

***The Birth of Purgatory.* Jacques Le Goff. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984.**

Epigrams

"Purgatory – what a grand thing!" (St. Catherine of Genoa)

"Purgatory surpasses heaven and hell in poetry, because it represents a future and the others do not."

**The Third Place**

Luther derogated Purgatory as "the third place." [1]

"The life of the believer undergoes a change when he becomes convinced that life does not end with death." [1]

"... the change the geography of the other world and hence of the universe, to alter time in the afterlife and hence the link between earthly, historical time and eschatological time, between the time of existence and the time of anticipation – to do these things was to bring about a gradual but nonetheless crucial intellectual revolution. It was, literally, to change life itself." [2]

Early Christianity chose the dualism of Roman myth over Jewish monism (Sheol) in envisioning afterlife. [2]

Rather than Roman contrast of right/left, Christianity imaged up/down. [3]

"To ascend, to raise oneself, to move higher" was the Christian envisionment of moral/spiritual progress – "whereas in social life the norm was to stay in one's proper place." [3]

Spatialization of Purgatory occurred between 1150 and 1200. [4]

The "'spatialization' of thought." [4]

"The potency of the idea of space manifests itself above all in symbolism" [4]

"If one is looking forward to the resurrection of the dead, the geography of the other world is of no small moment. Indeed, it seems reasonable to suppose that there is a connection between the way Christian society lays out the other world and the way it organizes this one, since the two are related by the ties that bind the society of the living to the society of the dead." [4]

"... a wholesale revision of the maps of both this world and the other." [4]

"... something new may happen to a human being between his death and resurrection." [5]

"... belief in Purgatory is associated with the idea of individual responsibility and free will." [5]

Purgatory is "intermediate" temporally and spatially. [6]

"A logical, mathematical concept, 'intermediacy' is an idea whose significance is closely bound up with profound changes in the social and intellectual reality of the Middle Ages." [7]

“To move from binary to tertiary schemes was to cross a dividing line in the organization of social thought.” [7]

Van der Leeuw on fire as sacred symbol: “In initiation rites, fire wipes out the past period of existence and makes a new period possible.” [7]

Legend of the Phoenix: fire rejuvenates and renders immortal. [8]

1 Cor 3.13 – “... fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is.” [8]

Trial by fire was an ordeal.... volcanoes as the site of Purgatory. [8]

Symbol of fire is paired with water – Purgatory as “a probative sauna.” [9]

Early Christian tradition of baptism by fire. [9]

Part of the ‘success’ of Purgatory was “because it incorporated certain very ancient symbolic traditions.” [11]

A certain persistence of fundamental elements. [11]

“This belief in the efficacy of prayer began a movement of piety that culminated in the creation of Purgatory.” [11]

“... belief in Purgatory took hold, I think, for reasons that go beyond theology.” [13]

## **PART ONE: THE HEREAFTER BEFORE PURGATORY**

### **Chapter 1: Ancient Imaginings**

As one moves from Hell to Purgatory and from Purgatory to Paradise, “the boundaries are pushed back, space expands.” [32]

In Jewish writing in the intertestamental period, there emerges an intermediate category of men who are neither entirely evil nor entirely good, who will be punished for a time after death and then go to Eden. [32]

Medieval Christians looked upon 2 Macc 12.41-46 as confirming two things: (1) sins can be redeemed after death; and (2) the prayers of the living are an effective way of accomplishing this. [42]

Three New Testament texts played an important role: (1) Mt 12.31-32 involved the assumption that sin can be redeemed in the other world; (2) Lk 16.19-26 locates Hell near the place where the saved await judgment; Hell is dominated by thirst, the waiting place is named, ‘the bosom of Abraham;’ and (3) 1.Cor 3.11-15 on fire. [42]

“Before being considered a place, Purgatory was first considered as a kind of fire.” [42]

“Purgatorial fire was at once a punishment and a purification and an ordeal.” [44]

Christ’s descent into Hell (Mt 12.40; Acts 2.31; Rom 10.6-7) – detailed in the Gospel of Nicodemus. [44]

The fate of some persons can be ameliorated after death. [44]

Souls in Hell are excluded from any such amelioration. [44]

Limbo emerges. [44]

Solomon Reinach: "pagans prayed to the dead, Christians prayed for the dead." [45]

"But in order for the idea of Purgatory to develop, it was essential that the living be concerned about the fate of their dead, that the living maintain contacts with the dead, not in order to call on them for protection, but rather in order to improve their condition through prayer." [46]

*Refrigerium* = refreshment (heavenly happiness) [46]

"... a quasi-paradisaical state of happiness." [46]

Tertullian imagined an "interim refreshment." [46]

"... the art of the catacombs expresses certainty more than uncertainty." [48]

"... countering the militant optimism of the early Christians was a deep anxiety that they shared with the pagans of late antiquity." [48]

*The Vision of Perpetua and Felicitas* is "the earliest document we have in which it is possible to catch a glimpse of Purgatory." [45]

Perpetua thinks of her dead brother and prays ("addressing my lamentations to the Lord") and saw her brother "coming out of a place of darkness" – "I had no doubt that I could relieve him in his trial." [49]

Perpetua saw her brother "refreshed" (*refrigerantem*). [49]

Perpetua's brother "suffers psychic and physical pain rather than the pain of punishment for a wrong." [49]

[*je: This relates to my concern with law having become the dominant hermeneutic.*]

