

Comparing the Afterlife Abodes of Religion with Recent Revelation

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All major religions teach that in some manner human consciousness survives bodily death and is sooner or later awakened in a non-material environment. Nirvana, Gan Eden, Heaven, Paradise, Sheol, Purgatory, Hades, Gehenna, and Hell are some of the names assigned to various afterlife environments. These environments range from indescribable and incomprehensible bliss to unspeakable and unimaginable torment. Seemingly, a life of love and service should result in the blissful state, while a life of selfishness and greed should lead to the tormented state. However, some major belief systems hold that even a life devoted to love and service is not enough to warrant the blissful environment in the “afterlife” if the individual has not bowed to the proper Savior or God or has not fully subscribed to the peculiar dictates of its particular dogma and doctrine. The predominant religious thinking seems to be that we end our earthly lives being labeled as either “righteous” or “wicked” – no in-between – and our environment is then either positive or negative for eternity.

In the blissful state, we should find, according to some religions, souls who led selfish and hateful lives but who repented on their deathbeds along with other wicked souls who “found” their Savior just before dying and suddenly became righteous. Among the tormented, we should expect to find souls who led righteous lives for most of their years but who transgressed just before dying.

It is difficult to reconcile much of what many major religions consider the proper sta-

tion in the afterlife with the loving, forgiving, and just God they see as governing that afterlife. Indeed, their God often appears cruel, capricious, vindictive, jealous, and wrathful. The religionist responds to such a comment by saying that God’s ways are beyond our comprehension and we should not attempt to apply our own standards of justice to something we are incapable of understanding.

It is also difficult to generalize or to categorize the various religions relative to afterlife beliefs. Even within a particular religion, it is impossible to get full agreement on many of the views pertaining to life after death. Certainly, there are people who subscribe to various religions who do not believe in life after death. There are so many parables, so many metaphors, so many similes, so many allegories, so many translations, so many interpretations, so many elucidations of ancient writings in which the religions are rooted. The subject matter lends itself to a semantical maze or nightmare. Consider that in the Hebrew Bible, the word *nephesh*, meaning soul, is used 754 times, but it takes on 30 different meanings, ranging from “soul” and “the dead” to “fish” and “dogs,” while the word *aion* is found in the New Testament 108 times and is given 10 different meanings, including “forever,” “ages,” and “never.” What we read in the English Bible as “everlasting punishment” meant “age-long pruning” in the original Greek.

Revelation Old and New

Ancient revelation, that giving rise to orthodox religions, appears to have come

from the same sources as modern revelation. That is, it came through mediums of one kind or another, even though those mediums, whether clairvoyants, trance types, direct voice types, automatic writers, or even near-death experiencers, might have been called prophets, seers, or even saviors (or were translated as such). "When we translate Bible language into the terms of modern psychic religion the correspondence becomes evident," wrote Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in *The Vital Message*. "It does not take much alteration. Thus for 'Lo, a miracle!' we say 'This is a manifestation.' 'The angel of the Lord' becomes 'a high spirit.' Where we talked of 'a voice from heaven,' we say 'the direct voice.' 'His eyes were opened and he saw a vision' means 'he became a clairvoyant.' It is only the occultist who can possibly understand the Scriptures as being a real exact record of events."¹

Doyle, of course, used the word "occultist" in its true metaphysical sense.² The word has been maligned by orthodox ministers who have associated it with witchcraft and sorcery.

On the religious side, the focus of this paper is on the Christian sources of life after death as compared with modern day psychic (occult) sources, although some mention will be made of other religions or belief systems. Modern revelation, as used in this paper, means anything said to have come from the spirit world since the time of Emanuel Swedenborg, some 250 years ago.

