



si si no no

"But let your speech be, 'Yes, yes,' 'No, no,' and whatever is beyond these comes from the evil one. (Mt. 5:37)"

May 1998 No. 26

Is Hell Empty?

A LETTER FROM ONE OF OUR READERS

Reverend Father:

I would be much obliged if you could enlighten me about the following question: The affirmation according to which God, by eternal decree, has predestined certain specific persons, in anticipation of their grave sins, to eternal reprobation; that is to say, the affirmation according to which a certain number of human beings are actually languishing and will continue to languish forever in hell; is this, yes or no, *a de fide* truth? If so, it is a matter of what kind of truth (divine, divino-Catholic, ecclesiastical, etc.)? Are there any passages in Holy Scripture or in official documents of the magisterium which touch on and unequivocally (*i.e.*, doubtlessly or unquestioningly as to meaning or intention) define this matter? And if so, what are they?

Signed,

OUR ANSWER

It is, indeed, *a de fide* truth that God, by eternal decree, has predestined certain persons, in anticipation of their grave (*i.e.*, mortal) sins to eternal reprobation, and this is, precisely, a (yet) undefined truth of divine and Catholic Faith.

Let us explain these terms:

- (1) A truth of divine Faith, because it is contained in the word of God (*i.e.*, divine Revelation), both written and orally transmitted to us.
- (2) A truth of the Catholic Faith, because the Church, in its ordinary and universal magisterium, has always proposed it to the faithful.
- (3) Undefined, because it has not yet ever been solemnly defined either by a pope or by an ecumenical council (which does not prevent it from belonging to the "deposit of Faith").

Let us now briefly examine Holy Scripture, Tradition, and the magisterium of the Church.

All of Holy Scripture unequivocally affirms that not all men are saved, but that some of them are lost by their own fault and will suffer eternal punishment. It is quite sufficient here simply to recall the Last Judgment mentioned in Mt. 25:31ff., and especially from v. 41 :

And when the Son of man shall come in His majesty...and all nations shall be gathered together before Him, and He shall separate them one from another...and He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on His left. Then shall the king say to them that shall be on His right hand: Come ye blessed of my Father...Then He shall say to them also that shall be on His left hand: Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels...and these shall go into everlasting punishment: but the just, into life everlasting.

And, in the same vein, in Jn. 5:28-29:

For the hour cometh, wherein all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that have done good things, shall come forth unto the resurrection of life; but they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment (*i.e.*, condemnation).

And in the Old Testament, we need only to refer to Daniel (12:2):

...and those that sleep in the dust of the earth, shall awake; some unto life everlasting, and others unto reproach, to see it always.

And thus it is throughout the Sacred Scriptures, both in the New as well as the Old Testament.

Against the Pelagians and semi-Pelagians, who (as some of today's modernists) reduced God to the level of a simple spectator of man's salvation or perdition, St. Augustine and his disciples have already defended predestination as a traditional teaching of the Catholic Faith:

The Church has always had faith in this truth of predestination, a faith which nowadays she defends with a renewed solicitude against the new heretics (St. Augustine, *De dono perseverantiae*, 23, 65).

The Church, as the divinely authorized interpreter of Tradition and Holy Scripture: (1) has always and everywhere taught that not all men will be saved; (2) has always defended and reaffirmed this truth against new and renewed heresies in various particular councils (Carthage, Milene, Orange, Arles, Quierzy, Valence, etc.); (3) presupposes, and therefore implicitly speaks of predestination (of which reprobation is a part) in the Ecumenical Council of Trent, where we read:

Neither anyone, as long as he is living in [our present] mortal condition, is to so overrate the secret mystery of divine predestination so as to declare himself absolutely certain of being counted amongst the definitive and final number of the predestined [for heaven]...In fact, there is no way of knowing those whom God has chosen except through a special divine revelation (*Dz.* 805). If anyone affirms that a man born again [*i.e.*, validly baptized] and justified is obliged by faith to believe that he is certainly to be included in the number of predestined, let him be anathema (*Dz.* 825).

