Chapter 1

The Existence of Purgatory

Eternity

There is no doubt but that the question of our existence after death is the most important and consequential of all questions. It is the fundamental question of life, decisive of our eternal destiny. Therefore it ever was, and must be, the ultimate and essential purpose of Religion to answer this question.

Eternal thanks to Our Divine Redeemer! We Catholics have the reasons of the faith that is in us implanted deeply in our hearts. Christ, “the Way, the Truth and the Life,” who dispels all darkness, lifted the veil that covers the next world and expressed Himself in the most emphatic manner that annihilation is not our destiny, but that we are created for an everlasting life, either of bliss or of torment. “And these shall go into everlasting punishment: but the just, into life everlasting.” (Matt. 25:46).

The body, taken from the earth, returns to dust; but the soul, the spirit breathed into man by his Creator, appears, after death, before God’s tribunal to be judged. The soul is immaterial, invisible, a spirit, created in the likeness of God, and immortal. As a child that resembles its parents is the image of its father or mother, because it has similar features, etc., thus man is the image of God, because he possesses similar (not the same) attributes as God. “And God created man to His own image.” (Gen. 1:27). Like God, man was to be pure, immaculate, an heir of the Kingdom of Heaven; he was to be gifted with great knowledge and to be
free from concupiscence, misery, pain, and even from death. Thus was the being, which is by nature an immortal spirit, endowed with reason and free will, gifted by the Creator with supernatural qualities. But sin destroyed the work of God. It dishonored Heaven and thinned out the ranks of the Angels; it destroyed Paradise and man’s eternal happiness, until the former was regained and the latter restored by the Son of God at the price of His Most Precious Blood.

Joseph was the saviour of Egypt from famine: Jesus Christ became the Saviour of mankind from eternal damnation. Joseph was persecuted by his brethren, ill-treated by them and sold for twenty pieces of silver; Jesus was betrayed by Judas, denied by Peter, and sold for thirty pieces of silver. After many trials and tribulations Joseph was placed over all Egypt, for Pharao said to him: “Seeing God hath shewn thee all that thou hast said, can I find one wiser and one like unto thee? Thou shalt be over my house, and at the commandment of thy mouth all the people shall obey: only in the kingly throne will I be above thee. And again Pharao said to Joseph: Behold I have appointed thee over the whole land of Egypt. And he took his ring from his own hand, and gave it into his hand: and he put upon him a robe of silk, and put a chain of gold about his neck. And he made him go up into his second chariot, the crier proclaiming that all should bow their knee before him, and that they should know he was made governor over the whole land of Egypt. And the king said to Joseph: I am Pharao; without thy commandment no man shall move hand or foot in all the land of Egypt. And he turned his name, and called him in the Egyptian tongue, the saviour of the world.” (Gen. 41:39-45). Now Joseph had power over life and death in the land of Egypt. To him all had to go that desired to escape the pangs of hunger; even his father and his brethren had to bow before him and accept of him the necessaries of life. Pharao’s order was, “Go to Joseph!” Although Joseph opened the full
granaries and provided Egypt with bread, yet those only were saved that made personal application to him and received the gift out of his own hand. Therefore all the people flocked to him; old and young, relatives and strangers, friends and foes, flocked to him from all countries to purchase provisions.

Our Lord Jesus Christ also had to suffer, and His sufferings were greater than those of Joseph in Egypt, because He was to be the Saviour of all mankind from eternal death. But He showed Himself as the "Wonderful," as the valiant Hero of whom Isaias foretells, "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: to them that dwelt in the region of the shadow of death, light is risen." (Is. 9:2). "For a Child is born to us, and a son is given us, and the government is on his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, God the Mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of peace. His empire shall be multiplied, and there shall be no end of peace: he shall sit upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it and strengthen it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth and forever." (Is. 9:6, 7)—Jesus "received from God the Father, honour and glory: this voice coming down to Him from the excellent glory: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him." (2 Peter 1:17). Jesus says of Himself: "All power is given to me in heaven and on earth." (Matt. 28:18)—"For which cause God also hath exalted Him, and hath given Him a name which is above all names: that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth and under the earth." (Phil. 2:9, 10). His victory was accomplished in sacrificial death. Redemption was achieved when Jesus, in view of Heaven and earth, exclaimed dying on the Cross, "It is consummated." (John 19:30).

Then death, man's eternal ruin caused by sin, was overcome through the victory of Christ, and life was restored by Him "Who was delivered up for our sins, and rose again for our justification." (Rom. 4:25). The
power of darkness was destroyed; mankind was delivered from disgraceful captivity; the abyss of Hell was closed and the gates of paradise were reopened. Christ’s treasury of atonement is superabundant and forever inexhaustible; it is not diminished or depleted even if millions upon millions draw from it grace upon grace, health and strength, light and life. As all the country flocked to Joseph, thus do men “of all nations, and tribes, and peoples” (Apoc. 7:9) come to Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, to obtain the eternal heritage of Heaven. Without the command of chaste Joseph “no man shall move hand or foot in all the land of Egypt”; without the will of Jesus Christ no man shall enter paradise recovered for us by Him. To attain salvation all must obey Him; we must personally use the means of grace instituted and ordained by Him; we must, moreover, cooperate with the graces He grants us. On this depends our eternal destiny.

Eternity! Eternity!—Heaven or Hell, one of the two we must choose by our lives. Because “the unjust”—such either by transgression or through unsatisfied justice—“shall not possess the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9), the ineffable mercy of God, in consideration of the merits of Jesus Christ, created, in the next world, a place of purification for those who, at the time of their death, are not entirely pure: this place is called Purgatory.

