

21 Centuries of Catholic Doctrine: PURGATORY

As taught in the Church's historical writings, from the time of the Apostles down to today

ca. 70 A.D.—*Didache or Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*

—*Indulgences (vicarious atonement)*—

7:4 Before the Baptism, let the one baptizing and the one to be baptized fast, as also any others who are able.

ca. 96—Pope Saint Clement, fourth Bishop of Rome, disciple of the Apostles Peter and Paul, *Letter to the Corinthians*

—*Indulgences (vicarious atonement)*—

53:5 O great love! O unsurpassed perfection! The servant [Moses] speaks openly to his Lord. He begs pardon for his people or requests that he too will be wiped out along with them (Ex. 32:31-32). ...

55:1-6 Let us take some heathen examples: In times of plague many kings and rulers, prompted by oracles, have given themselves up to death in order to rescue their subjects by their own blood (cf. Cicero, *Tusc.* 1:116). We know many of our own number who have had themselves imprisoned in order to ransom others. Many have sold themselves into slavery and given the price to feed others. Many women, empowered by God's grace, have performed deeds worthy of men. The blessed Judith, when her city was under siege, begged of the elders to be permitted to leave it for the enemy's camp. So she exposed herself to danger and for love of her country and of her besieged people, she departed. And the Lord delivered Holofernes into the hands of a woman. To no less danger did Esther, that woman of perfect faith, expose herself in order to rescue the twelve tribes of Israel when they were on the point of being destroyed. For by her fasting and humiliation she implored the all-seeing Master, the eternal God; and he beheld the humility of her soul and rescued her people for whose sake she had faced danger.

—*ca. 100, Death of Saint John, the last of the Apostles*

ca. 107—Saint Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, disciple of the Apostle John, *Letter to the Ephesians*

—*Indulgences (vicarious atonement)*—

8:1 A cheap sacrifice I am, but I dedicate myself to you Ephesians.

ca. 150—Saint Justin the Martyr, *First Apology*

—*Indulgences (vicarious atonement)*—

61 Whoever is convinced and believes that what they are taught and told by us is the truth, and professes to be able to live accordingly, is instructed to pray and to beseech God in fasting for the remission of their former sins, while we pray and fast with them.

ca. 156—*The Martyrdom of Saint Polycarp*

—*Indulgences (vicarious atonement)*—

1:2 [Polycarp] waited to be betrayed, just as the Lord did, in order that we too might be imitators of him, "not looking only to that which concerns ourselves, but also to that which concerns our neighbors" (Phil. 2:4). For it is the mark of true and steadfast love to desire not only that oneself be saved, but all the brothers as well. ...

14:1, 2-3 [Polycarp] looked up to heaven and said: "O Lord God Almighty, ... I bless you because you have considered me worthy of this day and hour, that I might receive a place among the number of the martyrs in the cup of your Christ, to the resurrection to eternal life, both of soul and of body, in the incorruptibility of the Holy Spirit. May I be received among them in your presence today, as a rich and acceptable sacrifice, as you have prepared and revealed beforehand, and have now accomplished, you who are the undecieving and true God. For this reason, indeed for all things, I praise you, I bless you, I glorify you, through the eternal and heavenly High Priest, Jesus Christ, your beloved Son, through whom to you with him and the Holy Spirit be glory both now and for the ages to come. Amen." ...

ca. 190—Saint Abercius Marcellus, Bishop of Hieropolis, Epitaph

—*Prayers for the dead*—

The citizen of a prominent city, I erected this

While I lived, that I might have a resting place for my body.

Abercius is my name, a disciple of the chaste shepherd

Who feeds His sheep on the mountains and in the fields,

Who has great eyes surveying everywhere,

Who taught me the faithful writings of life. ...

Standing by, I, Abercius, ordered this to be inscribed;

Truly I was in my seventy-second year.

May everyone who is in accord with this and who understands it pray for Abercius.

