The Word of Righteousness

Forgiveness in the Age to Come (2)

The complete economy of God in His salvation is rich, extensive, and multifaceted. In eternity past, God elected and predestined His chosen ones for the divine sonship, and in time, in the stage of His incarnation, He died an all-inclusive death to fully satisfy God's righteous requirements, thus accomplishing judicial redemption for us. Now, whoever confesses with his mouth Jesus as Lord and believes in his heart that God has raised Him from the dead will be saved, for "whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:9-13). However, after freely receiving eternal salvation, we believers must grow in life, give up the world, deal with the self, love the Lord above all, and count all things loss for Christ in order that we may be filled with the Holy Spirit to be transformed in our entire being. Moreover, we must exercise to be positive and aggressive to use the gift the Lord has given us to the fullest extent and be active in His work to gain a positive result for Him. Then at the Lord's coming, we will give an account to Him at His judgment seat (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10). At that time, our works will be tested with fire, and those who are found lacking will be "saved, yet so as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:11-15). Such ones will not lose their eternal salvation, but they will lose their reward and be disciplined by the Lord in the coming age, the kingdom age of one thousand years. This is the age to come, the age of reward and punishment referred to by the Lord in Matthew 12:32: "Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, neither in this age nor in the one to come."

In the previous article of this department (*Affirmation & Critique*, April 2004, 56-69) we examined these crucial passages in 1 Corinthians 3 and Matthew 12, especially in the light of the teachings of the early church fathers. There we saw that many of the church fathers interpreted these passages without prejudice, accepting the truth that believers who do not successfully complete their course in this life will complete it in a time of discipline in the next age. Moreover, most of these early teachers accepted the biblical imagery of fire as the universal sign of the Lord's judgment. As we also saw, however, beginning from a remarkably early point in the history of the church, the light of the truth concerning the believers' salvation and subsequent growth became dim. Salvation became confused with sanctification after salvation, grace became muddled with reward, and perdition became confounded with discipline and chastisement. Although the apostles, especially Paul, taught these things clearly, many of the church fathers misunderstood them in their important details. Some, such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen, even fell into outright error.

As a result, these early teachers unwittingly laid the groundwork for what would gradually develop into the Roman Catholic teaching of the "last things"—heaven, hell, and most notably, purgatory. Out of an unclear understanding of salvation arose a system of error which taught that persons who are disposed for eternal salvation but do not obtain it before the time of their death can obtain it only after being completely purged in purgatory. The Scriptures absolutely deny such a distorted understanding of eternal salvation. Moreover, the simple, seemingly pious, but unscriptural practice of praying for dead believers devolved into the superstitious dogma that prayers—along with material offerings and the "mass"—are efficacious to relieve and shorten the sufferings of souls who are on their way to obtaining eternal salvation in purgatory. This practice eventually degraded into a kind of necromancy, in which certain "saints" were visited by the dead and communicated with them. In this installment, we will continue to examine the errors of the teaching of purgatory and juxtapose them with the truths of salvation, reward, and punishment in the Holy Scriptures.

The Temporary Abode of the Dead

The Bible teaches that when a believer dies, his incorporeal spirit and soul go to Paradise, the pleasant section of Hades beneath the earth.[1] In the Old Testament, Hades is known as Sheol, a place under the earth, since the dead are said to descend into it (Gen. 37:35; Psa. 6:5; 49:14; Num. 16:30; 1 Sam. 2:6; Job 7:9; 21:13). In the Septuagint, *Sheol* is most often translated as the Greek *Hades*. As with Sheol, one is "brought down" to Hades, in contrast to ascending to heaven (Matt. 11:23). In 12:40 the Lord prophesied, "For just as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights." Acts 2:31 tells us that in His death the Lord descended into Hades. Together these two verses indicate that Hades is in the heart of the earth.

Hades is the temporary holding place of both the righteous and unrighteous dead until their resurrection, as Marvin R. Vincent says, "It is the place to which all who depart this life descend, without reference to their moral character" (93). According to Acts 2:22-34, it is the place to which not only Christ but also David descended after death. Christ resurrected from Hades on the third day; He was not abandoned to Hades (v. 31). Peter, however, testified that up to the day of Pentecost, fifty days after the resurrection of Christ and ten days after His ascension, David was still in Hades (v. 34). Moreover, the pleasant part of Hades in which David remains is called Paradise. While the Lord was being crucified, He told the repenting thief, "Today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). "Today" was the day of the Lord's crucifixion, in which He descended into Hades, yet of this day He said, "You shall be with Me in Paradise." This proves that Paradise, where both the Lord and the thief went, is the same as Hades, in the heart of the earth.

The situation in Hades is most clearly seen in the story of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16:19-31. In this account, Lazarus dies and is carried away into "Abraham's bosom" (v. 22), a place of rest and comfort. The rich man also dies. Verse 23 says, "In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham from afar and Lazarus in his bosom." Thus, both Lazarus and the rich man were in Hades, Lazarus being in the pleasant section of Paradise, also known as Abraham's bosom, and the rich man being across a great chasm and in torment (v. 26). This is the scriptural revelation of the temporary abode of both the evil and the believing dead. In *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* Coxe notes,

> Hades, in the view of the ancients, was the general receptacle of souls after their separation from the body, where the good abode happily in a place of light (φωτεινῷ), and the evil all in a place of darkness (σκοτιωτέρῳ)…Hence Abraham's bosom and paradise were placed in Hades. (221)

Tertullian, an early church father, testifies properly concerning Hades: "Christ in His death spent three days in the heart of the earth, that is, in the secret inner recess which is hidden in the earth, and enclosed by the earth" ("Soul" 231). He tells us that there too the souls of all the dead are kept: "Every soul is detained in safe keeping in Hades until the day of the Lord" (231). He further states that the faithful have not been removed from Hades, since "the archangel's trumpet has not been heard" (231, 1 Thes. 4:16). "Every soul" includes both the believing and unbelieving dead, each waiting for their respective final dispositions: "The soul undergoes punishment and consolation in Hades in the interval, while it awaits its alternative of judgment, in a certain anticipation either of gloom or of glory" (234). Thus, Tertullian speaks of "two regions" in Hades (233). He correctly distinguishes between the "everlasting abode" of the believers and their "temporary receptacle" between death and the resurrection ("Marcion" 406). Of the latter he says,

> This region, therefore, I call Abraham's bosom. Although it is not in heaven, it is yet higher than hell, and is appointed to afford an interval of rest to the souls of the righteous, until the consummation of all things shall complete the resurrection of all men with the "full recompense of their reward." (406)

Tertullian's view of Abraham's bosom is a simple, honest interpretation of Luke 16. Although it begins to add an unnecessary spatial dimension to Hades by speaking of it as "higher than hell," this is forgivable in light of verse 23, which says that in Hades the rich man "lifted up his eyes." Hippolytus also speaks of two sections of Hades:

> Now we must speak of Hades, in which the souls both of the righteous and the unrighteous are detained…The righteous shall obtain the incorruptible and unfading kingdom, who indeed are at present detained in Hades, but not in the same place with the unrighteous… the unrighteous…shudder in horror at the expectation of the future judgment, (as if they were) already feeling the power of their punishment. (221-222)

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The Scriptures tell us that after death believers pass into the pleasant section of Hades, known as Paradise or "Abraham's bosom." There they remain until the day of the Lord, His second coming, in which the believing dead will resurrect. The unbelieving dead will resurrect after the millennium to be judged at the great white throne (Rev. 20:11-15). However, the Bible tells us almost nothing about the believers' stay in Hades. After Luke 16, the single glimpse we have of that region is Revelation 6:9-11, in which John sees the martyrs "underneath the altar," praying, "How long, O Master, holy and true, will You not judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"[2] These are given white robes and told to rest yet a little while. Any "vision" of the region of the dead beyond this is unscriptural. However, the popular teaching of purgatory in the Roman Church is rife and rich with elaborate fabrications as to the locale and activities of the afterlife. These are speculative and imaginary, at

best. In some cases, such visions may actually be the visitations of "deceiving spirits" and "teachings of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1).

A Speculative Geography of the Afterlife

In Philippians 2:10 Paul said that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, "of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth." Here Paul speaks of the three sections of the universe. Those who are in heaven are the angels, those on earth are the living human beings, and those under the earth are the dead. In 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 Paul said that he was "caught away" to the third heaven and also "caught away" (ἁρπάζω, being neither "up" or "down") into Paradise. As a man living on the earth, the apostle knew the things of earth. For the sake of his ministry, however, he was also caught away into the two opposite, uttermost sections of the universe—the highest heaven and the place of the dead—to receive visions and revelations. Beyond what we have discussed here, the Bible does very little to spatialize the realm of the dead, and we must assume from this that the inspiring Spirit has little interest or need to do so.

