



# Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

## Misspent Wishes



When (if) you get to heaven, who will be the first person you want to meet?

Esquire magazine recently asked this of 18 well known people from all walks of life. Their question: "Who do you want to meet when you go up?"

Of course Esquire naturally assumed that everybody goes "up." When you're already "down," it's natural to think you can't go lower. So, following the line made popular by Raymond Moody's "Life After Life," that everybody — including collie dogs — goes to heaven, Esquire ran their Q and A with some of the world's most important citizens. The answers were revealing.

My old film idol, dancer Gene Kelly, said the first person he wanted to talk to was Adam. He wanted to ask Adam if he was surprised when his children came along and they had something he didn't have — a belly button. I wanted to cry. I discovered my old idol, although he had light feet, also has an empty head.

Writer Stephen Birmingham was almost as absurd. He said he wanted to meet Lenny Bruce in order to find out whether Lenny thought heaven was boring.

Then along comes another hero, football coach Bear Bryant, who said he would pass up Churchill, Napoleon and Lincoln to draw diagrams on a blackboard with coach John McKay. However, after looking at McKay's record last year with Tampa Bay, one wonders if he might not already be consigned in a different direction by the fans and stockholders. Besides, there are some serious doubts about coaches being qualified for heaven anyway.

The big shocker came when the magazine got around to the late theologian Karl Barth. "If I ever get to heaven (which is not a very dogmatic statement for a man who wrote a book on dogmatics) I must confess I shall first ask for Mozart." I'm surprised, for I really thought the old Swiss would go higher than asking for an Austrian. Like asking for a Jew, maybe.

Norman Vincent Peale didn't do any better. He said he would first like to speak to Teddy Roosevelt. He was sure the old Roughrider would confirm his feelings about the greatness of America. It's a bit sad, isn't it, to think that even our positive thinkers sometimes travel in small circles.

Only three of the 18 said they would want to see Jesus. One of them was tennis pro Aurther Ashe. Then actress Liv Ullman said she wanted to ask Him if He really believed he was God's son. But it was humorist Art Buchwald, of all people, who got serious enough to say his only choice in heaven would be Jesus. He wanted to ask Him whether or not it was worth all His trouble — and if He would do it all over again and become a Savior.

Those of us who have met Jesus already (this side of heaven) know the answer to that. But after reading the answers of others — including the preachers — I can understand why Buchwald would want to make sure.