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Vision Literature and the Monetization of Purgatory in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Europe

by

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There is, and will always be, a great deal of concern regarding the afterlife because there will always be equal or greater concern for death and dying. There is nothing more certain and less avoidable than the outcome that awaits the living. In Christianity, this inevitability has long been embraced, because for a great period of time, there were only two possible things awaiting the living: Heaven or Hell. This binary model of good and evil, the saved and the damned, lasted intact for hundreds of years. Yet, in life, there is scarcely a thing so wholly good or evil to match this model. In Christian belief, the angels and demons are spawned in Heaven and Hell, not on Earth. On this planet there is only humankind, and although there is no shortage of people both bad and good, there are few who are so wholly evil that they have never had a single moment of kindness, or so wholly good that they have never fallen victim to cruelty or hatred in their lives. Even Satan once roamed the heavens as an angel. Perhaps it is no surprise then that over the course of hundreds of years a new realm would be conjured up to fit in between the two final destinations, a place where the sins of the great many who exist in the vast, morally gray area are purged away.

The introduction of Purgatory into the landscape of the afterlife completely shifted the foundation of the longstanding binary model, but this was a gradual process. Although the concept of Purgatory would grow dramatically throughout the period of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and continue to grow into the fourteenth, the concept and the thoughts that founded its creation had been forming for hundreds of years. Eschatological questions regarding Judgement Day and the time between a person's death and the Resurrection had no doubt existed for as long as Christianity itself. In the early fifth century, after the passing of a priest's son to whom he had been close, Bishop Evodius of Uzalis wrote in a letter to Saint Augustine, "it bothers me a great deal to believe that the soul enters a kind of sleep, so that it becomes just like

one who is sleeping in the body, just like one buried and living only in hope, but taking no action, knowing nothing” (Evodius 45-6). Ideas like this regarding the whereabouts of the soul following death reveal a necessity for an in-between location, a checkpoint if you will, where the soul can atone for its sins before Judgment Day. Therefore, Purgatory gradually comes into existence in response and serves as a place where the soul stops after death (so long as it is neither wholly good or evil), getting its just desserts through the process of purgation. And yet, although Purgatory satisfied this societal need for a third possibility, one that will be expanded upon here, the introduction of this new concept came with a price.

There are few things left in the world that do not come with a price tag, and this extends even to death and dying. However, this is far from being a new phenomenon, and throughout the Middle Ages the monetary advantages of Purgatory that were enjoyed by the Roman Catholic Church are proof of that. Like the growth of Purgatory itself, this process was a gradual one, but one that depended on a simple economic scheme rooted in the complex topography of that in-between realm. In a crude system of exchange whereby certain services were traded for other services that were owned by the Church, the eschatological took on the form of indulgences. These indulgences varied over time, and so too did the means by which they could be received, until eventually they became largely exchanged for monetary gain. In *Indulgences in Late Medieval England*, R. N. Swanson includes the following passage from *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as a definition of indulgences:

a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed conditions through the action of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the

satisfactions of Christ and the saints...An indulgence is obtained through the Church who, by virtue of the power of binding and loosing granted her by Christ Jesus, intervenes in favor of individual Christians and opens for them the treasury of the merits of Christ and the saints to obtain from the Father of mercies the remission of the temporal punishments due for their sins. Thus the Church does not want simply to come to the aid of these Christians, but also to spur them to works of devotion, penance, and charity. (8)

According to the Church, these indulgences, grounded in the relationship between sin and forgiveness, are to be distributed by the Church, and yet the reality of their distribution is complex and often unclear. However, the fact that indulgences were a remission of the temporal punishment never truly changed.

As Swanson has shown, the exact origin of indulgences is one that is not altogether clear, although an early example of what they would become can be traced back to the mid- to late eleventh century during the time of the First Crusade. It was at this time that Pope Urban II gave “the promise of salvation to those who died in defense of the faith,” which was the first instance of the papacy asserting the right to grant indulgences (10). By the time of the early twelfth century it had also become common for bishops to grant pardons to alleviate penance, something that would serve as the model for full-blown indulgences. Penance as a process was complicated but, as Swanson explains, “a central requirement was satisfaction, the performance of a physical penalty imposed by a priest which had to be completed to ensure divine forgiveness”; therefore “in return for attendance at the consecration of a church, donations to support the building of bridges and maintenance of hospitals, and assorted acts of charity, bishops rescinded small chunks of the imposed penance” (11). The Church’s assignment of an impossible penalty for a

sin, and the so-called sinner's ability to have that penalty reduced, is the clear foundation for the relationship that develops between purgatorial punishments and indulgences.

The system of exchange for pardons grew and expanded until it was eventually addressed as early as 1215, during the meeting of the Fourth Lateran Council. In a clear mathematical formula, wherein the variables are purgatorial punishments and indulgences, calculated amounts of time would be removed from a soul's sentence in the afterlife. The time and severity of a particular punishment was decided by the nature and severity of the sins committed, subtracted by the amount of penance done by the soul while alive and later on; indulgences were the surplus that would be bestowed upon the soul, to be enjoyed by the living. Furthermore, the mathematical nature of this system lent itself to a bartering system, where remission would be negotiated and decided upon based on what the person seeking the pardon would do or give for it. The progression toward the monetization of indulgences and Purgatory seems only natural when these points are considered. Of course, the selling of indulgences would later become ubiquitous in the late Middle Ages and would go on to be cited by Martin Luther as one of the most heinous practices of the Church.

Yet, as has been stated, the increase in the practice of granting indulgences in exchange for money was gradual, and the growing prevalence of the practice depended upon Christians firmly believing in the new eschatological model. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the belief in Purgatory grew and became cemented as the third place in the new ternary structure of the afterlife; the entrenchment of the idea was helped along by a series of visions, the most important of which are included here, that simultaneously created and captured the details of this new society. Of the vision literature that appeared throughout the initial growth period of Purgatory's popularization, there are a few examples that stand out due to their descriptions of

the landscape, laws, and occupants of the place between Heaven and Hell, as well as their various social, political, and theological commentaries. Spanning the course of a century are four such visions: *St. Patrick's Purgatory*, *Tundale's Vision*, *The Monk of Evesham's Vision*, and *Thurkill's Vision*, each recorded by a different monk, and each taking place in a different part of Western Europe, from Station Island in Northern Ireland to the Village of Tidstude in Essex. Each of these visions carves out its own depiction of Purgatory and carefully describes at length a selection of sins and their respective punishments.

