

Review (74): *It's a Wonderful Life*: George enters Virtual Reality; Pottersville: A Town without Historical Impact

A. Immersive Virtual Reality: A New Teaching Aid:

- 1- Beginning at the scene of his accident and later at Nick's bar, George enters into what may be described in the language of the 1990s as Virtual Reality.
- 2- We have used the computer and its vocabulary to illustrate the doctrine of the divine decrees. We will now use a relatively new computer technology called Virtual Reality to illustrate the experiences of George Bailey as he moves through a world in which he never existed. In that virtual world, he knows almost all the people he encounters while he is but a rank stranger to them.
- 3- Definition of "Virtual Reality":
 - 1) The term "Virtual Reality" was initially coined in 1989 by Jaron Lanier, founder of the Virtual Reality Laboratory at the University of Michigan (UM), a research facility within the College of Engineering and operated by the Department of Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering.
 - 2) Other related terms include "Artificial Reality" by Myron Kruger in the 1970s, "Cyberspace" by William Gibson in 1984, and more recently, "Virtual Worlds" and "Virtual Environments" in the 1990s.
 - 3) Originally, the term referred to "Immersive Virtual Reality." In immersive VR, the user becomes fully immersed in an artificial, three-dimensional world that is completely generated by a computer.
 - 4) The head-mounted display was the first device providing its wearer with an immersive experience. It presents a stereo view of a virtual world. A motion tracker continuously measures the position and orientation of the user's head and allows the image-generating computer to adjust the scene representation to the current view. As a result, the viewer can look around and walk through the surrounding virtual environment.
 - 5) A variety of input devices like data gloves, joysticks, and hand-held wands allow the user to navigate through a virtual environment and to interact with virtual objects.
 - 6) The unique characteristics of immersive virtual reality include:
 - a. The ability to navigate in three-dimensional space and allow for look-around, walk-around, and fly through capabilities in virtual environments.
 - b. Stereoscopic viewing that enhances the perception of depth and the sense of space.
 - c. Presentation of a virtual world in full scale that relates properly to the human size.
 - d. Realistic interactions with virtual objects by means of data glove and similar devices that allow for manipulation, operation, and control of virtual worlds.
 - e. The convincing illusion of being fully immersed in an artificial world that can be enhanced by auditory, touch, and other non-visual technologies.
 - 7) The applications of Virtual reality are virtually unlimited. A virtual environment can represent any three-dimensional world that is either real or abstract. This includes real systems like buildings, landscapes, underwater shipwrecks, spacecrafts, archaeological excavation sites, human anatomy, sculptures, crime scene reconstructions, solar systems, and so on.

- 8) Of special interest is the visual and sensual representation of abstract systems like magnetic fields, turbulent flow structures, molecular models, mathematical systems, auditorium acoustics, stock market behavior, population densities, information flows, and any other conceivable system including artistic and creative work of abstract nature.
- 9) Useful applications of Virtual Reality include training in a variety of areas, i.e., military, medicine, equipment operation, education, design evaluation, architectural walk-through, ergonomic studies, and entertainment.
- 10) This information and much more on the subject of Virtual Reality are available by logging on the Internet and accessing the Web site of the Virtual Reality Laboratory:
<http://www-VRL.umich.edu>.

C. Pottersville: A Town without Historical Impact:

- 1- After George and Clarence leave the tollhouse keeper's office their first stop is the residence in front of which George smashed his car into a tree.

Clarence: What's the matter?

George: Well, this is where I left my car and it isn't here.

Clarence: You have no car.

George: Well, I had a car and it was right here. I guess somebody moved it.

Homeowner: (Arriving home with Christmas packages) Good evening.

George: O, say, where's my car?

Homeowner: I beg your pardon?

George: My car, my car. I'm the fellow who owns the car that ran into your tree.

Homeowner: What tree?

George: What do you mean, "What tree?" This tree! I ran into it. Cut a big gash in the side of it there.

Homeowner: (After checking his tree and finding no gash he smells George's breath.) You must mean two other trees. You had me worried. This is one of the oldest trees in Pottersville.

George: Pottersville? You mean Bedford Falls.

