



Hell and its Afterlife: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

By Margaret Toscano

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The notion of an infernal place of punishment for 'undesired' elements in human culture and human nature has a long history both as religious idea and as cultural metaphor. This book brings together a wide array of scholars who examine hell as an idea within the Christian tradition and its 'afterlife' in historical and contemporary imagination. Leading scholars grapple with the construction and meaning of hell in the past and investigate its modern utility as a means to describe what is perceived as horrific or undesirable in modern culture. While the idea of an infernal region of punishment was largely developed in the context of early Jewish and Christian religious culture, it remains a central belief for some Christians in the modern world. Hell's reception (its 'afterlife') in the modern world has extended hell's meaning beyond the religious realm; hell has become a pervasive image and metaphor in political rhetoric, in popular culture, and in the media.

Bringing together scholars from a variety of fields to contribute to a wider understanding of this fascinating and important cultural idea, this book will appeal to readers from historical, religious, literary and cultural perspectives.

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Editorial Review

Review

'A wide-ranging collection of essays on hell and the devil that encompasses religious disputes, literary influences, and cultural phenomena from ancient times through to the present. Taken as a whole, these essays demonstrate conclusively that hell has never been a singular or a simple place, but always a conflicted and polysemous discourse whether in a sacred or a secular context.' David Pike, American University, USA 'This is the best collection I've seen of diverse scholarly essays on hell and its history. The authors are eminent, the writing is elegant, the range of periods and places covered is both broad and disciplined. The varied perspectives cohere marvelously and substantially deepen our understanding of hell as a perennial concern and focus for human reflection on justice and mercy, suffering and healing, exclusion and belonging, death and enduring values'. Carol Zaleski, Smith College, USA '... [a] substantial and scholarly volume...' Church Times 'The overall collection's usefulness to ongoing theological debates surrounding the development of ancient perceptions of hell is clear in each of the chapters included. In addition, the political and societal implications discussed herein are valuable for further study. While the entire collection would be of interest to a scholar studying the general theme, the individual chapters would be of particular interest to researchers seeking a closer examination of specific topics, as each chapter provides well-written footnotes highlighting experts and allows for easy access to each additional research.' Relegere: Studies in Religion and Reception

About the Author

Isabel Moreira is Professor of History at the University of Utah. She has a PhD in Ancient History from the University of St. Andrews, Scotland. She specializes in the history and religion of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. Her publications include, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority in Merovingian Gaul* (2000), and *Heaven's Purge: Purgatory in Late Antiquity* (2010). Margaret Toscano is Assistant Professor of Classics and Comparative Literature at the University of Utah, where she also received her PhD in Comparative Literature. She specializes in religion, gender, and myth. She also publishes on Mormon theology. She is currently writing a book entitled *Making Love with God in the Medieval World: Sex and Identity in Mechthild of Magdeburg and Margery Kempe*. In 2007 she published chapters in *Rome, Season One: History Makes Television* and in *Discourses in Mormon Theology: Philosophical and Theological Possibilities*.

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