

The Roman Catholic Doctrine of Purgatory by Jack Cottrell

How does the biblical teaching on the intermediate state relate to the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory? We should note first that in Catholicism purgatory has nothing to do with Hades. Only the spirits of the lost go to Hades, and only the spirits of the saved go to purgatory. All who are in purgatory will eventually be in heaven. It is a step toward heaven, not hell. It is an instrument of salvation, not condemnation. The idea is simply this, that many if not most saved people when they die still have some remains of sin that have to be worked off or purged out of their system. This may include some vestiges of sinfulness, or even some temporal penalties for minor sins that were not fully forgiven in this life. Hence the need for a proportionate period of redemptive suffering to be endured before one is worthy of heaven.

This doctrine must be rejected as inconsistent with the biblical teaching on the intermediate state. The main Catholic proof text for purgatory is not even in the canonical Bible; it is in the Apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees (12:42–45). Every canonical Scripture that pictures the state of believers in the afterlife portrays them as experiencing joy and bliss in the very presence of God or Christ. There is no text whatsoever that depicts a period of suffering for the saved. Also, no text suggests any kind of distinction among saved saints on the other side of death. All are depicted as “spirits of the righteous made perfect” (Heb 12:23).

Most significantly, though, the doctrine of purgatory must be rejected because it contradicts the biblical doctrine of grace, especially the doctrine of full forgiveness through the saving blood of Christ. In Jesus, *all* penalty for *all* sins is forgiven; “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). The doctrine of purgatory is based on the idea that *something we do* can cancel out some of the punishment we incurred through our sins. Nothing could be further from the truth.

THE ROMAN DOGMA OF PURGATORY

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In the gradual development of the Roman Catholic system down through the ages, the belief in purgatory constitutes one of the most striking departures from the divine truths revealed in the Bible. Undoubtedly it came into being as a result of pagan traditions which were little by little introduced in the early church by half-converted men who failed to free themselves completely from the heritage of the old mythologies of the ancient world, concerning the life of man beyond the tomb. Imbued with the practice of praying for the repose of the souls of their ancestors, they could not understand the simplicity of the gospel message about an everlasting life for the righteous and an eternal torment for the wicked. They wanted to graft in the apostolic teaching a middle state of being, a place of purification after death which, although not mentioned in the Bible, was however taught from time immemorable by priests and philosophers and poets of heathen religions. Only in this way can be explained the invocations of the early Christians in behalf of their dead found in the catacombs; the affirmation of Tertullian that "the faithful wife will pray for the soul of her deceased husband, particularly on the anniversary day of his falling asleep" (*De Monogamia*, N. 10); the expressions of Eusebius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Ephrem, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine and others concerning the prayers of the living saints as beneficial to the souls of the dead. With such influential precedents it was natural, although not excusable, for the Roman Catholic theologians to build up later on their ponderous doctrine on purgatory which is not only unscriptural because it is not contained in the Bible, but also unreasonable in the sense that it nullifies the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary, making void the fruit of his redemption in behalf of Christian believers.

MEANING OF PURGATORY

Although the word "purgatory" is of late origin, the idea of a state of expiatory suffering for those whose goodness was not great enough for heaven and whose sins were not great enough for hell is rather old and is traceable in the most explicit terms at the close of the sixth century when Gregory I clearly spoke about that peculiar doctrine. Before that time,

purgatory was designated with different names by the early fathers as, for instance, "a place of pains and tears," "a purifying fire," "a prison where the souls remain confined until they pay to the last penny all the debts due for sins," "a profound lake," "a part of hell," and so on. But since the thirteenth century the name of purgatory has prevailed.

Today, by purgatory Roman Catholics generally understand an intermediate place and state of being in which the souls of the just are purged from their sins. This place is separated from hell, which is reserved exclusively for the wicked, and from paradise, which is destined for the everlasting rest and joy of the righteous. According to A Catechism of Christian Doctrine "those are punished for a time in purgatory who die in the state of grace but are guilty of venial sin, or have not fully satisfied for the temporal punishment due to their sins. There will be no purgatory after the general judgment. Since we do not know how long individual souls are detained in purgatory, there is need for persevering prayer for the repose of the souls of all who die after reaching the use of reason, except those who are canonized or beautified by the Church. The souls in purgatory are certain of entering heaven as soon as God's justice has been fully satisfied." (p. 143)

It is clear that the whole doctrine of purgatory rests upon the alleged necessity of expiation and satisfaction of venial sins, which have never in life been remitted through an act of repentance or love or by good deeds, and of mortal or grave sins, whose guilt with its eternal punishment has indeed been removed by God after an act of repentance but for which there is still left a debt of temporal punishment due to his justice on account of the imperfection of that repentance. (A Catholic Dictionary, p. 437)

To better understand such a doctrine it can be added that, according to Roman Catholic theologians, sin embraces two things: offence of God (guilt) and violation of justice which cannot be restored without an adequate amends (penalty). With repentance and confession the offence of God or guilt is fully remitted together with the penalty of eternal punishment, but there remains to pay for the violation of justice. There is a temporal punishment that must be satisfied in this life or in the next. Now, it is understandable that for those who did not repent before dying there is no purgatory but only hell, while for those who, although repented, had no will or time to satisfy on this earth for the temporal punishment due to their sins, will go to purgatory where they will suffer until all the debt has been paid.

As to the nature of pains suffered by "the poor souls in purgatory" besides the loss of the blissful vision of God, it is commonly believed by Romanists that they will also endure some pain of sense, inflicted probably by material fire.

EXISTENCE OF PURGATORY

The Councils of Florence and Trent, after declaring that "there is a purgatory," add that "the souls detained there are helped by the prayers of the faithful and above all by the acceptable sacrifice of the Altar." (Trent, Sess. 25) Two things are stressed by the authority of the above councils, namely the existence of purgatory and the correlative dogma about the utility of praying for the dead. Naturally the dogmatic pronouncement of the Roman Church was made against the Reformers, who, denying the existence of purgatory and the efficacy of the prayers for the dead, affirmed boldly that "after the reception of the grace of justification the guilt of the penitent sinner is so remitted, and the penalty of eternal punishment so annulled, that no penalty of temporal punishment remains to be paid either in this world or in the future in purgatory before the kingdom of heaven can be opened." (Encyclop. Brit., vol. 20, p. 114)

The reasoning with which Romanists strive to prove the existence of purgatory is taken from the following passages of Scripture. In the book of Revelation 21:27 it is said that "there shall not enter into it (heaven) any thing defiled," and in Matthew 12:26 that "every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account of it in the day of judgment." Now, from what we know about human nature, it is not improper to say that many who die in the grace of God are still burdened with some imperfections or venial sins. Such people cannot possibly enjoy the beatific vision of God without an adequate purification from their sins. On the other hand, since they are not enemies of God, they can not be sent to hell. Therefore, Romanists conclude, there must exist an intermediate place and state where the righteous can be purged and cleansed from all their imperfections, so that later on they may proceed to heaven spotless and pure.

