

# Penance and Purgatory

- The concept of purgatory flows naturally from the Roman understanding of forgiveness and penance.
- Our study will primarily come from the Catechism of the Catholic Church and New Advent.org which is the online encyclopedia of the Catholic Church which does have the imprimatur of the church (it's officially approved).
- This is a cursory examination of the church's doctrine, I am not an expert in canon law.
- Many of the concepts will be foreign to our ears but I want this to be an honest appraisal of what the church believes and why.

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- 1440 Sin is before all else an offense against God, a rupture of communion with him. At the same time it damages communion with the Church. For this reason conversion entails both God's forgiveness and reconciliation with the Church, which are expressed and accomplished liturgically by the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.<sup>38</sup>
- 1441 Only God forgives sins.<sup>39</sup> Since he is the Son of God, Jesus says of himself, "The Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins" and exercises this divine power: "Your sins are forgiven."<sup>40</sup> Further, by virtue of his divine authority he gives this power to men to exercise in his name.<sup>41</sup>

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- We believe this also, we call it the Office of the Keys and both churches base that teaching on the Word of God found in John.
- Joh 20:19-23 - On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

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- In the Roman Catholic tradition the Sacrament of Penance (we call Confession and Absolution) comprises three parts: Contrition, Confession, and Satisfaction.
- The debate about indulgences swirled around Satisfaction.
- According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church Contrition is:
  - 1451 Among the penitent's acts contrition occupies first place. Contrition is "sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed, together with the resolution not to sin again."<sup>50</sup>
  - The confession (or disclosure) of sins, even from a simply human point of view, frees us and facilitates our reconciliation with others. Through such an admission man looks squarely at the sins he is guilty of, takes responsibility for them, and thereby opens himself again to God and to the communion of the Church in order to make a new future possible.

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- 1456 Confession to a priest is an essential part of the sacrament of Penance: "All **mortal sins** of which penitents after a diligent self-examination are conscious must be recounted by them in confession, even if they are most secret and have been committed against the last two precepts of the Decalogue; for these sins sometimes wound the soul more grievously and are more dangerous than those which are committed openly."54
- 1457 56 Anyone who is aware of having committed a mortal sin must not receive Holy Communion, even if he experiences deep contrition, without having first received sacramental absolution

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- 1458 Without being strictly necessary, confession of everyday faults (**venial sins**) is nevertheless strongly recommended by the Church.<sup>59</sup> Indeed the regular confession of our venial sins helps us form our conscience, fight against evil tendencies, let ourselves be healed by Christ and progress in the life of the Spirit. By receiving more frequently through this sacrament the gift of the Father's mercy, we are spurred to be merciful as he is merciful:<sup>60</sup>
- There is a lot of misunderstanding in Protestant circles about venial vs mortal sin, we believe that all sins condemns and separates from God.

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- 1854 Sins are rightly evaluated according to their gravity. The distinction between mortal and venial sin, already evident in Scripture,<sup>129</sup> became part of the tradition of the Church. It is corroborated by human experience.
- 1855 Mortal sin destroys charity (agape) in the heart of man by a grave violation of God's law; it turns man away from God, who is his ultimate end and his beatitude, by preferring an inferior good to him. Venial sin allows charity to subsist, even though it offends and wounds it.
- 1856 Mortal sin, by attacking the vital principle within us - that is, charity - necessitates a new initiative of God's mercy and a conversion of heart which is normally accomplished within the setting of the sacrament of reconciliation:

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- 1857 For a sin to be mortal, three conditions must together be met: "Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent."<sup>131</sup>
- 1858 Grave matter is specified by the Ten Commandments, corresponding to the answer of Jesus to the rich young man: "Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and your mother."<sup>132</sup> The gravity of sins is more or less great: murder is graver than theft. One must also take into account who is wronged: violence against parents is in itself graver than violence against a stranger.

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- 1862 One commits venial sin when, in a less serious matter, he does not observe the standard prescribed by the moral law, or when he disobeys the moral law in a grave matter, but without full knowledge or without complete consent.
- 1863 Venial sin weakens charity; it manifests a disordered affection for created goods; it impedes the soul's progress in the exercise of the virtues and the practice of the moral good; it merits temporal punishment. Deliberate and unrepented venial sin disposes us little by little to commit mortal sin. However venial sin does not break the covenant with God.
- Mortal sin therefore breaks the covenant with God, sanctifying grace is removed and the soul will not be saved if the mortal sin is not confessed and absolved, not so with venial sin.

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- The Augsburg Confession has a lot to say about the “system” of Penance. You might be surprised to learn we do not disregard individual confession and absolution.
- Of Confession they teach that Private Absolution ought to be retained in the churches, although in confession 2] an enumeration of all sins is not necessary. For it is impossible according to the Psalm: Who can understand his errors? Ps. 19:12.
- The Apology of the AC: For we also retain confession, especially on account of the absolution, as being the word of God which, by divine authority, the power of the keys pronounces upon individuals. 3] Therefore it would be wicked to remove private absolution from the Church. 4] Neither do they understand what the remission of sins or the power of the keys is, if there are any who despise private absolution. 5] But in reference to the enumeration of offenses in confession, we have said above that we hold that it is not 6] necessary by divine right.

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- Rather than contrition, confession and satisfaction what we see in Scripture is contrition and faith as we hear from Christ.
- 30] Thus Christ comprises the sum of the Gospel when He says in Luke 24:47: That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in My name among all nations
- “According to Rom. 5:1: Being justified by faith, we have peace with God. This faith obtains the remission of sins.”
- For the two chief works of God in men are these, to terrify, and to justify and quicken those who have been terrified. Into these two works all Scripture has been distributed. The one part is the Law, which shows, reproveth, and condemns sins. The other part is the Gospel, i.e., the promise of grace bestowed in Christ, and this promise is constantly repeated in the whole of Scripture...For all the saints were justified by faith in this promise, and not by their own attrition or contrition.

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- According to Luther in the Smalcald Articles:
- This repentance is not piecemeal [partial] and beggarly [fragmentary], like that which does penance for actual sins, nor is it uncertain like that. For it does not debate what is or is not sin, but hurls everything on a heap, and says: All in us is nothing but sin [affirms that, with respect to us, all is simply sin (and there is nothing in us that is not sin and guilt)]. What is the use of [For why do we wish] investigating, dividing, or distinguishing a long time? For this reason, too, this contrition is not [doubtful or] uncertain. For there is nothing left with which we can think of any good thing to pay for sin, but there is only a sure despairing concerning all that we are, think, speak, or do [all hope must be cast aside in respect of everything], etc.

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- 37] In like manner confession, too, cannot be false, uncertain, or piecemeal [mutilated or fragmentary]. For he who confesses that all in him is nothing but sin comprehends all sins, excludes none, forgets none. 38] Neither can the satisfaction be uncertain, because it is not our uncertain, sinful work, but it is the suffering and blood of the [spotless and] innocent Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world.
- In order, therefore, to deliver pious consciences from these labyrinths of the sophists, we have ascribed to repentance [or conversion] these two parts, namely, contrition and faith. If any one desires to add a third, namely, fruits worthy of repentance, i.e., a change of the entire life and character for the better [good works which shall and must follow conversion], 29] we will not make any opposition.
- Good works are the fruit of faith not the root of faith or part of forgiveness.