

## 4 Questions On Purgatory

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*Question- Is there a third place outside of heaven and hell in which the souls of the faithful not yet perfected are purified by fire?*

*Answer-* The Orthodox Church believes, according to St. Vincent of Lerins, “that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all.” Simply put, the doctrine of purgatory, as articulated by the Latin West, is a novelty that developed somewhere, at a certain point in time, by some. Purgatory, along with the filioque, papal supremacy, unleavened bread, and a multitude of other doctrines are a departure from that which St. Vincent rightly defines as Catholic. The Holy Fathers have taught everywhere and always that there awaits for the souls of the departed either a blessed repose or eternal torment. There exists upon the death of all men a particular judgement, in which his soul is dragged “in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps” (Ps. 87:7) or allowed to pass through the air into Paradise. This, however, is not the end, but rather a foretaste for souls of that which they will receive after the Resurrection of the Dead, when the Lord will return in glory to judge both the living and the dead (Symbol of Faith). All will be raised on that day, all will be reunited in soul and body, and all will experience in fullness that which has been prepared for them. The belief, however, that the souls of the righteous who have not yet satisfied the debt of their sins must be withheld from Paradise that they must suffer a purifying fire is foreign to the Catholic (i.e. universal) teaching of the Church, and as such was rejected by the Orthodox as a novelty not found in the consensus of the Fathers. In the Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs, replying to the Latin Church, the Fathers word it as follows:

The one holy, catholic and apostolic Church of the seven Ecumenical Councils, walking according to the divinely inspired teaching of the Holy Scripture and the apostolic tradition, prays and invokes the mercy of God for the forgiveness and rest of those ‘which have fallen asleep in the Lord’; but the Papal Church from the twelfth century<sup>1</sup> downwards has invented and heaped together in the person of the Pope, as one singularly privileged, a multitude of innovations concerning purgatorial fire, a superabundance of the virtues of the saints, and the distribution of them to those who need them, and the like, setting forth also a full reward for the just before the universal resurrection and judgement.<sup>2</sup>

Here we see that there are two errors associated with purgatory- that there exists a purifying fire for souls before they can enter paradise, and that the righteous receive their full reward before the Resurrection and judgement. Such teachings are not accepted by the Orthodox, as they are not a part of the Universal (i.e. Catholic) tradition of the Church.

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<sup>1</sup> The doctrine of purgatory was first articulated at the second council of Lyon in 1274, and it was this definition that the West used at the Pseudo-council of Ferris-Florence.

<sup>2</sup> *Orthodox and Catholic Union* (North Seattle, Wa. St. Nektarios Press, 1985), 6.

*Question- If there is not a purgatorial state after death, what then is the state of souls after death?*

*Answer-* The Holy Fathers have, as a harmonious choir, taught that the souls of those departed “are in places proper to them,”<sup>3</sup> while not yet receiving the fullness of their eternal reward until the Resurrection of the Dead and the Final Judgement. It is at the Final Judgement that the Lord, as prophesied by the Prophet Daniel, will issue forth “a fiery stream” (Dan. 7:10) before Him, through which both the righteous and ungodly, being both saved by death and destruction by the Resurrection, must pass through. It is through this fire that our works will be made manifest, the works of the righteous made radiant like precious metals and jewels, while the works of the ungodly will burn as chaff before the fire (1 Co. 3:10-15). Both the righteous and ungodly are saved, but this salvation is experienced as a blessed reward for the righteous and as eternal torment for the sinner. However, until this day comes, the souls of the righteous and ungodly both experience a foretaste of the life to come, while not yet experiencing it in its fullness. The righteous are “in absolute repose and free, are in heaven with the angels and before God Himself, and already as in in the paradise from which Adam fell... and the second, on the contrary, remain in all confinement and inconsolable suffering, like condemned men awaiting the Judge’s sentence and foreseeing those torments.”<sup>4</sup> There are then two places in which the souls of the departed go- paradise, or hades, where they will await the fullness of their eternal inheritance.