With the Church's monetization of the purgation process as a focal point, it is useful to focus an analysis of these visions on certain monetary themes, such as the treatment of sins pertaining to money, including greed and usury, as well as the presence of other monetary aspects of medieval society related to the Church, such as the paying of tithes and giving of alms. Analyses of the appearances of monetary themes, along with attitudes and commentaries on money and wealth, reveal a complex layer beneath the economic system of the Church involving indulgences during the growth of Purgatory. These visions, in addition to providing primary examples of the relationship between medieval society and money, reveal a hypocritical practice of the Church regarding wealth and capital, where among laymen and lower-level clergy, riches are scorned, but are nonetheless aggressively sought after and accrued by the papal state during the late twelfth century and beyond. It is therefore the argument of this thesis that the vision literature of this period helped solidify Purgatory's place in Christianity, leading to the establishment by the Church of a system of dual-thinking somewhat analogous to George Orwell's concept of doublethink, a way that made possible the contradictory belief that money was able to be both a ticket to Hell and a ticket to Heaven. This economically expedient paradox allowed for the creation of a monetary system rooted in the concept of Purgatory and fueled by

indulgences, a system that allowed laymen to purchase indulgences to gain forgiveness for sinful greed (of the past, present, and future) and quite literally buy their way into Heaven.

One of the most famous pieces of vision literature is *St. Patrick's Purgatory*, which was recorded by the monk H. of Sawtry at the end of the twelfth century. However, the Knight Owen, who serves as the subject of the vision, is said to have served under King Stephen of England and he returns to the king after experiencing his vision within the story which places these events somewhere within his reign from 1135–1154. Geographically, it is worth noting the locations within *St. Patrick's Purgatory* before working through the vision itself. The recorder of the story, H. of Sawtry, was a Cistercian monk in England, but the story itself was passed on from the monk Gilbert who is mentioned in the vision as having traveled to Ireland, with Owen as interpreter, in hopes of founding a monastery. The location where Owen enters the cave that serves as the entrance to Purgatory is located on Station Island, in Lough Derg, in the middle of a lake in Northern Ireland. As a testimony to the fame that the legend of this purgatorial entrance received, for centuries thereafter the site would become a famous destination for pilgrimages. Carol Zaleski writes that by the time of its recording, “Lough Derg was already established as a sacred site. H. of Sawtry...describes the rituals for entering and leaving the Purgatory just as they are reported by pilgrims” (470). The rituals she mentions that H. of Sawtry captures are written prior to Owen entering the cave in *St. Patrick's Purgatory* where it is said that “he remained fifteen days in prayer” and “at the end of this time the prior celebrated Mass and gave him Holy Communion,” before he is led to the doorway at the cave entrance (137). The location of this legend as a well-known destination for pilgrimage adds to the believability of Owen's account, which goes as follows: after his fifteen days of prayer and receiving communion, the knight enters the cave where he must survive a single day and night to have his sins purged.

There he is met by a group of fifteen men, who look like ecclesiasts, and they pray for him and caution him before he undergoes his journey through Purgatory.

Throughout this journey some very common aspects regarding the landscape that he sees are described, such as an abundance of fire and “a lofty mountain” that he is dragged to the top of (141). There is also the primary component of Purgatory which is the torment and suffering that takes place there in order to purge one’s sins. Many such punishments that he both experiences and witnesses are carried out by demons, and described in explicit detail, such as the demons who “kindled a large fire...and seizing the knight by the arms and legs, threw him in the middle of it, dragging him with iron hooks backwards and forwards” (139). There are also the souls he sees being “basted by the demons with liquid metal, while others were baked in ovens and fried in frying pans” (141). From people being nailed down to the ground and beaten by demons to others who are burned and clawed at by dragons, the punishments depicted are as cruel as can be, but to varying degrees.

Unlike some of the other visions that will be discussed, the specific sins committed by those who are punished ultimately go unmentioned so there is no true one-to-one connection between sin and punishment that can be made. However, it is made clear that each of the punishments is located in a different topographical space, insinuating that different souls experience different tortures (likely based on the nature of their respective sins). Furthermore, the punishments of the souls as they undergo purgation are described as varying degrees of torture depending on the severity of whatever sins they committed. This is evident when Owen witnesses a house full of cauldrons that were full of “pitch, Sulphur, and melted metals, where there were human beings of both sexes, and all ranks and ages,” and he notices that “some were completely immersed...others to their breasts...some had only one hand or foot immersed”

(141). In other words, of the souls he sees, some experience harsher punishments than others.

The correlation between the sins committed and the punishments received in this text is one that is maintained in virtually all purgatorial visions. It is in keeping with a sense of justice that Jacques Le Goff discusses in his crucial work *The Birth of Purgatory*, but it is also important in establishing another aspect regarding punishment.

At the end of Owen's trip in Purgatory, after he sees the entrance to Heaven above him, and experiences the land of those who have finished purging their sins, he is told that "the penance we undertook before our death or at the hour of death, but did not complete on earth, must still be discharged by suffering in the places of punishment that you have seen, according to the nature and magnitude of the sin" (144). This confirms the relationship between sin and punishment, where the latter befits the former, which becomes one of the rules of Purgatory that gets followed in its many depictions. The knight, however, is also told something else that relates to the monetary themes that are seen throughout, and it is an allusion to indulgences. Before he leaves to exit the cave, he is told the following:

No one of us knows how long he or she will remain here. But by the Masses and psalms, by the alms and prayers of the universal church, as well as the special aid of their own friends, the torments of those in purgatory may be greatly lessened; or they may even receive a lighter kind of punishment in exchange for those to which they were first doomed, until they are released entirely in the end. (145)

This passage introduces a very distinct and important link between the living and the dead that plays an important role in the Church's ability to monetize indulgences. First, it states that the duration and severity of one's punishments can be lessened through outside intervention from the living, and the living alone, because once a person has died, he or she must carry out the

remainder of his or her penance. Second, the prayers of the universal church and the special aid of one's own friends all allude to suffrages, or short intercessory prayers, which can be provided for the souls in purgatory through indulgences. As is stated, in this way alone can the suffering souls of the dead be alleviated, and suffering is an understatement based on the severity of the punishments described in the vision literature. In her article "Wraiths, Revenants and Ritual in Medieval Culture," Nancy Caciola writes that "ecclesiastical doctrine promoted the provision of masses and prayers for those in purgatory as the best means of assuaging the torments of one's ancestors" (45). What this does is create a relationship between the living and the dead because the dead could no longer be mourned and forgotten, instead their souls became the responsibility of the living, and what better way to ease this responsibility while at the same time easing the pain of a loved one's soul than through indulgences.

