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"Behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world," because "I have loved you with an everlasting love: therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee" (Mt 28:20; Jer 31: 3).



Our Lord to Berthe Petit Contd. It has already obtained many Graces; it will obtain yet more when the Church will be exalted and the world renewed through its Consecration to the Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart of My Mother." (September 8, 1911)

J.M.J.

The following are excerpts from **Apologetics and Catholic Doctrine** by the late The Most Rev. M. Sheehan, D.D., Archbishop of Germia, and published by M. H. Gill And Son Ltd., 50 Upper O'Connell Street, Dublin in 1955.

**Hell, an Abode of Eternal Suffering** — The souls of those who die in mortal sin are cast into Hell. Each will suffer according to his deserts.

**(1) In Hell, the wicked will suffer the pain of loss. In this life, they rejected God for sin: in Hell, they will know what they rejected. They will see that they have missed the one thing for which they were created, the one thing that can make them happy, the one thing which they need and can never obtain.** That the living man needs air and water, is a truth only too distressingly illustrated in authentic narrative: we have read in the later history of India, how, amid the stifling heat of a summer night, a number of Europeans were packed into a little cell with but a few small apertures to the outer air; how, when the pangs of suffocation gripped them, they struggled and fought for places at the narrow openings; how they raved and blasphemed, tore one another to pieces, beat and trampled one another to death; — we have read many a time, how a group of castaways after days in an open boat under a blazing sun were driven mad with thirst, and how they threw lots to see which of them should be put to death, so that the others might drink his blood. These incidents, which one shudders to record, are our comment on the simple statement that man needs air and water; but **how shall we illustrate the truth that man needs God? Man's desire for air and water is a desire of his animal nature, while his desire for God is a desire of his whole being.** In the living man, the desire for air and water is always present, always more or less awake, and, if frustrated, leads to dreadful suffering. **In man after death, the desire for God which he now can hardly feel, will suddenly spring into full activity,** like the placid mountain-lake which, when the enclosing wall of stone is rent, flings its whole volume in raging flood down to the valley; **his whole being will flame up with an intense craving, with a hunger and thirst for God, of a force and vehemence infinitely beyond anything within mortal experience.** After judgment, **the sinner will feel himself fiercely, madly, borne and swept onwards by every faculty within him towards his Creator; but, held down pitilessly with his guilt, he will struggle in an agony of suffocation; he will rage with the frenzy of a parched and famished wild-beast in sight of the food and drink that cannot be reached; he will rave and curse, and, if he could, he would annihilate the very God whose attraction, whose infinite loveliness, now eternally unattainable, causes him such excruciating torture.** St. John Chrysostom says: **"Insupportable is the fire of Hell - who doth not know it? - and its torments are awful; but, if one were to heap a thousand hell-fires one on the other, it would be as nothing compared with the punishment of being excluded from the blessed glory of Heaven, of being hated by Christ, and of being compelled to hear Him say, 'I know you not.'"** 35



35 (a) In St. Matth. Hom. 23, 8. — The effect on the wicked is as though they were hated by Christ," but the serene happiness of Christ is not disturbed by any such passion. (b) Father Faber (Blessed Sacrament, Bk. 3, sec 7, p. 374, 3rd ed.) speaks thus of the Pain of Loss: — "Up and down its burning cage the many-facultied and mightily intelligenced spirit wastes its excruciating immortality in varying and ever varying still, always beginning and monotonously completing, like a caged beast upon its iron tether, a threefold movement, which is not three movements successively, but one triple movement all at once. In rage it would fain get at God to seize Him, dethrone Him, murder Him, and destroy Him; in agony it would fain suffocate its own interior thirst for God which parches and burns it with all the frantic horrors of a perfectly self-possessed frenzy and in fury it would fain break its tight fitters of gnawing fire which pin down its radical love of the beautiful Sovereign Good, and drag it ever back with cruel wrench from its desperate propension to its uncreated Centre. In the mingling of these three efforts **it lives its life of endless horrors.**"

