

Does Hell Exist?

by [Kenneth Francis](#) (October 2018)



Hölle der Vögel, Max Beckmann, 1937-38

Some unfairly say it's a place filled with depraved, narcissistic, vile, perverted, vulgar, noisy, egotistical, shallow, sex-obsessed, morally sick, drunken, drug-addled, greedy scoundrels. No, it's not your local neighbourhood, it's Hell. In most religions, Hell is a place of suffering in the afterlife. In Christianity, it is separation from God for eternity.

But sophisticated Christians don't believe in Hell by a leap of blind faith. [First Thessalonians \(5:21-22\)](#) states it is the responsibility of every Christian to be discerning: "But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil." And the apostle John says: "Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" ([1 John 4:1](#)). For the believer in the New Testament, both discernment and rationality are required.

Pope Francis sometimes mentions Hell and the devil but it's never clear what his true belief is on such matters. Greeting journalists recently on his way to Lithuania, he received a book on photography which had a picture of John Paul 2nd on the cover. Francis said that the late pope was a saint but "I am the devil." What kind of pope would say such a thing, even as a jab against his traditional Catholic followers who crave authentic, doctrinaire popes? And what about his views on the existence of Hell?

Francis's alleged recent quote that Hell does not exist came as a major shock to Gospel-believing Christians who hold sacred the Words of Jesus, who mentioned Hell many times in the New Testament. The pope's alleged comments were last May expressed in a conversation with his atheist friend, Eugenio Scalfari, the founder of the publication, *La Repubblica*. However, the Press Office of the Holy See issued the following statement regarding the piece that appeared in *La Repubblica*, under its founder's by-line:

"The Holy Father recently received the founder of the daily La

Repubblica in a private meeting on the occasion of Easter, without, however, releasing any interview. Everything reported by the author in [Thursday's] article is the fruit of his own reconstruction, in which the verbatim words pronounced by the Pope are not quoted. No direct report of speech, therefore, may be considered a faithful transcription of the words of the Holy Father."

Whether the Pope's quote is true or false is the subject of another essay on his vagueness (Matthew 5:37) and his controversial, seemingly contradictory, comments on theology. As for Hell: the concept of this fiery place became a fairly terrifying prospect since AD 80/100, when John wrote about a burning lake, which pagans and emperors were hurled into. And there are other writings on Hell in literature before *Dante's Inferno*, despite the topic being fairly taboo over the past 40 years in both church sermons and liberal Christian circles.

President of Theopolis Institute, Peter J. Leithart, writing in *First Things*, wrote: "Revelation goes a step beyond Dante. Dante recognized that hell is a 'creation of primal love.' Revelation hints that hell is *identical* to primal love, as experienced by sinners who, in C. S. Lewis's words, prefer self-righteousness to the righteousness of God and 'the deformed sense of satisfaction from holding on to bitterness, resentment, and hurt' to the joys at God's right hand. It's a line of meditation that Pope Francis might wish to revisit before his next interview."

One wonders if Pope Francis regularly consults Scripture before making comments. But what does Scripture actually say about Hell and does it really exist?

For if it does exist, it is literally the most terrifying concept imaginable, as there is no end to suffering.

In the 1976 Fred Schepisi movie, 'The Devil's Playground', the writer Tom Keneally plays Fr Marshall, a visiting priest to a Catholic seminary. To a packed congregation of priests and schoolboys, Fr Marshall gives a fire-and-brimstone sermon on the screams and torment of eternal souls suffering in Hell for ever more. He says: "And what does that for ever more mean? Imagine a sphere of metal vast as the sun. Imagine that once every 10,000 years a sparrow should visit it and brush it with its wings. When that ball had been worn to nothing, we would still be in Hell; we would still be the howling damned, who do not see God's face."

In His parables, Jesus speaks of Hell as a place of outer darkness (Matt. 8:12); a fiery furnace where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 25:41); and eternal punishment (Matt. 25:46). "For many are invited, but few are chosen." (Matt 22:14) "You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?" "You belong to your father, the devil." (John 8:44) John in Revelation speaks of a bottomless pit (9:1); a huge furnace (9:2); fire and burning sulphur (14:10); no relief day or night (14:11); the fiery lake of burning sulphur (21:8); and the second death (21:8).

A fiery place of burning sulphur was also mentioned in one of the strangest (alleged?) events that happened in the history of Mankind: the Marian Apparitions of Fatima (1917) when Our Lady appeared to three peasant children. According to one of the children, Lucia, they were shown a vision of Hell. She

describes a fiery place of suffering, where the spirits of human beings were being tormented by dark, transparent demon-like figures, resembling grotesque animals.

“That vision only lasted for a moment, thanks to our good Heavenly Mother, Who at the first apparition had promised to take us to Heaven. Without that, I think that we would have died of terror and fear,” wrote Lucia.

