

Is there a hell?

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Is there a hell?

No... and yet at the second thought – yes... But it is not what we are told that it is.

The idea we are by the Church fed with from childhood is that of eternal condemnation in some dark and nasty place, and no one knows where and how. This is a millennia old and very popular tool to manipulate us and brainwash our minds with fear. The fear that we would have to go to hell, unless we stick to the Church and support it: “Outside no salvation”... outside of the Church.

This is blatantly absurd, for several reasons:

1. If there would really be an *eternal* condemnation, it would burst all logic as completely useless. A waist of creation energy and timelessness to keep this going on with no end and with absolutely no result for anyone. The least for those who are in that condemnation without the slightest chance to ever get out of it.
2. But if it is relatively “eternal” only in the sense that it would last to the end of the present aeon, what would then happen at the end of it? Some doctrines claim that such souls would then destroyed and cease to exist. So why, then, not destroy them in the first place and save all the useless effort of keeping them in a nearly endless state of condemnation?
3. And why are the souls supposed to be there? Because they have *sinned*. However that sin is defined, it could only last less than the duration of a physical lifetime, say a few decades. The relation of some decades to *eternity* is completely contradictory to all concepts of justice. Who has “sinned” maybe 30 years would be punished *eternally*. This is *infinitely* far from any concept of justice! It is nothing else but pure and evil *revenge*! And a revenge that helps no one. The punished has no chance to better himself, since he will never ever get out of that state.
4. Some doctrines claim that at a final judgment after a long and almost eternal time in condemnation, a few souls could, after all, be saved. Then there would definitely be a shorter way for an almighty God! Rather than wasting his effort on keeping souls condemned up to that final judgment.
5. What, then, is sin? The doctrine of the Church already regards the one as a sinner who does not accept Jesus (and then the Church often commits real sins against him...). Hence, who lives under conditions in which he has no chance to hear the Gospel would be condemned to hell. And by this “rule” also all the multibillions who lived before Jesus was born. Hell would be a place that is overpopulated up to bursting and heaven would, comparatively, have only a “handful” of souls... The situation seems to be similar in Islam. Beyond that, “sin” is a very subjective and flexible concept that is adapted to the aims of rulers and Church authorities.

The common concept of hell

What then is in spite of all this, the common concept of hell? According to [Wikipedia](#):

“In many mythological, folklore and religious traditions, hell is a place of eternal torture and punishment in an afterlife, often after resurrection. Religions with a linear divine history often depict

hell as endless. Religions with a cyclic history often depict a hell as an intermediary period between incarnations. ... Other traditions, which do not conceive of the afterlife as a place of punishment or reward, merely describe hell as an abode of the dead, a neutral place located under the surface of Earth ... Modern understandings of hells often depict them abstractly, as a state of loss rather than as fiery torture literally underground...”

In Judaism we have the concept of *She'ol* (Hebrew שְׁאוֹל *Š'ól*), translated as “grave”, “pit”, or “abode of the dead”, a place of darkness to which all the dead go, both the righteous and the unrighteous, regardless of the moral choices made in life, a place of stillness and darkness cut off from God ([Wikipedia](#)). Then there is Gehenna as a destination of the wicked. This is different from the more neutral *Sheol*, the abode of the dead: *gehinnom* (Hebrew: גֵּהֶנּוֹם/גְּהִנּוֹם). ([Wikipedia](#).) Gehenna is not Hell, but originally a grave and in later times a sort of purgatory where one is judged based on one’s life’s deeds, or rather, where one becomes fully aware of one’s own shortcomings and negative actions during one’s life. The Kabbalah explains it as a “waiting room” (commonly translated as an “entry way”) for all souls (not just the wicked). The overwhelming majority of rabbinic thought maintains that souls are not in Gehenna forever ([Wikipedia](#)).

The New Testament uses a few different words for what is generally understood as “hell”. In English translations mainly *hell*, the Greek word *hades* and in one passage (II Peter 2:4) some translations use the Greek word *tartarus*. The general understanding, however, is in the latter cases different from the Greek concepts. It appears that the Greek translators of the lost original texts have used words familiar to them, and then modern translations sometimes just “copy” these words.