The major cultures of the Near East and Mediterranean regions each have their mythology of the afterlife. The conceptions of the Greeks and of their cultural heirs, the Romans, were the most significant outside influence during the early centuries of the church. In Book Six of the *Aeneid* Virgil describes the underworld with a topological precision not attempted again until the time of Dante in the fourteenth century. In this account, Aeneas passes through the initial vestibule of the Lower World and is conducted past subsequent regions haunted by giants and monstrous hybrid beasts until he reaches a great fork in the path. To the left is Tartarus, in which ceaseless and savage punishments are dealt out to the damned according to their sins. To the right, past Pluto's battlements, are the Elysian Fields, the Land of Joy where the Homes of the Blest are, where "bright spirits" indulge in the same pleasures they knew while still in the flesh. Beyond this is the sacred woods where souls are purged from their engrafted faults by being "schooled by retribution" through various salutary punishments (6.739), a clear precursor to the teaching of purgatory. Virgil's contribution to the mythology of the afterlife is worthy of this brief mention. Dante acknowledges the guidance of Virgil in his own classic portrayal of the afterlife, and elements of Virgil are more than evident—to this day—in traditional Christian depictions of hell, purgatory, and even heaven.

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Early Jewish and Christian apocryphal writings, often composed of purported apocalyptic visions, speak of various imaginary geographical configurations of the afterlife. The dead are variously situated in caverns, vestibules, or other dwellings, numbering sometimes two and sometimes four, seven, or more. These receptacles differ according to categories of persons, and each is visited with gradations of consolations or punishments. The places of the dead are commonly traversed through treacherous portals, bridges, staircases, and paths and are furnished with rivers of fire, columns of fire, wheels of fire, and trees of fire. Very commonly, punishments are individualized and suited to the particular sins of the suffering soul. Even Augustine, whose beliefs were later retrofitted to support purgatory, despised and refuted these apocryphal visions. Concerning the visions in the *Aeneid*, which he calls "poetic falsity," he says, "Who can incline a Christian heart to these poetical and fabulous figments?" ("Care" 545, 540). He likewise comments on the apocryphal Apocalypse of Paul,

> Some presumptuous men, some very stupid men, have invented the Apocalypse of Paul, which the Church rightly does not recognize and which is full of I know not what fables. They say that this is the story of his being carried off to the third heaven and the revelation of the ineffable words he heard there, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Is their audacity tolerable? When Paul says that he heard what is not lawful for a man to utter, would he then have said what it is not lawful for a man to utter? (Le Goff 36)

By the time of the Council of Carthage in A.D. 397 which was dominated by Augustine, the false, apocryphal Jewish and Christian visions were discounted from Scripture, but there is no doubt that they already had exercised a certain amount of influence on the early church fathers, some of whom condemned them while others quoted from them in their own writings. Many of these unscriptural images lay dormant only to emerge again in the popular medieval view of hell and purgatory.

Near the end of the sixth century, Gregory the Great lent further credibility to a speculative geography of the afterlife, speaking of "higher regions" and "lower regions" in hell (Le Goff 89). In his commentary on Job, he reads *Sheol* in 14:13 as the Latin *inferno*, the lower hell, and in 17:16 for "the bars of Sheol" he reads *profundissimum infernum*, "the lowest hell." In this way he perpetuates the imagery of a universe made of layers of "worlds." It is this view, this geography, that gives hell and purgatory

their mythological dimension, and which conveys much of their power and appeal to the imagination. Gregory was a concrete thinker with the desire to appeal to the popular sensibilities of the common people, and his commentaries would later be used to vindicate medieval notions of purgatory.

In the centuries after Gregory, little was added to the serious teaching of the disposition of the dead. Rather the contribution of the early Middle Ages was what Jacques Le Goff calls "the riot of imagination" (96). In the barbarian regions of Christianity, Celtic and Germanic mythology was assimilated and adapted to produce imaginary accounts of voyages to the "lands" of the afterlife. As maps of the world were being redrawn and refined in the later Middle Ages, Christianity urged a renewed interest in defining the maps of the afterlife. In the eleventh century the mouth of purgatory was "located" by the monks of Cluny in a fiery mountain in Sicily, later clarified to be Mount Aetna, and in the late twelfth century, the anonymous *Saint Patrick's Purgatory* located the opening to purgatory in Ireland. This truly was the culmination of a very disorderly "riot of imagination."

The Medieval Birth of a Three-part Universe

Teachers in late antiquity and the Middle Ages attempted to formulate the various dispositions of persons in the afterlife according to their degrees of righteousness or unrighteousness. Earlier, Augustine had formulated a fourfold classification of men: those who are entirely good (thus suited for heaven), those who are not entirely good (thus not wholly suited for heaven), those who are not entirely evil (thus not wholly suited for hell), and those who are irremediably evil and thus suited only for hell ("Enchiridion" 272). Since heaven and hell had already claimed their places in the medieval imagination, the bulk of speculation dealt with Augustine's two middle classifications. In his own day, Augustine placed these in vague, hidden receptacles after death, but the Middle Ages sought to define a more specific world view of the afterlife. "Abraham's bosom" was frequently misappropriated for the not entirely good, being inferior to heaven but a place of temporary refreshment. In contrast, the not entirely evil were thought to be in a place of purgatorial fires. The writings of scholars and "visionaries" in the twelfth through fourteenth centuries tended to "infernalize" the intermediate regions, making them to appear more like a kind of hell than a refreshment. Eventually, the temporary rest in Abraham's bosom was eliminated altogether in favor of a single state between heaven and hell—a place of fiery purgation. It is ironic that the speculations of the medieval church eliminated the concept that bore the closest resemblance to Scripture. Thus, a belief in a tripartite structure of the universe emerged.

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Le Goff skillfully shows the development of the thought of purgatory as a definitive place by the evolution of the noun *purgatory*. Augustine introduced the terminology for purgation that remained in use for much of the Middle Ages, speaking of purgatorial punishments *(poenae purgatoriae)*, purgatorial torments *(tormenta purgatoria)*, and purgatorial fire *(ignis purgatorius)*. Later the phrase *in purgatorial places (in locis purgatoriis)* was used, which was sometimes shortened to in purgatorial without the noun. *Purgatorial* was used only as an adjective until the late twelfth century. The noun *purgatory (purgatorium)* cannot be found until the decade of A.D. 1170 in the writings of Parisian masters and Cistercian monks. Therefore, Le Goff cites this date as the "birth of purgatory" (63, 362). What was first considered as a process for unperfected believers was now definitively understood to be a physical locale with its own name in the tripartite geography of the medieval theological universe.

Here we must assess and critique the continuum of error concerning the "world" view of the afterlife. A number of the teachers in the early church did not properly understand the New Testament teaching of "Abraham's bosom" as being the temporary resting place for the believers after their life in the flesh. Such a lack of clarity and teaching may be considered a negative sowing (Gal. 6:7-8), from which Christianity eventually reaped a particularly wild assortment of imaginary and speculative geographies of the afterlife. These mythical topologies slowly took the form of erroneous teachings concerning heaven and hell, as well as the heresy of purgatory. In Matthew 12:32 the Lord spoke of forgiveness in "this age" and in "the one to come." *Age* in Greek is αἰών, anglicized as *eon*, which always denotes a period of time. In the Latin Vulgate, verse 32 reads *"neque in hoc saeculo neque in futuro"* with *saeculum* also having the meaning of "age." The Lord's word here clearly relates to the time, not the locale, of forgiveness. It is regrettable that the King James Version, for example, reads, "neither in this world, neither in the world to come." The economical move of God is divided into dispensations and ages, not into worlds. As we saw in the previous article, forgiveness in the age to come is the forgiveness under God's governmental discipline in the coming kingdom age, which will be granted to defeated believers after a certain period of punishment.

We strongly assert that the proper teaching of forgiveness in the age to come is distinct in every way from the erroneous, fantastical, and heretical teaching of purgatory. In 1 Timothy 1:3-4 Paul said, "Even as I exhorted you, when I was going into Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus in order that you might charge certain ones not to teach different things nor to give heed to myths and unending genealogies, which produce questionings rather than God's economy, which is in faith." The speculative geography of the "world to come," as developed in late antiquity and the Middle Ages, is a system of myths which are contrary to God's economy, and we are enjoined to give no heed to them.

The Biblical Time of Discipline

A keystone practice of the Roman Church is the offering of suffrages—prayers, alms, and the mass—in order to relieve the suffering of the souls in purgatory. The feasibility of this practice is based on two concepts, the "communion of the saints," which we examined in the previous article, and the belief that the departed are currently in the place of purgation. Having forsaken the scriptural testimony of the believers' rest in "Abraham's bosom," certain early teachers fixed the time of judgment and discipline as beginning immediately after death. Augustine conjectured that the time for discipline was in the "interval between the death of this present body and the coming of that Day, the day of condemnation and reward which is to be after the general resurrection of the body" (*City* 1013). This formulation was considered the most authoritative and became the paradigm for the future teaching of purgatory. This is the basis for the threefold distinction of the church in Roman dogma: the Church Militant (on the earth), the Church Suffering (or Expectant, in purgatory), and the Church Triumphant (in heaven)—all present in the universe contemporaneously.