Purgatory

Between Heaven, “the place of refreshment, light and peace,” and Hell, the abode of eternal torment, there is, till the day of general judgment, a middle state, called Purgatory, for those souls that depart this life justified, but still in need of final purification. In this place of punishment and purification, of justice and mercy, dwell the souls that have venial sins to expiate, or temporal punishment to undergo, or both. The doctrine of the Catholic Church concerning Pur-
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Purgatory is expressed in the following two sentences:

1) There is, in the next world, a temporary place for the atonement of such venial sins, and temporal punishments of sin, as man is found guilty of on his departure from this world.

2) The faithful can, by prayer and good works, especially by the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, assist the souls suffering in Purgatory.

Concerning the location of Purgatory, the nature of its torments, the extent of its suffering, etc., the Church has made no official declarations, hence only the two above sentences are dogmas which we must believe under pain of excommunication. Nevertheless we should be guilty of culpable temerity if we were to reject the generally accepted doctrine of the holy Fathers and of notable spiritual writers relative to some other points concerning Purgatory.

In connection with the Catholic doctrine concerning Purgatory it is necessary to bear in mind the doctrine of remission of sins. With the remission of mortal sin there is necessarily connected the remission of its eternal punishment. But the case stands quite differently with regard to the *temporal* punishment of sin which God permits to remain even after the remission of its guilt. The sinner who committed a mortal sin and thereby became an enemy of God becomes, through the Sacrament of Penance, a friend, a child of God; his eternal punishment is condoned, but a temporal punishment remains. It is, however, the general doctrine of theologians that at least a part of the temporal punishment is remitted, every time, in the tribunal of penance, and that this part is in proportion to the contrition and penitent disposition of the repentant sinner. The remaining part must be atoned for in this world by penance, or in the next by the torments of Purgatory.

Both the temporal punishment yet due to sin remitted, and the stain of venial sin yet unremitted are, in the sight of God, a defilement of the soul. Venial sin,
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to which man is so prone, is not remitted by merely external works of penance without true contrition; its remission depends on the interior disposition of the penitent soul, on perfect charity, patience and resignation to the Will of God. "Whether remission is obtained gradually by means of repeated acts," says Deharbe (Explanation of the Catechism, vol. II. p. 409) "or at the parting of the soul from the body through one act of perfect charity, is a question on which theologians do not agree. Suarez defends the latter opinion, because such an act is followed by an increase of charity or sanctifying grace, and may be made so perfectly as to cleanse the soul from every inclination to sin."

We must not, however, conclude from this that all souls shall be excluded from the beatific vision of God until they shall have passed through the fiery furnace of Purgatory. Such a view is untenable. Unquestionably true as it is that many souls are banished forever from the presence of God immediately after the particular judgment, it cannot, on the other hand, be denied that they that were cleansed from all their faults in this life, soar up, after the particular judgment, into the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of peace, whose inhabitants are blissful in love.

Moreover, from the fact that a soul is sentenced to chastisement in Purgatory the conclusion is not to be drawn that it will be inferior in heavenly glory to souls admitted to Heaven without undergoing purification by fire. The most precious stones and metals sometimes need longer and more thorough purification than less valuable ones. The degree of their value depends on their interior worth and not on the dross and corrosion that surrounds them. Thus also the degree of heavenly glory depends on the merit of each saint. Thus it may happen that souls eminent for works of penance and full of merit, may nevertheless have to remain in Purgatory longer, and yet, after their purifi-
cation, they may attain to a higher degree of glory than such as were not in need of purification. Each one shall receive his reward according to his merit, after having paid the last farthing of his debt, being “purified as if by fire.”

The religious innovators of the last centuries, by denying the existence of Purgatory, made an attempt indefensible both before the tribunal of religion and of reason. They desire to replace this consoling doctrine by one more pleasing to the “father of lies,” only for the sake of innovation, and instigated by pride, avarice, envy, sensuality, etc. The rebels dare to weigh God’s mercy and judgment in the scales of their darkened reason. By rejecting prayer for the dead and the doctrine of temporal punishment of sin, they disrupt one of the most sacred bonds with which faith has encircled mankind, viz. the communion of saints. The Church Militant, Suffering and Triumphant in its entirety composes the Mystical Body of Christ, who is the Head, while the faithful are the members. The departed, then, who died in the Lord, are an integral part of this great Mystical Body, either as saints in Heaven, or as suffering souls in Purgatory. But the misguided innovators have only the darkness of the grave to place between the human heart and its departed loved ones. Their presumption is condemned by Divine Revelation and the constant Tradition of the Church, by the unanimous belief of all nations, and by non-Catholics themselves, by reason and by sentiment. Leaving these gloomy and rebellious men to deny the Suffering Souls a prayer, we shall seek to prove in the following pages how all nations and all ages concur in the sentiment: “There is a Purgatory; and ‘it is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins.’” (2 Mach. 12:46).
Sentiment

Like unto a mourning dove, the beloved Spouse of Christ, the Church, never interrupts her sighs and prayers for the faithful departed until they have arrived in the port of eternal bliss. She renews in Holy Mass our Divine Redeemer’s sacrificial death, offering it up to His Heavenly Father; she invites the Church Triumphant and the Church Militant to join in persevering prayer for the Church Suffering. What a consolation for the dying, what a reassurance for the living to profess a religion so comforting: consoling to the dying who, though cleansed from all mortal sin by the holy Sacraments, yet are uncertain whether they shall be found sufficiently pure, and worthy of Heaven, but rest assured that the Church Triumphant and Militant will come to their aid after death; comforting for their surviving friends, because they continue to show them their affection in case they should stand in need of their assistance in the purifying flames. Hence we can never be sufficiently thankful to God for having called us to a religion whose maternal care, charity and zeal goes beyond the confines of our earthly pilgrimage and follows us even after our eyes have been closed in death.

