

Are the dead conscious?: Revisiting the doctrine of purgatory in the light of biblical concept of death

Gambo Dauda Daniel¹

Religious Studies Department,
Babcock University, Nigeria

Kingsley C. Anonaba²

Religious Studies Department,
Babcock University, Nigeria

Abstract

Bible Scholars have advanced diverse theories regarding the state of man in death. While some hold the view that the dead are oblivious of any happening around them another school of thought subscribe to the view of consciousness of the dead but with the restriction of a physical re-existence on the planet earth. Yet, another school of thought holds the view that the soul of the dead exists in a different realm with the hope of being interceded for by their loved ones. Purgatory, a tenet in the contemporary Christianity trails the path of reinforcing the belief in the unconscious state of the dead. It warrants the practice of praying for the dead as they undergo the process of purgation which culminates in their translation to heaven. Consequently, this work explores this plethora of views with the aim of finding their consistency with the Bible. The findings revealed that the doctrine of purgatory does not enjoy support from the Bible rather than tradition and Apocryphal writings. The Scripture describes the state of man in death as unconscious; the dead are oblivious of any performances of benevolence accruable to them. Also, the soul of man is not an independent entity that exists outside of human which assumes continuity of life and enjoys certain privileges after death. The Bible mentions two components (dust and breath) that were employed at creation of man that made human to assume the status of "living soul." The term soul is used in the Bible to denote "persons," "human" etc not a separate entity but a nonmaterial integral part of living human which naturally terminates with death.

Keywords: Dead, Purgatory, Concept of Death, Sheol, Soul

Introduction

Scholars overtime have advanced diverse theories concerning the state of human in death. For instance, while some subscribe to the state of unconsciousness in death theory, the evangelical Christians on the other hand hold the view that the dead transit to heaven to be with the Lord Jesus.³ Yet, another school of thought would describe where the dead go as temporary

¹ +2348061144033 daniel@babcock.edu.ng

² +2348166807748 anonabak@babcock.edu.ng

³ Robert Osei Bonsu, Purgatory: A Study of the Historical Development and its Compatibility with Biblical Teaching on the Afterlife, 286.



heaven.⁴ However, the Seventh-day Adventists wield an antithetical stance concerning the state of the dead vis-a-viz the foregoing theories as they subscribe to "soul asleep" theory otherwise known as the doctrine of "conditional immortality." These terms characterize "the condition of the dead person to be in a sort of suspended state until the final judgement."⁵ Jehovah Witness also trails the path of "soul asleep" theory. Nonetheless, there is a thin line of divide on the explanation of this belief between them. Whereas the Seventh-day Adventists assert that the soul is not conscious in death Jehovah Witness on the other hand holds that the soul ceases to be existent "Soul annihilation."⁶ Inferentially, the soul is said to be completely destroyed without existing in any form. In describing the unconscious state of human in death Seventh-day Adventists aptly captures it thus: "While asleep in the tomb the child of God knows nothing. Time matters not to him. If he should be there a thousand years, the time would be to him as but a moment."⁷ Further, the Seventh-day Adventist Dictionary buttresses this point by highlighting seven basic elements that constitute the unconsciousness of human in death:

- (1) Sleep is a condition of unconsciousness.....
- (2) In sleep conscious thought is dormant...
- (3) Sleep brings an end to all the day's activities...
- (4) Sleep dissociates us from those who are awake, and from their activities...
- (5) Normal sleep renders the emotion inactive...
- (6) In sleep men do not praise God...
- (7) Sleep is transitory and presupposes an awakening...⁸

This concept demonstrates the oblivious state of man in death thereby incapacitating any possibility of communication between the dead and the living. Islam also aligned with the belief in the existence of the dead but in another location other than the earth.⁹ In a sense, death in Islam is actually not regarded as the end of life but rather its continuity in another form and arena altogether.¹⁰ Consequently, this philosophy about death has invariably influenced their internment and shapes the way prayers are offered for the dead. This is evident in their funeral prayer, technically called *Salat al-Janazah* that is aimed at interceding for the forgiveness of the deceased and the dead ones at large who were members of their community.¹¹

Further, the Hindus viewpoint about death differs slightly in the sense that the spirit is said to depart from the dead and wanders away. Congruently, they observe a ceremony called *nshradha* which is believed to give the dead the

⁴Ibid.

