

Eternal Destiny

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2371 “Let all be convinced that human life and the duty of transmitting it are not limited by the horizons of this life only: their true evaluation and full significance can be understood only in reference to man’s eternal destiny.”161 (1703)

No matter what your world view is, even if you’re an atheist, that worldview must be able to answer four primal, fundamental, or existential questions about: origin, meaning, morality, destiny. Where did it all come from, what is the meaning of life, what’s the difference between right and wrong, and where does it all end up.

In (Genesis 1:1) we read “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” The significance of that statement is that creation is the foundation of all God’s saving plans. It is the beginning of the history of salvation which culminates in Christ; and it is the first answer to our fundamental questions regarding our origin and, ultimately, our eternal destiny.

The Meaning of Christian Death

In the Preface of Christian Death in the Roman Missal we read “Lord, for your faithful people, life is changed, not ended. When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death, we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven.”

The final article of the Creed proclaims our belief in everlasting life. At the Catholic Rite of Commendation of the Dying we sometimes hear this prayer: “Go forth, Christian soul, from this world... May you live in peace this day, may your home be with God in Zion, may you see your redeemer face to face” Ecclesiasticus writes “[There is] a time to be born, and a time to die”. This underlines the urgency in our lives because “Death puts an end to... the time, open to either accepting-or-rejecting the divine grace manifested in Christ” (CCC, no. 1021). This teaching recognizes that the end to our earthly journey with its sorrows and joys, its sinful failures, is counterbalanced by the triumphs of Christ’s saving grace and help.

We will talk about the Four Last Things:

*Individually (death, judgment, heaven, hell)

*Universally (Second Coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, general judgment, the end of the world).

Genesis 2:17 states that death is the penalty for sin, and since we have all sinned in one way or another, then all of us must die someday (Romans 5:12).

Each man and woman on earth, since the time of Adam and Eve, has or will experience death. [Guaranteed, or double you money back, but wait there’s more now you get these Ginsu knives!!...no... you don’t get Ginsu knives, you get something better!!]

What happens after death?

Particular judgment occurs immediately after the person dies. Philosophically and theologically, once the immortal soul leaves the mortal body, there is death. Because the soul is immortal, it cannot stay on a physical place like Earth without a physical body. At our Particular judgment, Jesus Christ appears as Judge of the living and the dead and judges the person by the life he or she lived on earth. St. John of the Cross (1542-1591) wrote, "**At the evening of life, we shall be judged on our love**" (Dichos, no. 64).

The one word that most closely describes the fundamental character of God is... love. If you were wondering what the criteria is that will be used to judge your life that is it.

St. John of the Cross goes on to say "Perfect love will make possible entrance into heaven, imperfect love will require purification (in Purgatory,) and a total lack of love will mean eternal separation from God."

Muggeridge:

Turning away from God, blown up with the arrogance generated by their fabulous success in exploring and harnessing the mechanism of life, men believe themselves at last in charge of their own destiny. He also says: "The only ultimate disaster that can befall us, I have come to realize, is to feel ourselves to be at-home here on earth." We won't be here forever.

What is Hell?

The simplest expression is, eternal separation from God. Hebrew uses two words to define it, Sheol and Gehenna. Sheol is a temporary place of the dead, and Gehenna is a perpetual one. English, however, uses one word to describe both: hell. So to differentiate them we speak of the "hell of the dead" and the "hell of the damned." Just cus you're dead don't mean you're damned.

After the sin of Adam and Eve, no human soul could go to heaven until the human race was redeemed by the Savior (Jesus Christ). They waited in Sheol or as the Greeks say hades.

There is pain in hell and the "pains of hell," for the most part, are two types:

1) The *pain of loss* is the suffering of being separated forever from God, who is love.

Even the simplest forms of pleasure will not be ours in hell, not for one minute. The more we absorb ourselves in loving ourselves, instead of God, the greater the pain will be when we're forced to open our eyes and look inside. Only then to find that there is no one there loving us back.

2) The *pain of sense* is the physical pain which is experienced in hell after the body is reunited with the soul after the resurrection. Remember, Christ returned with a body, and so will we. From a simply pragmatic viewpoint, we want to avoid spending eternity in hell with the scum of the earth, those who love to hate, and cause pain in others. Hell is lonely—not because no one is there, but because everyone there hates everyone else. There is an absolute and complete lack of

any form of love! You've heard the expression that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," even that doesn't work in hell because there is no such thing as friend.