As we have seen, the believers pass after their death into Paradise, the pleasant section of Hades. In Revelation 6:9-11, which transpires near the end of this age, they are still seen there "underneath the altar." It is not until the Lord descends from heaven that the dead in Christ are raised (1 Thes. 4:16; 1 Cor. 15:52). This transpires at His second coming at the end of the church age. At this time the Lord will set up His judgment seat, before which all the resurrected and raptured believers will appear to give an account to Him (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10). Those whose lives are found to have been faithful and whose works are proven to be of "gold, silver, precious stones" (1 Cor. 3:12) will enter into the joy of the Lord in the millennial kingdom and reign with Him for one thousand years (Rev. 20:4, 6). Those whose works are found to be "wood, grass, stubble" (1 Cor. 3:12) will be excluded from the bright glory of the kingdom. At that time, the defeated believer will "suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire" (v. 15); that is, he will not lose his eternal salvation, but he will lose his reward and suffer a period of chastisement in the kingdom age. During the kingdom age, it is the dead unbelievers, not the believers, who will remain in Hades, as Revelation 20:5 says, "The rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were completed." After the millennium is completed, the unbelieving dead will resurrect, and the Lord will sit on His great white throne to judge them for eternal perdition (vv. 11-15). Concerning the judgment seat of Christ before the millennium, W. E. Vine says,

> This judgment-seat is to be distinguished from…the post-millennial "Great White Throne," Rev. 20:11, at which only "the dead" will appear. The judgment-seat of Christ will be a tribunal held "in His Parousia," i.e., His presence with His saints after His return to receive them to Himself. (623)

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At the present time, all the believing dead are resting in Paradise, but at the end of the church age, they all will be resurrected to stand—along with the living raptured believers—at the judgment seat of Christ. It is only at that time that the reward or punishment of the believers will be known. Then the time for reward or punishment will be the kingdom age of one thousand years. Therefore, the believers will be either rewarded or punished at the same time, in the same age, which is the age to come. According to the proper understanding of the Scriptures, it is impossible that the believing dead are suffering chastisement today while the living believers are still running their course in this age. What then can we say about the "solidarity" between the "Church Militant" and the "Church Suffering"? What can we say about visions of the souls in purgatory and their mystical visitations to the living? Only that "anyone who consults a spirit of the dead or a familiar spirit or inquires of the dead…is an abomination to Jehovah" (Deut. 18:11-12). To speak with the spirits of the dead is to do "evil in the sight of Jehovah beyond measure, provoking Him to anger" (2 Chron. 33:6).

The Formalization of the False Doctrine of Purgatory

With the advances and restructuring of society in the later Middle Ages, universities became crucial, serving, among other purposes, to shape opinions on important theological

issues. At this time, scholastic debates on the issue of purgatory intensified, especially at the University of Paris, the theological center of Latin Christendom, and by the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries the basic components of the doctrine reached their final form. The first pontifical definition of the doctrine is found in the letter from Innocent IV in A.D. 1254 to the hierarchy of the Greek Church with whom the Latins had been debating the issue. The Greeks never accepted the Latin belief that redemption could take place after death. The letter begins by invoking Matthew 12:32 and 1 Corinthians 3:15 but quickly turns into an appeal to agree upon the name of "Purgatory" *(purgatorium)* as the place of afterlife purgation. In further attempts at reconciliation with the Greeks, the Latin position was stated officially in the Council of Lyons in 1274 and the Council of Florence in 1438. However, the most definitive statement of the Roman dogma required the fuel of the Reformation to stoke its polemic fire. The main object of the Council of Trent in 1563 was the definitive determination of the doctrines of the Roman Church in answer to the perceived heresies of the Protestants. Among other issues, the council made dogmatic decrees concerning the extended canon of Scripture, justification, the sacraments, the veneration of saints and relics, and purgatory. Concerning the latter, the council decrees,

> The Catholic Church, instructed by the Holy Ghost, has, from the Sacred Writings and the ancient tradition of the Fathers, taught, in sacred Councils, and very recently in this ecumenical Synod, that there is a Purgatory, and that the souls there detained are helped by the suffrages of the faithful…To wit, the sacrifices of masses, prayers, alms, and other works of piety. ("Canons" 198-199)

Thus, the councils of the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries formally enshrined the doctrine of purgatory in Roman Catholic theology.

The Apocryphal Foundation

Catholic teachers and theologians are quick to admit that the teaching of purgatory has very little support in the Holy Scriptures, as distinguished from the Apocrypha. The passage most often quoted in this regard is from 2 Maccabees 12. After the battle against Gorgias, the governor of Idumea, the army of Judas Maccabeus gathered their slain to be buried. When under the coats of the slain they found things consecrated to idols, and thus realized why these men had fallen in battle, they prayed for those who had died:

> All men therefore praising the Lord, the righteous Judge, who had opened the things that were hid, betook themselves unto prayer, and besought him that the sin committed might wholly be put out of remembrance…And when he had made a gathering throughout the company to the sum of two thousand drachms of silver, he sent it to Jerusalem to offer a sin offering, doing therein very well and honestly, in that he was mindful of the resurrection: for if he had not hoped that they that were slain should have risen again, it had been superfluous and vain to pray for the dead. And also in that he perceived that there was great favour laid up for those that died godly, it was an holy and good thought. Whereupon he made a reconciliation for the dead, that they might be delivered from sin. (vv. 41-45)

This account suggests two major components of the teaching of purgatory. First, a collection of silver was made for a sin offering for the dead, and second and more importantly, prayers were made for the dead so that they might be delivered, after death, from their sin. However, this can hardly be called a scriptural evidence for purgatory, since apart from much controversy the book of 2 Maccabees is not accepted into the canon of Scripture.

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It becomes apparent, therefore, that the inception, development, and propagation of the errors that eventually became the doctrine of purgatory derive from a reliance upon a deuterocanon, an extendible canon, that is characterized in particular by the Catholic Church. Christians who accurately share the "faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3) receive the Bible as the Word of God, the ultimate, inspired authority on all matters of Christian teaching and practice. In addition, seeking believers are edified by healthy biblical exposition based on and faithful to the teaching of the apostles, though they never rank these with the Scriptures themselves. The councils of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches, however, extended the canon of the Old Testament to include those books called apocryphal, or deuterocanonical. Moreover, the traditions of Roman Catholicism ascribe a very high authority to the teachings of the fathers and to the teachings and examples in the hagiography, the biographies of the saints. While defending the Catholic view toward the books of the Apocrypha, John Collins admits, "The tendency to inclusiveness, and to blurring the line between canon and tradition, remain typical of a Catholic as distinct from a Protestant sensibility" (xxxiv).

This inclusive sensibility is carried to the extreme of

venerating a broad and diverse range of seemingly Christian testimony, embracing even the visions of fast-starved monastics and ecstasies of young religious girls. *"Vidit…"* ("he saw") occurs frequently in the Apocalypse of Paul and is a typical apparatus of the early apocalyptic genre, denoting that what is normally hidden from view is now open to the "seer" (Le Goff 36). Similarly, in the thirteenth century, the Dominican Stephen of Bourbon began his *exempla* on purgatory with *"Audivi…"* ("I have heard," 313). Thus, "he saw" and "I have heard" replace "it is written," the healthy reliance on the pure Word of God. The modern Dominican Garrigou-Lagrange recommends his treatise on heaven, hell, and purgatory with the words, "A handmaid of God once heard these words…" (viii). Maria Simma entitled her accounts of conversations with the dead, *The Souls in Purgatory Told Me* (Emmanuel 1). To the devout and mystical Catholic, these apocryphal and anecdotal witnesses all become part of the elastic and extendable deuterocanon. In such a spirit of inclusiveness, a handmaid is thought to be a visionary, and a poet a theologian.

The Hebrew Old Testament and the Apocrypha

The foundational passage for the doctrine of purgatory is found in 2 Maccabees, a book whose position in the canon of Scripture is, to say the least, contested. To be sure, a thorough discussion of the canonicity of the apocryphal books is not possible in this article, but because of its relevance to our subject, we will present a brief summary. The books of the Hebrew Bible are twenty-four in number, traditionally arranged in three divisions. The Law contains the five books of the Pentateuch. The Prophets contain four Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings) and four Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Book of the Twelve Prophets). The Writings consist of eleven books: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles. Dividing Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, and Ezra-Nehemiah into two books each, and the Twelve Prophets into twelve, the above list corresponds exactly with the thirty-nine books of the recognized Old Testament. The twenty-four books were often numbered as twenty-two by assimilating smaller books such as Ruth and Lamentations into larger ones. (The early church fathers also practiced these kinds of combinations in various methods. Therefore, in this discussion the twenty-four and twenty-two are in the greater part equivalent.) By any method of counting, the Jewish community was not ambivalent in its acceptance of these books. In Contra Apion, Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian and Pharisee, represents the common belief of the Jews: "We do not possess myriads of inconsistent books, conflicting with each other. Our books, those which are justly accredited, are but two and twenty, and contain the record of all time" (Wegner 110-111).