The fallacy of the above reasoning lies on the fact that before God, according to the divine revelation, there is no distinction whatsoever between venial sins and mortal sins as affirmed by the Roman Church. All sins are equally grave in the scale of the divine justice, although there can be more or

less deliberateness on the part of the sinner. By true repentance all sins are washed away and there remains not any debt to be paid. The Bible speaks unmistakably about it in many passages concerning God's gracious pardon upon repented sinners. In Isaiah 1:18 He says: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." In Micah 7:19 God is said to cast sins and punishment in the bottom of the sea: "He will put away our iniquities and He will cast all our sins into the bottom of the sea." And in the first letter of John 1:9 we read: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity." The apostle with amazing clearness states that by acknowledging our sins not only do we receive complete absolution from our guilt, but also we are purged immediately from all our unrighteousness, and that is from the penalty of eternal and temporal punishment. If this were not so, how may our Roman Catholic friends explain the fact that Christ upon the cross rewarded the faith and confession of the penitent thief with a full discharge of all his sins both as to the guilt and punishment, admitting him soon after death in the blissful enjoyment of paradise? He was a thief and a murderer and, although repented, he remained with a huge load of temporal punishment to satisfy even after receiving the grace of justification through repentance, according to the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory. How is it then that the Lord cleansed him so suddenly from the guilt and penalty of sin? Will Jesus, the righteous judge, treat all other repented sinners in a different way than that adopted with the thief? We fully disagree with them because we are told in the Bible that "there is no respect of persons with God" (Rom. 2:11), while the beloved disciple assured us that "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." 1 John 1:7.

APOCRYPHAL FOUNDATION

However, in order to substantiate their spurious dogma of purgatory with a more acceptable argument, Romanists must come back to an apocryphal book of the Old Testament, because the evidences of the New Testament, even according to them, have not enough weight for proving their man-made doctrine. This book, Second Maccabees, was never considered as inspired by the Jews, and therefore excluded from the canon of their Scriptures; was never quoted in the New Testament, as generally was the Old Testament, neither by Jesus nor his disciples, and, finally, was rejected by the early

Roman Catholic fathers. Among them Jerome, who translated from the original text the Romanist Vulgate and refused to translate this book on the account that it was not listed in the Jewish canon. The second book of Maccabees was added to the Roman Catholic list of sacred writing very late and only in the sixteenth century definitely recognized as inspired by the council of Trent.

Besides, the internal evidences of the book show beyond any doubt that its unknown author not only does not claim divine inspiration, but he explicitly affirms to have done a work of abridgement, summarizing in one book all the matter that Jason of Cyrene wrote in five books long before: "And all such things have been comprised in five books by Jason of Cyrene, we have attempted to abridge in one book." 2 Macc. 2:24. The question comes naturally, "Who is the inspired writer, Jason or the abridger?" Moreover, at the close of the book the author plainly says to have written only for historical purposes, begging the readers to forgive him for any eventual imperfection or mistake they would find in his work: ". . . I also will here make an end of my narration. Which if I have done well and as it becometh the history, it is what I desired; but if not so perfectly, it must be pardoned me." 2 Macc. 15:38-39. Can we imagine an inspired writer being doubtful and confused about the truths he was supposed to proclaim in the name of God and with the infallible assistance of the Holy Spirit?

Although the Roman Church easily admits that in this book there is no direct or indirect reference to the word "purgatory," yet the doctrine of it may be deduced from the belief of Judas Maccabee and his fellow-soldiers concerning the usefulness of praying for the dead. The classical text used by Romanists on the matter is 2 Macc. 12:43-46:

"43. And making a gathering, he (Judas) sent twelve thousand drachmas of silver to Jerusalem for sacrifice to be offered for the sins of the dead, thinking well and religiously concerning the resurrection.

"44. (For 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.)

"45. And because he considered that they who had fallen asleep with godliness had great grace laid up for them.

"46. It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins."

The deduction that the Roman theologians commonly draw from the above testimony is three-fold: 1) that both Judas and his comrades were convinced that the dead could be helped by prayers and sacrifices; 2) that such a practice was a general belief of the Jews which was still extant at the time of Jesus, who, although condemning many other human traditions grown on the body of the Jewish ecclesiastical code, never reproved this one; 3) that the dead soldiers, in whose behalf money was sent to the temple, were not guilty of grave sin since they had fallen asleep with godliness. (Synopsis Theologiae Dogm. by Tanqueray, vol. 3, p. 798)

But evidently the theologians have missed to see the difficulties working against their own conclusion. They have overlooked the contradictions which would come up by accepting their inferences. Compelled to defend at all costs an untenable position, they have taken the text out of its context with the consequence of hiding an internal contradiction between the statement of Judas and the commandments of God which alone should destroy any alleged inspiration of the book, and another contradiction between the belief expressed in the Maccabees and the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory.

INTERNAL CONTRADICTION

In order to substantiate with facts the two irreconcilable discrepancies in which Romanists have incurred, it is necessary to give the full story of Judas Maccabee by quoting the five previous verses which have been purposely omitted by the theologians from their classical text recorded above, namely 2 Macc. 12:43-46.

"38. So Judas, having gathered together his Army, came into the city of Odollam; and when the seventh day came, they purified themselves according to the custom, and kept the sabbath in the same place.

"39. And the day following, Judas came with his company to take away the bodies of them that were slain and to bury them with their kinsmen in the sepulchres of their fathers.

"40. And they found under the coats of the slain some of the donaries of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbiddeth to the Jews: so that all plainly saw, that for this cause they were slain.

"41. Then they all blessed the just judgment of the Lord, who had discovered the things that were hidden.

"42. And so betaking themselves to prayers they besought him that the sin which has been committed might be forgotten. But the most valiant Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves from sin, forasmuch as they saw before their eyes what had happened because of the sins of those that were slain."

