

Wednesday April 3, 2013

How you can't get to heaven

By Jim Taylor

I remember sitting around a campfire, singing

*"Oh you can't get to heaven on roller skates
'Cause you'll roll right past them pearly gates..."*

Clearly, we boys thought of heaven as a real place, perhaps even with a postal address. And with solid floors:

*"If you get to heaven before I do
Just bore a hole and pull me through..."*

I don't believe in that kind of heaven any more – if I ever did. Probably my juvenile mind couldn't imagine a place that wasn't a place.

Later, Led Zeppelin sang about a Stairway to Heaven – perhaps the ultimate eight-minute rock track. I don't believe in that kind of heaven either – especially since I can't make head or tail of the nearly indecipherable lyrics about a lady who buys the stairway to heaven and then has a bustle in her hedgerow. At least, I think that's what they said.

I know I'm supposed to believe in heaven. After all, that's where Jesus went, after his resurrection – the Bible tells me so. That's where I'm supposed to be re-united with my parents, our son, several dearly loved dogs, and a multitude of saints...

Assuming I've been good, of course.

Otherwise I'll probably just re-unite with a few school friends and a multitude of self-centred cats.

Basis for comparison

The only way I can imagine heaven now is as an ideal against which to compare earthly realities.

A church I belonged to, some years ago, held a study session on disarmament. Several people enthused about a world without wars. Without weapons. Without enemies.

"It won't work," snorted one man. "If you make yourself vulnerable, someone will always take advantage of you. That's why we need armies. Peace only comes through a balance of power."

In the silence that followed his outburst, my friend Grant Kerr asked, mildly, "Do you suppose there will be armies in heaven?"

That question changed the tone of the discussion. The idea of armies waging wars in heaven offends all our presuppositions about what heaven would be like. In heaven, surely, there would be no aggressors, no injustice, no need for defences.

From which it follows that there would be no National Rifle Association, no guns, no murders. And no arms dealers peddling weapons of destruction to underdeveloped nations. In fact, no underdeveloped nations to peddle arms to.

No one dominating anyone else. Which would also eliminate rape, domestic violence, and mugging.

And while we're dreaming in High Definition, how about no amoral bankers flogging credit derivatives, sub-prime mortgages, and Ponzi schemes?

I'm not sure how food would appear, but it certainly wouldn't require genetic modification. Count Monsanto out.

If everyone's content, no one would need drug dealers pushing marijuana, cocaine, heroin, or booze to provide escape into an alternate reality.

I have only two questions – if we can imagine all those things for a place that may or may not exist, why can't we imagine them for a place that we know does exist?

And the other way around, too – if we can't imagine them here, does that make heaven unimaginable?

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YOUR TURN

I was utterly overwhelmed by the letters and good wishes – yes, and prayers – that you sent me this last week after my accident. I seem to be recovering – that is, yesterday was better than the day before, and I expect today to be better than yesterday. But oh my, a disability can be a burden! I'm discovering that even the simplest tasks can take inordinate amounts of time and energy, and can leave me exhausted afterwards.

So I'm not going to attempt to sift through your wisdom about previous columns this week. Maybe next week we'll get back closer to normal.

PSALM PARAPHRASES

Sorry, I don't have the energy to work up a psalm paraphrase this week.

YOU SCRATCH MY BACK...

If you know someone else who might like to receive this column regularly via e-mail, send a request to jimt@quixotic.ca. Or, if you wish, forward them a copy of this column. But please put your name on it, so they don't think I'm sending out spam.

For other web links worth pursuing, try

- David Keating's "SeemslkeGod" page, www.seemslkegod.org;
- Isobel Gibson's thoughtful and well-written blog, www.traditionaliconoclast.com
- Alan Reynold's weekly musings, punningly titled "Reynolds Rap," write reynoldsrap@shaw.ca
- Wayne Irwin's "Churchweb Canada," an inexpensive service for any congregation wanting to develop a web presence, with free consultation. <http://www.churchwebcanada.ca>
- Alva Wood's satiric stories about incompetent bureaucrats and prejudiced attitudes in a small town are not particularly religious, but they are fun; write alvawood@gmail.com to get onto her mailing list.

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You can access several years of archived columns at <http://edges.Canadahomepage.net>.

I write a second column each Sunday called Sharp Edges, which tends to be somewhat more cutting about social and justice issues. To sign up for Sharp Edges, write to me directly, at jimt@quixotic.ca, or send a note to sharpedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca
