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Where and What Is Heaven?

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erwähnen, daß Quentin sich in Gen. 3, 15 für die Lesart „*ipsa conteret caput tuum*“ entschied, obwohl, wie Stummer schreibt, *ipse* „auf Grund des hebräischen Textes zu fordern wäre“. Die Beweisführung ist beinahe so klassisch wie der dogmatische Beweis für das Primat Petri, der die Geschichte einfach beiseite setzt. Trotzdem aber bleibt wahr, was Stummer zum Schluß sagt: „So dürfen wir also sagen, daß wir tatsächlich am Vorabend einer neuen und verhöhnungsvollen Epoche der Geschichte der Vulgata stehen.“

F. E. F r e e m a n n.

Where and What Is Heaven?

This is not an idle question, as one might be inclined to think upon seeing it in this plain form. Few topics have been the subject of more idle speculation than the question proposed above, particularly on the part of such as are affected by any form of millennialism or some other type of enthusiasm. Hence the double question “Where and what is heaven?” What information does Holy Scripture give us in answer to this question?

The Bible uses quite a few terms or designations for the place and condition of the blessed. The Lord says in Matt. 5, 12: “Your reward will be great *in the heavens*” (*οὐρανοί*), the plural being used here, as often throughout the New Testament. Cp. Matt. 6, 9. In 2 Pet. 3, 13 the apostle speaks of the *new heavens*, in which righteousness will dwell. In 2 Cor. 12, 2 St. Paul speaks of being taken up or snatched away to the *third heaven*, which implies a plurality, and he identifies this heaven with *paradise* in v. 4. In Mark 10, 21 the singular, *heaven*, is used to designate the place of the Lord’s merciful reward. The word “paradise” for the home of the blessed is used by the Savior in comforting the penitent thief, Luke 23, 43. In John 14, 2 the Lord uses a singularly beautiful word for the abode of the blessed, namely, *μοναί*, *dwelling-places*, well rendered in Luther’s word *Wohnungen*. In 2 Cor. 5, 1 the apostle speaks of a *house* (*οικία*), which is identical with a *building*, *οικοδομή*. In Eph. 1, 3 the apostle speaks of the *heavenly places* (*τὰ ἐπουράνια*). A more figurative expression is used Luke 16, 22, namely, *bosom of Abraham* (*κόλπος*), the plural of which is used in v. 23. John the Baptist refers to the *garner* (*ἀποθήκη*) of the Lord, Matt. 3, 12; Luke 3, 17, while Jesus Himself speaks of the eternal *habitation*, or *tents* (*σκηναί*), Luke 16, 9. The writer to the Hebrews, who is constantly making comparisons between the Old Testament and the New, speaks of the *sanctuary* of heaven in the plural (*τὰ ἅγια*) in Heb. 10, 19. Cp. Heb. 9, 12. The same writer refers to the *fatherland* (*πατρίς*) of those who have reached the end of their faith, their soul’s salvation, Heb. 11, 13—16. A similar designation

is found in the word *city* (πόλις) in Heb. 13, 14; 11, 10. Among the more fanciful and poetical terms for the abode of the blessed are the *Jerusalem above*, Gal. 4, 26, a designation similar to that of Heb. 12, 22, where we find the name *heavenly Jerusalem*. The connotation in these passages is very much like that in Matt. 8, 11, with its *kingdom of the heavens*; Luke 13, 29, with its *kingdom of God*; and Luke 22, 30, where Jesus speaks of *My kingdom*. The most complete description in this fanciful manner is that of Rev. 21, where a *new heaven and a new earth* is spoken of as *the city, the new Jerusalem, the tabernacle of God*, with the description completed in Rev. 22. The abode of bliss is described in terms of the most unusual imagery, as a city with marvelous dimensions, consisting of pure gold like glass in appearance, with a twelvefold foundation, with twelve gates of pearls, and with other amazingly beautiful and overwhelming attributes. This description is in line with similar efforts on the part of the inspired writers to picture the glories of heaven in terms of the sublimest imagery, as when in Matt. 25, 10 the guests are taken to the *wedding festivities*, and when in Rev. 19, 9 the invitation to the *marriage supper of the Lamb* is spoken of. All these designations, comparisons, and descriptions are very valuable in the teaching of the Church, for they enable men to speak of the bliss of heaven in such concrete terms as will more easily convey their message to our earth-born minds.

