

# PURGATORY

EXPLAINED BY THE LIVES  
AND LEGENDS OF THE SAINTS

*“But I say unto you, that every idle  
word that men shall speak, they shall  
render an account for it in the day of  
judgment.”* —Matthew 12:36



# PURGATORY

EXPLAINED BY THE LIVES AND  
LEGENDS OF THE SAINTS

*by*

FATHER F. X. SCHOUPPE, S. J.

Translated from the French

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

—2 Machabees 12:46

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## PROTESTATION OF THE AUTHOR

In conformity to the decree of Urban VIII, *Sanc-tissimum*, of March 13, 1525, we declare that if in this work we have cited facts represented to be supernatural, nothing but a personal and private authority is to be attached to our opinion; the discernment of facts of this kind belongs to the supreme authority of the Church.

CANON XXX. SESSION VI.  
THE COUNCIL OF TRENT. JANUARY 13, 1547.

If anyone says that after the reception of the grace of justification the guilt is so remitted and the debt of eternal punishment so blotted out to every repentant sinner, that no debt of temporal punishment remains to be discharged, either in this world or in Purgatory, before the gates of Heaven can be opened, let him be anathema.

DECREE CONCERNING PURGATORY.  
THE COUNCIL OF TRENT. SESSION XXV.  
DECEMBER 4, 1563.

Since the Catholic Church, instructed by the Holy Ghost, has, following the sacred writings and the ancient tradition of the Fathers, taught in sacred councils and very recently in this ecumenical council, that there is a Purgatory, and that the souls there detained are aided by the suffrages of the faithful and chiefly by the Acceptable Sacrifice of the Altar, the Holy Council commands the bishops that they strive diligently to the end that the sound doctrine of Purgatory, transmitted by the Fathers and sacred councils, be believed and maintained by the faithful of Christ, and be everywhere taught and preached.

CANONS CONCERNING THE SACRAMENT OF  
PENANCE. THE COUNCIL OF TRENT.  
SESSION XIV, NOVEMBER 25, 1551.

CANON 12. If anyone says that God always pardons the whole penalty together with the guilt and that the satisfaction of penitents is nothing else than the faith by which they perceive that Christ has satisfied for them, let him be anathema.

CANON 13. If anyone says that satisfaction for sins, as to their temporal punishment, is in no way made to God through the merits of Christ by the punishments inflicted by Him and patiently borne, or by those imposed by the priest, or even those voluntarily undertaken, as by fasts, prayers, almsgiving or other works of piety, and that therefore the best penance is merely a new life, let him be anathema.

CANON 14. If anyone says that the satisfactions by which penitents atone for their sins through Christ are not a worship of God but traditions of men, which obscure the doctrine of grace and the true worship of God and the beneficence itself of the death of Christ, let him be anathema.

CANON 15. If anyone says that the keys have been given to the Church only to loose and not also to bind, and that therefore priests, when imposing

penalties on those who confess, act contrary to the purpose of the keys and to the institution of Christ, and that it is a fiction that there remains often a temporal punishment to be discharged after the eternal punishment has by virtue of the keys been removed, let him be anathema.

CHAPTER IX—ON THE WORKS OF  
SATISFACTION. SESSION XIV. THE COUNCIL  
OF TRENT. NOVEMBER 25, 1551.

It [the Council] teaches furthermore that the liberality of the divine munificence is so great that we are able through Jesus Christ to make satisfaction to God the Father, not only by punishments voluntarily undertaken by ourselves to atone for sins, or by those imposed by the judgment of the priest according to the measure of our offense, but also, and this is the greatest proof of love, by the temporal afflictions imposed by God and borne patiently by us.

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## PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

Of all the Catholic books the reader is likely to encounter, it is difficult to imagine one that will ever be more moving or that will influence him more than *Purgatory—Explained by the Lives and Legends of the Saints*, by Fr. F. X. Schouppe, S. J. Because of this fact the publishers have cooperated with another apostolate in issuing this inexpensive pocketbook edition, popularly priced and generously discounted, in the hopes that it will reach the widest possible readership.

For the doctrine of Purgatory sums up, from its own perspective, all of Catholic teaching. It puts us, especially through the agency of Fr. Schouppe's book, vitally in touch with the central issues of our Religion—the salvation of our souls and the means to attain this end.

