



As is usual during Easter, there are some interesting articles being written to sell magazines to the "religiously" inclined. And while they seem to address Christian topics, they generally do not support a Christian worldview. But, does that mean they have no value other than to raise the blood pressure of some Christians?

In this issue, we consider an article in the current issue of *Time* magazine, concerning heaven. As the *Time* article reflects, Americans hold many different views concerning the afterlife. Be sure to check out the Culture Tracks section to see what the statistical data says.

In other news, the predictions are that the Republican challenger for the presidential race will be Mitt Romney. In the next issue of *CrossingCurrents* we will take a look at the elephant in the room (and it is not the Republican symbol) that none of the other Republican candidates brought up and which the media has allowed to remain dormant. But, will that be true of the Democrats and of the media when it comes to the general election.

Over forty of you have taken the time to respond to our poll regarding President Obama's religion. 41% of those responding believe him to be a Muslim. If you haven't logged your response, please do so and be sure to read the accompanying article, "A Muslim President?"

As we celebrate this very special time of the year, we pray that you and yours will enjoy a wonderful and blessed Easter.

We are especially grateful to all of you who help make our ministry possible through your prayers and financial investments.

Serving Christ Together,

Bob Waldrep

Thank you for your interest in our work. We would enjoy hearing your comments on this and other topics we address, whether you agree with us or not.

Email your questions or comments to:

info@crosswindsfoundation.org

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Rethinking the Resurrection: Really?

By Bob Waldrep

All one need do to know Easter is upon us is to look at the covers of the current editions of *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines. The cover of *Newsweek* boldly declares, "Forget the Church: Follow Jesus"; while *Time*'s provocatively states, "Rethinking Heaven". The publishers understand that religion sells; particularly, during Easter. (Ed. Note: For more on this read our article, "The Controversy Over Hell; April 2011 *CrossingCurrents*, Vol 4:2.)

This is not the first time one of these publications has offered to help "rethink" an issue of faith or religion. The Easter edition of *Newsweek* in 1996, proclaimed, "Rethinking the Resurrection: A New Debate About the Risen Christ". As with this 1996 article about the resurrection, Jon Meacham's article in *Time* proposes there is a new debate in the Church about heaven.

Meacham writes, "...a running debate about the hereafter is raising new questions about the definition of heaven and what it says about the meaning of life." The article calls into question, what is referred to as the long-held belief among Christians, the idea that heaven is a place in the clouds, a kingdom apart from this world - sealed behind "pearly gates".

The divide is described as,

"...whether believing Christians see earthly life as inextricably bound up with eternal life or as simply a prelude to a heavenly existence elsewhere". In other words, is heaven a remodeled and better version of this present earth - somewhat of a heaven come to earth - or is it a "paradise in the sky" we are waiting to enter?



Meacham argues the former was the view of first century Christians and the latter developed as the church aged. Regarding early Christian theology, he states, "Those who believed in Jesus were to be saved, which did not mean a glorious eternity in an ethereal region. It meant, instead, a two-step process. First, when a believer died, his body was left behind and his soul went to a place of rest in preparation for the second phase: a bodily resurrection into 'new heavens and a new earth'-not simply a heaven."

So, how does he explain the more

popular and divergent view, held by many Christians today? Meacham states, "After Jesus failed to inaugurate the new kingdom in the lifetimes of the disciples and early apostles, subsequent generations of Christians - now two millennia's worth - were left to speculate about the nature of life after death. And the further believers have moved in time from the New Testament era, the further many Christians have moved from New Testament understandings about heaven."

In support of his premise that there is an ongoing debate on this issue, scholars, pastors, and Christian leaders of each persuasion are quoted and referenced, including: former Anglican Bishop, N.T Wright; evangelist and author, Billy Graham; renowned scientist, Stephen Hawking; and popular pastor and author, Charles Stanley. Meacham even references the book *Heaven Is For Real* - the story of a four-year old who visited heaven while undergoing surgery.

Supposedly, the child returned with vivid memories of his visit and offered an account in support of the popular view; one, most likely, also held and preached by his father, a Wesleyan pastor. The book is not without its detractors; however, at one point it was the number one best-selling non-fiction book on the New York Times list.



