

# For All the Saints?

## Remembering the Christian Departed

### 1. Saints, Souls and Sinners

Sunday, April 3, 2005

10 to 10:50 am, in the Parlor.

*Everyone is welcome!*

*St. John in the Wilderness*

**Eternal God,  
whose Son Jesus Christ is the way, the  
truth, and the life,  
grant us to walk in his way,  
to rejoice in his truth,  
and to share his risen life;  
who is alive and reigns, now and for  
ever.**

Common Prayer, p. 403

# FOR ALL THE SAINTS?

Remembering the Christian Departed



N. T. Wright



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Chapter 1 “Saints, Souls  
and Sinners: The  
Medieval View and Its  
Later Developments”



- N. T. Wright taught New Testament studies at Oxford, Cambridge, and McGill Universities for 20 years.
- Recently Canon Theologian of Westminster Abbey.
- Currently Bishop of Durham, England.
- Has written numerous academic and popular works, notably the three volumes (and still unfinished) series “Christian Origins and the Question of God.”

**Saints, Souls and  
Sinners: The Medieval  
View and Its Later  
Developments:  
Introduction**

# Introduction

## Questions

- What has happened to those whom we have loved, who are now dead? Where are they *now*?
- What will happen to us personally when each of us dies? What is it that we should look forward to? What is our ultimate hope as Christians?

# Introduction

## Questions

- Such questions can arise:
  - out of the wellsprings of human grief and love for another.
  - from our human need for solace and hope.
  - amid personal despair that can be assuaged only by knowing the purpose and goal of life's journey.
- They are not idle or selfish questions.

# Introduction

## Theology vs. Popular Piety

- The pastoral challenges these questions pose for ourselves and those who minister to us are enormous, and have spawned popular and liturgical pieties that attempt to suggest answers.
- However, these pious answers have sometimes:
  - Gone beyond what theologians are willing to say.
  - Elevated ideas which have a very tenuous Scriptural basis.
  - Downplayed aspects of established theology and doctrine.

# Introduction

## Our Goals: Today

- To review the traditional ideas about what happens after death, and:
  - Discuss the origin of these traditions.
  - Point out some ways in which the tradition may downplay or even undercut what Scripture tells us.

# Introduction

## Our Goals: Next Week

- Review and discuss N. T. Wright's views about:
  - What we can say on the basis of Scripture, and
  - What we cannot, and should not, be saying.

# Introduction

## Points of Discussion Today

- Traditional ideas about **destinations** after death that persist to this day:
  - “Heaven”
  - “Purgatory”
  - “Hell”

# Introduction

## Points of Discussion Today

- Traditional ideas about “**Saints**” versus “**Souls**” that persist to this day:
  - “All Saints Day” (Nov. 1) versus “All Souls Day” (Nov. 2)
  - “**The Communion of Saints**”
  - Praying to / for / those who have died:
    - *To* the “Saints.”
    - *For* the “Souls.”

# Introduction

## Points of Discussion Today

- A traditional view of the Church that persists to this day: the threefold Church:
  - **The Church Triumphant** (those who have died who are now “saints” in “heaven.”)
  - **The Church Expectant** (the “souls” who have died and are destined for “heaven,” but who must go through further “purification” before they get to heaven. The place of their “intermediate” state is called “Purgatory.”)
  - **The Church Militant.** (Those of us still alive battling evil and temptation here on earth).

# Introduction

## Points of Discussion Today

- Much of our liturgies, hymns, and popular thinking assume these traditional ideas.

**Heaven**

# “Heaven”

## One of Multiple Destinations

- A tradition of multiple possible destinations after death developed in the middle ages\*:
  - “heaven”
  - “purgatory”
  - “hell”

\* We will not discuss a fourth destination, called “limbo”

# “Heaven”

## One of Multiple Destinations

- Today these destinations persist most completely in traditional Roman Catholic piety.
- The Protestants reformers threw out “Purgatory,” but retained intact most of the pious speculations about “Heaven” and “Hell.”
- Anglicans rejected the “Romish” doctrine of Purgatory, but today are still willing to entertain some “intermediate” state akin to Purgatory.

