Heaven: HG Bishop Youannis of Gharbeya

Heaven and Us

1. Man is a heavenly creature
    - Man is created with body and soul/spirit - the body is taken from the dust of the ground, and the spirit is breathed by God (Genesis 1, 2)
    - For this reason, "the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh" (Galatians 5:17)
    - If he didn't have the body, he would be spirit like the angels
    - If he didn't have the spirit, he would be flesh like the animals
    - But man is unique
2. Man is separated from God, living in sojourn
    - Sojourn is temporary. We came from heaven, and we are going there again. In the mean time, we live on the earth.
    - Jacob when Pharaoh asked how old he was said "the years of my sojourn are few and evil"
    - King David wrote in the Psalms: "I am a stranger in the earth" (Psalm 118:19) - "Be not silent for I am a sojourner in the land and a stranger, as all my fathers were" (Psalm 38)
    - St Paul wrote about the righteous of the Old Testament that they died in the faith not having received the promises, but having seen them from afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims of the earth." (Hebrews 11:13)
3. Man is constantly linked to heaven
    1. Eagerness for heaven
        - All humanity years for heaven - they earn for comfort and peace and goodness
        - Monastics who leave the world and go to live in the desert exemplify this eagerness
    2. Prayer
        - Prayer connects us to heaven since we are talking to God who dwells in heaven
    3. Charity and Offerings
        - When we give charity and offerings, we lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven (heavenly bank)
    4. Intercession of the Angels and Saints
        - Contacting the heavenly inhabitants is easy: just say "O Virgin Mary; O Archangel Michael; O Saint George; O Saint Mina; O Saint Augustine!"
        - We believe in the power of intercession
        - When we pray the morning doxology, it is like we are saying good morning to each of the saints one by one

4. Man has authority in heaven
    - Because man is heavenly, he has authority in heaven
    - Joshua managed to stop the sun in heaven
    - Elijah shut the sky from rain for three and a half years, and then opened it again (by his prayers)
    - The Priesthood is given an additional authority in heaven "to bind and too lose on earth that it be bound and loosed in heaven"
5. Man's Last Dwelling is in heaven
    - "When I witness the overwhelming joy that man gains by dying and the triviality of what he loses by departing from life, I cannot bear any eagerness so intense to go up to heaven. I cry out to God saying, "When, O God, will You deliver me from this life and make me dwell in my dear country?" - St Gregory Nazianzen
6. Man's has heavenly parentage
    - The Lord Christ always referred to "your heavenly Father" or "your Father in heaven" or "when you pray, say Our Father"
    - The sonship to God is real by the Second Birth.
        - Christ has two births - Begotten of the Father before all ages; Born of the Virgin in the fullness of time
        - We have two births - physical birth by natural delivery; second birth from God and the Church of water and the Spirit
7. Man's Life is to prepare for heaven
    - When you will move to a new house, you do a lot of research - the schools, the neighborhood, crime rates, nearby churches, etc.
    - When you are going to a new school or a new job, you ask a lot of questions do a lot of research, etc.
    - Same with preparing to go to our new country - Heaven

Heaven is a Confirmed Fact and Reality

What is heaven?

- The word heaven refers to "what is up above" - in English it comes from "heaved up"
- Three levels of heaven
    1. "Heaven of the birds" - the atmosphere around the earth
    2. "Outer Space" - where the sun, moon, stars are
    3. "Paradise of Joy" - where St Paul glimpsed (2 Corinthians 12:2-4)
    4. "Heaven of Heavens" - The Throne of God

Witnesses to the Existence of Heaven

- Human Nature has always inclined towards afterlife
    - Ancient peoples always believed in immortality, existence of God, life after death, etc. This was regardless of time period or geographic location.
    - It is an instinctive feeling in mankind - although it may weaken in some for a time, it is never extinguished from our nature
    - God gave us the instinct for a reason - to redirect towards Heaven

