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The Search for Mere Purgatory

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Introduction

Jerry L. Walls, in his book *Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation*, examines the different models of postmortem purgation that have been advocated over the years. After having assessed the value of satisfaction, sanctification, and mixed models, Walls proposes C. S. Lewis's model as a type of "mere purgatory" that most Christians could get behind. He gives several reasons why Lewis's account could prove most ecumenical:

1. Lewis is respected by believers from most all Christian traditions, including evangelicals;

2. his other views on the afterlife are already highly regarded;

3. his model is purely sanctification based while also allowing for pain, making it palatable for Protestants;

4. very strong view of human freedom (2012, 153-173).

Notice that the first three reasons are wholly practical in nature. The last, however, seems to be a plus for Walls because of his own theological leanings. While I am inclined to think that this is actually a strength of Lewis's view, his tendency towards universalism and blurring of the line between Christian and non-Christian stemming from this could prove difficult for all traditional Christian groups, evangelicals in particular.

This project will not be conflicting or challenging the purpose of Walls's book. In fact, I think the majority of his book is exactly correct in its assessments of the difficulties surrounding the doctrine of purgatory and the even greater difficulties if one denies it. If one is looking for a treatment of issues surrounding time, personal identity and how sanctification plays into the afterlife for the Christian, I suggest finding this book.

Walls also in this book provides a chapter covering three main types of models of purgatory: pure satisfaction, pure sanctification, and a mixed model. While this work is spot on

in what it handles, there are other elements to models of purgatory that ought to be considered. Along with walls I will examine the writings of Christians from late antiquity and the middle ages in hopes of discovering the primary models of purgatory that have been advanced. I have decided to divide the types of models into two primary camps, and then locate particular variations within these models. The two camps are not primarily related to the satisfaction/sanctification question, but by geography – both in this life and the next; will all souls be located in the same space in purgatory, or are there definite boundaries in the spiritual plane as there are in the physical like we are accustomed to thinking? As will be seen below, both major camps have some particular tendencies within them and their proponents, providing some limitations to what is theoretically possible (or comfortable rather) in their systems of the afterlife.

This question of geography was first brought to my attention by Lewis's *Great Divorce,* but only embryonically. The importance of spacing in regard to purgatory was brought to the forefront by Jacque Le Goff in his *Birth of Purgatory*. One of the primary theses of which being that the development of purgatory as a place distinct from heaven and hell did not occur until the middle ages were in full swing, securing its spot in the western religious imaginary. While I think he exaggerates this claim in several places, his work is nonetheless essential for study and accurate to the extent that there is a distinction between how one (older) model of purgatory and the (newer) one understand the placement of souls. Although geography is one defining characteristics of these two views, the focus of my paper will not be here, but this location issue should be kept in mind.

The goal of this project, rather, is to further Walls's search for mere purgatory. This will require a few things. First, a glance at some of the related doctrines to purgatory that have been

endorsed over the centuries. Second, I will give a rough sketch of two major schools of thought on purgatory, drawing from several sources from across the centuries of western Christianity. Along the way here we will locate Lewis's model within the "Alexandrian" camp. And third, an assessment of the merits of both models in order to find which is the better candidate for the title of "mere purgatory."

Supporting Doctrines

Handling whole models of purgatory without first considering the closely related doctrines that supported them, while possible, would be incomplete. Prayers for the dead, the divisions of sins into varying degrees, and viewing penance as a way of purgation are three ideas that are distinct yet closely bound to ideas of purgatory, even though they (and do) exist in Christian belief systems that do not accept purgatory. For the second of the three this is obvious, but less so for the first and last, but this will be handled in their distinct sections.

Prayers for the Dead

Taking up prayers for the dead first, evidence for this practice can be found in the earliest Christian communities. Indeed, many would later found their belief in this doctrine on the well-known passage from 2 Maccabees. After briefly looking at this passage, we will then turn to an early Christian martyr's account, then to St. Augustine and lastly to a small passage from Lewis on the topic.

Since no treatment of purgatory would be complete without handling the Maccabean text, I will present it here as a piece of the literary and historical context that later models of purgatory would grow up in:

On the next day, as had now become necessary, Judas and his men went to take

up the bodies of the fallen and to bring them back to lie with their kindred in the

sepulchers of their ancestors. Then under the tunic of each one of the dead they

found sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids the Jews to

wear. And is became clear to all that this was the reason these men had fallen. So

they all blessed the ways of the Lord, the righteous judge, who reveals the things

that are hidden; and they turned to supplication, praying that the sin that had been

committed might be wholly blotted out. The noble Judas exhorted the people to

keep themselves free from sin, for they had seen with their own eyes what had

happened as the result of the sin of those who had fallen. He also took up a

collection, man by man, to the amount of two thousand drachmas of silver, and

sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin-offering. In doing this he acted very well

and honourably, taking into account of the resurrection. For if he were not

expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been

superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid

reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and

pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, so that they might be

delivered from their sin. (2 Macc. 12: 39-45)

Whether this paragraph be regarded as canonical or not, it has been important in how

communities of Christians have understood the afterlife for centuries. Apart from its other

underlying assumptions about the believer's post-mortem experience, it is at least clear that the

faithful's prayers for the dead are effective and, thus, ought to be carried out by the faithful. It is

also clear in this passage that the various related doctrines have been being combined from the

earliest times. Here we find, principally, prayers for the dead and some sort of expiation of sins

in the form of an offering. One could also argue that there is an underlying assumption of the

tiered levels of sin and punishment in that there are specific sacrifices and punishments for different actions under the Old Law. I will not try to reach too far. The other passages will not contain all of these ideas as explicitly, but it is important that one of the chief biblical texts concerning this doctrine can be seen to support an idea of purgatory with the full set of supplemental beliefs.

