

In Between

Church Tradition has always had room for more than heaven or hell. Though no explicit warrant can be found in Scripture for it, Tradition remembers the prayers of the Maccabees for the dead: that those who die with the project of transformation incomplete, will not lose out. It is unacceptable that God should be less compassionate than human beings and abandon such people.

Many today wonder what to make of all this. Like the apocalyptic teaching, it is only helpful when we remember that we do not know literally the how of everything. But comparisons do help. In everyday experience when we know we have been forgiven after betraying love, when we recognise all too well the pain and hurt we have inflicted on another, and find ourselves forgiven, we need time and space to come to terms with such graciousness.

We need to go away and live with this new experience, and to recover our self-respect. Is this what Purgatory means? God gently allowing us this space, this room to accept being forgiven, with no strings attached - room to cry a little, before we can smile?

What about the Judgement? Jesus reminded us that the world is already judged; and found worthy of the Incarnation. The General Judgement, celebrated graphically in Tradition, is that everything stands or falls within the context of Jesus Christ.

The Particular Judgement is, in effect, a self-judgement, seeing oneself in the context of who Jesus Christ claims to be for me. Language about life after death has to be figurative, though the truth of it is very real. This requires that faith, hope and charity must be allowed to replace my own way of coping with God. The completion of conversion will be not accepting the simple statement that I believe in God, but that God believes in me.