**(2) They will suffer the pains of sense.** In this life they rejected God for a created thing: **In Hell, God will employ a created thing to punish them. They will be tortured by a physical agency which the Sacred Scriptures call fire.** **Our Lord says** that "at the end of the world, **the Angels shall go out, and shall separate the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**" 36 "If thy hand scandalise thee," He says, "cut it off: it is **better for thee to enter into life maimed than having two hands to go into Hell, into unquenchable fire.**" 37 **He tells us too of the rich man and of the beggar Lazarus who lay at his gate:** "And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. And **the rich man also died and was buried in hell; and lifting up his eyes when he was in torments, he saw Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom, and he cried and said: 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water to cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame.'** And Abraham said to him: 'Son, remember that thou didst receive good things in thy life-time, and likewise Lazarus evil things, but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is fixed a great chaos (chasm), so that they who would pass from hence to you cannot, nor from thence come hither.'" 38

36 St. Matt. Xiii. 49, 50.

37 St. Mark ix. 42.

38 St. Luke xvi. 19-26. — The parable of the rich man and the beggar is our Lord's impressive illustration of the truth that **He punishes the grave abuse of worldly wealth with unending torments**. But He does not intend us to accept the dramatic details as literally true; He does not require us to believe that there could have been a respectful interchange of words between Abraham and a soul in Hell, nor that a disembodied spirit could have cried out for "a drop of water" to cool its "tongue." **What He does require us to believe is that even if, on an impossible supposition, a lost soul could make a piteous appeal for the very slightest relief, its request would be denied:** Cf. Knabenbauer, *Cursus Sacrae Scripture* (Gospel of St. Luke).—A parable differs from an allegory. In a parable there may be several details whose sole purpose is to brighten the narrative and fix it in the memory; in an allegory, on the other hand, every detail corresponds exactly, or very closely, to some part of the truth that is being illustrated. The parable referred to in the text above is a parable strictly so called. Some of the other illustrations used by our Lord, though called "parables," are really allegories: e.g., the Parable of the Sower and the Parable of the Vineyard (St. Matt. xiii 3-8; 18-23; XXI. 33-46).

**St. John writes in the Apocalypse that the wicked "shall drink, of the wine of the wrath of God," that they shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the sight of the holy Angels, and in the sight of the Lamb; and the smoke of their torments shall ascend up for ever and ever; neither have they rest day nor night."** 89

The pain of sense includes not only the pain of fire but every pain distinct from that of loss. It includes, therefore, all that the damned soul will suffer from remorse of conscience, from the memory of lost opportunities, from the thought of the wretched pleasures of this life purchased at the price of eternal happiness; it includes all that it will endure from association with demons, hateful to the soul as the soul is hateful to them. There is no sufferer on earth we pity more than him who is cared for by no one and never hears a kind word; yet to such, God, unknown to man, may give many consolations. But what of the soul in Hell? It will never again hear the voice of pity; it is left to brood on its misery, alone for ever.<sup>40</sup>

39 Apoc. xiv. 10, 11

40 The reader might consult Faber's *Spiritual Conferences* (Sec. XI, "Heaven and Hell).

**(3) They will suffer for all eternity:** Christ speaks of Hell as the Hell "of unquenchable fire where the gnawing worm dieth not." 41

He tells us that God will pass sentence on the wicked, saying to them: **"Depart from Me you cursed into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels."** He contrasts the fate of the bad and the good in the words: **"And these shall go into everlasting punishment, but the just into life everlasting."** "Everlasting" is sometimes used loosely in Sacred Scripture to denote a long, but not endless, period; this, however, as St. Augustine points out, is not its meaning here; it must, he says, mean "eternal" in the strict sense, and for the following reason: — the two expressions "everlasting punishment" and "life everlasting" occur in the same sentence; "everlasting" must, therefore, bear the same meaning in both; but all admit that "life everlasting" means "life never-ending;" hence all must admit that **"everlasting punishment" means "never-ending punishment."**



