

2. Horrifics of Hell and Foibles of Purgatory

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I. Horrifics of Hell Portrayed in Literature and Art of Middle Ages

We should not pass from the Middle Ages to the oncoming Reformation without first noting the horrific side of Immortal-Soulism, which was particularly prominent in the centuries just preceding the Protestant Reformation. While not pleasant to contemplate, it was nevertheless an inseparable part of the teaching of the times, and the emphasis of the dominant church.

Hideous portrayals of the horrors of hell, iterated and reiterated in written and sculptured form, and pictured upon canvas, characterized the oppressive ecclesiastical portrayal all the way from the sixth century to and through the late Middle Ages:* -Dante, of Florence (1265-1321), the greatest of Italian poets, in his Divine Comedy filled Purgatory and Hell with the spirits of the departed, but treated the theme so nobly that their horror was almost hidden. Not all writers, however, were that way. In the eighth century the Venerable Bede (673-735) recorded that such portrayals stem from the "Dialogues of Gregory the Great" (590-604), though he notes that there was a fifth-century vision of heretics in Hell recorded by the monk Cyriacus. [1] Later, Thomas Aquinas, Berthold of Regensburg, Herold, Fra Luis de Grenada, and particularly Ignatius Loyola, along -

1. The Venerable Bede, Ecclesiastical History fed. J. A. Giles, George Bell), book 5, chap. 12, p. 255.

-Throughout this dreary period ecclesiastical art is replete with horrific details. Prof. Percy Dearmer, of King's College, London, in his The Legend of Hell (1929), reproduced an authentic series of these revolting picturizations. These stark characterizations included:

-(1) A Damned Woman Carried Off by a Devil, by Signorelli (1499-1504), in the Oviato Cathedral.

-(2) The Torment of Cold, by Verard (1492)—a biting wind forcing its victims into the more unbearable cold of a frozen river, whence Beelzebub throws them into a lake of fire, and sometimes into the jaws of a monstrous beast, which first swallows and then vomits them up again.

-(3) The Ladder of Salvation (c. 1190), in Chaldon Church, Surrey, showing the "harrowing of hell"—a beast devouring the feet of those who sinned by dancing, a dog gnawing the feet of a woman who had been unkind to animals, and souls being pulled off a ladder and plunged into Hell.

-(4) Two Devils Roasting a Soul Over Hell-Fire (c. 1250) — a carving in Worcester Cathedral.

-(5) The Tortures of the Damned (c. 1416), from Les Tres Riches Heures by Due de Berry, in Chantilly—Satan spewing up damned souls, who afterward gave birth to fiery serpents which in turn devoured them, as in the vision of Tundal. Other devils work bellows under the central grid to intensify the heat, and volcanos belch victims from below.

-(6) The Last Judgment (1390), in Bourges Cathedral—a typical sculptured depiction, wrought over the central arch, where all who entered the edifice must see it. Here Christ is pictured as a stern judge, and Michael as mercilessly weighing a soul. Abraham's bosom is portrayed, to which angels conduct the blessed, while the damned are led to Hell's mouth by devils.

-(7) Christ Cursing the Lost—detail from The Last Judgment in the capella sistina of the Vatican, by Michelangelo (1534-1541), striking mortal terror to the damned.

These horrific portrayals met the eye with deadly frequency. There was no escape, since they constituted the sustained note of unnumbered literary productions, and were sculptured in stone in many a famous medieval church. These formed the inescapable background emphasis throughout these dismal centuries. And as the Reformation dawned these assuredly helped to create an inevitable revolt against the terrors of such a dogma.

II. Historical Development and Involvements of Purgatory

1. MULTIPLE PAGAN SOURCES OF CATHOLIC PURGATORY.—

Purgatory, in historical antecedents, was first projected by pagan philosophers and poets. It was they who first proffered hope for sinners who at death were not fit for the abodes of the blessed.

So a middle state was conceived, with purgatorial pains to purge away the guilt. Neander, in volume one of his *Dogmatics*, saw one of its sources in the ancient Persian doctrine of a purifying conflagration that must precede the victory of the Zoroastrian Ormazd (god of good and light) and consume away everything that is impure. [2] -From the Persians it passed, with modifications, to one segment of the Jews. [3] And from them it came to be accepted by certain Christians—the Gnostics borrowing it via the Neoplatonic philosophical notion that matter is inherently evil. If the body is to rise, it must be purged of evil, with fire as the instrument of purification. Even in Egypt the same sort of purgatorial idea was taught. [4] With this went prayers for the dead and inter position by the priests for pay.