In Deut. 7:25 there is an explicit command of God forbidding the Jews to appropriate for themselves the things offered to the idols: "Their graven things thou shalt burn with fire. Thou shalt not covet silver and gold of which they are made: neither shalt thou take to thee anything thereof, lest thou offend, because it is an abomination to the Lord thy God." That the transgression of such a law was a very serious and grave sin is shown from the fact that the fellow-soldiers of Judas, who committed it, were permitted by God to be slain mercilessly at the hand of the enemy, and this just judgment of the Lord was blessed by all. How is it then that in verse 45 Judas says that the same sinners died "with godliness" and "had a great grace laid up for them"? The contradiction between the two statements is such that it has been deeply felt by the Roman Catholic commentator of the Douay Version who, in the lack of a better explanation, says in a footnote: "Judas hoped that these men who died fighting for the cause of God and religion, might find mercy: either because they might be excused from mortal sin by ignorance, or might have repented of their sin, at least at their death." The embarrassment of the commentator is evident; he is forced to make hypothetical assumptions in which he himself does not believe at all. The truth of the matter is that there is an open contradiction in the quoted passages, and such a thing must absolutely exclude the divine authorship of the second book of Maccabees.

CONTRADICTION WITH THE DOGMA OF PURGATORY

But not only is the above text contradiction within itself, it also contradicts the whole doctrine of purgatory. As we have seen before, the Roman Church teaches that purgatory is a place exclusively reserved for unforgiven venial sins and unexpiated temporal punishments. Hence, all those who die in mortal or grave sin are destined to hell and not to purgatory. The same Church also teaches that idolatry is such a grave sin that once, in early Christianity, it was considered to be unforgivable on earth. Now, Judas Maccabee, as said in the passage, made a sin-offering and prayers for men

who were killed exactly because of this idolatry, committed by them in the unduly appropriation of the donaries or votive offerings to idols explicitly forbidden by the law. They died, therefore, in mortal sin and, consequently, their souls went to hell and not to purgatory, according to the Roman Catholic teaching. In that case the effort to prove the existence of purgatory with the above passage is absolutely illogical. Or if those souls went to purgatory and not hell despite the mortal sin they committed and in which they certainly died, for the donaries of the idols were found under their coats after they were slain and not before, the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory as a middle state of purification only for the just, before entering heaven, crumbles down into pieces. So, Romanists find themselves on the sharp points of a terrible dilemma. In either way they are wrong. The second book of Maccabees does not help them a bit. Besides being uninspired, it is in contradiction with the Word of God and, worst of all for the Roman Church, it nullifies a doctrine which has been so cleverly built up in the course of time.

NEW TESTAMENT TESTIMONY

Moreover, Romanists have no better chance to prove the existence of purgatory with some quotations taken from the New Testament. Cardinal Gibbons in fact, being aware of this, plainly says that in the New Testament the doctrine of purgatory is only insinuated but not proved. The passages most used are Matthew 12:32; 1 Cor. 3:13-15; 1 Pet. 3:18-20.

In Matthew, Jesus, condemning the obstinacy of the Pharisees who attributed the miracles of Christ, wrought by the Spirit of God, to Beelzebub, the prince of devils, says: "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."

In commenting this passage, Augustine (*De Civit. Dei*, book 21, c. 13) and Gregory (*Dialog.* 4, c. 39) gather that some sins may be remitted in the world to come; and, consequently, that there is a purgatory or middle state. Such a queer interpretation became later on a common belief of the Roman Church which is exposed by Cardinal Gibbons as follows: "When our Savior declares that a sin against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven in the next life he evidently leaves us to infer that there are some sins which will be

pardoned in the life to come. Now in the next life, sin cannot be forgiven in heaven, for nothing defiled can enter there; nor can they be forgiven in hell, for out of hell there is no redemption. They must, therefore, be pardoned in the immediate state of purgatory." (Faith of Our Fathers, p. 212)

But such a deduction is both unscriptural and unreasonable. It is unscriptural because in the quoted passage there is no biblical ground to support it. The expression of Jesus about "the world to come" has nothing to do with purgatory, it is only a rhetorical figure of speech called hyperbole by which the Lord said with an exaggerated statement that the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is such an enormous sin that it cannot be forgiven anywhere. Verse 32 is but an emphatic declaration of verse 31 in which Jesus states: "Therefore I say to you: every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven, but the blasphemy of the Spirit shall not be forgiven." That this interpretation is true can be shown from the parallel passages of Mark 3:29 and Luke 12:10 in which there is no mention whatever about "the world to come."

Besides, the interpretation of Romanists is unreasonable because it is inapplicable to their doctrine of purgatory. In fact, according to them, purgatory will end at the final judgment and thus there can not be such a place in "the world to come." Moreover, the Roman Church holds that purgatory exists not for obtaining remission of sins, but as a place of payment to the last penny for "unremitted venial sins and unsatisfied temporal punishments." Finally, the same Church teaches that the blasphemy against the Son of man is such an extremely grave sin that a person dying without previously receiving remission from it is headed to hell and not to purgatory.

Another passage quoted by the Roman Church in defense of purgatory is 1 Cor. 3:13-15:

"Every man's work shall be manifest. For the day of the Lord shall declare it, because it shall be revealed in fire. And the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is. 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." Cardinal Gibbons, commenting on this passage, offers as the unanimous voice of the fathers of Christendom the interpretation that the soul of man "will be ultimately saved, but he shall suffer, for a temporary duration, in the purifying flames of purgatory." (Ibid., p. 213)

That this is a false interpretation is evidenced by the fact that Paul does not mention the flames of purgatory as purifying the soul of man, but he simply states that the fire shall try every man's work. Now to try has a completely different meaning from to purge or purify. According to Webster's Dictionary, to try means to test or make trial of; put to proof; while to purge or purify gives the idea of cleaning, to become free from impurities both material and moral. Therefore, there is no indication or insinuation of a Roman Catholic purgatory in the quoted passage. Paul with wonderful imagery shows the different kinds of buildings put by different men on the same foundation: Jesus Christ. Their respective value will one day, on the great and final day, be determined. They will break in with the accompaniment of fire, and the fire will test the superstructures. Then two possibilities arise. One man's superstructure will stand the test, and he will be rewarded; another man's superstructure will perish, and he will have to pay, yet he will not fail of salvation, though he will only just escape the fire which has burnt up his work. (Commentary on Holy Scripture by Gore, Goudge and Guil-laume, p. 490)

The fire-imagery applies to the last day and not at all to a preceding purgatorial period as Romanists infer. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that purgatory will cease to exist at the end of the world, in the day of the final judgment. Therefore, there is an evident discrepancy between the official teaching of the Church and the interpretation given to the passage of Paul. Besides, purgatory has been stated to be only a place of purging souls and not a testing-trial for the work of God's ministers as it is in our case. The existence of purgatory cannot be proved by 1 Cor. 3:13-15. It only shows contradiction and misinterpretation on the part of Romanists who, once again, have failed to substantiate Scripturally their claim of a middle state of purification after death.

"Because Christ also died for our sins, the just for the unjust; that he might offer us to God, being put to death indeed in the flesh, but enlivened in the spirit. In which also coming he preached to those spirits that were in prison: which had been some time incredulous, when they waited for the patience of God in the days of Noah, when the ark was a building: wherein a few, that is eight souls, were saved by water."