Here we can go around in circles and discuss various linguistic, historical and other textual aspects, but it would not take us much further. It will be much more interesting to see what the Gnostic Christianity has to say about it. This study scans through some of them without claiming to be complete and could be more profound if much more time could be devoted to it

English translations of Gnostic texts do not use the word *hell*, but *hades*, *abyss*, *chaos* and *outer darkness*. “... the Lord [Jesus] called destruction the ‘the outer darkness’: there is not another outside of it” ([Gospel of Philips](#)). There is, however, no specific “hell” in Gnosticism in same sense as in the doctrine of the Church. It is more a kind of concept, condition or state and less a place, region or some kind of location. And there is no clear indication of an eternal condemnation nor of eventual destruction of souls.

What is the outer darkness?

Creation took place out of light, a light that is the primal energy of the original Creator. There is a kabalistic concept of *tsimtsum* – or *tzimtzum* (צִמְצוּם) – that enlightens the understanding. First, the true creator God was everywhere as light. To leave a space for the creation, God retracted himself so that the light no more was everywhere, but encircled by an empty space, called *challal* (חלל), in which the further steps of creation took place. Thus in that space there were degrees of darkness, becoming darker the further out, until complete darkness. The latter will be “the outer darkness” of the Gnostics. In this originally empty space, the creation of worlds and regions took place, in which spiritual and physical worlds and ultimately, free will can exist, thus filling that space ([Wikipedia](#)). The empty space is called *chaos* in Greek. The word is commonly misunderstood as a complete disorder, but it in fact means “emptiness”, “vast void” ([Wikipedia](#)). This is the *tohu wa bohu* in Gen. 1:2 (תוהו ובוהו) that means the same: complete emptiness that makes room for further creations.

So where, then, is “hell” in this darkness? We may say that it is all of it in grades and shades of hell! Hell would then be something gradual, proceeding from a “soft hell” near the light of God up to a deepest hell in the “outer darkness.” This means that our Earth (and more or less other populated planets) also belongs to “hell”! In the Gnostic world concept, Yaldabaoth = YHWH was assigned to rule over this darkness, and he in turn assigned Belial (Belias) to rule over the darkest part, the “outer darkness.”

“Yaldabaoth united with the thoughtlessness (*aponoia*) within him. He begot ruling authorities (*exousia*), modeling them on the incorruptible realms above. ...The twelfth is Belias, who rules over the very depth of Hades.” ([The Secret Book of John](#) [The Apocryphon of John].)

Jesus’ descent to hell

Tradition has it that Jesus descended to hell after the crucifixion (“[harrowing of hell](#)”). This is in the New Testament indicated in 1 Peter 3:18-20:

“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water...”

This is also mentioned in the apocryphal [Gospel of Nicodemus](#) (also called Acts of Pilate) Part II, according to which Jesus liberated several souls from hell. The authenticity of the part is disputed, since it is missing from certain versions of the text – which, however, could mean that it has been censored from them...

“For the Son of Man clothed himself with their first-fruits; he went down to Hades and performed many mighty works. He raised the dead therein; and the world-rulers of darkness became envious of him, for they did not find sin in him. But he also destroyed their works from among men, so that the lame, the blind, the paralytic, the dumb, (and) the demon-possessed were granted healing. And he walked upon the waters of the sea. For this reason he destroyed his flesh from [...] which he [...]. And he became [...] salvation [...] his death...” ([The Testimony of Truth](#)).

It has been suggested that the “descent to hell” could actually be Jesus’ appearance in *this* world, on the Earth, since the Earth would be a part of “hell”, even if – maybe – on an higher level in it. The quotation above could certainly sustain such a suggestion... After the crucifixion, he may then have descended to lower levels in “hell”...

Is this world a part of hell?

The first indication would be that, in spite of all beauty on this planet and in its humanity, there is a horrible amount of evil. There is so much cruelty and suffering and a principle that goes like a “red thread” through all life on earth is that of *predatorship*. From the lowest animal forms to the highest, the majority are predators and *kill* to feed (and reproduce) themselves. A minority of animals are vegetarians (and preys...). Humans are the worst predators of all, since we to day keep animals in “concentration camps”, intensive and battery livestock farming under torturing conditions and industrial slaughter with total neglect of the suffering that the animals have to go through, only for the business of providing food for profit. Humans also are predators on each other in various ways: from subtle forms of slavery and profiting from others up to killing of individuals and genocidal mass killing in wars.