"... it is impressive that a still hesitant account of what would one day become Purgatory occurs in this admirable document, under the auspices of so moving a saint." [51]

## **Chapter 2: The Fathers of Purgatory**

Paradox: it was the Greek fathers who were the 'founders' of the doctrine of Purgatory, a doctrine never developed in the Greek church (Clement and Origen). [52]

Both thinkers were indebted to the Greek notion (Plato) that the gods' chastisement "is not punishment but rather a means of education and salvation, part of a process of purification." [52]

"From the Old Testament, Clement and Origen took the notion that fire is a divine instrument, and from the New Testament the idea of baptism by fire (from the Gospels) and the idea of a purificatory trial after death (from Paul)." [52]

Origen sees Old Testament "passages in which God describes himself as fire not as expressions of a God of wrath but rather of a God who, but consuming and devouring, acts as an instrument of purification." [53]

Origen glosses John the Baptist's "baptism in fire" to refer to the purification of the dead and awaiting all. [53]

Clement of Alexandria was the first to distinguish 2 categories of sinners and two categories of punishment. [53]

"The peculiar notion that made a heretic of Origen was this: that there is no sinner so wicked, so inveterate, and so essentially incorrigible that he cannot ultimately be completely purified and allowed to enter into Paradise." [55]

"In Origen's thought there is a feeling for the redemptive value of suffering." [55]

Origen associates this with the fire at the end of the world (Last Judgment). [56]

"... it was Origen who clearly stated for the first time the idea that the soul can be purified in the other world after death." [57]

But: "By making the purifying fire not only 'spiritual' but also 'invisible', Origen prevented the imagination of the faithful from gaining a purchase on it." [57]

Jerome (though an enemy of Origen): "... we believe that the judgment of Christian sinners, whose works will be tried and purged in fire will be moderate and mixed with clemency." [61]

Augustine (about questions touching on salvation): "... it is even more difficult, Augustine believed, to say anything definite, because it is necessary to respect the secrecy, the mystery." [63]

Augustine introduced three key terms: *purgatorius*, *temporarius*, and *transitorius*.

On the death of his mother, Augustine wrote movingly on the effectiveness of suffrages for the dead. [64]

"... tears which I offer to you, my God, for your handmaid." [64]

"Let her rest in peace with her husband." [65]

"... inspire those who read this book to remember Monica." [65]

Augustine believed "that the tribulations of this life are a kind of 'purgatory.'" [66]

"Although some will be saved by fire, this fire will be more terrible than anything that a man can suffer in this life." [68]

Augustine's views "on the possibility of redemption after death began to narrow and sharpen" after 413, partially as a reaction to the laxist ideas of the *misericordes*, who believed that "all, or most, inveterate sinners would be saved. [68]

"Augustine emphasized that in order to be saved by fire one had to have lived a life in which faith and works were combined" – especially almsgiving. [71]

"... one's life must have 'changed for the better.'" [71]

"From Augustine onward what we find is that millenarianism was incompatible with a belief in Purgatory." [83]

Augustine's two primary contributions: (1) the purifying effects of fire work only on lesser sins; (2) the fire is situated in the interval between death and resurrection. [83]

"But Augustine left two major elements of the Purgatory system in the dark: (1) he says nothing about what kind of sin can land a soul in Purgatory; and (2) he says nothing about Purgatory as a place. [83]

"Christian teaching gradually evolved toward its definitive position that it is possible for some sinners to be redeemed after death." [85]

"Church hierarchy remained cautious." [85]

- Not wanting to empty out Hell altogether; and
- Suspicious of popular imagination.

"The 'barbarization' of Roman society was in part a democratization." [87]

Regarding Church hierarchy: "Their contempt for the peasant and hatred of paganism, coupled with their lack of understanding of behavior informed by alien cultures, behavior they were quick to label 'superstitious,' led these ecclesiastical leaders to preach a religion of fear." [87]

Gregory the Great approaches matters much in the manner of Augustine, but the novelty in his approach is the use of anecdotal illustration. [90-91]

"In his zeal as a pastor, Gregory the Great understood two psychological needs of the believers to whom he ministered: the need for authentic testimony delivered by witnesses worthy of belief and the need for details about the location of purgatorial punishments." [93]

### **Chapter 3: The Early Middle Ages: Doctrinal Stagnation and the Riot of Imagination**

Regarding the early Middle Ages: "During this lengthy period we see the imagination at work, gathering and sifting its material." [97]

In the eighth and ninth centuries, a constant emerges: "... the time of purgation is set between death and judgment, and the duration is allowed to vary." [104]

"At the moment of Purgatory's inception, we shall see how the optimistic Celtic (and perhaps Germanic) conception of a place of waiting and purification gave way to the image of Purgatory as cruel, for a time, as Hell..." [110]

Bede records a number of visions: "... he wants to prove to his readers that the other world is real and to inspire enough fear in the living to make them change their way of life in order to avoid torment after death." [112]

"... for the first time we find... a special place set aside in the other world for souls undergoing purgation..." [112]

"... the growing fervor of the living in praying for the dead helped to lay the groundwork for Purgatory." [122]

Between 1024 and 1033, Clung began celebrating the Day of the Dead on November 2 – “This solemn new bond between the living and the dead cleared the ground for the inception of Purgatory.” [125]

The life of Odilo, abbot of Cluny, “gave us a definite spot: a mountain that spits fire.” [127]

