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Roberts' "Exploring Heaven and Prayers at Sunset" - Book Review

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Exploring Heaven: What Great Christian Thinkers Tell Us About Our Afterlife with God
By Arthur O. Roberts, Introduction by Richard J. Foster
Harper San Francisco, 2003, $21.95

Prayers at Twilight
By Arthur O. Roberts
Barclay Press, 2003, $9.95

In Exploring Heaven, Arthur Roberts reaches beyond his Friendly audiences into the global marketplace of ideas by developing a theme sure to engender discussions for a long time. This new book on Heaven draws upon the best of religious thought, constructing a fresh set of glimpses into the afterlife. Prayers at Twilight accompanies it with a new collection of poems written about life now and hereafter from a variety of perspectives.

In a day and age where speaking of the afterlife bears with it some uncertainty, Roberts challenges apparent scientific views with some of the latest explorations of the subject by scientists, philosophers and theologians. He proposes that heaven indeed is a real place and that our bodies will not be left behind. Rather, heaven is a reality “congruent with creation,” and “in the afterlife people will be truly present in bodily form.”

Evidences for heaven include the purposeful intelligence behind the cosmos, persistent cultural intuitions, the resurrection of Jesus and the testimony of witnesses. Roberts then moves beyond issues of plausibility to sketching the character of what heaven might be like. Isaiah’s vision of the Peaceable Kingdom may have an echo in the hereafter.

But what sort of persons will we be in heaven? Roberts takes our three and four-dimension world and speculates beyond a fifth dimension; perhaps heaven will involve eleven dimensions! Perhaps this is what Paul was getting at in I Corinthians 15. Glorification may involve changes of spirit, mind and character plus some rhythms of our earthly existence may continue in heaven.

What sorts of social order will there be in heaven? Will we still find ourselves within family structures? How about commerce, the arts, governance, and denominations? Roberts works here with the principle that heaven will enhance the values we treasure rather than diminish them. With God as the orderer of the eternal community, interactivity will continue without the flaws we know so well in this life. All of this will lead to a renewed cosmos—the destiny and purpose of the created order.

Set in an attractive and readable form, this book has an extensive annotated bibliography and also includes an appendix of the relevant biblical texts describing heaven and the afterlife.

Heaven will therefore not simply mark an end to our lives as we know them; rather, it will bring, in Christ, their fulfillment. I strongly recommend this book!

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