In addition to the introduction of the idea that the living can lessen the time a soul spends in Purgatory, there is a specific landscape being described. As Le Goff writes in *The Birth of Purgatory*, "at last there was a description of Purgatory, a place with a name of its own...in which the hardy knight-penitent travels extensively and which he describes at length. Furthermore, the geography of the next world is fitted into the geography of this one...by specifying the precise location on earth of one of Purgatory's mouths" (201). *St. Patrick's Purgatory* is an essential vision regarding the establishment of Purgatory for various reasons. First, it is the earliest vision to describe an entrance to the in-between realm as existing on earth, which is founded in this account when St. Patrick is visited by Christ who "led him to a deserted place where he showed him a round cave, dark within," which serves as the entry point into the other world.

Another reason why this vision is essential is because it is also one of the earliest to refer to the realm in between Heaven and Hell by name, something that is explicitly written in the beginning of the vision when Owen declares “for the remission of my sins I will enter the Purgatory of St. Patrick” (135). Yet another reason is that it also describes the purgatorial landscape as a physical one, one that is structurally complex and with various sections for different punishments, all of which exist between the land for the damned and the land for the saved. This is evident throughout the story as Owen traverses a multitude of locations and is described moving from one place to the next. For example, Owen is described crossing a “broad and stinking river” on “a bridge stretched across it,” where he is tormented by demons (142); he is also taken “to the top of a lofty mountain” by the demons (141), and ultimately has to physically make his way back to the cave entrance at the end of his purgatorial visit. Rather than simply appearing in different realms as if by some otherworldly magic, Owen has to walk on foot, or be dragged by demons, to various locations because they all exist within an enormous and physical purgatorial landscape. Therefore, it can be said that the work accomplished in this vision is essentially the culmination of this genre of literature in the Middle Ages because it presents and spreads the established and very specific details of Purgatory in a way that brings it to life while significantly adding to its lore and its believability.

The rising number of pilgrimages that Zaleski discusses, which follow this vision, is indicative of its popularity. Furthermore, that people would make this specific pilgrimage, which is a difficult one even to this day, and enter the cave, even claiming new experiences regarding Purgatory, testifies to how compelling this story about the entrance to the third destination truly was. This is what gives weight to the aforementioned point regarding the allusion to indulgences and the connection established between the living and the dead because this legend, at the very

least, was what helped enforce the belief in Purgatory that was held on to in the back of many Christians' minds during the centuries preceding and following its circulation. As Le Goff argues, this particular vision is perhaps the most important because of what it accomplishes; but by first establishing the end point, we can more appropriately trace through the other visions that will be discussed in order to see the exact growth of certain themes that were developed throughout the twelfth and into the thirteenth century. Only then can light be shed on the ways in which these visions, through their enforcing of certain themes and the ways in which they helped establish Purgatory, crafted this other world so that it was ripe for the Church to build an economic system of indulgences therein.

Another vision which made its way throughout the Christian world during the twelfth century is *Tundale's Vision*. This vision is said to have been recorded by a monk known as Brother Marcus, an itinerant monk from Ireland who was in Regensburg at the time, who St. John D. Seymour, in "Studies in the Vision of Tundal" (one of the numerous translated spellings of the name Tnugdali), believes "won a considerable degree of immortality, for it soon became one of the most popular medieval visions" (106). In the introduction to this vision, the author begins by stating that "from Cashel there was a certain nobleman by the name of Tundale" (149) who provided the details of the story of which he is the subject. Cashel is in southern Ireland, which the author very carefully locates and refers to as the "most famous city of the south" (149). Ireland is once again the location for a vision, and the island of Ireland, or Hibernia as it is referred to in the opening of the text, is "noted for otherworldly fantasy" (*The Birth of Purgatory* 181) as Le Goff observes. This notoriety helps accomplish something that may not be immediately obvious. Because Ireland was believed to be a place for otherworldly fantasy, even if all of the legends that originate from it are known to be only legends, there is a sense that is

created that within those almost mystified regions there is a greater potential for these legendary things to occur. Both *Tundale's Vision* and, especially, *St. Patrick's Purgatory* have a far reach; to the Christians who hear these stories, such as those in England and France, there is an additional level of plausibility added to the legends coming from the monasteries overseas. That believability which is built upon in the vision of *St. Patrick's Purgatory* is something that is central to the vision of Tundale who, throughout his long journey, witnesses an innumerable amount of places for all matters of sin.

The journey is in the tradition of most visions that came before, and would come after, where a wealthy man is chosen to witness Purgatory so that he may gain faith in God, be purged of his sins, and most importantly share with everyone around him the things that he witnessed. For Tundale, this journey, while following many traditions, is exceptional in its overwhelming detail. After lying dead for three days, he awakens and shares what he has seen, which goes as follows: after his soul departs his body he is immediately attacked by the demons and cursed spirits that he goes on to see in Purgatory, although God chooses to send an angel to him and instead provides him with a tour of it, without being kept there. In a way, these kinds of journeys into Purgatory function as a way for God to make an example out of man. He takes a sinner, shows him the torments of Purgatory, and warns him that this is what awaits him if he continues to live in sin without doing any of the various things that can alleviate that punishment. In a sense these visions act almost like a scared straight program, where a person who is going down the wrong path sees firsthand the sentence that awaits him or her and, based on the Purgatory that Tundale witnesses, the sentence is almost beyond imagination.

Of the punishments that Tundale encounters there is one designated for murderers, one for traitors, one for the proud, and of course, one for robbers and one for the greedy. None of

these punishments are mutually exclusive: if you commit a sin or multiple sins then you will endure the punishments of all the sins committed, seemingly until the entire sentence, or purgation process, is complete. All of the harsh penalties that the souls endure are described at length, and something that may be surprising is that there are few sins that stand out from the rest in terms of severity. In fact, the punishment for the greedy is equally cruel, if not worse, than that which awaits those guilty of patricides, fratricides, and the like. For the murderers, what awaits is a seemingly infinite cycle of being melted in a frying pan, restored, and melted down once more. In all, the description for this particular torture is rather brief, and although cruel, it is quite simple in comparison to the cruelties that other sinners must endure. Notably, and in line with this observation, what awaits the greedy is an incredibly elaborate punishment that is shared in vivid detail:

Tundale saw an incredibly large and intolerably horrible beast not far from them. In its enormous magnitude this beast exceeded all the mountains that he had ever seen. His eyes seemed like burning hills. His mouth was open and so wide that it seemed to him it could contain nine thousand armed men. Moreover, in his mouth he had two parasites with turned heads...Inextinguishable flames also belched forth from his mouth...and into this flame the condemned souls were compelled to enter...“This beast is called Acheron, who devours all the greedy.” (159)

The image of the beast Acheron is given in perfect detail, with close attention being paid to its enormous mouth that has a vastness that is captured rather effectively. This mouth serves as an entrance for these souls, burning the souls in the process as they scream in agony until finally, they exit the beast. There are a few potential reasons for the difference between the punishment of murder, which society today would likely consider a far greater sin, and the punishment of

greed, but one stands out among the rest as the most plausible. The emphasis placed on certain sins and the severity of their corresponding punishments is explained through the nature of Purgatory that is established within the literature: the punishment fits the crime, or in this case, the sin. Therefore, if the greedy face a more severe process of purgation, the vision is making a claim that greed is more severe than even murder. Of course, Tundale's guide makes a distinction that among the murderers the homicides are punished less severely, but the souls that are described are very clearly referred to as patricides and fratricides, and therefore it stands that greed is described, at least, as equally punishable as what is perhaps the most monstrous of crimes.