## **PART TWO: THE TWELFTH CENTURY: THE BIRTH OF PURGATORY**

### **Chapter 4: The Fire of Purgatory**

From 1000 to 1250, the population almost doubled in Latin Christendom; spectacular urban growth; increased agricultural productivity. [131]

A new social element is introduced: “... the free middle class of artisans and merchants.” [131]

Also an expansionist era. [132]

Spiritual and intellectual renewal. [132]

“Purgatory found its place as man’s social imagination expanded to embrace the other world as well as this one.” [132]

“... the belief that gained the most ground between the fourth and eleventh centuries and that helped to prepare the way for the inception of Purgatory was this: that the souls of the dead could be helped by prayer, and more particularly by suffrages.” [134]

“... Purgatory did not exist before 1170 at the earliest.” [135]

Pierre de Poitiers “manifests, to an almost maniacal degree, a concern with penitential bookkeeping that is typical of thirteenth century practices in regard to Purgatory.” [152]

“... in Purgatory a liturgical chain was forged binding the dead to the living.” [153]

### **Chapter 5: “Locus Purgatorius”: A Place for Purgation**

Le Goff regards Peter the Chanter as “the man who first integrated Purgatory into theological teaching.” [165]

Purgatory was “born” in Paris.” [165]

The name and doctrine of Purgatory emerged in two milieus in the late twelfth century: Cathedral school of Notre Dame in Paris. [167]

1. In the heart of the Paris of Louis VII and the young Philip Augustus, in contact with the money changers on the bridges, the shippers on the Seine, the artisans and workers who were traded as human commodities on the labor market in the place de Greve, Christianity’s deepest truths were reworked and reshaped in a climate of intense creativity.” [167-168]
  - a. This was during “the first great outpouring of scholastic thought, and it did not last long. As early as 1200 the Church and the monarchy moved to reassert their control. Pyres were raised to burn both books and men.” [168]
  - b. “Etienne Temper, the bishop of Paris, brought his crosier down on whatever seemed new and original.”

2. Among the Cistercians at Cîteaux: "The special attention that the Cistercians devoted to the relation between the living and the dead and the new importance that they attached to the liturgy of early November... led them to the brink of Purgatory." [168]

Purgatory first emerged "at the crossroads between these two worlds, that of the monasteries and that of the urban schools." [168]

The new doctrine of Purgatory was used as "a weapon in this struggle" against heresy." [169]

"It was against the heretics of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Greeks of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, and the Protestants of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, that the Roman Catholic Church honed the doctrine of Purgatory." [169]

"All of the Church's enemies were agreed that a man's fate in the other world depended only on his merit and God's will. On this view, the game is up at death." [169]

Bernard opposed heretics who "were hostile to marriage, to baptism, to prayer for the dead, to the cult of the saints, and to the eating of meat (refusing to consume anything derived from sexual intercourse)." [170]

Cathari: "... the living can do nothing for the dead, and suffrages are useless." [170]

A work against the Waldensians (Ermengaud of Beziers) "attacks the perverse opinion of certain heretics that the prayers of saints are of no help to the living and that the dead are not relieved by the offerings and prayers of the living." [171]

"... with respect to the inception of Purgatory, the legal movement is conspicuous by its absence." [173]

Innocent III: "... who indeed would not willingly praise the saints to the indivisible Trinity, when we believe that by the prayers and merits of the saints we too will one day be helped to reach their side? And who would not willingly pray to the indivisible Trinity for the dead, when he himself must die; who would not do in this life for another what he wishes to be done for him after his death?" [174]

Innocent, "using traditional symbolism, gives a full, clear, and most carefully constructed account of both this world and the other, a perfect plan in which every man has his place from birth until the end of time." [175]

"Now it is Purgatory's turn to be divided up." [176]

## **Chapter 6: Purgatory between Sicily and Ireland**

"A Marian devotion, late to develop in the West, began its astonishing rise to popularity, the Virgin came to the fore as the mainstay of souls consigned to what would later be known as Purgatory." [178]

Peter Damian regarding the vision of a dead monk who appeared to his community: "Thus does divine clemency instruct the living by means of the dead." [180]

Common to monastic vision: "Even saints must spend short periods of time in Purgatory for what appear to be slight faults." [181]

In the visions, Purgatory tends to have an “infernal character” – “a world of torture, a penal colony.” [185]

But “great stress is laid on solidarity between the living and the dead.” [186]

“... there seems to be nothing in Muslim doctrine that might correspond to Purgatory.” [186]

In a vision: “Saint Peter then tells Alberic that a man must not despair, no matter how great his crimes, because any sin can be expiated through penance.” [188]

“... I believe that the coherence of the system of Purgatory was an important factor in its success with both clergy and the masses in an ‘age of rationalization.’” [192]

Saint Patrick’s Purgatory [193ff]:

“... to remind his readers how much the living stand to profit from edifying visions and revelations concerning the hereafter.” [193]

Regarding St. Patrick: “... Jesus showed him in a forsaken place a round, dark hole (*fossa*) and told him that if a person animated by a true spirit of penitence and faith spent a day and a night in this hole, he would be purged of all his sins and would see the tortures of the wicked and the joys of the good.” [194]

Patrick had a church built there. [194]

Bishop and prior dissuaded penitents, informing that many who had attempted this penance had died. [194]

The ordeal began with two weeks of prayer – and two weeks of prayer followed. [194]