St. Perpetua, martyred in 203, left behind her prison journal which was later edited to present her story to the larger Christian community. Without going into too much detail here, as this text will be more heavily analyzed later in its connection with early models of purgatory, her story is that of praying for her deceased brother after receiving a vision of him in a dream. After her constant prayers, she has another dream about her brother in which his pain has been ended and the place he is living in has transformed from gloomy to bright. Years later St. Augustine would offer a prayer for his late mother in his *Confessions*:

> And so, my praise and my life, God of my heart, I shall leave aside for the
> moment those good deeds of hers for which I joyfully thank you, and I shall now
> beg your mercy for my mother's sins. Hear me, I pray, in the name of the
> Medicine of our wounds, who hung upon the cross, and now *sitting at Thy right*
> *hand maketh intercession to Thee for us.* I know that she dealt mercifully and
> from her heart *forgave her debtors their debts; do thou also forgive her debts,*
> whatever she has contracted in all the years since the water of salvation. Forgive
> her, Lord, forgive her, I beg you; *enter not into judgement with her. Let Thy*
> *mercy be exalted above Thy justice,* because your words are true, and *Thou hast*
> *promised mercy unto the merciful* (2009, 200).

St. Augustine prays through passages of the Scriptures promising God's mercy on faithful souls and seems to be showing God in which ways St. Monica has held up her end of the bargain and reminds God of his part. Although it is true that he was often quiet on matters about purgatory specifically, it is interesting that he expounds on this plea for his mother's soul so lavishly.

Prayers for the dead, as Lewis tells us, need not be purely to save loved ones from the fires of punishment, though that is typically their function. In his *Great Divorce*, Lewis gives us some idea of what else prayers for the dead could be used for:

> Though even in Heaven some perpetual increase of beatitude, reached by a continually more ecstatic self-surrender, without the possibility of failure but not perhaps without its own ardours and exertions – for delight also has its severities and steep ascents, as lovers know – might be supposed. But I won't press, or guess, that side for the moment. I believe in Purgatory (1992, 145).

Of course, this makes sense; people pray for additional grace to grow in virtue all the time and have since the beginning of Christianity. The only strange part about praying for people who are assumed to be being blessed by God in the extreme is the same strange thing about prayer to a perfectly good, omniscient God in the first place. For more on this read the rest of the chapter from Lewis's *Letters to Malcolm.*

These few examples pulled from across Western Christianity in place and years should suffice as a brief treatment of prayers to the dead. From these passages we have established the antiquity of the beliefs, as well as their contemporary development; it should be clear form these that prayers for the dead are understood in nearly as many different ways as purgatory is and, as such, can be blended with different models of purgatory to produce interesting and spiritually stimulating models of the afterlife.

Division of sins and virtues

The next supplemental doctrinal to be handled is the division both of sins and virtues. What is thought of here is not the mere categorization of sins, but the tiering of them into more and less severe and allotting specific punishments accordingly. The process here will be as before, I will handle a biblical passage first and then two others in chronological order.

While there are several passages that could be used to support a belief in the division of sins, one should be enough for the purposes of context. St. John writes in his first letter:

And this is the boldness we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him. If you see your brother or sister committing what is not a mortal sin, you will ask, and God will give life to such as one – to those whose sin is not mortal. There is a sin that is moral; I do not say that you should pray about that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that is not mortal. (5: 14-17)

That last sentence is the one I would like us to bear in mind. Regardless of what the specific sin was that St. John was referencing, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit or something else, the principle is the important part. Some sins are deadly to the human soul, and others are not. This is not the full-fledged medieval division of sins we will see Dante, nor even the simpler division found in the *Aeneid*, but only a statement that there are in fact different categories of sins. I will refrain from providing additional biblical passages here as our next source draws on several in arguing for his view that should give us enough background on the Biblical text for the sake of introduction.

Our next example comes from St. Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses* penned in the late second century. Here St. Irenaeus lays out in clear terms what he perceives to be the nature of the blessings righteous souls will receive:

> Then those who are deemed worthy of an abode in heaven shall go there, others shall enjoy the delights of paradise, and others shall possess the splendour of the city; for everywhere the Saviour shall be seen according as they who see Him shall be worthy. [They say, moreover], that there is this distinction between the habitation of those who produce an hundred-fold, and that of those who produce sixty-fold, and that of those who produce thirty-fold: for the first will be taken up into the heavens, the second will dwell in paradise, the last will inhabit the city; and that was on this account the Lord declared, "In My Father's house are many mansions." For all things belong to God, who supplies all with a suitable dwelling-place; even as His Word says, that a share is allotted to all by the Father, according as each person is or shall be worthy. And this is the couch on which the guests shall recline, having been invited to the wedding. The presbyters, the disciples of the apostles, affirm that this is the gradation and arrangement of those who are saved, and that they advance through steps of this nature (Kirby, 2020).

Moving away from the division of sins that we saw with biblical text, St. Irenaeus argues for the gradations in beatitude as well. Some souls will have it better in heaven than others, harsh though that may sound to evangelical ears. This aspect, though less focused on and suitably so for a discussion on purgatory, was also picked up by Dante beautifully in his *Paradiso*. However, the rest of Western Christianity was not quite as ready as St. Iranaeus was to begin its calculating the blessedness (and punishment) of souls just yet.

St. Augustine, writing a few centuries later would categorize souls along similar lines into four categories. Jacques Le Goff sums up St. Augustine's thought on the matter in this way:

> There are four kinds of men: the godless (infidels, and perpetrators of criminal sins), who are consigned directly to Hell, with no possibility of a reprieve or second chance. At the other end of the scale are the martyrs, the saints, and the righteous, who, even if they have committed "slight" sins, go immediately, or at least very quickly, to Heaven. Between these two extremes are those who are neither altogether good not altogether wicked (1984, 69).

