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Alert the Media — A Pastor Believes in Hell

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Hell just emerged as an issue in Election 2008, and the campaign now enters a zone where politics and theology collide.

The catalyst for this emergence of eternal punishment as an issue is a “[Belief Watch](#)” column in this week’s edition of *Newsweek* magazine. In “[A Religious-Right Revival](#),” Lisa Miller suggests that the nomination of Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin as the Republican nominee for Vice President represents a resurgence of the so-called “Religious Right.”

There is something to this argument, of course, given Gov. Palin’s record and positions on key controversial issues. Her pro-life credentials, even taken alone, would be enough to encourage many evangelical Christians, as the response to her nomination now demonstrates.

But what makes Lisa Miller’s article most interesting has nothing directly to do with abortion, marriage, or any social issue. The most interesting (and revealing) part of her article is a sentence that does not refer to her campaign, nor to her role as Governor, but to her church:

The senior pastor of that church, in sermons that circulated online before they were taken down last week, preaches hell for anyone who isn’t saved by Jesus.

In the event a reader might miss that sentence, the magazine put the words, “The senior pastor of Palin’s church preaches hellfire for anyone who isn’t saved by Jesus” in large type in both print and electronic editions. In other words, these words are intended to catch a reader’s eye as newsworthy — an attention grabber.

Miller went on to explain that the fact that her pastor preaches such a message “puts her squarely in the tradition of the old-school religious right.”

Of course, belief in hell as the just punishment of the impenitent is part and parcel of historic biblical Christianity. Taken at face value, the belief that “anyone who isn’t saved by Jesus” faces the verdict of hell is as normative as any other Christian belief.

There is no way to read the New Testament without encountering the very clear message about the reality of hell. “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul,” Jesus warned. “Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” [[Matthew 10:28](#)].

True, there are those who have denied both the reality of hell and the exclusivity of the Gospel. Some attempt to deny that those who do not believe in Christ will spend eternity in hell. Nevertheless, even those who propose doctrinal theories such as universalism and inclusivism (or those who promote annihilationism with reference to hell) must admit that their position does not represent what most Christians throughout the centuries have believed — or believe now. We should be concerned that these theories may be spreading in influence, but it should hardly be surprising to find that an evangelical pastor preaches historic Christianity.



What this article in *Newsweek* represents is the absolute confidence that discovering people who believe that those who do not believe in Christ will go to hell is supposed to be shocking.

So we find in Sarah Palin's pastor an evangelical who believes in hell and preaches the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the only means of escaping hell. In other words, he is an evangelical preaching like an evangelical. Alert the media.

See my articles "Hell Under Fire," Parts [One](#) and [Two](#), and my chapter in the book, *Hell Under Fire*.

See also my review of Richard Florida's new book, *Who's Your City*, at [The Reading List](#), [here](#).

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