203—Saint Vibia Perpetua and others, *The Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas*

—*Prayers for the dead*—

2:3 [*Perpetua*.] After a few days, while we were all praying, suddenly in the middle of the prayer I spoke, and uttered the name of Dinocrates; and I was astonished that he had never come into mind till then; and I grieved, thinking of what had befallen him. And I saw at once that I was entitled, and ought, to make request for him. And I began to pray much for him, and make lamentation to the Lord. At once on this very night this was shown to me. I saw Dinocrates coming forth from a dark place, where there were many other dark places, very hot and thirsty, his countenance pale and squalid; and the wound which he had when he died was in his face still. This Dinocrates had been my brother according to the flesh, seven years old, who had died miserably of a gangrene in the face, so that his death moved all to loathing. For him then I had prayed; and there was a great gulf between me and him, so that neither of us could approach the other. There was besides in the very place where Dinocrates was a font full of water, the rim of which was above the head of the child; and Dinocrates stood on tiptoe to drink. I grieved that the font should have water in it and that nevertheless he could not drink because of the height of the rim. And I woke and recognized that my brother was in trouble. But I trusted that I could relieve his trouble, and I prayed for him every day until we were transferred to the garrison prison, for we were

to fight with the beasts at the garrison games on the Cæsar Geta's birthday. And I prayed for him day and night with lamentations and tears that he might be given me.

2: 4 During the daytime, while we stayed in the stocks, this was shown to me. I saw that same place which I had seen before, and Dinocrates clean in body, well clothed and refreshed; and where there had been a wound, I saw a scar; and the font which I had seen before had its rim lowered to the child's waist; and there poured water from it unceasingly; and on the rim a golden bowl full of water. And Dinocrates came forward and began to drink from it, and the bowl failed not. And when he had drunk enough of the water, he came forward, being glad to play as children will. And I awoke. Then I knew that he had been released from punishment.

211—Tertullian, *The Crown*

—*Indulgences; Mass for the dead*—

3:3 We offer sacrifices [i.e., the Holy Eucharist] for the dead on their birthday anniversaries [i.e., the anniversaries of their deaths, their "birthdays" to eternal life].

ca. 215—Tertullian, *Monogamy*

—*Indulgences; Mass for the dead; prayers for the dead*—

10:1, 4 A woman, after the death of her husband, is bound not less firmly but even more so, not to marry another husband Indeed, she prays for his soul and asks that he may, while waiting, find rest; and that he may share in the first resurrection. And each year, on the anniversary of his death, she offers the sacrifice [i.e., the Holy Eucharist].

ca. 220—Tertullian, *Modesty*

—*Indulgences*—

21:7 "But," you say, "the Church has the power of forgiving sins." This I acknowledge. ...

22:1-2 But you even pour out this power [of forgiving sins] upon your martyrs. As soon as anyone by common agreement has put on the bonds—soft ones, in the new and nominal imprisonments—immediately adulterers beset him, immediately fornicators gain access to him; instantly prayers echo around him, instantly pools of tears of all the polluted surround him; nor are they more anxious to buy their way into prison [i.e., to become martyrs themselves] than those who have lost the Church. Men and women are violated in the darkness made familiar to them by their habitual indulgence of lust; and they seek

peace at the hands of those who are risking their own. Others flee to the mines and return from there as communicants [i.e., recipients of the Holy Eucharist], when already another martyrdom is necessary because of the new sins committed after martyrdom.

250—Saint Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, *Letter to His Clergy*

—*Indulgences*—

18 [12]:1 Inasmuch as I find that there is not yet an opportunity of coming to you, and the Summer has already begun—a season disturbed by continual and grave illnesses—I think that we must deal with our brethren. Therefore, those who have received certificates from the martyrs and are able to be assisted by their privileged position before God, if they should be seized by some misfortune or dangerous illness at a time when my return is not expected, then, before whatever presbyter is present, or if a presbyter is not found and death begins to be imminent, even before a deacon they are permitted to make their confession of sin, so that a hand may be imposed upon them in penance and they may come to the Lord with the peace which the martyrs, as indicated in letters sent to us, desired to be given them.