St. Augustine's divisions, then, are a result of a four-part categorization of souls. The wholly good, the wholly bad, and two mixed groups learning one way or the other. I suppose there is also the possibility of a person being perfectly down the middle, but we'll glance over that.

Le Goff notes that St. Augustine considers sins as either severe or light, with the severe sins being the ones that actually count for anything on an eternal scale. In Book 21, chapter 26 of his *City of God* he goes into more detail about what specific types of sins might fall into each category. He lists as example the difference between a husband being too lustful with his wife compared to a man who is lusting over his sister or some other close family relation. Obviously, he thinks, the one is less severe than the other. He goes so far as to say that the second sin – incestuous desires – is less likely to be survived because it cannot ever be rationalized by a man into being just if that man has Christ as his foundation. St. Augustine endorses a very strong version of this idea earlier in the chapter: "Yet he will be saved 'through fire' in virtue of that foundation, because if a persecutor had given him the choice between having that enjoyment and having Christ, he would have chosen Christ in preference to those delights." So we see here *any*

sin that a person would likely forfeit for Christ is given the real and obvious option for him, then that could be considered a light sin (2003, 1011).

This last point is not essential to a division of sins but is an interesting supporting doctrine to this supporting doctrine that one might want to add to their model. Many Christians now, as before, feel a strong pull towards something like universalism, or at least letting as many people into heaven as possible. As I will say again in this work, flexibility in a model is what should be most prized when trying to accommodate as many different Christians as possible. Whatever broad model we reach at the end of this paper, it should be clear that it can admit variations of supporting doctrines like this one here as easily as it may admit of a more rigid categorization of sins. I focus primarily on universalist learning variations in this work, as will be seen as much because of my personal spiritual leanings as well as the leanings of Lewis's model that Walls proposes in his book. Regardless, a similar argument could be made for Christians who are staunchly anti-universalist; the goal is finding a baseline model to encourage doctrinal debates from more similar assumptions than from more disparate ones.

Penance as purgative

Reaching now our last supporting doctrine, here are three passages of Scripture that we will first interact with:

> 1My point is this: heirs, as long as they are minors, are no better than slaves,
> though they are the owners of all the property; 2but they remain under guardians
> and trustees until the date set by the father… 6And because you are children, God
> has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7So you are
> no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God. (Gal.
> 4:1-2, 6-7)

20When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21So

what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed?

The end of those things is death. 22But now that you have been freed from sin

and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal

life. (Rom. 6: 20-22)

7Endure trials for the sake of discipline. God is treating you as children; for what

child is there whom a parent does not discipline? 8If you do not have that

discipline in which all children share, then you are illegitimate and not his

children. (Heb. 12: 7-8)

Each of these three passages are examples of the use of both the son and slave metaphors. Isabel

Moreira in her book *Heaven's Purge* argues that the blending of these two metaphors along with

how punishment was applied to these two groups allowed assisted in the development of the

western conception of purgatory. From the Galatians passage we find that the Christians are

sons, though minors and therefore akin to slaves. From Romans the idea of the Christian being a

slave is pronounced more boldly as Paul tailors his letter to the Roman audience. And in the

Hebrews passage we see the justice of punishment and its efficacy in promoting holiness. These

became central points of rhetoric through from the inception of Western Christianity through late

antiquity and would come to "dictate eschatology as depictions of the afterlife drew on images of

abject servitude and the corporeal punishment of slaves" (2010, 44).

    So far nothing particularly troubling to the unbeliever of purgatory has been said. That

punishments are instructive is a commonly held fact. However, returning back to *The City of*

God, St. Augustine complicates the matter by blurring the line between purificatory punishment and retributive punishment. In responding to the Platonic idea that all punishment is to be corrective, he retorts that, "punishments are a means of purification only to those who are disciplined and corrected by them" (2003, 990). St. Augustine's argument here is necessary to sustain the traditional Christian cosmos, for without it we would necessarily have to admit that either Satan will be reformed, or hell is not a punishment. Moving towards the end of the chapter he says that men will be tortured by either good or evil angels in the afterlife, and that:

> not all men who endure temporal pains after death come into those eternal
>
> punishments, which are to come after that judgement. Some, in fact, will receive
>
> forgiveness in the world to come for what is not forgiven in this, as I have said
>
> above, so that they may not be punished with the eternal chastisement of the
>
> world to come.

If we are trying to say that St. Augustine reserved corrective punishment for his proto-purgatory and retributive punishment for hell, that seems to fall through here. He seems to be speaking of groups of souls and how some will fare, while others will fare differently. If purgatory, here, is understood strictly as corrective, then why would some of that punishment be forgiven and the souls not learn their lessons, entering heaven imperfect? These are not questions that can or will be attempted to be answered here, but it I enough to note that the blurring of the purpose of purgatory's fires can be traced back at least to St. Augustine.

This blending of the purposes of punishment indeed goes back farther than St. Augustine. Origen will propose other models, and his will be fought over – all to be handled in depth below. This last doctrine is less supplemental than the others, but a forced choice as to what type of model one may believe in. In my encounters with Protestants in the south United States it often

seems that the idea of purgatory they have in their mind is one of purely retributive punishment, not imagining that it might have a corrective feature as well. This is understandable giving that it is the more unseemly version of purgatory and, thus, more easily attacked in a sentence or two. To be sure authors like the one quoted above and the Medieval sale of indulgences as well as contemporary indulgences offered for various spiritual acts contribute to this idea.

