

Hell no, or yes?

In USA Today this week was an interesting article entitled, “Who is, or isn’t, going to hell—*Megachurch pastor Rob Bell has the faith world ablaze with his new book ‘Love Wins.’ [In it] He says a compassionate God offers universal salvation, essentially a direct challenge to traditional Christian dogma...The book has caused an uproar among evangelical Christians, for whom the doctrine of hell has long been a theological certainty. Many like Bell believe that progress in ethical understanding requires modification of precepts such as hell. Denying the reality of hell might suit modern tastes, but it doesn’t stand up to the overwhelming weight of Christian scriptures and historic tradition.*

Beyond the domain of ethical modification and traditional dogma are those who claim to have experienced both heaven and hell and lived to tell their story. In Renny McLeam’s book Eternity Invading Time he accounts his experience of heaven, “*You see, I have been to Heaven on several occasions, scripturally referred to as being ‘caught up in the Spirit.’ When I was seven, I had a supernatural experience that changed my life...I saw angelic beings around God’s throne in worship...As the Lord spoke to me, He began to show me things which I have never forgotten to this day. I saw life as He sees it...There are no words to explain what I observed...I would come to understand the things I saw with greater clarity as I grew older.*”

In Bill Wiese’s book, 23 Questions about Hell, he recounts what he saw, heard and experienced in a literal hell—the searing flames, total isolation, the putrid and rotting stench, and, finally, the strong hand of God lifting him out of the pit. The purpose of such an experience was to awaken others concerning hell’s reality with such metaphors as, “*Suppose you knocked on the door of the most expensive home in the country and told them, ‘I’m moving in with you.’ What do you think they would say? ‘No,’ of course! And you wouldn’t expect them to welcome you. You have no relationship with them. [So if you have no relationship with God through Christ why would you expect Him to let you in?]*

For many of Catholic persuasion, purgatory becomes the missing link in wiggling free of the theological dilemmas posed concerning a loving versus a wrathful God—heaven or hell. For other religions, with their mystical and metaphysical systems of belief, reincarnation and its wheel of rebirth, with their own particular fiery infernos recorded in the Tibetan and Egyptian Book of the Dead, suffice to cope with the dichotomy of bliss or hell. While atheists and secular humanists posture an arrogant pragmatism and condescending sophistication in matters religious placing themselves precariously on the bench between heaven and hell waiting in a benign angst for God.

So who is or isn’t going to hell? The jury is out. In fact, it won’t be the jury that makes the decision on this one. It will be exclusively up to the Judge. The charges have been or will be made. The court date set—the trial complete the gavel will come down. Each one of us will face justice in the end that will be according to laws and principles immutable. The final verdict will not be based upon what we believe but on what we have done. After that, Rob Bell, Osama bin Laden, you or me will find ourselves in a place that is a continuation of our actions and who we have served.

Concluding, I would like to quote a lyric from an old album titled Slow Train Movin by Bob Dylan a Jewish boy from Minnesota, 60s folk hero and saved during the 1980s under the ministry of Bill Bright’s Campus Crusade for Christ. But like Rob Bell who knows where Bob is in his spiritual journey now? Here is the lyric, “*You may serve the devil or you may serve the Lord but you gotta serve somebody.*” Heaven is an extension of a loving God and is a loving hereafter. Hell is the antithesis of this populated by the actions of evil in pursuit of itself. With this in mind, chose this day where you want to be and who you want to serve; and, do it knowing there is a loving God who will give you such choice as a free will being and then will work with you each step along the way to provide the best possible outcome.