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According to Jewish tradition, the direct voice of God had ceased among them following the time of Malachi, about 400 B.C., after which time no more books were added to the Scriptures. Even 1 Maccabees 9:27 testifies that by that date (second century B.C.) a long interval had passed "since the time that prophets ceased to appear among them" (NRSV). Since the time of the prophets, the writings of wise men were considered the *bath kol,* the indirect voice (lit., "daughter of a voice") rather than the direct voice of God. Around A.D. 90, the canon of the Hebrew Bible was debated by the rabbis at Jamnia, the Hebrew center for the study of Scripture in western Judea. As a result, the canon remained as it had been until that day with twenty-four accepted books.

It was in Alexandria that the Hebrew Scriptures were first translated into Greek, from which we now have the collection known as the Septuagint. Since the Septuagint also contains a number of the apocryphal books, the canonicity of these books became a matter of debate. Apparently, though, it was an issue for debate among Christians only, not for the Jews, who did not accept the extra books. The theory that a separate canon was held by Alexandrian Jews, a Hellenistic canon differing from a Palestinian canon, is based on no real evidence, and most recent researchers have abandoned it. Philo probably speaks for all of Alexandrian Judaism in referring to writings outside of the accepted twenty-four books as those "by which knowledge and piety may be increased and brought to perfection," but he nowhere commends them as Scripture (Bruce 46). The earliest extant copies of the Septuagint date from the Christian period, from the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. Because of this, it is possible that the inclusion of the non-canonical books reflects changes made by early Christians who were unfamiliar with the Hebrew canon.

The Church Fathers and the Apocrypha

Of the early Christian witnesses on the subject of the Old Testament books, we will consider only a few. Few of the early Christian writers gave a precise list of the Old Testament books. One such list is given by Melito of Sardis, which includes none of the apocryphal books included in the Septuagint. Another important list is provided by Origen, who despite his other faults is still recognized as

the leading biblical scholar among the Greek fathers. His chief contribution to Old Testament studies was his compilation of the *Hexapla,* the Old Testament in six parallel Hebrew and Greek texts. He concluded that the books of the Old Testament are twenty-two, according to the Hebrew canon, specifically mentioning that the books of Maccabees are "outside these" (Bruce 74). Athanasius was the first to use the word *canon* to refer to the accepted Old Testament books. In a pastoral letter he speaks concerning "the books included in the Canon, and handed down, and accredited as Divine," saying, "There are, then, of the Old Testament, twenty-two books in number" (Wegner 112). Using the same phrase as Origen—"outside these" (Bruce 79)—he goes on to commend a few of the apocryphal books simply as worthy to be read, but he makes no mention of the books of Maccabees.

Jerome—a linguist and master of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin—was one of the most qualified biblical scholars of the Latin church fathers. He also limited the Old Testament canon to the Hebrew Old Testament. In his prologue to the books of Samuel and Kings he states clearly, "There are also twenty-two books of the Old Testament; that is, five of Moses, eight of the prophets, nine of the Hagiographa" (Jerome 490). He considered that just as there are twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet, the twenty-two books of the Hebrew Scriptures are the "alphabet of the doctrine of God" (489).[3] "Whatever falls *outside these,"* he adds, "must be set apart among the Apocrypha" (Bruce 90, emphasis added). To Jerome, "Apocrypha" meant those books that were "ecclesiastical" and edifying but not Scripture. The greatest accomplishment of Jerome was his translation of the Old Testament into Latin. He began by revising the existing Latin translation based on the Septuagint, but abandoned this in favor of returning to the original Hebrew, the Hebraica veritas ("true-to-the-Hebrew") as he called it. In accordance with the already established custom, he included several of the apocryphal books in his translation. However, in his prologue to the canonical books of Solomon he comments on two similar apocryphal books, the Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus:

> As, then, the Church reads Judith, Tobit, and the books of the Maccabees, but does not admit them among the canonical Scriptures, so let it read these two volumes for the edification of the people, not to give authority to doctrines of the Church.[4] (Jerome 492)

Jerome's views on the books mentioned above, and on all the apocryphal books, is very clear. They retain a certain ethical value, they may be read for edification, and they may be quoted in this regard, but they are not to be used "to give authority to doctrines of the Church." Jerome's translations formed the greater basis for the Vulgate, which became the standard Latin translation of the Bible for over a thousand years. As his text became widely distributed and reproduced, however, it suffered two great harms: More apocryphal books were added to it, seeming to render them the weight of Scripture, and Jerome's proscription against their use for defining doctrine was omitted. Concerning 2 Maccabees in particular, around which our larger discussion turns, *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia* adds this telling note:

> Jerome did not intend to include 1—2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach, and Baruch, since as a Scripture scholar, he considered them noncanonical. These translations of the deuterocanonical books in the Vulgate were done by other translators and preserved by the Church, so that the Vulgate becomes the basis for the canon of Scripture for Roman Catholics. (Doohan 905)

The leading biblical scholars among the early church fathers all held to the Hebrew canon. All other books were "outside these," and although they could prove to be edifying, they did not hold the weight of Scripture and should not be used for defining doctrine. Jerome was explicit on this point.

Most readers of the Vulgate Bible made no distinction between the uncontested books and the apocryphal ones, even the ones added after Jerome.

Augustine, however, disagreed with Jerome sharply and became the first major church father to accept all the apocryphal books. Although considered a greater theologian, he was a lesser linguist, and the fine points of the *Hebraica veritas* were not significant to him. In fact, Augustine urged Jerome to revise the existing Latin translation from the Septuagint rather than return to the Hebrew original, since a translation of the Hebrew might differ from the version already being read in the Greek churches. Augustine's stand wielded a powerful influence over the decisions related to scriptural canon, and councils held in his own lifetime—in Hippo in A.D. 393 and in Carthage in 397 and 419—formally endorsed the books that Jerome had called apocryphal.

The Apocrypha after the Reformation

In the subsequent centuries, most readers of the Vulgate Bible made no distinction between the uncontested books and the apocryphal ones, even the ones added after Jerome. With the revival of serious biblical scholasticism in the Middle Ages the issue of canonicity was raised again, but it did not come to a crisis until the Reformation.

Luther followed Jerome in distinguishing the apocryphal books. Although he retained some of them in his *Heilige Schrift*, he moved them into a separate appendix, as did later Protestant editions. About 2 Maccabees, however, he spoke clearly:

> That book is not among the books of Holy Scripture, and, as St. Jerome says, it is not found in the Hebrew tongue, in which all the books of the Old Testament are found. In other respects too this book has little authority, for it contradicts the first book of Maccabees in its description of King Antiochus, and contains many more fables which destroy its credibility. ("Argument" 113)

In his Great Bible, Coverdale also singled out a few books, including 2 Maccabees, as those that were "the more suspect and the less received" (Callaway xxxvi). The Roman Church was forced to deal with the Reformation attitude toward the canon of Scripture, and it did so most stridently in the Council of Trent, listing the books received by the Synod—including Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, and 1 and 2 Maccabees—and adding this warning:

> But if any one receive not, as sacred and canonical, the said books entire with all their parts, as they have been used to be read in the Catholic Church, and as they are contained in the old Latin vulgate edition; and knowingly and deliberately contemn the traditions aforesaid; let him be anathema. ("Canons" 82)

Although medieval scholastics systematized the ideas of purgatory, and the Roman Church defined its official dogma, the Church and scholars made no definitive decision as to its imagery and details.

By this affirmation the council set the rule as to which "testimonies and authorities it will mainly use in confirming dogmas…in the Church" (82). Although the text of the Bible prescribed here is the "old Latin vulgate edition" *(veteri Vulgata Latina editione)*, the greater part of which was due to Jerome, Jerome's original proscription against the Apocrypha seems to be long forgotten by the council. The council declares its intent to use the deuterocanonical books in "confirming dogmas" *(confirmadis dogmatibus)*, where Jerome had said that they are "not to give authority to doctrines" *(non…dogmatum confirmandam)*.

Not coincidentally, the issue of purgatory became pivotal to the arguments concerning canon. Luther observed that the abuse of the indulgence system stemmed from the belief in prayers for the dead, and the practice of praying for the dead was based in the greatest part on a single passage from 2 Maccabees. The acceptance of the Apocrypha has always been driven to some extent by theological motivation. Collins suggests that without the Apocrypha, for example, the Hebrew Scriptures would be "notoriously lacking in attestations of immortality and resurrection" (Collins xxxiii), in particular with respect to prayers for the dead. Catholic interpretations of crucial passages in the Apocrypha also figure prominently in the liturgical veneration of the Virgin Mary, as well as the role of women, the question of natural theology, and other minor issues. Although most of these doctrinal issues (especially the veneration of Mary) would stand in Catholic dogma without the Apocrypha, it is hard to imagine that a canonized belief in purgatory could survive in its present form without the single supporting passage in 2 Maccabees. Thus, in at least this case, an apocryphal book has indeed been used as the foundation and supporting pillar of an official Roman doctrine, a practice that the original translator of the venerated Vulgate specifically prohibited. This truly suits the extra-scriptural, inclusive sensibility of the Roman Church, without which we probably would not have a clearly defined teaching of purgatory.