In actuality there may be three different ideas on how one may understand the role of purgatory's punishment: strictly retributive, strictly purgative, and a mixed model. The first fits most nicely with the indulgences mentioned above, the second seems to make the most sense if pure sanctification is the goal, while the third may best encapsulate the merits of the second and add to them an appreciation of some types of sanctification. This last point I am uncertain of, but there is at least the tendency in many people to make restitution after harming someone. Even if the wrong has been forgiven, and the perpetrator learned their lesson, there still seems to be something just about making restitution or accepting some penalty for the action. While this may seem too legalist or antithetical to the Gospel, it is not unheard of that a man will turn themselves into the police after committing some crime, even if their doing so shows signs of a correction made by their repentance.

Conclusion

Each of these doctrines, fitting better or worse within different Protestant sects, have one particular upside. These are only doctrines that add the rich and diverse models of purgatory that Christians have historically endorsed. From the few variations on doctrine we have seen a full twelve different models of purgatory could be formulated, and many have been by implication if not directly argued for.

None of these doctrines is essential to an idea of mere purgatory and, thus, are not hills to die on in attempting to argue for the belief. While true on a technical level, some, myself included, might say that any theory of purgatory without at least two of these additional doctrines probably isn't worth arguing over anyways. If not these beliefs in fact, then at least analogous ones that can serve similar functions (like the *schola animarum* replacing penance that the Alexandrian model favors, as we will see below).

At the very least, any one person's view on purgatory should include answers to questions on each of these points, as they hint at underlying theological assumptions that can indicate severe theological disagreement. That, of course, is the point of this essay. In locating ourselves on a similar playing field, on mere purgatory, we can better understand the assumptions of others and how our beliefs differ or align.

In the pages below reference will be made to these ideas and how they were used in our authors' theories of postmortem purification. It is my hope that by comparing the two major models of purgatory together, we may more clearly see which has the best chance of becoming the standard view of the doctrine outside the Catholic system of beliefs.

The Alexandrian Model

Formulating the Alexandrian Model

In *Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation*, a work I am deeply indebted for its discussion of this topic, Jerry L. Walls explores the viability of C.S Lewis's ideas on the afterlife in constructing an idea of a "mere purgatory." Lewis's status among American evangelicals makes him the perfect candidate for building a model of Purgatory that will appeal across denominational lines. Lewis's view, however, is not unique among Christian thinkers, and is in fact the oldest semi-formulated models of purgatory in the Christian tradition.

While Walls does not delve too deeply into the particulars of Lewis's beliefs on purgatory, mostly because Lewis himself does not offer too many hard ideas, his model can be fleshed out by ancient writers who had roughly the same idea. I will primarily be drawing from Irenaeus of Lyon, Origen, and Clement of Alexandria in supplementing Lewis's ideas. It should be stressed that this model is not identical to what any one of these writers actually proposed, indeed Irenaeus does not offer one, but rather a model based on their various ideas. I have called this the "Alexandrian model" because Origen, working in Alexandria, formulated the entirety of the system while drawing form the work of Clement.

While Irenaeus did not offer a consistent system of postmortem purgation like Origen did a few decades later, his perspective on salvation and the teleology of creation will form the basis of the Alexandrian model. Irenaeus saw salvation as God's grooming humanity for perfection. God was not so much focused on saving humanity from death, destruction, or the devil as much as he was creating a world where, like children, humanity would make mistakes, learn from them, and steadily grow into perfection (Daley 2010, 29). The method of this salvation is inextricably bound up with the person's sanctification through knowledge of God, making the opposite of this – separation and ignorance of God – the real definition of eternal damnation (2010 29-31). Irenaeus wonderfully sums up the general trajectory of humanity while defending Christianity to the Gnostics:

> It was necessary that the human person should in the first instance be created; and
> having been created, should receive growth; and having received growth, should
> be strengthened; and having been strengthened, should abound; and having
> abounded, should recover [from the disease of sin]; and having recovered, should
> be glorified; and being glorified, should see his Lord. For God is the one who is

yet to be seen, and the beholding of God is productive of immortality, but

immortality renders one near to God (2010, 29).

He adds to these lines the belief that the interim period between our deaths and Christ's return

will be a period of preparation for the day of resurrection when we will enter into heaven itself

(2010, 31).

Clement and Origen reach similar conclusions to Irenaeus with their idea of postmortem

purgation being a type of *schola animarum* in which souls were educated into greater holiness.

Their idea stems to some extent form their adoption of several ideas found in Plato, but most

importantly in what he understood the purpose and nature of punishment to be.

Clement divides punishment into two different categories; the first is educational, the

other punitive. What separates the two, however, is not an essential aspect of the trial being

endured itself, but in how the subject responds to the trial. This means that while two people may

have the same exact misfortunes, for person A it is corrective and for person B it is punishment

for punishment's sake. Clement does not carry out these ideas of punishment into the afterlife –

he distinguishes between two types of fire after death. However, his ideas on punishment being

distinguished by personal response form the basis for both Origen and Lewis's models of

purgatory (1984, 54). Origen expands, as Clement should have, this idea punishment into the

purgatorial fire being endured (or not) by everyone in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 3:13:

I think that we all must come to this fire. Whoever we may be, be it Peter or Paul,

we come to this fire… as before the Red Sea if we are Egyptians we shall be

swallowed up in this river or the lake of fire, for sins will be found in us… or else

we too shall enter into the river of fire but, just as the waters formed a wall to the

right and to the left of the Jews, so shall the fire forma a wall for us.. and we shall

follow the pillar of fire and the pillar of smoke (1984, 54).

Here we see that whatever that fire is that awaits us at death is the same for all people, but the

status of our soul determines how we experience the fire.

