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What About Purgatory?

Is Purgatory an invention of Catholic theologians?

Martensen, a Protestant, in his "Christian Dogmatics", says no. "As no soul leaves this present existence in a fully complete and prepared state," he writes, "we must suppose that there is an intermediate state....in which souls are prepared for the final judgment."

And if we read the Scriptures with our intellects as well as with our eyes, we find Purgatory revealed in both the Old and the New Testaments.

In II Machabees (XII 43-46), we learn that Judas, leader of the forces of Israel, sent 12,000 pieces of silver to Jerusalem for sacrifice to be offered for the sins of the dead. The passage concludes: "It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from their sins."

Why offer sacrifice, why pray for the dead if they be either in Heaven or in Hell?

In the New Testament Jesus Christ Himself declares (Matt. XII, 32): "....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." Here Christ clearly implies that some sinners, not forgiven in this world, are actually forgiven in the world to come.

Purgatory, then, is a place of purification and of temporary separation from God. Those good people go there who die in the state of sanctifying grace, without true repentance for their smaller faults, or without having expiated fully the temporal punishment due to their forgiven sins.

In Purgatory the process of purification is painful. St. Augustine, St. Gregory the Great, and St. Thomas, speak of a purgatorial fire which causes more pain than anything a man suffers in this life. And, as you can see in many hospitals, there are plenty of long and severe pains suffered in this life!

Yet the souls in Purgatory feel no resentment towards God, but only a deep longing and profound lonesomeness to be with Him.

They cry out every day during the month of November for assistance, for Masses and Holy Communions, that they may be freed from Purgatory to share in the full joys of Heaven. The following words of Tennyson might have been spoken by some Poor Soul:

Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer  
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore let thy voice  
Rise like a fountain for me night and day,  
For what are men better than sheep or goats  
That nourish a blind life within the brain  
If knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer  
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?

For Father O'Donnell.

Father Charles O'Donnell would have been 50 years old tomorrow. It is also the anniversary of his religious profession. Remember him in your Masses and Holy Communions. Tomorrow is the feast of St. Albert the Great, teacher of St. Thomas.

PRAYERS: Deceased, aunt of Joseph Nowak (Off-Campus). Ill, mother of Kevin Kehoe, '36. Five special intentions.