- Good things come from God
- Nature's Testimony
  - "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims the work of His hands" (Psalms 18:1)
  - Throughout history, scientists have seen God in the works of nature
    - "I have seen God in the works of nature and its laws. These prove the existence of wisdom and power are not materialistic" - Sir Isaac Newton
  - Silk worm that gets in a cocoon and emerges as a butterfly
  - A seed that dropped in the earth and buried brings forth grain
- Death of Atheists vs Saints
  - Many atheists who deny God's existence or the existence of heaven or an afterlife, come to the end of their life and lay in fear
  - Compare with the saints who are joyful on their deathbeds, or even raced to their death in martyrdom, facing it with aspiration, with a smile - as if approaching a date of encounter with someone they have been longing for
- The Testament of Scripture
  - Exodus 20:4
  - Psalms 19:6
  - Psalms 10:5
  - Psalms 2:4
  - Psalms 102:19
  - 1 Kings 8:27
  - Job 38:33
  - John 3:13
  - John 1:51
  - Matthew 5:34-35
  - Matthew 5:18
  - Luke 10:20
  - Hebrews 12:25
  - Acts 7:55-56
  - Revelation
  - 2 Corinthians 12:4
  - 1 Corinthians 2:9
- The Testament of Contemporaries
  - Miracle of St Mary at Zeitoun
  - Page 51-55 has several examples

Holy, Holy, Holy: The Majesty of Heaven

The Heavenly City

10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great
city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, 11 having the glory of God. Her light
was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. 12 Also she had a great and
high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are
the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: 13 three gates on the east, three gates on

the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west.

14 Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve
apostles of the Lamb. 15 And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates,
and its wall. 16 The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he
measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are
equal. 17 Then he measured its wall: one hundred *and* forty-four cubits, *according* to the measure
of a man, that is, of an angel. 18 The construction of its wall was *of* jasper; and the city *was* pure
gold, like clear glass. 19 The foundations of the wall of the city *were* adorned with all kinds of
precious stones: the first foundation *was* jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the
fourth emerald, 20 the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the
ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. 21 The twelve
gates *were* twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city *was* pure
gold, like transparent glass.

22 But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23 The city had
no need of the sun or of the moon to shine [l]in it, for the [m]glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb *is*
its light.

- "Made of pure gold"
  - Gold that we consider the most precious of elements on earth is what the floors in heaven are made of
  - Indication of purity
- "Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal."
  - Like Moses' shining face after being in God's presence
  - The outside of the city reflects God's light
- "The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth"
  - Refers to perfection - thus, those who dwell in it must be perfect
- "the wall: 144 cubits" - "the city: twelve thousand furlongs."
  - 12,000 furlongs is like 1500 miles and it's symbolic to refer to the immensity of the heavenly city
  - The walls are high to symbolize that "there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life" (Revelation 21:27)
  - The repeated use of 12 and its multiples - doors are twelve, twelve angels, tribes and apostles are twelve, twleve foundations, 12,000, 144, etc. 12 points to the Kingdom of God and the sons of the Kingdom. In the OT, the sons of God were the twelve tribes. In the NT, they are the Church preached by the 12 apostles.
- "names written on it"
  - Both the tribes and the apostles are written, referring to the fact that heaven includes both as the Church gathers both - those from the Old Covenant who believed, and those from the New Covenant
- "the twelve gates"
  - three doors on each of the four sides represents that the city of God accepts dwellers with no partiality, from every corner of the earth
- "the foundations"

- Made of precious stones, with the names of the apostles engraved on them
- The foundation on which we build our eternity is the divine virtues that God grants us

Life in Heaven

- "there is no hunger or thirst; no heat or cold" (Revelation 7:16)
- "there is no crying or sighing; no suffering or sickness" (Revelation 7:17)
- "there are no passions or divisions" (1 Cor 15:42-44)
- "there is no jealousy, envy, or disagreement in heaven" (Psalm 132)
- "there is no darkness" (Revelation 22:5)
- "there is no ignorance in heaven, only perfect knowledge" (1 Corinthians 13:9-12)
- We shall see all those who have attained the glory and who have departed before us
- We shall hear the praises of the angels
- We shall experience the fullness of God's presence and His love, that we cannot describe except by saying "My beloved is mine, and I am His" (Song of Songs 2:16)

Will we get bored?

We cannot give a perfect picture of heaven:

- It is in expressible
- We will be changed (and without bodies that get bored, or that lust for other things)
- We will be in the presence of God who is Life and Joy Itself

Heaven's Creation

Death and the Afterlife

Everyone will taste death

- It is nothing to cringe about - everyone dies
- "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27)
- Even Elijah and Enoch who did not taste death yet, will come back in order to fulfill their mission and then taste death

Death

Death is the end of a painful stage in man's life in a world of toil and affliction. It is also a beginning of an eternal life full of joy. The Lord Jesus tasted death and changed it to life!

Death is victory and conquest

Man is Soul, Body and Spirit. The spirit is the rational and non-material essence - the immortal element in man; □□□□□□ . The soul is the live essence or the vital strength in the living being. When the spirit leaves the body, this is what death is.

