

Addison Sharpe

Professor: John Crow

Introduction to World Religions

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Course Project

Since the beginning of time and the creation of man, there has always been a sense surrounding man that there is a higher power at work in this universe. Humans have always looked for something that would give them hope of a better life or afterlife in some religions. The promise of a better future, without any suffering, by following scriptures on how one should behave. For the sake of this argument, let us focus on Christianity. In particular, the Roman Catholic doctrine and the Protestant doctrine. Christianity has grown to become the world's largest religion and comprises more than 25,000 different denominational groups (Amore, p. 153). Christianity dates back to the time of the birth of Jesus at around 3 BCE, according to the World Religions, third edition we use in class (Amore, p. 154). From this point on Christianity will only splinter off into new sects, interpreting the scriptures in many different fashions.

In October 1517, Martin Luther (1483-1546) posted a list of 95 'theses' against indulgences on the door of a church in the town of Wittenberg, where he was a monk (Amore, p. 186). This simple action by Luther set off a chain reaction of people challenging the Roman Catholic Church and how they go about operating within society and their practices. This marked the beginning of the Protestant reformation. That eventually led to the 25,000 different denominational groups that are around the world that we know today.

The Roman Catholic doctrine and the Protestant doctrine have multiple aspects where they find common ground, but one topic of discussion that they cannot seem to agree on is purgatory. The predominant belief among individuals in today's society is that there is no purgatory. According to the Roman Catholic doctrine purgatory is a place that separates Heaven and Hell and it is where the souls of some individuals may wind up, temporarily. Purgatory, according to Catholic doctrine, is said to be a place where those who die and have sinned and have yet to repent for their sins are sent. In this area known as purgatory souls can be purified. The "purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of Heaven," which is experienced by those "who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified" (CCC 1030).

One quote from the Bible that most Catholics refer to when discussing purgatory is, "Paul, in 1 Corinthians 3:13-14, makes this statement: "Each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire." From this excerpt from the Corinthians, Catholics interpret that when it is said that "if anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire" as purgatory being this so called fire. The Catholic Church also states that one must receive baptism, whereas Protestants do not.

Under the doctrine of the Roman Catholic doctrine all who die in God's grace and friendship, but still are imperfectly purified are sent to purgatory. To ensure eternal salvation, after death they must undergo this purification process to achieve the holiness that is essential to enter Heaven. This entire process is somewhat of a form of a safety net. Though the Catholic

doctrine does briefly discuss the reasoning behind such a place, it does not go into detail about who is solidified in enter straight into Heaven and Hell, and whom shall be sent to purgatory. According to PhD. Dumsday, although the Bible does not definitively state directly to purgatory, it is reference in several passages within both the New and Old Testament. In these particular scriptures it is noted that these scriptures explicitly backs the praying for the dead. As pointed out by PhD. Dumsday, the status of purgatory was not understood or depicted by Catholics until the growing of the topic between the age of 1150 and 1200. Although the specifics may differ, the "Scholastics provide both theological and philosophical arguments in support of purgatory" (Dumsday).

After Martin Luther protested the over indulgence of the Catholic Church many new ideals and sects began to sprout forth with their interpretation of how the Christian faith should be doctored and implemented. Those splinter cells of the Roman Catholic Church is what is known today as Protestant, meaning protest. Like Martin Luther there were two other individuals who splintered off from the Catholic Church to start their own form of Christianity. Those gentlemen were Jean Calvin (1509-1564) and Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), both of which can still be found presently in the world (Amore, p. 186-187). All three men are given credit for starting the Protestant formation that gives us over 25,000 different denominations under the umbrella of Christianity.

Under the Protestant doctrine there is no need for there to be a purgatory. For in the Protestant doctrine it is believed that the only way to get to Heaven is by faith alone. By having faith in God you are giving full acknowledgement that he controls every aspect of life and is in complete control. There is no place in scripture where a form of purgatory is mentioned.

Protestants are strict on focusing on what the Bible says on practicing and worshiping God. If it

is not in the Bible; than it cannot be the word of God and therefore should not be taken into account. Achieving salvation under the Protestant belief is solely based on an individual's repentance and acceptance of God and trust in that Jesus is Lord and savior.

Each religion that has been established has its very own and unique aspect and or aspects to its doctrine. These religions have both pros and cons and that is why there are so many different forms of Christianity. One can choose to take bits and pieces from one religion, while excluding the unwanted or portion that is thought to be irrelevant in the individual's eyes. This does not exclude either the Roman Catholic Church nor the Protestant doctrine. Each have their own faults and benefits for their followers.

Both the Roman Catholic doctrine and Protestant belief there is no denying the fact that both share the vision and have the hope of one day entering Heaven and meeting the creator face to face. That is the most blatant benefit that the two religions happen to agree upon. Under the Catholic doctrine the parents of a newborn child will have the child baptized. Catholics believe that baptizing the children so young, so as to wash away mortal sin and give the child a path to Heaven, if anything happens to put the child's health at risk. On the contrary, the Protestant belief structure is set up so that only adults of a mature age can be baptized. This is due to the fact that it should be the individual's choice to be saved and not the family's choice.

The protestant faith allows anyone who has accepted God as the one and only true God, can participate in the church's practice of communion. Whereas, under the Catholic doctrine only those who have undergone the scriptural training and understanding of the proper practices can participate and must be baptized and part the Catholic Church. Communion is practiced among

many of the Christian faiths and some see this practice as symbolic; whereas others see communion as the literal body and blood of their Lord Jesus Christ. Communion, as noted in the Bible as Jesus's last meal with his disciples before he was betrayed and given over to the Romans, who would ultimately crucify him on the cross.

Communion, according to the Roman Catholic doctrine is embodied in the Eucharist. The practice of communion in the Catholic Church celebrates the Eucharist "by a community that gathers at the communion table in the Holy Spirit in remembrance of the saving death and Resurrection of Christ, through the proclamation of the Word, the prayer of thanksgiving over bread and wine, and the ritual communion in the body and blood offered to the faithful" (Power). Catholics believe that once consumed, the Eucharistic wafer is transformed into the body of Christ as the wine is, turned into the blood of Christ. Other Christian beliefs hold that communion is more a symbolic practice that is derived from Jesus's last meal.

To conclude, the rise of Christianity has evolved since its origin, back in 3 BCE. The splintering off of the Roman Catholic Church picked up movement for reformation, when Martin Luther established the 95 "theses" of indulgences, that the Church had committed. As stated, the Roman Catholic doctrine is interpreted as the Bible referring to purgatory and why it is established between Heaven and Hell. Purgatory ultimately is viewed as beneficial within the Catholic Church. Although there are a multitude of sects under the Christian faith today, we ultimately believe in the same God, the main difference is our interpretations of the scriptures are differently understood.

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