For anyone who wants to doubt or ridicule this apparition, never forget that the prophecies, to date, all came true. The children were also prepared to die for their account of the story when threatened by the then secular, Portuguese authorities. It's also strange that Our Lady should show such details of Hell to three children.

The Catholic theologian, Peter Kreeft, says that Jesus does not tell us much detail about hell. He tells us that it exists, that it's horrible, that any man can go there. “Judas seems to be one, for Jesus says of him, ‘It would have been good for that man if he had not been born’.” Professor Kreeft adds that if no one goes to hell, it would seem to be inexcusable for Jesus to give us so many fearful warnings about it.

But he does not give us population statistics. He says: “To his disciples' question ‘Are many saved?’ he does not answer with estimates but with a forceful appeal to the will: ‘Strive to enter in.’ Jesus says the way to hell is broad and many find it and that the way to heaven is narrow and few find it.”

The 'Encyclopaedia America' describes Hell as "the abode of evil spirits; the infernal regions . . . whither lost and condemned souls go after death to suffer indescribable torments and eternal punishment . . . Some have thought of it as the place created by the Deity, where He punishes with inconceivable severity, and through all eternity, the souls of those who through unbelief or through the worship of false gods have angered Him. It is the place of divine revenge, untempered, never ending."

The idea of God seeking revenge or allowing sinners to suffer in Hell is seldom heard from the pulpit because it causes offence to politically correct Catholics. Many Christian churches teach annihilationism and universalism which get rid of Hell in different ways. Universalism holds that everyone is going to Heaven regardless of what they do or believe. But St Augustine of Hippo said: "If you believe what you like in the Gospel, and reject what you don't like, it is not the Gospel you believe, but yourself."

Pope John Paul II said Hell is the state of those who freely and definitively separate themselves from God, the source of all life and joy. And before recently standing down as pope, Benedict XVI said that Hell "really exists and is eternal, even if nobody talks about it anymore"

The Christian philosopher, J.P. Moreland, says of Hell: "The pain that's suffered will be due to the sorrow from the final, ultimate, unending banishment from God, His kingdom, and the good life for which we were created in the first place. People in Hell will deeply grieve for all they've lost."

Moreland also maintains Hell is not a place of fire because how can a place be “outer darkness” and “eternal fire” if fire would light things up? This image in Scripture is a symbol of God’s judgment. And in His judgment, God does not send anyone to Hell: we send ourselves there by rejecting God. In other words, God will not force us against our will to love Him for ever more.

The metaphorical ‘gnashing of teeth’ in Hell will result in overwhelming fury and loss at what the damned have chosen. The Bible says: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not *perish*, but have everlasting life.”

But the concept of everlasting life in Heaven can also spook some hardboiled atheists. One often hears such people say eternity with God would be boring whereas the music in Hell would be a lot better—not to mention meeting all of one’s dead, roguish friends. Such infantile statements are theologically illiterate and it’s worth correcting them: If eternity with God is boring, then it’s not Heaven or bliss; as for ‘great music’ and old friends in Hell: such notions are equally absurd. Hell is void of the stuff of earthly delights and is more likely to contain old enemies who’ll torment one who ends up there for ever more.

But whatever Hell is or is not, contemporary PC clerics refuse to ‘offend’ and use buzz words like ‘Love Wins’ or the out-of-context use of, ‘Who am I to judge?; yet just saying there is no God, so saying there is no Hell, will make no difference to the truth of the matter. For Christians, Hell is a reality because Jesus says so and denying it is denying the Truth of Scripture. But we live in what many believe in an age were

harsh theological words are deemed old-fashioned and 'judgmental'. Worldly, guilty pleasures are a major temptation for us mortal beings and many will seek sinful acts, thus they block out the prospect of the existence of Hell.

In such a world, for every moment of sadness or heartbreak, there is an end to the suffering. The same applies for every headache, toothache, or unbearable physical or spiritual pain. But the duration in Hell goes on for evermore. It may seem like it's not loving to teach this and that it's spiritually destructive. But the God of Christianity *is* fair and loving and will grant a separation for all those who reject Him.

God will not force someone to love Him. All that are in Hell, freely chose it by rejecting God. Because that is what Hell is: A rejection of Christ who offers us The Way, The Truth, and Everlasting Life. Finally, is there any escape from Hell; an exit option? The answer is no, and here's why: someone in Hell who reaches out to God because of his or her desperation of eternal suffering is not doing it genuinely for the love of God, but for one's own self-preservation and desire for a better comfort zone. The same applies to living beings on earth who *solely* and self-centeredly accept Christ as their Saviour as a kind of fire-insurance 'Plan B' beyond the grave. And to repeat: for those atheists who fear an eternity in Heaven as something boring and undesirable, they are missing the point. Heaven by its definition is bliss; for if it were anything less than bliss then it is not Heaven, but—yes, you've guessed it—Hell.

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