⁵R. C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1992), 215.

⁶Mary Fairchild What is the Doctrine of Souls Sleep? <https://www.Learningreligions.com/700360>. Accessed, 10/1/2024.

⁷Seventh-day Adventists Answer and Questions on Doctrine (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1957), 215.

⁸Siegfried H. Horn, ed., *SDA Bible Dictionary*, 2d ed.; (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1979), 278.

⁹Oliver Leaman, ed. "Al-akhira." *The Quran: An Encyclopedia* (Routledge, 2006),

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹John Paul Nzomiwu, *The History and Messages of Islam* (Meks-Unique, 1989),

right of admittance into the assembly of the fore fathers called *pitri*.¹² The *shraddha* ritual is intended to nourish, protect, and support the spirits of the dead in their transition from the lower to the higher realms, prior to their reincarnation or and resurface on planet earth.¹³ Similarly, in African Traditional Religion, life is deemed as not completely terminable. In fact, one of the unique identities of its teachings is the belief that life does not end with the death but rather serves as a springboard that paves way for its navigation to another realm of existence.¹⁴ It is held that the existence in this new location avails the dead with the capability of having a new body that gives the individual the capacity to wander from place to place as an ancestor. Hence, the essence of a proper burial for the dead as the failure to do that has the tendency to cause the dead to hover around the living relations and possibly cause nuisance to their lives.¹⁵ Contrariwise, a reversal of potency for accord of help seems to play out in African Traditional Religion as the living are said to be incapacitated to render any form of assistance to the dead vis-a-viz other beliefs as mentioned afore. In this case the living can only appease to the dead when they did not meet up with their demands and hence provoke them to anger.¹⁶

Correspondingly, the Roman Catholic Church has at the core of its tenets about the state of the dead, the doctrine of Purgatory. This is described as an intermediate state between hell fire and heaven where souls of the dead are believed to undergo a process of cleansing by suffering for a stated period of time after which they will attain a final union with God in heaven.¹⁷ One of the passages often used in favor of the doctrine of purgatory is 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 where the author mentioned how the ungodly works will be destroyed by fire. The purgative fiery process in purgatory is said to be the purification the passage describes. The question that comes to mind is whether there is a text in the Bible that can serve as a springboard passage to substantiate any act of benevolence for the dead. This study therefore, aims at exploring the theory of purgatory and its developmental stages relative to the Bible position on the state of the dead. The study is beneficial for the reason of providing a premise to substantiate the unconsciousness of the dead. Accordingly, the work adopts a Historical-Grammatical method of hermeneutics that pays attention to the contextual usage of the word overtime time and its import for Bible studies.

¹²Stefon Matt, "Shraddha"

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/shraddha#:~:text=shraddha>, Accessed, 10/1/2024

¹³Ibid

¹⁴Aba Cyprian, African Eschatology in the Igala Traditional Religion and Cultural Studies. A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Religion and Culture, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu Nigeria, July 2012. 3.

¹⁵Encyclopedia of Death and Dying. The African Concept of Death.

<http://www.deathreference.com/A-Bi-African-Religions.html>

¹⁶Encyclopedia of Death and Dying. The African Concept of Death.

<http://www.deathreference.com/A-Bi-African-Religions.html>

¹⁷Anthony Kanu, "Purgatory and Praying for the Dead" (Lagos, Nigeria: Hansel Communications L.T.D., 2018), 10.

What is Purgatory?

