On the Last Things

Hell

The idea of eternal damnation, which had taken ever clearer shape in the Judaism of the century or two before Christ, has a firm place in the teaching of Jesus, as well as in the apostolic writings. Dogma takes its stand on solid ground when it speaks of the existence of Hell and of the eternity of its punishments.[1]

When God creates human beings with free will, God judges it acceptable to him that possibly some human beings might not be united with God and that human beings have control over whether this possibility is actualized. If God had not willed to create human beings with free will, then all states of affairs would have been up to God alone. But then union with human beings would have been precluded for God, since union requires two wills to unite. So, it is God's will that it lies ultimately within the control of human beings whether God's desire for union with each human being is fulfilled.[2]

Heaven reposes upon freedom, and so leaves to the damned the right to will their own damnation. The specificity of Christianity is shown in this conviction of the greatness of man. Human life is fully serious. It is not to be denatured by what Hegel called the "cunning of the Idea" into an aspect of divine planning. The irrevocable takes place, and that includes, then, irrevocable destruction. The Christian man or woman must live with such seriousness and be aware of it. It is a seriousness which takes on tangible form in the Cross of Christ.[3]

Purgatory[4]

The essential Christian understanding of Purgatory is clear. Purgatory is not, as Tertullian thought, some kind of supra-worldly concentration camp where man is forced to undergo punishment in a more or less arbitrary fashion. Rather is it the inwardly necessary process of transformation in which a person becomes capable of Christ, capable of God and thus capable of unity with the whole communion of saints.

Simply to look at people with any degree of realism at all is to grasp the necessity of such a process. It does not replace grace by works, but allows the former to achieve its full victory precisely as grace.

What actually saves is the full assent of faith. But in most of us, that basic option is buried under a great deal of wood, hay and straw. Only with difficulty can it peer out from behind the latticework of an egoism we are powerless to pull down with our own hands. Man is the recipient of the divine mercy, yet this does not exonerate him from the need to be transformed.

Encounter with the Lord is this transformation. It is the fire that burns away our dross and re-forms us to be vessels of eternal joy. This insight would contradict the doctrine of grace only if penance were the antithesis of grace and not its form, the gift of a gracious possibility.

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[1] Eschatology: Death & Eternal Life—Joseph Ratzinger
[2] Atonement—Eleonore Stump
[3] Eschatology: Death & Eternal Life—Joseph Ratzinger
[4] Eschatology: Death & Eternal Life—Joseph Ratzinger

The identification of Purgatory with the Church's penance in Cyprian and Clement is important for drawing our attention to the fact that the root of the Christian doctrine of Purgatory is the Christological grace of penance. Purgatory follows by an inner necessity from the idea of penance, the idea of the constant readiness for reform which marks the forgiven sinner.

Heaven[5]

Heaven, therefore, must first and foremost be determined Christologically. It is not an extra-historical place into which one goes. Heaven's existence depends upon the fact that Jesus Christ, as God, is man, and makes space for human existence in the existence of God himself. One is in heaven when, and to the degree, that one is in Christ. It is by being with Christ that we find the true location of our existence as human beings in God.

Heaven is thus primarily a personal reality, and one that remains forever shaped by its historical origin in the paschal mystery of death and resurrection. From this Christological center, all the other elements which belong to the tradition's concept of heaven may be inferred. And, in pride of place, from this Christological foundation there follows a theological affirmation: the glorified Christ stands in a continuous posture of self-giving to his Father. Indeed, he is that self-giving.

The paschal sacrifice abides in him as an enduring presence. For this reason, heaven, as our becoming one with Christ, takes on the nature of adoration. All cult pre-figures it, and in it comes to completion.

Christ is the temple of the final age; he is heaven, the new Jerusalem; he is the cultic space for God. The ascending movement of humanity in its union with Christ is answered by the descending movement of God's love in its self-gift to us. And so worship, in its heavenly, perfected form, entails an immediacy between God and man which knows of no setting asunder.

NORMS FOR GAINING INDULGENCES <u>APPLIED TO THE POOR SOULS IN PURGATORY</u>

1. A plenary indulgence, remitting before God all temporal punishment due to sins, can be gained on **All Souls' Day** by visiting a Church or Oratory and there reciting one Our Father and the Apostle's Creed.

2. One plenary indulgence per day may be gained from **1st to 8th November** by visiting and praying in a cemetery.

In order to gain these indulgences: one must (1) be Detached from Sin, (2) make a Sacramental Confession, (3) Receive Holy Communion, and (4) Pray for the intentions of the Pope (Our Father and Hail Mary).

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[5] Eschatology: Death & Eternal Life—Joseph Ratzinger