

Fr. Perozich comments —

Msgr. Charles Pope offers a teaching on hell with citations from St. Thomas Aquinas and from the Holy Bible.

People have asked me some of the same questions in the article and have proposed the same objections in the comments , some of which Msgr. Pope answers.

Fr. Chad Ripperger, exorcist, also spoke about and rejected a heterodox belief that says the fallen angels can be redeemed. Apocatastasis.

*“In any case, the doctrine was formally condemned in the first of the famous anathemas pronounced at the Council of [Constantinople](#) in 543; Harduin, Coll. Conc., III, 284:- *Ei tis ten teratodn apokatastasis presbeuei, anathema esto.* [See, also, Justinian, Liber adversus Originem, anathemas 7 and 9 (P.G., LXXXVI, col. 989).] The doctrine was thenceforth looked on as heterodox by the [Church](#). — from a [Catholic Answers](#) article by Pierre Battifol*

<https://www.catholic.com/encyclopedia/apocatastasis>

[MARCH 16, 2023 BY MSGR. CHARLES POPE](#)

Seven Teachings on Hell From St. Thomas Aquinas

The teachings of the Lord on Hell are difficult, especially in today’s climate. The most difficult questions that arise relate to its eternal nature and how to square its existence with a God who is loving and rich in mercy.

1. Does God love the souls in Hell? Yes.

How could they continue to exist if He did not love them, sustain them, and continue to provide for them? God loves because He is love. Although *we* may fail to be able to experience or accept His love, God loves every being He has made, human or angelic.

The souls in Hell may have refused to empty their arms to receive His embrace, but God has not withdrawn His love for them. He permits those who have rejected Him to live apart from

him. God honors their freedom to say no, even respecting it when it becomes permanent, as it has for fallen angels and the souls in Hell.

God is not tormenting the damned. The fire and other miseries are largely expressions of the sad condition of those who have rejected the one thing for which they were made: to be caught up into the love and perfection of God and the joy of all the saints.

2. Is there any good at all in Hell? Yes. Are all the damned punished equally? No.

While Heaven is perfection and pure goodness, Hell is *not* pure evil. The reason for this is that evil is the privation or absence of something good that *should* be there. If goodness were completely absent, there would be nothing there. Therefore, there must be some goodness in Hell or there would be nothing at all. St. Thomas Aquinas teaches,

It is impossible for evil to be pure and without the admixture of good [So]those who will be thrust into hell will not be free from all good ... those who are in hell can receive the reward of their goods, in so far as their past goods avail for the mitigation of their punishment (Summa Theologica, Supplement 69.7, reply ad 9).

This can assist us in understanding that God's punishments are just and that the damned are neither devoid of all good nor lacking in any experience of good. Even though a soul does not wish to dwell in God's Kingdom (evidenced by rejection of God or the values of His Kingdom), the nature of suffering in Hell is commensurate with the sin(s) that caused exclusion from Heaven.

This would seem to be true even of demons. In the Rite of Exorcism, the exorcist warns the possessing demons, "The longer you delay your departure, the worse your punishment shall be." This suggest levels of punishment in Hell based on the degree of unrepented wickedness.

In his *Inferno*, Dante described levels within Hell and wrote that not all the damned experience identical sufferings. Thus, an unrepentant adulterer might not experience the same suffering in kind or degree as would a genocidal, atheistic head of state responsible for the death of millions. Both have rejected key values of the Kingdom: one rejected chastity, the other rejected the worship due to God and the sacredness of human life. The magnitude of those sins is very different and so would be the consequences.

Heaven is a place of absolute perfection, a work accomplished by God for those who say yes. Hell, though a place of great evil, is not one of absolute evil. It cannot be, because God continues to sustain human and angelic beings in existence there and existence itself is good. God also judges them according to their deeds (Rom 2:6). Their good deeds may ameliorate their sufferings. This, too, is good and allows for good in varying degrees there. Hell is not in any way pleasant, but it is not equally bad for all. Thus God's justice, which is good, reaches even Hell.

3. Do the souls in Hell repent of what they have done?

No, not directly.

