

Subject: For Your Thoughts; Western notion of Purgatory at odds with ours

From: Zacharias P Thundy <zthundy@gmail.com>

Date: November 7, 2024 at 8:52:54 AM EST

To: Joseph Palackal <jpalackal@gmail.com>, Sanjay George <sanjayfgeorge@hotmail.com>, John Mannamkery <johnmannamkery@gmail.com>

Subject: Re: For Your Thoughts; Western notion of Purgatory at odds with ours

Correction: I did indeed refer to "beth purqana" in my book briefly. Here it is:

3. As for the interesting second error attributed to the Nazranis by Diamper that “**That all things come necessarily to pass whether through fate or fortune,**” I shall be very brief in my critique: It is true that Nazranis, like all Indians, continue to place some emphasis in daily life on surrender to the will of God or fate as most Muslims mean when they say “*insha Allah,*” or as Christians say “Thy will be done” while relying on divine Providence, or as laissez-faire capitalists firmly believe infallibly on John Calvin’s “invisible hand” of the market, etc. Diamper goes further and says that it is a “manifest error, and condemned by holy mother Church, forasmuch as it destroys that liberty of will.” Yes, this error was condemned by the Council of Trent against Luther, who denied the presence of free will in humans in order to overemphasize the role of original sin in us humans and to justify his view that we are saved **ONLY** by the Grace of God (*sola gratia*) and not by any free action in our part. I have explained this issue freedom vs. determinism in the theology of Martin Luther at length in my book *Hamlet’s Too, Too Solid Flesh and Dram of Ale: Heart of the Matter*.

4. As for the first error on the Nazrani views on transmigration of souls, it is true that the idea of karma and reincarnation is very deeply embedded in the psyche of almost all Indians of all persuasions; however, bear in mind that the idea of reincarnation is simply another way of expressing the traditional Catholic idea of “purgatory” or the universal idea of retributive justice. The typical Catholic view of “purgatory” as a place of fire where departed souls are tortured is difficult for us all to stomach; so, like the Greeks and Romans in the Western world, Nazranis viewed the so-called purgatory or the place where the souls of the dead go simply as a place or state of salvation (*beth purqana*) and not necessarily as a place of torture, which the medieval Catholic Dante describes poetically in his *Divine Comedy*. I shall not go further on that point either.

5. Now I shall address another thorny issue raised by the Council at some length: It is about the preaching and presentation of Jesus as crucified, depicted on crucifixes in Western Catholic churches even though the cross was prominent as a Nazrani symbol known as *Mar Thoma Sliva* (“St. Thomas Cross”) which is found in several parts of South India



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On Wed, Nov 6, 2024 at 7:59 AM Zacharias P Thundy <zthundy@gmail.com> wrote:

My fallible thoughts:

An Aside Here: Resurrection of Apostles Creed or Resurrection of the Dead as in Nicene Creed?

The Nicene Creed was formally accepted by both the Eastern and Western Church at the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325, which states the formula “We believe ... in the resurrection of the dead (*resurrectionem mortuorum*) ...”, whereas the later (fifth century?) Apostles’ Creed (*symbolum apostolorum*), the enlargement of the Roman Creed, states, “I believe ... in the resurrection of the flesh (*carnis resurrectionem*).^[1] The emphasis in the Apostles’ Creed is on I or ME and on the survival and glorification of the body of the individual for all eternity in heaven. On the other hand, the Nicene council basing its teaching on the Fourth Gospel and Greek thought envisions the survival of our immortal soul as a community with divinity.

According to the Fourth Gospel, Jesus expires or gives up his immortal spirit like Socrates willingly:

Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.”²⁹ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips.³⁰ When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down.³² The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other.³³ But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.³⁴ Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.³⁵ The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe (John 19:28-36).

I have to admit that the Greeks also shared this view of demigods, like Julius Caesar (as in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*)^[2] and Heracles, at their death; that is, their immortal part survived and triumphed after death by ascending to heaven. Later myths say that Hercules married Hebe while in heaven and thus became another married god like Zeus.

The important point that the Fourth Gospel emphasizes is that the immortal “soul” – often symbolized as outgoing breath--will continue to be immortal, and the physical body will be discarded like a used garment that is thrown away as spelled out in the Fourth Gospel (20:7) and in the Gita (**BG 2.22: As a person sheds worn-out garments and wears new ones, likewise, at the time of death, the soul casts off its worn-out body and enters a new one**) and the immortal soul can put on a new body like a garment at will.



Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed (20:1-9).

