

Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory

Sometime between AD 1306 and AD 1321, the Italian Dante Alighieri wrote an epic poem called the *Divine Comedy*. Whether you have read the *Divine Comedy* or not, its images are most likely the ones that come to mind when you think of the Christian conceptions of the afterlife.

Divided into three major sections called canticas, the poem describes the journey of Dante (the protagonist in the work) through Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven. Thirty-three cantos comprise each cantica; thus when the introductory canto is included, the entire poem consists of one hundred cantos.

The plot of this narrative poem begins on Holy Thursday evening and continues through Wednesday of Easter week in the year 1300, when Dante was thirty-five years old. It is written in the first person, so the reader can easily relate to it as an allegory—that is, a story whose characters, events, and objects have symbolic meanings beyond their literal meanings. For fourteenth-century hearers, a comedy was a story with a happy ending. In the case of the *Divine Comedy*, the happy ending is human redemption and salvation, which explains its Holy Week setting.

The purpose of this essay is not to explicate the *Divine Comedy* but rather to survey the development of Christian conceptions of Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven. However, the imagery and literary expressions of the *Divine Comedy* help to capture the richness and complexity of Christian beliefs about the afterlife.

Hell

In the *Inferno*, the first cantica of the *Divine Comedy*, Dante finds himself lost in a dark forest at the entrance to Hades (the underworld) on the eve of Good Friday. There he is assailed by three beasts that seem to represent three categories of sin: self-indulgence, violence, and fraud or maliciousness. Unable to find his way toward salvation, he despairs that he is falling into a place “where the sun is silent” (1.60).¹ Eventually Dante is rescued by the classical poet Virgil, whom Dante greatly admired, and they make their way through the underworld, of which Virgil wrote in his *Aeneid*. As they descend through nine circles of Hell, they see souls suffering consequences that are appropriate to their specific sins. In all its gore, this cantica is an allegory for humanity’s experience of the horrid reality of sin.

The English word *hell* translates the Hebrew term *Sheol*, meaning “place for the departed,” and the Hebrew and Greek terms *Gehenna*, referring to the Valley of Hinnom. Although the actual location of this valley is unknown, it is usually associated with a wadi that runs south and southwest of Jerusalem (see Joshua 15:8, 18:16). In the Old Testament, this wadi was a place of human sacrifice and idol worship (see 2 Chronicles 28:3, 33:6; 2 Kings 16:3, 21:6, 23:10–12; Jer 7:31, 19:2–6). In later Jewish literature, the accursed valley became a place of punishment for the wicked:

Then said I: “For what object is this blessed land, which is entirely filled with trees, and this accursed valley between?” Then Uriel, one of the holy angels who was with me, answered and said: “This accursed valley is for those who are accursed for ever: Here shall all the accursed be gathered together who utter with their lips against the Lord unseemly words and of His glory speak hard things. Here shall they be gathered together, and here shall be their place of judgement. In the last days there shall be upon them the spectacle of righteous

¹ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, translator. *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, Charles Welsh, editor. New York: Davoe Press, 1909. www.everypoet.com/archive/poetry/dante.



judgement in the presence of the righteous for ever: here shall the merciful bless the Lord of glory, the Eternal King.” (Ethiopian Enoch 27:1–4)²

The allusion to Gehenna as a fiery pit or a valley of eternal punishment for the wicked is also found in the New Testament, especially in the Gospel of Matthew. See, for example, Jesus’ denunciation of the Pharisees: “You serpents, you brood of vipers, how can you flee from the judgment of Gehenna?” (Matthew 23:33; cf. Matt 5:22, 29–30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15; Mark 9:43–47; Luke 12:5; James 3:6). In the Book of Revelation, however, the place of eternal destruction is described as a “lake of fire,” in which the dragon, its beasts, and all who were associated with them are destroyed, never to return, and even death and Hades are destroyed (19:20).