St. Augustine, after the sack of Rome by the barbarians in the year 410 said: "Men build cities and men destroy cities, but the City of God they didn't build and cannot destroy. The Heavenly City outshines Rome beyond comparison."

So What is Heaven?

Heaven is the exact opposite of hell. Everyone in heaven is happy that everyone else is there. Heaven is basically having the beatific vision defined in the Catechism #1028: "Because of his transcendence, God cannot be seen as he is, unless he himself opens up his mystery to man's immediate contemplation and gives him the capacity for it. The Church calls this contemplation of God in his heavenly glory 'the beatific vision.'" In other words, the beatific vision is knowing God directly and immediately, seeing him face-to-face, and being in his presence at all times. [Like being washed away by a Tsunami of love] The effects of this vision are eternal happiness and unending joy. You could even correctly say that heaven is more about a person than a place.

No one is owed heaven, and no one earns their way to heaven. Heaven is a purely and totally free gift from God that he lovingly offers to humankind. It is the individual human person who freely and knowingly either accepts the gift or rejects it. But thanks to Christ's death and resurrection, we now have the possibility and the opportunity of going to heaven. We were, in a sense, orphans in the foster care system of the world, but through Christ's sacrifice we have been adopted by the greatest father of all, into the family of God, and RCIA helps out like an adoption agency.

Theologically speaking, since the sin of Adam and Eve (the original sin), human nature has been wounded and has fallen. It needs sanctifying grace from God, which is a supernatural divine assistance that justifies and redeems by the merits and sacrifice of Jesus Christ's death on the cross. Only baptism confers this special grace; without this grace, the soul cannot enter heaven. Jesus died for everyone (sufficient grace, as Saint Augustine would call it), but it only affects those who freely accept and cooperate with it (efficacious grace). Jesus redeemed human nature by making salvation possible, but salvation occurs at the moment the person enters heaven. That is why Catholics do not refer to any of the living as "saved," since only the saints in heaven are actually saved (they are now in heaven and will be there forever). Catholics do say they are "redeemed" since all men and women were redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

If baptism is necessary and Christ is the only way to salvation, then does that mean only Christians go to heaven?

No. Anyone who, through no fault of his own, has not consciously or willingly rejected Christ and His church is not culpable (guilty), and God does not punish us for things for which we are not responsible. Besides the baptism of water, there are also the baptism of blood, which is

martyrdom, and the baptism of desire for those who, through no fault of their own, are unable to obtain a baptism by water.

If it is not their fault that they do not know and believe that Jesus Christ is the only means of salvation, or that he founded the Catholic Church to accomplish that salvation of souls, then their ignorance of the truth will excuse them from being deprived of the joys of heaven. They will be judged according to the morality of the life they lived on earth. Whatever faith they had, they will be judged as to what they did or did not do with that faith. Once more, as St. John of the Cross said: **“At the evening of life, we shall be judged on our love”**

What is Purgatory?

Referring again to St. John of the Cross “Perfect love will make possible entrance into heaven, imperfect love will require purification (in Purgatory,)”

We look forward with some trepidation to purification required to gain the ability to express perfect love for God in the Purgatory Boot Camp. I think purgatory can be viewed like that, military training camps make their soldiers burn with patriotism enthusiasm for service, our training camp makes us burn from purification of sins, as well as attachment to past sins. I think the expression "no pain, no gain" is equally true in both boot camps. We really can't expect to have the intimate and utterly personal "beatific vision," while our souls are as flabby and out of shape as they are. I think that precious few will bypass the gates of the Purgatory Boot Camp.

Where is Purgatory in the Bible?

The word “purgatory” is not in the Bible, but neither is the word “bible.”

In the book of 2 Maccabees 12:42–46 are these key passages: “He then took up a collection among all his soldiers, amounting to two thousand silver drachmas, which he sent to Jerusalem to provide for an expiatory sacrifice.

What is happening here is that Judas Maccabeus (a Jew) had just led a successful revolt against the Syrian King Antiochus IV Epiphanes from 167–160 BC. Some of his soldiers died, though, and it was discovered that a few of them wore amulets around their necks as good luck charms. These were strictly forbidden under Mosaic Law, as the commandments forbade any graven image, and these medallions had an image of a pagan god. Hence, the soldiers were guilty of idolatry. They died in sin even though they died fighting for the freedom of their people and their religion.