A footnote in the Douay Version interprets the "spirits that were in prison" as follows: "See here a proof of a third place, or middle state of souls:

for these spirits in prison, to whom Christ went to preach after his death, were not in heaven; nor yet in the hell of the damned: because heaven is no prison: and Christ did not go to preach to the damned."

Although the passage in question is very difficult to understand in its true meaning, it is absolutely certain that it has nothing to do with Catholic purgatory. The main inference which the apostle intends for us to draw from it is the contrast between our sins and the victorious power of the Passion. Christ, the just par excellence, died for the unjust of all times, past, present and future. As the second Adam He had to pay for the sins of humanity since the fall of man. So, after his mission was fully accomplished, He went spiritually, that is not by a local motion, but by a special operation as God is frequently said to move in the Bible (Gen. 11:5; Hosea 5:15; and Micah 1:3), to the spirits in prison in order to show them his great victory over sin and death. By the "spirits in prison" cannot be understood the traditional limbus patrum (limbo of the Fathers), consisting in an awaiting place of rest for all the just who died before Christ's ascension, because there is no evidence of such a place in the Bible, and besides it is clearly inferred from Luke 14:22 and 23:43 that the souls of the righteous were admitted to paradise immediately after their death. It is very likely therefore that the expression of Peter refers to the ever-living Spirit of Christ, preaching to the ante-diluvians in the person of Noah who was a preacher of righteousness. In this respect, Matthew Henry in his Commentary explains the "spirits in prison" in this way: "He went and preached, by his spirit striving with them, and inspiring and enabling Enoch and Noah to plead with them. Because the hearers were dead and disembodied when the apostle speaks of them, therefore he properly calls them spirits now in prison, not that they were in prison when Christ preached to them." At any rate, whatever Peter meant in his letter, it is true that he had not in mind the third place or middle state of souls claimed by Romanists, because the Bible says that the people in Noah's day did not believe in God, refused his divine invitation and despised his mercy, so that when they died, they could not possibly be saved because of being in mortal sin, and therefore, according to the Roman doctrine, they went straight to hell and not to purgatory, reserved exclusively for those who die in the grace of God.

TESTIMONY OF TRADITION

Unable to demonstrate the existence of purgatory with reason and Scripture, Romanists base all their hope on the argument of tradition, appealing to the fathers of the church, to the ancient liturgies of the Oriental and Western Church, and, finally, to the emotional feeling of the human heart. But not even such a kind of reasoning helps them any. First of all, the fathers of the five early centuries are not always clear in their writings, having incurred many substantial errors as even Romanists must admit. Secondly, they are not unanimous in affirming the same thing, and in many instances they are in contradiction one with another. Thirdly, they never mentioned purgatory by name, and many of them, like Origen, Ambrose, Jerome, and others, believed in a temporal duration of hell, denying an eternal punishment for the wicked as contrary to the justice and mercy of God who, in the end of time, through an universal palingenesis or renovation, would restore all things in him. Surely this is not purgatory as taught by the Church of Rome.

As to the ancient liturgies of both East and West, they were of a later origin and, therefore, the practice of praying for the dead did not descend from apostolic times as Romanists claim, but was a pagan custom inherited from the contemporary heathen religions. In fact, as we have already mentioned, the belief in a place of purification after death is incredibly old. The first news about it was found in India thousands of years before the coming of Christ. The Egyptian priests taught the theory of torments after death sixteen centuries B.C., and Babylonians, Persians, and Phoenicians believed the same. Still now Buddhist priests in their liturgies and rituals have prayers for the souls suffering in fire that have been transmitted unto them through an unbroken succession of clergymen from time immemorial. Even the great Greek philosophers, as Socrates and Plato, who lived in the fifth century B.C., fix up an amazing purgatory theory along the lines of earlier pagan mythologies. Among the Greek and Roman gods Pluto was considered to be the god of hell and purgatory. At least in ten writings of Virgil, the Latin poet, can be found a description of how dead sinners are "purged in fire." With such precedents and environments it can be easily understood how the early fathers and the ancient liturgies could introduce in the church a practice which was developed later on by Romanists into the Catholic dogma of purgatory. Exactly so it happened that the many gorgeous ceremonies were added little by little to the severe simplicity of the New Testament church. How then can a practice of the old liturgies be traced back

to apostolic times? A claim such as this is not only presumptuous but even dishonest.

Neither can it be said that the doctrine of purgatory is a comfort and consolation to the deepest sentiments of the human heart. No one can see, in fact, how it is possible to be comforted and consoled by the expectation of terrible punishments with fire, tortures, and torments of all kinds soon after death. And, although such punishments are said to be temporary, yet any good Christian would be really frightened to death in thinking of the horrible place where he could be confined for an indefinite period of time before being allowed to enjoy the blissful vision of his God. This is not at all the wonderful joy experienced by the early Christians at the close of their lives; this is not at all the manifestation of the infinite mercy of God but rather the exhibition of his wrath; this is not at all the incorruptible reward promised by Jesus to the good and faithful servant: "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Matt. 25:21. Oh no, Roman Catholics shall never convince Christians that purgatory is the answer to the longings of their hearts. Their comfort and consolation do not rest upon such a dreadful place but upon the everlasting promise of joy, blessedness, and happiness of heaven, upon the assurance of seeing face to face the mightiness and omnipotence of God. This is the kind of comfort and consolation that Christians experience at the departure of their beloved ones. They do not need to pray for them, because they believe in the unbreakable promise of God who not only forgives, but forgets our sins: "And their sins and iniquities I will remember no more." Heb. 10:17.

FULL SALVATION IN CHRIST

If it would be unfair for a human tribunal to forgive a criminal the guilt of his crime and still send him to prison to expiate for it, how much more offensive to the mercy of God would be this half-measure of forgiveness. That is why Christians cannot believe that God deals with repented sinners in a way less dignified and generous than that adopted by human beings. That is why they reject purgatory as an invention of men, as a bare-faced falsehood, as one of the most gigantic frauds of all times. The dogma of purgatory cannot be proved either by reason or by Scripture, either by tradition or by appealing to the tenderest affections of human hearts. It is only an essential belief of the Roman Church because, as has been cleverly said, "the source of Catholic power is in the graveyard." Through it, in fact, the hierarchy

controls the life and death of the faithful and, above all, the purse of millions of gullible and superstitious people who have been taught to give money for masses in order to relieve from the torments of purgatory their deceased relatives. On the contrary, the Word of God states with all authority that we are "not redeemed with corruptible things, as gold or silver; but with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb unspotted and undefiled." 1 Pet. 1:18-19. Through the expiatory oblation of himself Jesus obtained for us, once for all, full salvation, justification and sanctification, so that He is in the true meaning of the word the Lamb of God who takes away all our sins: "Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who taketh away the sin of the world." John 1:29. By faith and obedience in him we are indeed sure that our sins are washed away, and completely forgiven as to the guilt and to the penalty of temporal punishment, "because the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." 1 John 1:7. The belief in an intermediate place of purification or purgation for the just and the necessity for the living to pray for their souls would destroy the full efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ, would nullify the promises of God, who cannot lie, and, finally, would remove from the heart of Christian believers the glorious hope of an immediate and endless happiness in the triumphant kingdom of heaven. For this reason, we urge our Catholic friends to re-examine their blind acceptance of purgatory and find out by themselves, through an unprejudiced study of the Bible, if what they have learned from the Roman Catholic priests is in accordance with the infallible Word of God.