How sorely we feel the parting from our dear ones! When the dying husband bids farewell to his loving wife, recommending himself to her prayers; when affectionate children stand around the deathbed of a dear mother, listening to her parting words; when the death of a dear friend is announced to us, we are overwhelmed with sorrow; the smart of parting well-nigh breaks our heart. At such moments religion, with its heavenly consolation, comes to our aid, exhorting us to lift up our hands in supplication to our brethren of the Church Triumphant, to distribute with liberal charity among our suffering dear ones our prayers, alms and suffrages. How beautiful is this faith, how consoling this doctrine of the communion of saints!
Therefore, Christian soul, do not abandon yourself to sorrow; follow the advice of St. Paul, “Do not mourn as those who have no hope.” Remember the parting words of St. Monica to her son, St. Augustine, “Remember me at the altar of God!” Glancing at the battlefield of the Machabees, make an act of faith in the existence of Purgatory, saying with the inspired writer, “It is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from sins.”

Reason

Reason, when assisted by the higher light of revelation, gives us satisfactory evidence of the existence of a middle state, and, to our consolation, compels us to profess our belief in it. Our dissenting brethren ask: Why is it that souls who departed this life in the state of grace must nevertheless suffer so severely? Why must they, after having devoted their earthly career to true love of God, to the renunciation of all wickedness and worldly aspirations, after living in self-denial, justice and piety, why must they nevertheless suffer, why are they denied entrance into eternal bliss?—Let the inquirer rest assured that if it were not necessary, God would not permit it; for He finds no pleasure in the misfortune and pain of man, but in his salvation and eternal happiness. As a father will not hurt his child except in case of necessity, thus also our Heavenly Father will not hurt us except it be necessary for our true welfare.

God-fearing persons conscientiously avoid mortal sin; yet, either from a want of due vigilance or from human frailty, they commit venial faults which, trifling as they may appear, are punished by God; for Jesus says: “But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account for it in the day of judgment.” (Matt. 12:36). True, we know that these venial faults are blotted out by an act of contrition, and that they are remitted by voluntary acts of penance,
as well as in Confession: but nevertheless, may a person not be overtaken by death before having thus blotted them out, even before thinking of doing so? Then, when appearing before the tribunal of God, the soul is immediately confronted with its unatoned faults, and remembers with sorrow and terror its delinquencies. It acknowledges as supremely just the sentence of God condemning it to the purifying flames of Purgatory. And how will they fare whose faults approach in dangerous proximity to mortal sin? It is related of a poor woman that she sometimes covertly permitted her cow to graze in a neighbor’s field. It was rarely done, for she was very conscientious. The damage caused amounted to, perhaps, twenty cents a year. But as she continued the practice for nearly twenty years, the amount finally reached the sum of four dollars. Simple-minded as she was, she never thought of this. She died and appearing before her Judge, was reminded of her indebtedness. She is confused, can scarcely believe that she owes such a sum, but nevertheless it is so. In sorrow and contrition she acknowledges her fault, and goes to Purgatory for it.

We so often have little regard for small matters, and are thereby led to contract bad habits. Many a person is accustomed to complain of his hard lot and to regard himself as less fortunate than his neighbors: this is a fault which must be atoned for. Another is over-sensitive, and hangs his head when contradicted; or he is talkative and mixes in every conversation; or he is morose and vindictive, prone to making sharp remarks; another has contracted the habit of making only half genuflections before the Blessed Sacrament, etc., etc.; all these faults must be atoned for. Thus there is a number of faults, bad habits, weaknesses and negligences, of which even good Christians are guilty: they must be atoned for. For of Heaven Holy Scripture says; “There shall not enter into it anything defiled.” (Apoc. 21:27). Pure as gold chastened by fire must the soul be before it can be admitted to the beatific vision of God.
There are others who have been guilty of mortal sins, but returned to God before their death by a true conversion, obtaining forgiveness of their sins and remission of eternal punishment in the Sacrament of Penance. Divine justice nevertheless demands satisfaction for these remitted sins; some temporal punishment is due to them. This we see in Moses, Aaron and David, in St. Peter and in St. Mary Magdalen: God had forgiven them their sins together with the eternal punishment due to them; He Himself, or His prophets had assured them of pardon: yet He punished David by the death of the son born to him (2 Kgs. 12:14); He punished Moses and Aaron by denying them entrance into the promised land (Num. 20:12). All these servants of God, though freed from the guilt and eternal punishment of their sins, continued nevertheless to deplore them all their lives, and to atone for the temporal punishment due to them by penance. Yet, who can say whether they ever attained to a point when they could say truly: Now we have destroyed all the evil effects of our sins in ourselves and in others? According to the words of Christ, “Thou shall not go out from thence till thou repay the last farthing.” (Matt. 5:26).