Traditional images (e.g., cold) left out of this document tend to disappear from subsequent accounts of Purgatory.” [197-198]

St. Patrick’s Purgatory was “one of the bestsellers of the Middle Ages” (Shane Leslie). [198]

“The new region of the underworld took shape in two phases, first in theological-spiritual literature between 1170 and 1180 at the prompting of Parisian masters and Cistercian monks, and then in visionary literature stemming from the 1180-1215 period.” [198]

Caesarius of Heisterbach: “Let anyone who doubts the existence of Purgatory go to Ireland and enter the Purgatory of Patrick and he would have no further doubts about the punishments of Purgatory.” [199]

“The vogue for Saint Patrick’s Purgatory in both high and popular literature lasted at least until the eighteenth century.” [200]

“... the geography of the next world is fitted into the geography of this one.” [201]

“... specifying the precise location on earth of one of Purgatory’s mouths.” [201]

“... contiguous with the world of the living.” [201]



Twelfth century traditions locating purgatorial fires in Mt. Etna. [202-2-4]

“Purgatory was attracted toward two poles: Paradise and Hell. It might have developed into a near-paradise or a quasi-hell.” [204]

“Purgatory (in various rudimentary forms) veered toward the infernal pole, and it was a long time before it began to differentiate itself from Hell.” [204]

Latin Christendom for a long time couldn't decide whether Purgatory was in Ireland or Sicily, or whether it “should be made more like Hell or more like Heaven.” [205]

In Sicily, the Etna tradition was highly infernal, and so as Purgatory began to differentiate itself from Hell, the Sicilian location was not apt.” [205]

### **Chapter 7: The Logic of Purgatory**

“The natural and the supernatural, this world and the next, yesterday, today tomorrow, and eternity are enjoined in a seamless fabric, punctuated by events (birth, death, resurrection), qualitative leaps (conversion) and unforeseen occurrences (miracles).” [209]

Between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, all of life became characterized by greater complexity. [209]

The ‘old world’ was characterized by dualistic rhetoric: two cities, powers, swords, armies. [209]

But Innocent III spoke of *three* churches, thus adapting to new developments in society. [210]

“The ideas that living human beings formed about the other world were inspired, I think, more by a need for justice than by a yearning for salvation.” [210]

The eventual system of Purgatory “was obviously inspired by juridical procedures and legal ideas associated with this world rather than the next.” [211]

The twelfth century saw significant development in feudal and ecclesiastical law. [211]

This development was both in terms of the ideal of justice and in terms of juridical procedures.” [211]

“We actually reach Purgatory when we enter the sphere of penance, on the borderline between spiritual life and material and social life, where during the twelfth century Church and society embarked on a new venture.” [213]

Changes in thinking about sin and penitential practices “were brought about by exploring the connection between sin and ignorance and by seeking to discover the intentions behind the sinner's behavior.” [213]

Anselm “insisted on the essential difference between voluntary sin and sin due to ignorance.” [213]

Two distinctions emerged: [214]

1. Between vice and sin: sin involves the assent of the sinner.[214]
2. Between guilt and punishment: guilt can be pardoned through contrition and confession; punishment is effaced by 'satisfaction,' i.e., by completing the penance ordered by the Church – the notion of personal responsibility involved “an internalization and personalization” of moral life.” [214]+

Early twelfth century: “On True and False Penance”

The desire to confess is proof of contrition (so in the absence of a priest, one may confess to a lay person). [214]

Frequency of penance is recommended.

“... secret sins require secret penance, public sins require public penance” – this public penance subsequently declines and disappears. [214]

Auricular confession becomes integrated in the spiritual life..... confessor’s manuals developed. [215]

The notion of lesser sins has a long history; the term ‘venial’ came into common usage in the twelfth century. [216]

Worthy of *venia* (pardon) – legal/spiritual connotation. [217]

Scholastic discussion of categories of sin become so esoteric that “the rarefied argumentation of intellectuals cut off from their roots in society had scarcely any influence on the conceptions of Purgatory held by the mass of the faithful.” [217]

In contrast to the twelfth century: “By contrast, the theologians and canonists of the thirteenth century were products of a corporate movement, mental workers isolated from the manual laborers in the urban workplace.” [218]

“The criterion of ignorance” in venial sin excluded guilt, but “there remained the punishment to be suffered in Purgatory.” [218]

“Purgatory thus became the normal receptacle of venial sins.” [219]

“... the real point is that the clerks of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries were not primarily interested in abstractions such as crime, sin, guilt, and so on, but rather in men; society was their primary preoccupation.” [219]

In order to understand Purgatory, we must understand how men/Christians were categorized. There was a transformation of mental frameworks and logical tools; classification and categorization are operations of thought of particular importance. [220]

Traditionally there had been a four-fold categorization of men: (1) the good; (2) the not-entirely good; (3) the not-entirely wicked; and (4) the wicked – but now there was a three-fold categorization of places: (1) Heaven; (2) Hell) and (3) Purgatory. [221]

“A tradition of kinds of sinners was thus matched to a triadic other world.” [221]

"This development was encouraged by another change, namely, the general shift from binary to ternary logical schemes." [221]

Two-fold and four-fold categorization remained binary: "The real change came when Augustine's four categories of men... we pared down to three." [221]

"But the change and the way it came about were, I think, related in a deep sense to changes in feudal society..." [222]