-But it appeared in its most highly developed form among the Platonic philosophers and poets of Greece. A purgatorial region and process appeared in Plato's *Phaedo*, and in his *Gorgias* [5] nearly four hundred years before the Christian Era.

-2 See A. H. Newman, *Manual of Church History*, vol. 1, p. 37.

-3 John M'Clintock, and James Strong, *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, vol. 8, p. 798.

-4 John Wilkinson, *Ancient Egyptians*, vol. 2, p. 94.

-5 Plato asserts that some, guilty of curable offenses, are purified through pain and torments.—W. C. Helmbold, *Plato's Gorgias*, p. 104.

That famous Grecian philosopher divided men into three classes —good, bad, and "middling." He had his Acheron River, from which wretched sufferers might escape after a purgation process.

"Some," he said, when they "have finished their first life, . . . receive judgment. After it some go beneath the earth to places of chastisement and are punished." [6] -This thought he embellished with all the skills of imaginative language and striking metaphor. This was later augmented by Cicero's, classic dream of Scipio, likewise drawn from Plato's imagery. And Vergil similarly wove the Platonic speculation into his immortal *Aeneid* (book iv. 1) as one of the compartments in his Elysium, with souls in the infernal world making expiation and obtaining purification through the medium of water, wind, and fire.

-So it was paganism that first offered hope after death for sinners who, at the time of "departure," were not yet fit for Heaven. For this purpose a "middle state" was conceived in which guilt would be purged away by purgatorial pains. In Greece, as noted, this was expressly inculcated by the philosophers. Plato held out hope for all, but some must first sustain a deserved punishment, or purification. So Platonism is the immediate origin, just as with Innate Immortality.

-As observed, in the Inter-Testament period some of the Jews likewise believed in a purgatorial purification of the soul after death, also derived, it is believed, directly from Platonism.

Such were the multiple sources from which Roman Catholicism borrowed her Purgatory- postulate. And later, even the Moslems adopted the notion of a purgatorial, posthumous punishment and purification, acquired in turn from the Catholic and Jewish systems.

6 W. C. Helmbold and W. G. Rabinowitz, *Plato's Phaedrus*, p. 32.

-2. PROGRESSIVE ESTABLISHMENT IN CATHOLIC CIRCLES.

— The origin of Purgatory as a medieval Catholic doctrine is briefly this: The foundation was laid by Augustine. It was then sanctioned by Pope Gregory the Great (c. 582), supported next by Damian, and consummated under Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas. Augustine, following Plato in his concept of an abode of unending pain, seems to have been the first Christian writer to project the idea of purifying the "immortal soul) while the body lies in the tomb, though he emphatically rejected the idea of a "third" place "as unknown to Christians and foreign to revelation." But he sought some avenue of escape from the fearful pains of an unending hell. He taught that— "there are some who have departed this life, who are not so bad as to be deemed unworthy of mercy, nor so good as to be entitled to immediate happiness." [7] -Augustine's high standing in theological circles gave credence to this definite idea, and it found reception among the barbarian tribes in Italy, Spain, and England when the Goths and Lombards invaded Italy, and when France was subdued by the Franks, and the Vandals desolated Spain.

-Purgatory, as a burning away of sins, was unknown in East or West prior to Gregory I. And Gregory spoke on the theme with some indecision. He added, however, the idea of tormenting fire, which later came to be associated with indulgences.

Peter Damian (d. 1072), eleventh-century cardinal, added the hot and cold element, to be noted shortly. About the same time, Odilo (d. 1048), famous abbot of the Cluniac monasteries, opened an extensive mart for prayers and masses for souls detained in Purgatory. Nevertheless, according to Otho of Freising (d. 1158), German chronicler of the Middle Ages, the purgatorial novelty had not obtained a general reception by the middle of the twelfth century.