The Afterlife Abodes of Religion

Our search for the origins of the Christian afterlife belief begins in the Old Testament with Genesis 37:35, where Jacob, upon being told that his son Joseph had been devoured by a beast, states he must go down to Sheol in mourning for his son. Exactly what Jacob meant is subject to various interpretations. The other 65 references to Sheol in the Old

Testament are similarly vague, some of them suggesting that Sheol simply meant the grave while from others we can infer that it was a shadowy underworld where departed spirits roamed in a state of confusion while awaiting a final resurrection and judgment. The King James Version of the Bible translates Sheol as "Hell" 31 times, "grave" 31 times, and "pit" three times. And, yet, in Job 26:6 and Psalms 139:8, we read that the souls in Sheol still have a connection to God. In Job 14:13, Job asks God to hide him in Sheol until His anger has passed, thereby suggesting that Sheol is not a permanent abode.

In the Septuagint, the oldest Greek version of the Old Testament, Sheol becomes Hades, although Hades is also used in several places to mean other things. In ancient Greek mythology, Hades was also an intermediate state for souls. From there, the blessed would go to Elysium and all others to the infernal regions of Tartarus. "The Greeks termed this place Hades, the Egyptians the Underworld, and the Hebrews Sheol," Arthur Findlay summarizes it in *The Psychic Stream*. "These terms all meant the same place, where the dead existed till the arrival of the Saviour-Judge who would separate believers from unbelievers. The believers then went with him to Heaven while the unbelievers were consigned to Hell, a lake of fire under the earth, volcanoes being its chimneys."³

The predominant Jewish thought seems to be that only the very righteous go to Gan Eden (Garden of Eden). The average person goes to an intermediate state, apparently Sheol, for punishment and/or purification, while the wicked go to Gehenna, a place of eternal punishment (although some Jews see Gehenna as the intermediate state). This intermediate state is referred to by Catholics as Purgatory. Catholics point to 2 Maccabees 12:39-46, 1 Corinthians 3:11-15, Matthew 5:25-26, and 12:31-32 to support their belief in the doctrine of Purgatory. Although they do not

clearly state it, these passages all suggest a realm where one purges his sins before being admitted to Heaven. A Catholic Internet source quotes St. Augustine from *The City of God*: "Temporal punishments are suffered by some in this life only, by some after death, by some both here and hereafter, but all of them before that last and strictest judgment. But not all who suffer temporal punishments after death will come to eternal punishments, which are to follow after the judgment."⁴

The Protestant Reformation attempted to do away with the idea of Purgatory. In fact, it was the primary issue giving rise to the break with the Catholic Church. Martin Luther rebelled against the corruption involved with buying indulgences to shorten one's sentence in Purgatory. Rather than attempt to make sense of it, Protestantism offered a black and white afterlife, Hell or Heaven, even though the righteous soul does not *fully* experience bliss of Heaven until after the Resurrection and the wicked soul does not *fully* realize his punishment until that time. However, at the same time, some Protestant scholars see degrees of punishment in Hell. Pointing to Matthew 11:21-24, Dr. Robert A. Morey, in *Death and the Afterlife*, states that "while all sinners in Hell will be perfectly miserable, they will not be equally miserable."⁵

As Dr. Spiros Zodhiates interprets it in his book, *Life after Death*, "no righteous person has yet entered into the final and eternal heaven where we shall dwell forever. Nor has any sinner entered the final and eternal hell, the place of eternal torment."⁶ His view, which apparently is a popular one in mainstream Protestantism, is that Paradise is a staging area of sorts for the righteous, who will not enter Heaven until after the Resurrection. Likewise, Hades is a staging area for the wicked, who will not enter Hell until after their final judgment at the Resurrection.

Islamic belief is similar to Judeo-Christian belief as to the afterlife abodes. Islam posits a Paradise or Heaven, where the desires of faithful Muslims are met, and a Hell for unfaithful and non-Muslims. As for an intermediate realm, the predominant Muslim view seems to be somewhat similar to that of orthodox Protestantism, i.e., that the soul does not fully realize itself until the day of Resurrection.

Factions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam believe that the soul making the transition from earth life to the afterlife remains unconscious or "sleeps" after death until a resurrection day for all. Most of the defenders of this view are Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses.