After death, repentance in the formal sense is not possible. However, **St. Thomas makes an important distinction. He says,**

A person may repent of sin in two ways: in one way directly, in another way indirectly. He repents of a sin directly who hates sin as such: and he repents indirectly who hates it on account of something connected with it, for instance punishment or something of that kind. Accordingly, the wicked will not repent of their sins directly, because consent in the malice of sin will remain in them; but they will repent indirectly, inasmuch as they will suffer from the punishment inflicted on them for sin (Summa Theologica, Supplement, q 98, art 2).

This explains the “wailing and grinding of teeth” in so far as it points to the lament of the damned. They do not lament their choice to sin without repenting, but for the consequences. In the Parable of Lazarus, the rich man in Hell laments his suffering but expresses no regret over the way he treated the beggar Lazarus. Indeed, he still sees Lazarus as a kind of errand-boy, who should fetch him water and warn his brothers. In a certain sense the rich man cannot repent; his character is now quickened and his choices forever fixed.

4. Is eternal punishment just?

Yes.

Many who might otherwise accept God’s punishment of sinners are still dismayed that Hell is eternal. Why should one be punished eternally for sins committed over a brief time span, perhaps in just a moment? The punishment does not seem to fit the crime.

This logic presumes that the eternal nature of Hell is intrinsic to the punishment, but it is not. Rather, Hell is eternal because repentance is no longer available after death. Our decision for or against God and the values of His Kingdom values becomes forever fixed. Because at this point the will is fixed and obstinate, the repentance that unlocks mercy will never be forthcoming.

St. Thomas teaches,

[A]s Damascene says (De Fide Orth. ii) “death is to men what their fall was to the angels.” Now after their fall the angels could not be restored [Cf. I:64:2]. Therefore, neither can man after death: and thus the punishment of the damned will have no end. ... [So] just as the demons are obstinate in wickedness and therefore have to be punished for ever, so too are the souls of men who die without charity, since “death is to men what their

fall was to the angels,” as Damascene says (Summa Theologica, Supplement, q 99, art 3).

5. Do the souls in Hell hate God? No, not directly.

St. Thomas teaches,

The appetite is moved by good or evil apprehended. Now God is apprehended in two ways, namely in Himself, as by the blessed, who see Him in His essence; and in His effects, as by us and by the damned. Since, then, He is goodness by His essence, He cannot in Himself be displeasing to any will; wherefore whoever sees Him in His essence cannot hate Him.

On the other hand, some of His effects are displeasing to the will in so far as they are opposed to any one: and accordingly a person may hate God not in Himself, but by reason of His effects. Therefore, the damned, perceiving God in His punishment, which is the effect of His justice, hate Him, even as they hate the punishment inflicted on them (Summa Theologica, Supplement, q 98, art 5).

6. Do the souls in hell wish they were dead? No.

It is impossible to detest what is fundamentally good, and to exist is fundamentally good. Those who say that they “wish they were dead” do not really wish nonexistence upon themselves. Rather, they wish an end to their suffering. So it is with the souls in Hell.

St. Thomas teaches,

Not to be may be considered in two ways. First, in itself, and thus it can nowise be desirable, since it has no aspect of good, but is pure privation of good. Secondly, it may be considered as a relief from a

painful life or from some unhappiness: and thus “not to be” takes on the aspect of good, since “to lack an evil is a kind of good” as the Philosopher says (Ethic. v, 1). In this way it is better for the damned not to be than to be unhappy. Hence it is said (Matthew 26:24): “It were better for him, if that man had not been born,” and (Jeremiah 20:14): “Cursed be the day wherein I was born,” where a gloss of Jerome observes: “It is better not to be than to be evilly.” In this sense the damned can prefer “not to be” according to their deliberate reason (Summa Theologica, Supplement, q 98, art 3).

