

PERSONAL ESCHATOLOGY

January 2025

INTRODUCTION

What is meant by “**Personal Eschatology**”?

- **Personal** — The word “personal” signifies that the focus is on an individual rather than all of humanity, or God’s plan for the world.
- **Eschatology** — The word “eschatology” signifies that the focus is on what the ultimate end or destiny is of individuals.

KEY WORDS

I. DEATH

A. The Meaning Of Death.

1. The Biblical Words for Death.

- a) Old Testament, Hebrew: Verb — *muth*: to die, to be killed. Nouns — *maweth*: death; *mōth*: death. Together 1033 times.
- b) New Testament, Greek: (1) *teleutā* (Mt 2:15); (2) *anaireō* (24x abolish; kill; put to death; take away); (3) *thanatos* (*noun*, 120x, death, the extinction of life); (4) *thanatoō* (*verb*, 11x, kill; put to death); (5) *apokteinō* (*verb*, 74x, kill; put to death.); (6) *eschatōs* (*adj*, 1x, to be in the last extremity).

2. The Concept of Death in the Ancient World — Not extinction; various concept of “death.”

3. The Biblical Idea of Death. (See the next point)

B. The Three Aspects Of Death: Physical, Spiritual, And Eternal.

1. Physical — separation of the body and the spirit or soul.
2. Spiritual — separation between man and God.
3. Eternal — 2nd death; permanent.

II. ETERNAL LIFE

A. What It Is Not — not continual existence of the spirit; A state or condition of a spirit.

B. Eternal.

1. This is a tricky word because of how it is used so imprecisely.
2. Old Testament (Hebrew) — two main words: ‘OLĀM (439x), and QEḌEM (61x).
 - a) ‘**olam** — ancient; eternal; everlasting; forever.
 - b) **qedem** — ancient; east; long ago.
3. New Testament (Greek) — aiōnios (*adj*, 71x) indeterminate as to duration, eternal, everlasting → eternal.
 - a) (1) **Fire** — Mt 18:8; 25:41, 46; Jud 7; (2) **Life** — Mt 19:16, 29; 25:46; Mk 10:17; Lk 10:25; 18:18, 30; Jn 3:15, 16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:24, 39; 6:27, 40, 47, 54, 68; 10:28; 12:25, 50; 17:2, 3; Acts 13:46, 48; Rom 2:7; 5:21; 6:22, 23; Gal 6:8; 1Tm 1:16; 6:12, 19; Tit 1:2; 3:7; 1Jn 1:2; 2:25; 3:15; 5:11, 13, 20; Jud 21; (3) **Condemnation/Judgment** — Mk 3:29; 10:30; Heb 6:2; (4) **Home** — Lk 16:9; (5) **Time** — Rom 16:25 (see Gk); 2Tm 1:9; (6) **God** — Rom 16:26; (7) **Weight of glory** — 2Cor 4:17; 2Tim 2:10 (*glory*); 1Pt 5:10 (*glory*); (8) **Things not seen** — 2Cor 4:18; (9) **Building from God** — 2Cor 5:1; (10) **Destruction** — 2Th 1:9; (11) **Consolation** — 2Th 2:16; (12) **Power** — 1Tm 6:16; (13) **Receive** — Phlm 15; (14) **Salvation** — Heb 5:9; (15) **Redemption** — Heb 9:12; (16) **Spirit** — Heb 9:14; (17) **Inheritance** — Heb 9:15; (18) **Covenant** — Heb 13:20; (19) **Kingdom** — 2Pt 1:11; (20) **Gospel** — Rev 14:6.
4. Summary of Eternal

C. Life — not existence; several different aspects.

D. Summary

III. THE INTERMEDIATE STATE

A. The Intermediate State Is That State Of Existence After Physical Death And One’s Final Destiny.

B. Terms “Hell” And “Heaven” In Relation To The Intermediate State.

C. Differences In The Intermediate State.

IV. HEAVEN & HELL

A. Heaven

1. What Is Heaven?
 - a) Hebrew *SHAMAY* (421x); almost always plural, "heavens".
 - b) Greek *ouranos* (281x) — 94 plural, 76 of those are in the Gospels or Hebrews (Mt 56, Mk & Lk 10, Heb 10).
2. Heaven as the Abode of God.
3. Heaven Should Not Be Thought of as the Final Destination of the Believer.