In the Scholastic period, debate about the nature of Hell focused on the type of sin that might merit a place in Hell and the sort of punishment that each type of sin incurs. Thomas Aquinas provides a well-represented response in his *Summa Theologica*. His question is whether sin incurs a debt of punishment infinite in quantity:

I answer that, punishment is proportionate to sin. Now sin comprises two things. First, there is the turning away from the immutable good, which is infinite, wherefore, in this respect, sin is infinite. Secondly, there is the inordinate turning to mutable good. In this respect sin is finite, both because the mutable good itself is finite, and because the movement of turning towards it is finite, since the acts of a creature cannot be infinite. Accordingly, in so far as sin consists in turning away from something, its corresponding punishment is the “pain of loss,” which also is infinite, because it is the loss of the infinite good, i.e. God. But in so far as sin turns inordinately to something, its corresponding punishment is the “pain of sense,” which is also finite. (I.II.87.4)³

Arguing that the punishment must be proportionate to the sin, Thomas identifies mortal sin (i.e., sin that results in death) as deliberately turning away from perfect and unchangeable good, which, of course, is God. (Turning toward a lesser good without deliberately rejecting God is a lesser sin.) Appropriate to the crime, the punishment is self-inflicted: it consists of experiencing, in an infinitely intense way, “the pain of loss” (*poena damni*) that comes from turning against the utterly benevolent One, the Source of all life, and Goodness itself. This permanent loss of relationship with God and the suffering such loss incurs were thought to be accompanied by the “pain of sense” (*poena sensus*), which is the eternal fire. This is Hell for the Scholastics.

The Scholastics also wrestled with questions pertaining to when eternal punishment and reward would take place (see, for example, Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa*, Supplement, question 69, article 2). Would it begin immediately after death? or at some later time, if indeed we can even speak about the passage of time after death? The doctrine of particular judgment says that at the moment of death, a person no longer is capable of accepting or rejecting God’s grace and no longer has the opportunity to repent. Therefore that person immediately experiences whatever fate he or she deserves: whether that be the “pain of loss” and the “pain of sense” that is Hell; the blessed peace of Heaven; or the purification and promised peace

² R. H. Charles, translator. *The Book of Enoch*. Introduction by W. O. E. Oesterley. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1917.

³ *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Second and Revised Edition, 1920. Literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Online Edition. Copyright © 2008 by Kevin Knight. www.newadvent.org/summa/2087.htm.



that is Purgatory (see below). The related doctrine of the general judgment says that—at some as-yet-unknown time and in some way associated with the return of the glorious Christ—God will judge all of the living and dead. They will be eternally confined to Hell or eternally rewarded with heavenly bliss, according to their deeds, and God will manifest himself as triumphant over all of the forces of evil in the world. Thus the general judgment is a manifestation of God’s sovereignty and justice. This is the message of the New Testament book of Revelation, as well.

Today the basic doctrines of the Catholic Church on the particular and general judgments and on Hell are largely unchanged. However, in contemporary theology these doctrines tend not to be interpreted so much on the basis of place and time as on the reality of one’s relationship with God and with the rest of God’s creatures. This shift in focus can be seen, for example, in the section on Hell in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

We cannot be united with God unless we freely choose to love him. But we cannot love God if we sin gravely against him, against our neighbor or against ourselves: . . . Our Lord warns us that we shall be separated from him if we fail to meet the serious needs of the poor and the little ones who are his brethren (cf. Matthew 25:31–46). To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God’s merciful love means remaining separated from him for ever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called “hell.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1033)

The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, “eternal fire.”⁴ The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1035)

In simple terms, the *Catechism* says that Hell is a self-inflicted judgment insofar as it is constituted by the infinitely painful realization that one has deliberately and firmly chosen to turn away from God’s love. And can a person say that he loves God but hate his neighbor? Absolutely not. Love for God must be shown by love-in-action for one’s neighbor.