Therefore, without going into all the details of this great mystery, it is a divine as well as a Catholic certainty that, although God indeed wishes all souls to be saved, in actual fact, not all men are saved. And this is the reason why it is impossible to truthfully say "hell exists, but it is empty," nor is it even reasonably possible to even "wish" that it were empty. Modernists, as we have already had occasion to point out, have their way so easily from the fact that the dogma of predestination is so rarely preached upon in all of its aspects, and is therefore presently so little known by the faithful. This does not, however, annul the fact that...:

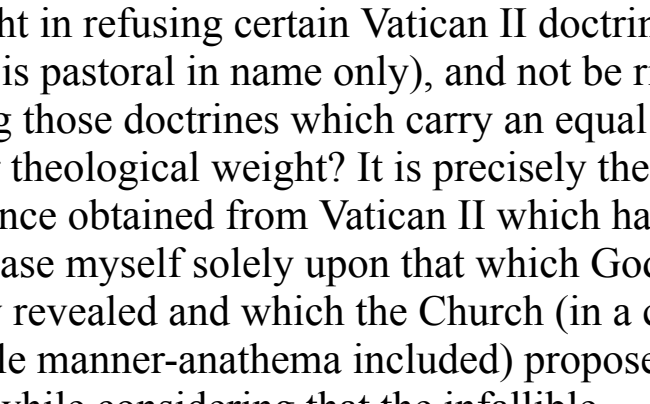
...the Church, although opposed to the exaggerations of the "Predestinators" [who favor a predestination not only for the punishment but also for the sin] has, however, always professed "the predestination of the elect to eternal life" (*Dz.* 322 and Quierzy, ch.1, *Ez.* 316).

The Church has declared that God, through His divine grace, has predestined to eternal life those He has first known and for whom, first and foremost, He has prepared that eternal life. As for the others, those who *are lost through their own fault*, God has certainly known them beforehand [otherwise, He would be neither eternal nor all-knowing], but He has not predestined them to perdition, but only to eternal punishment, and therefore.....

...as regards sin, reprobation is only a foreknowledge while punishment is in the nature of a divine predetermination [God, being eternal as well as omniscient, has, from all eternity, pronounced His verdict: "Depart from me, you cursed" (Bartmann, *Manuale de Teologia dogmatica*, vol. 2, p.273, and pp.276ff.)].

The *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, in turn, gives the following resume of the constant teaching of the Church regarding eternal reprobation (*i.e.*, damnation):

Against predestinationism as well as against the Protestant and Jansenist doctrines which renew it, the Church [in the above-mentioned councils] teaches: *a*) that God does, in truth, and in a certain way, wish to save all men while making the accomplishment of His precepts possible to everyone; *b*) that there is no predestination to evil, but God from all eternity has decreed the eternal punishment of damnation for those future sins of final impenitence, sins of which He is in no way the cause but which He only permits.



The Church has always had faith in this truth of predestination, a faith, which nowadays she defends with a renewed solicitude against the new heretics. (St. Augustine, *De dono perseverantiae*, 23, 65)

Evidently, the doctrine of the Church against opposing heresies is summed up in the profound words of St. Prosper, words taken up exactly by the Council of Quierzy:

Quod quidam salvantur salvantis est donum [against Pelagianism and the semi-Pelagians] ; *quod quidam perirent perentium est meritum* [against predestinationism] - That some men are saved is the gift of the One who saves; that some are lost is the just salary of those who lose themselves.

This is exactly what is expressed in Holy Scriptures:

Perditio tua ex te, Israel tantum modo in me auxilium tuum -Destruction is thy own, O Israel: thy help is only in me" (Osee 13:9) (Cited in *the Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, word *predestination*, col. 2994).

Conclusion: To pretend that "hell is empty" or that we may hope that it be so, is to fly in the face of divine Revelation and to declare, also, the entire Church to be in error for two thousand years.