B. Hell

1. Many Misconceptions About "Hell".
2. English Bible
3. Translations
 - a) Hebrew *SHE'OL*; Greek *geenna*, *gehenna* and *tartaroō*.
4. The Basic Sense in Which "Hell" Is Used:
 - a) **Judgment** (Dt. 32:22; Psa. 9:17; Psa. 55:15; Prov. 15:11; 23:14; 27:20; Ezek. 31:15, 16, 17; 32:21, 27; Matt. 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5; James 3:6).
 - b) **Of death & the grave** (Ps 139:8; Prov 15:24; Isa 14:9; Hab 2:5).
 - c) **A wicked place** (Prov 5:5; 7:27; 9:18).
 - d) **Depths of the earth** (Amos 9:2)
 - e) **Holding place for the rebellious angels** (2Pt 2:4).

V. SHEOL

A. The Hebrew Word.

1. "Sheol" = "the realm of the dead".
2. **Used 65 times** — Gen 37:35; 42:38; 44:29, 31; Num 16:30, 33; Dt 32:22; 1Sam 2:6; 2Sam 22:6; 1Kgs 2:6, 9; Is 5:14; 14:9, 11, 15; 28:15, 18; 38:10, 18; 57:9; Ezk 31:15-17; 32:21, 27; Hos 13:14; Amos 9:2; Jonah 2:3; Hab 2:5; Psa 6:6; 9:18; 16:10; 18:6; 30:4; 31:18; 49:15-16; 55:16; 86:13; 88:4; 89:49; 116:3; 139:8; 141:7; Job 7:9; 11:8; 14:13; 17:13, 16; 21:13; 24:19; 26:6; Prov 1:12; 5:5; 7:27; 9:18; 15:11, 24; 23:14; 27:20; 30:16; Song 8:6; Eccl 9:10
3. **Distribution** — Gen 4, Num 2, Dt 1, 1Sam 1, 2Sam 1, 1Kgs 2, Isa 9, Ezk 5, Hos 2, Amo 1, Jon 1, Hab 1, Ps 16, Job 8, Pro 9, Song 1, Eccl 1.

B. Selected Passages

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|------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Gen 37:35 | 11. Psa. 30:3 |
| 2. Num. 16:30 | 12. Psa. 31:17 |
| 3. 2Sam. 22:6 | 13. Psa. 49:14 |
| 4. Is. 14:9 | 14. Psa. 55:15 |
| 5. Is. 57:9 | 15. Psa. 86:13 |
| 6. Ezek. 31:15, 16, 17 | 16. Psa. 139:8 |
| 7. Ezek. 32:21, 27 | 17. Job 24:19 |
| 8. Amos 9:2 | 18. Prov. 1:12 |
| 9. Jonah 2:2 | 19. Prov. 23:14 |
| 10. Psa. 16:10 | |

VI. HADES / HELL

A. A Greek Word "Haidās" — "not seen"; Latin "Pluto" god of the nether-world.

B. In The New Testament

1. **References** — Mt 11:23; 16:18; Lk 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:27, 31; 1Cor 15:55; Rev 1:18; 6:8; 20:13–14
2. **Distribution** — Mt 2; Lk 2; Acts 2; 1Cor 1; Rev 4.
3. **Verses**
 - a) Mt 11:23
 - b) Mt 16:18
 - c) Lk 10:15 (See Mt 11:23)
 - d) Lk 16:23
 - e) Acts 2:27, 31
 - f) 1Cor. 15:55
 - g) Rev. 1:18
 - h) Rev. 6:8
 - i) Rev. 20:13
 - j) Rev. 20:14

C. Summary

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

VII. GEHENNA

A. Greek Word.

1. **Translated as "Hell" in all Common English Translations.**
2. **12 Times** — Mt 5:22, 29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mk 9:43, 45, 47; Lk 12:5; Jam 3:6.
3. **All in the Gospel Except for 1 in James** — Mt 7 (5-3, 10-1, 18-1, 23-2); Mk 3 (9-3); Lk 1 (12-1); Jam 1 (3-1).
4. **Origin**
 - a) A transliteration from the Aramaic to Greek; should be "ge-henna".
5. **Why "Gehenna" Is Translated as "Hell".** (See Jer 19)

B. References

1. Matt. 5:22
2. Matt. 5:29-30
3. Matt. 10:28
4. Matt. 18:9
5. Matt. 23:15
6. Matt. 23:33
7. Mark 9:43
8. Mark 9:45
9. Mark 9:47
10. Luke 12:5

11. James 3:6

C. Summary

1. "Gehenna" is connected to "fire" 6 times — Mt 5:22; 18:9; Mk 9:43, 45, 47; Jam 3:6.
2. "Gehenna" is negative — all of the references are negative.

VIII. VALLEY OF HINNOM (SEE "GEHENNA")

WHY IS DEATH VIEWED A AN ENEMY?