Since all souls enter into the same fire, there is no pressing need for a distinct place for

impure holy souls. Writers from all models of postmortem cleansing have varied on whether

purgatory was closer to heaven or closer to hell. Early Medieval visions like that of Wetti had

Charlemagne's sexual organs being mutilated by wild beasts or holy souls tormented by demons,

while Dante saw purgatory as a mountain ascending into heaven, capped with the Garden of

Eden (1984, 117). One of Lewis's Bright People echoes the Platonic idea of punishment in the

Great Divorce, saying to one of those souls just off the bus, "If they leave that grey town behind

it will not have been Hell. To any that leaves it, it is Purgatory" (2001, 68). Lewis, understanding

purgatory as a condition rather than a location, situated it within both heaven and hell. While he

only has one soul admit to hell being a place for purgation, the bulk of his book and the trials it

recounts actually happen in heaven, or at least in heaven's outskirts.

It should also be noted that Lewis's views on hell as well as on purgation resemble

Alexandrian thought. He, like Origen, characterized hell primarily in personal and psychological

terms rather than in the traditional fire and brimstone - Napoleon drives himself mad by isolating

himself from all others and obsessing over how he was defeated (2001, 12). One could imagine

Lewis's MacDonald, repeating after Origen, "every sinner himself lights the flames of his own

fire, and is not immersed in some fire that was lit by another or existed before him" (Daley 2010,

56).

The passage from 1 Corinthians elaborated on above was the key Biblical passage for proponents of this model and was used as a proof text for virtually all models of purgatory from late antiquity until the Reformation. The fire spoken of in this passage is essentially probative, uncovering the true nature of whatever it burns. Thus, the purgatorial flames are necessarily probative as well. St. Eligius, a seventh century bishop from Noyon, says as much in his commentary on the same passage:

> It is certain that here he [Paul] spoke of purgatorial fire. Now, this fire will be felt in different ways by the godless, the saints, and the righteous. From the torment of this fire the godless will be cast into the flames of fire everlasting; the saints who will reawaken in their body without any stain of sin, for they will have built on the foundation which is Christ… This leaves the righteous guilty of minor sins… which they have not been properly purged and so are not yet found worthy of the glory of the celestial city. After having passed through this fire, when the day of the Last Judgement is complete, each one will be either damned or crowned, according to his merits (1984, 101).

Whatever the trials are that souls are presented with after death either purge them of their sins and, therefore, reveal them as being righteous or expose them as being wicked for their inability to overcome them. Those souls that possess the proper virtuous dispositions are able to withstand what awaits them, while those without them are not.

So now that we have sampled some of the ancient inclusivist views along with Lewis, we may state the basic criteria for this position:

1. All souls are subjected to purgatorial fire after death.

2. The fire is both corrective to good souls and punitive to bad souls.

3. The fire is probative in so far as the righteousness or wickedness of the soul is exposed through its performance in this experience.

While each of these authors held several other beliefs relating to purgatory, these three are the essential ones that define this model of purgatory as such and distinguish it from the exclusivist model.

The Anglo-Saxon Model

Introducing the Anglo-Saxon Model

The Alexandrian model that we have explored thus far, for all its merits, was not well received by Latin Christians. Our next model, originally formulated by St. Boniface and the Venerable Bede sometime in the early eighth century, was crafted to finally put an end to the Alexandrian model (Moreira 2010, 149). This model of purgatory is most similar to the traditional Catholic understanding of it, being the one adopted (and expanded on) by Dante a few centuries later. It is this model that also served as the basis for the indulgence crisis that would spark the Reformation and, thus, lead to the loss of belief in purgatory for millions of Christians in the years to come.

I will focus primarily on the works of Augustine and Bede. Augustine being the one who developed many of the beliefs that Bede would go on to formulate into a purgatorial system to rival the Alexandrian model. Bede's ideas, stemming from Augustine, were not merely speculative but were trying to preach true doctrine of the afterlife against the day's heresies – including Origenism.

I have decided against calling this simply the "orthodox view" for two reasons. First, the goal of this project is to find out what an orthodox view of purgatory could look like for today's Christians, so labeling one picture "orthodox" from the outset would undermine the purpose of

the paper. Second, the traditional view of purgatory is one that has significant satisfactory elements in it. As I said in the introduction, Walls's argument for a purely sanctification-based system, as well as my own theological leanings, has limited my paper to only considering sanctification models. So, to avoid confusion I have decided to label this version of purgatory after the place where it was first truly formalized in doctrine.

Formulating the Anglo-Saxon Model

Augustine sets the Stage

Before the Anglo-Saxon model was crafted as a defense against the heretical Alexandrians, Augustine took to other theological arguments to settle the debate. While he used several different methods in his defense, his fear of over speculation in the realm of the afterlife led him to never formalize an idea on purgatory. However, his work in the division of people into moral categories, the separation of the fires after death, and his disavowal of universalism would all serve as bases for Bede's work a few centuries later.

Augustine, along with most other Christians from his time and on, believed that hell was a lifetime appointment (Moreira 2010, 23). This served as a foundation for corollary doctrines concerning moral categories and the fires after death. His division is unique for its four-part structure. For Augustine there are the good, the mostly good, the mostly bad, and the bad. The first two groups are the only ones that may go to heaven, leaving the other two to suffer an eternity in hell. He does, however, entertain the possibility of the mostly bad (but still somewhat good) to have a less painful experience that might be made more bearable by the prayers of the saints (1984, 69). I suppose this is a more gracious option than eternal damnation in the worst possible pain.

While the first group gets to go straight into heaven or into an intermediate paradise, the second good group opens the possibility to postmortem purgation. Although Augustine is unsure of its existence, he is sure that the purgatorial fire will be the more painful than anything on earth and that very souls would have to endure it anyways (1984, 69). I suppose I should say *get to endure* since the other way into heaven is by not needing any correction after death. It would seem that this would severely limit the number of souls that are allowed into heaven, since I would assume that the number of souls not needing correction would be only a fraction of the souls that do need correction after death. If one is looking for an argument against universalism, this premise would seem to do the trick – assuming traditional categories of good and bad.