ANOTHER LETTER ON THE SUBJECT

Dear Father:

The question raised by *SI SI NO NO* regarding the lost souls in hell has left me quite perplexed. Since the liturgy has much to do with theology, I have always stuck to that which St. Augustine wrote on the Psalms in the fifth lesson of the second nocturne of Matins of Holy Thursday, an opinion which does not seem to me to differ very much from that of Card. Biffi in this matter, and well-founded in view of St. Augustine's authority, and the venerable antiquity of the liturgy in question. Obviously, this "opinion" is just as valid as its opposite, for it is quite disconcerting to see compared to dogmas (which were clearly and solemnly defined by ecumenical councils or by popes) those theological conclusions (even respectable) or the so-called common sentences (even those approved by the popes). How then could I be right in refusing certain Vatican II doctrines (which is pastoral in name only), and not be right in refusing those doctrines which carry an equal or inferior theological weight? It is precisely the experience obtained from Vatican II which has taught me to base myself solely upon that which God has directly revealed and which the Church (in a clearly infallible manner-anathema included) proposes to our belief, while considering that the infallible declaration can possibly be poorly worded or expressed without losing its validity. Among other things (and always on the subject of hell) I think that if God has seen fit not to reveal to us certain details. It is for our own good and it is therefore improper to rack one's brains on a matter which He has not given us to know. Moreover, and unless I am mistaken, the proposition formulated by the theologians "parallel magisterium is ammunition in the hands of the neo-modernists.

Signed,

P.S. In the expression "theologians" used above, it is evident that I do not include the Fathers of the Church, whose unanimity is approximately equivalent to Holy Scripture. But the era or age of the Fathers, unless I am wrong, ended in the seventh century.

OUR ANSWER

The fact that hell is not empty is not simply an "opinion," but *a de fide* truth. For example, Ludwig Ott, in his *Précis de théologie dogmatique* (ed. Marietti Herder, p.402) writes:

God, by his eternal decree, has predestined certain persons, in anticipation of their [unrepented mortal] sins, to eternal reprobation [or punishment].

This is followed by the theological qualification "*de fide*."

De fide means that it is a truth immediately revealed by God Himself and not, as you have wrongly supposed, a "theological conclusion" or "a theologian's common sentence" (which do, however, have their value, especially those "theological conclusions" which, if defined by the Church, do have the same degree of infallible certitude as have the veritable dogmas). Therefore, that passage of St. Augustine's to which you have referred can in no way be interpreted in opposition with dogma; and any opinion or other contradicting dogma should be rejected out of hand because contrary to the true Faith.

The patrimony of the Catholic Faith is not limited, as we shall see, to those "dogmas which were clearly and solemnly defined by ecumenical councils or by popes" and - which will certainly surprise you - dogmas are not limited even to defined dogmas.

The dogmatic Vatican Council I (1869-1870) has infallibly declared:

According to the divinely revealed Catholic Faith, we are solemnly duty-bound to believe everything contained in God's word, be it written [Holy Scripture] or transmitted by word of mouth [Tradition], and which the Church has proposed as divinely revealed for our belief, either by a solemn judgment or by its ordinary and universal magisterium (*Dz.* 1972).

MAGISTERIUM: The Church's divinely appointed authority to infallibly teach the truths of religion (*DZ.* 1972).

Dogmas are precisely those truths proposed by the Church for our belief as an article of "divine and Catholic Faith." In order to have a dogma, there must, therefore, be two essential elements:

- (1) that this truth be contained either explicitly or implicitly in the sources of revelation (Holy Scripture and/or Tradition);
- (2) that this truth be proposed by the Church for our belief (cf. L. Ott, *op. cit.* pp.13, 22). Contrary to your expressed opinion, it is not necessary that dogmas be "already and solemnly defined by ecumenical councils or by popes," given that the proposition of the Church, as resulting from the above-quoted text, can occur in two different ways: either through the extraordinary channel of solemn papal definitions or solely through the ordinary and universal magisterium of the Church. The dogma of eternal reprobation is found in the second category and is, nevertheless, a true dogma indeed.

Ludwig Ott, as a matter of fact, after having declared the doctrine of reprobation to be "*de fide*" (*e.g.*, Catholic dogma), adds:

The reality of reprobation has not been formally defined, but does constitute a common teaching [*semper et ubique*] of the Church.

Bartmann in turn writes:

Eternal reprobation has certainly not been formally defined, but it is, in truth, part of the general doctrine of the Church and can be proved through Holy Scriptures...