The old Catholic Encyclopedia (1913) describes purgatory as “a place or condition of temporal punishment for those who, departing this life in God’s grace, are not entirely free from venial faults, or have not fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgression.”¹⁸ Deductively, Purgatory is a place where the dead ones are believed to be kept for a while with the hope of finding repose to their souls before they are finally taken to heaven. Further, it is held that these souls are incapacitated in power to relieve themselves from any challenging situation that could hamper or delay their transition to heaven devoid of external support from their living loved ones or relatives,¹⁹ hence, the need for the living believers to offer help for them through prayers given the fact that they are still considered as members of the community of believers.²⁰ The need for this form of intercessory prayer is well captured in the words of Anthony Kanu thus: “Just as we rely on the prayers of the saints in heaven, the same way they (the dead in purgatory) depend on our prayers.”²¹ He goes further to buttress the reason for this prayer as a channel of light to brighten their pathway through the darkness that encompasses purgatory to eternal place of blissful abode (heaven).²² Given the foregoing, one pertinent probe that comes to mind is about the location of purgatory. In describing the location of purgatory, Kanu asserts that it is situated at the neighborhood of hell where souls are tormented by the demons.²³ Nonetheless, a school of thought holds that Purgatory is depicted as a mountain situated somewhat far side of the world, in southern hemisphere. This place is believed to consist of seven different stages of suffering and spiritual growth usually associated with seven deadly sins (pride, envy, wrath, sloth, avarice, gluttony and lust). However, the question of whether these seven sins have a bearing on the seven days of prayers for the dead as mentioned afore remains oblivious.

The Evolution of Purgatory

This aspect discusses the developmental stages of the formulation of the doctrine of Purgatory sparsely without going into full details so as to cast light on the general overview of its relation to the perception about the state of the dead within the Christian community. Travis maintains that the doctrine of purgatory is not expressly captured or articulated in the pages of the Holy Writ despite the use of some biblical references to justify its support.²⁴ This suggests that its theological weight is hinged on non-biblical sources. The most prominent portion in the Catholic Catechism that provides a cogent ground for the formulation of purgatory states: “All who die in God’s friendship, but still

¹⁸Catholic Encyclopedia 1913

¹⁹ John Negeleison, *Charity for the Suffering Souls: AN Explanation of the Catholic Doctrine of Purgatory* (USA:TAN Publications, 1977), 180.

²⁰John Negeleison, *Charity for the Suffering Souls: AN Explanation of the Catholic Doctrine of Purgatory*.

²¹Anthony Kanu, 3. *Purgatory and Praying for the Dead*

²²Ibid. 27.

²³Ibid. 11.

²⁴Travis Dumsday “Purgatory,” *Philosophy Compass*, vol. 9, no. 10. Concordia University College of Alberta

imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven."

Moreover, The Church (Catholic) gives the name 'Purgatory' to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned," (1995, p. 291, Part 1, section 2, article 12). A deduction from the above statement provides us with a glimpse of the beneficiaries of the purgation in purgatory. It is exclusively experienced by the members of the community of believers who died in their venial sins (those sins that did not completely hamper their communion with God). Further, it benefits those whose good works did not measure up for their qualification for heaven in contrast to the "damned" whose case is beyond redemption. Similarly, there exist some non-Biblical sources; un-canonized materials that provide ground for the intercession for the dead which shows up in the early Christianity as recorded by some Church fathers, namely Tertullian and Chrysostom.²⁵ Travis, buttresses this further: "Also found in the patristic literature is reference to temporary postmortem punishment and/purifications... in such authors as Cyprian of cartage, Clement of Alexadria, Origen, Ambrose, Augustin, Lacantius, Hilry of Poitiers, Jerome, Ambrosiater, Caesarius of Arles, Gregory the Great and Julian of Toledo."²⁶

Some advance the argument that God does not and would not allow any form of repentance after death as that conveys the tendency of denying human life of its moral magnitude and consciousness.²⁷ However, Walls points out the implausibility of this idea on the ground of justice and equity given the lack of ample opportunity for some to make right every wrong through repentance.²⁸ This implies an additional opportunity of salvation for those who did not grab it while alive. This however does not edge out the possibility that some will still persist in opposition to God and his free offer of salvation as the opportunity does not imply universalism of acceptability.²⁹ This idea continued to assume prominence and subsequently transmitted through the dark and middle ages as described by Atto of Verceil, Bede and the rest.³⁰

The reinforcement of purgatory significantly grew between the period of 1150 and 1200 as its development was further enhanced by scholastic such as Albert Magnus, Robert Pullus, Bernard Fontcaude, and Thomas Aquinas.³¹ This was

²⁵Steve Kellmeyer, "Bible Basics: Discovering the Scriptural Basis for 70 Catholic Doctrines" (U.S.A: Basilica Press), 87.