**The Fire of Hell. - According to the safe and common teaching the fire of Hell is something real and physical, something material;** yet, as the Fathers tell us **it is not identical with the fire of this world.** Thus, Lactantius says: "The nature of that everlasting fire is different from this fire of ours which we use for the necessary purposes of life, and which ceases to burn, unless it be sustained by the fuel of some material. **But that divine fire always lives by itself, and burns without nourishment."** St. Ephraem<sup>45</sup> and St. Basil<sup>46</sup> declare that **the fire of Hell causes darkness, and incessantly torments its victims without destroying them.** St. Augustine says that, **while not corporeal, it resembles a corporeal thing.**<sup>47</sup> Whatever be the nature, **God has given it the power of acting on pure spirits and disembodied Souls.** Though we know it only from its effects, and though we know these effects themselves very imperfectly, **we may be assured that "fire," the name given to it by Christ, conveys to us the best idea of its nature that we are capable of conceiving.**

41 St. Mark ix. 43, 44.

42 St. Matt xxv. 41. 43 Id. Ibid. 46

44 De Div. Inst. 7, 21.

45 Serm. Exeg. Vol. II, p. 354.

46 In Psal. 28, 7 n. 6.

47 De Genesi ad Literam xii. 32, 41 61.

**The Torments of Hell cannot be adequately described. - No tongue can describe the happiness of Heaven: no tongue can describe the horrors of Hell. It is a grievous mistake to suppose that the dreadful pictures of Hell drawn by preachers and writers are mere fabrics of the imagination, mere senseless exaggerations with no relation to the truth. The details presented may not indeed correspond with the facts, but they help us to stretch our mind towards the awful reality; they put before us sufferings we know of so that we may get some**

idea of sufferings similar in their nature, but far more intense (the pain of sense), and of other and inconceivably greater sufferings of a different and higher order (the pain of loss). Ponder over the words of our Saviour Himself: they are the most appalling ever uttered by human lips, and He that spoke them did not exaggerate. His description of the damned as separated from happiness by an impassable chasm, as gnawed by the undying worm, as afflicted with burning thirst, as tortured in flames, as flung into unquenchable fire, as buried in Hell, gives us, when fully understood and expanded, more than all that we find in sermons and religious epics.

**Replies to difficulties against the doctrine of Eternal Punishment.** 48 - note as a general reply to all difficulties - God commands us to believe in the eternity of Hell. The doctrine raises many difficulties; so does the doctrine of the most Holy Trinity; So does the doctrine of the Blessed Eucharist; yet it is precisely because the doctrine is difficult to our feeble understanding, our faltering reason, that we glory Him in accepting it. We glorify Him by trusting in Him whose Divine Son died on the Cross for us; we glorify Him by our unshakable faith in His infinite justice, His goodness and mercy.

48 Formerly all Protestants believed in Heaven and Hell but not in Purgatory; now-a-days most of them believe in Heaven and Purgatory but not in Hell. In denying the doctrine of Eternal Punishment, they shut their eyes to the clear evidence of Sacred Scripture and to the general belief of the human race. The ancient and modern beliefs of Pagans are briefly given by Raupert, Hell and its Problems, London, St. Anselem's Publishing Co., 1912. His work will be found very useful on all the matters discussed in these paragraphs.

A. "Eternal punishment seems opposed to Divine Justice."

1. "How can a sin committed in moment of time deserve an eternity of punishment?"