But then we also have [karma and reincarnation](#)! We are here to learn what it means to do evil. We learn it though karma. If we do evil and cause suffering to others, and if we are too stubborn to realize the wrong that we did and regret it, we have to experience on our own skin the pain that we gave to others. This is not a matter of punishment, but of learning from experience, because then I cannot avoid understanding what I did and will gradually mature to never do such a thing again. But how can I learn that? When I get my karmic lesson, I do not know why and see no connection with my own earlier wrongdoings in lifetimes I have forgotten. This is a common objection since old times, based on a misunderstanding. It is only in my rational mind that I have forgotten and do not see a connection and do not know why. My *soul* knows what my mind does not, and thus in my unconscious self I do know why I have to go through that lesson. In earlier times, the unconscious self was not yet discovered, but since its discovery (that began more than a hundred years ago), we should certainly know better and not repeat old objections only because we do not like the principle.

After death, when we are out of the body and back in the soul state, we look upon the material life we left and do remember: “Oh, that is why I had to go through it! Now I understand.”

Thus, because the “soul school of karma” requires opportunities to be victims where we earlier were perpetrators, there will obviously have to be evil in this world. And the way the world looks still to day there is no lack at all of potentials perpetrators that my soul can find to give me a lesson I need and *unconsciously* seek. Or else we may *unconsciously* seek conditions and an environment where I am likely to have my experience. Or I may even *unconsciously provoke* a potential perpetrator.

But karma can also be good or it can involve the opportunity to do it better this time and repair.

Read more about these things in my book *Reincarnation, Christianity and the Dogma of the Church* (freely downloadable as a PDF for [European paper size A4](#) or [US paper size “letter”](#)).

These aspects also fit to the view that life on this Earth *can* be a (relative) “hell” when we need such experience...

Is this not too much suffering?

Well, yes... in certain ways it is. We as souls sometimes overdo it and take another lesson even though it would not be needed: “Better I have another lesson so that I can really be sure to not do such a thing again.” Such “overkill” results from unconscious feelings of guilt in the soul. (It is, therefore, of specific importance to clear the soul of excessive and no more needed feelings of guilt – that have already done their job – in sessions of regression therapy).

Then there is another aspect. There is much evidence that also souls incarnate on our planet that come from other civilizations in space to have karmic experiences here, which adds to the “volume” of sufferings (where needed) in terms of numbers of individuals. But the main spiritual reason for the population explosion seems to be another. It could be that things are going to change drastically on our planet so that now is – maybe – a last opportunity to incarnate here under circumstances as they used to be and have a corresponding karmic lesson. In the future, this may be quite different. It looks like there may be a kind of rush for souls to take this last opportunity.

The levels of creation according to Origen

There is much in common between the Christian Gnosticism and [Origen’s work](#). In a way, one may see his work as a continuation and completion of certain Gnostic concepts. He wrote about the following levels in the creation:

- 1 The divine world
- 2-10 Nine (3x3) angelic levels (number according to [Dionysios Areopagites](#))
- 11 The material worlds with human beings.
- 12 The world of “demons and adversaries.”

He clearly stated that there is no eternal condemnation and that each and everyone will eventually be redeemed. The two lower levels correspond to Gnostic levels or regions of darkness, the 12th being the “outer darkness”. There is much evidence that Origen considered reincarnation as real, even though the theology of the Church tries to prove the contrary.

The Pistis Sophia

This is an interesting Gnostic text that is considerably later than those discovered in Nag Hammadi. It clearly reflects the Gnostic knowledge about reincarnation. Yet the descriptions of karmic “punishments” therein appear greatly exaggerated in comparison with to-day’s empirical knowledge from a very high number of regression therapy sessions. In this text, there are indications of eventual destruction of certain souls that also does not agree with our modern empirical knowledge.