²⁶Travis Dumsday Purgatory, "Philosophy Compass" vol. 9, no. 10. Concordia University College of Alberta; Hick, J. *Death and Eternal Life*. (Fount: London, 1979).414; Rahner, K. *Theological Investigations*. (Darton, Longman & Todd: London, 1983), 192.

²⁷Ombres, R. 'Latins and Greeks in Debate over Purgatory, 1230-1439.' "Journal of Ecclesiastical History" 35. (1984): 1-14; Le Goff, J. *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. A. Goldhammer.(University of Chicago Press: Chicago, Illinois, 1984).

²⁸J. Walls, "Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation." Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2012), 147.

²⁹Travis Dumsday "Purgatory, 192.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Robert OseiBonsu, *Purgatory: A Study of the Historical Development and its*

preceded by its full formation in Church dogma at the second council of Lyon in 1274.³² Worthy of note is the blatant rejection this doctrine received during the reformation era on the ground of its inconsistency with the Bible as regards to salvation which was demonstrated through the sale of indulgences.³³ Prominent among the reformers that rejected it were Luther and Calvin whose reasons were based on the incompatibility of the teaching with the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith alone.³⁴

The debate about the doctrine of purgatory continued to gain a stronger foothold and at the same time received more rejection and opposition by the Anglican Church as well as by Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley. Interestingly, the progression of time witnessed a significant embrace of this by Leibniz, a protestant Lutheran and other protestant theologians who sought to justify its position by giving it a significant drive.³⁵ Travis posits that the formulation of the doctrine is based on the absence of moral corruption in heaven hence, the need for purification as a means for qualification so as to fitly integrate into its aura.³⁶ Another ground for the justification of purgatory is rooted in the theological dimension of the practice of praying for the dead, which provides an avenue to ensure the mitigation of the purgative punitive measures experienced in the intermediate state between hell and heaven (purgatory).³⁷ Further, the theory of the apparitions of the dead was upheld as the appearance of those dead ones who did not find their base in heaven nor hell and in need of prayers of the living so as to experience a pleasant fate in that realm³⁸ hence the need for external agent to intercede for their fate.

Even though the term 'purgatory' is not explicitly articulated in the Bible, however, references to it are said to have been made in the Bible in an attempt to justify its authenticity.³⁹ Conversely, Osei-Bonsu claims that, the doctrine of purgatory has significantly depended on tradition, church councils and Apocryphal documents as its bedrock for existence over the time.⁴⁰ The foregone postulation is buttressed by a notable Catholic theologian, Zachary J. Hayes who observes that, "if we look for clear and unambiguous statements of

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³²Richard K. Fenn "The Persistence of Purgatory." (New York: Cambridge UP, 1995), 58.

³³ Richard K. Fenn

³⁴Joseph Finkenzeller "Purgatory" The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation vol. 3, ed. Hans J. Hillbrand (New York: Oxford UP, 1996), 363-64.

³⁵Le Goff, J. *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. A. Goldhammer. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, Illinois, 1984.; Alfeyev, H. *The Mystery of Faith: An Introduction to the Teaching and Spirituality of the Orthodox Church*, trans. J. Rose. Darton, Longman & Todd: London, 2002. Bakogiannis, V. *After Death*, trans. W. J. Lillie. Tertios Publications: Katerini, 1995.

³⁶Travis Dumsday.

³⁷D. Bathrellos. 'Love, Purification, and Forgiveness Versus Justice, Punishment, and Satisfaction: The Debates on Purgatory and the Forgiveness of Sins at the Council of Ferrara-Florence.' *Journal of Theological Studies* 65. (2014): 78-121; S. Rose, "The Soul After Death," 4th ed. (Saint Herman of Alaska Brotherhood: Platina, California, 2004), 196, 213.

³⁸J. Le Goff, "*The Birth of Purgatory*" trans. A. Goldhammer. (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 243.

³⁹Anthony Kanu, 20.

