

November is the Month during which the Infallible, Catholic Church prays especially for the Faithful Departed souls still in Purgatory. It will be helpful to review the following information. The following information is taken from the book written over a hundred years ago:

Thoughts for all times by Right Rev. Mgr. John Vaughan.

Imprimatur – Herbertus Cardinalis Vaughan. 1899.

The Shadow of Sin, Or the Reasonableness of the Doctrine of Purgatory

When a mariner has lost his chart and compass, and finds himself the sport of wind and wave, he is glad to direct his bark across the troubled waters by the faint and flickering gleam of the distant stars; so, too, men who have lost the Faith, and who know nothing of the infallible authority of the Church, are glad to appeal to mere human reason to pilot them over the dangerous and turgid ocean of life.

Indeed, a non Catholic possesses no other authority to which he can appeal; and is therefore perfectly justified in satisfying himself of the Church's claims before submitting to her teaching. But when once he has satisfied himself of her claims, when once he is reasonably convinced of her Divine commission to teach all nations, from that moment reason ceases to be the supreme arbiter of right and wrong, of truth and falsehood, of justice and injustice. He possesses a surer, a higher, a more trustworthy guide. One whose voice is infallible, and whose words, though uttered in human accents, are no other than the words of God Himself. "Who heareth you, heareth Me, and who despiseth you, despiseth Me."

One who believes a doctrine merely because it is reasonable, because it satisfies his mind, or because it sounds plausible, may be a most excellent Protestant, and may act fully up to the principle of private judgment, but he is no Catholic. The faith of a Catholic rests upon much higher grounds than mere reason. Whatever the Church teaches will of course be reasonable, because it is true, but whereas with a Catholic a doctrine is *reasonable because it is true*, with a Protestant *it is true because it is reasonable*. As an instance in point we may refer to the doctrine of Purgatory. Though it has been scoffed at, and derided, and turned out of doors, and misrepresented and caricatured, we know it to be true, because we have the Church's warrant for it, and the Church is "the pillar and ground of truth". But, on the other hand, if it be true, it must of necessity be reasonable likewise; and the task before us now is to make this fact clear—to show even according to unaided human reason and common sense that it is a necessary postulate; that, in short, to deny Purgatory is impossible, without doing violence to reason.

If we look out upon the world and examine the lives of different men we shall find that they fall naturally into three distinct groups. The first is but a small one. It consists of those highly-favoured souls, few and rare, who spring up perfect creations of Divine grace and power; souls around whom an altogether special providence seems to keep guard: whom God never seems to let out of His hands, even for an instant; but whom He shields from every danger, and saves from every fall: souls indeed who almost seem out of place in this dark, sinful, woe-begotten world of ours, so pure, so spotless and so unspeakably bright do

they appear! They are, as it were, the picked fruit, the choice specimens of earth, made, one might almost fancy, for the express purpose of exhibiting the power and omnipotence of God's protective love and fostering care. Such was St. John the Baptist, sanctified in his mother's womb; and St. John, "the disciple whom Jesus loved," and who laid his head on His Master's breast: such also was the chaste and gentle St. Joseph, the foster-father of Christ; and such, above all and before all and beyond all, was the Virgin immaculate and all pure, whose very name carries with it an aroma of sweetness and perfection, inspiring joy and gladness. Souls upon whom the shadow of sin has never fallen; who were ever faithful to grace and loyal to God; who grew in years only to grow in sanctity and perfection. These form the first division of the human family. What becomes of them? Where is their dwelling-place and their home? Ah! with them to die is to go to God. To die is to be set free. Death is but the passage from earth to Heaven: but the rending of the veil that shuts out the beautiful vision of eternal peace. No earthly tie detains them, no human bond holds them back. The hour of their demise registers the hour of their triumph: they quit the earth only to enter at once into the joy of the Lord. Or rather, they had never *really* been parted from God. All their lives long they had been nestling on His breast, and reposing securely in His arms, and death to them was only as the gentle shock with which we awaken a sleeping child—they opened their eyes only to gaze entranced and enraptured full on the beautiful face of Him they loved.

II. Then there is another class who form a marked contrast to these. A class consisting of men without religion and without love: men who make up what the Scripture calls the "World" when it says, "The world is the enemy of God. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him," etc. These are persons who may be honoured, esteemed, and made much of by men. They may dwell in rich houses and sumptuous palaces, and may have many friends and a wide acquaintance and considerable influence; they may be much spoken of, and flattered and sought after, but their souls are steeped in iniquity. Men who know not God, and do not care to know Him, but who pass their lives in sin, and spend their years in forging for themselves chains which eternity will not wear through, and fetters which will hold them fast in the dungeons of hell for ever.

Those who die at enmity with God, who depart hence with mortal sin in their heart, unrepented and unconfessed, sink at once into the lake of fire, to begin a term of suffering which knows no end; and to be living witnesses throughout all future ages to God's irresistible power and His undying hatred of sin.

Were these two the only classes there would be little difficulty in dispensing with a Purgatory. Just as the first class of mankind that we have considered rise at once to Heaven, so this last sinks at once to hell. There is no difficulty so far.

III. But, in addition to the absolutely spotless and the manifestly reprobate, is there not another and a larger body of Christians who can be classed under neither of these categories? Who have neither the perfection of the first nor the diabolical wickedness of the last. Persons who are neither strikingly virtuous nor strikingly vicious, who do not arrest our attention or make us pause to marvel either at their piety on the one hand, or their deprav-

ity on the other. Men of ordinary virtue; of decent, regular lives; honest, sober, truthful, modest; men who have their faults and their failings, and who are striving with a greater or less earnestness against them; men who fall, and perhaps occasionally fall grievously, but who struggle up again, and go on their way resolved to do better. What is to become of such as these when they come to die? Suppose death were suddenly to overtake them, into what invisible region would their souls wing their flight? Would they ascend at once, all stained and be-spattered with the slime of earthly imperfection, into the very bosom of God? Or must we perforce consign them straight away to the land of eternal darkness and to the pool of quenchless fire? Is there no third alternative? According to the popular Protestant teaching there is not.

We will take a typical case. Suppose a man living in the great dreary city of London, or Liverpool, or Manchester—a married man, of mature age. He is a lawyer, or a doctor, or a man of business. He spends the greater part of the day in the exercise of his profession or trade. He enjoys life; he shares its amusements and its recreations; he is respected and trusted, and has many friends. His business will not permit him much time for religious practices, though it must be confessed that he gives less even than he might. He goes to Mass, at least on Sundays, though he studiously avoids the sermon; he says his morning and evening prayers, but he would rather we did not inquire too nicely into the fervour and earnestness that accompanies them; he confesses his sins, but his purposes of amendment are not very firm, and he takes no great trouble to atone for sin by any self-imposed penance.

He has his faults, and he is not altogether unconscious of them; nay, he regrets them, though he may not make any sustained effort to overcome them. Then he is irritable, or quarrelsome, or harsh to his subordinates, or uncharitable and censorious in his conversation, or he is too unmeasured and unrestrained with his tongue. He falls into many imperfections, he commits many venial sins. Then he is much engrossed with things of time; much preoccupied with the affairs of daily life. In a word, he is a man of ordinary virtue—one of the masses; an average Catholic, living for God, but not at all indifferent to the opinions of men; determined to please God, yet not by any means inclined to despise the favour and the smile of the world; resolved to walk to God, yet always taking a circuitous route. He is one who dreads mortal sin, and stands in fear of its consequences, but who is not likely to distress himself much about lesser faults.

Such a man is no saint; indeed, he makes no pretensions to sanctity; he does not profess to be a model; he is a traveler wending his way along the dusty road of life; his feet are bruised with many a stone, and torn and gashed with many a brier. At last he reaches the end of his journey; sickness comes, and his term of trial is nearly over. He lies on the bed of death, his end approaches; at last he dies . . . he dies—as men generally die—that is to say, *as he lived*. His death is, in fact, what deaths almost invariably are, an abridgment, an epitome of life: it is good, not perfect. We rejoice that it is no worse, though we might wish it were better: it inspires us with confidence and hope, but it is not the death of a saint. Nor can it be! The soul does not undergo a sudden transformation during its last

hours: there is no sudden leap from a state of incipient love to a state of perfect charity. Imperfections and faults of character, the growth possibly of years, still cling by a thousand invisible tendrils to the soul: nor are they shaken off in a moment. There is no sudden change, or, if there be, the mere approach of death or the weariness of pain is not enough to produce it. And so his earthly course draws to a close.