"When the Bible calls death sleep, it implies that the essence of our being sleeps," reads an Internet source favoring this view. The unnamed author cites Acts 7:59-60, which has to do with Stephen being stoned to death and asking for Jesus to receive his spirit, then stating, "He fell asleep." The author reasons that if Stephen were conscious in heaven, the Bible would say, "His body fell asleep." The author goes on to cite John 11:11, where Jesus tells His disciples, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up." Recognizing that opponents of soul sleep claim that *sleep* is only a metaphor, the author argues that there are 54 references to death as sleep in the Old Testament and another 18 in the New Testament. It is illogical, he says, to assume that God would inspire 72 misleading metaphors.⁷

Proponents of soul sleep also point to a number of passages in the Old Testament, including Ecclesiastes 9:5, which state that "the dead know nothing." Opponents of soul sleep argue that the comment must be read in full context, in which case it does not refer to soul sleep. They go on to cite numerous other New Testament passages, including Luke 23:43, in which Jesus says, "Verily I say unto

thee, today should thou be with me in Paradise.” The opponents of soul sleep ask why Jesus would tell the criminal hanging on the cross next to him he would experience Paradise that day if the criminal would be unconscious in the grave until a day of general resurrection.

Morey, a professor of Apologetics and Hermeneutics at Perry Bible Institute, points to Isaiah 14:9-20; 44-23; and Ezekiel 32:21, where souls in Sheol, which clearly was not Heaven, are pictured conversing with each other and even making moral judgments on new arrivals as evidence that they are conscious entities. However, he agrees that the Old Testament is vague on the issue of consciousness following death and states that principle of progressive revelation must be applied. That is, the New Testament was given to us to help clarify the Old Testament. “We must also point out that when we state that the Old Testament saints and the intertestamental Jews did not have a clear and precise understanding of what happened after death, this does not mean that their experience was not greater than their understanding,” Morey offers. “To deny that they understood where they were going at death does not mean that they did not get there.”⁸

Attempting to understand who are the “righteous” and who are the “wicked” as well as who are “saved” leads us deeper into the muddled maze. Making it even more complex is the belief by many Jews that the wicked are kept in the intermediate state for a maximum of 12 months, but the *utterly* wicked either cease to exist or continue in a state of remorse. How one is deemed righteous, wicked, or utterly wicked is not clearly addressed by any of the religions. Many Christians point to numerous passages in the New Testament indicating that one must accept Jesus as his Savior in order to be deemed righteous. “The Bible makes it clear that Christians have a moral assurance of salva-

tion, but the Bible does not teach that Christians have a guarantee of heaven. There can be no absolute assurance of salvation,” reads a Catholic “guide to truth.”⁹ The Catholic Church teaches that we are saved by grace alone, not by faith alone, as is taught by many Protestant denominations.

“Whether a man is going to enjoy eternal bliss in the presence of the Lord or suffer eternally in Hell is determined by his decision to receive or reject Christ,” writes Zodhiates, expressing the prevailing Protestant view. “His eternal destiny, therefore, is determined right here on earth.”¹⁰

Likewise, Muslims believe one must accept Mohammed as his Savior in order to be saved. Whether or not a truly benevolent man can be saved without accepting their Savior is subject to much debate by both Christians and Muslims.

The Afterlife Abodes of Modern Revelation

In John 14:2, Jesus says, “In my Father’s house are many mansions. If it were not so I would have told you.” The usual orthodox Christian interpretation of that is that Jesus was referring only to Heaven. Modern revelation suggests that Jesus was referring to the whole spectrum of the afterlife, from what is termed Hell on “up” through different realms or planes or spheres until we reach Heaven. This is consistent with the Buddhist view holding many realms or dimensions until reaching Nirvana or true Heaven. Swedenborg wrote that he discovered infinite diversity in “heaven” and “countless communities” during his clairvoyant explorations.¹¹

“Persons enter the Spiritual World with precisely the same character, enlightenment and disposition as that with which they leave your world and go into a sphere for which they are fitted,” a spirit talking through a medium told Reverend Arthur Chambers, an associate of King’s College, London and Vicar of the Church of England in Brockenhurst,