**REPLY:—(a) It is not reasonable to hold that the duration of the punishment should be determined by the length of time it took to commit the offence:** theft, forgery, or manslaughter may be committed in an instant, and yet such crimes are justly punished by imprisonment for many years. **(b) The suggestion that a good man may at the end of a long life be surprised into a single mortal sin and be cast into Hell, need cause no apprehension. Mortal sin is a violation of the law of God committed (1) in a serious matter; (2) with clear knowledge, and (3) in full freedom and with full consent.** Sometimes we see a man who has long been honoured for his virtue, die apparently the death of the unjust; but what to us seems a grave sin may be due to some merely physical weakness, break-down, or aberration; **God reads the heart; He will send no man to Hell who does not fully deserve it. But if he who has all his life enjoyed the blessings of God's friendship turns against Him in the end knowingly, freely, and deliberately, he is guilty of the blackest ingratitude and can expect no forgiveness after death.** The supposition is indeed improbable, and may never be realised in fact. **(c) God does not suffer from ignorance like a human judge; He knows us through and through; He will make full allowance for the obstacles in our path, for human frailty and ignorance, for evil surroundings, and for inherited tendencies to sin. He will judge us with perfect but humane or kindly justice.** 49

49 "God," says St. Thomas, "judges men through the Man Christ, so that the judgment may be gentler for men," ut sit suavius iudicium hominibus (S.T., III, q. 59, a. 2, c.); see Heb. iv. 15, 16. - God judges men, in His human nature, not because He as Man has more pity for them than He has as God, but because He desires to remind them that, in Him, they have a Judge who has felt all their weaknesses, - who has felt the stress of temptation and the edge of suffering.

2. "Is not all punishment designed for the correction of the wrong-doer? If so, is not eternal punishment unjust?"

**REPLY:—(1) All punishment is not designed for the correction of the offender.** The State will send a man to the scaffold for murder: in such a sentence there is obviously no thought of reforming the criminal. Nor can it be said that the sole object is to offer his example as a warning to the evil-minded. The State has something further in view: it puts him to death to make him expiate his crime, to do to him what he has done to another; and men approve, saying: "That is right, Justice has been done." Even in the lesser punishments inflicted by the civil arm, this element of expiation enters in: for instance, when a thief is sent to prison for ten years, the object is not merely to deter others from crime or to hold the malefactor in detention for a period nicely calculated as sufficient for his reform, but to make, him pay for his guilt. Crime disturbs the balance of justice: punishment restores it. The criminal owes a debt to justice: he must pay it to the last farthing. **Apply this to the doctrine of eternal punishment. A man dies in rebellion against God: he must suffer a penalty equal to his crime. But how are we to estimate the penalty? Only by humbly taking the words of God Himself: He has issued a most solemn and emphatic warning that the impenitent sinner deserves eternal punishment, and we must believe it. In this life, we walk by faith, and believe God is just; in the next, we shall know He is just, and perhaps there may be many who, to their cost, will know it too late.** - **(2) The objection assumes that lost souls are capable of reform. This is false. As we say below in our reply to the next objection, the will of the sinner, for reasons which we cannot fathom, is, as a consequence of its very nature, fixed after death in perpetual hatred of God; and this perpetual hatred demands in justice a perpetual**



**punishment. To ask God to refrain from punishing the wicked in Hell would be like asking Him to deny the truth that they died in rebellion against Him.**

**B. “Eternal Punishment seems opposed to Divine Goodness and Mercy.”**

**1. “How can we reconcile Divine Goodness and Mercy with the doctrine of eternal punishment?”**

**REPLY: - (a) If God were to release the damned, His mercy would be stultified.** The wicked could defy Him, saying: “We trampled on Your Law. We had our own way in spite of You. We knew that Your mercy would not allow You to punish our defiance of You with the eternal torments of Hell. We have triumphed over You.” - (b) **By dying in mortal sin, the damned have eternally disqualified themselves for deliverance. When a man commits mortal sin, he deliberately thrusts God and His commandments aside; he is no longer God’s servant; he has chosen himself as his own lord and master; and if he dies without reversing his choice, that choice becomes final for all eternity. He will never cease to be a rebel against God; he will never cease to be unfit for the kingdom of Heaven. The divine mercy, therefore, cannot release him. - (c) The lost soul is no object of pity. It is fixed in eternal selfishness; it regrets its sins, merely because they have made it suffer, but not because they were offensive to God; it will never bow its will to say: “Father, forgive me”; it will never appeal to the divine mercy for relief; it would gladly be rid of its suffering, hut only on condition of retaining its attitude of independence of God.**

