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<http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2010/03/heaven_is_wherever_gods_will_is_done.html>

**Heaven is wherever God's will is done**

*What is your vision of heaven? What images from scripture, tradition or your own personal experience describe it best?*

My vision of heaven is *walking into the arms of God.* This image has the support of "scripture, tradition," and my own "personal experience."

**SCRIPTURE**
A Hebrew Bible / Old Testament reference: "Underneath are the everlasting arms" (the traditional English translation of Deuteronomy 33:27).
A New Testament reference (Gospel of Mark 10:16): Jesus "took the children up into his arms."

**TRADITION**
Almost eight centuries ago, Christian theologian Thomas Aquinas used this image in a classic statement:
"The path that stretches before our feet is a challenge to our hearts long before it tests the strength of our legs. Our destiny is to run to the edge of the world and beyond, off into the darkness: sure in spite of all our blindness, secure in spite of all our helplessness, strong in spite of all our weakness, joyfully in love in spite of all the pressures on our hearts. In that darkness beyond the world, we can begin to know the world and ourselves. We can begin to understand that we were not made to pace our lives behind prison walls but*to walk into the arms of God*."

**PERSONAL EXPERIENCE**
I was lifted up into parental arms thousands of times before, simultaneously, I became too heavy and beyond need of parental arms for mobility. And when I passed from being a crawler to being a toddler, my struggles to walk were rewarded by my parents' assuring words and smiles and by their eagerly extended arms. / In light of the human potential, at 92 I'm *a toddler* toward the eagerly extended arms of my heavenly Father.

1.....I would be embarrassed to ask the slanted, amoral question, "What is your vision of heaven?" Unslanted, the research question might be put thus: "How do you see the afterlife, if any?"

2.....Realistically, the next life may be *worse* for everybody. That was the opinion of the ancient Greeks (who called it Hades) and the ancient Semites (who called it Sheol). For both, it was an underworld of shades, with little or no communication. At its earliest stage of developing the afterlife idea, the Bible argues that God should keep us alive so we can keep praising him (Psalm 6:5): "The dead do not remember you; who can praise you from the grave [Hebrew, Sheol]?" God wants to continue in communion with the Psalmist, so he'd better keep him alive. Sheol is amoral: how we lived life on earth has no carryover effects.

3.....On Faith's questions continue the poll slantedness of Lisa Miller's title, "HEAVEN: Our Enduring Fascination with the Afterlife": amorally , "afterlife " and "heaven" are synonymous. But instead of being primitive-neutral (as Hades and Sheol), the title is *primitive-romantic*.

4.....Our civilization went through thousands of years of thinking the afterlife to be *moral, an ethical extension of this life*. The life after death would include the just consequences of our behavior in this life. The technicolor-apocalyptic picturing of the good/evil divide was heaven / hell. God was "holy love," Judge as well as Lover. He did indeed want to be in communion with us human beings, but on his terms: "Be holy, for I am holy." Righteous and just, not just loving.

5.....But many in our culture have reverted to the amoral view of the afterlife. A dying atheist said to me, "I'm going to a better place." He was stimulated to serious thought when I responded, "What makes you thinks so?" A living atheist, brushing aside my Christian witness, said, "I believe that the Man upstairs, if any, will be kind to me." This romantic amoralization of the afterlife parallels a demoralization and even even depersonalization of God, who has been reduced from "holy love" to *"only love*," the Lover-Boy in the Sky (or wherever).

6.....In her book, Lisa Miller gives this summary of the heaven-views her research turned up: "Heaven is a perfect PLACE. It is the HOME of God and a reward for living the right kind of life. In heaven, we live forever." (My capitalization of the two words.)

**PLACE**
Near the conclusion of a recent course of mine titled "Conversations on Religion and the Bible," an eminent citizen came to me privately and sheepishly asked, "Where is heaven?" "Wherever God's will is done" is the answer one derives from Jesus' petition in the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father in heaven,...your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." When we do God's will, speaking and living truth in love, heaven is here. And since God's desire and will is that we be in communion with him, *heaven is wherever that communion exists*.

**HOME**
Home is house + communion. Heaven is "the home of God" and of those in communion with him. In my favorite analogy, it is where I will enter by "walking into the arms of God."

7.....Lisa Miller's book says that hope is, for her, heaven; and a good marriage is the closest we can get to imagining communion with God. I close with this personal testimony. For 66 years, "home" for me, wherever on earth I've been, has been wherever Loree was - the only woman to whom I've ever given my whole being . For 66 years, I have never looked upon her without joy. Daily I wake up to joy, and believe it will be so after my last day: it will be morning, and with joy I'll walk into the arms of God. / Heaven as place is metaphoric, but heaven as *relationship with God* is real; and we Christians see that relationship as made possible through Jesus Christ as God's Son and our Savior and Lord.

**BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT  |  MARCH 22, 2010; 3:17 PM ET**

**Comments**

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Rev. Elliott,

Thank you for your beautiful essay. May God bless and keep you.

**POSTED BY: FARNAZMANSOURI | MARCH 30, 2010 4:24 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

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