Raoul Ardent (late twelfth century): "But we, brothers, who do not know who has need and who does not, to whom it may profit and to whom it cannot profit, we must offer prayers, alms, and masses for all, including those for whom we have no certainty." [224]

Here is the transformation:

From:	Entirely good / not entirely good	////	not entirely wicked / entirely wicked
To:	Good	////	Medium-good-and-wicked
		////	Wicked

Thus, the binary categories of good and evil were brought together in a radical move to form the intermediate category. [224]

"Broadly speaking, dyads of the inferior/superior type, such as powerful/pauper, cleric/layman, monk/cleric, gave way to more complex triads." (virtue/vice, as well). [225]

"But from the year 1000, pluralistic models, many of them inherited from Greek and Roman antiquity and even more from early Christianity, began to overtake the dualistic models." [225]

E.g., twelfth century models based on the number 7: sacraments, capital sins, gifts of the Holy Spirit." [225]

"But the most important change was the replacement of binary patterns by ternary patterns, and the concomitant shift from blunt oppositions, bilateral confrontation, to the more complex interplay of three elements." [225]

E.g., the three orders: those who pray/fight/work. [225]

Regarding Purgatory: "... to introduce an intermediate category between two extremes. The new category was not made secondary to the original two. Rather, the center was raised up." [225-226]

"... the essential application of the model was of a sociological order." [226]

"The point was to represent – not describe – society as it emerged from the second phase of the feudal revolution." [226]

"The model distinguishes between *maiores*, *medioces*, and *minores*" – The role of the intermediate group is "To enlarge itself at the expense of its neighbors, or one of its neighbors, joining forces with one against the other, or alternately first with one and then with the other." [226]

“... the intermediate element is not equidistant from the two poles. Theoretically, the position of the intermediate category of the triad is such that it can gain advantage by forging alliances with, or moving closer to, one pole of the other.” [226]

“Purgatory was one of a group of phenomena associated with the transformation of feudal Christendom, of which one key expression was the creation of ternary logical models through the introduction of an intermediate category.” [227]

“The model... was firmly rooted in socioeconomic structures.” [227]

“Purgatory was not a product of this system but an element in it.” [227]

“... new attitudes with respect to number, time, and space.” [227]

“... two great trends which, at a deeper level, explain the birth of Purgatory”: [230]

1. “... weakening of that commonplace medieval attitude, *contemptus mundi*, contempt of the world. [230]
  - a. “... conversion to this world.” [230]
  - b. Last Judgment no longer appeared imminent to most. [231]
  - c. “Not yet happy, Christendom had nevertheless finally tasted growth after centuries of mere reproduction or even recession.” [231]
  - d. “the Gothic cathedrals... seemed to bring Paradise to earth.” [231]
  - e. As life on earth assumed greater importance, so too did “the intermediate period between individual death and collective judgment become an important matter for reflection.” [231]
  - f. “... those who took up residence on earth and so acquired an interest in the sequel of earthly life, the interval between death and resurrection.” [231]
2. In medieval iconography, there was a “gradual (and relative) effacement of the Apocalypse in favor of the Last Judgment.” [232]
  - a. Pictures of the end of the world tended to come more from Matthew than from the Apocalypse. [232]
  - b. Christ “remains the Christ of the Gospels and preserves his gentle humanity.” [232]
  - c. “The twelfth century saw the enrichment of memory.” [233]
    - i. “Purgatory became an annex of the earth and extended the time of life and memory.” [233]
    - ii. “Purgatory... fostered individuality. It focused attention on individual death and the judgment that followed.” [233]
  - d. Liturgical changes “reveal a heightened concern with the fate of the individual.” [233]

S.G.F. Brandon: “... in order to bridge the gap between the interests of the individual with his lifespan of three-score years and ten and those of the human race extending over millennia (a gap which the Jewish religion never successfully bridged), the Church invented the ideal of Purgatory.” [234]

### **PART THREE: THE TRIUMPH OF PURGATORY.**

## **Chapter 8: The Scholastic Systematization**

"The thirteenth century was the century of organization." [237]

Purgatory "rose to a position of prominence, though under tight ecclesiastical control." [237]

"In the thirteenth century the great doctors of Purgatory were mendicant masters." [238]

"... the scholastics were determined to discuss Purgatory on the basis of reason as well as authority." [238]

Latin intellectuals (in the curia and hierarchy) "were in some degree suspicious of the innovation" (i.e., Purgatory). [239]

Two reasons for this suspicion: (1) scant Scriptural basis; and (2) fear that "the belief was being swamped by vulgar and superstitious piety." [242]

"One senses a desire to rationalize Purgatory, to tidy it up to control it – in a word, to purge it of its offensive popular trappings." [242]

William of Auvergne: "That something remains to be purged after death is... an 'obvious fact' (*manifestum est*)." [242]

He conceives of Purgatory as "a continuation of earthly penance." [242]

"... purgatorial penalties are penalties that complete the penitential purgation begun in this life." [243]

On his view, "the population of Purgatory has been swelled at the expense of Hell." [243]

"... justice requires..." the existence of Purgatory." [243]

"If human justice does not tolerate confusion of penalties, divine justice, which is also divine mercy, tolerates it even less." [243]

Alexander of Hales: "Purgatory is hope." [247]

Souls in Purgatory can be subject to the power of the keys. [248]

This "asserted the Church's jurisdiction, at least in part, over the new territory just opened up in the other world." [248]