-Then it was that these speculations of Augustine, Gregory, and Odilo fell into the hands of Aquinas and other schoolmen, who finished the fabrication. Touched upon at the Council of Lyons (1274), the matter finally came before the General Council of Florence in 1439, received full sanction, and was ratified by Pope Eugenius IV. Thus, after a long succession of variations, it became a dogma of faith in the Latin communion. [8] The Greeks, however, opposed the Latins on the question of the Florentine decision, and thus injected discord. According to the Florentine Council, mankind consists of saints, sinners, and an intermediate class. The saints go to Heaven, the sinners go to Hell, and the middle group to the middle receptacle—Purgatory. [9] In this way the Council of Florence formulated the opinions of the schoolmen into a dogma, which in turn was reaffirmed and established by the twenty-fifth session of the Council of Trent. [10] Roman theologians, however, differed as to the medium of punishment. What one accepted, another rejected. The schoolmen placed it in the bowels of the earth, in the vicinity of Hell. Some even had the alternate variation of water, darkness, tempest, whirlwind, snow, ice, frost, hail, and rain—from icy pool to boiling caldron. These sharp differences Trent sought to compose.

-7 Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* xxi. 13 and 24.

Framing language to represent the wide diversity of opinion, the Council declared in general terms the existence of a middle place—and cursed all who dissented. [11] The Catechism of the Council of Trent declared:

"Among them is also the fire of purgatory, in which the souls of just men are cleansed by a temporary punishment, in order to be admitted into their eternal country, into which nothing defiled entereth." [12] -In the Middle Ages the Cathari, Waldenses, and Hussites openly rejected the doctrine of Purgatory, as did the sixteenth-century Protestants. But the majority in the Reformation retained Augustine's Hell, while denying his Purgatory.

-8 Philippe Labbe and Gabriel Cossart, *Sacrosanta Concilia*, vol. 18, p. 526; Severin Binius, *Concilia Generalia et Provincialia Græco et Latina*, vol. 8, p. 568.

-9 Labbe and Cossart, *op. cit.*, vol. 18, p. 533; vol. 20, p. 170; Pierre Crabbe, *Acta Conciliorum*, vol. 3, pp. 476, 939.

-10 Catechism of the Council of Trent for Parish Priests, trans. by John A. McHugh and Charles J. Callan, pp. xxiv, 63.

-11 Fra Paolo, *Historia*, vol. 8, pp. 633, 634.

12 Catechism of the Council of Trent, p. 63.

-3. BECOMES POWERFUL FORCE IN HANDS OF PRIESTHOOD.—

As might be surmised, people lived in mortal terror of the fires of Hell. So Purgatory came to be looked upon as a means of mitigation—an intermediate place wherein those not bad enough for Hell and not good enough for Heaven might make expiation. It was devised to explain the state of immortal souls v between death and the general judgment. But the pressure was alternately applied on Purgatory and then relaxed through proffered indulgences. Thus there was an oscillation between wrath and mercy, with tremendous power vested in the hands of the priests and the hierarchy. Prayers for the dead went hand in hand with Purgatory. But no prayers were efficacious without the interposition of the priest—and priestly functions called for pay.

-4. FOUR SCRIPTURAL PASSAGES SOMETIMES INVOKED.—

Catholics rely chiefly on the Apocryphal 2 Maccabees 12:39-45 in support of their doctrine of Purgatory. But four scriptural citations are sometimes invoked:

-(1) The "utmost farthing" of Matthew 5:26—Purgatory being the "prison" that detains, the venial transgressor, until he satisfies for his trivial impurities.

-(2) Others cite the sin against the Holy Ghost, forgiven "neither in this world. Nor in the world to come" (Matt. 12:32). So, inasmuch as forgiveness can have no application to Heaven or Hell, it must refer to the middle state. (But Purgatory is not considered a place of pardon, but of alleged punishment and expiation; and the statement concerning the irremission of sin against the Holy Ghost does not affect remission of other sins.)

-(3) Still another passage is Paul's building of "wood, hay, or stubble." Though his "work shall be burned," "he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (1 Cor. 3:15)—in the middle state. The doubtfulness of this exposition is easily recognized.

-13 Johann Lorenz von Mosheim, *Institutes of Ecclesiastical History* (Murdock tr., 1841), vol. 2, p. 291.