⁴⁰Robert Osei-Bonsu

the doctrine (of purgatory), we will look in vain.”⁴¹ Thus, this suggests that its authentication by extra biblical sources, namely Apocrypha, tradition, etc., other than the Bible has been the basis for the formulation of the practice. Expediency will suffice to mention that this doctrine hugely draws its support from a non-canonical book of Maccabees which reads thus: For if he [Judas Maccabaeus] were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore, he made atonement for the dead that they might be delivered from their sins. (2 Mac. 12:44-45). Further, prominent among the purported Bible passages used in favor of purgatory is Luke 12:58-59: “As you are going with your adversary to the magistrate, try hard to be reconciled to him on the way, or he may drag you off to the judge, and the judge turns you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison. I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.”

According to a school of thought the description of the term “prison” in the foregone narration is equated to purgatory where the debtor in the account is kept until he has paid the last debt.⁴² Gleaning from this passage, Kanu provides support for making intercession for the souls in purgatory: “This also connects to the possibility of praying for the forgiveness of the sins of a person in purgatory. For as a person is in prison, he or she can ask for the help of relations and friends to help pay off the debt owed.”⁴³ This passage offers a reason for the medieval Christians to substantiate the belief in purgatory on two distinct platforms: that there is possibility to redeem sins after death and that the prayers of the living are a vehicle to facilitate this process.”⁴⁴

The successful completion of the term in purgatory is believed to be followed by a moment of transition to heaven. The nature and process of this transition to heaven after the observance of the period of punishment is aptly captured in the words of Schwarz on the assumption that there is a “twofold possibility to change one’s status from purgatory to heaven, either by staying in purgatory for the allotted time to make up for one’s wrongs or omission in this life or by having the time reduced through outside intercession.”⁴⁵ The reference to outside intercession in this statement is suggestive of the intercessory role of the living loved ones through prayers and other forms of benevolent acts to assist the persons in purgatory. The question of whether the use of the phrases “transition to glory” and “a call to glory” draw their underpinning from this philosophy about the dead in the contemporary Christianity remains debatable.

Further, it is held that despite the fact that one’s merit cannot be reversed after death; hence the need for the assistance of the loved ones for those in purgatory has become expedient so they can progress to heaven through mass, prayers

⁴¹Zachary J. Hayes “*The Purgatorial View: Four Views on Hell*” ed. William Crockett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 67.

⁴²Anthony Kanu, *Purgatory and Praying for the Dead*, 21.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Jacques Le Goff, “*The Birth of Purgatory*” Trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: U of Chicago P., 1981), 42.

⁴⁵Hans Schwarz, “*Beyond the Gates of Death: A Biblical Examination of Evidence for Life after Death* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981),

and righteous works.⁴⁶In parallel, Hares posits that, “Catholics teach that the temporal punishment of another life, which are to be undergone in purgatory, may be bought off by fasting, prayers, almsgiving, and the other pious and laborious works of this life.”⁴⁷ With regards to the effort of the Church to provide succor for those souls in purgatory Loraine B. asserts that, “if anyone of us actually had the power to release souls from purgatory and refused to exercise that power except in return for payment of money, he would be considered cruel and unchristian- which indeed would be.”⁴⁸ Fittingly connected to this is the idea that for Catholics, offering prayers for the souls in purgatory is an obligation that is intertwined with the praying for the acceleration of the awaited kingdom of God.⁴⁹ Given the foregone, the liberation of the souls in purgatory is exclusively hinged on the efforts of the living loved ones who have to engage in various aspects of works to ensure their transition to heaven.

It is noteworthy that in the description of purgatory some scholars stress that it is not a location where repentance or trials or purgation are experienced but rather a place of punishment “where fire usually thought of as a material agent-serves, ideally, that is, by representation of great pain to have purifying impact on ‘poor souls.’”⁵⁰ The belief that the nature of the experience in purgatory is a horrible one is aptly described by some scholars thus: “that trial will be terrible, that torment will be more intolerable than all the most excruciating suffering in this world.”⁵¹ Others describe its location to be in close proximity to hell or its upper part.⁵² This seems to suggest the nature of the suffering in purgatory to be a very atrocious one.

