

Mysticism and the Dogma of Purgatory

Summary

Like every truth of faith, the truth about purgatory is rooted in Scripture. Although the word purgatory does not directly appear in the Bible, one can find many texts indirectly indicating its existence. The ancient Israelites professed belief in *sheol* - a realm to which the dead descend after death, and from which an all-powerful God can deliver. In addition to Scripture, the testimony of faith in the purgatory is the living Tradition of the Church: the texts of the Church Fathers, which undertake theological reflection based on biblical passages on the purification of man after his death. In accordance with the principle *lex orandi - lex credendi*, liturgical testimonies, as well as the *sensus fidei fidelium* - the supernatural sense of faith, causing one to believe that the prayers offered to the dead are an aid to their purification. Thus, belief in posthumous purification existed in the piety and consciousness of the faithful from the most ancient times, but was defined by the Magisterium only in the 15th century. The abiding in purification, or the Church purifying herself, together with the pilgrim Church and the Church triumphant together form the community of the Communion of Saints - *communio sanctorum*: a community belonging to Christ in which all are connected to and dependent on each other. What unites the various states of this community is love, or concern for one another, which has its source in God. Content elements of the Catholic doctrine of purgatory, such as the time and place of purgatory, purgatorial punishments or forms of assistance to the souls in purgatory have been constantly reflected upon over the centuries up to the present day, and their understanding has evolved with the historical development of theological thought on purgatory. Descriptions of the final purification of man can also be encountered in the holy mystics. Some of these testimonies have a clear character of mystical visions, while others are the result of their inner experiences, and reflections. Among the content elements of the dogma of purgatory present in the testimonies of the saints are those that have their justification in centuries-old theological tradition, as well as those that find no justification there and even contradict the official position of the Magisterium Ecclesiae on purgatory. Some of these may be the reason why the truth about purgatory seems completely out of step with the present times and the mentality of 21st century man. However, it should be remembered that visions and descriptions primarily use symbolism and imagery to depict

an invisible reality that is inexpressible in human language. In addition, certain visionary descriptions may depict purgatory as a sometimes painful consequence of human choice. At the same time, a merciful as well as just God gives man a chance to correct his mistakes so that, fully purified, he can be reunited with Him. It should also be remembered that the truth of the purgatory has a practical dimension, since our prayerful remembrance of the dead is a help to them, but also contributes to our sanctification and, consequently, salvation: *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*