Many die when they have scarcely begun their penance, others in the midst of it, others again at its end. Many a one who continued all through life in his wickedness, returns to God on his deathbed; he makes an act of contrition, confesses his sins and receives absolution, and feels happy at the thought that the burden of guilt is lifted from his soul. He dies, and is not condemned; but on his deathbed he neglected voluntary satisfaction and hence he is sentenced to undergo punishment in Purgatory. Entire satisfaction may be rendered in a short time: the Good Thief on the cross rendered sufficient satisfaction in his last moments to be admitted immediately into paradise. But many render but little satisfaction during a long time; numbers of people die without having even atoned for the sins of their youth: they must atone in Purgatory.
There is no doubt that in all these cases each one receives a gracious sentence; that all are saved because they died in the grace of God: but can they enter Heaven immediately? No; “there shall not enter into it anything defiled.” (Apoc. 21:27). Hence they are debarred from the beatific vision of God until they shall have been purified, and have rendered satisfaction to Divine Justice. Having glorified His mercy, God now illustrates His justice in them. This being so, we are compelled to admit the existence of a middle state, where the just undergo temporal punishment and render satisfaction. This is impossible either in Heaven or in Hell. In Heaven there is no pain or punishment; in Hell torment and punishment is everlasting: there sin is avenged, but not atoned for. Therefore the just, who as yet are not worthy of Heaven, but saved from Hell, must undergo their purification in a middle state, where God cleanses them by punishment and thus renders them capable of His beatific vision.

Hence reason, praising God’s mercy and justice, unites with the Catholic Church in the joyful declaration: “There is a Purgatory, and ‘therefore it is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins.’” (2 Mach. 12:46).

The Unanimous Concurrence of all Nations in the Belief of Purgatory

The doctrine of Purgatory being thus consonant with reason, even the heathens professed it; for what is easy of belief is accepted, at least in its fundamental theory, by all nations. Hence they all believed in the existence of a Supreme Being; so that Plutarch could refer to cities without walls and without laws, but was forced to declare that there were none to be found without belief in a deity to whom they zealously rendered homage and sacrifice. We find the doctrine of the creation of man, of the prevarication of our first parents, of the flood, etc., among the most savage and rude
nations. In the same manner, they all had some idea of a state of purification in the next world, however crude and perverted it might be. Thus we find this belief a part of the doctrine of the roaming savage who took with him on his predatory excursions the mortal remains of his father, and of the refined Greek and Roman, who scrupulously adhered to the customs by which he sought to placate the manes of the deceased. Widely as mourning customs differed, we find everywhere expiatory sacrifices for the dead, prayers for them: hence the holocausts, the cremations, the libations, offerings placed on tombs, funeral ceremonies, etc., as related in history. The Africans, the Chinese, the Japanese, the Celts and the Slavs professed their belief in purification in a middle state by the doctrine of the migration of souls, and of other modes of atonement. Similar views are found with the Esquimaux, Greenlanders, North American Indian tribes, etc., all concurring in the belief that the soul, on its way to Heaven, has to undergo many trials, in overcoming which the living can assist them by prayer, sacrifice and funeral celebrations.

Whence this universal sentiment which, though it does not appear everywhere with equal distinctness, yet is common to all? Undoubtedly these distorted views of an everlasting truth are founded in human reason which believes in the immortality of the soul and distinguishes between absolute purity and total depravity, between human frailty and obstinate perversity. Plato states the doctrine of paganism on this subject as follows: "As soon as the departed have arrived at the place to which they are conducted by demons, the separation of the just and holy from the wicked takes place. Those found to have led nearly a good life are conducted to the Great Lake to dwell there and atone for their faults till they are absolved. They whose condition is judged to be beyond remedy because of the wickedness of their transgressions, are plunged into Tartarus, whence they are never released. They whose
faults have been great, but remedied to some degree, are also plunged into Tartarus; but after remaining a year, the waves throw them ashore and they are transferred back to the Sea of Acherusia. If they are received there by them against whom they offended, their punishment is ended. They, however, that shall be found to have made great progress in holy life, escape all these prisons in the interior of the earth, and proceed to the pure abode above the earth.”

The Jews also, though accepting only the Old Testament, believe the doctrine of purification in the next world. They lay great stress on it, and are zealous defenders of its practice. For instance, with them a child is bound to say for a whole year a certain prayer called *Kadis* for his deceased father. When there are no children, strangers are paid to say this prayer. Josephus remarks that this custom is very ancient.

It is impossible that nations of such diversity of faith, morals, laws and languages should concur so unanimously in this one point, except they all drew from the same source, the fountain of truth. Here we may well say, *Vox populi vox Dei:* “The voice of the people is God’s voice.” This voice of all nations and tribes come to us from ages past, loudly attesting: “There is a Purgatory; and ’t is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins.’”

