

Paradise or Purgatory?



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"Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise."— Luke 23: 43.

Beyond all question the Christian religion is supremely important in connection with the subject of Death. The universality | of the fear of death makes it so. Death to the unconverted man is a terror.

Death subjects man to an ordeal through which countless millions have passed, but which none can explain. No wonder that nature trembles before it. Reason justifies the fear; religion never makes light of it; and he who does, instead of ranking with heroes, can hardly deserve to rank with a brute.

It teaches us that a believer's death is the departure from defiling corruptions into perfect purity; from heart-sinking sorrows into perfect joy; from entangling persecutions into everlasting freedom ; from distressing persecutions into full rest; from pinching wants into universal supplies; from distracting fears into highest security; from deluding shadows into substantial good. If this be, as it must assuredly be, the message of Christ to our hearts as we stand by the open grave, how serious a thing it is for any religious system calling itself Christian to oppose such a precious truth. And yet this is precisely what the Church of Rome does. She claims to be exclusively the one true Church of Christ, and advances as a doctrine to be held on peril of everlasting damnation the entry of the righteous at death into a flaming Purgatory. She indefinitely delays the entrance of the believer into the joys of Paradise, and **makes merchandise of the miseries** which she alleges the believer is enduring.

Let us look at this doctrine of Purgatory in its origin and development.

1—Purgatory is a Pagan, and Not a Christian, Conception.

You will search in vain for anything like it in the Scriptures, or in the primitive writers of Christianity. For the origin of horrors of Purgatory the pages of heathen poets like Virgil must be consulted. In their imaginings-of the life after death you will find the miseries of those who pass hence fully in accordance with medieval Roman teaching. Like so many of the doctrines and practices that are peculiar to the Roman Church, Purgatory finds its source in the darkness of heathendom and in that vain effort to "make merit" which is common to the religions of Pagan and Papal Rome.

2—Purgatory Was Developed as a Doctrine and Promulgated in the Middle Ages, and Not in the Days of Primitive Purity.

This tenet finds no advocate among the early Christian writers. Its first cautious sponsor is said to be Pope Gregory, whose Pontificate closed the sixth century of the Roman Church's history; although it should be added that there is some doubt as to whether the work in which the doctrine is advanced is really his. As we advance farther into the spiritual night of the Dark Ages, so the old idea of giving thanks to God for the bright example of brave Christians, was the primitive practice, is left behind, and prayers for the dead are substituted. At last the belief in such prayers was everywhere held, and its inevitable corollary, Purgatory, was officially taught.

Here is the formal language of the Creed of Pius IV.: "I constantly believe that there is a Purgatory, and that the souls confined therein are helped by the suffrages of the faithful."

And here are some further words which have the seal of the Roman Church on them: "There is a purgatorial fire, tormented in which the souls of the pious make expiation for a certain period, that an entrance may be opened for them into that eternal country where nothing that defileth can enter."

3—And for Whom is This Place of Torment Intended?

Does the Roman Church offer, as many foolishly suppose, a "second chance" to those who are careless about their spiritual state here? By no means. For the Romanist who dies "in mortal sin" there is no hope. For the Protestant who refuses to submit to the Roman Church there is nothing but eternal hell. Purgatory is not for such. It is, as you have seen from what I have said, for "the souls of the pious." It always seems to me a ghastly caricature of Christianity that confronts one on entering a Roman Catholic Church. "Of your charity," the notices run, "pray for the soul of" such a person, it may be a Pope or a cardinal, or a priest, or the superior of a convent, who died fortified by the last rites of the Church. **Purgatory is, you see, for good Romanists**, not for the unconverted or the wicked. At the dying bed of the poor Romanist the priest attends with his holy oils, his prayers, his last absolutions; there is much ritual and ceremonial.

But what a mockery it all appears when one remembers that its utmost value is to set the departing soul on its way to terrors which are, so a great Roman theologian asserts, **as awful as hell**, only not eternal! I will not detain you by examining the few texts in the Old and New Testaments upon which this dogma is said to rest. It is sufficient to say that they have no real bearing upon the matter of the state of the departed, and the more serious and learned of Roman Catholic controversialists have abandoned them as proofs. Nor does the apocryphal passage from the 2d Maccabees help the Roman Church. Indeed, it cuts clean against her teaching, for the persons on whose behalf she asserts (as I think wrongly) that Judas Maccabeus prayed for died in mortal sin, the sin of idolatry.