**2. “Why cannot God break the rebellion of the lost soul by giving it an overwhelming grace of repentance? Or why does He not of His pity annihilate it and end its misery?”**

**REPLY: - God can do neither of these things because they are absurd. When all that is now hidden is revealed, we shall see that to convert or annihilate a lost soul would involve an absurdity comparable to that of constructing a square-circle. In this present life, we can see clearly that a figure ceases to be a circle if it is transformed into a square; after death, we shall see that God’s release or annihilation of a lost soul would demand such a change in Him that He would cease to be God; and we shall see also that, as St. Thomas says, the divine mercy extends even to the wicked in Hell by making their punishment less than their deserts. 50**

50 S.T., (Suppl., q. 99, a. 2, ad. 1: etiam in eis [sc. damnatis] misericordiae locum habet, in quantum citra condignum puniuntur. Cf. ibid a. 3, ad. 4; a. 5, ad. 1; S.T., I., q. 21, a. 4, ad. 1.

**C. “It would seem that the contemplation of eternal suffering must destroy the happiness of the Blessed.”**

**“How can the Blessed be happy if they see those whom they loved on earth suffering eternal punishment?”**

**Reply: - The happiness of the Blessed In Heaven cannot be marred by the sufferings of those who were their friends on earth.**

**The friendships of this life are not proof against grievous wrong:** if, for instance, a man learns that his parents have been robbed and murdered by one whom he thought his dearest friend, or if husband or wife discovers the other in a sin of infidelity, does not all friendship cease? And in the latter case does not the Church herself grant a lifelong separation, no matter how penitent the offender may be? Such crimes we recognise as destructive of affection; **but the crime of one who dies as God’s enemy will appear far more heinous to the Blessed in Heaven; for them, it will bear the character of a most grievous personal wrong utterly extinguishing every claim to their regard. They will perceive the obstinacy and black ingratitude of the sinner; they will see how he spurned God’s graces, and how he hardened his heart against the sufferings of Christ; they will behold him after death with his will set in eternal hostility to his Creator; and so the very thought of retaining any vestige of friendship for such a one will seem to them to be an insult to the God they love. They will feel as little pity for a lost soul in Hell, as men on earth feel for the suffering so Satan. They will be united to God more closely, more lovingly, than a child is united to its parents; His honour will be their honour; His friends, their friends; His enemies, their enemies; His affections will be their affections, and they will see all things with His eyes.**



**The moral value of the doctrine of Eternal Punishment. — God has created no one for Hell; thus, we may put the Catholic doctrine of Eternal Punishment in a homely way by saying that He did not make Hell to put us into it, but to keep us out of it. He has created every one of us for Heaven, and has given us every help to get there. Among these helps, one of the greatest is His revelation of the eternal torments of Hell. He has shown us that sin leads to Hell, so that knowing this we may, by our own free will, and aided by His grace, learn to shun and hate what would bring us thither. If some one of agreeable manners sought our society with no other object but to rob us and ruin us, we would avoid him and come to hate the attractions with which he**

sought to ensnare us; in like manner, we come to detest sinful pleasure, knowing that it is but the bait that tempts us into the dread trap from which there is no escape. The more we meditate on Hell, the nearer we shall be drawn to God. We should pray with the Psalmist that we might be filled with fear of the Divine judgments: "Pierce Thou my flesh with Thy fear; " "Blessed is the man to whom it is given to have the fear of God.... The fear of God is the beginning of His love." <sup>52</sup>

51 Ps. cxviii. 120. The sense of the Hebrew differs somewhat: "My flesh shudders from fear of Thee"

52 ecclus. xxv 15. 16.

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