Augustine's last significant contribution to what would become the Anglo-Saxon model is the division of the fires after death. Instead of assuming as the Alexandrian model does that there is one intelligent fire that can distinguish between the souls that ought to be purified and those that ought to be punished, Augustine proposes one corrective fire (*ignis emendatorius*) and one punitive fire (1984, 69). Augustine does not yet see the far reaching effects of this belief and how it can be used against the Alexandrian model, but Bede will in the coming centuries.

Bede's Formalization

Bede's adoption of several Augustinian ideas can be clearly seen in the *Vision of Drythelm* recorded in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History.* Here, our author recounts a vision a monk was said to have had into the afterlife. Drythelm is a holy man who dies one night. Upon his death, his soul is guided by a heavenly spirit to four different places for the dead. The first is a valley of extreme weather that contains Christians who committed grave sins (*scelera*). The second a pit filled with fire. The third a paradise distinct from heaven. And the last heaven itself. After he has been duly

educated about what awaits all souls after death, he revives in his country cottage (1984, 113-114).

Before even getting to Bede's formal theological arguments for purgatory, in this story we see all of Augustine's ideas mentioned above come to life. Four destinations for the four types of souls, the good, mostly good, mostly bad, and just bad. Bede broadens heaven's doors by allowing the top three groups into heaven instead of only two, but only after assigning punishment to the mostly bad group. Le Goff sees this as a wholly punitive measure; those souls in the valley are in a punishment without ant purgative effect (1984, 115). Moreira, however, sees this harsh punishment through the lens of the son/slave relationship that the Christian has to God and, thus, sees this harsh corporeal punishment as having a purgative end after all (Moreira 2010, 155). Indeed, Moreira sees Bede's model as "an orthodox variation on universalism" solely because he saw these severe corporeal punishments as a way an omnipotent father/master might teach an eternal lesson (2010, 165). Regardless of if Le Goff or Moreira's version of Bede is more historically accurate, I will adopt Moreira's lens in crafting the Anglo-Saxon model as essentially purgative.

Moreira also uncovers Bede's genius in his use of Augustinian ideas in combatting the variants of Origenism in his day: his removal of the fire's automatic function. In dividing the other world into four distinct areas, the valley with one type of fire, the pit with another, and the other two with no fire at all, Bede diverged from typical accounts of the purgatorial fire. As I have stated elsewhere, First Corinthians 3 was a foundational passage to many apologists of purgatory, many of whom identified a probative and purgative aspect in the one flame after death. Bede, however, in accordance with Jerome and Augustine, did not use that passage or many of the other famous passages in formulating his doctrine of purgation (Moreira 2010, 19).

Denying this, as well as asserting the role of intercession in lessening the pains of purgation, "removed from [the fire] the capacity to burn sin automatically as a kind of universal barrier through which all souls pass" (2010, 164). So here we see Bede asserting that the initial judgement of souls is done at the moment of death where they are assigned to one of these four destinations.

Lastly, Bede hints at something like the Alexandrian idea of the *schola animarum* when the heavenly spirit explains to Drythelm what he saw in the meadow:

> [The souls in the meadow] are received of those who depart from the body practicing good works; but they are not in such a state of perfection that they deserve to be received immediately into the kingdom of heaven; nevertheless all of them at the Day of Judgement will enter into the presence of Christ and the joys of the heavenly kingdom (2010, 154).

Here we see holy souls who are not being punished for their sins like those in the valley are, but are, nevertheless, growing in perfection until they are ready to enter heaven. I say that this must be something like the *schola animarum* along with Moreira simply because there is no purging of sins going on via corporal punishment, yet there seem to be moral growth happening. The simple explanation for this must be some kind of education, either formally or just from interacting with the other holy souls there. While it cannot be said that Bede appropriates this idea to the extent that Clement and Origen do, it is still present in a modified degree.

Now that we have looked at both Augustine and Bede's ideas on postmortem purgation and their most important supporting doctrines, we can spell out the basic components of the Anglo-Saxon model:

1. God separates souls at death based on their moral condition;

2. Some destinations are purely for punishment (hell), some for reward (paradise),
    and some for preparation for reward (educative/purgative places);

3. Souls in hell and paradise cannot leave; souls being prepared for paradise may
    leave after having been purified.

This general model became the basis for the Medieval version of purgatory, with all of its
variations and embellishments, but this is the view at its core.

Final Analysis

Now that we have working models of the two main systems of postmortem purification, our task
now is to examine which of these would be the better fit for "mere purgatory." By way of
reminder, our mere purgatory model should be the one that is the least controversial and can
adapt itself to more camps of Christian thought than the other model. While Walls makes a good
point as to Lewis's persuasive power as an authority, I think that he may have overstated his
influence when it comes to purgatory. As it is, Lewis's works have been around for quite some
time, and we have yet to see a revival of belief in purgatory among protestants on any large scale
– particularly so among evangelicals.

In this section I will argue that the Anglo-Saxon model is to be preferred over the
Alexandrian because it has a greater degree of versatility and can, thus, encompass a greater
degree of variety among Christians. This model can do that all while retaining a more traditional
appearance than the Alexandrian.

Versatility

Our first criterion for judging between the two models is versatility. This is holding with the
spirit of Lewis's *Mere Christianity* in which he tries to outline the most basic Christian doctrines,

that people are least likely to fuss about (if they're Christians). With that in mind, systems that are less likely to allow for variation across denominational boundaries are, thus, inflexible and more likely to cause disagreement. With that in mind, I have attempted below to assess the versatility of the Alexandrian and Anglo-Saxon models using the three supplemental doctrines from the beginning of this essay as examples. How these two models interact with these three beliefs is not last word on their flexibility, but it can at least give us an idea of which one can better accommodate Christians *who already accept* purgatory as part of their system of beliefs.