Hampshire, England, more than a century ago. "And there they remain until mentally, morally, and spiritually advanced, they are fitted for a higher sphere."¹²

It is a message that has been repeated over and over again in spirit communication over the past 250 years. "If we have balanced our 'mistakes' by good deeds and kind actions, we shall find ourselves on a plane that is quite a pleasant one – in our earthly sense of the word – but we shall not have full power and freedom in the spiritual life because our soul bodies are not prepared and fitted for it," wrote Gladys Osborne Leonard, one of the most respected mediums in England during the first half of the last century.¹³ Through her out-of-body travel, Leonard claimed to have visited some of the lower realms, stating that she had never been to the higher ones, or at least she could not recall so upon coming out of her trance condition. She described the lowest planes as darker than the ones above it.

"The power, then, that a man will have, the position he will occupy, the place where he will live, all depend upon what he has made of his soul body while on earth," Leonard further explains. "He cannot 'will' or choose where he shall live in the spirit world; he goes to the place that he has fitted himself for during his life in the physical body."¹⁴

Edgar Cayce, the famous American "sleeping prophet" of the last century, also told of taking a tour of many realms during one of his out-of-body experiences. He described how he encountered a stream of light he knew he must follow. In the lower or darker realms he saw "forms" that were floundering or lost and seeking the light. As the light grew stronger and stronger, he arrived at a place where individuals appeared much as they do today.

Alvin Mattson, a Lutheran minister who made his transition to the spirit world in 1970, is said to have communicated with his

daughter, Ruth Mattson Taylor, through the British medium Margaret Flavell Tweddell. He, too, reported various planes of existence. "From this point we can progress to higher planes – to higher levels of consciousness," Mattson is quoted in his daughter's book, *Witness from Beyond*. "By 'higher' planes I do not mean spatially higher but rather those planes which have a finer vibration." Mattson went on to say that many of the religious denominations continue to practice the rites of their respective churches on the lower or intermediate planes, where he made his abode, but that he had been permitted to visit higher planes "where there is a unity of God-praise, not a segregation of the praise of God."¹⁵

The experiences of Leonard, Cayce, and Taylor are just a few of scores of spirit observations and/or communication relative to the afterlife that have been recorded over the past 250 years. Almost without exception, we are told of progressive spheres or realms or planes. It is often reported that there are seven basic planes, giving some credence to "Seventh Heaven" mythology, but many of the spirits communicating claim they do not know how many planes there are because they know only of the plane on which they live, those below, and perhaps, as with Mattson, those immediately above. It is further reported that the souls in the lowest realms, what might be called "Hell," are not there forever. They are able to progress to higher realms, usually with help from those in higher realms or through the prayers of those still incarnate.

"It is like knowledge," said Silver Birch, a spirit entity who spoke through the British trance medium Maurice Barbanell for some 50 years, ending around 1980. "The more you have, the more you realize there is further knowledge to be gained. The sphere or plane on which you exist in our world contains individuals at the same state of spiritual devel-

opment as you are. You can't go spiritually higher until you are ready. You can go lower, as many of us do in order to perform missionary work among the unenlightened beings in the lower spheres. Progress consists of shedding imperfections and striving and growing toward perfection at all times."¹⁶

The overwhelming preponderance of spirit communication gives credence to the Eastern belief in reincarnation. It is through living many lives that we evolve to higher and higher spheres in our pursuit to reach the Godhead...Heaven...Gan Eden...Nirvana, whatever name be attached to it. However, most of the communication also indicates that we can advance in the spirit world without reincarnating, at least after one attains a certain level of spiritual consciousness. At that point, we continue to evolve by serving as guides for those still incarnate and by other means, most of which are beyond human comprehension. "Reincarnation is a truth which has many facets," said Silver Birch. "Because of that it is not easy to explain the complexity of reincarnation to minds which are unable to accept all that is involved."¹⁷