Instead of leaving it at that Judas Maccabeus made supplication (prayer of petition) for the dead soldiers. He also made sure that sacrifices were made to ask God to pardon their sins. Here is an example of a doctrine that centers on the praying for the dead. The only way that prayers for the dead can be of any good or can be praiseworthy is if they actually do some spiritual good. If a person is in hell, no prayers can help; if in heaven, no prayers are needed. If there is a third alternative, a place before heaven where sinners are purged (cleansed) and enter heaven once made clean

Sin can merit eternal punishment (hell) or temporal punishment (purgatory). Unforgiven venial sins and already forgiven mortal sins may still have some attachments—the sinner’s fond memories of those sins. Purgatory is a state of cleansing where the soul is detached from former sins. The belief that purgatory exists is a dogma.

The idea that everyone *has to go* to purgatory is not a doctrine of the Church. We believe that some may have their temporal punishment here (often people say of another, “He had his purgatory on Earth”); others may have it in the afterlife.

The discomfort of purgatory is being so close but not quite there. The hope and joy of those in purgatory is the certain knowledge that one day they will in fact go to heaven. That is assured.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY

All the experience we have with our bodies is not likely to prepare us for a body that never dies. The nemeses of our earthly bodies will have no ability to affect our glorified bodies. No pain, no soreness, and one of my favorites, no hair loss. But as St. Paul says "...what you sow is not the body that it is to be, but a bare grain..." The implication therefore, is that the body we will have is more like an apple tree than an apple seed. Will the reflection of God in the beatific vision, reflect his glory in the bodies we will have? It's safe to say that even our current bodies reflect his glory, especially when we consider how wonderfully we are made. His invention of DNA is only now beginning to help us realize how genuinely awesome our creator is. It's all the more amazing to imagine the brilliance of design and creation that our glorified bodies will reflect.

THE LAST JUDGMENT

Without the music of the Old Testament playing in your head, the lyrics of the Book of Revelation sound dissonant, and unintelligible. The judgment language of the Old Testament is highly metaphoric, and the allegorical references have to be thought of in terms of the language of the people of that time. The beauty of our great book, the bible, is that the truth that it illustrates transcends time and language. It is Catholic dogma that He will judge us. We believe that there will be a general judgment when Christ returns, and He will judge the living and the dead. For Christians, we welcome and look forward to this, a joyous encounter with Christ our Savior, and an end to the sorrows of this world. We understand that Christ is Lord of e-v-e-r-y-o-n-e, and we understand that there are many others in this world that don't yet believe this. This knowledge is so convicting, that our hearts are compelled to fulfill the great commission. Our comprehension of the truth of His second coming, and all that it means for mankind, keeps us in "The Way."

THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH

God is preparing a new dwelling and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

—CCC, no. 1048, citing GS, no. 39

Once the Kingdom of God arrives in its fullness at the end of time there will be a renewal of the universe in Christ. Scripture uses many images to describe this mysterious reality. There will be a new heaven and a new earth:

“Creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay” (cf. Rom. 8:19-23).

Christ's second coming

The greatest family reunion that ever will happen. When our Lord returns to His family, the very nature of the word joy will be changed. The family of His followers, in communion with Him, and one another, will experience the greatest fulfillment of desire the human soul can undergo. So great is this desire that periodically, ever since his resurrection, there are those who have tried to predict the time of his return. Post-millennialism, Pre-millennialism, A millennialism, The Rapture, Post-tribulational, Pre-tribulational, Mid-tribulational, an entire "industry of eschatological theology" has formed around nothing more than speculation about His return.

What about the rapture?

Since the popularity of the Left Behind books and movies, many Catholics ask why they were never taught about the word “rapture.” Truth be told, the word is not in the Bible. It is interesting that those Christians who staunchly maintain that the Scripture alone (*sola scriptura*) is the only authority would use a term and idea that comes from outside the Bible.

No English Bible uses the word “rapture,” and it was not taught as Christian doctrine by the Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, or even Protestant Reformed churches.

The notion is very modern and comes from the nineteenth-century Evangelicals through essentially faulty hermeneutics.