251—Cyprian, *The Lapsed*

—*Indulgences*—

17 The Lord alone is able to have mercy. He alone, who bore our sins, who grieved for us, and whom God delivered up for our sins, is able to grant pardon for the sins which have been committed against Him. . . . Certainly we believe that the merits of the martyrs and the works of the just will be of great avail with the Judge—but that will be when the day of judgment comes, when, after the end of this age and of the world, His people shall stand before the tribunal of Christ.

ca. 310—Lactantius, *The Divine Institutions*

7:21:6 But also, when God will judge the just, it is likewise in fire that He will try them. At that time, they whose sins are uppermost, either because of their gravity or their number, will be drawn together by the fire and will be burned. Those, however, who have been imbued with full justice and maturity of virtue, will not feel that fire; for they have something of God in them which will repel and turn back the strength of the flame.

—313, *The Edict of Milan: legalization of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire*

ca. 350—Saint Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem, Doctor of the Church, *Catechetical Lectures*

—*Indulgences; Mass for the dead; prayers for the dead*—

23 [*Mystagogic* 5]:9-10 [Following the Consecration of the Mass] we make mention of also of those who have already fallen asleep: first, the patriarchs, prophets, Apostles, and martyrs, that through their prayers and supplications God would receive our petition; next, we make mention also of the holy fathers and bishops who have already fallen asleep, and, to put it simply, of all among us who have already asleep; for we believe that it will be of very great benefit to the souls of those for whom the petition is carried up, while this holy and most solemn Sacrifice is laid out. . . .

And I wish to persuade you by an illustration. For I know that there are many who are saying this: “If a soul departs from this world with sins, what does it profit it to be remembered in the prayer?” Well, if a king were to banish certain persons who had offended him, and those intervening for them were to plait a crown and offer it to him on behalf of the ones who were being punished, would he not grant a remission of their penalties? In the same way we too offer prayers to Him for those who have fallen asleep, though they may be sinners. We do not plait a crown, but offer up Christ who has been sacrificed for our sins; and we thereby propitiate the benevolent God for them as well as for ourselves.

374-377—Saint Epiphanius, Bishop of Constantia (Salamis), *Panárion or Panacea Against All Heresies*

—*Indulgences; Mass for the dead; prayers for the dead*—

75:8 Furthermore, as to mentioning the names of the dead, how is there anything very useful in that? What is more timely or more excellent than that those who are still here should believe that the departed do live, and that they have not retreated into nothingness, but that they exist and are alive with the Master? And so that this most august proclamation might be told in full, how do they have hope, who are praying for the brethren as if they were but sojourning in a foreign land? Useful too is the prayer fashioned on their behalf, even if it does not force back the whole of guilty charges laid to them. And it is useful also, because in this world we often stumble either voluntarily or involuntarily, and thus it is a reminder to do better. For we make commemoration of the just and the Fathers and Patriarchs and

Prophets and Apostles and Evangelists and martyrs and confessors, and of bishops and solitaries, and of the whole list of them, so that we may set the Lord Jesus Christ apart from the ranks of men because of the honor due Him, and give reverence to Him, while keeping in mind that the Lord is not to be equated with any man, even if that man live in a justice that is boundless and limitless.

387—Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, Doctor of the Church, *The Confessions*

—*Indulgences; Mass for the dead; prayers for the dead*—

9:11 Then [my mother] looked into my face and said: ... "You may lay this body of mine anywhere. Do not worry at all about that. All I ask you is this, that wherever you may be you will remember me at the altar of the Lord." ...

9:13 So let her rest in peace with her husband ... And inspire, my Lord and my God, inspire your servants my brethren, your sons my masters, whom I serve with heart and voice and pen, that as many as shall read this may remember at your altar Monica, your servant, with Patricius, her husband ... May they with holy affection remember those two who were my parents in this transitory light, who are my brethren under you, Our Father, in our Catholic mother [i.e., the Church], and my fellow citizens in the eternal Jerusalem for which your people in their pilgrimage sigh from the beginning of their journey until their return home. And so by means of these Confessions of mine I pray that my mother may have her last request of me still more richly answered in the prayers of many others besides myself.

388—Saint Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, Doctor of the Church, *Penance*

—*Indulgences*—

1:15:80 For he is purged as if by certain works of the whole people, and is washed in the tears of the multitude; by the prayers and tears of the multitude he is redeemed from sin, and is cleansed in the inner man. For Christ granted to His Church that one should be redeemed through all, just as His Church was found worthy of the coming of the Lord Jesus so that all might be redeemed through one.