Homeowner: I mean Pottersville! Don't you think I know where I live? What's the matter with you? (He walks away.)

George: I don't know ... either I'm of my nut or he is. (Looking at Clarence) Or you are!

Clarence: 'Tisn't me.

George: Well, maybe I left the car up at Martini's. Well, come on, Gabriel.

Clarence: Clarence!

- 2- The next scene reveals George and Clarence seated at the bar of what was formally Martini's but what is now known as Nick's. As Nick the bartender comes over to take their order, George asks,

George: Hello, Nick, where's Martini?

Nick: You want a martini?

George: No, Martini, your boss, where is he?

Nick: Hey, look, I'm the boss. You want a drink or don't you?

George: Okay. Double bourbon will ya. Quick! (As Nick turns away he says,) What's the matter with him? I never saw Nick act like that before.

Clarence: You'll see a lot of strange things from now on.

George: Hey, little fellow, you worry me. You got some place to sleep?

Clarence: Nope.

George: You don't, huh? You got any money?

Clarence: Nope

George: No wonder you jumped in the river.

Clarence: I jumped in the river to save you so I could get my wings. (At which moment the cash register rings up a sale,) Uh oh, somebody just made it.

George: Made what?

Clarence: (As Nick returns he overhears Clarence say,) Every time you hear a bell ring it means that some angel just got his wings.

George: (Under his breath) Look, I think maybe you better not mention getting your wings around here.

Clarence: Why, don't they believe in angels?

George: Yeah, they believe.

Clarence: Oh well, why should they be surprised when they see one?

George: (Feeling Nick needs an explanation) He never grew up. How old are you anyhow, Clarence?

Clarence: Two hundred ninety three next May.

Nick: That does it. Out you two pixies go, through the door or out the window.

George: Nick, what's wrong?

Nick: Now there's another thing. Where do you come off calling me Nick?

George: Well, Nick that's your name.

Nick: What's that got to do with it. I don't know you from Adam's off ox.

- 3- At this point Emil Gower enters Nick's bar. He is the druggist for whom George worked as a boy and whose career and reputation was saved by young George's heroics regarding a poisonous prescription Mr. Gower erroneously filled for a sick child in Bedford Falls.
- 4- As you recall, Mr. Gower's son died suddenly of influenza and in a state of depression the pharmacist mistakenly filled a prescription with poisonous pills and asked George to deliver it.

- 5- Knowing of the error George sought ways to inform Mr. Gower of the mistake but to no avail.
- 6- Ultimately, George refused to deliver the poisonous pills to the child's family and as a result was severely beaten by the distraught Mr. Gower.
- 7- George immediately used biblical problem-solving devices to manage the situation, won Mr. Gower's apology, and swore to protect him from his mistake by never mentioning the incident to anyone.
- 8- George kept his promise and Mr. Gower maintained his job and reputation. They remained friends from then on.
- 9- Now as a disheveled, bewildered, and broken old man, Mr. Gower enters the door of Nick's bar. He is in obvious poverty, suspect health, and apparently drunk. His presence gets Nick's immediate attention.

Nick: Hey, Rummy, come here. Didn't I tell you not to come panhandling around here, huh?
(As he squirts him in the face with water.)

George: Mr. Gower, Mr. Gower. What? Mr. Gower, this is George Bailey. Don't you know me?

Gower: No. No.

Patron: Throw him out.

George: Hey, Nick, isn't that Mr. Gower, the druggist?

Nick: Ya know, that's another reason for me not to like you. That rum head spent twenty years in jail for poisoning a kid. If you know him you must be a jailbird yourself. (To the bouncer,) Would you show these gentlemen to the door?

Bouncer: Sure! This way gentlemen.

- 10- He throws George and Clarence out the front door into the snow. As they lie there on the ground, Clarence says to George:

Clarence: You see, George, you were not there to stop Gower from putting the poison into the capsules.

George: What do you mean I wasn't there. I remember distinctly.

- 11- Principle: The decree of God is His eternal and immutable will regarding the future existence of events which will happen in time and regarding the precise order and manner of their occurrence.

