

Bored in Heaven #2

Some people's response to the idea of eternally beholding the face of God is that it would be as boring as staring at some single masterpiece painting in a museum for ages without end. It would be delightful for the first few minutes, uncomfortable after an hour, and torture forever thereafter.

This is the perspective I found on a website called "Thinking Atheist." The author, brought up as a "Fundamentalist Christian" but now atheist, reconsiders Heaven, writing the following:

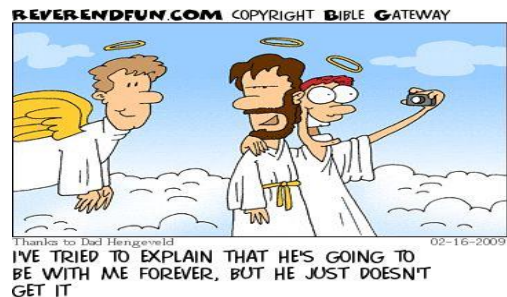
"Let's stop and consider this heavenly heaven that religion touts shall we? A place where you live FOREVER and ever. Does no one ever consider that maybe, after awhile, oh say, I don't know; three billion years, you might run out of stuff to do? I know the rivers are made of wine, and you'll never get a hang over, but drinking is only ever so much fun anyway. An eternity of heaven sounds like a really boring, tedious hell to me."

Regrettably, the writer confuses "infinity" with "eternity" in this reflection and he also transfers the element of "futility" from this mortal life into the afterlife. Neither "infinity" nor "futility" are aspects of the experience of heaven from a truly Christian point of view, (infinity understood as the continuum of time without end). I adapt the word "futility" from St. Paul's well known reflection in Romans 8 which, I believe, accords so well with human experience: We do get quite bored with even those things of the best and highest quality. We are all Mick Jagers who ***"can't get no satisfaction!"*** Well, OK, we do get some satisfaction, but our deepest desires are-not and cannot be met by merely worldly and temporal things. Further on, St. Paul speaks of a new reality: ***"creation will be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God,"*** (Romans 8:21).

Consider the spectacular promises and imagery of the Book of Revelation which describe an otherwise unimaginable existence: *"Behold! God's dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain. . . I*

saw the Holy City Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. It gleamed with the splendor of God. Its radiance was like that of a precious stone, like jasper, clear as crystal. . . Then the angel showed me the river of life, sparkling like crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of its street. On either side of the river grew the Tree of Life that produces fruit twelve times a year, once each month; the leaves of the trees serve as medicine for the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there anymore." (Rev. 21:3-4, 10-11, 22:1-3).

John, the Prophet who wrote down his vision for us makes a valiant effort to describe the indescribable with the language he had at hand. He uses the language of time, (month), the analogies of precious jewels along with lofty promises which are the desire of every human heart. For all the blessings it is to have John's visions handed down to us, perhaps the most prudent words are given by the Apostle Paul who adapts some words from Isaiah 64: *"What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him; this God has revealed to us through the Holy Spirit,"* (1Cor 2:9). Paul avoids specifics in favor of the promise of fulfillment beyond our wildest dreams."



Finally, I love the words of Pope Benedict XVI which I once cited as response to a Boston Globe article concerning a scientific solution for immortality. In the Encyclical, "Spe Salvi" the Pope wrote the following:

"To imagine ourselves outside the temporality that imprisons us and in some way to sense that eternity is not an unending succession of days in the calendar, but something more like the supreme moment of satisfaction, in which totality embraces us and we embrace totality. . . plung[ed] into the ocean of infinite love, a moment in which time—the before and after—no longer exists."