Here I have sketched, as though with a few hasty strokes of the pencil, a typical man. One who may be said to represent a considerable number. In fact (if we confine our thoughts to Catholics), it probably covers the majority of cases. We ourselves must surely come under the number, for if we dare not aspire to the innocence of a St. John the Baptist, so neither shall we consent to take our stand among the reprobate. Indeed, we may say that this class is made up of myriads? But now the question arises: What is to become of these myriads? Where are we to place men such as the one whose character I have roughly drawn?

Were we Protestants of the ordinary type we should be sorely perplexed, for they permit only heaven and hell, and he is as little fitted for the one place as for the other. They place us in a most awkward dilemma so long as they allow us but the two alternatives.

Is he then to be borne straight to heaven, without any previous purification, without any cleansing or preparation? Is this soul, the abode of a thousand imperfections and small vices and failings, to take its stand at once among the glorious citizens of the city of God? Is heaven, the abode of "the just made perfect," to harbour a creature who has that within him which is odious and revolting in the sight of the Most High? That which savours of weakness and infirmity, of disobedience and self-will? Evidently not! The words of the Holy Ghost Himself are eminently explicit upon this point. God declares, in unmistakable language, that "NOTHING DEFILED SHALL ENTER HEAVEN." Nothing defiled. No! not a stain or a blot, be it but of a sin of thought, or a hasty word, however passing, however momentary; if but a particle of earthly dust or defilement still adhere to the soul, it may not, it cannot enter.

However slight the defilement may be, it holds it back; it stands as a lion in its path: it rises up before it as a wall of brass; it checks its passage like a deep angry torrent roaring defiance as it rushes down its rocky bed. Though the soul presses forward, though it trembles in its love and eager haste to fling itself into the arms of God— yea! though it would die of very anguish, were it mortal, to find itself thrust back, and impeded from plunging and losing itself in the ocean of God's inexpressible delights. It is, nevertheless, withheld by its sins—possibly by a single sin, and that a small, a light, a trifling one. How the soul is wrung with anguish; how its heart is pierced with pain; how its whole mind and innermost being is burning and writhing in the flames of unsatisfied desires, to be united with the one supreme end for which it was created—for God, whose inexpressible Beauty and infinite Love it is beginning, for the first time, to know something about. But no! It cannot enter yet. It is still a debtor to God's justice, and it may not go from hence till it has satisfied its entire debt. "Amen, amen, I say to you; you shall not go out from hence until you have paid the last farthing."

No; as a venial offence, *i.e.*, a little impatience, kept Moses from the promised land, so will any small fault debar a soul from heaven. Nothing else could check Moses, the great leader of God's people; nothing but sin could prevail over him, or detain him on his way. He prevailed triumphantly over all other obstacles. The long journey, the arid desert, the fiery serpents could not hinder his onward march. Even the sea itself—the great sea before which the mightiest pause and rein up, receded at his approach, and stood up like a wall on either side to let him pass. Yet he, whom neither Pharaoh, nor his army, nor the arid desert, nor the deep sea, could stay in his onward course, was held fast and kept in bondage by a single venial fault, and prevented from entering the promised land.

And so it is with the Eden of the future, the heaven above, the least offence will check our immediate entry.

No one, who reflects upon what heaven is, would allow for a moment that an ordinary average Christian can enter at once into its possession. For what *is* heaven in its essence and substance? What constitutes the ecstatic joys of heaven? What do we mean by heaven?

Heaven is the inseparable union of God the infinite Creator with man, His fragile and lowly creature. It is the union between God and the soul. A union so close and intimate that the world has nothing to which we can compare it. It is without example and without parallel: unique and *sui generis*—(a) the soul loses itself in God without forfeiting its identity; (b) it becomes all God-like and Divine without ceasing to be human; (c) it shares in the knowledge and the power and the beauty and the holiness of God, and is made in a wholly inexpressible and sublime sense “a participator in the Divine nature,” to use the bold expression of the apostle. What this union is we can neither imagine nor describe. “Eye hath not seen it, ear hath not heard it, the heart cannot fathom it, words cannot picture it, the mind cannot conceive it.” All we know is, that in it consists the essential bliss of heaven, a bliss so excessive, so overpowering, that without it all other joys are empty, illusory and unsatisfying.

Now, who will dare to say that God would so unite with Himself any soul not perfectly spotless? Who will assert that Infinite Purity and Holiness would extend His arms and draw to His side, and press to His bosom, aught that is defiled or stained, or sinful, or impure? He knows little of God, who imagines that there can be any such union between light and darkness, between truth and falsehood, beauty and deformity. No! whatever else may be said of such imperfect and sin-stained souls, one thing at least is clear and patent and beyond dispute, and that is, till cleansed they can never enter heaven; never lose themselves in God, or enjoy the society of the saints. Never while God continues to be what He is; never while He is the infinite Sanctity, and the uncreated Goodness.