Recalling now the related doctrines mentioned at the beginning of this essay, we remember that there were twelve possibilities given the combination of those three different doctrines and our responses to them. On the table below are found the likeliest answers for someone holding to either model of purgatory concerning those supplemental doctrines:

Supplementary Doctrine	Alexandrian model	Anglo-Saxon Model
Prayers for the dead	Possibly	Possibly
Purgation tailored to sin	Yes	Possibly
Punishment model	Purgative/Mixed	Purgative/Mixed/Retributive

As can be seen above, both will admit a good variety among the beliefs listed. However, while the Anglo-Saxon model can accommodate any answer to any of the three supplementary beliefs listed, the Alexandrian model has set answers for the tailoring of sins to punishments and how the punishments can be understood. That prayers for the dead can be believed or not should be clear, as well as it should be that retributive punishment is off the table. However, that the punishment or purgation is to be tailored to the sin may need some justification.

Setting aside the specific variations we looked at above from Origen and Lewis who hold to the tailored view, it is at least possible that someone holds the Alexandrian viewpoint and yet

denies that there are differences among sins. Assuming that someone believed this, what would their purgatory look like? If we take the *schola animarum* as our example, what lessons might they be teaching? It is possible that in the afterlife all souls are subjected to years of intense spiritual, metaphysical, and metaethical lessons about the nature of sin and righteousness. These lessons, being about general principles, may say nothing of the particular sins and how they interact, but only how sin itself is seen by God and its effect on the human soul. The man who told white lies won't hear a lecture on why lying is bad itself, nor the man who lusted after his wife more than he ought to sit through a Power Point presentation over why his specific sin was a sin. After they have all served their time in the same classes and know the nature of sin enough to where they can understand where they erred of their own accord, then they may progress into beatitude. Purgatory, then, will seem very much like a public high school (on the verge of seeming a purely punitive model).

This, I admit, is wholly imaginable. However, it seems strangely out of touch with the heart of the Alexandrian thought process. If we take the core of the Alexandrian system to be that the purpose of purgatory is purely to correct the specific sins that a person damaged his soul with while alive, then it seems strange that their corrective would be the same. While it is possible that a doctor prescribe every possible medicine to you if you come down with the flu, it seems out of touch with the purpose of healing in the first place.

So, at least regarding these three beliefs, the Alexandrian model has some limitations. The Anglo-Saxon, meanwhile, has none here. This is chiefly because it admits the retributive model of punishment as an option. If souls in purgatory are not being educated at all, but merely paying back some debt for sins committed after baptism, then it makes seems plausible that the punishment for all sins can be a period of corporeal punishment only differing in the allotted

time of punishment. The differing in times need not be based on the quality of the sins committed but can be purely based on quantity. Silly though it seems that fifty stolen candy bars could incur the same stay in purgatory as fifty murders duly repented afterward, those who base their models of sin on God's infinite goodness at least have a view that should be heard. It could also be the case that all those souls who will be in purgatory will simply be there until the Resurrection, each enduring the same fire until that day.

One might say that my dismissal of the variation of Alexandrianism that allows purgation to be the same for everyone is unfounded given the dubious options just listed. It is certainly the case that what appears dubious to one person makes perfect sense to the other – particularly so in religious or moral matters. With that in mind, I do think what I have said still stands, but even if I admit that Alexandrians may have something like a core curriculum for purgatory, they still may not accept any hint of a retributive model.

The three doctrines may also be seen as ascending in weight on the table, prayers for the dead being less important than the division of sins, and the division of sins being less important than one's views on punishment. The nature of prayers for the dead is an obscure one with no way to verify what may be the right answer in the Protestant canon, nor in the experience of the daily life of the average believer. It is also true that no important dogmas of Christianity are founded on this belief. The division of sins, however, while not being foundational to any of the central tenets of the faith, does affect how we understand the nature of sin and, thus, what went wrong at the Fall and what was being corrected at the Crucifixion. This doctrine, though, is still only indirectly related to those more important issues. Yet in our understanding of how God may punish us in purgatory is a direct corollary to how we understand the nature of good and evil and,

thus, the issues of the Fall and the Crucifixion more immediately than our beliefs on how sins should be categorized.

If this is true, then it is also true that the most important type of flexibility would be at that most foundational level. Since the Alexandrian model is particularly set against one widely accepted version of punishment, then that is one whole group of Christians that believers in this model cannot be reconciled with in any way other than conversion at a fundamental level.

The staunch Alexandrian might still retort, "Why should I bother with those barbaric retributive theorists anyways? They pervert the meaning of the whole Gospel by trying to introduce legalism when there should only be love!" To this conscientious objector I would remind him of the purpose of our task: ecumenism and unity among the Churches. While it is possible to draw the line at retributive theorists as to who counts as a true Christian or not – the line must be drawn somewhere – the historical permanency of this group should make us wary of that. Retributive ideas were found in St. Augustine's writings, as we saw above, and persisted through the thousand years from then until the Reformation and survive even now. This will not convince everyone, but for those bent on ecumenism, it should hold some weight.

With the flexibility of the Anglo-Saxon model established and the relative rigidity of the Alexandrian, we will now move to the other primary criterion for establishing a "mere purgatory" – relation to traditional Christianity.