The doctrine of purgatory⁵³was first conceived and advanced by Tertullian (a Church father) who wrote on the need to pray for the departed as a custom in

⁴⁶Jerald C. Bauer, “Purgatory” (The Westminster Dictionary of Church History (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 680-86; Millard J. Erickson “Christian Theology” (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 1180.

⁴⁷Walter P. Hares, “The Doctrine of Purgatory as Taught in the Church of Rome” (Lohore, India: Nothern India Printing and Publishing n. d), 13, 14; Richard K. Fenn, “The Persistence of Purgatory” (New York: Cambridge UP, 1995), 265-66.

⁴⁸Loraine Boettner “Immortality” (New Jersey, USA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1956), 49.

⁴⁹Robert Ombres, Theology Today, No. 24: The Theology of Purgatory. Ed. Edward Yarnorl (Butler Winsconsin: Clergy, 1978), 59; Richard K. Fenn “The Persistence of Purgatory” (New York: Cambridge, 1995), 271.

⁵⁰FransJosefvanBeeck, God Encountered: A Contemporary Catholic Systematic Theology. Vol. 2-3 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1995), 154; Herma Bavinck, The Last Things: Hope for this World and the Next Ed. John Bolt. Trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids:Baker, 1996), 42.

⁵¹James Ryan, “Purgatory” (New Catholic Encyclopedia vol. 11. Ed. John P. Whalens (Washington, DC: The Catholic U of America P. 1967)1034-39; Walter Hares “The Doctrine of Purgatory as Taught in the Church of Rome” (Lahore, India:Northern India Printing and Publishing, n. d), 2.

⁵²Norman Gulley “Christ is Coming” (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 1998), 270; Jacques Le Goff “The Birth of Purgatory” Trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: U of Chicago P., 1981), 257; Louis Berkhof “Systematic Theology” (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 686.

⁵³Purgatory (from latin *purgare*, “to cleanse”) is the place where the dead go to have the remaining of their sins expiated before entering the visible presence of God; the damned go directly to hell. This doctrine is influenced by the belief in ‘intermediate state’ which

the Church.⁵⁴ He however wrote a defense of bodily resurrection against Marcion (a heretic group) that practiced baptism for the dead.⁵⁵ This stance seems to pose some challenges to the scriptures as regards to the state of the dead. The teaching on purgatory by the church seems to place more emphasis on justification by works on the part of man instead of the works of salvation wrought by Christ. John Blanchard collaborates in this direction: "The doctrine of purgatory clashes with scripture at one point or the other...first, it distinguishes between sins which are mortal and those which are venial; secondly, it says that there is hope of recovery and restoration after death. Third, it insists that man's good works have saving merit, whereas the Bible declares that "All our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6) and that salvation is by grace. Fourth, it implies that the holds the keys to the place of punishment in the afterlife, whereas the Bible says that Christ alone holds "the keys of death and Hades" (Rev 1:18). Fifth, it also implies that we need to make sacrifices for sins when the Bible teaches that when Christ died on the cross, he "offered for all time one sacrifice for sins." (Heb 10:12).⁵⁶

The statement above provides an insight and clarity on the inconsistency of the teaching of purgatory with the Bible; hence, it is a serious challenge to its foundation where the doctrine of purgatory is said to have drawn its support. The idea of purgatory is said to be premised on the notion of 'second chance' theory where God offers another opportunity for the dead to right their wrongs preparatory to their transition to heaven.

The Purgation Timeline

The length of the time accruable for those in purgatory and the intensity of the punishment are not uniform but are determined by the gravity of sin of an individual; it could be four days, seven months, five years as the case may be.⁵⁷ However, it is noteworthy that the length of the time spent in purgatory does not determine the intensity of the purgative process as there are occasions in which a soul who spends a lesser period of time can face a more severe punishment than the one that stays longer.⁵⁸ For instance, in recounting the experience of a certain Constantine who it was purported to have appeared after his death. John Nageleison further provides us with an insight that buttresses this argument: "I suffered three days, and it seemed to me to have been three thousand years."⁵⁹ Consequently, the indiscriminate treatment of the individuals in this case is traceable to the measure of efforts of their relatives or loved ones who intercede for them in the world. This effort is said to have the

stresses that there is a place for infants who died without baptism (*limbo* of infants), a place for the Old Testament (OT) saints to whom Christ descended and led to heaven (*limbo* of the fathers), a place for the saints (heaven) and a place for the average Christian (purgatory).