Then, must we say that all these souls are to be condemned to the quenchless flames of hell? Are all but the very highest of the canonized saints to pass their eternity in the prison-house of God's wrath? Are the ordinary painstaking, honest, God-fearing members of the Church to be eternally lost because they are not heroes of sanctity, and mirrors of innocence and holiness? Are those who fill our Churches and frequent the Sacraments and obey, at least in the main, all the commandments, to be damned? Are all but a solitary saint

here and there to be cast away utterly? This would seem to be the logical consequence if we accept the teaching of those who deny purgatory. This is the awful conclusion to which a rejection of purgatory must inevitably lead us. For reason itself rebels at the notion of the imperfect being admitted to the embraces of God; our whole sense of God's inaccessible purity and holiness is shocked at the very suggestion of such a union. We may not, we cannot entertain it: the notion is insupportable. So that *if* hell be the only alternative, to hell they must go: if the bottomless pit be the only other abode, *then* that must be their dwelling-place for ever and ever.

Ah! what a doctrine! A doctrine to freeze up the blood in one's veins; a doctrine without reason as it is without love. The fruit of the tree of heresy is indeed bitter; it is as gall and wormwood, and the breath of dragons; it can satisfy neither head nor heart.

How different is the sound Catholic doctrine! It neither outrages God's holiness on the one hand, by sending sinners directly into His presence, nor His mercy, on the other hand, by ejecting them directly into hell.

It declares that souls who depart this life with the stain of venial sin, or with forgiven mortal sins not fully atoned for, are detained for a season— for a longer or shorter period—according to their guilt, in the flames of purgatory, where they are cleansed from every defilement and every spot, and prepared for heaven. There they suffer the pangs of ungratified desire; there they are desolate with grief, because their sojourn is prolonged; there they are grievously afflicted because He who is to be their “reward exceeding great” is far from them, and they are shut out and deprived for a time of their inheritance and portion in the land of the living. They thirst after Him whom their souls love, as the parched land thirsts for the autumn rains; they long for Him as the weary traveler longs for refreshment and shade; they pine for His possession as a mother pines for her lost, and only son; they are sick with grief as the bride when the bridegroom tarries. Ah! who will describe their anguish, who will express their bitterness? **THEIR LOVE IS THE MEASURE OF THEIR DISTRESS; AND IN SO FAR AS A FINITE NATURE WILL PERMIT, THEIR LOVE IS PROPORTIONED TO ITS OBJECT; AND ITS OBJECT IS THE INFINITE GOD.** God the unlimited, the boundless, the only absolute beauty. To measure their grief, then, we must measure God's loveliness; to gauge the depth of their pain we must sound the bottomless abyss of God's perfections. But who can do this? Let it suffice, then, to say that their pains are beyond all computation, and exceed all thought and power of utterance. Such, then, is the doctrine of the Church of Christ.

What a perfect flood of light it casts over the being of God. Into what startling relief it brings out the dazzling brightness of His purity which cannot suffer a sin-stained soul to approach it. How wondrously it reveals His hatred of sin and His abhorrence of all defilement! How it lights up, in a word, the whole position of God, and points to Him as the centre and circumference, the beginning and end, the Alpha and Omega of all things! All things become desirable or undesirable, pleasant or unpleasant, good or bad, merely as related to Him. His attitude determines and regulates all things, gives to them their fairness and attractions, clothes them with grace and beauty, and makes them what they are.

What is heaven itself? God securely possessed. What is hell? God eternally lost. And what is purgatory? God hidden: hidden for a time, as the sun is hidden by the passing clouds. When God is thus hidden, then the soul is deprived of light and warmth and beauty and comeliness, as the earth is deprived of beauty when night lies thick over mountain, plain, and valley.

We may aid our suffering brethren by our prayers and sacrifices. These imprisoned souls are no strangers to us, but most dear and honoured friends. Heresy, thank God, has built up no impassable barrier between *us* and those we once knew and loved, and who have now passed away. They are still our friends, yea, more our friends than ever, and we may still extend towards them a helping hand in the hour of their trial. Let us hearken to their cry, "Have pity on me, at least you my friends," and do our best to succour them.

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