7. Do the souls in Hell see the blessed in Heaven?

Some biblical texts say that the damned see the saints in glory. For example, the rich man in the parable can see Lazarus in the Bosom of Abraham (Lk 16:3). Further, Jesus says, *There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves are thrown out (Lk 13:28).*

However, St Thomas makes a distinction:

The damned, before the judgment day, will see the blessed in glory, in such a way as to know, not what that glory is like, but only that they are in a state of glory that surpasses all thought. This will trouble them, both because they will, through envy, grieve for their happiness, and because they have forfeited that glory. Hence it is written (Wisdom 5:2) concerning the wicked: “Seeing it” they “shall be troubled with terrible fear.”

After the judgment day, however, they will be altogether deprived of seeing the blessed: nor will this lessen their punishment, but will increase it; because they will bear in remembrance the glory of the blessed

which they saw at or before the judgment: and this will torment them. Moreover, they will be tormented by finding themselves deemed unworthy even to see the glory which the saints merit to have (Summa Theologica, Supplement, q 98, art 9).

St Thomas does not cite a Scripture for this conclusion. However, certain texts about the Last Judgment emphasize a kind of definitive separation. For example, in Matthew 25 we read this: *All the nations will be gathered before [the Son of Man], and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ... Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life (Mat 25:32, 46).*

Clearly, Hell is a tragic and eternal separation from God. Repentance, which unlocks mercy, is available to us; but after death, like clay pottery placed in the kiln, our decision is forever fixed.

Choose the Lord today! Judgment day looms. Now is the time to admit our sins humbly and to seek the Lord's mercy. There is simply nothing more foolish than defiance and an obstinate refusal to repent. At some point, our hardened hearts will reach a state in which there is no turning back. To die in such a condition is to close the door of our heart on God forever.

*Somebody's knocking at your door.
Oh sinner, why don't you answer?
Somebody's knocking at your door!*

18 Replies to "Seven Teachings on Hell From St. Thomas Aquinas"

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- **Fr. Victor Feltes**

MARCH 25, 2023 AT 15:20

Dear Msgr. Pope,

Are there definitive Catholic Church teachings on the eternal damnation of the demons and/or the permanent damnation of at least some portion of humanity such that if Hell is one day empty of demons or humans then it would mean Christ permitted his Holy Church to teach error?

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- **Fr. Fizzlewit**

MARCH 25, 2023 AT 20:19

Although I respect Dante's writings on hell, his account thereof, although venerated in the Church, does not meet the criteria for Magisterium, ordinary or extraordinary. When one sees the penalty in hell Dante describes for those who die in the mortal sin of lust, they are simply blown around by the wind like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz for all eternity, a kind of permanent wing-suit outing. The devil himself is merely partially encased in a block of ice from which he can't escape. Given that he's ultimately responsible for all sin & its concomitant suffering, I would think that perfect justice demands (& will require) far worse. Rev 20:10 details a lake of fire for him. If Heaven is blissful happiness beyond our wildest imagination, hell has to be torture beyond our darkest nightmare, exponentially worse than

even the most excruciating earthly suffering. The visions of hell St.'s John Bosco, Faustina Kowalska & Teresa of Avila IMHO provide a better idea of how horrific the torments of hell are.

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Atho

MARCH 26, 2023 AT 13:26

Who wants a God Who allows the eternal torment that hell is said to contain?

I certainly don't.

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Laura Y

MARCH 26, 2023 AT 14:18

Thank you, Monsignor. I have a question: Since we know that we merit nothing if we are in a state of unrepented mortal sin and therefore any good that we do while being in this state is counted as nothing, how is it then that the goodness the damned have done while on earth is considered when determining their place in Hell?

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• **Msgr. Charles Pope**

MARCH 27, 2023 AT 15:16

Well, Merit is about salvation and it is Catholic teaching, as you note, that we can have merit. St. Augustine teaches that in his love God allows his graces to become our merit.

But as for the damned, merit is not a relevant topic though justice is. Hence God who is just judges us by our deeds (see Romans 2:6-11) and justice requires that punishments be somehow commensurate with the degree of sin. Hence it follows that an unrepentant Mass murderer suffers a different punishment than an unrepentant adulterer, even though both are mortal sinners.