(The trial is of works, not of persons. And the purpose is not to purify but to "try") -

-(4) Yet another citation is Christ's preaching to the "spirits in prison" (1 Peter 3:19). Here again there is division. Some claim it is Hell, others the "limbo" of the Fathers, or the bosom of Abraham—the one claim cancelling the other. The interpretation which would make it Purgatory is entirely modern, and unknown to the ancients. In fact, none of the early writers for the first four hundred years of the Christian Era mention such a place. Many of the Fathers—as Augustine, Ephraim, Epiphanius—testify against an intermediate place of expiation.

-Significantly, no advocates of this dogma pretend to have the authority of earlier Fathers, such as Barnabas, Clemens, Hermas, Ignatius, Polycarp, Justin, Tatian, Irenaeus, Athenagoras, and Theophilus. [14] They make no appeal to writers in the first two hundred years of the Christian Era. It is obvious that the invoking of Bible passages by the Romanists in support of the doctrine of Purgatory involves a malpractice irl exegesis, and the Apocryphal Maccabees offers no evidence of inspiration.

-5. WHEREIN PURGATORY DIFFERS FROM HELL.—

The pains of Purgatory are said to be the same as those of Hell, differing only in that they do not last-forever. In other words, Purgatory is set forth as filled with the same fires and the same, torments as Hell, except that those assigned to it remain only for a while.

-14 Samuel Edgar, *The Variations of Popery* (1838 ed.), p. 469.

According to Catholicism few enter Heaven immediately upon departure from this life. A purgation amid the fires of Purgatory is indispensable for most souls—some hold it even embraces pontiffs.

-After God has remitted the guilt and eternal punishment, it is held that a temporary punishment remains due, which may be shortened by masses and indulgence. Purgatory does not therefore involve the idea of the future redemption of the impenitent, but only of those who die in a state of grace. It is consequently a place of suffering for imperfect Christians.

Penitence must allegedly be supplemented by penance, in order to ensure salvation. Purgatory is therefore claimed to be the temporary punishment of those souls who die in a "state of grace" but not free from venial sins, and who are thus purified by suffering. [15] It is definitely to cleanse from venial sins, not to convert after death.

-It should be noted that Origen, with his Restorationism, conceived of a Purgatory broader than that of Plato or Augustine, from which all should at length be restored to the favor of God. But the underlying principle was the same.

-6. SUMMARY: MITIGATING THE HORRORS OF HELL.—

Thus it was that the dual postulate of the Innate Immortality of the soul and the Eternal Torment of the wicked grew more complex with the passing of the centuries. Springing undeniably from Platonic pagan philosophy origins, then permeating Alexandrian Jewish channels, the doctrine of Purgatory established itself in the great Latin apostasy—the maturing Roman Church.

There it slowly- but surely developed as a logical corollary to this antecedent dual dogma—a purgatorial cleansing of souls in order to ready them for the felicities of Paradise. It was the logical accompaniment of the inherent immortality thesis and -its paralleling concept of the eternal punishing of the wicked.

15 See James Cardinal Gibbons, *The Faith of Our Fathers* (1893), pp. 247, 248. See also such popular writers as Rumble and Carty, Conway, et cetera.

Purgatory was designed to mitigate the horrors of Hell and to provide an escape for a vast number from the hopelessness of perpetual Hellfire. It was basically a system of works, whereby the soul purified itself by efficacious suffering, a concept that constitutes the essence of Romanism. It was consequently a negation of the great apostolic and later Protestant doctrine of justification by faith in an all-sufficient Saviour and His vicarious atonement, and in salvation solely through His grace.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, however, there developed among some in the Church of England a hankering after Purgatory as a mitigation of Hell, later to be noted. It appeared conspicuously in the Tractarian Movement of the nineteenth century. It was inevitable that the true forerunners of Protestantism —the Waldenses, and the later Lollards and Hussites—should challenge this anti-Christian innovation, as we shall now find to be the case. The Waldensian missionaries spread out in every direction—into Italy, France, Spain, England, Germany, Bohemia, and even Bulgaria and Turkey—denying this innovation. The Wyclifites were definitely influenced by the teachings of these Waldensian barbes, and the Bohemian evangelical faith was greatly indebted to them. Unavoidable conflict between the two basic concepts developed.

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