The attitude that this vision captures towards money, one that will appear again, particularly in the vision experienced by the monk of Evesham, is an ultimately disdainful one. Although there is a general hostility and disgust toward all sins, there is great emphasis placed upon sins concerning money; while there is essentially only one sin concerning murder (despite being divided up based on who it is that one murders) there are multiple sins that are all related very closely to money, wealth, or capital. In Tundale's vision alone there is the punishment for greed and then a separate punishment for robbery and thievery, with the punishment for usury likely included within the category of the greedy, (though it is notable that it is not explicitly stated). Once again, the punishments for all sins must be endured, and so if one commits robbery due to greed, then he or she must undergo the punishments for both robbery and greed, with one being a trip into the terrifying depths of Acheron's mouth, and the other being crossing a bridge with a surface "pierced with very sharp iron nails, which slashed the feet of all those crossing" along with whatever one stole while living, such as the soul Tundale sees "burdened with a heavy weight of grain as he tried to cross the bridge," all while great beasts wait beneath the

crossers (162). The act of carrying across whatever one stole is made clear when Tundale himself is made to suffer the crossing of that bridge while leading a wild cow across to remind him of the one he had stolen from his neighbor (163). Due to the length at which they are described, and the creative and cruel nature of the punishments for these monetary related sins, it can be deduced that these specific sins are emphasized in the vision; in a sense they serve as a pointed warning to any Christians involved with money because, as is indicated by the harshness with which these sins are treated, relationships with money are all notoriously looked down upon at the time of the twelfth century, despite it being a very real and growing aspect of society.

The moral dilemma created by the Church regarding money is something that Lester K. Little discusses in *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe*. He writes that “a major moral issue was that the leading urban professions, like money itself, were simultaneously pursued and scorned” (35). Along with the twelfth century came a changing economy, one that was urban and more money- and city-centric, something that had become increasingly shunned by Christianity in the centuries leading up to the twelfth. It therefore makes sense that these monetary sins would be pushed to the forefront of much of the vision literature, and yet there is a duality there. As Little notes, the moral attitude towards money was one of disdain, “so uncompromising was that morality that virtually any participation in the upper levels of the commercial economy involved the dangers of sin and conjured up visions of appalling punishments” (41). Merchants, money lenders, and the like were said to have little to no chance of salvation as everything they did was believed to be deeply rooted in sins, be it lying, stealing, usury, or greed. Yet, as much as it was scorned it was also pursued, and this is not just by laymen, but even more so by the Church. While chastising others for monetary involvement, the Church was growing in its own involvement with money, property, capital, and wealth. This is

therefore where the dual-thinking starts to reveal itself: a type of thinking necessary in order to permit the hypocritical act of demonizing money while simultaneously moving toward the monetization of Purgatory that would start to take shape in the twelfth century.

Before moving on to the final two visions which originate in England as opposed to Ireland, it is important to elaborate upon the concept of dual-thinking that these visions help to create. To define the phrase, it is the acceptance of two contradictory beliefs, simultaneously. Regarding the topic at hand, this would be the ability of the Church to promote the idea that money is sinful, that greed demands purgation, and the accumulation of wealth warrants tortures beyond measure, while they monetize Purgatory through indulgences to increase the amount of revenue coming into the Church and expand the papal state over the course of the Middle Ages. The way that this is accomplished through the visions is by first establishing two concepts that *Tundale's Vision* and *St. Patrick's Purgatory* both do successfully. The first concept is a belief throughout Christendom that greed, wealth, the hoarding of capital, and virtually all things related to money, are all deserving of severe punishment, essentially on par with murder, unless that money is used to better the Church. The second concept is to establish Purgatory as a place where, despite the harshness of the tortures one faces, it—and the tortures therein—are all a means to an end, a way through which the soul can reach salvation and Paradise; the only way to lessen the severity of one's suffering after death is through intercession from the living through prayer, alms, and most popularly, indulgences.

These two concepts are what comprise the opposite sides of the dual-thinking theory and building upon them allows the Church to then make an exception regarding indulgences, an exception that would inevitably expand to include other matters regarding money. Following the foundation of the two concepts, which are the establishment of the idea that wealth is evil unless

it is used for or by the church and that the unimaginable punishments of the dead can only be alleviated by the living, comes a combination of these two notions: money is also acceptable if it is used to help the souls of the dead in Purgatory, in accordance with the preestablished rules of how a soul's purgation can be eased. This is one of the ultimate products of the dual-thinking that is introduced into Christendom and it allows the Church to become more involved with wealth, land, and the like, while maintaining restrictions on laymen and lower levels of the clergy. It is a powerful form of control. Le Goff argues that "there was no such thing as an independent economy in the Middle Ages, but that it was imbricated into a whole dominated by religion," and that the nature and use of money "were governed by other considerations" (*Money and the Middle Ages* 144).

The very nature of the economy was altogether different because of the fact that it was so deeply interwoven with and dominated by religion, as Le Goff shows, and so for a great period of time a system of gift-giving, and later gift-exchanging, was maintained. With a foundation heavily influenced by the Christian doctrine that one should give or lend "without hoping to be repaid," the negative attitudes toward money had already been deeply engrained in Christianity and the ways that the economy worked were limited by the clear doctrine regarding money, goods, and the acts of giving, and lending (Le Goff, *Your Money or Your Life* 23). However, as Le Goff notes in *Your Money or Your Life*, "the money economy became more widespread during the twelfth century," which led to complex relationships between laymen, the Church, and money. The bigger the part that money played in society and the economy, the more the Church pushed back on it; while the "wheel of fortune turned faster...the Church grew alarmed" (23). This alarm can be seen in the images depicted of the punishments for monetary sins, and in the rise of religious poverty's importance among the lower levels of the clergy.

