

One of the first religions to contain the concepts of *Endless Punishment*, *Hell*, and *Satan* is Daênâ Vañuhi. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, this religion is better known to the English speaking world as Zoroastrianism. According to the Zoroastrian religion, Zarathushtra was born in Iran over 4000 years ago. He is considered by many historians as the first human being to preach the concept of monotheism. In other words, a religion based on the belief in one god instead of many gods. Zarathushtra preached that Ahura Mazda was the one true god and that life in the universe was a battle between good and evil. Upon death, according to Zarathushtra, the spirit of the deceased had one of two fates waiting for their spirit. If the individual was good, their spirit successfully cross the ‘Chinvato Peretu,’ the Sword Bridge, and reached Heaven. If the individual was bad, their spirit fell from the Sword Bridge into *Hell*, the residence of the ‘evil one.’ According to the Zoroastrianism, at the end of time there would be a final battle between good and evil. Evil will be vanquished and the world will be purified by a bath of molten metal. After which, Ahura Mazda would establish his kingdom on earth.

The obvious similarities between Zoroastrianism and Christianity fosters a need to discover if there are any other religions that have similar beliefs in the concepts of *Endless Punishment*, *Hell*, and *Satan*. Let us take a brief look at the beliefs of other ‘Believers’ in the world.

For a Jew, the concept of *Hell* is far more optimistic than the Christian notion of *Hell*. In the Jewish religion *Hell* is known as Gehenna.

However, they make a clear distinction that Gehenna is in no way related to the Christian concept of *Hell*. A majority of Jewish traditions maintain that people are not tortured in Gehenna forever. According to the majority of rabbinical thought, the longest that one can be held in Gehenna is said to be a year. For Jews, Gehenna is a spiritual forge where the soul is purified from all imperfections for its eventual ascent to Gan Eden, the Jewish equivalent to Heaven.

For a Buddhist, the object of the believer is to remove his or her self from the cycle of death and rebirth. Therefore, in Buddhism, *Hell* is also not seen as a place of *Endless Punishment*. Upon death, according to Buddhists, the individual's Karma determines which of the 6 samsaric realms they will be placed in when they are reborn. Karma is the product of an individual's thoughts, words, and deeds. There are two types of Karma: meritorious and demeritorious. Meritorious Karma is produced by deeds of charity, meditation, moral discipline, praying, and/or preaching. Demeritorious Karma is produced by acts of greed, engaging in illicit sexual activity, murder, and/or selfishness. If an individual dies with abundance of meritorious Karma, they will be reborn in one of the three upper realms. If an individual dies with abundance of demeritorious Karma, they will be reborn in one of the three lower realms. The lower realms are divided into the animal realm, *Hell*, and the realm of the ‘Hungry Ghost.’ *Hell*, in Buddhism, is reserved for those whose life is dominated by anger, hatred, and violence. After their purification in *Hell*, these

individuals are reborn into one of the other 5 realms. This way, the Buddhist can make his or her way to Nirvana.

For a Muslim, the concept of *Hell* is just as optimistic as the Jewish and Buddhist notion of *Hell*. According to Maulana Muhammad ‘Ali, “*Quite in accordance with the idea of paradise as a place of unending progress to higher stages of life is the idea of hell where punishment is not meant for torture but for purification, in order to make a man fit for spiritual advancement*” (Introduction of the study of The Holy Qur’ân, p.72). In other words, Muslims believe that the punishment of *Hell* is not everlasting and eventually everyone will make it to paradise.

The Christianity of ‘Encounter with Christ’ organization, or EWC for short, perceives *Hell* as being a place where ‘sinners’ are stored after death. For the EWC, the keeper of hell, *Satan*, has been assigned the task of keeping the ‘sinners’ in *Hell* in order to torture and punish them for all eternity.

In the EWC's opinion, there are three reasons that cause one to suffer *Hell* in the afterlife:

1. You were a rotten person;
2. You did not believe in Jesus; or
3. ‘God’ did not want you to go to ‘Heaven.’

Let us examine these three reasons. The first reason is not clearly defined by the EWC's tract, based on their claim that, “*even the good deeds we do are actually seen as disobedience by God.*” Second, any human being who does not believe in Jesus, an individual who *cannot*

be proven to exist by any historical text that exists outside the Bible (see chapter 3, entitled “The Paragraph on Jesus in Josephus,” in Christopher M. Drew's Jesus and Moses Were Invented), is going to hell. Even if you have never been exposed to the ‘Story of Jesus,’ you are going to *Hell* by no fault of your own. The third reason is based on the idea that ‘God’ is omnipotent (all powerful) and therefore can do anything that it wishes. In its essence, EWC's tract, “Will you be in Hell,” revolves around an appeal to fear. The only purpose of ‘Encounter with Christ's’ tract is to scare you, by way of trickery, into believing in something that is not true.

As you probably now realize, the concepts of *Endless Punishment*, *Hell*, and *Satan* are not exclusively Christian concepts. These concepts collectively appeal to an individual's guilt and shame caused by their rotten, self-centered behavior. With this understood, one question comes to mind, ‘What is the purpose of having people believe in *Endless Punishment*, *Hell*, and / or *Satan*?’

Erich Fromm, noted social psychologist and mediator of Freud and Marx, extensively studied religion. In The Dogma of Christ, Fromm analyzed the “*socioeconomic situation of the social groups which accepted and transmitted [early] Christian teaching*” (p. ix). The aim of his study was “*to understand dogma on the basis of a study of people, not people on the basis of a study of dogma*” (p.21). Fromm summarized the concept that drives religion by stating, “*Man strives for a maximum of pleasure; social reality compels*

*him to many renunciations of impulse, and society seeks to compensate the individual for these renunciations by other satisfactions harmless for the society*” (p.19-20). What better way to compensate the marginalized members of a society (the poor, the sick, the ignorant, and the powerless) than in foisting a belief that those who persecute the weak will receive *Endless Punishment* for their *sins*? In other words, these concepts of *Endless Punishment*, *Hell*, and *Satan* are derived from humankind's need to fulfill its wish that the selfish, corrupt, greedy, glutinous, murderous, individuals of a particular society will not go unpunished.

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# The Origins of Endless Punishment, Satan, & Hell

Presented  
By the

## Campus Atheists, Agnostics, and Humanists at WMU

The purpose of this tract is to raise the level of discussion concerning the beliefs in the concepts of *Endless Punishment*, *Hell*, and *Satan*. The idea for this tract was sparked by the propaganda distributed by the ‘Encounter with Christ’ organization, entitled “Will you be in Hell?” The people responsible for this track, the one that you holding in your hand, are Freethinkers. They are Freethinkers for both logical and emotional reasons. They would like you to critically examine your beliefs in *Endless Punishment*, *Hell*, and *Satan*.