Spirit communications as well as near-death experiences further reveal that there is no single day of judgment, as is taught by orthodox religion. We judge ourselves, we are consistently told. Many near-death experiencers have reported life reviews in which they see every moment of their lives and how their actions affected others. Yes, there is a resurrection, Alice Bailey, another highly-respected medium, recorded. However, it was further explained by the high spirit communicating through her that resurrection, as used in Scripture, refers to spiritual awakening in the evolutionary process. "The note and message sounded by the Christ when last on Earth was resurrection, but so morbid has been mankind and so enveloped in glamour and illusion, that His death has

been permitted to sidestep understanding," Bailey was told.¹⁸

Summary and Commentary

Orthodox religion offers us a Divine plan, if it can be called that, which has various interpretations, none of which can be reconciled with a just and loving God. We are asked to believe that God or some giant computer in the heavens is able to classify us as either "righteous" or "wicked" upon transition to the spirit world as well as that God will condemn even the righteous who failed to recognize the true Savior.

"Not one in every ten thousand persons departing this life can either be designated as altogether good or altogether bad," Reverend Arthur Chambers added in his book, *Man and the Spiritual World*. "What will happen to those whose character at death is in a state of equipoise between good and bad?"¹⁹

In spite of his orthodox association, Chambers recognized the wisdom of those calling themselves Spiritualists. The belief of Spiritualists, based on the assumption that revelation is ongoing and progressive, is that we "cross over" with the spiritual consciousness with which we depart this life. That is, the very spiritually evolved person will immediately awaken on the other side with a full understanding of his or her new environment. The materialistic person, especially the one that did not lead a life of love and service, will be slow to awaken to his new environment, perhaps sleeping for a long time, as time is measured in our realm. In between those two extremes, there are various degrees of consciousness, just as there are many degrees of goodness and evil existing among the "living." Many are in a daze, much like a person suddenly awakened from a deep sleep in the middle of the night. In this sense, the "soul sleep" view of the Seventh Day Adventists and others might be partially true.

In her 1900 book, *The Spiritual Significance*, Lilian Whiting quotes another Christian minister with an unorthodox view. "A very little reflection will show that this is inconceivable, unthinkable," the Rev. Dr. S.O. McConnell, rector of Holy Trinity Church in Brooklyn, NY, said, referring to the belief by many that souls of "believers" are at death made perfect and pass into glory. "Humanity is thus put into two categories. A line is drawn through humanity, on one side being the righteous and on the other side the wicked. No such distinction is possible. There are no righteous and no wicked. The good and the evil are mixed up in all of us that such classification cannot be made."²⁰

Most of orthodoxy believes that all revelation has ended. Christians accept as gospel Revelation 22:18, in which John says that God will punish anyone who adds or takes away anything from the book (Bible). And, yet, in John 16:12-15, we are told that there was much more to learn but the world was not yet ready for it.

From numerous versions and translations over the centuries, it is clear that there have been many changes and many distortions to the Bible. Certainly, there are many conflicting messages and so much that is subject to a wide range of interpretation. We are left to wonder whether John's words have been accurately recorded, what he really meant, or if they were, in fact, inspired by God. We are asked to believe in all-knowing, all-powerful God, but a God who could not foresee the language problems resulting from the mishmash of words in a book He is said to have inspired. Here, again, however, we encounter a word subject to interpretation. To "inspire" does not mean He wrote it or that His words were accurately recorded. Were the ancients of the Old Testament actually hearing from God, or were they hearing from spirits of differing levels of enlightenment attempting to convey their

understanding? Were some of them, in fact, immature or low-level spirits communicating very imperfect knowledge? On what authority are we to accept that the words recorded by the ancients came from God or higher spirits? On what authority should we reject modern revelation?