Traditional Standing

Being labeled as "traditional" in our current culture can be something of a slap in the face – particularly so on the typical Christian college campus. The push to be innovative in outreach and worship structure can be dizzying, a fact Lewis handled in his own time with the regular restructuring of the liturgy that his era experienced. In theological terms, however, having a

traditional theology can be useful. Aligning one's beliefs with what has been overwhelmingly believed over the course of the Church is a fairly reasonable indicator that one is on the right track. There will be many who quibble with this, particularly among protestants who are quicker to deride tradition than Catholics, but all arguments benefit from attaching your position to someone older, more intelligent, and less distant in time from the founding of the Church. It is from this assumption that I use this criterion in deciding between the Anglo-Saxon and Alexandrian models. In this section I will point out the early issues with Origen's ideas on purgatory and why they were condemned, and I will also argue for the stronger traditional basis of the Anglo-Saxon model.

Turning first to Scripture, for better or worse Christianity has a recurring motif of selection and the uniqueness of being saved. "Enter through the narrow gate," Jesus said, "for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matt. 7: 13-14). And as Milton reminds us throughout his works, the righteous are in the minority, and rounded by wickedness on every side; Abdiel is the only one to reject Satan's words. These ideas could be interpreted in different ways. One might say that humanity tends towards destruction, and that true saintly lives are few; they may also maintain that God will still forgive in the end, after the wicked soul has been eventually reformed. This seems unlikely. The more traditional reading of this verse is that hell is severely more populated than hell. At least from a Biblical standpoint, the Anglo-Saxon model seems to better account for passages like the one quoted above.

Shifting focus to the legacy of the most prolific Alexandrian scholar, Origenism met with some backlash almost immediately – backlash as severe as some people's love of Origen was

sincere. Sts. Jerome and Augustine both quibbled with Origen's tendency towards universalism (1984, 61-68). Indeed while St. Augustine was not formulating his purgatorial beliefs explicitly to rebuke Origen himself, he was combatting a group called the *misericordes*, which firmly believed in the mercy of God and in the eventual salvation of almost everyone (1984, 68). That Sts. Jerome and Augustine, and descendants of theirs like Bede, have left a larger mark on Western Christianity in the long run than Origen should go without saying. Nor should it be forgotten that Dante is also in their camp, along with all of his devoted readers. So, while Lewis's fame might have the current hold on the American protestant fascination, it surely cannot be said that his fame alone is more useful than that of these few men, not counting the others on their side.

One might object to this that I have simply defined orthodoxy as that which lines up with the Anglo-Saxon model. This is a fair critique. However, I have not defined orthodox as such, but this definition has been handed down to us from the Fathers of the Church, the Councils, and the widespread acceptance of people like St. Augustine across denominational boundaries. Suppose we were trying to decide if the Jehovah's Witness interpretation of St. John's Gospel was more in line with traditional Christianity or not. The only way we could do that is by appealing back to what won the day as "traditional Christianity." The follower of this sect might say that that is unfair, and that what won the title of "orthodox, traditional Christianity" is not *true* Christianity at all. While that may be the case, we are not arguing here for which view is right, but only which is more in line with a specific historical religious tradition. That being said, Origenism *may very well be true*, but it is a distinct religious tradition – however closely related – from the traditional Christian religion.

Conclusion

So, by both of our critical criteria for judging the two models, the Anglo-Saxon has proved more flexible as well as more traditional. This should be of no surprise. Since the model has less restrictions concerning what traditional beliefs can or cannot be mixed with it, it is better able to align itself with the traditional camp. This does not mean that the flexibility of the model cannot be used to create something very untraditional – indeed it can effectively reach the same goal as the Alexandrian model while maintaining the same structure and geography as the most traditional Anglo-Saxon accounts propounded by Bede and Dante. While this much flexibility can be dangerous, it at least allows disagreements between models to have the same bones. Submodels may be different variations in fur color of the same species, instead of wholly different animals.

Conclusion

That this paper is being written at all on a Baptist campus, partially in response to a book written on another Baptist campus, should be encouraging. Five hundred years ago this debate might have been more problematic, but things are different now. Many things have changed in the Catholic Church over the past few centuries and now that we are more removed from some of the abuses that were committed by the institution, the differences in theology can be debated in earnest.

In this project we have examined two distinct lines of thought concerning how purgatory should be understood. Supplementary doctrines of differing degrees of importance have also been examined in relation to these. At the end the Anglo-Saxon model appears to have taken primacy of the Alexandrian. However, this is by no means the end of the discussion. As with Walls's list from the beginning of this paper, discovering the best candidate for mere purgatory is an empirical question. While I have spent a lot of this paper discussing theoretical differences

between the two views, this is still a pragmatic look at what theories would best serve our purposes here. So, while I agree with Walls that Lewis's model is the most attractive *to me*, I think many believers would have some severe reluctance in accepting it. On the Anglo-Saxon model, we can all have some type of agreement about the afterlife, but on a personal level it can be adapted to one's personal learnings towards or away from universalism.

Before ending this paper, I think we should look a few words describing the character of Origen. Daley sees him as, "a man of critical intelligence, unafraid of bold speculation, but also a man of the Church" (2010, 47). Speculation was almost a duty for such a person. By bold speculation on eternal truths he advanced the Church's knowledge beyond the hints and bones of Scripture. Even if one disagrees with Origen, that very disagreement is a refinement of beliefs and, thus, an advancement of spiritual knowledge.

Instead of an admonition for future research as most papers end with, I would rather there be a call for future speculation. In A. N Wilson's biography of John Milton, he explains that the real nature of Protestantism isn't merely giving the finger to the Catholic Church; he says it is "not an alternative orthodoxy… so much as a ferment of contradictory ideas in which intellectual freedom was tempered by the knowledge that salvation was at stake" (Wilson 1983, 196). That is the spur of speculation, something that contemporary Christians of whatever branch can embrace as part of their personal spirituality.

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