.....and continues:

Sacred Scriptures refer to the condemnation of the unrepentant sinners from the very beginning (*Manuale de Teologia dogmatica*, ed. Paoline, vol. II, p.277).

Also, the *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, basing itself upon the Holy Bible as well as upon the constant magisterium of the Church, concludes: "The fact that some souls are [eternally] condemned is therefore absolutely certain and constitutes a certitude of the Faith (vol. XII, col. 3007. Refer also to the *Encyclopédie catholique*, word *prédestination*).

(3) We are tempted in refutation of Vatican II, or, better, certain texts of Vatican II, not because they carry a "theological weight" inferior to infallible declarations, but simply because they are interpreted in contradiction with that which the Church has "*semper et ubique*" (*always and everywhere*) proposed to our belief or by the extraordinary magisterium (solemn definitions), or again with the ordinary and universal magisterium, which is that "common teaching" referred to by Ludwig Ott, or that "general doctrine of the Church" mentioned by Bartmann.

To make of this a question of a more or less great "theological truth" is an extremely grave error. In fact, the "deposit of Faith," that is to say, the tradition entrusted by Jesus Christ to His Church, cannot simply be reduced solely to defined truths of the Faith which would be very few and which exclude numerous...dogmas, but is, in reality, much more wide-ranging, embracing everything, that God has revealed and which the Church has constantly believed and revealed (implicitly or explicitly). Our act of Faith, in reality, is not limited to defined truths of the Faith, but is open to a general and universal act of Faith:

My God, I firmly believe everything which Thou hast revealed and which Thou teachest us through Thy Church [the Holy Church - obviously, but nowadays it is important to make this point unmistakably clear - is not to be identified with the presently reigning Pope who is not speaking *ex cathedra* and who is not proposing the constant doctrine of the Church, but only his own "opinions" which are at variance with that doctrine].

In a Brief dated December 21,1863, the Bishop of Munich, Pope Pius IX summed up the situation in these words, where he declared:

Even if it were a question of that obedience which we owe (concretely) to divine Faith, that obedience should not be limited to those truths expressly defined by decrees of ecumenical councils or of Roman Pontiffs or of this Apostolic See [*i.e.*, defined dogmas], but should also extend to truths which, springing from the ordinary magisterium of the Church, have been propagated throughout the world and have been transmitted as being divinely revealed; and therefore, by a common and universal accord of Catholic theologians [note: Catholic and *not* modernist] these truths are to be considered as being a matter of Faith [undefined dogmas].

This clarifying statement coming from Pius IX was later solemnly ratified by Vatican I (1870) in a dogmatic declaration reported above in no.2. It follows from this that a Catholic must not limit his Faith solely to defined dogmas, but, over and above those dogmas expressly professed in the *Credo*, he must embrace, in a general and universal act of faith, the "deposit of Faith" in its entirety. Vatican II or, more precisely, the errors coming from Vatican II, cannot be included in the "deposit of Faith," because God does not contradict Himself, and it is an absolute rule that Catholics must believe only that which does not stand in contradiction with the doctrine always and everywhere taught and believed by the Church [Cf. Origen, PG., vol. XI, col. 116, and St. Vincent of Lerins, *Commonitorium* (See sidebar on facing page)].

(4) With regards to the question of hell, God has never revealed the number nor the names of the damned, (except for Lucifer, the multitudes of fallen angels or demons, as well as for Judas, for whom - Jesus tells us - "it would have been better for him never to have been born," which can only be said of an eternally lost soul), because it would certainly be proved to be "improper to rack one's brains" on the subject of the existence of hell as well as on the fact whether it be full or empty, since God has clearly revealed to us that it does indeed exist and that it will be eternally inhabited not only by demons, but also by men damned through their own fault:

Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels (Mt. 25:41).

(5) The so-called "parallel magisterium" of the modernist pseudo-theologians has absolutely nothing to do with Catholic theology, which respects the rules of Faith and which does not fly in the face of the true magisterium, but is led or guided "under the vigilance of the holy magisterium," by authorities of great minds and holiness, and to whom "the magisterium of the Church has given, with its special authority, a so noteworthy approbation." This is so true that to scorn it [*i.e.*, Catholic theology] is tantamount to despising the magisterium of the Church itself (Pope Pius XII, *Humani Genensis* - available from Angelus Press: Price \$1.95).