A reading of this book should have three immediate and practical results: First, it will make us want to work to relieve the sufferings of the Poor Souls in Purgatory; second, it will inspire us to amend our own lives so that we do not have to go there; and third, it will motivate us to spread the knowledge about the truth of Purgatory to others, that they too will be motivated to pray for the Poor Souls and avoid Purgatory themselves. Actually, one of the greatest kindnesses we can perform for the Poor Souls is the spreading of this

book, which is so effective in teaching about this holy doctrine.

As the author states in his preface, this book was composed to inflame the hearts of *faithful Catholics* with a tender care and continual solicitude for the Poor Souls. It is not a polemical work nor an apologetics on Purgatory, but an inspirational one, a book intended to increase the reader's knowledge, understanding and love.

Today, little mention is made of Purgatory, even in Catholic circles, with the result that many who profess to be Catholics no longer believe in this doctrine. This is the natural consequence of the relative scarcity of good Catholic literature on the subject. If people never read about Purgatory, and seldom hear it spoken of, they are naturally going to place less and less credence in it.

Nonetheless, it is natural for human beings to believe in Purgatory, for it is completely logical and just—even prescinding from the fact that it is a Catholic teaching that comes down to us from the Apostles and is also found in Sacred Scripture. It may even come as a revelation to many Catholics today that *in order to be a Catholic one must believe in the existence of Purgatory*, for the existence of Purgatory is a dogma of the Church, and to be a Catholic requires that one adhere to *all* the teachings which the Church teaches as dogmatic.

It must be remembered that what any given person thinks or believes in relation to any specific teaching of Religion has nothing whatever to

do with its truth. The truth is always the truth, no matter what anyone thinks or believes in its regard. That many today do not speak about or believe in Purgatory does not take away the reality. Purgatory exists, for the Church teaches that it exists, and it was Christ who taught this to the Church.

We know that the Protestant “reformers” of the 16th Century rejected the Church’s teaching on Purgatory, though, as Calvin admitted, it had always been a common belief. And though Father Schoupe does not mention her (apparently not being familiar with her revelations), the Venerable Anne Catherine Emmerich deposes frequently on the subject of Purgatory, among which revelations one of the saddest is that the souls of Protestants languish the longest and suffer the worst in Purgatory because they generally have so few friends and relatives to pray for them. “Protestants” who save their souls but who do not merit Heaven directly will find themselves in Purgatory, just like everyone else. The fact they did not believe in it will not relieve them at all of the necessity of going there. God’s truth is still *the* truth, no matter what we as individuals might believe about it.

Father Schoupe has divided this book into two principal sections: The Mystery of God’s Justice and The Mystery of God’s Mercy, in that order. The reader should be keenly aware of the fact that the first part of the book, roughly one-half, concentrates on God’s justice and consequently

gives the general impression of severity. This is obviously done with a purpose. For the author wants to impress upon us the seriousness of everything we do and the strict account we will have to render for even the smallest act in our lives. With His holy justice seen in this light, scarcely a one could stand the judgment of Almighty God.

But there is also God's mercy to be considered, and this is the principal focus of the second half of the book. Here the author gives not only many instances of God's mercy being invoked and secured, but the various means we may employ to remit the temporal punishment due to sin—both for the Poor Souls and for ourselves. The author insists that we should ever entertain a holy and wholesome fear of God's justice, but that it should always be tempered and counterbalanced by a powerful trust in God's mercy and the many means He has placed at our disposal to obtain the remission of temporal punishment due to sin. Temporal punishment due to sin, it will be remembered, is that spiritual debt that will keep us in Purgatory until remitted either by our own sufferings or someone else's prayers and good works on our behalf.

In the course of this inspiring book, the author covers virtually every aspect of the doctrine of Purgatory. The reader is bound to find fascinating revelations he or she may never have realized. For example, the author says the sufferings of Purgatory are basically of the same nature and

intensity (depending on the severity of the punishment) as those of Hell. Yet, the Poor Souls do not wish to return to this world because they know that they are saved for sure since they are in Purgatory. Also, the duration of time there has no relationship to our experience of time in this world; even a few minutes to the Poor Souls can seem like years. Our suffrages or offerings for the dead are more agreeable to God than our prayers and good works for the living, for the Poor Souls are closer to God, stand in greater need, and cannot help themselves. The Poor Souls can pray for us while still in Purgatory, even though they cannot help themselves. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass which we cause to have offered for them is more efficacious than any other work or devotion we can do. Yet our almsgiving for them is more efficacious than either our prayer or fasting. And finally, all that we offer in charity for the Poor Souls is ultimately accounted to our own merit as well—to this end the author quotes St. John of God, who once traversed the streets of Granada proclaiming in a loud voice, "Give alms, my brethren, give alms for the love of yourselves!"

Fr. Schouppe quotes a disproportionate number of instances where religious, rather than lay people, have come back from Purgatory to make revelations about their sufferings. This is probably due to several facts: for example, the greater likelihood that such instances would be recorded and handed down by members of the deceased person's order; and the greater grace earned by

religious, who spend their lives close to God and in His special work, and therefore have won the greater mercy from Him during their sufferings in Purgatory. But the author is quick to point out that appearances from the Poor Souls often are seen by seemingly “ordinary” laymen and women as well, and that such appearances have occurred at all times and in many different places during Church history.

One of the best points scored by the author is the fact that we who are still among the Church Militant have a sacred *duty* to pray for and make sacrifices on behalf of the Poor Souls in Purgatory, for even the saints in Heaven, though they can aid the Poor Souls in their sufferings, still cannot gain for them indulgences, let alone plenary indulgences, as we can who are still on this earth.

Because so few people today understand the nature and value of indulgences and just how they may be gained—especially plenary indulgences—we have considered it wise to include as an appendix to this book a brief explanation of the Church’s teaching on the nature of indulgences and the method for gaining them. Indulgences constitute a spiritual treasure able so far to offset the justice of God in favor of His mercy that anyone who believes in the Faith and diligently works to earn indulgences, especially plenary indulgences, should have nothing to fear from God’s justice when he dies, provided he diligently and continually try to amend his life. So prodigally liberal with her indulgences has been

Holy Mother the Church that Blessed Mary of Quito (See chapter 26) "One day, rapt in ecstasy . . . saw in the midst of a large space an immense table covered with heaps of silver, gold, rubies, pearls, and diamonds, and at the same time she heard a voice saying, 'These riches are public property; each one may approach and take as much as he pleases.' God made known to her that this was a symbol of indulgences." Indulgences are spiritual riches free for the asking, riches which any believing Catholic who is in the state of grace can avail himself of for the relief of the Poor Souls or for the remission of the spiritual debts which he himself has incurred. If a person does not make use of these indulgences, it has to be one of the greatest wastes in the entire world.

Another important point to remember is the fact that prayers and sufferings offered to God during our life actually gain us merit, an increase in sanctifying grace, a higher degree of charity, closer union with God, and thus a higher degree of glory in Heaven for all eternity. But the sufferings of Purgatory, on the other hand, are useless as far as further advancement in holiness is concerned; they simply enable us to pay those debts which we should never have incurred in the first place. A Catholic who offers his prayers and sufferings to God during this life—the time for gaining merit—will achieve two objectives with one effort: he will reduce his own debt of punishment for sin, and he will also advance in holiness and increase the degree of his future glory in Heaven.

To illustrate this point, Father Schoupe recounts the story of a deceased Spanish monk who appeared on earth four months after the death of King Philip II (1589); presumably many Masses and prayers had been offered throughout Spain for the repose of the King's soul. The monk reported that King Philip II was already in Heaven, but that the King's place there was as much lower than the monk's as the latter's place had been below King Philip's during their lives on earth.

Finally, Fr. Schoupe quotes St. Catherine of Genoa, who has given in her *Treatise on Purgatory* one of the finest revelations we have on the subject; and in this, passage we can sum up the spirit and insight of this present book: "He who purifies himself of his faults in this present life satisfies with a penny a debt of a thousand ducats (\$300,000); and he who waits until the other life to discharge his debts, consents to pay a thousand ducats for that which he might before have paid with a penny."

The choice is ours. Will we as ostriches with our spiritual heads in the sand ignore Christ's consoling doctrine on Purgatory, to the great detriment of our loved ones who may be languishing there, and meanwhile pile up for ourselves a staggering debt, which we shall certainly one day have to pay? Or shall we inform ourselves about the sufferings of Purgatory and resolve to free from those excruciating pains as many helpless Poor Souls as we possibly can, and heap up to ourselves thereby an overwhelming treasure of grace

and attach to ourselves a great concourse of grateful souls who will pray for us in return, both in this life and during our own stay in Purgatory, if we should have to go there? Truly, the choice is ours! But a studious and pious reading of this book will surely sway the reader to the side of mercy for the Poor Souls, which, in the infinite mercy of God, will also redound to his own great spiritual benefit.

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Feast of St. Catherine of Siena