The Poetic Popularization of Purgatory

Although medieval scholastics systematized the ideas of purgatory, and the Roman Church defined its official dogma, the Church and scholars made no definitive decision as to its imagery and details. This was left to the sensibility and imagination of the medieval mind. Supernatural *exempla* and reports of visions thrived around the thirteenth century, especially among the preaching clergy and in the monasteries, imagining purgatory in various ways, provoking fear or offering hope as needed. However, it is to Dante Alighieri in the early fourteenth century and his epic trilogy—the *Divina Commedia*—that Western civilization owes its definitive and enduring images of hell, purgatory, and to a great extent even heaven. Dante's poetic masterpiece is the consummate otherworld journey, presenting a thorough and detailed view of the alleged "three kingdoms" of the afterlife. In *L'Inferno*, Dante is led by the shade of Virgil through hell, "an eternal place and terrible," a great funnel-shaped pit beneath the earth, descending through five narrowing circles of Upper Hell and four deeper circles of Nether Hell until they reach the center of the earth, where Satan is the "Emperor of the sorrowful realm" (*Hell* 1.114; 34.28).

In *Il Purgatorio*, Dante and his guide emerge out the other side of the earth and come to the solitary Island of Purgatory, dominated by a single great mountain. Here they ascend two steep terraces to arrive at Peter's Gate, where an angel marks seven *P*'s on Dante's forehead (for

peccata, the seven cardinal sins) with the command, "Wash thou these wounds within there" (*Purgatory* 9.114). He then ascends through seven successive cornices, each of which is characterized by one of the cardinal sins, an appropriate penance for the sin, a meditation on the opposing virtue, a prayer from the Psalms or a hymn, a benediction, and finally an angel who washes away one of the *P*'s and heals its wound. After passing the final cornice, Dante arrives at the earthy paradise on the summit of the mountain. In *Il Paradiso,* Dante is led from the mountain by Beatrice through ten heavens, formed of planetary and stellar spheres and serving as orders of increasing beatitude in a hierarchy of bliss, until they reach the Empyrean, "That heaven which is pure light alone: / Pure intellectual light, fulfilled with love," where Dante beholds the "Queen of Heaven," God, and Christ (*Paradise* 30.39-40; 31.100).

In *Purgatorio,* Dante captures and assimilates the thought and speculation concerning purgatory that had developed over the previous millennium, eloquently uplifting them to the standard of an enduring classic through masterful vernacular poetry. It would be a great task indeed, perhaps an impossible one, to enumerate each of the components of the teaching of purgatory supported by one of his verses or another; the thought and feeling of purgatory saturate and become the very fiber of the poem. To begin with, the structure of the *Divine Comedy* in general is remarkably pagan, or not so remarkably if we recall the Greco-Roman character of the classical revival in medieval scholasticism. Dante's guide through hell and purgatory is Virgil ("dear father, most kind Virgil," *Purgatory* 30.50-51), who was superstitiously considered by the Middle Ages to be a pre-Christian "prophet" of Christ. Most of the monsters that discharge the functions of hell are taken from Greek and Roman mythology, and when Dante and Virgil arrive at the shores of purgatory, they find them guarded by Cato, the Stoic Roman philosopher. The whole *Comedy,* including *Purgatorio,* frequently diverts to discussions of Aristotle and Plato, Greek poets, and mythological tales. When Dante first fears that he is not able to make the journey to the otherworld, he objects to Virgil, "I'm not Aeneas, and I am not Paul" (*Hell* 2.32), referring to the *Aeneid* Book 6 and the Apocalypse of Paul, both of which we have mentioned above. Thus, at the beginning of the *Comedy* he foretells that the whole epic is a continuation of both pagan and apocryphal traditions, which makes it an appropriate testimony to the defective teachings of hell, purgatory, and heaven that this poem so eloquently enshrines.

Dorothy L. Sayers calls *Purgatorio* the "tenderest, subtlest, and most human section" of the *Divine Comedy* (9). Purgatory is the "holy mountain" that soars to heaven, "Where human spirits purge themselves, and train / To leap up into joy celestial" (*Purgatory* 19.38; 1.5-6). It is a place of healing, the mount which "sets us free from evil as we climb," the arduous path that "rights in you what the world bent awry" (13.3; 23.126). Souls labor there because a great payment for sin is yet unsatisfied, and sufferings (or suffrages from the living) are required for "the whole great payment owed / By him that here in debt and bondage dwells" (6.38-39). These sufferings include long detentions, fire, starvation, and bearing heavy burdens, which accomplish "satisfaction" and repayment for sin according to the heretical paradigm of redemption through satispassion. The third step at Peter's Gate, the step of Satisfaction, is "redder than bright blood," signifying the "penitent's pouring out his own life and love in restitution for sin"; his blood must unite with the blood of Christ for the fulfillment of redemption (9.102; Sayers 139).

Above all, these sufferings are shortened and their effectiveness is expedited by the prayers of the living. Most souls in purgatory seek the aid of a relative or friend, as one of the departed says of the living, "You people there can help us here so much" (3.145). It is fundamental to the teaching of purgatory that a suffrage, a charitable act of love from a living person in a state of grace, can move a suffering soul from one stage of purgatory to the next, as one says, "I meanwhile remain / Outside, unless prayer hasten my remove— / Prayer from a heart in grace" (4.132-134). To complete the picture of the "communion of saints," the bond of prayer and love between the living and the dead, Dante portrays the reciprocal benefits of prayer. The suffering dead on the first cornice recite the *paternoster,* not for themselves but for the living, "for those / Who still remain behind us" (11.23-24). Dante reflects on the duty of the living in light of such prayers made in purgatory:

It is fundamental to the teaching of purgatory that a suffrage, a charitable act of love from a living person in a state of grace, can move a suffering soul from one stage of purgatory to the next.

> If a good word's said always there for us,
> What should not here be done for them by prayers
> From those whose will takes root where all good does?
> Truly we ought to help them cleanse the smears
> They carried hence, that, weightless and washed white,
> They may fare forth and seek the starry spheres. (31-36)

Dante's purgatory is lighter and brighter than hell. Its sufferings are carried out in the fresh air under the sun, not in the squalid darkness of the Inferno. Sufferings offer hope, release, joy, and gradual emergence into the light: "What difference passes these from those we knew / In

Hell! for there with hideous howls of pain, / But here with singing, we are ushered through" (12.112-114). Each ascent of a cornice lightens the feet of the suffering soul, and the circumferences of the cornices are progressively shorter. Finally, when a soul is purged through redemptive sufferings, to the satisfaction of his own conscience, he is carried up by an angel to the strains of *"Gloria in excelsis"* (20.136): "But when some spirit, feeling purged and sound, / Leaps up or moves to seek a loftier station, / The whole mount quakes and the great shouts resound" (21:58-60). After the final purgation, the purged sinner's memory of evil is purged by Lethe, the Greek mythological River of Oblivion. He is now restored to natural innocence and is ready to ascend to the Celestial Paradise. Dante's treatment of the thought and feeling of purgatory is masterful. Thus, Dante joins Aeneas and the apocryphal Paul (as falsely reported). To the pagan and the apocryphal view of the afterlife, the Middle Ages adds the poetic.

The Mythopoeic Theology of Dante

The epitaph on the tomb of Dante Alighieri reads, "Dante the theologian, skilled in every branch of knowledge that philosophy may cherish in her illustrious bosom" (Gardner 632). Father F. W. Faber, who studied under Cardinal Newman and is considered a master teacher of the spiritual life, confirms, "He was a theologian as well as a poet" (33-34). Michael J. Taylor, a Jesuit, enlarges the same thought:

> As the Church promoted the existence and purpose of purgatory in her sermons, writings, and official pronouncements, Dante's powerful poem instilled an acceptance of the concept in the minds and hearts of the people. In memorable form, Dante expresses the best theological thought and speculation that had evolved over many centuries in defense of purgatory. He expresses its fundamental meaning and purpose with great nobility and eloquence and brings to the subject a deep and appealing spirituality. (36)

Dante's great epic is more than deserving of the mention we have given it, because Western civilization owes much of its defective yet definitive and enduring images of hell, purgatory, and even heaven to this one man, who is considered not only a poet but a theologian. To this day, Dante's mythical contribution holds a dear place in traditional Christian thought. In *Christian Mythmakers*, Rolland Hein commends him as a "mature Christian" (17). The *Comedy*, Hein says, is the "most comprehensive narrative vision of Christian realities" (18).