This is something that serves as the foundation for much of Little's work in *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy*, where he discusses the Church's shifting attitude on multiple levels toward the economic transition from a gift-giving economy to what he refers to as a profit economy, one far more involved with urban professions, and far more involved with money. One of his primary focuses is on the pushback from monks and other lower levels of the clergy who truly gave themselves over to poverty and took stands against the ownership of property and wealth, not just among the laymen but among the Church as well. One such example that Little cites is Arnold of Brescia, who was in charge of his city's house of canons, and who expanded "on the ideals of the canonical reform to argue that no monk or priest or bishop who owned property could be saved," but notably "when the papal party secured its triumph in 1139, Arnold was expelled" (109). It is an example of the awareness held by the clergy of the existence of priests, bishops, and monks who participated in the very thing that their doctrine stood against, and yet the papal party makes a rather clear stand. So, while money, property, and ownership were harshly scorned by the Church among laymen, they were also simultaneously permissible, if even to a small extent, among the upper levels of the clergy.

In other words, it was the Church, and through examples like the case of Arnold of Brescia, perhaps more directly the papacy, that controlled the very purpose of money—picking and choosing when and where it was acceptable, and for whom. It is important to remember that indulgences themselves came from the papal state, and not only did they largely originate from Pope Urban II during the First Crusade, but they were also controlled by the papacy who approved pardons and established the rules surrounding them. However, due to the complexity surrounding their distribution, and the fact that despite the rules, they were often granted outside of this approval, it is more appropriate to attribute indulgences to the Church. Although there is a

top-down system of rule, with the pope sitting atop the powerful Roman Catholic Church, it is also important to remember how incredibly vast and intricate that system was. In many ways, things were done simultaneously on multiple levels, and to attribute the control of money, the distribution of indulgences, and the changes within the Church entirely to the papacy would be incorrect.

Regardless of this, however, the fact remains that the involvement of the Church with money was acceptable under the belief, or perhaps guise, that the value of money was decided entirely on how it could promote or serve God in some way. It was a system that put the Church in charge of assigning the value of money and how it should be used. Therefore, what begins to take place throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is the notion that the only righteous way to celebrate wealth is to give it to the Church; in this way the exchange of money, wealth, and capital become permitted because the exchange is done through the acceptable act of gift-giving (even if it was to receive the gift of forgiveness in return).

This directly relates to the spawning of the system of monetized indulgences, an economic tactic that increased the amount of money brought in and infused the notion of penance with money, because it established a line of thought that made the purchasing of indulgences perfectly excusable and acceptable. As it was, a bartering system had been used to decide pardons for years before, and so long as the thing being bartered was immaterial, it seemed to not matter to the Church. The monetizing of indulgences was just a progression of a system that had already been in place and it was acceptable, even if wealth was the gift that was given, because the Church had decided that that was okay so long as the wealth was going to them. Essentially, the system of paid indulgences was acceptable because it abided by the new dogma that wealth could be used righteously so long as it was used in a way that the Church had

chosen to permit. Therefore, should the reason be to help a soul undergoing purgatorial punishment, something conveniently alleviated through prayers that could be bought in the form of indulgences, then it was okay under the rules of the Church and therefore God.

As the twelfth century progressed, so did the Church's overall involvement with money, and by the time of *St. Patrick's Purgatory*, the Church enjoyed a substantial income and grew as a major property owner—all things that were forbidden for laymen and the clergy, but acceptable for the Church. From that moment forward, Purgatory also continued to adapt and grow throughout other visions, which built upon the groundwork that the knight Owen's vision had already put in place. Moving on to the other visions which originated in England, both in their recordings and with regards to the settings of the visions themselves, it can be seen that there are many similarities to the ones already described, which is proof that these visions built upon the foundation that had been set by the ones that came before them to continue to bring Purgatory to life. Coming half a century after Tundale is *The Monk of Evesham's Vision*, which presents a Purgatory very similar to the one that Tundale experienced. In his 1869 reprint of the vision experienced by the monk of Evesham, Edward Arber notes that originally it "was probably not written earlier than its ostensible date; 1196" (7) when it is claimed to have been recorded by Adam of Eynsham, the brother of the monk whose vision is told.

This journey into Purgatory begins with a monk of Evesham seemingly dying as his soul leaves his physical body for a period of time, during which his soul is escorted through a tour of the world of the in-between. Here, Purgatory is broken down into a number of sections, a division that has been seen in both of the depictions previously discussed. However, in this instance there is a very specific separation within the topography that is described, three places of punishment and three places of glory. To which place a soul belongs is dependent on the sins

committed, and the severity of those sins. The monk observes that “whatever people I saw, and for whatever sins they were punished, I noticed clearly both the nature of their sin and the degree of their punishment” (Eynsham 204). Through comparison it is clear that certain aspects regarding Purgatory do not change. Of them, the most important seems to be the notion that the punishment befits the sin committed, and this helps establish a sense of justice within this realm and creates the sense that people are getting what they deserve, despite the severity of these tortures, which are horrible beyond belief. Within this system, however, and as is focused in on by the monk who experiences this vision, these punishments are deemed tolerable because the end result is Paradise for every soul in Purgatory. Without justification this land of fire would be Hell, cruel and unforgiving, but because salvation awaits all those who fulfill their sentence, this land is instead merciful. That single distinction makes all the difference, and so with a light at the end of the tunnel the goal then becomes a question of how fast one can get there.

From the moment the monk of Evesham enters Purgatory until the time his soul is returned to his body, it is continuously stated how intercession from one’s friends or loved ones helps determine how much of the punishment process is alleviated. Presented with a glorious end, there is only one way that the dead can reach that destination more quickly and with a lightened punishment, and the recording of this vision ensures that the way is stated repeatedly. While traveling to the first place of punishment it is said that “by the intercession of others, in that place of exile and punishment they might earn admission to the heavenly country” (204), and similarly “each one was treated according to whether they were helped or hindered by their former actions or by the good works of their friends” (205). In the second place of punishment, “those guilty of greater crimes, or less assisted by the Masses of their friends, were punished more severely and for a longer time” (207). These three separate references make clear the

extreme influence that intercession has on the souls of the dead. It is arguably the most essential connection established through these visions regarding the Church's ability to capitalize on Purgatory and to create the system of indulgences that became so popular. This is because indulgences are entirely dependent on Purgatory existing in the exact way that it is shaped through the visions that have been explored thus far. The fact that there is an end to the punishments endured, that there is a way to get to this end in less time and with more restrained torments, that the way is only through the actions of the living, and that the masses and prayers that so steeply reduce one's purgatorial experience can be easily attained through indulgences, all come together as the perfect recipe for the monetization of Purgatory.