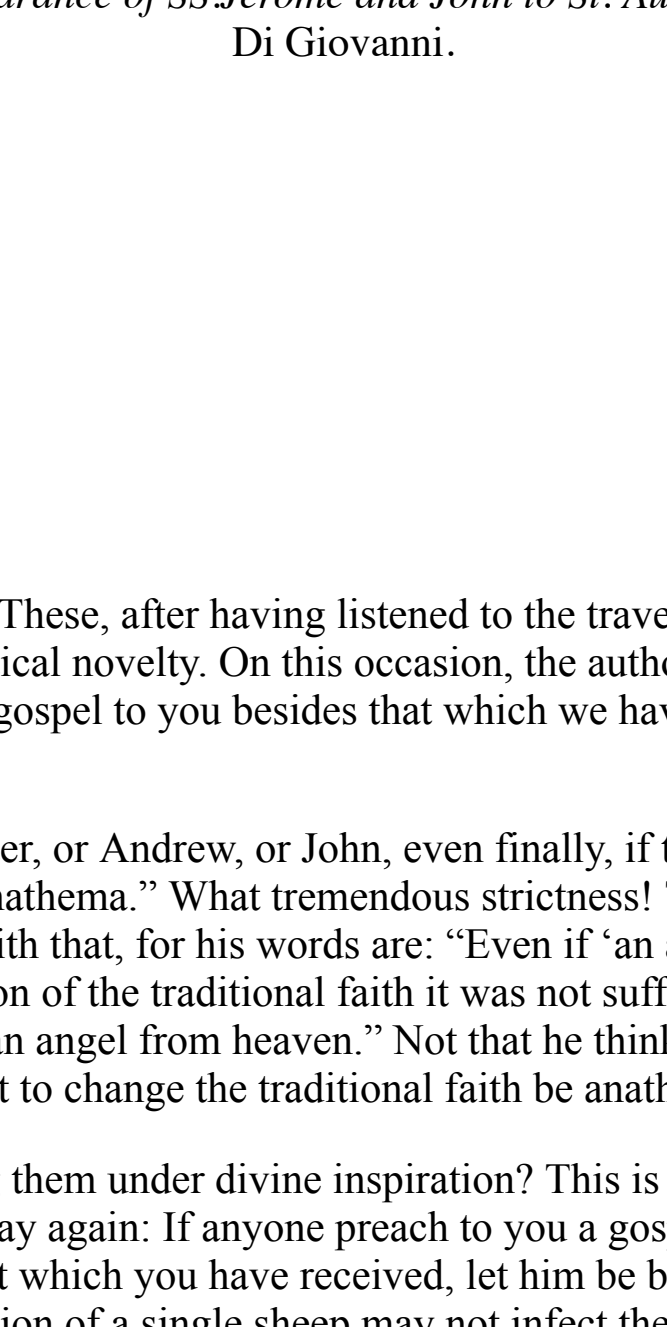
The unanimity of the Fathers of the Church testifies in favor of Tradition, which, together, with the Sacred Scriptures, forms one of the foundations of divine Revelation. But, following the Fathers of the Church, there came the Doctors (*i.e.*, teachers) of the Church who have, in common with the Fathers, an outstanding holiness together with an eminent doctrine as well as the (implicit or explicit) approval of the magisterium. Such is the great theology, that theology "canonized" by the Church, and upon whose mark authentic Catholic theology has always aligned itself (*e.g.*, St. Thomas Aquinas first of all) and according to the will of the Roman pontiffs themselves. This same authentic Catholic theology is presently being tragically and openly contradicted and opposed by the proponents of the "new theology" precisely because of its unswerving attachment to Tradition and the magisterium of the Church, which the neo-modernists, on the contrary, hold in the utmost contempt (cf. Pope Pius XII, *Humani Genensis*).