Without question, Meacham is correct as regards there being a debate about heaven taking place today; how new and how wide ranging it is, may offer the better debate. However, as is also true of the Sullivan article in Newsweek, it is obvious that covering a "major" news story was not the publisher's intent. What would have been, at any other time of year, merely a filler story has been packaged and presented in such a way as to be little more than a marketing ploy aimed at selling more magazines through a controversial topic.

That is unfortunate. For, both of these writers offer some interesting observations which the Church and Christians, generally, may do well to

consider. However, when packaged in a controversial story - that calls into question beliefs many Christians hold sacred - there is a tendency to only see those controversial points.

"A running debate about the hereafter is raising new questions about the definition of heaven and what it says about the meaning of life."

Jon Meacham



And, all too often, if someone even hints at something we believe is controversial or questionable (much less wrong) we tend to dismiss it, or go into "attack mode". In so doing, we miss the opportunity to engage in further dialogue and possibly learn

how to better defend and present our own beliefs.

The fact of the matter is none of us really know what heaven will be like. Meacham is probably correct that many times one's view of heaven is shaped more by one's present situation and need than by Scripture.

Maybe the four year-old got it right. Perhaps those who espouse an earth more like we have today - only perfect - are correct. It really doesn't matter to me. I don't think any of us who believe in heaven will ask to be deported from it if it doesn't match the theological view we held while on this earth.

I have often heard Christians say

Continued, p. 4



Culture Tracks

Statistical data reflecting the cultural footprints of Americans



2007 Gallup Poll American Religious Beliefs

- 86% believe in God
- 81% believe in heaven
- 75% believe in angels
- 69% believe in hell
- 70% believe in the devil

2003 Barna Poll Regarding Afterlife

- 81% believe in an afterlife
- 9% believe an afterlife may exist
- 10% contend there is no form of life after death
- 76% believe heaven exists
- 46% believe heaven is a state of existence in God's presence
- 30% believe heaven is an actual place of rest and reward for souls after death
- 14% believe heaven is merely symbolic
- 10% believe heaven is not real (5%), or were not sure it exists (5%)
- 71% believe in hell
- 39% believe hell is a state of eternal separation from God's presence
- 32% believe it is an actual place of torment and suffering
- 13% believe it is symbolic of unknown or bad outcome after death
- 16% did not believe in hell or were not sure it exists

For additional information about these and other cultural trends, email your request to: info@crosswindsfoundation.org



someone is so heavenly-minded they are no earthly-good. I think there is wisdom in that; especially as pertains to this so-called debate. Meacham seems to have reached a similar conclusion from his research when he makes this observation:

"For me, the scholarly redefinition of heaven as a manifestation of God's love on earth has been illuminating...[it] should inspire the religious to open their arms more often than they point fingers...It is not paradise in the sky but acts of selflessness and love that bring God's sacred space and grace to a broken world suffused with tragedy until, in theological terms, the unknown hour when the world we struggle to piece together is made whole again."

No matter which view of heaven one holds, surely we who call ourselves Christians can agree there is much we have to do on this earth in serving our Lord and others. In fact, we would do well to remember that

Jesus said much more about loving others and serving others than he did about heaven. Is there really any question as to where he would most call our attention?

For those who have heard the gospel and responded to it - who have trusted Christ for their salvation - Easter is a powerful reminder that heaven is real and is promised to all those who know Christ; it is the offer and assurance of eternal life. It is also a reminder that Jesus stretched out his arms on the cross on our behalf so that we could have life now and share that good news with others.

At the end of his article, Meacham points out that Paul's great address on the resurrection in I Corinthians 15 concludes with these words: "Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." In his *Newsweek* article, Sullivan makes a similar point when he asks, "What does it matter how strictly you pro-

claim your belief in various doctrines if you do not live as these doctrines demand?"

While we may not agree with all the points they make, each has picked up on the fact that, for many people, the Church appears to be made up of those who have punched their ticket for heaven and are waiting for the train to depart. Now, we can deny this and move on about our business; or, we can give it proper consideration and make any needed adjustments to live out our faith in word and deed until the day we depart this world.

Maybe Meacham is right. Perhaps we need to open our arms more to embrace those in need and point our fingers a little less. It surely couldn't hurt.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

We hearing from readers. Mail, or email, us your thoughts and opinions on this and other topics of concern in today's culture. Even if it's the same as ours we would appreciate knowing what you think.

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