I. DID GOD CREATE MAN MORTAL OR IMMORTAL?

A. This Question Can Be Divided Into Two Parts: Did God Create Physical Man / Spiritual Man Mortal Or Immortal? (Gen 2:7)

1. Recognize That God Created Both the Physical and Spiritual Aspects of Man.
2. Did God Create Physical Man Mortal or Immortal?
3. Did God Create the Spirit of Man To Be Mortal or Immortal?

B. Man Created As Mortal.

C. Man Created As Immortal.

1. The Creation Account Gives no Indication That Man Would Ever Cease To Exist.
2. The Bible Indicates That the Spirit of Man, Once Created, Never Cease To Exist or Goes Out of Existence. (Lk 16:23; 23:43; 2Cor 12:4; Rev 2:7; Acts 2:27; Rev 19:20; 20:10)
3. The Bible Indicates That the Body of Man, While Temporarily Ceasing To Exist (Due To Decay), Is Not Eternally Destined for Non-Existence.
4. Summary — The Bible clearly indicates that the spirit and body of every human is created in the condition of immortality.

D. The Importance Of This Question.

II. DEATH IS THE RESULT OF SIN.

A. Death Only Refers To The Animal Kingdom.

B. The Death Of Humans Is The Prime Concern.

1. The Death of Animals Is a Moot Point, and Cannot Be Equated With the Death of Humans.
2. Human Death Has Two Aspects:

C. The Death That Was The Result Of Sin.

1. Both Physical and Spiritual Death Was the Result of Sin.
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POSTMORTEM SALVATION AND SANCTIFICATION

I. POSTMORTEM SALVATION

A. Definition: The Opportunity To Respond To The Gospel After Death, Or, Postmortem Evangelism.

B. The Reason For This.

1. Compassion
2. The Fate of the Unevangelized.
3. The Missionary Dilemma
4. Experience or Feelings
5. The Principle of Doctrinal Development

C. The Problems.

1. This Assumes That Trusting in Christ Jesus Has Always Been the Way of Salvation (Reformed Theo./Cov. Theo.).
2. This Assumes That People Not Hearing the Gospel Are Innocent in Some Way, or Not Guilty Before God for Their Sins.
3. This Assumes That It Is God's Direct Responsibility To Share the Gospel With Everyone.
4. A Main, if Not the Main, Practical Problem With Postmortem Salvation/Evangelism.

D. Biblical Reasons For Rejection Postmortem Salvation/Evangelism:

1. It Is Appointed for Man To Die Once, and Then the Judgment (Heb 9:27).
2. Physical Death Locks a Person in to the Spiritual Condition They Were in at Death. (Rom 1-4; 9:1-5; Acts, Esp. 1:8; Tit 2:14)
3. There Is no Example of Anyone Having a Postmortem Opportunity To Believe.
4. The Record of the Rich Man and Lazarus at Least Directly Implies That any Decision in Life Is Fixed in the Afterlife (Lk 16:19ff).

E. Postmortem Salvation/Evangelism Fails

1. It Utterly Fails Biblically.
2. It Utterly Fails Theologically.
3. It Utterly Fails Practically.

II. POSTMORTEM SANCTIFICATION

The Doctrine Of Purgatory

by Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J.

DESCRIPTION

Fr. Hardon gives a thorough explanation of the Doctrine of Purgatory, including contrary views, biblical references, and quotes from the fathers on purgatory.

LARGER WORK — The Catholic Faith, PAGES 5 - 11; PUBLISHER & DATE, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, CA, November/December 2001

[NOTE: I (DSH) have numbered all the paragraphs for ease of reference. All quotations, even when divided into paragraphs, have been indented and underlined.]

1. God created man that he might possess his Creator forever in the beatific vision. Those who die in the state of enmity toward God are deprived of this happiness. Between these extremes are people who are neither estranged from God nor wholly dedicated to Him when they die. What will be their lot after death?
2. The response of faith is that nothing defiled can enter heaven (Rev 21:27), and therefore anyone less than perfect must first be cleansed before he can be admitted to the vision of God.
3. If this doctrine of Catholicism is less strenuously opposed than the one on hell, over the centuries it has nevertheless become something of a symbol of Rome. Historically, the Reformation was occasioned by a dispute over indulgences, with stress on indulgences for the souls in purgatory. Since that time, the existence of an intermediate state between earth and heaven has remained a stumbling block to reunion and its final acceptance by the Protestant churches would mean a reversal of four hundred years of divergence.
4. Too often the eschatology of the Catholic Church is considered her own private domain, when actually the whole of Eastern Orthodoxy subscribes (substantially) to Catholic teaching on the Last Things, including the doctrine on purgatory.