Dear friend, you are now in a position to fully evaluate the importance and gravity of the present crisis in the Church. In bygone times (before Vatican II), the faithful could sleep peacefully in the loving arms of their Holy Mother the Church; nowadays, the specter of neo-modernism presents Catholics with a false and horrible caricature of the Church while trying to treacherously convince them that such is their true Mother. Nowadays, Catholics are obliged to face up to problems and questions that they could formerly (*i.e.*, before Vatican II) ignore without blame. What, then, is the remedy for this tragic situation? It is quite a simple one, and within easy reach for those of good will: Let us stick to and be well content with that Faith professed by the Church before the Councils (*i.e.*, Vatican I, 1962-1965) in less suspect times (such is the rule propounded by St. Vincent of Lerins) while utterly and prudently rejecting all of the post-Conciliar novelties as we implore our Lord Jesus Christ to hasten the hour of His mercy, seeing that the "little ones [such as all of us are] beg for the bread of Truth, and there is no one to give it to them in these tragic times."

(Taken from *Courrier de Rome*, March 1997.)

Matins for Holy Thursday (Second Nocturn, Fifth Lesson)

Would to God, then, they that now exercise us were converted and exercised with us: but let us not hate them, thought they continue to exercise us; for we know not whether they will persevere to the end in their wickedness. And many times, when you imagine that you hate your enemy, it is your brother you hate, though you ignorant of it. The holy Scriptures plainly show us that the devil and his angels are doomed to eternal fire. It is only their amendment we may despair of, with whom we wage an invisible war; for which the apostle arms us, saying: Our conflict is not with flesh and blood, that is not with the men you see before your eyes, but with the princes, and powers, and rulers of the world of this darkness. And lastly, by his saying, of the world, you might think perhaps, that the devils are rulers of heaven and earth, he added, of this darkness. By the world, then, he meant the lovers of the world; by the world, he meant the impious and the wicked; by the world, he meant that which the Gospel speaks of; And the world knew him not (St. Augustine).



Detail from *Appearance of SS Jerome and John to St. Augustine*, by Matteo Di Giovanni.

St. Vincent of Lerins, The Commonitorium (Chap. 8).

Some men of this type traveling through provinces and cities, hawking their venal errors, came also to the Galatians. These, after having listened to the travelers, became lukewarm, towards the truth, rejecting the manna of apostolic and Catholic doctrine and delighting in the dirt of heretical novelty. On this occasion, the authority of the apostolic power asserted itself and decreed with utmost severity: "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach a gospel to you besides that which we have preached to you, let him anathema."

Why does he say: "But though we"? Why not rather: "But though I"? Because it is his understanding that they let him be Peter, or Andrew, or John, even finally, if the whole community of Apostles "should preach" a gospel to you other than that which we have preached to you, let them be anathema." What tremendous strictness! To assure firmness in the loyalty to the "first faith," he is ready to spare neither himself nor his fellow Apostles. But he is not satisfied with that, for his words are: "Even if 'an angel from heaven should preach a gospel to you besides that which we have preached to you, let him be anathema.'" For the preservation of the traditional faith it was not sufficient for him to look only on the condition of human nature; he also included the eminent angelic nature. "Though we," he says, "or an angel from heaven." Not that he thinks that holy and celestial angels could sin. What he really means is: If that happened which cannot happen, let whosoever may attempt to change the traditional faith be anathema.

But, perhaps he pronounced these words incidentally, uttering them out of a quite human impulse rather than forming them under divine inspiration? This is far from the case. He continues, and emphasizes his point with the whole weight of reiterated assertion: "As we said before, so now I say again: If anyone preach to you a gospel besides that which you have received. Let him be anathema." He did not say: "If anyone announced to you something besides that which you have received, let him be blessed, praised, welcome," but: "let him be anathema." That is, let him be separated, segregated, excluded, so that the horrible contagion of a single sheep may not infect the innocent flock of Christ with its poisonous virus.

[St.Vincent of Lerins, *The Commonitories (Commonitoria)*, Translated by Rudolph E. Morris, J.U.D. (Marquette University), New York, Fathers of the Church, Inc (1949) pp.281-282.]