> Theological systems within Christendom may differ from Dante's as to precisely how the ends he envisions are gained, but no Christian can disagree with the undergirding principles that shape his work, nor are images to be found which express these principles more graphically to the imagination. (27)

However, to the mind enlightened by the Holy Scriptures, Hein's glowing commendation of Dante's vision is simply a testimony of the high esteem still accorded to the pagan leaven that has been mingled with the fine flour of the Word of God (Matt. 13:33). Unscriptural tradition engendered the practice of prayers for the dead, and Catholic dogma defined the official teaching of purgatory, but Dante's mythopoeic theology wrought the popular, *de facto* imagery of the afterlife into the blood of Western civilization. It has penetrated Christian thought perhaps even more deeply than official Roman dogma, and it has reached a wider audience. The "undergirding principles" of the "sacred poem" still very much constitute even the Protestant vision of heaven and hell. The Lutheran R. C. H. Lenski tells us that, "Hell… will also be full of hideous devils whose one occupation it will be to plague and to torture the damned" (723). The Baptist Matthew Henry says likewise, "Devils, the executioners of God's wrath, that are the sinners' tempters now, will be their tormentors for ever" (266). Do these notable and respected Bible expositors suppose that "devils" will be profitably, perhaps even gleefully, employed in the eternal age? The Scriptures tell us that the devil and his angels will be tormented in the lake of fire forever and ever (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10), not that they will be cheerfully at work. From where do even Protestant teachers derive such afterlife mythologies? There is no doubt that Christians today owe more than they realize, in the most negative sense, to the medieval imagination of *"Theologus Dantes,"* Dante the theologian, whose mythopoeic theology wrought the traditional imagery of the afterlife into the Western mind.

Catholic dogma defined the official teaching of purgatory, but Dante's mythopoeic theology wrought the popular, *de facto* imagery of the afterlife into the blood of Western civilization.

The dogma of purgatory, as well as much of the popular theology of heaven and hell, are truly extra-canonical, unscriptural to the utmost degree. They are no more than "stubble," worthless materials that issue from an earthly source, and they are fit to be burned by the fire of God's judgment (1 Cor. 3:12-15). The Scriptures teach that in God's wisdom and under His government certain sins may not be forgiven until the age to come. Moreover, it warns that the work of each believer will be tested and that those who have built with wood, grass, and stubble will still be saved, "yet so as through fire." These are the words

of the Lord and the genuine teaching of the apostles. They need no apocrypha, mythopoeia, romantic mysticism, or creeds for their support. They stand in stark contrast to pagan afterlife journeys, visitations from apparitions, and systems of indulgences. The proper warnings of the pure Word of God are the healthy words and the teaching which is according to godliness (1 Tim. 6:3; 2 Tim. 4:3; Titus 1:9).

The Romanticization of Purgatory—Hagiographic Theology

The Roman Catholic sensibility for extra-canonical sources of belief is further satisfied by reliance on what Garrigou-Lagrange calls the "science of the saints," the deep and instinctual knowledge of even uneducated men and women in matters such as sin, repentance, judgment, heaven, hell, and purgatory (155). In the history of the development of purgatory, this "science" rose to the pinnacle of mystical devotion in the teachings of Catherine of Genoa, almost two hundred years after Dante. Catherine's *Treatise on Purgatory* is an ecstatic and poetic expression on purgatory as the vehicle of the pure divine love for the soul. Her foundational image of purgatory is the blessedness of the souls there, not their suffering: "Such is their joy in God's will, in His pleasure, / that they have no concern for themselves…There is no joy save that in paradise / to be compared to the joy of the souls in purgatory" (71-72).[5] Their cause for joy is the gradual shedding of sin, like the removing of rust, which brings the soul continually closer to God. By reason of the souls' submission to the love of God, the sufferings of purgatorial fire, though indescribably intense, are lost in joy: "This joy increases day by day… / The more rust of sin is consumed by fire, / the more the soul responds to that love, / and its joy increases" (72).

> The words of the Lord and the genuine teaching of the apostles need no apocrypha, mythopoeia, romantic mysticism, or creeds for their support.

Catherine reports that in purgatory God accepts the contrition of the repenting souls as a kind of goodness, and responds in kind: "God responds to their goodness with His, / …since in leaving this world they grieved for their sins / and were determined to sin no more. / It is this sorrow over their sins / that makes God forgive them" (75). Therefore, knowing that it cannot appear before God until it is cleansed by expiatory sufferings, the willing soul "hurls itself into purgatory." "The soul that has but the slightest imperfection / would rather throw itself into a thousand hells / than appear thus before the divine presence" (77-78). Catherine's purgatory is intensely romantic, confirming that Dante's theology belongs to the mainstream of Catholic tradition. The suffering there is based on love, appetite, longing, contrition, and an unfulfilled desire for God. To Catherine, the great theme of purgatory is love, with its attendant great joy and great suffering, and the soul's enthrallment in that love until it enters into God's presence: "As it is being drawn upwards, / the soul feels itself melting / in the fire of that love of its sweet God" (79).

To the Catholic mind, Catherine's ecstatic revelation is impeccable, inarguable, and lacking no authority. "God's grace, a spark of His light, / has illuminated this for me," she says; "I will say of it what I can / and leave the understanding of it / to those for whom God wills it" (72-73). Like Dante, Catherine is superstitiously considered to be more than a poet. She too is a theologian, a "first-rate spiritual genius of her time" (Groeschel 36) and the "great Doctress of Purgatory" (Faber 33). In 1666 when the doctors of the Sorbonne examined her work for official approval, they declared it to be a "rare effusion of the Spirit of God," a providential provision at a time when the "heresies" of Luther and Calvin were about to "make war upon the dead" (23).[6]

The writings of Catherine influenced the Catholic Reformation of the early sixteenth century as well as future mystics, such as John of the Cross, Father Fénelon, and Madame Guyon. Her gentle and joyful treatment of purgatory appeals to contemporary Roman theologians who feel that purgatory should have evolved closer to heaven than to hell. Taylor notes, "In our more sophisticated age, purgatory obviously needs some new imagery" (56). He feels that "the difficulties and hardship of undergoing purification" should be "rooted in Christian hope…permeated with a deep sense of anticipated joy" (56). This is the "sensible and attractive" image that Dante had tried to portray before the less gentle dogma of the Tridentine era (36), and it is the image favored by contemporary Catholic theologians and spokesmen. "Most melancholy, yet most interesting land," Father Faber effuses; "O beautiful region of the Church of God!" (6, 22).

Cardinal Newman's *The Dream of Gerontius* is a beautiful and celebrated afterlife mythopoeic of the nineteenth century. Gerontius dies in grace, and in the following moment he is carried by his angel to his "particular judgment."[7] As he approaches the throne of God, he still hears the living who are praying for him, but he begins to sense his unworthiness, and when he arrives at the throne, he is scorched by its holiness. In the climax of the poem, he voluntarily asks to be sent to the "penance-fire": "Take me

away," he cries. The "golden prison" opens its gates, and his angel tenderly commits him to the angels of purgatory (59, 68-69). C. S. Lewis, the twentieth century "Christian mythmaker" and devout Anglican, paints a similar heartfelt and romantic picture of purgatory. In *Letters to Malcolm* he condemns the Romish doctrine, as he calls it, and the hell-like view of purgatory, but he adds, "The right view returns magnificently in Newman's *Dream*," in which, he says, "religion has reclaimed Purgatory" (108). The foregoing sampling shows that the "science of the saints" truly has mixed its own measure of leaven into the imaginative teaching of purgatory, making it more palatable though no more scriptural and none the less heretical. The writings of the mystics and mythmakers add a romantic dimension to the false teaching that assures for it a place not only in the minds but also in the hearts of those who are willing to receive an unscriptural, extra-canonical, hagiographic theology.

Indulgences and the Reformation Revolt

The Roman Catholic system of forgiveness pivots on several crucial elements, which are of central importance to our subject. The first is the distinction between venial versus mortal sins; the second is the difference between the guilt of sin and the penalty of sin. Third are the all-important elements of the Sacrament of Penance—confession (to a proper mediator) and contrition for the absolution of the guilt and penitential acts for the satisfaction of the penalty. In the place of penitential acts, a person may be granted an indulgence, an official remission of the temporal punishment due to sins. Thus, indulgences, however obtained, fill the place of satisfaction and complete the penance. According to the Roman teaching, whoever dies in arrears of penitential satisfaction, or of corresponding indulgences, will complete the payment of his debt in purgatory. Thus, in the Catholic system, indulgences have great value for this life and the one to come.

Luther's Ninety-five Theses were by no means a rejection of the Roman teaching of forgiveness and purgatory. They were simply a protest against abuses.