**Opponents of Purgatory**

While reason compels all nations to proclaim their unanimous belief in Purgatory, a certain class of gloomy and proud men, whose dull intelligence admits only of an intercourse through the medium of the senses, presumes to deny this consoling doctrine. It is deplorable to see men calling themselves Christians, and professing to have progressed far in general culture, walking in the darkness of unbelief. Like owls, whose eyes sparkle and shine but do not see in daytime, such men
surround themselves with the semblance of knowledge, deceiving by an appearance of brilliant scientific attainments, yet sitting in the dark. They do not see the day that dawned with Christ and advanced with the propagation of His doctrine till it now shines in meridian splendor. They resemble, says St. Ignatius, the fallen angels; for as these were incited to pride and brought to their fall by their sublime position, thus they are made enemies of Christ, enemies of revealed religion, by their pretended science and sham learning, thus sinking in the estimation of sound reason even below the most uncultured nations. For though it is not clearly demonstrated that the ancient Carthaginians, Egyptians, Celts, Slavs, etc., believed in Hell, yet there is no doubt that they believed in a state of purification after death. Whence this remarkable fact? St. Thomas Aquinas says, that while real science renders its possessor humble and makes all things except ourselves appear great, false science puffs up and shows everything as small and insignificant, except self. Hence we know of no other explanation but the senseless fanaticism of such as revolt in rabid haughtiness against the existing order of things, at the same time considering themselves too good, and others too wicked for Purgatory; which spirit is the result of singularity, prejudice and obstinate adhesion to preconceived ideas, and of a mean, narrow mind, intent on measuring divine things by the rule of dulled human perception. Thousands of souls were led into a labyrinth of error and unbelief by pride and presumptuous inquisitiveness regarding the mysteries of religion, by negligence in fulfilling their religious duties, by wickedness of life, by the reading of bad books and papers, by promiscuous association with scoffers at religion, with infidels, and with others whose company endangers faith.

And as even some so-called Catholics are presumptuous enough to doubt the consoling doctrine of Purgatory because, deluded by false logic, they believe the Church to be wrong on this point, we give a brief, com-
prehensive statement of the errors concerning Purgatory; in order that they may have a chance to recognize more easily their indefensible position, rise above their prejudices, and put to flight the serpent of pride and error.

The Gnostics of the first centuries of Christianity believed that the human soul is destined to free itself by degrees from the dominion of sensualism by going through a kind of purification here on earth. These heretics retained but little of Christianity, and their system had no place for Purgatory. For according to them the soul, once freed from the body and purified by earthly sufferings alone, returns to God in the realms of light, while everything else is engulfed in the darkness of eternal night.

In the fourth century, Aerius, a follower of the heresiarch Arius, called the doctrine of prayer for the dead immoral, claiming that it caused men to abandon themselves to vice and sin in the presumptuous hope that they were enabled, by gifts of money, to obtain the prayers and good works of others to escape punishment.

In the twelfth century, the Waldenses were at variance among themselves concerning the doctrine of Purgatory. The Albigenses and Catharers, who followed Gnostic views, and denied a future life in general almost universally, were logically bound to reject Purgatory. In southern France, the adherents of the apostate, Peter de Bruis, denied Purgatory, because they regarded themselves too good, and others too wicked for it.

Until then the enemy of God made use only of one or the other of the objections to Purgatory hitherto mentioned, in order to gain adherents opposing Purgatory. In the so-called Reformation of the sixteenth century, however, all these objections were united into one heresy denying the existence of Purgatory. For fifteen centuries the Church had offered up the Sacrifice of Expiation for the Suffering Souls, when Luther, an apostate monk, disturbed her peace and assailed her sacrifice by divulging a new doctrine. Of a morose
and bitter disposition, he attacked the Catholic doctrine of indulgences, thus assailing the clemency of his spiritual Mother. Logically, he was soon led to deny the efficacy of her intercession, thus robbing the faithful of the consolation of her prayers after death by declaring that man, once justified, had no need of satisfying Divine Justice either in this world or in the next. Hence he denied the efficacy of prayer for the dead, and consequently the existence of Purgatory. But as he thus proclaimed a doctrine rejected both by Catholic Faith and by reason, a doctrine that aimed at the same time at being consonant with divine truth and conniving at the sinful inclinations of man, hence Luther wavered in his position and in his teaching. Lies are unstable, but truth remains steadfast forever. "The lip of truth shall be steadfast for ever: but he that is a hasty witness, frameth a lying tongue." (Prov. 12:19). The Protestant theologian, Fritschel, in his "Review for Lutheran Theology and Church," mentions the conflicting views of Luther concerning the doctrine of Purgatory as follows: In 1518 and 1519 the "Reformer" declares the existence of Purgatory as undeniable, and insists on its acceptance. In the following years, until 1530, his views underwent a change. He wished to retain Purgatory, but was not willing that it should remain an article of faith, "because," he maintained, "its existence can neither be proved, nor ought it to be denied." Then, in 1530, Luther published a "Denial of Purgatory," a "powerful argument against this error," as Fritschel calls it. In the Schmalkaldian Articles of 1537, the heresiarch calls Purgatory a "Devil's Mask." Nevertheless, he again wavers on other occasions, and in 1543, permits the insertion of prayers for the dead in the official edition of his Church Directory. No wonder that Fritschel repeatedly calls Luther's position "remarkable." It must appear "remarkable" to every person capable of reasoning, no less so than the following prayer taken from his Directory: "O God, if the soul is in a condition to be assisted, I beseech Thee to
be gracious towards it.” Still more remarkable it is, that so many persons adhere to his wavering doctrine.

Calvin calls Purgatory “a dastardly invention of Satan, a blasphemy against Christ which annihilates His cross.” Yet he concedes that prayer for the dead is an ancient and pious custom, and says that the souls of the just are detained until the last day in the bosom of Abraham. (Lib. Inst. 3. 5).

Luther’s illogical error was the result of wounded pride, nourished by intemperance like fire is fed by fuel. Smothering reason through exciting the passions, he aroused in his followers the seven-headed hydra of vice, causing them to show less logic than the Esquimaux and Greenlanders, by rejecting the consoling doctrine of a middle state in the next world.

