

Independent Essay Proposal
'How does the theology of Purgatory differ between Catholicism and Protestantism?'

George Whittington

Catholics and Protestants are essentially strands of the same religion. They both believe in the Trinity; They both believe that Jesus is the Son of God; and they both believe that faith in Jesus is what separates those who will ascend to Heaven from those who will descend to Hell. Why is it then that with so much in common with Christian life, they differ so much regarding death?

In my independent project, I intend to ask the question 'How does the theology of Purgatory differ between Catholicism and Protestantism?' I propose to explore the eschatological and theological differences between the two to highlight in this area of purgatory where they both align and where they differ. By asking this question, I hypothesise that I will discover that theologically, purgatory is in Catholicism as it relies more on works of man than faith in God whereas theologically, purgatory is not in Protestantism as it relies more on faith in God than works of man.

Throughout this essay, I intend to use multiple sources to explore the Theology of Purgatory and how it differs between Catholicism and Protestantism.

Primarily, I intend to consider the Canon of the Bible. The Canon (*Kanon* Meaning yardstick in Greek) is essentially what standards were put on the books of the Bible that differentiated them from canonical to deuterio-canonical. I intend to discuss and break down what the reformers believed regarding the only scripture that should make up the Old Testament going off the original Hebrew. To counter this I intend to investigate what the Catholics believed made up the Canon from the Greek and Latin versions which would include the deuterio-cannonical books (Apocrypha). To do this, a greater in depth exploration of the Council of Trent (1546) would be carried out and how this impacted the Old Testament and what would be regarded as scripture. Furthermore, I would highlight that not all reformers were against the Council of Trent with some even finding the deuterio-canonical books to improve their understanding of the Bible. It would be discussed that the only point of contention was what was recorded in the book of 2 Maccabees which referred to praying for the dead (those in Purgatory) (McGrath, 2016, p.107)

At this point I would look into the word 'Purgatory' and explain its meaning for the audience in order for the reader to get a basic understanding of the word before moving on to potential reasons why its existence is contested.

The next section of the essay would then be given to finding out why this caused such an issue? One potential reason, aside from the book not being a part of the Canon according to the reformists; would be the potential Paganistic resemblance of praying for the dead in that collecting money and praying for the dead may have seemed similar to the actions of Ancient Egyptians in the Predynastic period.(insert source here) or the ancient Greeks when they put coins in the eyes of their dead to cross the river Styx. It would then be pointed out that ancient ways of life are not the only ones to make reference to crossing a river to the netherworld. In Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, Dante makes reference to the crossing into purgatory

starting at river Tiber (Insert reference here). I intend to explore this potential link with the Egyptian predynastical period alongside the Greek mythology angle whilst delving further into *Dante's* divine comedy to see if there is indeed any connection.

As far as the Canon, it would appear that Theologically, the main crux of the notion of purgatory boils down to interpretation. There are many sources of the New Testament that Protestants point to to argue against the notion of Purgatory. Some of these include:

- *John 5.24*
- *2 Corinthians 5.8*
- *Hebrews 9.27*
- *Luke 23.43*
- *1 John 2.2*
- *And 1 Corinthians 3.15*

After this It is my aim to include the 5 solas and their significance to the reformation movement and how they played their part in going against Roman Catholicism.

At this point in the essay, focus would then be placed on a rebuttal and exploration would be made from the Catholic viewpoint. I would look at verses in the Old and New Testament that are used in Catholicism to support the idea of Purgatory. These verses include:

- *1 Corinthians 3. 13 - 15*
- *Matthew 5. 26*
- *2 Maccabees 12.14*
- *Hebrews 12.14*
- *Malachi 3.3*

As one can see, some of the books of the New Testament that are used to provide evidence for and against Purgatory are the same. At this point in the essay, as the source is the same book (The Bible) I would start to focus on interpretation of the readings and how Catholicism and Protestantism differ and where they align.

Whilst there would be no primary sources of information for me to use, a lot of my independent project would rely heavily on the history of the Church as it is recorded, reference of the predynastical period along with the ancient Greek and where their pagan practices may be seen as something to avoid when it comes to Christian Eschatological thinking.

Furthermore, a lot of my independent project would be down to weighing up and presenting the ideas of Protestantism and Catholicism in as neutral a way as possible to achieve a balanced argument, showcasing the breadth of history that both sides have and how this has influenced their theology.