⁵⁴Robert OseiBonsu.

⁵⁵Gene G. Brooks.

⁵⁶John Blanchard "What Happened to Hell?" (Durham: Evangelical, 1993), 84-85.

⁵⁷Anthony Kanu.

⁵⁸John Nageleison, "Charity for the Suffering Souls: An Explanation of the Catholic Doctrine of Purgatory" (USA: TAN Publications, 1977).;Anthony Kanu, 25.

⁵⁹John Nageleison, "Charity for the Suffering Souls: An Explanation of the Catholic Doctrine of Purgatory" (USA: TAN Publications, 1977).

capacity to shorten and or mitigate the length and severity of the purification process, respectively.⁶⁰

The three basic aspects of the help that could be rendered for the souls in purgatory by the community of believers are articulated by Kanu thus: The first is through the sacrifice of mass; the second involves the offering of prayers by the saints e.g, the recitation of the rosary and the station of the cross; and lastly, such souls in purgatory can also be helped through expiatory works that involves almsgiving, fasting and pilgrimages.⁶¹

The Biblical Concept of Death

The root word of “death” (Heb. *mawet*), meaning “to die” in the Old Testament account is said to have stemmed up from its Semitic usage.⁶² It has about 900 occurrences in the Old Testament and it stresses death in all instances, the point that marks the end of life.⁶³ The creation account of man provides us with an insight on the constituents (breath and dust) that form human life; the diffusion of God’s breath into the nostrils of the body of man, formed out of the dust resulted to shaping him into a living creature. Here, inference offers that, man before now was not a living being until the breath was given him (Gen. 2:7). The simple equation (dust + breath of life = living being) describes succinctly the components of life in man. Suffice it to mention from the foregone that the absence of any of the aforementioned elements (dust and breath) consequents the absence of life in man thus, death is the resultant experience. (Ecc 3:19, 20).

The question of where the dead go at death has generated a significant attention in the study of the destination of man at death. Consequently, the Old Testament employs the Hebrew term “*Sheol*” to designate a place where the dead go;⁶⁴ the abode of the dead (Ps 88:3, 5). The Old Testament says that both man and animal go to a common place at death (Ps 49:12, 14 & 20). Galeniecks observes that, “No physical, mental or spiritual activity is possible there because it is never linked with life or any kind of existence but exclusively with death.”⁶⁵ A close scrutiny of the term *sheol* delineates the two opposing views of anthropological and theological paradigms: the former view holds the incorporeal personal existence in *sheol* where the soul is said to be existing independently of the body while the later places emphasis on the return of the body back to dust as the spirit (breath) of life returns to God who gave it to man at creation (Gen 2:7).⁶⁶

⁶⁰Anthony Kanu, 26.

⁶¹Ibid., 28.

⁶²Osei-Bonsu Robert, 294.

⁶³EriksGaleniecks “*The Nature, Function and Purpose of the Term Sheol in the Torah, Prophets, and Writings*” A Dissertation Presented to the Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary for the Award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (April 2005).

⁶⁴Robert OseiBonsu.

⁶⁵EriksGaleniecks.

⁶⁶Walter A. Elwell, *Sheol Baker’s Evangelical Theology* (Baker Books: Grand Rapids, U.S.A, 1997): 210.