Purgatory

In the *Purgatorio*, the second cantica of the *Divine Comedy*, Dante emerges from Hell, still accompanied by his guide, Virgil. They arrive at the shore of Purgatory, which is on an island in the southern hemisphere. They arrive on Easter Sunday and begin to ascend the Mountain of Purgatory along seven terraces: pride, envy, wrath, sloth, avarice and extravagance, gluttony, and lust. Before they begin, however, in the space between the shore and the base of the mountain, they witness the arrival of souls, accompanied by angels, who are singing, “When Israel came forth from Egypt” (Psalm 114:1). This is an allegory of the human soul undergoing purification so that it can enter finally into paradise. Thus, at the top

⁴ Cf. Denzinger Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum* (1965) 76; 409; 411; 801; 858; 1002; 1351; 1575; Paul VI; *Solemn Profession of Faith: Credo of the People of God* §12. www.scborromeo.org/ccc/p123a12.htm



of the mountain, Dante is met by his friend Beatrice, who has come down from Heaven to encourage him to confess his sins so that he can be healed and enjoy salvation.

The Old Testament text that forms the basis of Christian teachings about purgatory and prayer for the dead is found in the Second Book of Maccabees (see 12:39–45). A deuterocanonical book, or an apocryphal book as Protestants understand it, the Second Book of Maccabees deals with part of the story of Judas Maccabeus, his defeat of the army of Seleucus IV, and the subsequent miracle of the oil for the Temple lamps that is commemorated in the Jewish feast of Hanukkah. Its major theme: God is just in rewarding his faithful people and in punishing the wicked. In Second Maccabees 12:39–45, the narrator describes how Judas and his army went to bury some of their soldiers who were killed in battle and discovered that the dead soldiers were wearing amulets associated with a pagan idol. Recognizing that God was just in taking the soldiers' lives, they prayed that "the sinful deed might be fully blotted out" (2 Maccabees 12:42) and took up a collection so that an expiatory sacrifice could be offered in Jerusalem for them.

The author of Second Maccabees explains Judas' actions on behalf of his deceased soldiers in this way:

In doing this he acted in a very excellent and noble way, inasmuch as he had the resurrection of the dead in view; for if he were not expecting the fallen to rise again, it would have been useless and foolish to pray for them in death. But if he did this with a view to the splendid reward that awaits those who had gone to rest in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Thus he made atonement for the death that they might be freed from this sin. (12:43–46)

Implied in these comments are the beliefs that at least some of the dead can be healed of the consequences of their sin by the intercessory prayer of the living and that expiation can be made for certain sins of otherwise good people who, in turn, will eventually be allowed to enjoy the rewards of the righteous. This text also forms the foundation for belief in a place or state of being for the deceased, in which they would wait for the purification of their relationship with God.

Belief in Purgatory as an opportunity for the deceased to complete the punishment due to sin or be healed of the consequences of sin through the intercessory prayers of the living appears to have been widely accepted in the early Church. Perhaps the most striking example can be found in the *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity* (d. AD 203), in which Perpetua describes how she became aware, through a vision, of the continued suffering of her deceased brother in some dark and otherworldly place:

I beheld Dinocrates coming forth from a dark place, where were many others also; being both hot and thirsty, his raiment foul, his color pale; and the wound on his face which he had when he died. This Dinocrates had been my brother in the flesh, seven years old, who being diseased with ulcers of the face had come to a horrible death, so that his death was abominated of all men. For him therefore I had made my prayer; and between him and me was a great gulf, so that either might not go to the other. There was moreover, in the same place where Dinocrates was, a font full of water, having its edge higher than was the boy's



stature; and Dinocrates stretched up as though to drink. I was sorry that the font had water in it, and yet for the height of the edge he might not drink.⁵

Clearly this place that Perpetua envisioned is not Hell, given the presence of the font of water, a symbol of salvation. Because Perpetua herself was in prison and about to be martyred for her Christian faith, she was encouraged to pray for her brother. This is the vision she received as a result:

I saw that place which I had before seen, and Dinocrates clean of body, finely clothed, in comfort; and the font I had seen before, the edge of it being drawn to the boy's navel; and he drew water thence which flowed without ceasing. And on the edge was a golden cup full of water; and Dinocrates came up and began to drink therefrom; which cup failed not. And being satisfied he departed away from the water and began to play as children will, joyfully. And I awoke. Then I understood that he was translated from his pains.⁶

Dinocrates' passage from Purgatory to heavenly bliss is illustrated by the fact that his illness was healed, he was no longer thirsty or suffering pain, and he was now able to play and be joyful as children should be. All this came about because of Perpetua's prayer on behalf of her deceased brother.