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Brian G

MARCH 27, 2023 AT 07:45

That the god you are talking about would get so angry at my eating a meat pie on a Friday that he would send me to hell for all eternity, seems to me you have an anthropomorphic god like Zeus, who has a justice problem, since even the meanest father on earth would not punish a child for such a minimal offence with such a huge punishment. Such a god would, with all the sin being committed all the time, would be angry 24/7, and never have a moment of peace and happiness. Better to believe in a transcendent God, who cannot get angry but exists serenely with compassion for his creatures.

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- **Msgr. Charles Pope**

MARCH 27, 2023 AT 15:07

I wonder if you read the piece, since St. Thomas addresses your objection to wit: it is not the sin that makes Hell eternal but rather, that repentance is no longer possible after we die, our disposition for or against God and his kingdom is forever fixed. As for eating a meat pie in a lenten Friday, I rather doubt that such a sin alone would bring someone to Hell. Rather, it is ultimately pride manifest as defiance that lands people there. There are many people who defiantly scoff at some or all the moral vision of the Scriptures and therefore refuse to repent. In effect they do not value what God values and prefer the darkness to light. God does not force them to love what or who he loves and lets them live apart in that place called hell. The saddest truth about them is that they would be more miserable in heaven.

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- **Brian G**
APRIL 2, 2023 AT 07:32

Thanks, Father, for your reply to my problem. I find I can't follow your doubt that my eating a meat pie on a Friday in Lent, and not so long ago it was any Friday, since our religious authorities have declared it a mortal sin, thereby grave matter, and hell the consequence, even if it was my succumbing to the aroma of pies coming fresh from the oven. But if I wanted to upset and cause this anthropomorphic god to get angry then I need not murder someone, simply eat a meat pie last Friday, which would make him so angry that if I was run over by a bus soon after, then his anger would have me suffering in hell eternally. I'm a cradle Catholic and frequent communicant, and at 88 I'm sometime within 10 minutes to 10 years about to meet my transcendent God who has no anger at disobedience to His commandments, but instead whose compassion is for the victims of sin. His commandments are for humans to live together in harmony, and sin is hurting other people, not God. So there is no anger in God, no punishment from Him, no hell for us. Jesus identified with the victims of sin, not the taking away of sinners' sins, as He pointed out to Paul on the road to Damascus. But Jesus did allow sinners to become right with God, but it was not by his crucifixion, but by their repentance as He stressed about a dozen times. Likewise Jesus pointed to the child as the epitome of holiness and the requirement for us to return to that innocence to get to Heaven. In stark contradiction, our religious authorities reversed this, and made out that the child, and even a foetus, had an innate hostility to God, called Original Sin, and required infant baptism to make the child acceptable to God. To Jesus there was no Original sin and so no Limbo. Jesus had difficulties with the religious authorities in his own day, and it seems to persist even today still. So the beliefs about hell and original sin resolve about whether we are talking about a transcendent God, or about an anthropomorphic god, a super-Zeus. I'm convinced He is transcendent with the

necessary conclusion there is no Original Sin and no Hell for us.

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- **Brian G**

APRIL 3, 2023 AT 07:14

Thanks, Father, for your reply to my problem. I find I can't follow your doubt that my eating a meat pie on a Friday in Lent, and not so long ago it was any Friday, since our religious authorities have declared it a mortal sin, thereby grave matter, and hell the consequence, even if it was my succumbing to the aroma of pies coming fresh from the oven. But if I wanted to upset and cause this anthropomorphic god to get angry then I need not murder someone, simply eat a meat pie last Friday, which would make him so angry that if I was run over by a bus soon after, then his anger would have me suffering in hell eternally. I'm a cradle Catholic and frequent communicant, and at 88 I'm sometime within 10 minutes to 10 years about to meet my transcendent God for whom anger is not in his nature, but instead whose compassion is for the victims of sin. His commandments are for humans to live together in harmony, and sin is hurting other people, not God. So there is no anger in God, no punishment from Him, no hell for us. Jesus identified with the victims of sin, as He pointed out to Paul on the road to Damascus, not the taking away of sinners' sins. But Jesus did allow sinners to become right with God, but it was not by his crucifixion, but by their repentance as He stressed about a dozen times. Likewise Jesus pointed to the child as the epitome of holiness and the requirement for us to return to that innocence to get to Heaven. In stark contradiction, our religious authorities reversed this, and made out that the child, and even a foetus, had an innate hostility to God, called Original Sin, and required infant baptism to make the child acceptable to God. To Jesus there was no Original sin and so no Limbo. Jesus had difficulties with the religious authorities in his own day,

