

The Classic view of Hell influenced Darwin and millions to reject Christ

written by Alfred Persson | July 6, 2025



Darwin notes the significance of the orthodox Christian belief in hell as a particular influence in his rejection of Christianity:

“I can indeed hardly see how anyone ought to wish Christianity to be true; for if so plain language of the text seems to show that the men who do not believe, and this would include my Father, Brother and almost all my best friends, will be everlastingly punished. And this is a damnable doctrine.”-Geisler, N. L. (2002). Systematic theology, volume one: introduction, Bible (p. 330). Bethany House Publishers.

Without Darwin, its possible “the theory of evolution” might have been delayed, or never arrive. Think of all the millions that might have been saved, if the “classic doctrine” of hell were different.

Surprisingly, there was a time when it was different. In the early church. Many early Church writers would agree with Clement of Alexandria (150-215) who spent his retirement years with the Bishop of the Church in Jerusalem, said this:

So I think it is demonstrated that God (being good) and the Lord (being powerful) both save with a righteousness and equality that extends to all who turn to God, whether here or elsewhere. For it is not here alone that the active power of God is present. Rather, it is everywhere and is always at work... For it is not right that those persons [who died before Christ] should be condemned without trial, and that those alone who lived after His coming should have the advantage of the divine righteousness. Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, EE Eastern), 2.491. Dead, Intermediate State of The. (1998). In D. W. Bercot (Ed.), A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers (p. 192). Hendrickson Publishers.

As Roman Catholicism rose in power, it squashed this early Christian belief, demanding all join the Catholic Church or be eternally punished.

Many NT statements about “preaching to the spirits in prison” (1 Peter 3:18ff); “For this reason the gospel was preached ALSO to the dead” (1 Peter 4:6); “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice” (John 5:28) were reinterpreted in some unlikely ways.

Unfortunately, the Reformers didn’t reject Catholic distortions of the early Christian view, when they rejected other Catholic heresies.

Thankfully, among conservative evangelical scholars the confirmation bias of the Reformers is being revisited, and rejected by many. We can’t undo the damage of the past, but hopefully we can offer real comfort to families today when their unsaved loved ones, die.

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