391-430—Augustine, *Sermons*

—*Indulgences; Mass for the dead; prayers for the dead*—

159:1 There is an ecclesiastical discipline, as the faithful know, when the names of the martyrs are read aloud in that place at the altar of God,

where prayer is not offered for them. Prayer, however, is offered for other dead who are remembered. It is wrong to pray for a martyr, to whose prayers we ought ourselves be commended. ...

172:2 But by the prayers of the Holy Church, and by the salvific sacrifice [i.e., the Holy Eucharist], and by the alms which are given for their spirits, there is no doubt that the dead are aided, that the Lord might deal more mercifully with them than their sins would deserve. The whole Church observes this practice which was handed down by the Fathers: that it prays for those who have died in the communion of the Body and Blood of Christ, when they are commemorated in their own place in the sacrifice itself, and the sacrifice is offered also in memory of them, on their behalf. If, then, works of mercy are celebrated for the sake of those who are being remembered, who would hesitate to recommend them, on whose behalf prayers to God are not offered in vain? It is not at all to be doubted that such prayers are of profit to the dead; but for such of them as lived before their death in a way that makes it possible for these things to be useful to them after death.

398-404—Saint John Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople, Doctor of the Church,

Homilies on the Epistle to the Philippians

—*Indulgences; Mass for the dead; prayers for the dead*—

3:4 Weep for those who die in their wealth, and who with all their wealth prepared no consolation for their own souls, who had the power to wash away their sins and did not will to do it. ... Let us weep for them, let us assist them to the extent of our ability, let us think of some assistance for them, small as it may be, yet let us somehow assist them. But how, and in what way? By praying for them and by entreating others to pray for them, by constantly giving alms to the poor on their behalf. ...

Not in vain was it decreed by the Apostles that in the awesome Mysteries remembrance should be made of the departed. They knew that there was much gain for them, much benefit. For when the entire people stands with hands uplifted, a priestly assembly, and that awesome sacrificial Victim is laid out, how, when we are calling upon God, should we not succeed in their defense? But this is done for those who have departed in the faith, while even the catechumens are not reckoned as

worthy of this consolation, but are deprived of every means of assistance except one. And what is that? We may give alms to the poor on their behalf.

419—Augustine, *The City of God*

21:13 [T]emporary punishments are suffered by some in this life only, by others after death, by others both now and then; but all of them before the last and strictest judgment. But of those who suffer temporary punishments after death, all are not doomed to those everlasting pains which are to follow that judgment . . .

—*Indulgences; prayers for the dead*—

21:24 For some of the dead, indeed, the prayer of the Church or of pious individuals is heard; but it is for those who, having been regenerated in Christ, did not spend their life so wickedly that they can be judged unworthy of such compassion, nor so well that they can be considered to have no need of it. As also, after the resurrection, there will be some of the dead to whom, after they have endured the pains proper to the spirits of the dead, mercy shall be accorded, and acquittal from the punishment of eternal fire. For were there not some whose sins, though not remitted in this life, shall be remitted in that which is to come, it could not truly be said, “They shall not be forgiven, neither in this world, neither in that which is to come” (Matt. 12:32) (pp. 18, 304, 726-727, 784, 795).

421—Augustine, *The Care that Should Be Taken of the Dead*

—*Indulgences; Mass for the dead; prayers for the dead*—

1:3 We read in the books of the Maccabees that sacrifice was offered for the dead (2 Macc. 12:43). But even if it were found nowhere in the Old Testament writings, the authority of the universal Church which is clear on this point is of no small weight, where in the prayers of the priest poured forth to the Lord God at His altar the commendation of the dead has its place.

421—Augustine, *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love*

18:69 That there should be some such fire even after this life is not incredible, and it can be inquired into and either be discovered or left hidden whether some of the faithful may be saved, some more slowly and some more quickly in the greater or lesser degree in which they loved the good things that perish,—through a certain purgatorial fire. . .

