

ABOUT HEAVEN

A film by

STÉPHANE GOËL

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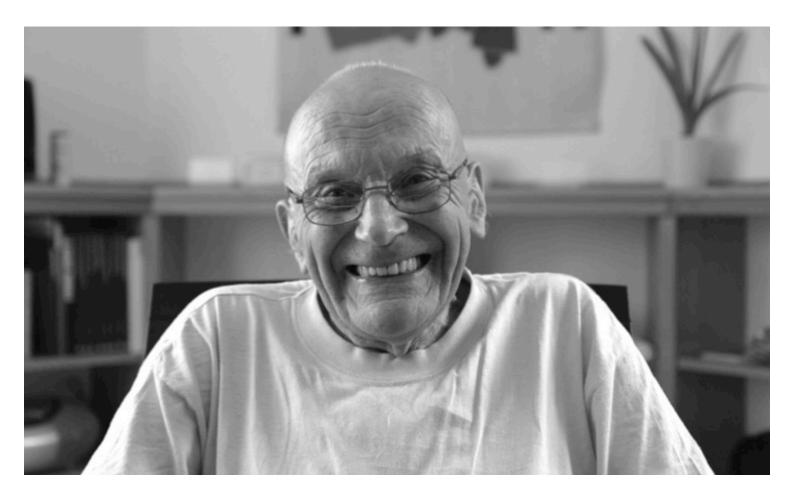
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SYNOPSIS

If Switzerland is sometimes perceived as heaven on earth, the question that follows is: do its inhabitants believe in heaven? Believers, agnostics and atheists all feel the need for a narrative when confronting death. So, what is left of paradise, which once promised eternal happiness?

Encountering people in the twilight of their years, this film offers a moving, offbeat and personal quest within the depictions of this place common to all of humanity, faced with hope and shared doubt.



DIRECTOR'S NOTES

I live in a country, Switzerland, which is often perceived as paradise on earth. But the question is: what is Heaven and do we still believe in it? Therefore I did embark on a serious and joyful journey throughout my country to meet people who are at the end of their life and ask them about their vision of the hereafter. Heaven, hell, reincarnation or total void: I interrogated the dying about their hopes, their doubts and their relation with the Sacred. Because, facing death, believers, agnostics, atheists, everyone needs to build a story.

What is left of Heaven?

I've reached the age at which fathers are beginning to disappear. Mine is 80 years old, crippled with pain after a life of labor as a farmer. He contemplates his "last mile" - as he says - with humor and philosophy. One summer day, while I was walking with him in the pastures of the Alps where he led his flocks for decades, he said: "It is up there, at the foot of this cliff, that I want you to spread my ashes. If heaven exists, that is how it should look. That's it. I do not know if I deserve the heavenly paradise, but at least I will rest in an earthly paradise."

My father was never a very religious man. His generation has seen the disappearance of the church as the backbone of this rural society. But, now that he is at the end of his life, what relationship does my father have with the religious? What is his hope of a life in the hereafter? What images does he have of heaven? Or hell? Does he still fear God's judgment?

I accompanied my father on several occasions to visit some of his friends in a nursing home. I asked this group of old men about their vision of paradise. That question fueled strong, moving and endless debates. Those who believe and those who do not believe. Those who do not know who or what to believe. I collected these words with passion. It is touching, sometimes tragic - when the fear of death is too unbearable - and always rich in emotion. I realize that there is here a wonderful material for a documentary film. Talking about heaven is a great way to talk about death, but also about the good and bad things of life, the joys and the fears that are transcending cultural or religious traditions. Death is a "common ground" of humanity, and we all share the necessity of building a vision of the afterlife. Talking about heaven, as I did with my father, can reveal people's innermost convictions. Our representation of the afterlife is largely conditioned by our religious sentiment, but also by our education, cultural identity, socioeconomic status and our life experiences in general.

These meetings confirmed my intuition. The words of those who are facing death, have a force, a power, both narrative and poetic, far greater than any scholarly or theological discourse.

I found in these stories an expression of profound humanity. Beyond the differences of expression, beliefs and practices, I feel an access to something essential, common to men: the solitary confrontation with the inevitable.

Stéphane Goël

STÉPHANE GOËL

Biography

Born in 1965 in Lausanne. Stéphane Goël studied documentary filmmaking at Global Village Experimental Center in New York and collaborated with artists like Nam June Park and Shigeko Kubota. He directed several artistic and experimental videos before moving to documentaries. Back to Switzerland he joined the producer's association Climage. He produced and directed several documentaries for cinema and television.

Filmography

- 2015 ABOUT HEAVEN Feature
- 2012 FROM THE KITCHEN TO THE PARLIAMENT TV doc
- 2010 LABOUR'S COURT- Feature
- 2008 THE TWILIGHT OF THE CELTS TV doc
- 2007 THE SECRET TV doc
- 2006 QUE VIVA MAURICIO DEMIERRE Feature
- 2005 IN THE LAND OF THE BLACK PHARAOHS TV doc
- 2005 ATELIERS DU NORD TV doc
- 2003 THE POISON TV doc
- 2001 ARCHITECTOUR DE SUISSE doc TV
- 1997 LOST CONTRYSIDE TV doc
- 1996 RESERVATION GOLD TV doc
- 1995 THIS BOY'S NAME WAS APACHE TV doc
- 1993 WEST OF THE PECOS Feature
- 1990 THE REPUBLIC OF UTOPIA TV doc



CREDITS

Directed and produced by Stéphane GOËL

Written with Claude MURET

Assistant director Céline PERNET

Cinematography Camille COTTAGNOUD

Stéphane GOËL

Dylan PERRENOUD

Sébastien REICHENBACH

Sound Stéphane GOËL

Céline PERNET

Editing Karine SUDAN

Music Jean-Philippe ZWAHLEN

Color correction Jean-Baptise PERRIN

Sound design and mix Jérôme CUENDET

Graphic design Manon ROLAND

Production CLIMAGE Audiovisuel

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et Gaspard LAMUNIÊRE

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