# “Heaven”

## The Saints in the Church Triumphant

- **“Heaven”** in traditional piety:
  - A “place,” far away, beyond space-time, where God reigns supreme (“The Kingdom of God”)
  - The place where the martyrs and all the **“saints,”** the blessed, the righteous, the saved reside.
    - They are all with God, seeing God in all God’s glory (“the beatific vision”).
  - These **“saints”** (= the residents of heaven) make up the **“Church Triumphant.”**

# “Heaven”

## Praying to the Saints

- If we imagine heaven as like the castle of a king in medieval times, the “saints” in heaven (“The Church Triumphant”) are in the inner court of the castle, in the immediate presence of the “king” (God).
- This view led to the idea that if we pray to the “saints,” perhaps they can put in a good word to the “king” (God) for us.
  - They are our “friends” in the court, for they can empathize with our situation, having lived through the same trials and tribulations of life that we are living through.

# “Heaven”

## Praying to the Saints

- In the middle ages, the idea further developed that the Saints in heaven had a “treasury” of “good works” and “merits” that we could tap into.
  - Led to the pious veneration of relics of the Saints.

# “Heaven”

## All Saints Day

- As early as the Fourth Century, the “saints” in heaven were given their own feast day: **“All Saints Day.”**
  - Originally held on the Sunday after Pentecost, where it is still celebrated in the Eastern (Orthodox) Church today.
  - Moved to November 1 in the 8<sup>th</sup> century in the Western (Roman) Church.

# “Heaven”

## The Communion of Saints

- A concept of “The Communion of Saints” goes back to the martyrdom of Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.
  - Among Christians who died, martyrs were said to have a special status, and Christians on earth continued to share fellowship with them and could receive spiritual aid from them.

# “Heaven”

## The Communion of Saints

- Later developed into the idea that the saints in heaven (“The Church Triumphant”) are not indifferent to what is happening to the Church on earth (“The Church Militant”), but are watching over it, surrounding it with their presence.
  - Christians in the Church on earth (“The Church Militant”) should be mindful that they are continually in fellowship and communion with the saints in heaven (“The Church Triumphant”).

# “Heaven”

## Sainthood

- So how do you get to be one of the “saints” in the bliss of the court of God = “heaven”?
  - 1. You go to heaven *directly* after death – but only if you are the very rare person who has lived a very, very holy life.
    - Includes perhaps Peter, Paul, and some other celebrated “saints” and martyrs.
  - 2. You go to heaven after you have first spent some time in a place called **Purgatory** – if you are like the vast majority who have not achieved the holiness they are capable of in this life.

# Purgatory

# Purgatory

## A Good Cleaning

- If we imagine heaven again as like a king's castle, most of us arrive at its gates after death as country bumpkins, in ragged clothes and muddy boots. We need a good scrubbing.
- Purgatory is the place that provides that scrubbing.

# Purgatory

## A Good Cleaning

- The primary impetus for the idea of **Purgatory** arose from a need to explain the common **liturgical practice of praying *for* the dead.**
- Purgatory was first suggested in the 6<sup>th</sup> century by Pope Gregory the Great to explain this liturgical practice.
  - Gregory suggested that the sins of otherwise good Christians that had not been forgiven in this life are dwelt with in an “intermediate place” between this life and heaven, called “Purgatory.”
  - It would thus make sense to pray for those who had died, for they might be in this intermediate place “Purgatory,” and not yet in heaven.

# Purgatory

## Medieval Roman Catholic Doctrine

- The doctrine of Purgatory was fully developed by Thomas Aquinas in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.
- The Council of Lyons (1274) made it official Roman Catholic doctrine.
- The work of Dante, the Italian poet of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, thrust the idea into the popular imagination.
- It became central to the practical piety of most Western Christians in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries.

# Purgatory

## Medieval Roman Catholic Doctrine

- Medieval doctrine of Purgatory:
  - At death, Christians destined for heaven are usually still sinful, and need more cleansing, punishment, purgation for their sins.
  - As good Christians, they know they are still unfit to see God, and thus *willingly* accept the additional punishment and pain of Purgatory so they can be cleansed and be made worthy of seeing God.
    - After all, who would *want* to enter the court of the King dressed in ragged clothes and muddy boots? Of course you would want to wash and dress up in clean clothes!

# Purgatory

## Medieval Roman Catholic Doctrine

- Medieval doctrine of Purgatory:
  - Everyone in Purgatory (the “Souls” in Purgatory) will eventually go the heaven.
    - The “Souls” in Purgatory, awaiting heaven, are called **“The Church Expectant.”**
  - Prayers and masses offered by those on earth could help those in Purgatory, and decrease the amount of time they needed to spend there before proceeding to the bliss of heaven and sainthood.