"But what a gain for the Church in its hold over the faithful!" [248-249]

"Thus the notion of pain and suffering began to emerge, first as simple expiation and later as the source of merits that would enable the souls in Purgatory not only to complete their purgation with the help of the living but also to become worthy to intervene with God on behalf of the living." [249]

"Thanks to Purgatory the Church developed the system of indulgences, a source of great power and profit until it became a dangerous weapon that was ultimately turned back against the Church." [249]

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Bonaventure “stress(es) the power over Purgatory of the Church in general and the pope in particular.” [254]

He firmly asserts that liberation from Purgatory can occur before the Last Judgment. [254]

“... to defer hope unduly is an act of cruelty, and if God were to keep saints far from their reward until Judgment Day, he would be very cruel indeed.” [255]

Albert the Great: “... the souls in Purgatory do not suffer from infernal punishments, because they have the benefit of the light of faith and the light of grace...” [257]

“... freezing (*gelidicium*) is not a punishment inflicted in Purgatory, because it is used to punish coldness in charity and as such is not applicable to souls in need of purgation.” [257]

Scholasticism: “... the rationalization of a belief which... arose as much from imagery as from reasoning, as much from fantastic tales as from authorities, and which did not develop in any straightforward way but rather through countless meanderings, hesitations, and contradictions, culminating finally in a tightly knit fabric of beliefs.” [259]

“Purgatory corresponds to a certain state of sin, one in which good and evil are mixed.” [259]

Albert clearly situates Purgatory closer to Heaven than to Hell. The ‘infernalization’ of Purgatory resulted from “an overriding decision by the institutionalized Church in this period to rely on the preaching of fear, to allow its inquisitors to wield instruments of torture in this world as well as the next.” [259]

“Purgatory is closely related to general conduct in this world and is made for the ordinary run of mortals.” [260]

“... the love the militant Church (*charitas Ecclesiae militantis*) is the source of suffrages:” for the dead. [263]

Albert “focuses more on the process of purgation than on the penalties.” [263]

“thus the pontifical monarchy extended its power beyond the temporal realm into the hereafter: from this time forward it could send saints to Paradise by canonization and remove souls from Purgatory.” [266]

“Thomas seems to me the most remote from the common view of his contemporaries concerning the Last Things. His thought is lofty in the strongest sense of the word. With eternity for its subject, a reality as transitory as Purgatory did not occupy a very important place.” [268]

“My impression is that Thomas dealt with Purgatory because the question was obligatory.” [268]

In Thomas, “we detect the influence of law on theology.” [271]

“... there is only one way to be good but many ways to be bad.” Thus there is only one place to reward good, but many for sinners. [271]

“While Thomas does not doubt the existence of a place of purgation, Purgatory, he is not interested in its intermediary character but only in the fact that it is temporary.” [271]

His is the standpoint of eternity. [272]

“Thomas played a part in the ‘infernalization’ of Purgatory” – he located Purgatory as subterranean. [273]

Thomas “wished to avoid establishing any sort of vulgar arithmetical accounting of the time spent in Purgatory.” [274]

Thomas refutes Aristotle’s opinion that “no communication is possible between the living and the dead – He asserts: “the bond of charity that links the members of the Church is valuable not only to the living but also to the dead who have died in a state of love... The dead live on in the memory of the living.” [275]

Le Goff: “Of all the expressions of the bonds between the living and the dead that I have come across in my research on Purgatory, this is the most beautiful.” [275]

Thomas refutes any idea of proportionality. [275]

Thomas believes “that what counts is above all the intention of the living person doing the suffrage.” [276]

Almost all thirteenth century treatises on heresy number rejection of Purgatory as among the errors of heretics. [279]

The Church eventually defined Purgatory to settle theological controversy with the Greeks. [281]

“Theory at the summit of the Church hierarchy crowned practice at the grass roots.” [282]

“I remain convinced that Purgatory succeeded because it was given a concrete spatial embodiment and because it provided ample room for the exercise of the imagination.” [286]

“The need for Purgatory, for a final episode between death and resurrection, for a continuation of the process of penitence and salvation beyond the bogus boundary of death was a requirement rooted in the masses, a need voiced – in the West, at any rate – by the *vox populi*.” [288]

### **Chapter 9: Social Victory: Purgatory and the Cure of Souls**

“Broadly speaking, Purgatory made even more impressive headway with the populace than it did with the theologians and clergy.” [289]

Developments in medieval notions of time: [290ff]

E.g., “extraordinary outpouring of narrative literature” involved a linear time. [291]

"The success of Purgatory was contemporary with the rise of the narrative"..... "Purgatory introduced a plot into the story of individual salvation. Most important of all, the plot continued after death." [211]

"Thus there came to be established in the hereafter a variable, measurable, and, even more important, manipulable time-scale." [292]

"Final contrition increasingly became the last resort for those who wished to take advantage of Purgatory. Life's final moments accordingly took on a new intensity..." [292]

"... Purgatory was one of the main reasons for the dramatization of the moment of death." [293]

Purgatory also coincides with decrease in apparitions of ghosts: "... one is struck by the contrast between the great bustle of souls around the heretical villagers reluctant to accept Purgatory and the virtual absence of ghosts in the book of the Dominican preacher eager to spread the belief in Purgatory." [293]

"... the solidarity of Purgatory would become involved in the new forms of sociability associated with the confraternities." [294]