The Fourth Gospel illustrates well this idea of immortality with the notion of the physical shifting body as it pleased the disembodied spirit of Jesus. Elsewhere in the Gospel, especially in Jesus' last discourse at the last supper, the author expands the idea of a universal identity for the diseased rather than individual existences like what we have on earth, which involves eating, drinking, sex, and even marriage, for us after death. In fact, one of the Synoptics, Greek Matthew, makes Jesus say, "I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I **drink** it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matthew 26:29). Certainly the Fourth Gospel's view of existence after death is different from that of the Synoptics with little emphasis on physical actions like eating and drinking.

Thus we see a major discrepancy between the Synoptics and the Fourth Gospel regarding the nature of life after death. Which question raises the issue as to Aramaic Matthew's possible divergence from the Western Church's spokesman Greek Matthew who emphasizes resurrection of the physical body as in the parable of the Last Judgment. My conclusion is that the Fourth Gospel is genuinely an eyewitness account probably like the original Aramaic Matthew but not like the Greek Matthew.

^[1] Quora.com: "What we now know as the Apostles' Creed is an enlargement of the Old Roman Creed. The first known occurrence of the Apostles' Creed, in a form that is nearly equivalent to its final form, is in the Latin tract *De singulis libris canonicis scarapsus* by the monk Priminius (sometimes spelled "Pirminius") from the early eighth century. The process by which the Old Roman Creed became the Apostles' Creed cannot be exhaustively known, though Kelly notes that creeds that are "practically identical" to the Apostles' Creed began to appear in South Gaul in the fifth century (Kelly, *Creeds*). Over the next few centuries, the Apostles' Creed in its final form gained acceptance throughout France and Germany. It was officially recognized by Charlemagne throughout the Frankish Empire in the early ninth century, and was eventually incorporated into the liturgy of the Church of Rome."

^[2] I have dwelt with the deification of Julius Caesar rather extensively in my book *I, Judas, Also Known as Iuda Scariota in Aramaic*.



on Tue, Nov 5, 2024 at 9:08 PM Zacharias P Thundy <zthundy@gmail.com> wrote:

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The answer, Joe, to your great question is found in the decrees of the Diamper Council, where you will find the Catholic Portuguese accuse the Kerala Nazranis for following Indian beliefs regarding life after death. In my book "Never the Twain Shall Meet" I forgot to mention "Beth Purqana" though.

On Tue, Nov 5, 2024 at 10:36 AM Zacharias P Thundy <zthundy@gmail.com> wrote:

That is the big question or questions, Joe. Maybe the answer is in the ancient Indian traditions.

On Tue, Nov 5, 2024 at 9:15 AM Joseph Palackal <jpalackal@gmail.com> wrote:

On a secret bd thought, did our ancestors have an idea of the si called purgatory? Did the appropriate the concept to house of salvation

Where can we find the earliest mention?

Sent from my iPhone

On Nov 5, 2024, at 4:52 AM, Zacharias P Thundy <zthundy@gmail.com> wrote:

Very good observations. All these notions hell, heaven, sheol, etc., were murky then as now. We are all trying to make some sense of what happens or should happen after death. I like Socrates' (as in *Phaedo*), Jesus' (as per the Fourth Gospel, which is equally murky), and Pascal's wager:

Pascal contends that a rational person should adopt a lifestyle consistent with the existence of [God](#) and actively strive to believe in God. The reasoning behind this stance lies in the potential outcomes: if God does not exist, the individual incurs only finite losses, potentially sacrificing certain pleasures and luxuries. However, if God does indeed exist, they stand to gain immeasurably, as represented for example by an eternity in [Heaven](#) in [Abrahamic tradition](#), while simultaneously avoiding boundless losses associated with an eternity in [Hell](#).

On Mon, Nov 4, 2024 at 11:39 PM Sanjay George <sanjaygeorge@hotmail.com> wrote:

Thanks for sharing I had no idea. I've often wondered what the similarities and differences between Sheol, Gehanna, Narakam, Paathalam, Hell, Perdition, Limbo, and Purgatory are.



Sent from [Outlook for Android](#)

From: Zacharias P Thundy <zthundy@gmail.com>

Sent: Tuesday, November 5, 2024 12:20:04 AM

To: Joseph Palackal <jpalackal@gmail.com>; Sanjay George <sanjayfgeorge@hotmail.com>;
John Mannamkery <johnmannamkery@gmail.com>

Subject: For Your Thoughts; Western notion of Purgatory at odds with ours

My grandmother and older priest used to refer to our modern notion of "purgatory" as "Beth Purqana" ("House of Salvation"). I don't know whether you guys know that. Maybe oldtimers can enlighten us.



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