *inventors of purgatory* look well *enriching Romanism* from the treasures of the false prophet!

The Greek Purgatory.

In the Council of Florence, when the points of divergence and of concord were presented by the Latin bishops and the representatives of the Greek Church, Mark, of Ephesus, stated that, "The Greeks believed that the souls of (saved) sinners went to a place of darkness and sadness, where they were for some time in affliction, and deprived of the light of God; but that they were purified and delivered from this place of affliction by sacrifices and alms." While these agencies aid in the Romish Church, the help they give is in hastening the release of the soul from the torments of purgatory; they do nothing to assist in its purification. It is FIRE THAT PURIFIES. In the Greek purgatory there is no fire, and men are cleansed by sacrifices and alms.

Purgatory in the Council of Trent.

The synod says: "Since the Catholic Church, instructed by the sacred Spirit from the holy Scriptures and the ancient tradition of the fathers, has taught in holy councils, and very recently in this general synod, that there is a purgatory, and that the souls confined there receive assistance from the suffrages of the faithful, but chiefly from the acceptable sacrifice of the altar, the holy synod commands the bishops that the sound doctrine about purgatory, handed down by the holy fathers and sacred councils, be believed, held, taught, and every where proclaimed by the faithful in Christ. . . . Moreover, let the bishops be careful that the suffrages of the faithful who

are living—that is to say, masses, prayers, alms deeds, and other works of piety which it is customary for the faithful to perform for the faithful departed—be piously and devoutly rendered, according to the appointments of the Church; and that the things which are due in respect to them be discharged not negligently but diligently and accurately, either the things belonging to the foundations of testators or from any other source, by the priests and ministers of the Church, and others who are held to render this service.”

Butler’s Catechism.

This popular work gives these questions and answers on purgatory:

Q. What is purgatory?

“A. A place of punishment in the other life where some souls suffer for a time before they can go to heaven.

“Q. Do any others go to purgatory besides those who die in venial sin?

“A. Yes; all who die indebted to God’s justice, on account of mortal sin.

“Q. When God forgives mortal sin, as to the guilt of it and the eternal punishment it deserved, does he require temporary punishments to be suffered for it ?

“A. Yes, very often, for our correction—to deter us from relapsing into sin, and that we should make some atonement to his offended justice and goodness.

“Q. Can the souls in purgatory be relieved by our prayers and other good works?

“A. Yes; being children of God and still members of the Church, they share in the communion of the saints, and the Scripture says: ‘It is a holy and a wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from their sins;’ 2 Macc. xii, 46.”

The Scripture just quoted is a mere human writing, not God’s word; and not only without authority, but it is a *wicked falsehood*.

Purgatory rests on no Scripture worthy of notice. And yet purgatory has been one of the chief builders of that mighty pyramid of folly and heresy—the Church of Rome.

The dying thief entered paradise the day of his death; when Paul was absent from the body he was present with the Lord; the Scriptures know only two places for departed souls: heaven and hell, the scene of happiness, and the world of woe. Any other state or locality for departed souls is destitute of EXISTENCE.

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