CHAPTER 8

THE DOCTRINE OF INDULGENCES

It has been rightly remarked that in the Roman Catholic system each doctrine finds its origin in a previous one and that all are so intimately related that one can not stand separated from the other. This is especially true for the doctrine of indulgences which flows from the spurious dogma of purgatory not less naturally than a river from its source. In fact, by teaching that the prayers and devotions of the faithful may shorten the sufferings of the "poor souls in purgatory," where they are purging themselves from the stain of venial sins and unexpiated temporal punishments, the Roman Church smoothly paved the way for the acceptance of its authority in granting

indulgences whose main purpose is precisely the partial or total release, under certain conditions, from the temporal punishment due to sin. As in the case of purgatory, the reason for the doctrine of indulgences is essentially based on the distinction between the guilt and the penalty of sin. While through repentance the guilt of sin is fully remitted by God, there remains a temporal punishment to be paid in this world by any satisfactory action, but if not sufficiently paid here it will be exacted till the last farthing in purgatory by sufferings and pains of different nature and degree. According to Romanists the Church has the power by divine right to remit this temporal punishment, in whole or in part, here and in purgatory, and such a remission is called an indulgence. In A Catechism of Christian Doctrine (p. 134) indulgences are mentioned together with masses and other good works as one of the many means by which Catholics may satisfy for the temporal punishment of the dead: "The faithful on earth, through the communion of saints, can relieve the sufferings of the souls in purgatory by prayer, fasting, and other good works, by indulgences, and by having Masses offered for them."

Contrary to such a belief we must say to our Catholic friends that indulgences have no foundation in the Bible, were introduced in the Church as a result of tradition, are against God's plan of salvation and pardon, and in contradiction with many doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church itself.

NATURE OF INDULGENCES

In order to avoid any kind of misrepresentation of the Roman Catholic standing on the question of indulgences, our brethren should clearly understand that indulgence does not mean a remission of sins and still less a permission to "indulge in sin," as many Protestants believe. It is rather a pardon of the temporal punishment which is granted by the Church to all those whose sins have already been forgiven by confession or because of an act of contrition. Etymologically the word "indulgence" come from the Latin *indulgeo* or *indu-licentia* which means leniency, relaxation, grace, remission or condonation. In the Canon Law it is defined as follows: "The remission before God of the temporal punishment due to those sins of which the guilt has been forgiven, either in the sacrament of Penance or because of an act of perfect contrition, granted by the competent ecclesiastical authority out of the

treasury of the Church to the living by way of absolution, to the dead by way of suffrage." (c. 911)

However, although Romanists affirm that the remission of the temporal punishment does not imply any relaxation from the guilt of sin either past or future, either mortal or venial, there have been times in the Church during which indulgences were granted under the formula "a culpa et poena" or "in remissionem peccatorum" which expressions implied precisely a complete and full condonation of the guilt and penalty of sins. That this had been for a long time the practice of the Roman Church can be proven by the fact that, later on, the council of Trent was forced to abolish all such abuses which had grown up, in the course of time, on the granting of indulgences.

According to the Roman Catholic theologians, the remission of the temporal punishment through indulgences is not only valid in the external forum,¹ before the Church, but also in the internal forum, before God; otherwise the Church, says Thomas Aquinas, would rather damage than help the condition of sinners who would be condemned to more grievous punishments in purgatory while believing to have been absolved from them by indulgences.

It is the teaching of the Roman Church that indulgences can be granted only by those to whom has been committed the dispensation of the so-called treasury of the Church, and that is the pope or a general council for all the Church, cardinals and bishops locally for their own subjects. By the treasury of the Church is understood "the superabundant store of the merits and satisfactions of Christ, which were beyond the needs of our salvation, to which are added the excess of merits and satisfactions of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the Saints." It is exactly from this treasury that the Church grants indulgences. It is a kind of compensation taken out from this spiritual store of merits in order to satisfy the justice of God in the place of the temporal punishments which have been remitted to sinners through the gaining of indulgences.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF INDULGENCES

By reason of effect, indulgences can be either plenary or partial; plenary indulgences remit the whole of the temporal punishment which has been incurred by a sinner according to the justice of God. Unless the contrary is stated, all plenary indulgences may be applied for the benefit of the souls, or

of an individual soul, in purgatory, but the decree of its acceptance depends on the will of God, so that there is no certainty that the penalty of these souls is fully remitted. Partial indulgences remit a part of the punishment due for sin at any given moment, the proportion of such part being expressed in terms of time as, for instance, 30 days, 7 years, etc. The precise meaning of these time periods has never been defined; their use is a relic of the former penitential discipline of the Church out of which the granting of indulgences arose and in which the time periods had their natural and practical significance. (A Catholic Dictionary, p. 266)

(1) Forum means a judicial court, and is the sphere in which the Church exercises her jurisdiction, especially her judicial authority. The forum is of two kinds: external, to deal with matters affecting the public welfare of the Church and her subjects; internal, to deal with matters which concern the private spiritual good of individuals especially in the direction of their consciences. The Church exercises her jurisdiction of the internal forum chiefly in the tribunal of Penance. (A Cath. Dictionary, p. 209)

By reason of subject, there are indulgences for the living and indulgences for the dead, namely those applicable to the "poor souls in purgatory." Indulgences are granted to the living only by way of juridical absolution and are reserved for those who are in full communion with the Church and have resorted to the sacrament of penance, in which alone, after due contrition and confession, provision is made for the remission of the graver penalty of sin. It must be born in mind that these indulgences are never absolutely gratuitous, being always conditioned to certain religious and pious practices, like prayers, fasting, alms, rosaries, medals, etc., which must be faithfully observed by the recipients in order to gain them. On the contrary, the indulgences for the dead are accorded by way of suffrage, and that is by an intercessory prayer whose efficacy depends on God's response to it due to the fact that the Church has no jurisdiction whatever on the souls in purgatory. The dead cannot gain any indulgence properly speaking, but the

living are permitted by the Church to apply in behalf of the dead certain indulgences that are gained by the former. However the living are not allowed to apply indulgences for other living.