Apparitions reveal time in Purgatory to be relatively brief but due to the intensity of the experience time passes very slowly." [294]

"Purgatory was popularized mainly through sermons." [297]

Sermons were often spiced with *exempla* (edifying tales). [297]

There is a tradition of "Sunday relaxation in Purgatory." [299]

"It was the regular clergy, the preaching friars most intimately involved with the urban environment, that took the lead in the use of sermons and exempla to disseminate belief in Purgatory." [300]

"To frighten was, if not the preacher's first concern, then at least one of his primacy preoccupations." [301]

Cistercian Caesarius Heisterbach's book of anecdotes for use by preachers. [300ff]

One of Caesarius's stories focuses on a wife's suffrages for her usurer husband: "The marital tie becomes paramount in the next world as well as in this one." [304]

Most striking in this story is that the sin involved was usury, against which the Church focuses in on as the foremost of mortal sins – the man had been refused burial in hallowed ground. [305]

"Here I want to emphasize Purgatory's sociological contribution. One of Purgatory's functions was in fact to save from Hell sinners belonging to specific social groups." [305]

Serious sinners who previously would have been regarded as beyond hope could not "count on the then flourishing cult of the Virgin – what better intercessor could there be in apparently hopeless cases? – and on the solid ties of community binding the members of the order to one another." [305]

"Women have an important role to play in the functioning of Purgatory." [306]



A nun who was seduced by a priest dies in childbirth; her family despairs and does not offer suffrages. She appears to an abbot, however, who tells her family: "... this brief story highlights Purgatory's essential function... Purgatory is hope." [306]

In one story, a monk appears in a vision and kicks a choir stall, which splits, leaving a relic (a common thing in the thirteenth century – there is a Museum of Purgatory in Rome). [307]

Broad range of punishments, the most lenient of which is simply deprivation of the beatific vision. [309]

Caesarius had written about 1220. By the 1250s when Stephen of Bourbon wrote a similar treatise, "Purgatory now represents not hope but fear." [310]

Stephen was an inquisitor as well as a preacher. [310]

He situates his discussion of Purgatory in a consideration of the gift of fear. [311]

"From the beginning, Stephen of Bourbon plunges us into a Christianity of fear." [311]

Stephen uses traditional materials, but 'infernalizes' them." [314]

In Stephen's treatise, "the harshness of purgatorial punishment is infinitely greater than that of any earthly punishment." [315]

He also emphasized "the importance of the restitution of property for the liberation from Purgatory." [315]

Stephen's *exempla* "helped to popularize the image of a vulgarized, infernalized Purgatory, which became an object of simplistic calculation." [315]

Among the Dominicans, *exempla* of Purgatory "offer a whole casuistry of venial sins." [318]

A preacher to the Beguines: "The middle way seems safest to me. Thus, since I cannot see into the hearts of different men, I would rather send them to Purgatory than to Hell out of despair, and the rest I leave to the supreme master, the Holy Spirit, who instructs our hearts from within." [319]

Le Goff: "Is there a more beautiful expression of Purgatory's function?" [319]

Sermons to the Beguines have a three-fold focus: (1) Purgatory is God's prison; suffrage thus harkens to the ancient Christian tradition of praying for prisoners; (2) solidarity between the living and the dead; (3) Purgatory is closely related to penance: either penance delivers the soul from Purgatory, or Purgatory completes the penitential process. [319-320]

"Purgatory was from the beginning a political weapon in the hands of the Church." [320]

In the thirteenth century, the notion of sainthood had also evolved: it came under the control of the papacy; for recognition of sainthood, beyond miracles, "a virtuous life and spiritual aura acquired even increasing importance." [320]

Lutgard, 'saint' of Purgatory: visited by souls liberated from Purgatory by her prayer. [324ff]

"Purgatory was of particular interest to the members of certain professions, those that were held in contempt, regarded as suspect..." [328]

“And is it not possible that one of the consequences of Purgatory’s progress was to rehabilitate professions the spiritual position of whose members had been precarious, restoring their prospect of salvation and thus giving religious sanction to their increased social status?” [328]

Vernacular literature [328ff]

“Let his give alms while he is alive / So that at his death these may help / Him to go to Purgatory / To make himself pure for Paradise.” [329]

Infernalization of Purgatory had progressed so far that the nature of Sabbath rest (initially posited of Hell) had been transferred to Purgatory. [329-330]

Late in the Jubilee Year of 1300, the notion of plenary indulgence as complete pardon of all sins was for the first time extended to include souls in Purgatory. [330]

Boniface VIII granted a plenary indulgence (on Christmas Day) to all pilgrims who had died en route to Rome.” [330-331]

“A new phase in the inclusion of indulgences in the system of Purgatory had begun.” [331]

#### **Chapter 10: The Poetic Triumph: The *Divina Commedia***

Regarding Purgatory, Dante “carver out for it an enduring place in human memory.” [334]

“Dante’s idea of this intermediate zone is dynamic and vibrant with spirituality.” [337]

“... an intermediacy with an orientation...” [337]

“Dante chose the one image that expresses Purgatory’s true logic, that of the climb.” [337]

“... purgation is accomplished in three ways: (1) “material punishment that mortifies the wicked passions and instills virtue;” (2) “by meditation on the sin to be purged and its correlative virtue;” (3) “Through prayer, which purifies the soul, strengthens it by the grace of God, and expresses its hope.” [339]