Before further exploring this connection that has steadily been constructed until this point, it is worth pausing to delve into one more essential moment within *The Monk of Evesham's Vision* which concerns the encounter the monk has with an acquaintance of his known only by his profession, the "goldsmith" (207). A very specific decision is made to include an encounter with a goldsmith, one who despite his tortures is in good spirits, and who had "so quickly gone through the cruel torments" (208). The monk questions him and the goldsmith replies that although seemingly everyone in the world of the living had cast him aside, convinced that he would never be saved because of the monetary nature of his sins, he is instead saved, although he must endure the punishments owed to him. Comparing this to the system of dual-thinking that the Church establishes slightly earlier, where money can be condemned while also being a means for salvation, we see the latter half of that thinking making its way to the surface more and more. The goldsmith very clearly expresses the attitudes of the people toward his sins, which captures the way that religion controls the relationships Christendom has towards money, but yet he receives mercy through God, and therefore the Church. This creates a system where

money is forgivable and helps solidify a slight adjustment in attitude that makes the monetary side of society a little more permissible just as the papacy begins to grow further involved with money and take its more direct steps toward the goal that these visions help make possible.

Le Goff points out in *Money and the Middle Ages* that there are changes in the way that the Church treats sins related to money. He takes the sin treated most harshly as an example, focusing in on the way the Church begins to treat the crime of usury more leniently, something which provides more evidence of a slow but shifting relationship between the papacy and money. The definition of usury during the medieval period was “lending at interest, in particular the taking of interest on money loaned” and he notes that “there was a growing tendency to define circumstances that would allow what the medieval Church called usury, or usurious loans” (*Money and the Middle Ages* 70). Although these major adjustments come further into the thirteenth century, their roots are evident in the century prior, and Le Goff supports this with an example of the first appearance of a usurer being saved from Purgatory, which comes around 1220 in the *Dialogue on Miracles* by Caesarius of Heisterbach (69). The story is of a usurer known as Liege whose wife saves his soul by becoming a recluse and through “alms, fasts, prayers and vigils” saves her husband’s soul (69). There is no description of Purgatory, but it is what makes the story of Liege possible and, unsurprisingly, the theme of intercession is found at the heart of it.

Since Purgatory appears so frequently in the visions and because it is what is most directly monetized, it is clear that intervention from the living is incredibly important to what Purgatory itself seeks to accomplish. While it may be a land for the dead, it is an inevitable place that most of the living will arrive at, but even just being the destination for the souls of the dead it remains important to all those who are alive because loved ones, friends, neighbors, fellow

clergymen, are all held there. Even if it is for a short period of time, and even if a person performed a substantial amount of penance while alive, there are very few who are elected to go straight to a place of grace within Purgatory. This encourages Christians to do what they can to assist the souls that are undergoing punishment, and, in many ways, it forms an obligation between the living and the dead. While the dead suffer endlessly, they can do nothing to redeem themselves or lessen that suffering and so their fate is entirely in the hands of their friends and family, which is captured perfectly within the final vision to be discussed.

The last vision comes after the close of the twelfth century, and Paul Gerhard Schmidt in his article “The Vision of Thurkill” very specifically dates the experience of Thurkill to “the evening of 27 October 1206,” when “the peasant Thurkill is out in the fields digging ditches” (52). The vision is recorded by Roger of Wendover and was done so at St. Albans Abbey in England. Within the vision itself, however, Thurkill, who undergoes the journey, comes from a small village named Tidstude in Essex. From each vision the locations have varied but the latter two which come directly from England are important because in many ways they connect even closer with the Church. Much like the other visions, Thurkill is a man who is taken to Purgatory while still alive, and who returns back to his body afterward to tell of what he has seen. Something interesting regarding Thurkill, however, is that unlike the central characters of the other legends, he is neither rich nor is he part of the clergy. Instead, he is a poor farmer who is both kind and hospitable. His journey into the afterlife reflects this, as he does not suffer the torments he witnesses—unlike Tundale or Owen, the knight. Present in his vision are similar themes, as he witnesses different locations of Purgatory where souls are separated based on a scale of good and evil, quite literally in this vision, and treated accordingly. There are also the foundational landmarks such as the giant mountain and the cleansing image of fire. Furthermore,

focusing more specifically on themes regarding the monetary aspects of society and religion, there are three specific elements of this recording that encourage careful analysis.

The first of these elements comes at the end of the vision but it is a repetition of the theme of the intercession of the living influencing the souls of the dead in Purgatory. What makes it so noteworthy in this vision is the sheer importance of the help of friends and the Church in this otherworldly land. Although in the other visions, such as in *The Monk of Evesham's Vision*, it has been stated that this kind of intercession can help alleviate punishments, here the souls are affected much more directly. It is written that he “saw an infinite number of spirits, all with their faces turned to the church. They were praying for the assistance of their friends who were alive, by which means they might deserve to gain admission to that church. The more special assistance they received, the nearer they approached...they were waiting for special assistance from their friends” (Wendover 233). All souls in Purgatory are completely dependent upon the intervention of the living in this depiction, and it seems that what is accomplished in this description is a drastic example of why the living should pray for their dead, something that translates very easily into indulgences for one primary reason: society naturally wants to assist the souls of the dead, and not just the souls of others but their own as well.

In *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, Jean-Claude Schmitt states that, “Christians could hope to be saved, but only under the condition that after death, they would undergo salutary punishments—the duration and intensity of which depended both on personal merits...and on the suffrages undertaken by relatives and friends for the dead’s salvation” (4). There is a direct correlation created between the penitential work done by the living and the benefits reaped by the souls of the dead, and this causes a close relationship between the living and the souls of the

dead in the afterlife. This is in large part made possible by the link that is first created between the time-space of both worlds where there is an established ratio of time between Purgatory and earth. Schmitt observes that “these two facets of time were examined side by side and sometimes even entered into a proportional relationship (It was said, for example, that a thousand years on earth were the equivalent of three days spent in the purgatorial fire)” (172). Despite the variations of that proportion, what stays the same is that “side by side” relationship between earth and Purgatory. Since over time the two planes become more deeply infused geographically, with entrances to that purgatorial realm physically existing on earth, such as the cave of St. Patrick’s Purgatory, that relationship is naturally made closer. If the two become temporally bound, then that link only becomes stronger.

Therefore, the obligation as a friend or loved one to alleviate another soul’s dead grows stronger as well, because “this is what enabled the actions of the living to work in favor of the dead, since the years of indulgence acquired by the living shortened by an equal or proportional number of years the duration of the punishments endured by the dead person in purgatory” (Schmitt 172). In addition to enabling the living to work on behalf of the dead, there is also a byproduct that this creates. From a mental standpoint, in addition to wanting to assist the dead, there is also to a certain extent a desire to move past them. With the increased obligation that the living held, being accountable not only for their own souls but also for the souls of family and friends, it makes sense that the Christians would seek the services of the Church to further alleviate the punishments of the dead and also to alleviate that obligation. How many of the living wish to pray endlessly for their dead every day for the rest of their lives? It is a grueling task and although it is a gracious act, one with practical benefits if it truly alleviates purgatorial punishment, it disallows a natural and healthy space to form between the living and the dead.