By reason of mode, indulgences can be personal, when granted to a person or an entire community; real, when attached immediately to a material thing, like crucifixes, rosaries, medals and other images blessed by the pope personally or by his delegates; and local, if they are granted to a religious place, like churches, shrines, sanctuaries, and so on.

A special mention must be made here of the great indulgence of Jubilee, consisting in a universal plenary indulgence, or remission of all temporal punishments, granted by the Holy See with special solemnity for a definite time to all those who, "truly penitent and having confessed and communicated, shall piously visit the Basilicas of the Blessed Peter and Paul, St. John Lateran, and St. Mary Major in Rome." The Jubilee is generally associated with the Holy Year, which begins with the opening of the holy doors of the said Basilicas on the Christmas eve of the previous year and ends with the closing of the same twelve months later. The idea of a year of special celebration at fitted periods is referred to by Moses (Lev. 25:10-15). Boniface VIII was the first pope to begin the series of the Holy Years in 1300 A.D. and, after him, a year of Jubilee was celebrated in the beginning of every century. The period was later reduced from 100 years to 50, to 33, and finally to 25 by Paul II in 1475. However, since Pius XI there has been an amazing increase in the celebration of the Holy Years (5 in 28 years), and we wonder if the modern popes are more concerned about the material gifts dropped into the Vatican treasury by the visiting pilgrims rather than about the spiritual relief from temporal punishment granted to the souls of the faithful. Surely God cannot be pleased with this cryptical form of religious exploitation which once, with an old-fashioned term, was called simony.

As we may see, the Roman Church has been granting and multiplying indulgences in so many ways and in such an abundant manner that it can be hardly believed how Catholics may still be fearful about the alleged pains of purgatory, and how priests may still continue to ask money for masses and alms in behalf of the poor souls of the dead supposed to be suffering in the purgatorial fire. Surely something must be wrong with them if they do not take full advantage, while living, of an opportunity by which they may purify

themselves from all temporal punishments due to their sins in such an easy and cheap way like that of indulgences.

EXISTENCE OF INDULGENCES

Roman Catholics claim that the Church has been entrusted by Christ with the power of granting indulgences to all those who, having reached the use of reasoning and being therefore capable of falling in sin, meet the specified conditions. The Council of Trent, in order to condemn, once for all, the alleged errors of the Reformers, who called indulgences pernicious and useless and denying to the Church the power of granting them, issued the following decree: "The Church being endowed by Christ of the power of granting indulgences and having exercised from time immemorable such a power divinely transmitted to her, the Holy Synod teaches and commands all Christian faithful the practice of indulgences as useful and recommended by the authority of the past Councils, condemning with anathema any contrary teaching." (De Indulgentiis, Sess. 25) The theologians say that such a power flows directly from the dogmas of the communion of saints, of the superabundant satisfaction of Christ, and from the power of the keys.

By the communion of saints is understood the unity under and in Christ of the faithful on earth (Church militant), the souls in purgatory (Church suffering) and the blessed in heaven (Church triumphant). Among all the members of this spiritual body, whose head is Christ, there exists such an intimate relationship or communion that each one shares of the merits of the other, so that the living pray to God and the blessed in behalf of the suffering, and to God in honor of the blessed; the blessed intercede with God for the suffering and the living; the holy souls pray to God and the blessed for others, while Christ intercedes continually for the living and the dead by virtue of his infinite and superabundant satisfaction merited for all. In view of this spiritual and reciprocal help indulgences may be gained by the living for themselves or applied to the souls in purgatory.

But the scriptural text upon which the Roman Church bases its power to distribute indulgences is taken from Matthew 16:19, where Christ promises to Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven: "And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shall bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven: and whatsoever thou shall loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven." The same declaration was made by Christ also to the

other apostles assembled together later on (Matt. 18:18). In commenting upon the quoted verse, Cardinal Gibbons states: "By these words our Saviour empowered his Church to deliver her children (if properly disposed) from every obstacle that might retard them from the kingdom of heaven. Now there are two impediments that withhold a man from the heavenly kingdom—sin and temporal punishment incurred by it. And the Church having power to remit the greater obstacle, which is sin, has power also to remove the smaller obstacle, which is the temporal punishment due on account of it." (Faith of Our Fathers, p. 376)

NO SCRIPTURAL FOUNDATION

Once again we find the Roman Church making conclusions which were absolutely foreign to the mind of the Lord, whose main object was to entrust the apostles in general and Peter in particular, because of his inspired confession, with the authority to preach the gospel of grace and redemption. In the quoted passage there is no reference whatever about indulgences or the alleged authority of the Church in distributing spiritual privileges which are never mentioned in the Bible. The Roman Catholic belief that with the promise of the keys Jesus gave to Peter and to the Church an unlimited power of doing and undoing is completely false. Peter in Matthew 16:19 was only promised to become an administrator, a steward of the kingdom of heaven, which the context identifies with the Church, and as such would have a divinely recognized authority to teach and discipline the future community. When the time came for the fulfillment of his promise, Jesus made all the apostles stewards of the mysteries of God, scribes of the kingdom, entrusting everyone with power to interpret his will in the power of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 18:17-18; John 20:22). The figure of the key is rather familiar in the Scriptures and is generally used to mean power, authority, jurisdiction exercised in the name of the household or master. It never signifies an absolute or independent power to do as one pleases. Eliakim, son of Hilkiah, is promoted instead of Shebna as the minister of the house and bears the key of the house of David (Is. 22:15-22). In Luke 12:42 our Lord speaks of the faithful and wise steward, who is to give his household their portion of food in due season, while in 11:52 He speaks of the scribes as taking away the key of knowledge and, consequently, shutting the kingdom of heaven against men (Matt. 23:13). In our case, therefore, the main thought meant by Jesus in the

promise of the keys seems to be that of teaching (Matt. 13:52), and of the disciplinary power by which it is to be enforced. This is confirmed by the words that follow. "To bind" and "to loose" are technical Rabbinic terms for the power of the doctor of the law to "pronounce forbidden" or "pronounce permitted" some actions about which a question has arisen, while the terms are occasionally applied to disciplinary measures such as excommunication. Now the power of the church to bind and to loose is a power to interpret the law of Christ and not a power to add to it or to take from it, just as the power recognized in the scribes was a power to interpret the law of Moses and not to add to it. (Commentary on Holy Scripture by Gore, Goudge and Guillaume, p. 168)

On the contrary, the practice of the Roman Catholic Church in granting indulgences is diametrically opposed to such a logical interpretation, and, consequently, presupposes an authority which is "beyond the things that are written." The duty of a minister, steward, or administrator is necessarily limited by the will of his master, so that he can do only what he is authorized to do. The apostles in the beginning and now the Church have always bound and loosed not through the alleged power of remitting imaginary temporal punishments, but through the natural channel of preaching, baptizing, correcting and punishing in due time. Matthew 16:19 does not endow the Roman Catholic Church with any peculiar power and indulgences are indeed an invention of the priests in order to deceive and exploit the invincible ignorance of innumerable superstitious people.