—*Indulgences; Mass for the dead*—

29:109-110 The time which interposes between the death of a man and the final resurrection holds souls in hidden retreats, accordingly as each is deserving of rest or of hardship, in view of what it merited when it was living in the flesh. Nor can it be denied that the souls of the dead find relief through the piety of their friends and relatives who are still alive, when the Sacrifice of the Mediator is offered for them [in the Mass], or when alms are given in the church. But these things are of profit to those who, when they were alive, merited that they might afterwards be able to be helped by these things. For there is a certain manner of living, neither so good that there is no need of these helps after death, nor yet so wicked that these helps are of no avail after death. There is, indeed, a manner of living so good that these helps are not needed, and again a manner so evil that these helps are of no avail, once a man has passed from this life.

ca. 540—Saint Caesar, Bishop of Arles, *Sermons*

—*Indulgences*—

179 [104]:2-5 Although the Apostle has mentioned many grievous [i.e., mortal] sins, we, nevertheless, lest we seem to promote despair, will state briefly what they are. Sacrilege, murder, adultery, false witness, theft, robbery, pride, envy, avarice, and, if it is of long standing, anger, drunkenness, if it is persistent, and slander are reckoned in their number. For if anyone knows that any of these sins dominates him, if he does not do penance worthily and for a long time, if such time is given him, and if he does not give abundant alms and abstain from those same sins, he cannot be purged in that transitory fire of which the Apostle spoke (1 Cor. 3:11-15), but the eternal flames will torture him without any remedy. But since the lesser [i.e., venial] sins are, of course, known to all, and it would take too long to mention them all, it will be necessary for us only to name some of them. . . There is no doubt that these and similar deeds belong to the lesser sins which, as I said before, can scarcely be counted, and from which not only all Christian people, but even all the saints could not and cannot always be free. We do not, of course, believe that the soul is killed by these sins, but still they make it ugly by covering it as if with some kind of pustules and, as it were, with horrible scabs, which allow the soul to come only with difficulty to the embrace of the heavenly Spouse, of whom it is written: “He prepared for Himself a Church

having neither spot nor blemish” (see Eph. 5:27). ... If we neither give thanks to God in tribulations nor redeem our own sins by good works, we shall have to remain in that purgatorial fire as long as it takes for those above-mentioned lesser sins to be consumed like wood and straw and hay (cf. 1 Cor. 3:12). But someone is saying: “It is nothing to me how long I stay there, so long as I go on finally to eternal life.” Let no one say that, beloved brethren, because that purgatorial fire itself will be more difficult than any punishments that can be seen or imagined or felt in this life.

593—Pope Saint Gregory the Great, 64th Bishop of Rome, Doctor of the Church, *Dialogues* 4:30 *Peter [the Deacon]*: I should like to know whether or not we must believe in a purgatorial fire after death. *Gregory*: ... Everyone is presented in judgment just as he is when he departs this life. But nevertheless, it must be believed that there is, for the sake of certain lesser faults [i.e., venial sins], a purgatorial fire before the judgment, in view of the fact that Truth does say that if anyone speak blasphemy against the Holy Spirit it will be forgiven him neither in this world nor in that to come (Matt. 12:32). In this statement we are given to understand that some faults can be forgiven in this world and some in the world to come. For if something is denied to one in particular, the intellect logically infers that it is granted for some others. But, as I said before, this must be believed to be a possible disposition for small and lesser sins.

—636, *Death of Saint Isidore of Seville, end of the patristic period in the West*

ca. 645—Saint John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*

—*Prayers for the dead*—

Pray often where the dead are laid out and paint in your heart an indelible image of them, traced there with the brush of fasting.

720—Eadburga (or Bugga), Abbess of Minster, *Letter Congratulating Boniface on His Success in Frisia*

—*Indulgences; Mass for the dead; prayers for the dead*—

I beg of you also to offer some holy Masses for the soul of a relative of mine, who was dear to me beyond all others and whose name was N_____.

—ca. 749, *Death of Saint John Damascene, end of the patristic period in the East*

ca. 836—Rudolf of Fulda, *The Life of Saint Leoba*—*Indulgences; prayers for the dead*—

Most earnestly do I beg you and all the nuns who unceasingly invoke the name of the Lord to pray for me, so that I, Rudolf, a monk of Fulda and a wretched sinner, in spite of my unworthiness to share the fellowship of the elect of God, may through the merits of those who are pleasing to Him receive pardon of my sins and escape the penalties due to them. ...

