

ROMAN CATHOLICISM

In the Light of Scripture

by

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CHAPTER TWELVE

PURGATORY

THE IDEA OF PURGATORY finds its roots in Buddhism and other ancient religious systems, long before the existence of the Roman Catholic Church. Evidences of its introduction into Christian thought are found in some of the writings of the early church fathers, as far back as the third and fourth centuries of the Christian era, but it had no officially recognized place until the time of Gregory I. He added the concept of purifying fires to the already current belief that there was a place somewhere between Heaven and Hell, to which were sent the souls of those who were not bad enough for Hell with its endless torments, and not good enough for Heaven with its holy and eternal joys. These purifying fires would gradually consume all defilement, until the soul was fit to see God.

By the eleventh century it was regularly taught that whereas the unrepentant wicked, at death, went straight to Hell, and a very few souls of exceptional merit went straight to Heaven, the generality of Christian people must of necessity pass through purgatory. It was not until 1439 that the doctrine was established as an article of faith. *The Ground of Catholic Doctrine Contained in the Profession of Faith*, published by Pius IV, says by way of question and answer:

Question. What kind of people go to purgatory?

Answer. (1) Such as die guilty of lesser sins, which we commonly call venial, as many Christians do, who, either by sudden death or otherwise, are taken out of this life before they have repented for these ordinary failings.

(2) Such as, having formerly been guilty of greater sins, have not made full satisfaction for them to divine justice.

Here is an added thought. In spite of the fact that according to Romish teaching the souls in purgatory have already been justified at and by baptism; divine justice has not thereby been fully satisfied, so that the soul, though escaping the torments of Hell, must still endure the temporary punishment for its sins in purgatory.

This was categorically stated by the Council of Trent:

If anyone should say that after the reception of the grace of justification, the guilt is so remitted to the penitent sinner, and the penalty of eternal punishment destroyed, that no temporal punishment remains to be paid, either in this world, or in the future, before the access to the kingdom can be open, let him be accursed (Sec. VI).

Purgatory therefore is not merely purifying—it is penal as well. The purgatorial fires, we are told, are greatly to be feared.

The fire of purgatory will be more terrible than all corporal sufferings together. One single day in this place of expiation might be compared to a thousand of earthly suffering—*Spiritual Bouquet Offered to Souls in Purgatory*.

Purgatory According to the Revelation of the Saints, a booklet issued under the Imprimatur of the Archbishop of Montreal, tells of a Franciscan monk, grievously ill, who was given the option of lingering on earth for another year or dying at once and spending three days in purgatory. He elected to die. After being one day in purgatory the angel visited him, and was accused of cruelty, having left him there to suffer for a century instead of three days as stipulated! But the angel assured him that he had been there for only twenty-four hours, and it was the extremity of his anguish that made him think he had been there so long. He was released, and in the sight of his brethren his soul returned to the body, whereafter he exhorted them to rigorous penance for their smallest faults, that they might escape the sufferings he had endured.

The same book tells of a revelation given to St. Margaret de Pazzi, who in a trance visited purgatory for two hours, during which time she walked about the convent garden wringing her hands and uttering awful lamentations as she viewed different compartments of torment. Priests and nuns were there. In another place were the impenitent and disobedient. In yet another, misers and liars, the latter having molten lead poured down their throats. These are but selections, and we are struck by the resemblance of the torments to those of the Buddhist hell portrayed in the temples of the Far East.

And what is the duration of these sufferings which the Christian man is supposed to face at death, and in which his forebears are already involved, and to which the children he has begotten are hastening? No one can tell. All is in the realm of speculation and hideous dream.

One Catholic writer, Mazzarelli, bases his calculation on thirty venial sins per day, at a day in purgatory for each, making a grand total of eighteen hundred years for sixty years of lifetime down here, with yet more to be added for mortal sins, absolved but not fully expiated.

Another records the case of Pope Innocent III, who appeared to St. Lutgarda in the flames of purgatory and told him that he was to suffer there till the day of judgment—this from a pope, who in his day claimed to be and was acknowledged as the Vicar of Christ, the head of His church on earth, with the power of the keys of the kingdom of Heaven in his hands, able to loose and able to bind. Could anything be more incredible? Yet there the record stands, to be received and believed.

What evidence does Rome bring forward in proof of the existence of this melancholy place, prepared, not for the reprobate, but for Christians?

First, she appeals to a few passages of Scripture, from which inferences, and nothing more, are drawn.

Whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come (Matthew 12:32).

The inference drawn is that, since there is one sin which cannot be forgiven in the world to come, there must be others which can, and since there are no sins in Heaven to be forgiven, and none in Hell can be forgiven, there must be a purgatory.

Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment
(Matthew 12:36).

The inference? God could not send a soul to Hell for things so trivial as idle words, therefore there must be a purgatory.

If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire (I Corinthians 3:15).

Inference. There are purgatorial fires which burn away the dross, but from which the soul being purified will eventually escape. It should be observed that the apostle's subject in this passage is not men's sins, big or little, but Christian work or service.

In verse 9, Paul says, "**We are laborers together with God.**" Then he goes on to say, "**According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master-builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon.**"

He did not continue at Corinth, but passed on to other places where as yet Christ was not preached. Others carried on the work at Corinth, building the spiritual house, with true believers, but they were not so wise or faithful, and built into this temple of God those who were not true Christians, compared to wood, hay, and stubble. In the day of their Lord's return, though they themselves would be saved, all their work would be destroyed. There would be no reward for their service, but instead only loss and shame.

I tell thee, thou shalt not depart thence, till thou hast paid the very last mite (Luke 12:59).

Payment can be made in purgatory, and the soul eventually finds release, is the inference. But surely this is no more than an emphatic way of saying "never." It is part of a parable, and the language is parabolic.

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men (I Timothy 2:1).

The inference is that the apostle had the dead in mind as well as the living. But that can hardly be, unless, like the heathen, we believe in ghosts, and that the spirits of dead men can come back to annoy the living, for the apostle gives as his reason for this charge "**that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty**" (I Timothy 2:2).

It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from their sins (II Maccabees 12:46).

The inference is that it is therefore right and useful to pray for loosing of souls in purgatory. The first answer to this is that the Books of Maccabees are apocryphal, and cannot be used as a basis for doctrine. In any case, the verse quoted says nothing whatever about purgatory, and if accepted as accredited history, records only what Judas Maccabeus did when he found votive offerings from heathen temples upon the bodies of his slain. What he wrote tells us what he thought, but does not establish a Christian doctrine.

The very fact that Rome has to appeal to such passages as these, not one of which mentions purgatory, and then base its arguments upon forced and unreliable deductions from them, shows how lacking in scriptural foundation is the doctrine of purgatory. In seeking to defend it, she has recourse almost entirely to selected quotations from the church fathers.

Practically the only point at which the church fathers are in full agreement with each other is in their acceptance of the canonical Scriptures as their final court of appeal, however widely their interpretations may differ. But from the Bible itself Rome can find no solid foundation for this truly monstrous doctrine, while the whole trend of Scripture teaching is dead against it.

What method of release from the pains of purgatory, for oneself and for others, does Rome lay down? Most definitely she asserts that there are ways at least of alleviating the torments of those suffering in purgatorial fires, and even of complete deliverance therefrom, though with no certainty as to time.

Concerning this the Council of Trent declared:

Since the Catholic Church, instructed by the Holy Spirit from the sacred writings, and the ancient traditions of the fathers, hath taught in holy councils, and lastly in this Ecumenical Council, that there is a purgatory, and that the souls detained there are assisted by the suffrages of the mass, this holy council commands all bishops diligently to endeavor that the wholesome doctrine concerning purgatory, delivered unto us by venerable fathers and sacred councils be believed, held, taught and everywhere preached by Christ's faithful (Sec. XXV).

What are the “suffrages” which assist those in purgatory? There are several besides the masses mentioned above.

Prayers for the Dead. This is supposed to be supported by the passage in II Maccabees and I Timothy. *Spiritual Bouquet Offered to Souls in Purgatory* says, “Let us think before going to rest of the extreme torments of the poor souls in purgatory, and pray for them.” Apart from special collects in the liturgical service, Roman Catholics are expected to use the rosary in their personal devotions, to number the Paternosters (Our Father) and Ave Marias (Hail Mary) which are repeated either for themselves or “with intention” for others, to secure for them easement or remission of their pains. The use of beads is very ancient, but the rosary is claimed to have been given and taught to St. Dominic by the Virgin Mary, and its use, when the beads have been duly blessed, is efficacious to secure many indulgences. What is known as the Crown Chaplet for the Dead, offered to the Virgin Mary, can, according to Roman Catholic authority, secure not less than 23,300 days’ indulgence!

Masses. This is perhaps the chief means employed, money being paid to the priest for the saying of a stipulated number of masses “with intention” for the one in purgatory for whom they are being said. It is claimed that not only does the one for whom they are said benefit, but the one who pays for them accumulates merit as; well.

Almsgiving. To give alms with intention to apply them to the needs of a soul in purgatory is “to pour water on the flames which devour them.” The claim is that “just as water quenches the fiercest fire, so alms wash away sin.” Alms, as well as masses, avail for the giver also.

The whole Romanist doctrine of purgatory and the means by which its torments can be avoided is full of tragic absurdities and self-contradictions, and is in direct conflict with the teaching of the Word of God. The doctrine of purgatory derogates from the glory of Christ.

His redeeming blood is the only means of our cleansing from sin, both for this life and for that to come, and to teach that the element of fire—material fire, according to Cardinal Bellermino—is required to purge souls after death and make them fit for the Lord’s presence, renders the blood of Christ insufficient (Hadwen).

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost (John 19:30).

And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom (Matthew 27:51).

Christ being come a high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us (Hebrews 9:11, 12).

By one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified (Hebrews 10:14).

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having a high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water (Hebrews 10:19-22).

The Scripture teaching concerning the believing dead sweeps away the Romish doctrine of purgatory. The Lord Jesus said to the dying thief,

To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise (Luke 23: 43).

We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord (II Corinthians 5:8).

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better (Philippians 1:21, 23).

Your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory (Colossians 3:3, 4).

I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (II Timothy 4:6-8).

And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them (Revelation 14:13).

~ end of chapter 12 ~

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