In early medieval times satisfaction came most often in the form of alms, prayers, fasting, and later pilgrimages. Eventually, indulgences were granted for participation in a crusade, and those who did not actually "take up the cross" could find equal recourse to satisfaction by contributing financially to the cost of the wars. Since Rome soon recognized the benefit of penal alms-giving to expeditions, building projects, and the strengthening of papal power, the sale of indulgences became a regular institution. Indulgence vendors were given broad powers not only to hear confessions and grant absolutions to the living but to remit penalty for both the living and the dead. The Dominican John Tetzel, a subcommissary of the Jubilee Indulgence campaign of 1510, was an infamous exploiter of the sentiments for the dead in purgatory. He is reported to have preached,

> Listen to the voices of your dear dead relatives and friends, beseeching you and saying, "Pity us, pity us. We are in dire torment from which you can redeem us for a pittance…Will you let us lie here in flames? Will you delay our promised glory?"
>
> Remember that you are able to release them, for "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, / The soul from purgatory springs."[8] (Bainton 59-60)

Luther's Ninety-five Theses were by no means a rejection of the Roman teaching of forgiveness and purgatory. They were simply a protest against the abuses that had sprung up around the Sacrament of Penance and the sale of indulgences in particular. The Theses do not dispute the validity of the sacrament, the right of the pope to forgive sins, or even the general virtue of indulgences. Rather, they refute the granting of pardons apart from contrition, the false assurance of salvation, and the "lust and license of the pardon-preachers" who fish for "the riches of men" rather than for "men of riches" ("Disputation" 35-36). By 1520 Luther still asserts that prayers for the dead are effectual if made in faith, and in his commentary on the Lord's Prayer he offers a template petition in which the names of particular souls in purgatory can be inserted: "Have mercy also upon all poor souls in purgatory, especially N. and N. Forgive them and all of us our sins, comfort them and receive them into grace" ("Explanation" 382). Shortly afterwards he says,

> I have never yet denied that there is a purgatory, and I still hold that there is, as I have many times written and confessed, though I have no way of proving it incontrovertibly, either by Scripture or reason…There is only one thing that I have attacked, namely, the way in which they apply to purgatory passages of Scripture so inapplicable that it becomes ridiculous. ("Argument" 111)

Of these "inapplicable" Scriptures he mentions 1 Corinthians 3:15, Matthew 12:32, and 2 Maccabees 12. Concerning the latter he says, "It is a suspicious circumstance that on this subject alone there should be found in the whole Bible no more than one passage, and that in the least important, most despised book" (113). By 1539, however, Luther's tone changes considerably, concluding that purgatory, masses, and indulgences for the dead are

all of one category—"this mine, ore-pit, and trade" for the enrichment of the papacy ("Councils" 156). Three years later he rejoices in having driven out "pestilential abominations from our churches, such as vigils, masses for the dead, processions, purgatory, and all other mockery and hocus pocus on behalf of the dead" ("Songs" 288). Finally, in his *Table-Talk* he adds this conclusion, upon which we will comment shortly:

> God has, in his Word, laid before us two ways; one which by faith leads to salvation,—the other, by unbelief, to damnation.
>
> As for purgatory, no place in Scripture makes mention thereof, neither must we any way allow it; for it darkens and undervalues the grace, benefits, and merits of our blessed, sweet Saviour Christ Jesus.
>
> The bounds of purgatory extend not beyond this world; for here in this life the upright, good, and godly Christians are well and soundly scoured and purged. (278)

The Reformation Formulation

Coming in the generation after Luther, Calvin required no similar evolution in his thought about purgatory. Although he might have condescended to overlook the minor errors of purgatory, Calvin saw that the Roman teaching touches the expiation of sins. Therefore, he could not tolerate it and denounced it to the fullest degree:

> When expiation of sins is sought elsewhere than in the blood of Christ, when satisfaction is transferred elsewhere, silence is very dangerous. Therefore, we must cry out with the shouting not only of our voices but of our throats and lungs that purgatory is a deadly fiction of Satan, which nullifies the cross of Christ, inflicts unbearable contempt upon God's mercy, and overturns and destroys our faith. For what means this purgatory of theirs but that satisfaction for sins is paid by the souls of the dead after their death? (*Institutes* 676)
>
> Now, on this view [that there is a purgatory], the redemption made by Jesus Christ cannot be complete, and we must detract from the death which he suffered, as if it had only procured a partial acquittal—a thing which cannot be said without blasphemy. ("Confession" 147)

To Calvin, this is the point of blasphemy to which the doctrine of purgatory must answer. Like all apologetics on the subject, Calvin touches on the crucial passages from Scripture. His arguments, however, are neither elaborate nor profound. The fire in 1 Corinthians 3:15, he says, is the Holy Spirit, and "the day" of the Lord mentioned in verse 13 is any day in which the Spirit appears to purify us. This argument is rather weak and adds no irrefutable substance to the defense against the Catholic error. He says little about 2 Maccabees lest he give it the false grace of being considered as Scripture, and his refutation of prayers for the dead mostly follows the line we set forth in the previous installment of this department.[9] For Calvin, it is the uniqueness and sufficiency of the atoning power of the blood of Christ that overthrows, or is overthrown by, the teaching of purgatory: "Purgatory cannot stand without destroying the whole truth of Scripture…In short, when satisfactions are overthrown, Purgatory of necessity tumbles along with them" ("Acts" 161).

The Westminster Confession of Faith, drawn up in 1647, is an enduring document of Calvinist theology. Concerning the destination of the righteous, Chapter 32, section 1 reads,

> The bodies of men, after death, return to dust, and see corruption; but their souls (which neither die nor sleep), having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them. The souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies: and the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day. Besides these two places for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledgeth none. (670-671)

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A great body of the definitive formulations of Christendom derive from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. To this day, Catholic theologians still seek refuge and substance in the Council of Trent, just as Protestants do in Luther and Calvin. At this great turning point, medieval Christianity was torn into two great courses. Although the Protestant Reformation itself emerged in various shapes, all of its manifestations shared a number of common themes, including *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, *sola Scriptura*—and the wholesale, unequivocal rejection of the doctrine of purgatory as defined by Roman Catholicism. However, the formulations of the Reformation are also inadequate and unsatisfactory in defining, expounding, and ministering the pure Word of God, particularly with respect to the discipline of believers in the

coming age. As noted above, Luther declares, "The bounds of purgatory extend not beyond this world; for here in this life the upright, good, and godly Christians are well and soundly scoured and purged." He speaks well that the Father reproves and disciplines His sons for their perfection, "for whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives" (Heb. 12:6). However, not all genuine, born-again Christians are "upright, good, and godly," such as Ananias and Sapphira, who died in their deceit against the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-11). Since Satan had filled their hearts, and they died in that state, it cannot be said of them that their souls were "well and soundly scoured and purged" here in this life. Thus, Luther's formula cannot be applied to all Christians generally.

Should we believe, as the Westminster Confession instructs us, that having contrived a lie to God in their hearts, having continued in it without repentance, and having fallen dead under the governmental discipline of God, Ananias and Sapphira were immediately "made perfect in holiness"? Although their bodies died, their souls and spirits continued in the same condition in which they had lived. Since Reformed theology emerged from medieval darkness into *sola Scriptura*, can it tell us where in the Scriptures we find evidence of such an instant and perfect transformation of the heart? Calvin hated the teaching of purgatory because through it "expiation of sins is sought elsewhere than in the blood of Christ." However, expiation of sins and the perfection of the soul by the transformation of the Spirit are two greatly different issues, and neither Luther's nor Calvin's formulae answer the question of how unfaithful and untransformed Christians are to be dealt with in the next age.

Neither Luther's nor Calvin's formulae answer the question of how unfaithful and untransformed Christians are to be dealt with in the next age.

An honest and unbiased acceptance of Matthew 12 and of 1 Corinthians 3, in the light of similar supporting and strengthening passages, yields the understanding of a principle in God's New Testament economy—that genuine, redeemed, and regenerated believers who leave this life in immaturity and unfaithfulness will require a further period for perfection and a way to be perfected in the coming age. This principle is a stream bed cut by God and filled with the pristine and healthful waters of the truth through the words of the Lord and the teaching of the apostles. However, throughout the centuries of Christian history this stream became more and more muddied by the lack of clarity concerning salvation and sanctification after salvation. Then by the thirteenth century, the stream was polluted beyond recognition by mythologies of other-world geographies and afterlife voyages, and by the sixteenth century it had been blackened beyond toleration by the filthy trade of indulgences. The Protestant Reformation reacted by dredging the filth, but in the process it also drained the stream and placed a "Keep Out" sign in front of the bed once cut by God and filled with the truth, closing access to it for centuries to come. Thus, Protestantism became a mixture of its own kind, joining service and disservice to the same truth. It is no wonder that Christ spoke to their prefigure, the church in Sardis, saying, "Become watchful and establish the things which remain, which were about to die; for I have found none of your works completed before My God" (Rev. 3:2).