and it seems to persist even today still. So the beliefs about hell and original sin resolve about whether we are talking about a transcendent God, or about an anthropomorphic god, a super-Zeus. I'm convinced He is transcendent with the necessary conclusion there is no Original Sin and no Hell for us.

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- **Jon**

MARCH 27, 2023 AT 11:51

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- First of all Brian, God spells His name with a capital "G."
Second of all, He's not going to cast you into hell for "eating a meat pie."

If you eat that meat inadvertently, no problem. If you eat that meat just wanting the meat on Friday, and you give in, though knowing you shouldn't, and have that pepperoni pizza, well, venial sin.

But if you eat that meat in utter contempt for Christ's sacrifice on Good Friday, which abstention of meat is meant to commemorate and unite you, and if you do it with a cynical grin and a great big middle finger to the Church, well, then it's hell for you.

Mortal sin requires three things:

Serious matter (the Church's disciplinary laws on penance and diet aren't such)

Full knowledge of the nature of the sin

Full and deliberate consent of the will

I'm guessing by your last name and your reference to "meat pies" that you're British. Your misconception of Catholic doctrine and belief in this matter is very typical of British Protestant prejudice against Catholicism.

I pray you might pick up a catechism, speak to a priest, and God touch your heart.

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- **Skip**
MARCH 28, 2023 AT 01:39

Yes, however God orchestrated the system as such. What good father would do such a thing?

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- **Msgr. Charles Pope**
MARCH 29, 2023 AT 08:45

A Father who made his children free and respects that freedom since he wants sons and daughters, not puppets or slaves

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- **nemo**
MARCH 28, 2023 AT 06:05

In #4 you write that “at this point the will is fixed and obstinate.” It seems like people lose their free will once they get to heaven or hell. But to no longer have free will is to lack a fundamental aspect of humanity. One might say that the good that people experience in heaven (i.e., God Himself) is so good that they simply won’t ever choose anything other than that ultimate good, even with free will, once they have experienced it. But that doesn’t explain why the people in hell also seem to lose their free will.

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- **Msgr. Charles Pope**
MARCH 29, 2023 AT 08:44

The souls in heaven do not lack free will, having been fully perfected and conformed to the will and Good of God, they no longer desire to sin. As for the damned, neither do they lack free will but are not configured to something other than God.

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- **Skip**

He knew when he created them that the vast majority would end up in hell forever, according to the vision of our lady of fatima. Why would he create them then knowing they were bound for misery beyond comprehension? Why would he not create them all free from original sin the way he did with Mary, which didn't affect her free will? Then more would probably make it to heaven And he could do it without breaking a sweat! Why would he force people to make eternal decisions while deliberately limiting their ability to fully understand the eternity of hell or heaven and by the time they do begin to understand its too late to change? That has nothing to do with being puppets versus free.

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- **Comment:**
- Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. After Jesus resurrection, He gave the apostles heavenly powers to go and preach Jesus resurrected, and sent the Holy Spirit to guide his Church. Since then many men have lead the church in Jesus name. These men, theologians, etc, have made many laws depending on the social events of the time. Some of these laws attest to the teachings of Jesus and some do not. Some of these laws have changed. In the simplicity of what Jesus has taught us, why do men, theologians, etc, have to make things so complicated? The blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God has visited us on many occasions. Her main message, pray the Rosary daily. Jesus is the way and in his path we must follow. Simple. Perhaps my love of God is too simplistic. I leave the judgement of our fate to God, Whom I love with all my heart, soul and spirit. I am Catholic..... A Question, " What will I care about, if I make it to Heaven, while I'm in Heaven?"