The views and speculations concerning Purgatory, which originated in the diverging doctrines of Protestantism, are too manifold to be noted here. It is sufficient to mention that some of its adherents admit Heaven and Hell alone, others a place of purification and Heaven, others again no Hell and no Purgatory, but Heaven alone.

Nevertheless there are, and always have been, a great many dissenters from the Catholic Church who, intent on living justly and uprightly, cultivate a profound logical religious sentiment, and hence agree with the learned Protestant Leibnitz who says: “It always was the teaching of the Church that they that have departed this life, though acceptable to God through Christ and therefore elected to eternal life, must sometimes suffer natural punishment or purification for their sins, especially if they have not cleansed themselves sufficiently from their faults while on earth. True, the holy Fathers do not agree as to the mode of purification; but nearly all agree in the opinion that after this life a paternal punishment or purification, whatever its nature may be, will take place, by which the souls, after their departure from the body, are enlightened, and then, convinced of the imperfection of their past
life and of the turpitude of sin, are filled with sorrow, and themselves desire it, unwilling to be admitted to the height of beatitude without having undergone it.” And he concludes: “It always was a doctrine of the Church that we should pray for the dead, because they receive assistance by our prayer.”

Collier, also a Protestant, remarks: “Prayer for the dead is one of the most ancient and best authenticated practices of religion. It quickens the belief in the immortality of the soul, draws the veil of darkness from the grave, and joins this world with the next. Had it been retained, most likely we should not have experienced so much skepticism and unbelief among us. I cannot find a reason why a dissenting Church, which cannot claim supernatural gifts, and is quite foreign to the early ages of Christianity, has rejected, or permitted the neglect of, a custom which is not condemned.” True, the so-called Reformers, if they would be logical, could not admit Purgatory; but it was a rather hazardous proceeding to draw, by mere deduction, a negation of truths so firmly rooted in faith and so consonant with reason and sentiment. Hence the untenable position of Protestantism, which loudly proclaims to the world that despite its doctrinal negation, many of its adherents unite with the Catholic Church in declaring: “There is a Purgatory; ‘it is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from sins.’” (2 Mach. 12:46).

**Uninterrupted Tradition of the Church and Purgatory**

Protestants admit that the belief in purification after death, and the custom of praying for the dead, were both universal in the Church for fifteen centuries. And indeed, if we would but go to the trouble of examining the pages of history, we should find the view correct, as a few proofs from the writings of the holy Fathers, the inscriptions in the catacombs and the
decrees of the councils of the Church will show.

St. Chrysostom, in his third homily, says: “The Apostles did not ordain without good reason a commemoration of the departed to be made during the celebration of the sacred mysteries; for from it the deceased draw great gain and help. Why should our prayers for them not placate God, when, besides the priest, the whole people stand with uplifted hands whilst the august Victim is present on the altar? True, it is offered only for such as departed hence in the Faith.” St. Gregory of Nyssa writes: “The Apostles and disciples of Christ have handed down to us what since has obtained the force of law everywhere in the Church of God, namely that the memory of those that died in the true Faith be recalled in the celebration of the sacred and illustrious mystery.” In the fourth century, St. Jerome presents to our view the pious Pammachius mourning over the mortal remains of his consort, less with tears than with prayer and by alms. St. Augustine relates with touching emotion the parting words of his mother, St. Monica: “Lay this body anywhere; be not concerned about that. Only this I beg of you, that wheresoever you be, you make remembrance of me at the Lord's altar.” Even as early as the second century, Tertullian wrote: “On the anniversaries of the dead we offer the Holy Sacrifice for the departed. Even though Scripture did not warrant this, the custom originates in Tradition; it was confirmed by universal adoption and sanctioned by faith.”

A touching proof of the belief that the living are able to help the dead is found in the history of St. Perpetua. She beheld her own brother Dinocrates, seven years of age, in the torments of Purgatory. The Saint continued assiduously in prayer for him, and in a new vision saw his pain gradually lessened, until he finally appeared to her with a luminous countenance leaving the place of his suffering to engage in childish sport. “I then awoke,” she remarks, “and knew that my brother’s punishment was over.”
The catacombs, the subterranean tombs of the martyrs, give eloquent testimony of the belief in Purgatory, which is all the more impressive because it leads us back to the very cradle of the Church, to the bloody persecutions overcome by the faith and virtue of thousands and thousands of victims. A number of renowned cemeteries, for instance that of SS. Peter and Paul, of St. Priscilla, St. Domitilla, etc., date back to the first century, to the very time of the Apostles, and the others are as old as the second and third century. In the numerous inscriptions found there, abundant proof of the belief in Purgatory is expressed in prayers for the departed. For instance: “Here, dearest son, thy life has come to an end. But Thee, O Heavenly Father, we implore to have mercy, to take pity on the sufferings of our dear one, through Christ, Our Lord.” “To Lucifera! Whosoever of the brethren chances to read this, let him pray to God to take unto Himself her holy and pure spirit.” “Eternal light shine upon thee, Timothea, in Christ!” Verily, the reading of these few specimens among the hundreds of inscriptions dating from the first centuries, present to us in a true mirror the reflection of the faith of the Church of our own times.

But how strange! Dissenters ask us to regard Purgatory as a mere conjecture, which received its form and shape by SS. Gregory and Augustine, and by later Councils. In return, the Church points to her constant Tradition, as embodied in her ordinances and customs, and triumphantly vindicates the doctrine of Purgatory by her councils.