Those In Purgatory

5. When we speak of the souls of the just in purgatory we are referring to those that leave the body in the state of sanctifying grace and are therefore destined by right to enter heaven. Their particular judgment was favorable, although conditional: provided they are first cleansed to appear before God. The condition is always fulfilled.
6. The poor souls in purgatory still have the stains of sin within them. This means two things. First, it means that the souls have not yet paid the temporal penalty due, either for venial sins, or for mortal sins whose guilt was forgiven before death. It may also mean the venial sins themselves, which were not forgiven either as to guilt or punishment before death. It is not certain whether the guilt of venial sins is strictly speaking remitted after death, and if so, how the remission takes place.
7. We should also distinguish between the expiatory punishments that the poor souls in purgatory pay and the penalties of satisfaction which souls in a state of grace pay before death. Whereas before death a soul can cleanse itself by freely choosing to suffer for its sins, and can gain merit for this suffering, a soul in purgatory can not so choose and gains no merit for the suffering and no increase in glory. Rather, it is cleansed according to the demands of Divine Justice.
8. We are not certain whether purgatory is a place or a space in which souls are cleansed. The Church has never given a definite answer to this question. The important thing to understand is that it is a state or condition in which souls undergo purification.
9. The Catholic practice of offering prayers and sacrifices for the dead is known as offering suffrages. These suffrages are offered both by the individuals and by the Church. They are intended to obtain for the poor soul, either partial or total remission of punishment still to be endured.
10. Who are the faithful that can pray effectively for the poor souls? They are primarily all baptized Christians but may be anyone in a state of grace. At least the state of grace is probably necessary to gain indulgences for the dead.
11. The angels and saints in heaven can also help these souls in purgatory and obtain a mitigation of their pains. When they do so, the process is not by way of merit or of satisfaction, but only through petition. A study of the Church's official prayers reveals that saints and the angelic spirits are invoked for the Church Suffering (i.e., those in purgatory), but always to intercede and never otherwise.

Contrary Views

12. Since patristic times there have been many who have denied the existence of purgatory and have claimed it is useless to pray for the dead. Arius, a fourth-century priest of Alexandria who claimed that Christ is not God, was a prime example. In the Middle Ages, the Albigenses, Waldenses, and Hussites all denied the existence of purgatory. Generally, the denial by these different groups of heretics was tied in with some theoretical position on grace, or merit, or the Church's authority. But until the Reformation, there was no major reaction to Catholic doctrine on the existence of purgatory.
13. With the advent of the Reformers, every major Protestant tradition — the Reformed (Calvinist), Evangelical (Lutheran), Anglican (Episcopal) and Free Church (Congregational) — took issue with Roman Catholicism to disclaim a state of purification between death and celestial glory.
14. John Calvin set the theological groundwork for the disclaimer, which he correctly recognized to be a part of the Protestant idea that salvation comes from grace alone in such a way that it involves no human cooperation:

15. "We should exclaim with all our might, that purgatory is a pernicious fiction of Satan, that it makes void the cross of Christ, that it intolerably insults the Divine Mercy, and weakens and overturns our faith. For what is their purgatory, but a satisfaction for sins paid after death by the souls of the deceased? Thus the notion of satisfaction being overthrown, purgatory itself is immediately subverted from its very foundation."
16. "It has been fully proved that the blood of Christ is the only satisfaction, expiation, and purgation for the sins of the faithful. What, then, is the necessary conclusion but that purgation is nothing but a horrible blasphemy against Christ? I pass by the sacrilegious pretences with which it is daily defended, the offences, which it produces in religion, and the other innumerable evils, which we see to have come from such a source of impiety." Institutes of the Christian Religion, III, 5
17. Calvin's strictures have been crystallized in the numerous Reformed Confessions of Faith, like the Westminster Confession of the Presbyterian Church. "Prayer is to be made," says the Confession, "for things lawful, and for all sorts of men living, or that shall live hereafter; but not for the dead, nor for those of whom it may be known that they have sinned the sin unto death" (Chapter XXI, Section 4).
18. In the Augsburg Confession of the Lutheran churches, it is stated that "the Mass is not a sacrifice to remove the sins of others, whether living or dead, but should be a Communion in which the priest and others receive the sacrament for themselves" (Chapter XXIV, The Mass).
19. The Thirty-nine Articles of the Anglican Communion, which in the United States is the Protestant Episcopal Church, are equally clear. They place the existence of purgatory in the same category with image worship and invocation of the saints:
20. "The Romish Doctrine concerning Purgatory, Pardons, Worshipping and Adoration, as well of Images as of Relics, and also Invocation of Saints, is a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God" (Article XXII).
21. Standard formularies of the Free Church tradition simply omit mention of purgatory from their Confessions of Faith, with a tendency in the United Church of Christ towards universalism. Thus life everlasting is univocally equated with blessedness, the "never-ending life of the soul with God," which means "the triumph of righteousness (in) the final victory of good over evil, which must come because God wills it" (Christian Faith and Purpose: A Catechism, Boston, p. 21).
22. A fine testimony to the ancient faith in purgatory occurs in the authoritative Confession of Dositheus, previously referred to. This creed of the Orthodox Church was produced by a synod convened in Jerusalem in 1672 by Patriarch Dositheus. The occasion for the creed was Cyril Lucaris, who had been elected Patriarch of Alexandria in 1602 and of Constantinople in 1621, Lucaris was strongly influenced by Protestantism and especially by Reformed theology. His Protestant predilections aroused the opposition of his own people. He was finally strangled by the Turks, who thought he was guilty of treason.
23. The Confession of Dositheus defines Orthodoxy over against Protestantism. It is the most important Orthodox confession of modern times:
24. "We believe that the souls of those that have fallen asleep are either at rest or in torment, according to each hath wrought. For when they are separated from their bodies, they depart immediately either to joy or to sorrow and lamentation; though confessedly neither their enjoyment nor condemnation are complete. For, after the common resurrection, when the soul shall be united with the body, with which it had behaved itself well or ill, each shall receive the completion of either enjoyment or of condemnation. Such as though involved in mortal sins have not departed in despair but have, while still living in the body, repented, though without bringing any fruits of repentance — by pouring forth tears, by kneeling while watching in prayers, by afflicting themselves, by relieving the poor, and in fine by showing forth by their works their love towards God and their neighbor, and which the Catholic Church hath from the beginning rightly called satisfaction — of these and such like the souls depart into Hades, and there endure the punishment due to their sins which they have committed."
25. "But they are aware of their future release from thence, and are delivered by the Supreme Goodness through the prayers of the priests and the good works which the relative of each perform for their departed — especially the unbloody Sacrifice availing the highest degree — which each offers particularly for his relatives that have fallen asleep, and which the Catholic and Apostolic Church offers daily for all alike. It is not known, of course, when they will be released. We know and believe that there is deliverance for them from their dire condition, before the common resurrection and judgment, but we do not know when" (Decree XVII).
26. An unexpected development in contemporary Episcopalianism is the verbal admission of Article XXII of the Thirty-nine Articles alongside a belief in prayers for the dead sanctioned by the American Book of Common Prayer. Among others, one oration reads: "O God, whose mercies cannot be numbered, accept our prayers on behalf of the soul of thy servant, and grant him (her) an entrance into the land of light and joy, in the fellowship of thy saints" (p. 34). Masses for the faithful departed are also offered in the High Church Episcopalianism.

Biblical Elements Of Purgatory

27. The definition of the Catholic Church on the existence of purgatory is derived from Sacred Scripture and the Sacred Tradition, which Christ promised would enable the Church to interpret Scripture without error. In particular, the Church relied on the writings of the early Fathers in defining this article of faith.
28. The classic text in the Old Testament bearing witness to the belief of the Jewish people in the existence of a state of purgation where souls are cleansed before entering heaven is found in the Book of Maccabees. Judas Maccabeus (died 161 BC) was a leader of the Jews in opposition to Syrian dominance, and Hellenizing tendencies among his people. He resisted a Syrian army and renewed religious life by rededicating the temple; the feast of Hanukkah celebrates this event.
29. In context, Judas had just completed a successful battle against the Edomites and was directing the work of gathering up the bodies of the Jews who had fallen in battle. As the bodies were picked up, it was found that every one of the deceased had, under his shirt, amulets of the idols of Jamnia, which the Law forbade the Jews to wear. Judas and his men concluded that this was a divine judgment against the fallen, who died because they had committed this sin of disobedience. The sacred writer describes what happened next:

30. "So they all blessed the ways of the Lord, the righteous Judge, who reveals the things that are hidden and fell to supplication, begging that the sin that had been committed should be wholly blotted out."
31. "And the noble Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves from sin, after having seen with their own eyes what had happened because of the sin of those who had fallen. He also took a collection, amounting to two thousand silver drachmas, each man contributing, and sent it to Jerusalem, to provide a sin offering, acting very finely and properly in taking account of the resurrection. For if he had not expected that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead; or if it was through reward destined for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, so that they might be set free from their sin" (2 Mac 12:42-46).
32. The Maccabean text shows that Judas, and the Jewish priests and people believed that those who died in peace could be helped by prayers and sacrifices offered by the living. Luther denied the canonicity of seven books of the Old Testament (the Deuterocanonical books), including the two books of Maccabees. But even if the text were not inspired, as an authentic witness to Jewish history in pre-Christian times it testifies to the common belief in a state of purgation after death and in the ability to help the faithful departed by prayers of intercession on their behalf. Jewish tradition since the time of Christ supports this view.
33. There are also certain passages in the New Testament that the Church commonly cites as containing evidence of the existence of purgatory. In the Gospel of Matthew, Christ warns the Pharisees that anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven either in this world or in the next (Mt. 12:32). Here Christ recognizes that there exists a state beyond this world in which the penalty due for sins, which were pardoned as to guilt in the world, is forgiven. St. Paul also affirms the reality of purgatory. In his first letter to the Corinthians, he says that "the fire will assay the quality of everyone's work," and "if his work burns he will lose his reward, but himself will be saved, yet so as through fire" (1 Cor 3:13, 15). These words clearly imply some penal suffering. Since he connects it so closely with the divine judgment, it can hardly be limited to suffering in this world, but seems to include the idea of purification through suffering after death, namely in purgatory.

The Fathers On Purgatory

34. During the first four centuries of the Christian era, the existence of purgatory was commonly taught in the Church, as seen in its universal practice of offering prayers and sacrifices for the dead.
35. The most ancient liturgies illustrate the custom in such prayers as the following: "Let us pray for our brothers who have fallen asleep in Christ, that the God of the highest charity towards men, who has summoned the soul of the deceased, may forgive him all his sin and, rendered well-disposed and friendly towards him, may call him to the assembly of the living" (Apostolic Constitutions, 8:41).
36. Equally ancient are the inscriptions found in the catacombs, which provide numerous examples of how the faithful offered prayers for their departed relatives and friends. Thus we read from engravings going back to the second century such invocations as: "Would that God might refresh your spirit . . . Ursula, may you be received by Christ . . . Victoria, may your spirit be at rest in good . . . Kalemir, may God grant peace to your spirit and that of your sister, Hildare . . . Timothy, may the eternal life be yours in Christ."
37. Writers before Augustine explicitly teach that souls stained with temporal punishment due to sins are purified after death. St. Cyprian (died 258) taught that penitents who die before the Sacrament of Penance must perform the remainder of any atonement required in the other world, while martyrdom counts as full satisfaction (Epistola 55, 20). St. Cyril of Jerusalem (315-386) described the sacred rites of the Liturgy with the comment, "Then we pray also for the dead, our holy fathers, believing that this will be a great help for the souls of those for whom the prayer is offered" (Catechesis, 32).
38. St. Augustine not only presumed the existence of purgatory as a matter of divine faith, but also testified to this belief from the Scriptures. Among other statements, he said, "some believers will pass through a kind of purgatorial fire. In proportion as they loved the goods that perish with more of less devotion, they shall be more of less quickly delivered from the flames." He further declared that the deceased are "benefited by the piety of their living friends, who offer the Sacrifice of the Mediator, or give alms to the Church on their behalf. But these services are of help only to those lives had earned such merit that suffrages of this could assist them. For there is a way of life that is neither so good as to dispense with these services after death, nor so bad that after death they are of not benefit" (Enchiridion 69, 110).
39. Augustine's most beautiful tribute to purgatory occurs in the book of his Confessions, where he describes the death of his mother Monica and recalls her final request, "Lay this body anywhere at all. The care of it must not trouble you. This only I ask of you, that you remember me at the altar of the Lord wherever you are." Augustine complied with his mother's desire and admits that he did not weep "even in those prayers that were poured forth to Thee while the sacrifice of our redemption was offered for her" (Confessions, IX, 11).
40. After the Patristic period, the Church did not significantly develop the doctrine of purgatory for many centuries. Then in the twelfth century, Pope Innocent IV (1243-54), building upon the writings of the Fathers, expounded in detail upon the doctrine. In context, Innocent was concerned with reuniting the Greek Church which had been in schism since the Photian scandal in the ninth century. He appealed to the Greek's belief in a state of purgation as a point of departure from which to bring them into communion with Rome. In a doctrinal letter to the apostolic delegate in Greece, he discussed the common belief:
41. "It is said that the Greeks themselves unhesitatingly believe and maintain that the souls of those who do not perform a penance which they have received, or the souls of those who die free from mortal sins but with even the slightest venial sins, are purified after death and can be helped by the prayers of the Church."
42. "Since the Greeks say that their Doctors have not given them a definite and proper name for the place of such purification, We, following the tradition and authority of the holy Fathers, call that place purgatory; and it is our will that the Greeks use that name in the future."
43. "For sins are truly purified by that temporal fire — not grievous or capital sins which have not first been remitted by penance, but small and slight sins which remain a burden after death, if they have not been pardoned during life" (DB, 456).