Two Heresies and the Need for a Recovery of the Truth

In this and the previous article we have examined the development and the nature of the Roman Catholic teaching of purgatory. As Calvin noted, if we comment on all the "grosser superstitions" and "base traffickings" spawned by this teaching, there will be no end to our argument (*Institutes* 684). In summary, though, the foundational and definitive errors of this teaching are three. First, this false tradition errs greatly in its eschatology. The Roman teaching is that after passing instantly through a "particular judgment," most believers are carried immediately to a place of purgation, where they will suffer until no later than the final day of judgment. This is contrary to the biblical teaching of "Abraham's bosom," the temporary abode of the believing dead before the resurrection, at which time they will rise to stand at the judgment seat of Christ. Based on that judgment in the future, at the time of Christ's second coming, the believers will receive either a reward or a rebuke, and some will be excluded from the bright glory of the manifestation of the kingdom in the subsequent millennium. The time for this discipline, therefore, is the future kingdom age, not the present age.

The second great error is that prayers, alms, the mass, and indulgences offered on behalf of the dead can assist them by shortening their time of suffering in purgatory. According to proper eschatology, all believers will receive their reward or chastisement at the same time in the coming age. Thus, there is no possibility that dead believers are under a purgation while others are still running their race in this age. Moreover, the Bible never teaches us to pray for the dead. As we have seen, this great and abominable superstition is a direct result of the Catholic sensibility to receive teaching from many, various, and highly dubious extra-canonical sources.

The third and greatest error of the Roman teaching is that the sufferings of the believers, both in this life and the next, avail to their eternal salvation. This is an absolute overturning of the teaching of the Bible. As the Lamb of God, Christ "was wounded because of our transgressions; / He was crushed because of our iniquities; / The chastening for our peace was upon Him, / And by His stripes we have been healed" (Isa. 53:5). Through His death Christ has accomplished eternal redemption, including forgiveness of sins, justification, and reconciliation to God (Acts 10:43; 13:39; Rom. 5:10). His blood is the satisfaction of sins, and nothing from us can add to it. It is a great heresy to teach that our own sufferings have any redemptive, atoning value at all and serve toward our eternal salvation. That Christ's righteous offering to God obtained for us only a "partial acquittal," as Calvin said, is a "deadly fiction of Satan." The Roman teaching of "satisfaction" for sins is a great evil, and the teaching of "satispassion" in purgatory is the consummation of that evil.

However, the Bible clearly indicates that after receiving eternal salvation through the precious blood of Jesus, a believer remains responsible and accountable before the Lord for his life and service in this age. The New Testament teaches that sons of God undergo chastisement, not for redemption but for their perfection, and it provides a number of examples of sinning believers under the governmental hand of God, such as Ananias and Sapphira and the sinning brother in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5. Most of all, it warns us of a judgment for believers yet to come, at which time our life and work will be tested. As a result of this judgment, some genuine believers will lose their reward; nevertheless, they will be saved, "yet so as through fire." Finally, those who remain in a sinful, faithless condition can receive forgiveness under God's perfecting yet chastening hand in His governmental administration, perhaps in this age but surely in "the one to come."

Luther and Calvin ultimately bequeathed to the following centuries a partial truth that neglects the teaching of the accountability and judgment of the believers.

The great Reformation under Luther and Calvin rescued God's children from the darkness of the Roman heresy, but it ultimately bequeathed to the following centuries a partial truth that neglects the teaching of the accountability and judgment of the believers. In this sense, the Protestant teaching may be considered as a kind of heresy of its own. Watchman Nee explains:

> Only those who understand the truth can oppose heresy. One heresy cannot oppose another heresy. But all heresies are not pure heresy; they are the truth plus a little error. Heresy is to add wrong things to right things. Add a little of man's thought to God's thought, and you will have heresy. (461)

The Protestant "heresy" comprises not only what it has added to the truth but what it has neglected. G. H. Lang observes that the biblical teaching of the believers' discipline "differs *radically* from the Romish doctrine of purgatory," but he goes on to add, "It is to be expected that in even their doctrine of purgatory there is an element of truth. In the fierceness of Reformation controversy it too largely happened that almost everything Roman was rejected *in toto*, instead of discrimination being employed to rescue the wheat from the chaff" (186-187). D. M. Panton points out very well, "The Roman doctrine of Purgatory would have been impossible had the Church always held and taught the full Scripture truth of a believer's purging" (1). However, Protestant Christianity has not always held and taught the full truth of Scripture; it has threshed out some wheat with the chaff.

Regrettably, many truths as revealed in the Scriptures have been lost, missed, misunderstood, misinterpreted, and wrongly applied throughout the ages; hence, there is the need of a recovery of the truth. As is abundantly evident from history, the early fathers of the church almost universally held that believers may experience a certain dealing by "fire" after their death in order to be fully perfected subjectively for their participation in God in the eternal age. This was their honest and spontaneous interpretation of passages such as 1 Corinthians 3:15 and Matthew 12:32. However, as the centuries passed, their teachings from the pure Word of God suffered two great evils, first that of perversion and then that of neglect. In the hands of the Roman Church, their teachings were perverted into false traditions, traditions were mixed with superstitions to become a Christianized mythology, and through councils and decrees mythology became formal doctrine. In the hands of the Reformers, however, many teachings of the pure Word suffered the backlash of the Reformation reaction. Then reaction became neglect, and neglect has become codified in its own way by the Reformed and Evangelical misconceptions and false teachings concerning the believers' entrance into a heaven that, in effect, requires no subjective process of sanctification, renewing, transformation, and conformation to the image of the Son of God—neither in this age nor in the one to come. Thus, Christianity on the whole has been cheated from the pure Word of God with regard to the believers' responsibility toward God concerning

their life and work in the present age. Now the truth of the Lord is in need of a great recovery.

by John Campbell

Notes

[1]For a fuller discussion of Paradise and Hades as the believers' place of rest after death, please see "The Believers' Passage through Death" in *Affirmation & Critique*, April 2000, 101-114.

[2]The prayer of Revelation 6:10 is altogether different from the prayers that departed souls are said to pray in purgatory. The prayer in verse 10 is general and relates to those believers' martyrdom. It assumes no knowledge of the present situation on the earth and involves no communication with the living.

[3]Jerome believed that the equivalence between the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet and the number of books in the Hebrew Scriptures was divinely inspired. He even compared the doubling of consonants in Hebrew to the doubling of the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles.

[4]In the Biblia Sacra, Jerome's commentary reads (with emphasis added), "Sicut ergo Iudith et Tobi et Macchabeorum libros legit quidem Ecclesia, sed *inter canonicas scripturas non recipit*, sic et haec duo volumina legat ad aedificationem plebis, *non ad auctoritatem ecclesiasticorum dogmatum confirmandam*" (Biblia 957).

[5]This recalls Dante's own vision of the souls in purgatory, "Those who in the fire / Are happy, for they look to mount on high, / In God's good time, up to the blissful quire" (Hell 1.118-120).

[6]Catherine's life itself was considered a mirror of purgatory, reflecting the sufferings of the "holy souls" while she was still in the flesh. Even as a child she was observed to have a "wonderful love of Christ's Passion and of penitential practices" (Capes 446). Her voluntary sufferings were characterized by intense asceticism, including contemplative withdrawals, long and peculiar fasts assisted by vomiting, kissing the sores of syphilitics, and eating lice. Her cult remained popular long after her death, and she was canonized in 1737.

[7]The "particular," or individual, judgment is a major component of the doctrine of purgatory. The Roman Church teaches that in the moment after death, each individual appears before a personal tribunal of God. It is only then that he knows whether or not he will be saved. If he has died in grace, he is disposed for salvation and is sent to purgatory to expiate for his sins; if not, he is sent to hell.

[8]The rhyming jingle cannot be traced to Tetzel with full certainty. Luther quotes the phrase in his twenty-seventh Thesis without rhyme. Nevertheless, Catholic authorities do not deny that the substance of the thought is Tetzel's.

[9]Calvin does make some novel contributions to the arguments against purgatory. First, he notes that forgiveness in the age to come in Matthew 12:32 cannot have anything to do with purgatory since that alleged place deals only with satisfaction of penalty and not forgiveness. According to the Catholic formula, if a sin is mortal, it cannot be forgiven after death, and if it is venial, it requires only punishment, not judicial absolution. Strictly speaking, therefore, the teaching of purgatory is that sins are expiated, not forgiven, after death (*Institutes* 677).

Second, he enumerates several passages in the Scriptures where believers are enjoined to pray and instructed on how to pray. In these passages, he points out, it would have been most appropriate to insert the injunction to pray for the dead, but no mention is made of them: "Scripture, while it accurately relates the mourning and burial [of the dead], and other matters apparently minute, says not a word of prayers. Who, I ask, can believe that the Holy Spirit forgets the principal, while dwelling on a minor point?" ("Interim" 323).

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