CHRISTIAN DEATH

Thus, for example, Christians assist those whose earthly journey is coming to an end. “The dying should be given attention and care to help them live their last moments in dignity and peace. They will be helped by the prayer of their relatives, who must see to it that the sick receive at the proper time the sacraments that prepare them to meet the living God” (CCC, no. 2299). Not only do we care for the dying to help them pass their final moments in dignity and peace, but we also maintain reverence for their bodies once they are deceased. “The bodies of the dead must be treated with respect and charity, in faith and in the hope of the Resurrection. The burial of the dead is a corporal work of mercy, honors the children of God, who are temples of the Holy Spirit”

CHRISTIAN FUNERALS

The Christian funeral liturgy tells us that life is changed, not ended. Funerals are acts of faith. In the dialogue between Martha and Jesus just before the raising of Lazarus, Jesus tells her, “Your brother will rise again.” She replies, “I know that he will rise in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus then identifies himself as the Resurrection and the Life, and asks her, “Do you believe this?” She responds, “Yes, Lord, I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God” (cf. Jn. 11:17-27). We express this same belief at Christian funerals. Arrangements for a funeral need to include a Mass and burial in a Catholic cemetery whenever possible. It is preferable that the body be buried in a Catholic cemetery or columbarium (repository for cremated remains) consecrated for this purpose.

The Church prefers the burial of the body but does allow cremation "...provided that it does not demonstrate a denial of faith in the resurrection of the body" (CCC, no. 2301).

Ultimately all this talk about eternal destiny, points toward the author of unmitigated mercy, the flawless advocate of the insignificant, who's death on the cross brings eternal consequence to the word Savior, Jesus The Christ.

Additional funeral info.

In cases where cremation is planned, the Church urges that if at all possible, the body be present for the funeral Mass with cremation taking place afterwards. However, if for some reason cremation takes place before the funeral Mass, the diocesan bishop can permit the practice in his diocese of allowing cremated remains to be brought into the Church for the funeral rites.¹² Whenever a Catholic is cremated, the remains are to be buried, not scattered.

FROM THE CATECHISM

1. What happens when we die?

By death the soul is separated from the body, but in the resurrection God will give incorruptible life to our body, transformed by reunion with our soul. Just as Christ is risen and lives forever, so all of us will rise at the last day. (CCC, no. 1016)

2. What is the beatific vision?

Because of his transcendence, God cannot be seen as he is, unless he himself opens up his mystery to man's immediate contemplation and gives him the capacity for it. The Church calls this contemplation of God in heavenly glory "the beatific vision." (CCC, no. 1028)

3. What does the Last Judgment call people to do?

The message of the Last Judgment calls men to conversion while God is still giving them the "acceptable time... the day of salvation." (CCC, no. 1041, citing 2 Cor. 6:2)

Why do we pray for the dead? (see Purgatory)

DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS

* The Communion of Saints includes the faithful on earth, the souls in Purgatory, and the blessed in heaven. In this Communion, the merciful love of God and his saints is always attentive to our prayers for one another here and for the souls of the faithful departed. The Communion of Saints also refers to "holy things," above all the Eucharist, by which the believers are formed into one Body of Christ.

* “The dying should be given attention and care to help them live their last moments in dignity and peace. They will be helped by the prayer of their relatives, who must see to it that the sick receive at the proper time the Sacraments that prepare them to meet the living God” (CCC, no. 2299).

* “The bodies of the dead must be treated with respect and charity, in faith and in the hope of the Resurrection. The burial of the dead is a corporal work of mercy [cf. Tb 1:16-18]; it honors the children of God, who are temples of the Holy Spirit” (CCC, no. 2300).

* Immediately after death, each person comes before God and is judged individually (the particular judgment) and enters heaven, Purgatory, or hell. Yet at the end of time, a final judgment will occur when all are assembled before God and their relationship to God is made public (the general judgment).

* The soul is immortal; it does not perish when it separates from the body at death. At the final resurrection, it will be reunited with the body.

* Those who die in the state of grace and friendship with God but who are not fully purified are assured of their eternal salvation. They must undergo a purification to attain the holiness needed to enter heaven. This process is called Purgatory. We pray for those in Purgatory, that they may soon be with God in heaven.

* Following the example of Christ, the Church warns the faithful of the sad reality of eternal death, also called hell, which is brought about by a person’s free and permanent rejection of God and his love.

* “The Last Judgment will come when Christ returns in glory.... The Last Judgment will reveal that God’s justice triumphs over all the injustices committed by his creatures and that God’s love is stronger than death” (CCC, no. 1040).