Long ago, the Council of Carthage recommended prayers for the dead; the same was done by the Roman Synod, in 502; by the Synod of Orleans, in 533; by the Council of Braga, in 563; by the Council of Toledo, in 675; by the Synod of Chalons, in 813; by the Synod of Worms, in 868. The second Council of Lyons, in 1274, says: “The Holy Roman Church declares and teaches, that when truly penitent souls die in charity before they have atoned for their faults of commission and
omission by worthy fruits of penance, they are purified after death in the torments of Purgatory.” The Council of Florence, in 1439, states the same doctrine in the very words of the Lyonese Council. Finally, the Council of Trent (Session VI. 22, 25), declares formally, first, that the faithful are able to assist the souls detained in Purgatory by their prayer and by the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Moreover, it threatens with excommunication those who affirm that after receiving the grace of justification the penitent sinner’s debt and eternal punishment are remitted in such a manner, that no temporal punishment remains to be undergone in Purgatory.

Thus the belief in Purgatory is clearly and unmistakably expressed in the writings of the holy Fathers, by the testimony of the Catacombs, and the decrees of the Councils. Besides eternal Heaven for undefiled souls; besides everlasting Hell for souls departing with the guilt of mortal sin on them, there is a middle state—Purgatory. Hence: “It is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins.” (2 Mach. 12:46).

**Divine Revelation and Purgatory**

The Council of Trent, assembled for the defense and vindication of the ancient Faith, branded the audacious innovators of the 16th century with the note of excommunication, condemning their nefarious doctrine, and reaffirming Catholic belief in Purgatory. By the declaration of this dogma the Church did not invent a new doctrine, but simply sustained and made an authentic declaration of the faith founded on ancient Tradition and on Holy Scripture. She set the seal of her divine authority on it, sustained it by her authoritative declaration, and thus consummated our consolation by her authentic evidence for the existence of Purgatory.

In Holy Scripture we find this evidence even in the
Book of Genesis. It informs us that Joseph, on his father's death, ordered the Egyptians to hold a mourning celebration of seventy days, and a funeral celebration of seven days. In the First Book of Kings we read that the inhabitants of Jabez Galaad fasted seven days at the death of Saul, Jonathan and Abner. The learned divines Suarez and Bellarmine declare in conformity with the holy Fathers, that these practices are not to be understood simply as expressions of mourning alone, but must be regarded also as suffrages for the dead. If fasting was nothing but an expression of sorrow, it is difficult to explain why David fasted during the illness of his child, but ceased to fast immediately after its death. It is evident that he was of the opinion that a continuance of his fast was no longer to any purpose, because the child, having died in innocence, was no longer in need of prayer, and good works. The royal prophet describes in a touching manner the doctrine of Purgatory when he refers to the ineffable bliss of those souls that, having passed through the flood and fire of affliction, at length have found the long desired deliverance. The prophet Micheas takes comfort in advance in the consolations of Purgatory, saying: “I will bear the wrath of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him, until He judge my cause and execute judgment for me: He will bring me forth into the light.” (Mich. 7:9). Hence the declaration of Ecclesiasticus (7:37): “A gift hath grace in the sight of all the living, and restrain not grace from the dead.” One hundred and fifty years before the light of the Gospel shed its saving rays on the world, belief in Purgatory finds unmistakable expression in the history of the victorious Machabee, Judas. This renowned hero, having lost a great number of warriors in battle, is not content with honoring them by a pompous burial: he orders a collection to be made, and sends the proceeds—twelve hundred drachms of silver—to Jerusalem, to have sacrifice offered for the deceased. “For,” adds the inspired writer, “if he had not hoped
that they that were slain should rise again, it would have seemed superfluous and vain to pray for the dead. And because he considered that they who had fallen asleep with godliness, had great grace laid up for them. It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins.” (2 Mach. 12:44-46). Holy Scripture itself, then, draws from the action of this chieftain the conclusion that Purgatory exists, and that our prayers and sacrifices are accepted in suffrage for the release of the departed.

Our Lord Himself, though He was most zealous in correcting abuses, and well knew that the Jews prayed for the dead, not only did not interfere with this practice, but confirmed it. For He said, “And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but he that shall speak against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in the world to come.” (Matt. 12:32). From these words SS. Augustine, Gregory the Great, Bernard, the Venerable Bede and others conclude as follows: Whatsoever may be the nature of this speaking against the Holy Ghost mentioned here as an unpardonable sin, whether it be understood as referring to the obstinacy of the Jews or of the unbelievers in resisting the acknowledged truth: one certain, clear and indisputable fact follows from this passage of the Gospel by the very exception made in it: it proves convincingly that certain sins are forgiven in the next world. Now this forgiveness is not obtainable in Heaven, because sin does not gain admittance there, nor in Hell, where there is no redemption. There is only one possibility: these sins are forgiven in Purgatory—hence there is a Purgatory.

Moreover, Our Lord exhorts us: “Be at agreement with thy adversary betimes, whilst thou art in the way with him: lest perhaps the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Amen I say to thee, thou shalt not go out from thence till thou repay the last far-
thing." (Matt. 5:25, 26). Many holy Fathers, among them Origen, St. Jerome, St. Ambrose and others, declare that this passage is to be understood not only as referring to a place of eternal punishment, but also to one of temporal atonement in the next world, because deliverance is promised to those that “repay the last far-

The doctrine of the Apostles agrees with that of their divine Master. Like Him, they never reproved the Jews for believing in a middle state, nor did they ever prohibit prayers for the dead. St. Paul mentioning the Jewish custom of pious practices for the dead, refers to these as to a baptism, or religious rite, and draws therefrom the conclusion of a future resurrection. He writes, “What shall they do that are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not again at all? why are they then baptized for them?” (1 Cor. 15:29). Thus he teaches us that the custom of praying for the dead is one beneficial to them, and hence to be retained by the Christians. But if there were only Heaven and Hell in the next world, such prayers would be unprofitable.