The same thing can be said concerning the communion of saints about which not even Romanists may find a reasonable passage in the Scripture in order to support their complicated theory of the three churches, militant, suffering, and triumphant. Neither can they prove the existence of the so-called treasury of the Church, formed by the superabundant satisfaction of Christ and by the merits of the Virgin Mary and of other saints, which have been accumulated throughout the centuries nobody knows where. And yet it is amazing to see endless crowds of people of all kinds and conditions believe in the doctrine of indulgences with such a fanaticism that they would make any sacrifice in money and personal mortification for the privilege, they say, of gaining the partial or total remission of the temporal punishments due to their sins on the occasion of a Jubilee in Rome. Such is the power of a

religious custom practiced from generation to generation in intellectual blindness and spiritual serfdom.

RESULTS OF TRADITION

The true origin and foundation of the doctrine of indulgences is not to be found in the Word of God, but rather in the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church; a tradition which has changed and transformed holy things, practiced for good in the early Christianity, in what is today the most ponderous system of politico-religious organization in the world. Unfortunately for Christendom this tradition is still at work through the progressive increase of dogmatic definitions, and on Nov. 17 1950, we have witnessed the papal proclamation of another dogma, that of the bodily assumption of Mary into heaven. We may easily guess how many new doctrines shall be defined a hundred years from now.

According to the Roman Catholic theologians, the doctrine of indulgences has developed from the penitential discipline of the early Church. Christians who had been convicted of crimes were required to make confession of them publicly before the entire congregation, to implore pardon, and to undergo whatever punishment the Church thought best to impose on them. This was done as well for example as to prevent reproach to the Christian religion among infidels. However, these punishments were not supposed to be satisfactory to God in the so-called internal forum, but only unto the Church or the external forum. The idea about the remission of the temporal punishment valid before God as understood by Romanists today cannot be traced in any of the writers of the age who mention the practice. At the latter end of the third century, when many had lapsed through fear of persecution, the punishment and period of probation became more severe and lengthened before they were readmitted. Sometimes the period was protracted for a series of years. Hence, arose the custom of prescribing times or periods—five, ten or more years of penance; but, lest the penitent should lose heart, or be driven to despair, the bishops took upon themselves, under certain circumstances, to mitigate the period of punishment. This act was called a relaxation or remission, that is an indulgence. (A History of Reformatory Movements by Rowe, p. 267)

An early and explicit proof of such a practice can be found in the fifth canon of the Council of Ancyra (314). This discretionary leniency was

sometimes granted by the bishops on the intercession of those who were witnessing for the truth in prison, as appears from the writings of Cyprian and Tertullian (*De Pudic.*, c. 22; *De Lapsis*, c. 5) ; sometimes also at the instance of the civil magistrate. The episcopal power was occasionally exercised, not only in a shortening of the canonical duration of the penance, but in some mitigation of the nature of the penalty itself (*Syn. Anc.*, c. 2). We find indication at a very early period that some of the minor ecclesiastical offences could be readily and canonically atoned for by almsgiving (*Aug. De Fide et Operibus*, c. 19) ; thus gradually arose, by steps which can readily be conjectured; a regular system of commutations (*redemptiones*, *commutationes*), set forth in penitential books (*libri penitentiales*), offering striking analogies to the provisions made by the various criminal codes by which the Theodosian Code was supplanted throughout Europe. In the Penitential of the Greek Theodore of Canterbury for example (690), which is to be found in Migne's *Patrologia*, a canonical fast of days, weeks, or years may be redeemed by saying a proportionable number of psalms, or by paying an adequate fine. For more than four centuries this work held a position of great authority all over Europe. At the time of the Crusades, to go to Palestine and take part in the war against the infidels was considered to be a work of such extraordinary merit as to render unnecessary any other penitential act on the part of the sinner who engaged in it. Thus at the council of Clermont, held under Urban II (1095), it was decreed that "that journey would be reputed for the remission of all penance." Later on the greatest schoolmen reduced to a theory the praxis which had gradually sprung up within the Western Church. (*Encycl. Brit.*, vol. 12, pp. 846-47)

However, it must be said that even when the doctrine of indulgences was first systematized, it was understood in a far different sense from its modern use. It signified only a discharge, a mitigation, or pardon of the canonical censures and penalties inflicted by the church, and not at all a remission of the temporal punishment due to the divine justice for the sins of the penitent already forgiven otherwise. Neither was there any mention about indulgences applicable in behalf of the souls of the dead suffering in the purifying fire of purgatory. The actual idea of indulgences cannot be traced back before the thirteenth century. That is why we want to tell our Catholic friends that the doctrine of indulgences has not come to us as a practice derived from the divine revelation, but as a result of Roman Catholic tradition, and as such is

of human origin and, therefore, must be rejected as an apostasy from early Christianity.

AGAINST GOD'S PLAN OF PARDON

Another reason why indulgences should be utterly condemned is because they are against God's plan of pardon. Although everyone recognizes that God is loving and merciful and is always ready to meet the needs of the sinners, nevertheless He has established a definite plan in order to grant them full remission of their sins. This involves not only the guilt or offence to God, but also the penalty which is the consequence of sin. The plan of God is very simple: baptism for those newly-converted to Christianity, and repentance for Christians who have fallen into sin. There is no other way of obtaining the divine pardon. As far as baptism is concerned, Romanists concede that both the guilt and the penalty of sin is fully remitted by it, while this is not so in the case of repentance in which there remains to be paid the alleged penalty of temporal punishment. On the contrary, the Bible assures us that God's forgiveness is not only full and complete, but likewise abundant: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Is. 55:7. Could the prophet say that God's pardon is abundant if his forgiveness would not include also the total extinction of the temporal punishment due to sin? Can Romanists produce any passage in which God, our supreme lawgiver, has ever followed a different policy than that shown in Isaiah? Can we imagine our merciful and loving God forgiving a repented sinner as to the guilt and, at the same time, condemning him to pay for the debt of temporal punishment attached to his sins? This is exactly what the Roman Church teaches in its doctrines of purgatory and indulgences: a half-forgiveness whose final outcome has been placed in the hands of the priests, who may bind or loose at will the spiritual future of their unfortunate subjects. The power of granting indulgences for the remission of the temporal punishments, which otherwise should be paid here or in purgatory, as claimed by the Church of Rome, is not only above and beyond the authority of the Word of God, but is in open opposition to the divine plan of pardon. It is foolish therefore for our Catholic friends to gain indulgences whose existence is in the realm of the fables and whose benefit is only imaginary. They should better put their trust and confidence in our Lord Jesus

Christ, who is the propitiation for our sins, our advocate with the Father who will forgive us not only the guilt but also the penalty due to our trespasses if we truly repent and sincerely ask for his pardon. Let them listen to the affectionate words of the beloved disciple: "My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin. But if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the just. And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." 1 John 2:1-2.