“Love is the principle that governs the assignment of souls to the various cornices of Purgatory.” [339]

“All sins have in common absence of the love of God.” [339]

In Purgatory, “the true love of God is restored.” [339]

“The whole logic of the mountainous Purgatory lies in the progress that the soul makes while climbing: with each step upward it becomes more pure. The ascent is twofold, spiritual as well as physical. As a sign of this progress the punishment is alleviated as the soul rises, as if the climb becomes easier, the mountain less steep, as the soul sheds its burden of sins.” [339]

In Dante’s work there is little reference to venial sins, but rather the seven capital sins – the difference from Hell is that the sinner had sinned less gravely, or engaged in repentance and penance, or were less inveterate sinners. [341]

Dante “considers the sins of the spirit committed against one’s neighbor – pride, envy, and wrath – to be more grave than the sins of the flesh.” [342]

Cf. Canto 26 – Dante offers Purgatory to homosexuals. [342]

Dante “paid particular attention to tardy repentance.” [342]

Ante-Purgatory is part of Dante’s originality – waiting for the actual progress of purgation. [342]

“Dante agrees with Augustine that the punishments of Purgatory are worse than the worst punishments on earth.” [344]

Dante points out “the fundamental difference between Hell and Purgatory” – he “rescued Purgatory from the infernalization to which the Church subjected it in the thirteenth century.” [346]

“Dante was in a sense more orthodox than the Church, more faithful to Purgatory’s underlying logic. He depicts Purgatory as a place between two extremes, but closer to one of them, straining in the direction of Paradise. For him it is a place of hope, of initiation into joy, of gradual emergence into the light.” [346]

Dante was faithful to the twelfth century tradition relating Purgatory to penance. [347]

*Purgatorio* 9.76-108 – “The first step symbolizes contrition (*contritio cordis*), which is supposed to make the penitent as white as marble. The second represents confession (*confessio oris*), which causes the penitent to turn deep purple with shame. The third embodies penance in the proper sense (*satisfactio operis*), which is flaming red like the ardor of charity, of love, by which the penitent is now motivated.” [347]

“The soul must want to purify itself.” [347]

5.104-107: A sinner turned loose from the devil’s grip thanks to a single tear (remorse). [347]

“Dante insists, however, that in Purgatory hope reigns supreme.” [349]

“Hope is frequently expressed through prayer.” [349]

“When the pilgrims begin their climb (4.27-30) they are again driven on by desire and hope toward the light.” [349]

The souls in Purgatory, according to Dante, “for their part they pray for those on earth as much as they are able.” [351]

“Purgatory is a realm that subsists in time.” [352]

10.109-111: “Do not think of the torments: think, I say, / of what comes after them: think that at worst / they cannot last beyond the Judgment Day.” [352]

“Time is a congeries of various tempi, a composite of the experience of each of the souls undergoing trial in the space between earth and Heaven and in the interval between earthly life and eternity. Time is speeded up and slowed down, it shuttles back and forth between the memory of the living and the anxiety of the dead. It is a time still attached to history and yet already absorbed by eschatology.” [353]

"In Purgatory time is marked out by the progress made by souls. Along the boundary between human time and divine eternity, miracles occur. These are the only events that can take place in Purgatory." [353]

Dante posits clearly that it is "God's angels who are responsible for souls purging their sins" (not dreams). [354]

"... the mountain of Purgatory gradually becomes enveloped in light as they climb." [354]

"Between the darkness of Hell and illumination of Heaven, Purgatory is a study in chiaroscuro in which the light steadily drives out the dark." [354]

The Lethe "washes away all memory of sin" – the Eunoe "restores the memory of all the good one has done." [355]

"It is the final metamorphosis of memory, it too cleanses of sin." [355]

### **Why Purgatory?**

Eventually, there emerged the notion of "the reversibility of merits"...: "the system of solidarity between the living and the dead instituted an unending circular flow, a full circuit of reciprocity." [357]

"Trent... established Purgatory in dogma once and for all" – but "remained noncommittal as to Purgatory's imaginary content." [357]

"There is a flamboyant gothic Purgatory and a Purgatory of the *devotio moderna*. There is not only a Counter Reformation Purgatory but also – more important perhaps – a classical Purgatory, a baroque Purgatory, a romantic Purgatory, and a Sulpician Purgatory." [357]

"Purgatory dramatized the end of earthly existence and changed it with an intensity compounded of mingled fear and hope." [358]

Le Goff's judgment regarding the present – "once again it is the imaginary content of the afterlife that is being sacrificed for the sake of purification, in order to eradicate 'primitive' beliefs." [359]

"... a way must be found to adapt man's beliefs to his changing social and intellectual circumstances but without excising man's imagination – that essential part of his memory and being." [359]

"All too often in history, progress toward adaptation has come at the expense of the imagination. But man's reason is sustained by images." [359]

"My concern is that the desire to purify will prove especially costly to Purgatory." [360]

"The clergy has been moving toward a less infernal, less material conception of Purgatory. Among the rank-and-file, on the other hand, there is growing indifference to the idea of an intermediate interval in the afterlife." [360]

"... the decision again seems to have narrowed to a choice between various paradises and various hells." [360]

“Yet there will always, I hope, be a place in man’s dreams for subtlety, justice, accuracy, and measure in every sense of the word, for reason (O reasonable Purgatory!) and hope. I hope that it will be a long while before it can truly be said of Purgatory that its time is past.” [360]