St. Paul affirms this doctrine still more explicitly when he teaches that there are faithful who attain Heaven by fire, or, to use his own words, they “shall be saved, yet so as by fire.” (1 Cor. 3:15). According to the Apostle there are such as make Christ the foundation of their salvation, but build on this foundation an edifice of wood, hay or stubble, that is, they believe in Christ, but mix many imperfections with their good works. “If any man’s work abide, which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work burn, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.” (1 Cor. 3:14-15). “The fire shall try every man’s work, of what sort it is,” whether “gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble.” (1 Cor. 3:12, 13). The holy Fathers remark that by gold, silver and precious stones are meant good works, by wood, hay and stubble venial sins and imperfections. Hence St. Augustine says, “Punish me in Thy wrath, that I may
be cleansed in this world, and so transformed that I shall not stand in need of the purifying flames like those that are ‘saved as if by fire.’ Whence this? Because they built on the foundation with wood, hay and stubble here below. Had they built with gold, silver and precious stones, they would be safe from both fires, not only from the everlasting one that shall torment the wicked forever, but also from the one that purifies those that are saved by fire.” The learned commentator Allioli, explaining the above words of St. Paul, says: “Remark well, the fire of which the Apostle speaks cannot be understood to mean the tribulations of this world; for he speaks of a fire burning on the day of judgment, consequently after the time of this life. It cannot be understood to mean the great examination by the Judge, for you are not only examined, but made to burn, so that you suffer by fire. It cannot mean the fire of Hell; because he that suffers by the fire mentioned is saved after suffering loss. It can be understood only as meaning the cleansing fire after death called Purgatory, which burns the soul departed in imperfections, during the time of cleansing, and shall be extinguished at the general judgment in the destruction of the world.” Our works, then, shall be subject to examination; they shall be cleansed from every base alloy in the flames enkindled by divine wrath, the same as gold and silver are purified in the crucible of the refiner. Hence the learned Bellarmine remarks, “It is a doctrine held in common by all divines, that in this passage the words, ‘by fire’ are to be understood as referring to a temporal fire of purification, to which they are sentenced after death, who, according to the verdict of their particular judgment, have built with wood, hay and stubble. This explanation is not only warranted by the text, but agrees with the general opinion of the Fathers.” The renowned theologian then adduces the testimony of SS. Cyprian, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Gregory, Anselm, Thomas, Bonaventure, etc. St. Paul himself gave us the example of praying for
the dead. Having received hospitality at Rome in the house of Onesiphorus, he reminds his disciple Timothy of it, saying: “The Lord give mercy to the house of Onesiphorus: because he hath often refreshed me, and hath not been ashamed of my chain . . . The Lord grant unto him to find mercy of the Lord in that day.” (2 Tim. 1:16, 18). Allioli remarks: “The Apostle does not send greeting to Onesiphorus when speaking of his past merits, but to his family. For the deserving man himself he prays that the Lord grant mercy unto him on the day of judgment. Hence it is apparent that at that time the good man was dead, and that the Apostle teaches us by his example to offer up suffrages and prayers for the souls of those that died in the Lord: this, however, can be done only if we believe in a middle state—Purgatory.”

Hence the existence of Purgatory, demonstrated and proved as it is by reason, revelation and theological evidence, is an accepted Catholic dogma. It is a doctrine contained so unmistakably clear in the sources of revelation, in Scripture and Tradition, and is presented so concisely as the outcome of faith in eternal reward and punishment, that it would be a Catholic dogma even if it had not been declared as such by the authority of the Church. It is a dogma because there is indisputable evidence that the whole Church, in all ages and in all countries, accepted it as such, and because it was declared as such by the solemn declaration of the Church’s supreme teaching authority.

The doctrine of Purgatory does away with the foolhardy doctrine of the soul’s mortality; it convinces us that death is but a transient occurrence. “In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die: and their departure was taken for misery . . . Afflicted in few things, in many they shall be well rewarded: because God hath tried them, and found them worthy of Himself” (Wis. 3:2, 5), so that He will not destroy their souls. “My soul shall live.” (Ps. 118:175). For God solves the mortal bonds of the just only to lead them to the place of
purification. “As gold in the furnace He hath proved them, and as a victim of a holocaust He hath received them” (Wis. 3:6) to open for them the portals of the abode of refreshment, light and peace. “For grace and peace is to His elect.” (Wis. 3:9).

We love to hear this doctrine. It brings us consolation in affliction; it renders easy the sacrifices we have to make for virtue; it moves us to joyous praise of the Lord’s justice and mercy; it makes us love our Faith; it elevates us above ourselves and transports us into the land of the living, that is, into the regions of immortality, into the Church Suffering and Triumphant. On the other hand, denial of this doctrine brings death. Bellarmine observes: “The doctrine of the existence of Purgatory is so Catholic a dogma, that they who nevertheless deny it assuredly have to fear not Purgatory, but rather the flames of Hell.”

And thus we hear faith and nature, all nations and all ages proclaim for the welfare of mankind: “It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins.” (2 Mach. 12:46).