Some of these terms already imply a *condition*, rather than a place. But the description of the *condition of bliss* is even more prominent in other passages. In 1 Thess. 5, 9 the Apostle Paul writes: "God hath not appointed us unto wrath, but to *obtain salvation* by our Lord Jesus Christ," where "salvation" evidently denotes the final consummation of the Christian's hopes, "the end of faith, even *the salvation of your souls*," as in 1 Pet. 1, 9. The same use of the word "salvation" is found in 2 Thess. 2, 13, in 2 Tim. 2, 10, in Heb. 1, 14; 9, 28. It is the final deliverance which is the ultimate objective in the Seventh Petition. But this blessing at the end of time is spoken of also as the *inheritance*, or the *heritage*, of the saints, the marvelous treasure which is laid up for them in heaven, as the apostle says Acts 20, 28. Cp. Gal. 3, 18. In Eph. 5, 5 the same apostle speaks of the "inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." The writer to the Hebrews says of those who are called that they will "receive the promise of eternal inheritance," 9, 15. And the Apostle Peter identifies the final salvation with an "inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you," 1 Pet. 1, 4. Closely related to such designations is the concept of *glory*, or glorification, as the lot of those who remain steadfast to the end. "We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God," Rom. 5, 2. "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to

be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us," Rom. 8, 18. "Our light affliction . . . worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," 2 Cor. 4, 17. "Christ in you, the hope of glory," Col. 1, 27. "The salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory," 2 Tim. 2, 10. Here an explanation is appended by the apostle when he writes in verse 12: "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him." Other descriptions of the heavenly glory are "eating and drinking at My table in My kingdom and sitting on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel," Luke 22, 30; 13, 29, and "entering into the rest of the Lord," Heb. 3, 11; 4, 1. 10. 11.

What, then, is meant by heaven? And what will be the condition of the heavenly bliss? These questions are answered in the Bible from two sides. On the one hand, Scripture refers to the absence of those features which make life here on earth, as a consequence of sin, an almost constant succession of afflictions, tribulations, disappointments, trials, and punishments. The Apostle Paul writes: "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom," 2 Tim. 4, 18. In the Book of Revelation we read: "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them nor any heat," Rev. 7, 16. And again: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away," Rev. 21, 4. On the other hand, the bliss of heaven, of eternal life, will consist in the positive enjoyment of joys ineffable, of a happiness which words of human language can but feebly convey. Thus, Rev. 7, 15 states of the redeemed in heaven: "Therefore are they *before the throne of God* and serve Him day and night in His temple." In Phil. 1, 23 Paul looks forward to the glories of heaven, "to *be with Christ*." In 1 Cor. 13, 12 he tries to explain the meaning of heaven: "Now we see through a glass, darkly (*ἐν αἰνίγματι*), but then *face to face*; now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known." At the present time the truth is still hidden in the language of imagery, but in heaven it will stand before our eyes in unveiled beauty and power. The same thought is presented in 2 Cor. 3, 18: "But we all, *with open face beholding* as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image *from glory to glory*." This includes the full enjoyment of unalloyed pleasures before the face of God and of Christ, Ps. 16, 11; 1 Pet. 1, 8, and the beholding of the glory of the Savior, the eternal Son of God, John 17, 24. And such enjoyment of divine bliss will be possible because this mortal, our mortal and decrepit bodies, shall have put on immortality and this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, 1 Cor. 15, 53. 54. "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body," 1 Cor. 15, 44. "Who shall change our vile body that it may be *fashioned like unto His*

glorious body," Phil. 3, 21. "Then shall the righteous *shine forth as the sun* in the kingdom of their Father," Matt. 13, 43. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall *be like Him*, for we shall see Him as He is," 1 John 3, 2.