[The Abbess Tetta] counselled them to lay aside their resentment, to accept the ill-treatment they had received and to show without delay their forgiveness: if they wished their own sins to be forgiven by God they should forgive others from the bottom of their hearts. She begged them to forget any wrongs inflicted by the dead woman before her death and to join with her in prayer that God, in His mercy, would absolve her from her sins. When they had all agreed to follow her advice, she ordered them to fast for three days and to give themselves earnestly to watching, prayer and the recitation of psalms for the repose of her soul.

910—William the Pious, Duke of Aquitaine, *The Foundation Charter of the Order of Cluny*—*Indulgences*—

I give, moreover, all these things ... first for the love of God; then for the soul of my lord king Odo, of my father and my mother; for myself and my wife—for the salvation, namely, of our souls and bodies;—and not least for that of Ava who left me these things in her will; for the souls of our brothers and sisters and nephews, and of all our relatives ... Finally, since all of us Christians are held together by one bond of love and faith, let this donation be for all,—for the orthodoxy, namely, of past, present or future times.

—1054, *Start of the Eastern Schism*

1075—Pope Saint Gregory VII, 157th Bishop of Rome, *Letter to King Henry IV*

—*Indulgences*—

[T]hou dost know thyself that thou may'st receive the favour neither of the divine nor of the apostolic benediction unless—those who have been excommunicated being separated from thee, and compelled to do penance—thou do first, with condign repentance and satisfaction, seek absolution and indulgence for thy transgression.

ca. 1156—**Saint Elisabeth of Schönau, *Third Book of Visions***

5 I spoke to her, saying, "I beg you, my lady, may you deign to reveal something to me about Origen? He was a great doctor of the church, who honorably and lovingly wrote your praises in many places. Is he saved or not, since the catholic church condemns him for the many heretical things found in his writings?" To this she answered in this way, "It is not the will of God that much should be revealed to you about this. However, you should know that the error of Origen did not come from malice, but from the excessive fervor by which he immersed his thought in the profundity of holy scripture, which he loved, and in the divine secrets, which he wished to scrutinize too much. On account of this, the punishment in which he is detained is not grave. Know indeed that for those honors that he offered me in his writings, a special light shines on him among the other souls on those special feasts in which my memory is celebrated in the church. However, what will be done to him on the last day is not to be revealed to you now, for the Lord wishes to keep this among His secrets."

1266-1272—**Saint Thomas Aquinas, Doctor of the Church, *Summa Theologica***

Appendix 2:1:3 [S]ince these good actions are not rewarded after this life in those who will be damned, neither should those evil actions be punished after this life [in those who will be saved].

—*Indulgences; prayers for the dead*—

On the contrary, It is said: *It is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins* (2 Macc. 12:46). Now there is no need to pray for the dead who are in heaven, for they are in no need; nor again for those who are in hell, because they cannot be loosed from sins. Therefore after this life, there are some not yet loosed from sins, who can be loosed therefrom; and the like have charity, without which sins cannot be loosed, *for charity covereth all sins* [Prov. 10:12]. Hence they will not be consigned to everlasting death, since *he that liveth and believeth in Me, shall not die for ever* [John 11:26]; nor will they obtain glory without being cleansed, because nothing unclean shall obtain it, as stated in the last chapter of the Apocalypse (*verse* 14). Therefore some kind of cleansing remains after this life.

1343—**Pope Clement VI, 198th Bishop of Rome, *Unigenitus Dei Filius***

—*Indulgences*—

For [Christ] himself having been made for us by God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30), not through the blood of goats or calves, but through his own blood entered once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption (Heb. 9:12). For not with corruptible things, with silver and gold, did he redeem us, but with the precious blood of himself, a lamb without spot or blemish (1 Pet. 1:18 ff.), the precious blood which he is known to have shed as an innocent victim on the altar of the cross, not a mere drop of blood (although, because of its union with the Word, that would have sufficed for the redemption of the whole human race), but as it were a copious flood, so that from the sole of the foot to the crown of the head there was found no soundness in him (Isa. 1:6).