CONTRADICTION WITH OTHER CATHOLIC DOCTRINES

Finally, the doctrine of indulgences contradicts other Roman Catholic tenets as, for instance, confession, extreme unction, and purgatory, besides opening the way to spiritual idleness and shameful abuses.

First of all, indulgences, being a remission of the temporal punishment due to sin, devoid the sacrament of penance of its efficacy and validity. In fact, it is the official teaching of the Roman Church that in order to have a valid confession it is necessary to comply with three conditions, namely sorrow of sin, auricular account to a priest of one's trespasses, and satisfaction which is "the act by which the sinner endeavours to make reparation to God for offences committed against him by undergoing some form of punishment." Moreover, the Church goes on to say that "the effect of sacramental satisfaction is the remission ex opere operato (wrought from the work) of temporal punishment due to sin." (A Catholic Dict., p. 475) If through indulgences the sinner is completely freed from the temporal punishment due to his sins, the satisfaction, requested by the sacrament, is made void and therefore confession becomes invalid.

Furthermore, indulgences nullify the meaning of the sacrament of extreme unction which, according to the Roman Catholic position, "comforts in the pains of sickness and strengthens the patient against temptations; remits venial sins and cleanses the soul from the remains of sin; and restore to health when God sees fit." By the expression "remains of sin" the theologians mean "the inclination to evil and weakness of the will as well as the temporal punishment due to sin." (Synopsis Theol. Dogm. by Tan-queray, vol. 3, p. 691) If this is so, extreme unction would be useless, the temporal punishment being already remitted by indulgences which are granted by the Church abundantly and without any condition upon all those who are in danger of life (in articulo mortis).

But the doctrine of indulgences is even more contradictory when considered in relation with the dogma of purgatory from which it derives. Knowing, in fact, that the primary purpose of indulgences is the remission of the temporal punishments due to sins, and being also assured by the Roman Church that "venial sins can be remitted by prayer or other good works," there is no need any more for an intermediate place of purification. What should be purified when the so-called treasury of the Church has already provided for a full relaxation of the very same things which are supposed to be punished in purgatory? If indulgences really work and are so easy to gain, especially in articulo mortis, why purgatory? And if purgatory, to which the majority of Roman Catholics, it is said, will have to go, why indulgences? We wonder if the hierarchy is making joke of its own subjects, blessing with one hand and punishing with the other.

CAUSE OF LAZINESS AND TRAGIC ABUSES

Even though we disagree with those who have considered indulgences as "a remission of past sins, or a license to commit sin granted by the pope as a spiritual compensation to the faithful for pecuniary offerings made him," nevertheless we cannot but emphasize the fact that indulgences are at variance with the spirit of the gospel, stimulating spiritual easiness and dangerous laziness in facing temptations and sins. They constitute a slippery road that may hinder, if not kill, the religious life of the vicarious merits of others than upon the obedience to the commandments of God. That this is true can be seen from the scandalous abuses that flooded the Roman Catholic Church at various times, particularly in the sixteenth century during the infamous traffic in indulgences. Even Romanists are compelled to admit such abuses, especially in the case of John Tetzel who, being appointed as chief preacher to announce the great indulgence in Germany for collecting money in order to bring to completion the church of St. Peter in Rome, used methods and words which were the proximate cause of the Protestant Reformation. This Dominican monk with unparalleled zeal and energy made appeals for money that today could be considered as powerful examples of salesmanship. Among similar appeals the following is particularly moving for its emotional efficacy: "Even repentance is not indispensable. But more than all this: indulgences save not the living alone—they also save the dead. Ye priests, ye nobles, ye tradesmen, ye wives, ye maidens, and ye young men, hearken to

your departed parents and friends, who cry to you from the bottomless abyss: 'We are enduring horrible torments! a small alms would deliver us; you can give it, and you will not!' The very moment the money clinks against the bottom of the chest, the soul escapes from purgatory, and flies free to heaven." (Dowling, History of Romanism, p. 443)

Tetzel was not even ashamed to fix prices according to the rank of his client and to the gravity of sins, guaranteeing that indulgences, gained in change of resounding money, would assure not only full pardon of all sins, but that "at death the gate of the place of torment shall be shut against thee." Such and other abominable practices used by Tetzel and Catholic company show very clearly the kind of abuses to which indulgences even today might open the way. Although Romanists say that the abuses have been removed by forbidding the taking of money for indulgences, yet a so-called free-will offering is not considered a fee and is permitted. Besides, there are thousands of purgatorial associations within the Roman Church today, whose memberships are usually sold from \$5 per individual to \$25 per family. As compensation the members are assured of a perpetual remembrance for their deceased relatives and friends and of having a share in masses, prayers and good works offered by the association. (Paulist Calendar, April, 1952) Of course, Romanists would be highly scandalized if we would call practices such as these a raising of money under false pretenses, or a selling of spiritual deeds for material goods. It is their privilege, however, to believe as they want to, but we feel it to be our imperative duty to denounce the fraudulent practices of Roman Catholicism whose world-wide success is mainly due to the superstitious ignorance of the people, enslaved and deceived from time immemorable by the insatiable avarice of their priests. We are deeply concerned about our poor Catholic friends, unconscious victims of an erroneous tradition that has taught them man-made doctrines instead of New Testament truths. We want to discourage them from continuing to gain fallacious indulgences which can neither remit the alleged temporal punishment due to their sins nor release their departed beloved ones from the excruciating flames of a non-existent purgatory. We want them to know that indulgences have not the least foundation in the Bible, have been introduced by men as a means of enriching the material rather than the spiritual treasury of the Church, are at variance with God's plan of pardon, contradicting other Roman Catholic doctrines and causing spiritual inactivity and possible ruin to

many souls. We want and pray that the light of our Lord may finally shine in their minds, may warm up their hearts in such a way that from, now on they will put their only hope in Christ Jesus, the "one mediator between God and man: who gave himself a ransom for all." 1 Tim. 2:5-6.