"If you had the complete and unamended text of Christ's doctrines, many a load imposed by man in the name of religion and Christianity would be taken from your shoulders," a spirit speaking through a trance medium, a young peasant boy, told Father Johannes Greber, a Catholic priest in Germany, in 1923. "Many a precept which you are expected to believe, even though it seems out of all reason, would be discarded because it would be recognized as being wrong, and you, as God's children could again breathe freely." The same spirit had previously told Greber that the teachings of Christ are no longer to be found in their original purity and clearness, that entire chapters have been omitted and that what we have now are "mutilated copies."²¹

Still another clergyman connected with modern day mediumship was Rev. William Stainton Moses, an Anglican minister, who, during the late 1800s, began receiving messages, while entranced, from a spirit who called himself Emperor. Many of the messages were contrary to Moses' beliefs and were initially resisted by him. The communication received by Moses from Emperor and other spirits is set forth in a book called *Spirit Teachings*. Emperor said that the Bible, together with many other writings which were not included in it, are, in fact, the records of "that gradual growth in knowledge of Himself which the great and good God has given to man." He went on to say that some of what is in the Bible, as is similarly the case with modern mediumship, has been "colored" by the mind of the medium. That is, the communication was not purely filtered. Impera-

tor further states that revelation is progressive and that only as much truth is given as man can grasp.²²

And so what can we believe? Are all these modern day spirits “wolves in sheep’s clothing,” as orthodoxy claims? Surely we must heed the words of John to “test the spirits to find out if they are of God” (1 John 4:1) as well as those of Paul that we should be “discerning of the spirits” (1 Corinthians 12:10). But neither John nor Paul tells us how to test or discern the spirits. Seemingly, the best test or best discernment would be to ask if the

spirit communication is consistent with an all-loving and all-just Creator?

By going beyond the self-imposed limits of orthodox religion, by testing and discerning the teachings of spirits like Imperator, Silver Birch, Mattson, and others, we find a much more logical, more sensible, more appealing environment – one that can be reconciled with a loving and just God. We discover a Divine plan – one of attainment and attunement, of gradual spiritual growth, of evolution of spirit through progressively “higher” (in vibration) planes.

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¹ Doyle, Arthur Conan, *The Vital Message*, George H. Doran Company, 1919, p. 125.

² Meaning one who can discern what is unseen by others.

³ Findlay, Arthur, *The Psychic Stream*, Psychic Press Ltd., 1939, p. 203.

⁴ <http://www.catholic.com>.

⁵ Morey, Robert A., *Death And The Afterlife*, Bethany House Publishers, 1984, p. 153.

⁶ Zodiates, Spiros, *Life After Death*, AMG Publishers, 1994, p.108.

⁷ <http://www.worldonly.com/C106.html>.

⁸ Morey, p. 84.

⁹ *No Pillar of Fire/Pillar of Truth*, Catholic Answers, 1997, p. 25.

¹⁰ Zodiates, p. 119.

¹¹ Swedenborg, Emanuel, *Heaven & Hell*, Swedenborg Foundation, 1976, p. 40.

¹² Chambers, Arthur, *Man and the Spiritual World*, George W. Jacobs & Co., 1900, p. 167.

¹³ Leonard, Gladys Osborne, *My Life In Two Worlds*, Gassell & Co., Ltd., 1931, p. 117.

¹⁴ _____, p. 116.

¹⁵ Taylor, , Ruth Mattson, *Witness From Beyond*, Foreword Books, 1975, pp. 41-44.

¹⁶ Ballard, Stan A. and Roger Green, *The Silver Birch Book of Questions and Answers*, Spiritual Truth Press, 1998, pp. 38-44.

¹⁷ Riva, Pam, *Light From Silver Birch*, The Spiritual Truth Press, 1983, p. 76.

¹⁸ Bailey, Alice, *Death: The Great Adventure*, Lucis Publishing Co., 1985, p. 127.

¹⁹ Chambers, pp. 193-194.

²⁰ Whiting, Lilian, *The Spiritual Significance*, Little Brown, and Company, 1901, p. 196.

²¹ Greber, Johannes, *Communication With the Spirit World of God*, Johannes Greber Memorial Foundation, 1979, pp. 19-20.

²² Moses, William Stainton, *Spirit Teachings*, Arno Press, 1976, pg. 64.