Principle: In eternity past, divine sovereignty established that certain things would actually come into being while other things would not.

Principle: Many things that occur are the result of angelic or human free will acting contrary to God's desires.

Principle: Nevertheless, God decided or willed that these things would take place. Thus He makes our volition truly free.

- 12- George Bailey's life is a part of the perfect plan of God regarding human history so that what he now observes as Virtual Reality did not occur historically.
- 13- The way God prevented this potential from becoming a reality was by His sovereign decision to select George Bailey with human life and provide him with a volition that was truly free.

- 14- George Bailey, by using his own free will, had invisible historical impact on his wife, children, family, fellow citizens, and community.
- 15- As George gets up out of the snow he notices that the sign over the building no long reads “Martini’s Tavern,” but simply, “Nick’s.”

George: Hey, what’s going on around here? This ought to be Martini’s place. (He looks at Clarence) Look, who are you?

Clarence: I told you, George. I’m your guardian angel.

George: Yeah, yeah, I know, you told me that. What else are you, a hypnotist?

Clarence: No.

George: Then why am I seeing all these strange things?

Clarence: Don’t you understand, George. It’s because you were not born.

George: Well, if I wasn’t born, who am I?

Clarence: You’re nobody! You have no identity.

George: Oh, what do you mean, no identity? My name’s George Bailey.

Clarence: There is no George Bailey. (As George searches for his wallet and can’t find it) You have no papers, no cards. No driver’s license, no 4-F Card, no insurance policy. (As George sticks his fingers into his watch pocket) They’re not there either.

George: What?

Clarence: Zuzu’s petals. You’ve been given a great gift, George, a chance to see what the world would be like without you.

- 16- Principle: To the degree that a believer makes application of doctrine to life, to that degree he has historical impact.

Principle: Doctrines applied to life accumulate and eventually have positive consequences in the believer’s life.

Principle: Every time the believer applies doctrine to his life it becomes a part of the “indivisible system of things which are essential to the integrity of the whole.”

Principle: A believer’s decisions have impact on his life, the lives of others, and on history in general.

George: Wait a minute here. This is some sort of a funny dream I’m having here. So long, mister, I’m going home.

Clarence: Home? What home?

George: Aw, shut up! Cut it out! You’re crazy, that’s what I think. You’re screwy. You’re driving me crazy, too. I’m seeing things here. I’m going home to see my wife and family, you understand that, I’m going home alone.

Clarence: (Looking heavenward) How am I doing, Joseph? Thanks.

- 17- George has become immersed into what for him is a virtual world. He is able to walk around in a three-dimensional town, interact with its people, and observe a Zeitgeist that appears real but is the exact opposite of what he has known his entire life.

- 18- But in the drama what he is experiencing is not Virtual Reality but a portion of potential human history that has been converted into reality by divine sovereignty and omnipotence, as well as omniscience.
- 19- George is observing life in Pottersville, née Bedford Falls, as a result of having never been born. As he leaves Clarence in front of Nick's bar and walks toward Main Street, the changes become even more stark and staggering.
- 20- George's experiences at the scene of his automobile wreck and at Nick's bar were mild compared to the intensified levels of Virtual Reality he encounters once he arrives at Main Street. There he confronts a community that is an inversion of the city he knew only hours before.
- 21- The sign that once read YOU ARE NOW IN BEDFORD FALLS now reads WELCOME TO POTTESVILLE.
- 22- And as George begins his walk through downtown he sees a city dominated by nightclubs. That's the real motherlode in Pottersville. All up and down Main Street, twenty-four hours a day, liquor, hostesses, gambling, making money hand over fist. Establishments known as the Blue Moon Bar, the Midnight Club, the Bamboo Room, the Burlesque Theater, the Indian Club, and the Dime A Dance Club dominate the scene. Other businesses include a bowling alley that advertises fights every Wednesday night, a pawnbroker, and the Pottersville Hotel.
- 23- The Bailey Building & Loan was once over what is now the Dime A Dance Club. George asks a policeman where the Building & Loan moved and is told it went out of business years ago.
- 24- As George talks with the policeman, Violet Bick is being arrested for some reason and put into a paddy wagon. Confused by all of this George resolves to go home. He sees the cabbie, Ernie Bishop, drive by and hails him down.