The conclusion which we reach after the contemplation of the various passages adduced is this: Heaven, eternal glory or bliss, is the condition of the most perfect salvation, of complete and unbroken peace and bliss. Its essence consists in this, that God, Himself the highest Good, is all in all, and that in the most perfect manner, without interruption and cessation, and that we, with spiritualized, immortalized bodies, see Him face to face and share in the perfection of His bliss, with God in us and constantly before our eyes as the All in all. From the standpoint of its enjoyment by the perfected saints *vita aeterna* may be defined: "*Forma consistit generatim loquendo in ineffabili plenissimaque ac nullis saeculis finienda incomprehensibilium bonorum perceptione.*" (Quenstedt, *Theol. Did. pol.*, I, xiv, 1, 11.) Or, in the words of another dogmatician: "*Consistit in summa felicitate, gloria ac beatitudine, quo electi, ab omnibus malis liberati ac liberi, corpore et anima plenissime et iucundissime in omnem aeternitatem perfruentur.*" (Gerhard, *Loci*, XX, v, 48.) "Eternal salvation consists in seeing God, that is, man enjoys eternal salvation by virtue of the fact that he *sees God*. While the believers in this life know God only through His Word, that is, in a picture (*cognitio Dei abstractiva*), God permits the saints in bliss to know Him *without picture and cover*, face to face (*cognitio Dei intuitiva*). That this seeing God is the *cause* of salvation, because by it man according to both soul and body is fully permeated by the glory of God, Scripture distinctly teaches 1 John 3, 2." (Pieper, *Christl. Dogmatik*, III, 619.) This essence, or real nature, of salvation is not influenced by the fact that Scripture teaches degrees of glory in heaven, Dan. 12, 3; 2 Cor. 9, 6; Matt. 19, 28; for that does not mean that there will be degrees of salvation, of the enjoyment of the actual bliss of heaven, itself. "All will be equally satisfied, for each will receive according to his capacity to receive and to use. If two persons, one a highly trained musician and the other simply an average lover of music, attend the same concert, both are thrilled and satisfied. And yet the former has a greater appreciation of the wonderful harmonies of sound than the other, because of his greater capacity to receive and understand them. They are both equally satisfied, but with a different measure of what may be enjoyed." (Gruber, *What after Death?* 241.)

But *where* will all this take place? Are we to think of heaven as a circumscribed, bordered, and bounded *locality*?

Some scholastics, a number of Roman theologians, and a few Calvinists have held the affirmative. Bernhardinus of Siena and

Scotus referred to the sensual delights of heaven. Petrus Martyr Vermigli, the most prominent Calvinist of Italy (1500—1562), later in Strassburg, Oxford, and Zuerich, writes: "*Ultra firmamentum, quod octavum orbem nostri faciunt, est regio felicissima, ubi corpus Christi degit et sancti sua loca, suas sedes et mansiones cum habent tum post resurrectionem sunt habituri.*" In the *Compendium Doctrinae Christianae* of Zacharias Ursinus (1534—1583) we read: "*Locus beatorum est spatium illud immensum, lucidissimum, gloriosum, extra et supra totum hoc mundum et coelum spectabile, is, quo Deus se patefecit [sic] beatis angelis et hominibus.*" Another Calvinist, Matthias Martinius (1572—1630), writes in a similar vein: "*Locus coeli est proxime supra firmamentum.*" A document as important as the *Neostadiensium Admonitio Christiana de Libro Concordiae*, the most important attack against the Formula of Concord on the part of the German Reformed Church, in the preparation of which men like Junius, Tossanus, Zanchius, and particularly Ursinus were engaged, attributes to God *locale domicilium cum sanctis angelis et beatis hominibus commune*. (Cp. Hoenecke, *Ev.-Luth. Dogmatik*, IV, 349.)