Although Perpetua's visions concerning her brother Dinocrates rank among the more vivid Christian expositions on praying for the dead, many more such statements occur in the history of the early Church. For example, John Chrysostom (c. 347–407), in his *Homily 41 on First Corinthians*, argues that Christians would not be praying for the dead during their Eucharistic liturgies if God did not hear those prayers and if the dead did not receive some benefit from them, because Christians pray, "For all that have fallen asleep in Christ, and for those who perform commemorations in their behalf," under the ordinance of the Holy Spirit.⁷

Despite such a long tradition of praying for the dead, it was not until sometime in the eleventh century that people began to use the word *purgatory* to designate this intermediate state where the deceased awaited their full purification. It was available to those who had repented of their sins before death but had not completed the punishment due to those sins. The First Council of Lyons (1254) declared that those who had not been in the state of mortal sin (i.e., a serious and deliberate turning away from God) and who had received a penance (i.e., punishment) for minor sins but died before the penance was performed could expect to be cleansed of their sin after death and be helped by the prayers of the church of the living. This "place" of purgation, the bishops declared, should be called Purgatory.

Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–1274) is usually credited with working out the doctrine of purgatory, but in fact he died before he was able to complete that part of the *Summa Theologica*. Regardless, the work that has been passed on to us in the *Summa* is representative of scholastic thinking about purgatory:

Gregory of Nyssa [De iis qui in fide dormiunt] says: "If one who loves and believes in Christ" has failed to wash away his sins in this life, "he is set free after death by the fire of Purgatory." Therefore there remains some kind of cleansing after this life. . . . For if the debt of punishment is not paid in full after the stain of sin has been washed away by contrition, nor

⁵ W. H. Shewring, translator. *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* (London: 1931), §7. Modernized for the *Internet Medieval Sourcebook*, edited by Paul Halsall. www.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook.html.

⁶ From W. H. Shewring, translator. *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*, §8 (London: 1931). Modernized for the *Internet Medieval Sourcebook*. Paul Halsall, ed. <<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook.html>>

⁷ John Chrysostom, *Homily 41 on First Corinthians*. Translated by Talbot W. Chambers. From *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, Vol. 12. Edited by Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1889.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. www.newadvent.org/fathers/220141.htm.



again are venial sins always removed when mortal sins are remitted, and if justice demands that sin be set in order by due punishment, it follows that one who after contrition for his fault and after being absolved, dies before making due satisfaction, is punished after this life. Wherefore those who deny Purgatory speak against the justice of God: for which reason such a statement is erroneous and contrary to faith. Hence Gregory of Nyssa, after the words quoted above, adds: “This we preach, holding to the teaching of truth, and this is our belief; this the universal Church holds, by praying for the dead that they may be loosed from sins.” This cannot be understood except as referring to Purgatory: and whosoever resists the authority of the Church, incurs the note of heresy. (*Summa*, Supplement 12.1)⁸

Two points are critical to the *Summa*'s argument in support of the existence of Purgatory. First, God is just. If the wiping away of sin requires that punishment for sin be paid, and if someone repents of his or her sin but dies before completing the punishment, then God's justice requires that cleansing be allowed to take place after death. Second, Tradition (supported by the Sacred Scriptures) has always held that, through the Eucharistic prayer of the Church and the prayers of individuals, the deceased may be released from their sins. The intermediate state in which the deceased await this purification is what Catholic Christians call Purgatory.