After-death experiences

There is much empirical knowledge about this to day, mainly from two sources: a large number of near-death experiences (that gave insights “in the other side”) and an even larger number of regression experiences in which the persons relived their death in a past life. The normal after-death ex-

perience is to eventually enter a light world. This is like another dimension, in which everything is made of light that seems to be closer to the divine light than this world is. Many do not go there immediately, but stay some time, ranging from days to years, on the earthly level, before they go on. Only few do not go to the light world at all (this time), but reincarnate out of an earthbound state. Even fewer out of some kind of a limbo state between here and the light world. It seems to be very rare to spend a time between two incarnations in a negative environment that could have certain aspects of a “hell.”

What about the purgatory?

This is an invention by the theology of the Catholic Church that became a dogma as late as 1245 (at the 1st Council of Lyon), obviously to counter the concept of “soul purification through reincarnation” of the Cathars while they were being eradicated by the Church in a most unchristian genocide, and to give people an alternative to it: “There is no reincarnation and the soul can instead be purified in the [purgatory](#).” The Lutheran and Eastern Churches do not share this doctrine and there is no support for it in the Bible. The Gnostics did not even mention it.

Origen had a view that resembles a “purification” after death, but not with a fire of some kind that the soul would have to pass through. What he meant was instead that the insight after death into evil things and injustices committed while in the body “burns like a fire” of shame and guilt in the soul, a “fire of consciousness.” (*Reincarnation, Christianity and the Dogma of the Church*, [A4-version](#), p. 30 and [“letter”-version](#) p. 32).

Why did all this happen?

[Origen](#) was not really a Gnostic, but his writings are in many ways close to Gnosticism and in my view complete it. Regrettably, the Church has destroyed almost all of his maybe around 2000 writings, but some were preserved in a *manipulated* (censored) form as Latin translations. Fragments have been preserved in the writings of others. Emperor Justinian had Origen condemned as heretic at the Council in Constantinople in 553, after a first condemnation in 543 at a local synod in Constantinople. The first [anathema from 543](#) states:

“Whoever maintains that the souls of human beings preexisted, in that they had been beforehand spirits and holy powers, but that they became weary (sated) of divine contemplation, that they made themselves worse, were thus cooled (*psychō*) in the love of God, and for this reason are called souls (*psychē*) and were sent for punishment in[to] bodies – let him be anathema!”

The second [anathema from 553](#) states:

“If anyone shall say that the creation of all reasonable things includes only intelligences without bodies and altogether immaterial, having neither number nor name, so that there is unity between them all by identity of substance, force and energy, and by their union with and knowledge of God the Word; but that no longer desiring the sight of God, they gave themselves over to worse things, each one following his own inclinations, and that they have taken bodies more or less subtle, and have received names, for among the heavenly Powers there is a difference of names as there is also a difference of bodies; and thence some became and are called Cherubim, others Seraphim, and Principalities, and Powers, and Dominations, and Thrones, and Angels, and as many other heavenly orders as there may be: let him be anathema.”

In this view, we all were in the primordial divine light from the beginning. However, many of us wanted to go out from there to have experiences that we could not have in the light world. For that reason, God contracted (see above) and made room for the creation of worlds, where we could have other experiences. What kind of experiences were they? In one way, we wanted more “action” (to use a modern expression related to movies and fiction), since the existence in the light became “dull.” Only light, love and harmony was not enough for us. But we also wanted to live out our free will completely. If one in the light world would harm or hurt another entity, one would immediately feel its pain (or whatever negative feeling), because that is how connected we are there. It would be like an “instant karma.” Therefore, there were things that some of us would have liked to do, but for

that reason could not. We wanted to live such that we could do even what may harm others, if needed to get what we wanted. That is, in a selfish way.

This was not a good idea, but since we do have our free will, God let us have it. However, he changed time so that we would – if we did harm to another – still have to feel the feelings and emotions we cause him or her to have, since we have to learn how wrong that is and overcome selfishness. This occurred with a time delay, usually as karma in another incarnation (sometimes in the same lifetime). Even if the mind no more knows why we have to experience that, the soul does. This way, reincarnation became a kind of “Jacob’s ladder” that would take us back in the light world to at the end finally stay there.