Over against these and other similar conceptions of heaven as a circumscribed locality the Lutheran dogmaticians, practically without a dissenting voice, have urged the attributes ascribed to the perfected saints as well as the descriptions of heaven and the heavenly bliss. Among the attributes of the saints in bliss we find that of *illocalitas*: *Erunt corpora beatorum in certo ποῦ, sed non circumscriptive*. 1 Cor. 15, 44. And as for confining heaven to a circumscribed locality, this is excluded:—

1. By the very descriptive terms used in the Bible itself; for they offer a great variety of ideas, not only on account of their lack of uniformity, but also on account of the plurals which are employed in a number of instances (heavens, tabernacles, dwelling-places—city of gold, fatherland, marriage feast);

2. By the relation of the perfected saints to God, who is Himself *illocalis*, and by the nature of the heavenly bliss (being with God, seeing God face to face, eating and drinking at the heavenly feast), which certainly cannot be said of a definite place or locality;

3. By the fact that the resurrection bodies, though material, partake of the nature of spirits, even if this is not true in the same degree as in the body of Christ after His exaltation;

4. By the fact that the enjoyment of the bliss of heaven on the part of Christ in the state of His humiliation, John 1, 14. 18 (ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόσμον); John 3, 13 (ὁ ὢν ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ) and of the angels even when engaged here on earth in ministering to the saints, Matt. 18, 10 διὰ παντός βλέπουσι; Luke 1, 19 (ὁ παριστηκὼς ἐνώπιον...), is clearly taught in Scripture.

5. Space and time are properties of this *present* world only.

From this we conclude that heaven is not to be thought of in concrete terms of the first Paradise, with the physical properties of an earthly Eden, or as a city with actual streets of gold and gates of pearls or as a series of beautiful tents or flights of rooms, etc., but as a place in only the widest sense of the word, without the connotation of locality, rather as a *being in the presence of God and of Christ*, with the enjoyment of eternal bliss as the chief feature. "Where that heaven is and what is its exact nature we cannot in this world know. . . . The location of heaven is purely a matter of speculation, because the Scriptures do not tell us where it will be. But the condition of the saved as one of everlasting glory and happiness is a clear teaching of Scripture. Perfect in body and soul, they will dwell with Christ forever and ever." (Stump, *The Christian Faith*, 178, 427.) "Wenn die Schrift nun auch zu bestimmten, POSITIVEN Angaben ueber den Himmel kein Material an die Hand gibt, so doch zu der naeheren NEGATIVEN Bestimmung, dass der Himmel nicht als Lokalitaet in grobsinnlicher Art vorgestellt werden darf. Namen wie Haus, Paradies, Stadt, Schoss Abrahams sind sicher μεταφορικῶς und μυθικῶς zu verstehen." (Hoenecke, l. c., 348.) "Die oertliche Lage des Himmels der Seligen ist ebensowenig zu bestimmen wie die der Hoelle. Wie das πῶν damnatorum da ist, wo sich Gott in seiner ewigen Strafgerechtigkeit erzeigt, so ist das πῶν beatorum dort, wo sich Gott in aufgedeckter Herrlichkeit, πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον, zu schauen gibt." (Pieper, *Christl. Dogmatik*, III, 623.) "Allen grobsinnlichen Ansichten gegenueber geben wir noch einmal die lutherische, schriftgemaesse These mit den Worten Gerhards: 'Nos libenter concedimus, coelum beatorum esse certum aliquid πῶν, sed negamus, per locum corporeum esse definiendum, aut sedes et mansiones corporeas illi adscribendas.' Wir verstehen unter coelum also allerdings nicht einen blossen Zustand, so dass es nur ein Ausdruck fuer Seligkeit waere, wie analog unter Himmel an gewissen Stellen Gott selbst zu verstehen ist, Luk. 20, 4, wozu Quenstedt sagt: 'Coelum Dei est ipsa divina maiestas', aber wir halten ihn fuer ein bestimmtes πῶν, nicht fuer eine Lokalitaet in grobsinnlicher Weise." (Hoenecke, l. c., 350.) Cp. Luther, XI, 69 f., § 58.

We close with the prayer of Hoenecke: "*Perducat nos ad beatitudinem vitae aeternae Christus Iesus, fidei et vitae ἀρχηγέτης, in saecula benedictus!*"

P. E. KRETZMANN.