The doctrine of Purgatory suffered significant challenges in the Middle Ages because of abuses associated with the granting of indulgences: preachers who made false claims about the scope of particular indulgences, hawkers and scam artists who went around selling indulgences for profit to simple folk, people who made false claims about their authority to issue indulgences, and kings who were allowed to take from the alms given for the poor to support their armies during the crusades. An indulgence is a full or partial remission of the punishment due to sin, after the penitent has confessed, sought absolution, and met certain other requirements of the indulgence, usually involving prayer and good works. Although the Church made several attempts to control these abuses, they reached a crescendo after 1517, when Pope Leo X offered indulgences to people who made contributions to rebuild Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome. When Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses on the door of the Wittenberg Church, and inadvertently launched the Protestant Reformation, he was protesting these abuses. The Council of Trent (1545–1563), which was partly a response to the Protestant Reformation and partly a reform council in itself, placed new restrictions on the granting of indulgences and reaffirmed the doctrine of Purgatory that was first made official at the First Council of Lyons.

The Second Vatican Council also wrote about Purgatory and praying for the dead, but it did so by drawing on other important threads of the Tradition. In *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium, 1964)*, nos. 49–50, the Council Fathers wrote about the Church as the communion of the whole Body of Christ. They noted that the Church is established more firmly in holiness because of those who are already united with Christ in Heaven and that we are all strengthened by their intercessory prayer. With full recognition that we stand together as one body in Christ, they remind us of the Church's tradition of praying for the dead:

Fully conscious of this communion of the whole Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, the pilgrim Church from the very first ages of the Christian religion has cultivated with great piety the

⁸ *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Second and Revised Edition, 1920. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Online Edition Copyright © 2008 by Kevin Knight. www.newadvent.org/summa/7001.htm.



memory of the dead, and “because it is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins,” also offers suffrages for them.⁹

And so, even as the Church has traversed far and wide on its pilgrim journey in the two millennia since its founding, it has not gone far from its first insights about the efficacy of praying for the dead. It is a good and holy thing.

Heaven

In the *Paradiso*, the third cantica of the *Divine Comedy*, Dante is accompanied by his friend Beatrice from the top of the Mount of Purgatory into the atmosphere, through the nine spheres of Heaven, and finally into the Empyrean, where God dwells. For Dante, the nine spheres of Heaven are associated with the hierarchy of angels and the heavenly bodies—the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the Fixed Stars, and the Primum Mobile (“the first moved” sphere; that is, the first moved by God).

The first three spheres are still under the shadow of the earth, so they are associated with imperfect or incomplete versions of the virtues of fortitude, justice, and temperance. In the fourth sphere, the Sun, Dante encounters twelve examples of prudence, identified as the souls of the wise, including Thomas Aquinas, Albertus Magnus, Solomon, and Bede. In the fifth sphere, Mars, he meets the warriors of the faith: martyrs who gave their lives with genuine fortitude. In the sixth sphere, Jupiter, Dante encounters the just rulers of the earth, who tell of God’s justice. In the seventh sphere, Saturn, Dante talks with Peter Damian about monasticism and the state of the Church. In the eighth sphere, the Fixed Stars, Dante is questioned about his understanding of faith, hope, and love. In the ninth sphere, the Primum Mobile, the home of angels, Dante sees God as a bright light surrounded by nine circles of angels. Finally, Dante leaves the physical realm and enters the Empyrean, the abode of God.

As they were moving through the latter spheres of Heaven, Dante noticed that Beatrice was becoming more and more beautiful, and now Dante himself is enveloped in light, making him ready to see God. After seeing an enormous rose, whose petals comprise God’s faithful enthroned in Heaven, he is guided by Bernard of Clairvaux to the last stage of his journey. This is an allegory of the soul’s ascent to God.

Dante describes his vision of God as three circles of threefold color having one dimension, appearing within the luminous subsistence of a Great High Light (*Paradiso*, Canto XXXIII.115–120). He also sees an image in the midst of the circles, which he presumes to be Christ, and he struggles with his mind to understand how it can be human and divine (*Paradiso*, Canto XXXIII.124–138). At that moment Dante has his face-to-face encounter with God, in which finally his will and desire become fully aligned with God’s love. He describes it as follows:

But my own wings were not enough for this,
Had it not been that then my mind there smote
A flash of lightning, wherein came its wish.
Here vigour failed the lofty fantasy:
But now was turning my desire and will,
Even as a wheel that equally is moved,
The Love which moves the sun and the other stars. (*Paradiso*, Canto XXXIII.139–142)

⁹ www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html



In the Old Testament, the word *heaven* can refer to both the physical heavens (the sky) and the place where God was thought to live, above the heavens. Recall, for example, the story of Jacob's encounter with the Lord at Bethel, where he saw a ladder set up with its top reaching to Heaven and angels ascending and descending on it, and how God suddenly stood before him (see Genesis 28:12–13). Recall, also, the story about God's descent to the top of Mount Sinai, where God gave Moses the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19:16–20:17).

Similarly, in the New Testament, when the risen Christ departed this world, Luke—the evangelist and author of Acts of the Apostles—says he was carried up into Heaven as the apostles looked up to the sky (see Luke 24:51, Acts of the Apostles 1:9–11). Some New Testament texts also suggest knowledge of a multi-tiered structure of the Heavens not unlike that found among other Hellenistic texts. For example, in his Second Letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes about his mystical experience, saying that he was caught up into the third Heaven (see 12:2–4).

In Jewish religious literature, a few texts describe humans going up into Heaven. Elijah and Enoch are perhaps the most famous. In Genesis it is said that Enoch “walked with God” and God took him (Gen 5:24). The non-canonical Books of Enoch describe the visions that Enoch received while in the heavenly realms. In Second Kings, Elijah was taken up in a fiery chariot and “went up to heaven in a whirlwind” (2:11). Finally, the book of Daniel describes a scene of triumph in which the deceased wise ones awake from death and “shine brightly / like the splendor of the firmament” and “like the stars forever” (12:2–3), suggesting that they now reside in the heavens. But Christians believe that all God's elect will one day dwell with Christ in Heaven.

What, then, is Heaven like? Even the form of the question is appropriate here, because we first have to acknowledge that, like our language for God, all descriptions of Heaven are made by analogy. Theologians can ask what Heaven is *like*, but they cannot say what heaven *is*. Theologians ponder questions like whether and when souls are reunited with their bodies in Heaven, or what the reward of the redeemed will be like—but in fact we cannot know. The only thing about which theologians are in relative agreement is that the redeemed will somehow see or know God face-to-face. This is called the beatific vision. In his encyclical entitled *Benedictus Deus (On the Beatific Vision of God)*, Pope Benedict XII (1336) defines the doctrine in terms of two ways of seeing:

Since the passion and death of the Lord Jesus Christ, these souls have seen and see the divine essence with an intuitive vision and even face to face, without the mediation of any creature by way of object of vision; rather the divine essence immediately manifests itself to them, plainly, clearly and openly, and in this vision they enjoy the divine essence. Moreover, by this vision and enjoyment the souls of those who have already died are truly blessed and have eternal life and rest.¹⁰

But the beatific vision is not simply about seeing God, as if humans were even capable of seeing God. Benedict XII indicates that Heaven was opened to the redeemed because of the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. For Christians, then, entering into Heaven is about enjoying full, unmediated communion with God and all those who are one with God, made possible because Jesus triumphed over sin and death through his own death and Resurrection. This communion is like the experience that Dante wrote about in

¹⁰ Cited in J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*. New York: Alba House, 1990. www.papalencyclicals.net/Ben12/B12bdeus.html.



the *Divine Comedy*: he entered the Empyrean, above the nine spheres of Heaven, and realized that his will and desire had become fully aligned with God's love. No human words can describe it. We must simply stand in awe!

[Catherine Cory, PhD](#)

[Cory is associate professor of theology at the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minnesota.](#)