Consequently, when the clergy pray on your behalf, it alleviates a certain pressure and restores an emotional balance, while at the same time satisfying the need for alleviation of purgatorial punishment. Thus, when the Church prays for your loved ones, for you, and forgives the sins you have committed, or the sins those loved ones committed, and all of the sins that can and will be committed in the future, it seems more than worth paying a price for, especially if it can be paid with earthly goods. Material wealth, after all, is not believed by Christendom to travel the otherworldly planes with the soul; a fact that gives the Church leverage since in exchange for temporary wealth, they provide a service that is supposed to have an eternal impact.

The second of the three aspects of *Thurkill's Vision* worth noting comes early in the vision when, near the pit of hell, Thurkill smells a foul stench. This catches the attention of his guide, St. Julian, who says to him: "It appears that you have not duly tithed your crop, and therefore you have smelled this stench"; although Thurkill pleads poverty, "the saint told him that his field would produce a more abundant crop if he paid his tithes justly. The holy man also told him to confess this crime in the church openly to all and to seek absolution from the priest," (Wendover 222). Beginning with the stench that Thurkill cannot help but smell, this is a clear warning sign of what awaits him should he continue sinning in this way. Despite his otherwise good life, and even despite his poverty, his failure to pay his tithe earns him a warning straight from the pit of Hell. This warning goes beyond just him though, and much like the rest of these visions, the true warnings and messages discovered within them are targeted at those who will read or listen to these legends. On one hand, it was a very literal warning to all Christians to pay their tithes, because as Le Goff discusses in his chapter "Money and the Nascent States" as time goes on and "with the general rise in monetary expenditure, the tithe was paid with increasing reluctance" (*Money and the Middle Ages* 51). He notes that in 1215, less than a decade after the

vision takes place, “a reminder of its obligatory nature was issued...which also fixed a minimum sum to be paid to the Church” (51). What is witnessed in *Thurkill's Vision* is therefore a sign of what was to come and a clear reminder in its own regard to the strict obligatory nature of the tithe, something which points to the growing interest in money that develops from the papacy downward. Even for a poor farmer, who is not infallible but is clearly created to be a good and kind peasant man, a sin such as this will ultimately lead you to the cruelty that Thurkill witnesses; that stench is a warning sign that those who think they are above the purgation of Purgatory will find themselves with much penance still remaining. Referencing back to the tithes, however, it is interesting that as involved with money as the Church becomes, there is still the appearance in this vision of what serves as the second element of this legend which requires further analysis.

After making his way further into Purgatory, he witnesses a variety of some of the more graphic punishments that have been encountered in the vision literature of Purgatory. He sees a proud man dismembered, his limbs fried in grease, only to be restored for more torture. He also sees a soldier who gets burned all over and dismembered as well, only for his limbs to also be fried, but these sautéed body parts get pieced back together to restore the soul for more punishment. However, what is of greatest interest is the figure of the priest who comes in between them, which is recorded as follows:

A priest was next dragged violently from his fiery seat into the arena and placed before these inhuman goblins by the servants of sin, who cut his throat in the middle, pulled out his tongue, and cut it off at the root. When he could have done so, this priest did not repay the people entrusted to his care for the temporal goods

that he had taken from them by holy exhortation or by an example of good works.

He had not given them the support of prayers or of Masses. (228)

This is the most crucial element of this vision because it directly relates to the selling of indulgences, even more so than the allusion to them which comes through the many references to intercession. Dissecting this passage, it is first presented that the soul is that of a priest. This priest is said to have received from laymen a number of temporal goods, or in other words, money (coin, gold, or various material goods, it is wealth, and in turn money, nonetheless). However, this is not why he is there, because there is nothing wrong with receiving those goods through holy exhortation. Instead, what has led him to suffer the cruelty of having his throat cut and tongue removed, is that he did not give back to them what he should have. Had he completed his side of the trade, there would be nothing wrong. In other words, this is the first direct example in a vision of the acceptance of the selling of indulgences, the exchanging of goods or money for the support of prayers or masses.

Robert W. Shaffern, in “Indulgences and Sainly Devotionalisms in the Middle Ages,” writes that “indulgences, which were (and still are) remissions of temporal penalty for sin granted by the episcopal authority of the Catholic Church, have long been associated with mechanicalism, decadence, and formalism in later medieval society” (643). The remission of penalty for sin is meant to distinguish the purpose of indulgences from the belief that indulgences directly forgave sins; even though the end result is the same, the technicalities are what the papacy was concerned with, to an extent. Logically, it makes sense that should the Church outright say that indulgences forgive sins it would be problematic; in accordance with the beliefs of Christianity, only God can truly do that and therefore those sins can only be forgiven on the Day of Judgement. Instead, indulgences cover the part of the penance necessary to have

that sin forgiven, instead of directly forgiving the sin itself. This distinction, however, is little more than a technicality. As Ekelund et al. write in “The Political Economy of the Medieval Church,” an indulgence technically “provides remission of afterlife penalties imposed on sinners (i.e., purgatory), not forgiveness of the sin itself. However, local agents of the Church (with the tacit approval of Rome) often fostered the belief that indulgences wiped away sin itself. If we regard penance as a kind of ‘sin tax’ then we may likewise treat indulgences as a form of ‘tax credit’” (11). The example used of indulgences as a tax credit is fitting as there is only a further increase in the involvement that the Church has with money as the Middle Ages progress, and this involvement, which we see even in the form of tithes, demonstrates the control the Church enjoys over wealth during this period. Regarding this power, Le Goff refers to the church as “the most precocious and the most dictatorial...the one most plentifully supplied with money” (*Money and the Middle Ages* 50). Between the collecting of tithes and the collecting of wealth due to the Church’s ownership of vast amounts of land, there was indeed a large supply of money making its way up through the monasteries to the top of the Catholic hierarchy, and this was helped by the collecting of payments for indulgences.