Wherefore therefrom (so that the pitifulness of such an effusion be not rendered idle, useless or superfluous) how great a treasure did the holy Father acquire for the Church Militant [i.e., the faithful on earth], wishing to enrich his sons with treasure, that so men might have an infinite treasure, and those who avail themselves thereof are made partakers of God's friendship. Now this treasure is not hidden in a napkin nor buried in a field, but he entrusted it to be healthfully dispensed—through blessed Peter, bearer of heaven's keys, and his successors as vicars on earth—to the faithful, for fitting and reasonable causes, now for total, now for partial remission of punishment due for temporal sins [or of temporal punishment for sins], as well generally as specially (as they should understand it to be expedient with God), and to be applied in mercy to them that are truly penitent and have confessed. And to this heap of treasure the merits of the blessed Mother of God and of all the elect, from the first just man to the last, are known to have supplied their increment: and no diminution or washing away of this treasure is in any wise to be feared, as well because of the infinite merits of Christ (as aforesaid) as because the more men are drawn to righteousness as a result of its application by so much the more does the heap of merits increase.

1418—Council of Constance, 16th ecumenical council, *Questions Proposed for the Followers of Wyclif and Hus*

—*Indulgences*—

26. Likewise, whether he believes that, for a just and holy reason, the pope can grant indulgences for the remission of sins to all Christians who are truly contrite and have confessed, especially to those who make pilgrimages to the holy places and to those contributing to them.

27. And whether he believes that by reason of this sort of grant those who visit the churches and those who contribute to them can gain indulgence of this kind.

—1517, *Start of the Protestant Revolt*

1563—Council of Trent, 19th ecumenical council, *Decree on Indulgences*

—*Indulgences*—

Christ gave the power of granting indulgences to the Church, and since the Church has, even in ancient times, made use of this divinely given power (see Matt. 16:19; 18:18), the holy council teaches and commands that the usage of indulgences—a usage most beneficial to Christians and approved by the authority of the holy councils—should be kept up in the Church; and it anathematizes those who say that indulgences are useless, or that the Church does not have the power of granting them.

1618—Saint Francis de Sales, Bishop of Geneva, Doctor of the Church, *Sermon for the Feast of the Assumption*

What prevents the rest of us from going directly to Heaven when we die, as Our Lady did, is that almost all of us have dust or stains on our feet which must be washed away and purified in that place called Purgatory before we enter Heaven.

1750—Saint Alphonsus Maria de Liguori, Bishop of Saint Agatha, Doctor of the Church, *The Glories of Mary*

—*Indulgences*—

1:2 Fortunate, indeed, are the clients of this most compassionate Mother; for not only does she succor them in this world, but even in purgatory they are helped and comforted by her protection. And as in that prison poor souls are in the greatest need of assistance, since in their torments they cannot help themselves, our Mother of mercy does proportionately more to relieve them.

1897—Saint Thérèse (of the Child Jesus) of Lisieux, Doctor of the Church, *The Story of a Soul*

8 Purgatory holds no fears for me; I know I do not deserve even to enter this place of expiation with the Holy Souls. But I also know that the Fire of Love is far more sanctifying than the fires there; I know that Jesus cannot want us to suffer uselessly and that He would not fill me with the desires I feel if He did not mean to grant them.

1964—Second Vatican Council, 21st ecumenical council, *Lumen Gentium*

—*Indulgences; prayers for the dead*—

50 In full consciousness of this communion of the whole Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, the Church in its pilgrim members, from the very earliest days of the Christian religion, has honored with great respect the memory of the dead; and, “because it is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins” (2 Macc. 12:46), she offers her suffrages for them. ...

2001—Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger

(Pope Benedict XVI), *God Is Near Us*

All of this has now outlined the main features of what our faith means by the words “heaven” and “hell”. The meaning of the “place of purification” can likewise be easily understood on this basis. Ultimately, the place of purification is Christ himself. When we encounter him without disguise, then as a matter of course everything that is wretched and guilty in our lives, which we have for the most part kept carefully hidden, in that moment of truth will stand before our soul in flames of fire. The effect of the presence of the Lord upon everything within us that is interwoven with injustice, with hate, and with lies will be as a burning flame. It will become a purifying pain, which will burn away from within us everything that cannot be reconciled with eternity, with the living cycle of Christ’s love.