What happens to man after death?

- Taken to the waiting place, awaiting the final judgment
  - Before Christ's redemption was fulfilled, all who died - whether righteous or evil - went to Hades.
  - Christ, after dying on the Cross, immediately went to Hades and released the souls of those saintly and righteous ones that were confined and had died in the hope of His coming and His salvation.
  - Christ took them to the third heaven which is Paradise - a waiting place.
- Paradise
  - *[9] When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. [10] And they cried with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” [11] Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.*" *(Revelation 6:9-11)*
    - "How long O Lord"
    - "Rest a little while longer"
  - Some believe it is the Paradise of Genesis (Garden of Eden) which was once on earth and was lifted up to the third heaven
  - Some believe Paradise was in heaven and is still there
  - Some believe Paradise was on earth and is still on earth, but is hidden from our eyes after it has adopted a special spirituality - a spiritual existence that cannot be visible to the physical eyes.
- Hades
  - *[9] then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment,*" *(2 Peter 2:9)*
    - Reserve the unjust for the day of judgment
  - Also called the abyss is believed to be a place under the earth (e.g. in the core of the earth)
    - Psalm 70:20
    - Psalms 139:8
    - Isaiah 14:9-15
  - It can also be symbolic in that it is degraded and ugly, contrary to heaven that is exalted and sublime
- What do the departed to in the waiting place?
  - Waiting
    - As a student who completed the exam and is waiting for the results
    - The righteous in paradise are looking up to the heavenly kingdom
    - The wicked are as someone sentenced to death, and waiting for the sentence to be executed; they know their end, and are waiting in fearful worry of the horrible execution of the death sentence
  - Feel for us
    - As soon as man gets rid of his body, he sees so much
    - Remember the parable of the rich man and Lazarus

- Our Prayers for the Departed
  - Our Litany for the Departed is prayed for those righteous who have departed and we pray for the sake of their lapses or mistakes: "Even if any negligence or heedlessness has overtaken them as men, since they were clothed in flesh and dwelt in this world... O Lord, repose and forgive them."

Those Qualified for Heaven and Those Forbidden

The End of the World and Christ's Second Coming

We are assured of Christ's Second Coming

- Matthew 24:30
- Matthew 25:31
- Luke 21:27
- 1 Corinthians 4:5
- 1 Corinthians 15:23
- Philippians 3:20
- Colossians 3:4
- 1 Thessalonians 1:10
- 1 Thessalonians 4:16
- 1 Timothy 6:14
- Titus 2:13
- Hebrews 9:28
- 2 Peter 3:12
- 1 John 3:2
- Acts 1:11
- Revelation 1:7

When is the Second Coming?

“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of [f]heaven, but My Father only. 37 But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. 38 For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39 and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. 40 Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. 41 Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. 42 Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. 43 But know this, that if the master of the house had known what [h]hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. 44 Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." *(Matthew 24:36-44)*

6 Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” 7 And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority." *(Acts 1:6-7)*

27 For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be." (Matthew 24:27)

We can compare the uncertainty in God's Providence as a teacher who tells his students to prepare because he can test them at any time. So that way the student is constantly prepared and learns the material. For a similar purpose, Christ hid from man the time of his death, so he would be constantly prepared to meet the Lord. If man knew the time of his departure from the world, and that he still has many years to live, this would be a motivation for him to be negligent, delay his repentance, submit to his passions, etc. The opportunity could slip from him.

Signs Preceding the Second Coming

1. Persecution of the Believers
2. Appearance of False Prophets and False Christs
3. Wars, Confusion, Rebellion, Disturbances
4. Natural Disasters
5. The Great Apostasy
6. The Gospel Message Reaches the Entire World
7. Signs that Appear in the Sun and Planets

The Second Resurrection

- The first death is the death of sin
- The second death is that of the Body
- The first Resurrection is the Baptism
- The second Resurrection is the Resurrection of the Body that happens after the Second Coming, in preparation for the Day of Judgment
  - "The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth - those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation." (John 5:28-29)

The Second Coming and Judgment

1. The sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven and the powers of heaven will be shaken
2. The Son of Man's sign will appear in the sky - the sign of the Cross
3. Christ will come on the clouds in great power and glory
4. With the archangel's trumpet, he gathers everyone for judgment
5. The dead in Christ will rise first, and this is the second resurrection
6. All will stand before Christ in Judgment
   - Matthew 25 details the Judgment
7. After the Judgment, the believers go in a wedding procession to the Bridegroom in the Heavenly Kingdom

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