

Documentary explores Christian teachings on hell

By C.S. Morrissey
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A documentary on hell, you say? Wow! How did they get that footage?

Actually **HELLBOUND?** is a feature-length film that uses interviews with a quirky parade of theologians, pastors, authors, exorcists, and even heavy-metal musicians.

The movie explores the current debate over the Christian doctrine of hell, with a special focus on Protestant quarrels that Catholics should find fascinating.

Moreover, in a nice touch, Catholic philosopher Peter Kreeft makes an appearance in the exact centre of the film. Whether it is intentional or not (the writer and director Kevin Miller attends an Anglican church), this beautiful formal structure artfully communicates the Catholic position for what it is: namely, the golden mean for a hot theological argument.

Hell really exists, says Kreeft, but we simply do not know whether it is populated with many, few, or even one person. Kreeft admirably communicates the Catholic Church's sane and balanced view. He points out that, "Lead all souls to heaven, especially those most in need of thy mercy," is part of her famous rosary prayer.



The movie, which explores the current debate over the Christian doctrine of hell, has a "nice touch," writes C.S. Morrissey. Catholic philosopher Peter Kreeft makes an appearance in the exact centre of the film.

Kreeft is surrounded on either side of the film by the non-Catholic extremes. One Protestant extreme wants to affirm that over 99% of humanity winds up damned. The film begins with this group of angry cranks.

They abusively voice their extremist view as they demonstrate at the 9/11

"Ground Zero" Memorial in New York. The filmmaker himself debates them in a riveting series of episodes.

The opposite extreme is represented in the film by Frank Schaeffer, author of *Crazy for God: How I Grew Up as One of the Elect, Helped Found the Religious Right, and Lived to Take All*



Hell highlights the dramatic problem of human choice.

(or *Almost All*) of *It Back*.

Schaeffer denies that hell exists, and his contempt for the rationality of Western Christianity's intellectual tradition is palpable.

No doubt Schaeffer's dogmatic skepticism and radical-left politics are a reaction to whatever in his evangelical upbringing has embittered him, but his substitute creed is indistinguishable from a crude and militant atheism, and an angry anti-Catholicism is on display in many of his publications.

Schaeffer is therefore a mimetic double of the other extremist cranks that the film opens with at Ground Zero.

Both extremes are mirror images possessing a deadly certainty, whether it is the misanthropic certainty that hell is stuffed full with most of humanity, or the equally contemptuous certainty that hell is a fairy tale, useful only for spiritual abuse and political manipulation (and therefore obviously empty).

Both extremes are self-righteously certain about who the monstrous villains are.

When avoiding these two extremes, the remaining voices in the film have more interesting things to say about the hell debate. Filmmaker Kevin Miller even reveals his screenwriter's interest in the topic, because hell highlights the dramatic problem of human choice, as screen-writing guru Robert McKee explains in his interview.

HELLBOUND? is subtly and sympathetically committed to promoting a reconsideration of "universalism," the theological idea that everybody will be saved from hell.

From the Catholic point of view, this position would be heretical if, moving beyond a seriously lived Chris-

all things."

It's a salutary invitation, since everybody is daily tempted to scapegoat convenient targets. This "consignment to hell" of our favourite hated enemies is always and everywhere a failure to live the Gospel fully.

The movie **HELLBOUND?** which opened in the U.S. in September, will open in B.C. Oct. 12. There will be an audience Q&A with the filmmaker after the Oct. 12 Vancouver show at Cineplex Odeon International Village Cinemas, and also after the Oct. 13 show at Colossus Langley. Details at hellboundthemovie.com.

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What the Catechism of the Catholic Church says about hell

"The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity" (#1035).

"Hell's principal punishment consists of eternal separation from God, in Whom alone man can have the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs" (#1057).

"Following the example of Christ, the Church warns the faithful" (#1056).

"The affirmations of Sacred Scripture and the teachings of the Church on the subject of hell are a call to the responsibility incumbent upon man to make use of his freedom in view of his eternal destiny. They are at the same time an urgent call to conversion" (#1036).

"God predestines no one to go to hell" (#1037).

"The Church prays that no one should be lost: 'Lord, let me never be parted from You.' If it is true that no one can save himself, it is also true that God 'desires all men to be saved' (1 Tim 2:4), and that for Him 'all things are possible' (Mt 19:26)" (#1058). □

The Last Judgment, by Jan van Eyck.