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## The Doctrine of Man: What does the Roman Catholic church say about man's destiny?

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# THE DOCTRINE OF MAN

## ARTICLE SEVEN

### What does the Roman Catholic church say about man's destiny?

Two concepts aptly summarize their view:

A. Purgatory—This is the belief of Roman Catholics that all those who die at peace with the church but are not perfect must undergo penal and purifying sufferings. However, this is only for those who die in venial (lesser) sin, for all dying in mortal sin are forever condemned to hell. Roman doctrine teaches that a person's stay in purgatory may be shortened by the gifts or services rendered by living people in behalf of the beloved dead one through the Roman Catholic church.

1. This position reviewed—The doctrine of purgatory is based upon two main sources, neither of which is scriptural.

- A church council decree—In 1563 the Roman Catholic Council of Trent approved the Decree Concerning Purgatory. It reads:

Whereas the Catholic Church, instructed by the Holy Spirit, has, from the Sacred Writings and the ancient tradition of the Fathers, taught, in sacred Councils, and very recently in this ecumenical Synod, that there is a Purgatory and that the souls there detained are helped by the suffrages of the faithful, but principally by the acceptable sacrifice of the altar—the holy Synod enjoins on bishops that they diligently endeavor that the sound doctrine concerning Purgatory, transmitted by the holy Fathers and sacred Councils, be believed, maintained, taught, and everywhere proclaimed by the faithful of Christ.

- A reference from 2 Maccabees, a noncanonical book—Following his victory over an enemy in battle, Jewish hero Judas received an offering of some 12,000 pieces of silver and sent it to Jerusalem “for sacrifice to be offered for the sins of the dead (soldiers who had fallen in battle),” concluding, “It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins” (2 Macc. 12:43, 46).

2. This position refuted

- The Scriptures teach a repenting sinner is saved by faith in the grace of God alone, apart from any good works, including suffering in purgatory. (See Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5.)

- The Scriptures teach Christ's work on the cross was sufficient to save all sinners. (See Heb. 9:11-14, 24-28; 10:12, 16-17.)

B. Limbo—This is another aspect of Roman Catholic theology that teaches that all unbaptized children and the mentally incompetent, upon death, proceed to a permanent place of “natural happiness,” but not heaven. Jesus himself refuted this view on at least two occasions:

*“At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven”*

(Matt. 18:1-3). *“But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven”* (Matt. 19:14).

In his booklet, *Purgatory, Doctrine of Comfort and Hope*, Catholic apologist Joseph Kenney makes the following interesting observation concerning the subject:

In the last analysis, however, the Catholic doctrine does not rest on any direct Scriptural proof but on tradition, increasingly clear and unmistakable. More than one writer has pointed to a belief in Purgatory that was constantly developing. It was not so much a doctrine that was discussed, but a firm belief that was acted upon in day-to-day Christian living. As witness to this, we have evidence that the Christians from the beginning prayed for their dead. In doing so, they had no illusions about the complete sinlessness of all who died. They were clearly in need of some help if they were to become ready for Heaven.

Hence the names of the dead were frequently inscribed on special lists to be read at liturgical services, and solemn ceremonies were held at burial places to pray for the dead. Inscriptions on the tombs also asked for prayers. Father Robert Gleason in *The World to Come* writes: “The early Church was fully aware that there were many who had passed into the next world burdened with the heavy load of daily venial sins, and for these she prayed during the Eucharist.”

It is worth noting here that the word, “Purgatory” does not occur in any of these early writings. The term itself was invented by later theologians. This undoubtedly was the main reason why the 16<sup>th</sup> century reformers, with their insistence of “Scripture alone” as the source of doctrine, rejected the term and the doctrine of Purgatory. The term itself comes from the Latin “*purgare*.” (Published by the Knights of Columbus, pp. 5, 6)