George: Ernie! Hey, Ernie, take me home; I'm going off my nut.

Ernie: Where do you live?

George: Now doggone it, Ernie, don't you start pulling that stuff. You know where I live—320 Sycamore.

Ernie: All right, all right! Three twenty Sycamore.

George: Ernie, straighten me out here. Look, I got into some bad liquor or something. Now listen to me! Now, you're Ernie Bishop and you live in Bailey Park with your wife and kid. That's right isn't it?

Ernie: You seen my wife?

George: Seen your wife? I've been to your house a hundred times.

Ernie: Look, Bud, what's the idea? I live in a shack in Potter's Field. My wife left three years ago and took the kid and I ain't never seen you before in my life, see?

George: Okay. Well, just step on it and get me home.

- 25- As Ernie drives past the Burlesque Theater he spots Bert the policeman out front. He indicates that his passenger is, as George would put it, "off his nut." With that Ernie gets into his squad car and follows Ernie's cab. As they arrive at 320 Sycamore Ernie asks,

Ernie: Is this the place?

George: Of course it's the place.

- 26- Three twenty Sycamore is an eyesore. It is rotting and crumbling in upon itself. As George runs into what remains of his house Bert drives up.

Bert: What's up, Ernie?

Ernie: I don't know but we better keep our eye on this guy. He's bats.

- 27- Inside George runs through a decayed interior cluttered with cobwebs and debris shouting for Mary and the kids. Suddenly Clarence reappears:

Clarence: They're not here, George. You have no children.

George: Where are they? What have you done with them?

Bert: All right, put up your hands! No fast moves! Come on out here—both of you!

George: Bert! Thank heaven you're here. What's happened to this house? Where's Mary? What's happened to my kids?

Ernie: Watch him, Bert.

George: What's the matter here? Bert? Ernie? What's the matter with you two guys? You were both here on my wedding night. You both stood out there on the porch and sung to us, don't you remember?

Ernie: Think I better be going.

Bert: Look, why don't you be a good kid. We'll take you into a doctor. Everything's going to be all right. Now come on.

George: Bert, now listen to me—Ernie, will you take me to my mother's house? Bert, listen—it's that fellow there. He's trying to hypnotize me.

Bert: I hate to do this but ...

- 28- Bert raises his gun and starts to buffalo George with it but before he can, Clarence grabs his arm, bites his hand, and hollers:

Clarence: Run, George! Run, George!

- 29- George breaks free and runs away as Bert struggles on the ground with Clarence. As he tries to put handcuffs on him, Clarence screams for Joseph to help him. Suddenly, Clarence disappears, leaving Bert grasping at thin air.

- 30- George runs all the way to his mother's house and rings the bell. As he waits, he sees a sign on the porch, "Ma Bailey's Boarding House," with "No Vacancy" posted underneath.

- 31- As he turns around he sees his mother at the door. However, she is not the charming, elegant lady as before but rather a dark, hardened woman with a scowl on her face.

Ma Bailey: Well?

George: Mother.

Ma Bailey: Mother? What do you want?

George: Mother, this is George. I thought sure you'd remember me.

Ma Bailey: George who? If you're looking for a room, there's no vacancy.

George: Mother, listen! Please help me. Something terrible has happened to me. I don't know what it is. Something's happened to everybody. Please let me come in and keep me here until I get over it.

Ma Bailey: Get over what? I don't take in strangers unless they're sent by somebody I know.

George: Well, I know everybody you know. Like, your brother-in-law, Uncle Billy?

Ma Bailey: You know him?

George: Well, sure I do.

Ma Bailey: When did you see him last?

George: Today, over at his house.

Ma Bailey: It's a lie. He's been in the insane asylum ever since he lost his business. And if you ask me, that's where you belong.

32- With that she slams the door. George runs off the porch out to the street. Clarence, leaning on the mailbox, patiently awaits him.

Clarence: Strange isn't it? Each man's life touches so many others' lives. But when he isn't around, he leaves an awful hole, doesn't he?