

which the Greek and Latin churches were united, teaches that these words are to be understood of the fires of Purgatory, and so do all the Greek and Latin Fathers, and the constant tradition of the church. In fact, the unbroken tradition of the Catholic Church, and of all the Christian ages down to the sixteenth century, testifies that a belief in a middle state of purgatorial expiation in the next life was a doctrine of Christian faith firmly, constantly and universally held and acted upon. The east and west, the north and south—in other words, the universal Church of Christ, from the earliest ages downwards, held and taught the doctrine of purgatory and the farther and co-relative doctrine that the souls therein detained could be assisted, relieved and freed by prayers, almsdeeds, and by the unbloody sacrifice of the altar. Hence, the Council of Trent, basing its teaching on the word of God and the unanimous tradition of the Christian ages, defined and decreed that “there is a Purgatory, and that the souls there detained are helped by the suffrages of the faithful, but chiefly by the acceptable sacrifice of the altar.” And this brings us to the consoling doctrine that those prisoners of hope may be helped, relieved and freed from their purgatorial prison by our prayers, almsdeeds and other good works, but chiefly by the holy sacrifice of the mass. No doctrine of our holy religion has more undeniable proofs of its antiquity than this of the duty of praying for the dead in Christ, and the benefits they derive from this holy practice. No proof of the existence of a middle state could be more convincing than this of the unfailling tradition and practice of the Church. Of what use, without the existence of a middle state, could be prayers for the dead? They could be of no use to the just in heaven, for as St. Augustine says, “he who prays for a martyr does injury to the martyr;” of none to the damned, for out of hell there is no redemption. Tertullian, who lived in the age next to that of the apostles, speaking of a pious widow, says: “She prays for the soul of her husband, and begs refreshment for him.” St. Cyprian, in