# Purgatory

## Medieval Roman Catholic Doctrine

- This latter idea provided a rationale for the abuse of selling “indulgences” (= days of time in Purgatory you could strike off for a loved one in Purgatory, for a price)
- The abuse of indulgences led to Martin Luther’s protests and ultimately the Protestant Reformation.
  - And hence to the Protestant Reformers’ rejection of the doctrine of Purgatory.

# Purgatory

## All Souls Day

- In the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the Benedictines introduced **All Souls Day**, celebrated on November 2 (the day after All Saints Day).
  - Assumed a clear distinction between the “Saints” in heaven (“**The Church Triumphant**”) versus the “Souls” still in Purgatory, still not fully happy (“**The Church Expectant**”).
  - **All Saints Day**: A day to pray *to* the Saints in heaven (“The Church Triumphant”).
  - **All Souls Day**: A day to pray *for* the Souls in Purgatory (“The Church Expectant”).

# Purgatory

## Modern Anglican Views

- Anglicans today:
  - Reject the traditional “Romish” doctrine of Purgatory (Articles of Religion, XXII, in the Book of Common Prayer)
  - Are willing to entertain the idea of an “intermediate state” (like Purgatory) between this life and “heaven,” in which it might make sense to pray for a loved one who has died. But such a view is not required.
  - Keep both All Saints Day and All Souls Day in the Liturgical Calendar.
    - Yet the meaning and traditional distinction of the two days is left ambiguous (Wright: traditional Anglican Fudge).

# Purgatory

## Modern Catholic Views

- Roman Catholic Theology on Purgatory changed radically in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (although much of this change did not filter into the practical piety of Catholics).

# Purgatory

## Modern Catholic Views

- Karl Rahner (d. 1984)
  - “widely acknowledge as one of the greatest Roman Catholic theologians of the mid-twentieth century”
  - Tried to combine Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox teachings on the place of the soul between death and resurrection.
  - Suggested that after death, the soul becomes more closely united with the cosmos, and becomes aware of how its sins impacted the cosmos.
    - This realization would be “purgatory” enough for the soul.

# Purgatory

## Modern Catholic Views

- Joseph Ratzinger
  - German Catholic theologian.
  - Suggested that “purgatory” is actually the “fire” of that moment when Jesus judges us and conforms us to our new glorious resurrected body.
  - Side note: Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger is:
    - Currently Dean of the College of Cardinals, and will preside over the College of Cardinals as they meet to elect the next Pope.
    - Is himself on the “short list” of candidates for the next Pope.

**Hell**

# Hell

## Traditional View

- In the traditional view, hell is:
  - A final destination. Once in hell, you aren't going to go anywhere else.
  - A place of eternal torment.
  - A place where the evil receive the just punishment they deserve.
    - One of the traditional “delights” of heaven, it was speculated, was to see the just torments (i.e. justice) being wrought upon those who had been evil – an idea now usually repugnant to mainstream Christians.

# Problems with the Tradition

# Problems with the Tradition

- There is something missing, radically de-emphasized in the traditional view of what happens after death.
- It is highlighted by what we say (and do not say) in the Creed.
  - *We say*: “We look forward to the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come.”
  - *We do not say*: “We look forward to going to heaven after we die”

# Problems with the Tradition

- The New Testament describes:
  - A general judgment of all of humanity and human history,
  - A communal resurrection of the bodies of all those who have died,
  - A renewal of creation (“a new Jerusalem”) in which God will reign and live among God’s people.

# Problems with the Tradition

- If this New Testament vision is the ultimate Christian hope – as we profess in the Creed – then isn't there something flawed about the “pinnacle” of the traditional structure being the “Church Triumphant.”?
  - What more, in the traditional view, could the Saints in heaven, the denizens of the Church Triumphant, want or need?
- But the New Testament implies even the “saints” in heaven still await the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come.
  - They still await what we profess in the Creed is the ultimate Christian hope.

# Problems with the Tradition

- The problem of soul-body duality
  - The tradition seems to assume the ancient Greek idea of a soul – body duality.
    - Before the Resurrection of the Body, the “soul” part of us is the part that resides in Purgatory or in Heaven.
      - We pray for the “souls” in Purgatory on All Souls Day.
      - In Heaven, we are still just souls, designated as “saints,” spirits without bodies.
  - Modern thinking however favors the idea that our being is a psychosomatic (mind-body) unity.
    - How can we fit this idea into the traditional view?