

The Pagan Origin of Purgatory

The following timely article, which shows up the pagan doctrine of purgatory, is adapted from Alexander Hislop's well-documented scientific work, "THE TWO BABYLONS."

In every religious system, except that of the New Testament, the doctrine of purgatory after death and prayers for the dead have always found a place. In ancient and modern times, we find that paganism leaves hope after death for sinners, who, at the time of their departure, are unrepentant, and consciously unfit for heaven. For this purpose a "middle state" was invented in which guilt could be removed in the future world by means of purgatorial pains.

In Greece the doctrine of a purgatory was taught by the very chief of the philosophers. Thus Plato, speaking of the future judgment of the dead, holds out the hope of final deliverance for all, but maintains that, of "those who are judged," some must first "proceed to a subterranean place of judgment, where they shall sustain the punishment they have deserved." In pagan Rome, purgatory was also held up before the minds of men. Virgil, celebrated poet of pagan Rome, describing its different tortures, puts it thus:

"Nor can the groveling mind, in the dark dungeon of the limbs confined, assert the native skies, or own its heavenly kind. Nor death itself can wholly wash their stains; but long-contacted filth, even in the soul, remains the relics of inveterate vice they wear and spots of sin obscene in every face appear. For this are various penances enjoined; and some are hung to bleach upon the wind, some plunged in water, others purged in fires, till all the dregs are drained, and all the rust expires. All have their Manes, and those Manes bear. The few so cleansed to these abodes repair, and breathe in ample fields the soft Elysian air. Then are they happy, when by length of time the scurf is worn away of each committed crime, no speck is left of their habitual stains, but the pure ether of the soul remains."

In Egypt, substantially the same doctrine of purgatory was taught. But once this doctrine of purgatory was admitted into the popular mind, then the door was opened to all manner of priestly extortions. Prayers for the dead can be completely efficacious without the priest as intermediary and no priestly functions can be rendered unless there be special pay for them. Therefore, in every land we find the pagan priesthood "devouring widow's houses," and making merchandise of the tender feelings of sorrowing relatives sensitively alive to the immortal happiness of their beloved dead.

From all quarters there is the same testimony as to the burdensome character and the expense of these posthumous devotions. One of the oppressions under which people in Roman Catholic countries groan, is the periodical nature of special devotions, for which they are required to pay, when death has carried away a member of a Catholic family. Not only are there funeral services and funeral dues for the repose of the departed at time of burial, but the priest pays repeated visits afterwards to the family for the same purpose, which entail heavy expense, beginning with what is called "the month's mind" mass, that is, a service in behalf of the deceased when a month after death has elapsed.

A similar practice was in vogue in ancient Greece: "There the Argives sacrificed on the thirteenth day (after death) to Mercury as the conductor of the dead." In India there are many burdensome services of the Sradd'ha, or funeral obsequies for the repose of the dead, and for securing the due efficacy of these it is taught that "donations of cattle, land, gold, silver, and other things," should be made by the man himself at the approach of death, or, if he be too weak, by another in his name."

In all pagan religions the case is the same. In Tartary, "The Gurjumi, or prayers for the dead," says the ASIATIC JOURNAL, "are very expensive." In Greece, says Suidas, "the greatest and most expensive sacrifice was the mysterious sacrifice called the Telete," a sacrifice which, according to Plato, "was offered for the living and the dead, and was supposed to free them from all the evils to which the wicked are liable when they have left this world." In Egypt the exactions of the priests for funeral dues and masses for the dead were equally burdensome. "The priests," says Wilkinson, "induced the people to expend large sums on the celebration of funeral rites; and many who had barely sufficient to obtain the necessaries of life were anxious to save something for the expenses of their death. For, beside the embalming process, which sometimes cost a talent of silver, about \$1,000, the tomb itself was purchased at an immense expense; and numerous demands were made upon the estate of the deceased for the celebration of prayer and other services for the soul."

"The ceremonies," he tells us elsewhere, "consisted of a sacrifice similar to those offered in the temples, vowed for the deceased to one or more gods (as Osiris, Anubis, and others connected with Amenti); incense and libations were also presented; and a prayer was sometimes read, the relations and friends being present as mourners. They even joined their prayers to those of a priest. The priest who officiated at the burial service was selected from the grade of Pontiffs who wore the leopard skin; but various other rites were performed by one of the minor priests to the mummies, previous to their being lowered into the pit of the tomb after that ceremony. Indeed, they continued to be administered at intervals, as long as the family paid for their performance."

Such was the operation of the doctrine of purgatory and prayers for the dead among avowed and acknowledged pagans, and it differs in no way from the operation of the same doctrine as taught by the Roman Catholic Church. There are the same extortions in both. The doctrine of purgatory is purely pagan, and cannot for a moment stand in the light of Scripture. For those who die in Christ no purgatory is or can be needed; for "the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth from all sin." If this be true, where can there be the need for any other cleansing? On the other hand, for those who die without personal union with Christ, and consequently unwashed, unjustified, unsaved, there can be no other cleansing; for, while "he that hath the Son hath life, he that hath not the Son hath not life," and never can have it. Search the Scripture through, and it will be found that, in regard to all who "die in their sins." The decree of God is irreversible: "Let him that is unjust be unjust still, and let him that is filthy be filthy still."

Thus the whole doctrine of purgatory is a system of plain pagan imposture, dishonoring God, atoning for it after death and cheating them at once out of their property and their salvation. In the pagan purgatory, fire, water, wind, were represented (as may be seen from the lines of Virgil) as combining to purge away the stain of sin. In the purgatory of the Roman Catholic Church, ever since the days of Pope

Gregory, fire itself has been the grand means of purgation. Thus, while the purgatorial fires of the future world are just the carrying out of the principle embodied in the blazing and purifying Baal-fires of the eve of St. John, they form another link in identifying the system of Rome with the system of Tammuz or Zoroaster, the great God of the ancient fire-worshippers.

Now, if baptismal regeneration, justification by works, penance as a satisfaction to God's justice, the unbloody sacrifice of the mass, extreme unction, purgatory, and prayers for the dead, were all derived from Babylon, how justly may not the whole theological system of the Church of Rome be styled Babylonian?

What thanks therefore, ought we not render to God, that, from a system such as this, we were set free by the Protestant Reformation! How great a boon to be delivered from trusting in such lies that can no more take away sin than the blood of bulls or of goats! How blessed to know that the blood of the Lamb, applied by the Spirit of God to the most defiled conscience, completely purges it from dead works and from sin! How fervent ought our gratitude be, when we know that, in the name of no creature, but of God's eternal and well-beloved Son we are saved.

The New Testament shows us Jesus Christ as a most tender and compassionate high priest, who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, having been in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Surely the thought of all this, while inspiring tender compassion for the deluded people of the Roman Catholic church, ought to make us stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free and act like men, so that neither we nor our children may ever again be entangled in the yoke of bondage.