44. The Second Council of Lyons, convened in 1274, used the teaching of Pope Innocent IV in its formal declaration on purgatory. This declaration stated:
45. "If those who are truly repentant die in charity before they have done sufficient penance for their sins of omission and commission, their souls are cleansed after death in purgatorial or cleansing punishments . . . The suffrages of the faithful on earth can be of great help in relieving these punishments, as, for instance, the Sacrifice of the Mass, prayers, almsgiving, and other religious deeds which, in the manner of the Church, the faithful are accustomed to offer for others of the faithful."
46. The next major pronouncement by the Catholic Church regarding purgatory came shortly before the Council of Trent, from Pope Leo X who condemned a series of propositions of Martin Luther, including the following:
47. "Purgatory cannot be proved from the Sacred Scripture which is the Canon. The souls in purgatory are not sure about their salvation, a least not all of them. Moreover it has not been proved from reason or from the Scriptures that they are beyond the state of merit or of growing in charity" (DB 777-778).
48. The Council of Trent went further, including in the Decree on Justification an anathema of those who deny the debt of temporal punishment, remissible either in this life or in the next:
49. "If anyone says that, after receiving the grace of justification the guilt of any repentant sinner is remitted and the debt of eternal punishment is blotted out in such a way that no debt of temporal punishment remains to be paid, either in this life or in purgatory, before the gate to the kingdom of heaven can be opened: let him be anathema" (DB 840).
50. Fifteen years after the Decree on Justification, and shortly before its closing sessions, the Council of Trent issued a special Decree on Purgatory, as well as corresponding decrees on sacred images, invocation of the saints and indulgences. It was a summary statement that referred to the previous definition and that cautioned against some of the abuses that gave rise to the Protestant opposition:
51. "The Catholic Church, by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, in accordance with Sacred Scripture and the ancient tradition of the Fathers, has taught in the holy councils, and most recently in this ecumenical council, that there is a purgatory, and that the souls detained there are helped by the prayers of the faithful, and especially by the acceptable Sacrifice of the Altar."
52. "Therefore, this holy council commands the bishops to be diligently on guard that the true doctrine about purgatory, the doctrine handed down from the holy Fathers and the sacred councils, be preached everywhere, and that Christians be instructed in it, believe it, and adhere to it."
53. "But let the more difficult and subtle controversies, which neither edify nor generally cause any increase of piety, be omitted from the ordinary sermons to the poorly instructed. Likewise, they should not permit anything that is uncertain or anything that appears to be false to be treated in popular or learned publications. And should forbid as scandalous and injurious to the faithful whatever is characterized by a kind of curiosity and superstition, or is prompted by motives of dishonorable gain" (DB 983).
54. Most recently, the Second Vatican Council in its Constitution on the Church renewed the teaching of previous councils on eschatology, including the doctrine of purgatory. "This sacred Council," it declared, "accepts with great devotion this venerable faith of our ancestors regarding this vital fellowship with our brethren who are in heavenly glory or who, having died, are still being purified . . . At the same time, in conformity with our own pastoral interests, we urge all concerned, if any abuses, excesses or defects have crept in here or there, to do what is in their power to remove or correct them, and to restore all things to a fuller praise of Christ and of God" (Chapter VII, no. 51).

Meaning Of The Doctrine

55. Although not defined doctrine, it is certain that the essential pain in purgatory is the pain of loss, because the souls are temporarily deprived of the beatific vision.
56. Their suffering is intense on two counts: (1) the more something is desired, the more painful its absence, and the faithful departed intensely desire to possess God now that they are freed from temporal cares and no longer held down by the spiritual inertia of the body; (2) they clearly see that their deprivation was personally blameworthy and might have been avoided if only they had prayed and done enough penance during life.
57. However, there is no comparison between this suffering and the pains of hell. The suffering of purgatory is temporary and therefore includes the hope of one day seeing the face of God; it is borne with patience since the souls realize that purification is necessary and they do not wish to have it otherwise; and it is accepted generously, out of love for God and with perfect submission to His will.
58. Moreover, purgatory includes the pain of sense. Some theologians say that not every soul is punished with this further pain, on the premise that it may be God's will to chastise certain people only with the pain of loss.
59. Theologically, there is less clarity about the nature of this pain of sense. Writers in the Latin tradition are quite unanimous that the fire of purgatory is real and not metaphorical. They argue from the common teaching of the Latin Fathers, of some Greek Fathers, and of certain papal statements like that of Pope Innocent IV, who spoke of "a transitory fire" (DB 456). Nevertheless, at the union council of Florence, the Greeks were not required to abandon the opposite opinion, that the fire of purgatory is not a physical reality.
60. We do not know for certain how intense are the pains in purgatory. St. Thomas Aquinas held that the least pain in purgatory was greater than the worst in this life. St. Bonaventure said the worst suffering after death was greater than the worst on earth, but the same could not be said regarding the least purgatorial suffering.
61. Theologians commonly hold, with St. Robert Bellarmine, that in some way the pains of purgatory are greater than those on earth. At least objectively the loss of the beatific vision after death, is worse than its non-possession now. But on the subjective side, it is an open question. Probably the pains in purgatory are gradually diminished, so that in the latter stages we could not compare sufferings on earth with the state of a soul approaching the vision of God.