In the new worlds, there came to be a *separation* between entities, especially when incarnated in bodies. In the light world there is no separation, but unity and yet individuality. Therefore, we cannot possibly go to the light world to stay there unless we completely overcome the separation. Karmic lessons and love gradually remove such separation and when we have completely overcome it, we are fit for leaving the circle – or rather upward spiral – of reincarnation. Any rest of separation that expresses itself in our behavior and attitude towards others and how we deal with them is an obstacle to a definitive return to the light world. We can between incarnations only go into its periphery, since we have to again take a new body, until that separation is overcome.

YHWH and reincarnation

Translated quotation from Antonio Orbe: *Cristología Gnóstica*, vol. II, pp. 596-597 (Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid, 1976). Orbe was a Basque Jesuit, professor in Gnosticism and an acknowledged scholar in Gnostic Christianity:

“Christ did not take his seat to the right of Yahweh only to receive the homage of the heavens. As an award for his services (and the death on the cross), he – throughout the NT – a new regime, contrary was inaugurated contrary to the one that was in force until then. It did not concern him to declare the gospel to the angels and archons. The revelation of the Father is connected to the person of the Son, the Savior. It also did not concern him to face Yahweh in his demiurgic function. Strictly speaking, that function continued under a new sign. The creator makes no new worlds and does not form new humans.

What, then, remains for Christ for inaugurating a regime? Not all Gnostics answer in the same way. Most of them, however, agree in something essential. Christ puts an end to reincarnation. He weakens Yahweh, removes his control over all who believed in the Gospel of Jesus and liberates them from the cycle of rebirth.

During the OT, Yahweh came to take power, at the root of death, over all humans ..., pagans and Israelites, good and bad, and forced them to take a body anew (at least a human) on Earth; one birth after the other without hope to brake the chain of rebirth. The underground hell was superfluous. It was useless to unite the dead in one place *ad hoc*. It was enough to oblige them to live anew in another body and under other circumstances (of family and region), without leaving the Earth. Even the good ones subjugated to the demiurge [Yahweh] and to the circle of rebirth, in which he had put them. The soul of Phineas appeared again in the body of Elias and later in the one of John the Baptist. ...

The breakdown of such a regime announced itself in the arrival of Jesus in the world with the triumph over fate. ... But it completed itself after the journey back with the ‘*sessio a dextris*’ of Messiah. Sitting to the right of Yahweh, with power over him, Christ liberates all who are devoted to the Gospel of Truth. None of those who had professed for God the Father and for the Savior the Only Begotten Son would fall back into the fatal circle of rebirth. All of them became free from the hands of Yahweh in their after-death journey to go into those of Christ.

The incredulous, which are all who persist in the old beliefs and pay cult to Yahweh as the only true God, continue the regime of the OT. They after death continue to reincarnate, going from one body to another. Who rejects the benefit of welfare (and redemption) that Jesus brought to the world, continues to be a slave of Yahweh as punishment and at the same time to be subject to his whims, nourishing his adorers through the *metensomatosis*. They do not let themselves experience Christ’s ‘*sessio a dextris*’ as an instrument of the savior for the good of humans.”

This will not mean that YHWH *introduced* reincarnation in his region, but he *hijacked* it! It was there all the time and belief in (or rather knowledge about) reincarnation is as old as humanity itself and belonged to almost all ancient and prehistoric cultures and religions – also to the original Gnostic Christianity and to an essential extent the Hebrew religion. Even in Islam there have been and still are groups that believe in incarnation. YHWH wanted the souls to stay in his region and, therefore, incarnate there again. For that purpose, he wanted humans to make bad karma through violence and negative behavior to ensure their return in his region. This works even better if humans do not know about reincarnation, and that is why he in his religious manipulations strove for eradication of the knowledge. Thus, the Churches and Islam lost it, as did in part the Hebrew religion (even though the knowledge was to an important extent preserved in the Kabbalah).

It will also not mean that Christ immediately liberates those from reincarnation who adhere to him, but he through his messenger Jesus *showed us the way out of it* to considerably shorten the “cycle of rebirth”, so that we can escape from it much sooner (most of us will still have some “residual karma” left to work off). It is obvious that YHWH did not like that...