*Question- If there exists no Purgatory for souls, what then is the purpose for prayers, Liturgies, and other acts for the dead?*

*Answer-* Prayers, Liturgies, almsgiving, and all other works that are done on behalf of our departed loved ones are “for the forgiveness and rest of those ‘which have fallen asleep in the Lord.’<sup>5</sup> In this we can agree that there are actions which the Church can perform that are of benefit to the departed. Where we differ, however, is in what exactly these actions help with. The Latins teach that

If those who truly repent have departed this life in love (towards God) before they were able to give satisfaction by means of worthy fruits for their transgressions or offenses, their souls are cleansed after death by means of purgatorial sufferings; but for the easing (or ‘deliverance’) of them from these sufferings, they are aided by the help which is shown them on the part of the faithful who are alive...<sup>6</sup>

It is the existence of a purgatorial fire that is of benefit to the souls of the departed where we differ. Such a teaching is not accepted by the Orthodox, since it is found nowhere in the Holy Fathers and had only been recently introduced by Rome at the time of Ferra-Florence. St. Mark of Ephesus, responding to this, says that “even the souls which are held in hell and are already given over to eternal torments, whether in actual fact and experience or in hopeless expectation

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<sup>3</sup> Fr. Seraphim Rose, *The Soul After Death, Appendix 1* (Platina, CA. St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2009), 207

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 211.

<sup>5</sup> *Reply of the Eastern Patriarchs*, 6.

<sup>6</sup> From the report on Purgatory given to St. Mark of Ephesus at the Pseudo-council of Ferra-Florence. Cited from *The Soul After Death*, 199.

of such, can be aided and given certain small help, although not in the sense of completely loosing them from torment or giving hope for a final deliverance.”<sup>7</sup> Saint Basil, in the prayers read at Pentecost, petitions the Lord for “a great hope of improvement for those who are imprisoned from the defilements which have imprisoned them, that Thou wilt send down Thy consolation.”<sup>8</sup> However, those who have departed this life “in faith and love,”<sup>9</sup> while still not being purified from their sins, must indeed undergo purification, *but not from a purgatorial fire*. The purification of souls can happen (1) at the time of our death, if out of terror we fervently repent of all the sins we have knowingly or unknowingly committed, or (2) after death, through the prayers of the Church for the souls of the departed. In this second method the souls are freed from the torment of their sins, because through the intercessions of the Church the remission of their sins has been granted. According to St. Mark of Ephesus, “remission and punishment can by no means exist together.”<sup>10</sup> The Lord is merciful and will show mercy upon whom He will show mercy, and this mercy frees us from the debt of sin. “For the one who receives remission of [sins] at the same time is delivered from the punishment owed for them.”<sup>11</sup> The prayers of the Church for the departed are therefore for the mercy of the Lord towards them and the remission of their sins.

*Question- How can the souls of those who have not yet born the fruit of repentance enter into Heaven without first being purified in Purgatory?*

*Answer-* It is by God’s mercy, through the prayer of the Church, that the sins of those who have departed are remitted and they are freed from their punishment. This remission is an act of mercy and thus frees the souls of the departed from punishment. If one must be punished for sins they haven’t adequately repented of, then how can the Lord be merciful? How can remission be granted, if a purifying fire eliminates the need for remission? Such a concept, that we must be burned by fire before being admitted into Paradise, denies the Lord’s promise to Peter (and by extension the other Apostles), that the Church has the power to bind and loose (Matt. 16:19). This, then, is the purpose of prayers for the dead- to loose them of their sins, that through our prayers they may be purified and enter into a place of light, a place of repose, a place of refreshment, where there is no sickness, sorrow, or sighing, but life everlasting.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *The Soul After Death*, 200.

<sup>8</sup> Third Kneeling Prayer, *The Soul After Death*, 201.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 201.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 210.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 209.

<sup>12</sup> The prayer at the Pannykhida