62. Parallel with their sufferings, the souls also experience intense spiritual joy. Among the mystics, St. Catherine of Genoa wrote, "It seems to me there is no joy comparable to that of the pure souls in purgatory, except the joy of heavenly beatitude." There are many reasons for this happiness. They are absolutely sure of their salvation. They have faith, hope and great charity. They know themselves to be in divine friendship, confirmed in grace and no longer able to offend God.
63. Although the souls in purgation perform supernatural acts, they cannot merit because they are no longer in the state of wayfarers, nor can they increase in supernatural charity. By the same token, they cannot make satisfaction, which is the free acceptance of suffering as compensation for injury, accepted by God on account of the dignity of the one satisfying. The sufferings in purgatory are imposed on the departed, without leaving them the option of "free acceptance" such as they had in mortal life. They can only make "satispassion" for their sins, by patiently suffering the demand of God's justice.
64. The souls in purgatory can pray, and, since impetration is the fruit of prayer, they can also impetrate. The reason is that impetration does not depend on strict justice as in merit, but on divine mercy. Moreover, the impetratory power of their prayers depends on their sanctity.
65. It is therefore highly probable that the poor souls can impetrate a relaxation of their own (certainly of other souls') sufferings. But they do not do this directly; only indirectly in obtaining from God the favor that the Church might pray for them and that prayers offered by the faithful might be applied to them.
66. However, it is not probable but certain that they can pray and impetrate on behalf of those living on earth. They are united with the Church Militant by charity in the Communion of Saints. At least two councils approved the custom of invoking the faithful departed. According to the Council of Vienne, they "assist us by their suffrages." And in the words of the Council of Utrecht, "We believe that they pray for us to God." St. Bellarmine wrote at length on the efficacy of invoking the souls in purgatory. The Church has formally approved the practice, as in the decree of Pope Leo XIII granting an indulgence for any prayer in which the intercession of the faithful departed is petitioned (Acta Sanctae Sedis, 1889-90, p.743).

A Problem

67. A major problem arises regarding the forgiveness of venial sins in a person who is dying in the state of grace. When and how are they remitted? Is the forgiveness before death? If so, by what right? What has the person done to deserve forgiveness, since it is not likely God would remove the guilt of sins that were not repented of. Or is it after death? But then how can this take place, since ex hypothesi the person can no longer merit or truly satisfy, but can only suffer to remove the reatus poenae.
68. According to one theory (Alexander of Hales), venial sins are always removed in this life through the grace of final perseverance, even without an act of contrition. Remission takes place "in the very dissolution of body and soul," when concupiscence is also extinguished. Few theologians look on this opinion favorably, both because there is nothing in the sources to suggest that final perseverance remits guilt, and because everything indicates the need for some human counterpart in the remission of sin.
69. Others claim (e.g., St. Bonaventure) that forgiveness occurs in purgatory itself by a kind of "accidental merit" which allows for the removal of guilt and not only satispassion in virtue of Divine Justice. If anything, this theory is less probable than the foregoing because it presumes there is a possibility of merit after death.
70. Blessed Dun Scotus and the Franciscan school say the deletion takes place either in purgatory or at the time of death. If in purgatory, it is on the assumption that the expiating venial sins is nothing more than remitting the penalty they deserve; if at the time of death, it could be right at the moment the soul leaves the body or an instant after. In any case, Scotists postulate that remission occurs because of merits previously gained during life on earth. This position is not much favored because it seems to identify habitual sin with its penalty and claim that venial sins are remissible without subjective penance.
71. The most common explanation is that venial sins are remitted at the moment of death, through the fervor of a person's love of God and sorrow for his sins. For although a soul on leaving the body can no longer merit or make real satisfaction, it can retract its sinful past. Thus, it leaves its affection for sin and, without increasing in sanctifying grace or removing any penalty (as happens in true merit), it can have deleted the reatus culpae. The latter is incompatible with the exalted love of God possessed by a spirit that leaves the body in divine friendship but stained with venial faults.

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