Similarly, Galeniecks argues that the Old Testament text does not offer any support in favor of the idea that the word *sheol* is associated with one's after-death experience.⁶⁷ The incorporeal (disembodied) personal existence view assumes a weakness given its weighty emphasis on the immortal nature of the soul⁶⁸ which invalidates the certainty of the "resurrection to immortality and everlasting life in the new heavens and earth" since this state is assumed already.⁶⁹

The Nature of Sheol

The concept of grave (Heb *Sheol*) and its immortal state has received diverse of interpretative approaches in the Biblical scholarship. Some scholars have stated that the term is traceable to Babylonian origin; hence, it was a borrowed term by the Israelites.⁷⁰ However, Lods on the other hand negates this idea of borrowing and eventually attempts to provide an explanation of the term relative to the imaginative laws that govern the general understanding of human.⁷¹ The Babylonian rendition for the Hebrew word *Sheol* is *Arallu*, which by interpretation means a place covered by darkness, or by dust or corruption.⁷²

The Hebrews had from inception a common belief concerning the dead and *Sheol*: "At death one was completely removed from Yahweh's jurisdiction and was thrown upon the mercies of the host of the underworld deities. The dead could hope for no succor from Yahweh, for He was powerless to give aid in the nether world."⁷³ The power of Yahweh was said to have been in a state of incapacitation to offer aid to the dead in *Sheol* hence the reason for external support to provide aid for those in it. However, it is also held that the progression of time, specifically the era of the prophets tempered with the narrative as there was a gradual shift from the main line of belief in the power of Yahweh to intervene in the cases of those in *Sheol*.⁷⁴ This position enjoyed a significant embrace and emphasis in intertestamental works and stretches to Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism.⁷⁵ Worthy of note is the fact that the Hebrews at a point in time never subscribed to the idea of unconsciousness of the dead in *Sheol* as death was not considered to be a total obliteration of the

⁶⁷ Erick Galeniecks,

⁶⁸ Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Pterson, eds., "*Hell under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment*" (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 34.

⁶⁹ Ellis, Christian and the Future, 196 (Galeniecks work); Edward William Fudge "The Final End of the Wicked" JETS 27, no. 3 (1984); 325-334.

⁷⁰ Walter A. Elwell in Baker's Evangelical Theology "*Sheol*" (Baker Books: Grand Rapids, U.S.A, 1997): 210

⁷¹ A. Lods, *La Croyance a le vie future et le Culte des morts deus L'antiquite Israelite*, 2 vols., (Paris: Fischbascher, 1906),

⁷² Andrew F. Key, *The Concept of Death in Early Israelite Religion*.

"Journal of Bible and Religion, vol. 32, no. 3 (Jul., 1964), 239-247.

⁷³ R. Martin-Achard, *From Death to Life*, tr. by J. P. Smith, (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1960), 87.

⁷⁴ R. H. Charles, "*A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life*" (London: A & C Black, 1913), 123.

⁷⁵ Andrew F. Key, *The Concept of Death in Early Israelite Religion*.

"Journal of Bible and Religion, vol. 32, no. 3 (Jul., 1964), 239-247.

dead but a change of status (a change of a place of existence i.e from this world to *Sheol*) where existence is said to assume a new phase of continuity.⁷⁶

Conclusion

The state of human in death is one of the subjects that have enjoyed diverse theories. There is no Biblical justification for any benevolent acts for the dead. The Scripture describes the state of man in death as unconscious; the dead are oblivious of any performances of services accruable to them. Accordingly, the doctrine of purgatory derives its support heavily from outside the Bible. Hence, it leans on the three major sources: 2 Maccabees, tradition and other non-canonical sources rather than the Bible. The soul of man is not an independent entity that exists outside of human which assumes continuity of life and enjoys certain privileges after death. The Bible describes the creation of man as formed of two components: clay and Spirit after which he became a living soul. Accordingly, at death the spirit returns to God while the body returns to earth. The silence of the Bible on where the soul goes at death is suggestive of the fact that it does not exist as a separate entity but a nonmaterial integral part of living human which naturally terminates when death sets in. The term soul is often used in the scriptures to denote living person. Congruently, 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 does not substantiate the doctrine of purgatory. Any attempt to justify such on its basis is aberrant to its contextual meaning.

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⁷⁶Laird R. Harris The Meaning of the Word *Sheol* as Shown by Parallels in Poetic Texts "Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society" 4, no. 4 (1961): 129-135 ;ErickGaleniecks "The Nature, Function and Purpose of the Term *Sheol* in the Torah, Prophets, and Writings."

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