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## **Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory: Rethinking The Things That Matter Most**

Jerry L. Walls

Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2015. 235 pages. Paperback. ISBN 978-1587433566.

The Christian vision of the afterlife is far from uniform across branches and denominations of the religion, but in this apologetic book, Jerry L. Walls seeks to outline a philosophically-informed account that has the potential to appeal to those across the Christian spectrum. In addition to chapters on heaven, hell, and purgatory, Walls examines related topics such as personal identity, the problem of evil, and morality. The part of the book that will garner the most attention is surely the defense of a version of the doctrine of purgatory, since the Protestant Walls might reasonably be expected to reject the doctrine, as most Protestants do.

The defense of purgatory Walls offers here is a popular presentation of the argument developed at much greater length, and in much greater depth, in his earlier book, *Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation* (Oxford University Press, 2012). At the heart of the argument is a distinction between two different models of purgatory: the satisfaction model and the sanctification model. On the satisfaction model, humans are required to be punished for every sin they have committed before they can enter heaven in order to satisfy divine justice. On the sanctification model, humans must be fully sanctified and holy before they can enter heaven. Both models underwrite the doctrine of purgatory inasmuch as neither satisfaction nor sanctification is typically completed in this life, suggesting that their work must continue after death. Walls notes that it is the satisfaction model that attracts most of the Protestant opposition to purgatory, largely because it conflicts with the widespread belief that Christ's sacrifice for us is satisfaction enough for God. But, according to Walls, even if there is no need for us to further satisfy God for the sins we have committed, there is still a need for our sanctification. As he puts it, even if we have been forgiven for what we have done, this still leaves us with the problem of what we are, namely creatures with a tendency to sin, and *this* needs to be fixed in order for us to be worthy of fellowship with God (111).

Walls takes this view to be broadly accepted by all Protestants. The bone of contention instead concerns the speed with which our characters get fixed and the role we play in its happening. Protestants commonly insist that those individuals bound for heaven are perfected in an instant at the point of death, by a "zap" from God, as Walls colorfully puts it (94). Against this, Walls argues that sanctification must be a process rather than a zap, something that takes time to complete, and also requires our free cooperation if it is to succeed at all (112-15). The point is illustrated with the fictional example of Ebenezer Scrooge (134-37), whose transformation in character would have come across as wholly implausible if it had been achieved in an instant and without his knowledge or consent. Accordingly, Walls concludes that purgatory, when understood as a post-mortem process of character transformation undertaken freely, not only makes more sense than the alternatives (e.g., a zap from God), but is also a doctrine that every Christian theology requires.

While the germ of this argument can be found in a book written by the eighteenth century Catholic convert Isaac Papin (see his *Les deux voies opposées en matière de religion*, Liège, 1713, 336), Walls's principal inspiration is not Papin but C. S. Lewis, who is the source for a good many of the ideas in Walls's book. Although I am an agnostic with no dog in this fight, Walls's argument for purgatory strikes me as philosophically defensible, even if there is something of a lacuna on the matters of where and how the purgatorial transformation is supposed to take place. But given that the target audience of the book is surely reflective Christians rather than agnostic philosophers such as myself, a more pertinent question is whether Walls's position is scripturally defensible. Here, I think, there may be a problem. For example, how does Walls's understanding of purgatory square with Luke 23.43, in which

Jesus tells a criminal being crucified that, “today you will be with me in paradise.” This certainly looks to be *prima facie* evidence against the idea of a post-mortem sanctification process, and Walls acknowledges that his opponents often raise it as such (114). Accordingly, the reader might reasonably expect a robust account of how this passage is consistent with the doctrine of purgatory, yet none is offered. Walls simply states that he doesn’t see the passage as a problem for his account, but as his opponents clearly do, I imagine they are unlikely to be assuaged by his assurances that it is not.

This is a pattern repeated over the course of the book: Walls is much more convincing when defending his doctrines philosophically than he is when trying to show their consistency with scripture. To give a further example, Walls suggests that God will not give up on any of his creatures, even after judgment, and will thus extend to those in hell the opportunity to be saved, which they may seize if they so wish (200 ff). The philosophical grounds for allowing such post-mortem conversions are indeed strong, at least if one considers God to be a God of love, as Walls clearly does. Scriptural support for the idea of post-mortem conversions is thin on the ground, however. Even worse, passages such as Matthew 7.21-23, 13.36-43; Luke 13.23-30, 16.19-31; John 5.28-29; Revelation 20.11-15; and Hebrews 9.27-28 seem to rule it out altogether. Unfortunately, Walls mentions only two of these, and his discussion of them is rather more cursory than one might expect in a work of apologetics. The target audience of *Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory* is thus likely to rue that there is not a greater engagement with the biblical data to support the fine philosophical thinking that constitutes the heart of the book.

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