Naturally, indulgences were sold at varying degrees, with one of the more extreme examples being noted in “The Economics of Religious Indulgences,” where it is said that “historians report that some indulgence sellers even promised the liberation of souls already in hell” (438). Instances like this were never condoned by the Church, but they reveal the system of abuse that surrounded indulgences. This is also where the system begins to resemble a top-down business: with an infinite supply of indulgences and a countless number of monks and other members of the clergy all taking it upon themselves to sell them, it is impossible to control the goings on of things at every level. However, this was the system that was created by the Church

as Purgatory came into existence, and there was a reason for it. As Purgatory developed, so too did ideas regarding relationships between sinners and God, or in other words, salvation, and this “opened up the possibility of salvation for the laity as well” (Swanson 12). This is contrary to previous ideas, because as Swanson writes, “previously, it had commonly been assumed that most laypeople were destined for hell: only monks and the saints were reasonably assured of heaven and eternal salvation” (11). Purgatory changes this because it makes room for penance, it takes a binary model where people are either sent to Heaven or to Hell, and turns it into a ternary one, and so it also alters the way that the afterlife is thought about and treated. For the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, this also meant changing the system of penance as well, and so there is the rise of indulgences. The two go hand in hand.

Each of the visions repeatedly state how the living can help relieve the dead, as well as themselves, from the punishments that are described, and the punishments are unfathomably horrible. This is all with a purpose. With the information that the laity were previously thought to all be worthy of Hell, it can be seen that the attitude towards laymen is one of distrust, if not disgust, at the lives that they lived. Yet, they would be destined for the same place as the monks and saints. However, the Church had a solution for that dilemma, and it is in the form of the cruel punishments that are described. In these visions the monks, the saints, and the devout clergymen are all ushered directly to the beautiful places of grace that exist within Purgatory. Rarely do they undergo punishments, and when they do in the literature it is mostly to serve as a warning to the corrupt members of the Church. Other than that, they enjoy the waiting room that is Purgatory while the others undergo tortures almost beyond imagination. This maintains a balance for the Church within the landscape of Purgatory, but more importantly, it created a way for them to control the behavior of the laity. For them to be saved they needed to follow Christian doctrine

more closely, but in the same way it also presented an opportunity. Christians are said to be sinners by nature, and for all of the laymen to dedicate themselves to Christianity in the way that the monks and saints did was not a possibility. This is where indulgences come into play. Not only are they a way for the laity to compensate for their sins, but they are also a way to promote charity or the giving of gifts to their local churches. In this sense, the exchange between the donors of these gifts and the receipt of some level of purgatorial alleviation resemble the economy that had existed. It is the perfect set up for the monetization of indulgences, and the vision literature reveals how this works.

It is the vision literature which promotes an obligatory relationship between the living and the dead where the living are responsible for the souls that exist in Purgatory, it is also the vision literature which makes this relationship possible by establishing Purgatory as a real location through their many descriptions of the vast purgatorial landscapes. Furthermore, the visions also work to create the complicated system of dual-thinking necessary to permit the selling of indulgences while still punishing the sins of greed and usury to simultaneously shun the rise of the profit economy while also allowing the Church to take advantage of it. In each of these ways, the visions that held so much popularity throughout the Middle Ages worked to create the system of indulgences that became so deeply connected with Purgatory. However, it would be wrong to say that vision literature created Purgatory, because although they did help construct it in a way that promoted the economic system of indulgences, they did not create the need for it, nor could they single-handedly give it the popularity that it had. The question therefore becomes whether the Church was solely responsible for the creation and rise of Purgatory, and the answer is no.

Rarely can things be attributed to one sole entity, and in the case of Purgatory, this is also true. The connection between the living and the dead that is established in these visions is something that had existed for far longer than Purgatory itself. Things such as ghost stories, which pre-date the visions mentioned here by more than a few centuries, are all evidence of that; tales where the souls of the dead would visit the living in order to seek their assistance and move on to the next realm. Although Purgatory, with the help of the literature, creates a system where the living are responsible for the dead, it is not something that is altogether new, rather it takes new forms. The aforementioned stories about dead relatives and friends visiting the living become stories of the dead returning “at different times after the prayers and masses from which they benefitted directly, in order to attest to the efficacy of those suffrages, to ask the living for an additional effort, and to thank them for their help before disappearing forever” (Schmitt 173). Furthermore, the way that this part of the system adapts is also telling. Le Goff, in *The Birth of Purgatory*, touches on the notion of “the reversibility of merits” or the idea that the same way the living benefit the dead, so too can the dead help the living, and he refers to this as a “system of solidarity between the living and the dead” (357). The relationship that has been discussed therefore becomes more positive, as a cyclical element to “giving” comes to exist, signaling that what is created in this system is not entirely harmful, but instead may actually provide some benefits to both the living and the dead.

Furthermore, and more importantly, we must consider the complex way that Purgatory as a construct evolves over time. The previously mentioned relationships between the two realms of the souls on earth and the souls in the afterlife no doubt were a large factor, but there is much more to it. Le Goff believes that “the ideas that living human beings formed about the other world were inspired...more by a need for justice than by a yearning for salvation...the other

world was supposed to correct the inequalities and injustices of this one” (*The Birth of Purgatory* 210). This belief is based on the political and social establishments of the Middle Ages, a system dominated by feudalism and hierarchies, a system ripe with injustice and inequality. At its rawest form, Purgatory is a place where, before moving on to such a swift and finite end of being brought up to Paradise or damned down to Hell, souls enter a realm where they must face justice, a justice that is normally withheld for many elect people while on earth. It is in this way that Purgatory satisfies the desire for justice rather perfectly, at least until paid indulgences come about.

At the very core of the notion of indulgences, especially paid indulgences, is a system that breaks away from the foundation upon which Purgatory was founded. The notions of justice that Le Goff rightfully believes fueled its creation are slowly dismantled by a fraudulent system of paid indulgences that is progressively rolled out with legends of Purgatory which are shaped to fit the agenda of the Church. No, the Church did not singlehandedly create or shape Purgatory, but nor did the Christians of the Middle Ages. It was a slow and steady process, and one that very clearly traded hands between the laymen and the clergy as Purgatory became more and more cemented amidst a changing society and a changing economy.

The people founded Purgatory upon a system of justice that was rooted in superstitions surrounding life and death and that answered burning questions about the period of time between death and Judgement Day. As an overhaul of the ill-fitting binary system that had been in place for some time, Purgatory made room for an afterlife reflective of the ways of the changing world. However, as we have seen in the vision literature considered here, Purgatory was shaped and molded by the hands of the Church that disseminated doctrines aligning the laity more closely with the Church; among those doctrines were harmful ones at the same time that, taken together,

resulted in a corrupt and corrupting monetization. Yet, despite its monetization, Purgatory would continue to abide throughout the Reformation. For despite the evidence of indulgence sales, and despite the fact that the system and practice of monetization eroded the very foundation of justice upon which it was established, Purgatory nevertheless functions as answer to the pressing questions of death and the afterlife that continue to burn hot in the minds of the living.

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