

# ON THE MATERIALITY OF THE ETERNAL STATE

By Ashby Camp

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I have long understood Scripture to teach that the redeemed will spend eternity with God in resurrected bodies on a new earth of material substance. I was aware that some in churches of Christ held a contrary view, but only recently have I come to appreciate the size and ardency of that group. I begin this presentation with a glance at church history. I then demonstrate through a multitude of quotations that materialistic eschatology, sometimes called "holistic" or "new creation" eschatology, is the consensus view of scholars who have a high view of Scripture.<sup>1</sup> After noting that materialistic eschatology was the dominant view of churches of Christ in the late nineteenth century, I sketch the basis for the view and then finish by addressing various objections to it. I harbor no illusion about changing minds; that is an exceedingly rare phenomenon. I do hope, however, to encourage respect for materialistic eschatology as a reasonable theological option.

## Glance at Church History

The view of the early church was that resurrected Christians will spend eternity on a new earth of material substance that God had prepared for that purpose. As Carolyn Bynum states, "Early Christians expected the body to rise in a restored earthly paradise, whose arrival was imminent."<sup>2</sup> The bodily resurrection they hoped for "was supposed to occur in a reconstituted universe – a 'new heaven and new earth.'"<sup>3</sup>

There was some disagreement over whether God would transform the present earth into the new earth or would create the new earth out of nothing after annihilating the present earth, but in either scenario it was understood that the new earth would be material or physical. After quoting Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, Methodius, and Melito of Sardis, Gregg Allison states, "In summary, the early church held to the hope of a new heaven and new earth in the future. Whether that would come about through the miraculous divine renewal of the existing heavens and earth, or by means of a total annihilation of the existing universe followed by a divine re-creation out of nothing, was a point of disagreement."<sup>4</sup>

It seems a large majority of early Christians believed the new earth would be a "renewed" earth, a radically transformed version of the present earth. Roger Olson refers to the belief of

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<sup>1</sup> I avoid the shorthand "Evangelical" only because I suspect some I cite would not accept that label.

<sup>2</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 14.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>4</sup> Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 726. Even Richard Middleton, who is more cautious in his interpretation of the early Christian writers on this point, acknowledges that "in the *Epistle of Barnabas*, Justin, Irenaeus, and Methodius we find a significant affirmation of this-worldly redemption, even if we cannot conclusively decide that all of them taught the permanent renewal of the cosmos." J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 290.

Origen and Augustine in the "renovation of creation in its union with heaven" as "common Christian belief."<sup>5</sup> According to N. T. Wright, the early Christians "believed that God was going to do for the whole cosmos what he had done for Jesus at Easter."<sup>6</sup> It was "the strongly held belief of most first-century Jews, *and virtually all early Christians*, that history was going somewhere under the guidance of God and that where it was going was toward God's new world of justice, healing, and hope. The transition from the present world to the new one would be a matter *not of destruction* of the present space-time universe but of its *radical healing*."<sup>7</sup> Michael Svigel makes the same point, perhaps too emphatically:

Rather than a carefully harvested selective reading of the patristic period, these voices from the second through fifth centuries actually represent a unified chorus of fathers who shared the view that this created universe would not cease to exist in a final conflagration. Instead, the fires of judgment would purge and purify the present material world, renewing and readying it for eternal life. Indeed, to find contrary voices during the patristic period, one has to peer across the boundary line of catholic Christianity and look to the Gnostic heretics, who delighted in an eschatology that anticipated the total annihilation of the physical universe.<sup>8</sup>

Gnostics did indeed reject the traditional Christian understanding of a new earth of material substance preferring to spiritualize the concept in keeping with their radical dualism and conviction that the material world was evil. As Gregory Riley observed:

The *Gospel of Thomas* [a Gnostic writing] refutes directly the conception of an eschatological resurrection of the dead at the end of the age. The community of Thomas certainly knew of those who expected the kingdom of God at the eschaton and a new heaven and earth. In conscious contradiction of such expectation, one finds (*GTh* 51):

His disciples said to him: When will the Repose of the dead occur? And when will the new cosmos come? He said to them: This thing which you expect has come, but you do not recognize it.<sup>9</sup>

This is why Gnostic apocalypses are devoid of any eschatological cosmic renewal. "Obviously, there is no interest in these Gnostic apocalypses in cosmic transformation at the end of time, since the cosmos is in principle evil."<sup>10</sup> George MacRae writes:

What is of course most distinctive of the apocalyptic eschatology of Gnosticism is the total absence of any new creation. Given its radically dualistic perspective,

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<sup>5</sup> Roger E. Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity & Diversity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 343.

<sup>6</sup> N. T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope* (New York: Harper, 2008), 93.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 122 (emphasis supplied).

<sup>8</sup> Michael J. Svigel, "Extreme Makeover: Heaven and Earth Edition – Will God Annihilate the World and Re-Creat It Ex Nihilo?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 171 (2014), 402-403.

<sup>9</sup> Gregory J. Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 131.

<sup>10</sup> Francis T. Fallon, "The Gnostic Apocalypses," *Semeia* 14 (1979), 125.

expressed in the concept of creation as error, Gnosticism can see the end time only as the dissolution of the created world. Even though the Gnostics can speak of the "aeon to come," there is strictly speaking no age to follow the destruction, and such language is but another illustration of the well known ambiguity of the Gnostic use of the word "aeon." Ultimate destiny is the reintegration of the divine particles into God, the dissolution of multiplicity in the restored unity. And with that the whole cosmos disappears.<sup>11</sup>

According to Bynum, the Christian hope of a new heaven and earth had not disappeared by the fifth century, but the "eschatological yearning was increasingly focused on heaven, to which soul might go while the bones still reposed in the ground."<sup>12</sup> The historical perspective is still represented in the Middle Ages,<sup>13</sup> but it faded in emphasis during that time leaving the notion of a nonmaterial eternity to infect popular understanding. By the modern period, the doctrine of bodily resurrection and eternal life on a new earth of material substance was unknown by average churchgoers, a fact lamented by more than a few scholars.<sup>14</sup>

### Modern Scholarly Consensus

The good news is that the historical view of eschatology has resurged in the last fifty years or so. In 1958 Oscar Cullmann summoned Christians "to place our resurrection within the framework of a cosmic redemption and of a new creation of the universe," stressing that the resurrection of the body "is only a part of a *whole new creation*" in which God "will not *destroy* matter, but set it free from the flesh, from corruptibility" so that "concrete objects will then rise anew." As he said, this hope "expresses the belief of a divine miracle of new creation which will embrace everything, every part of the world created by God."<sup>15</sup> Whether traceable to that call or not, materialistic eschatology can fairly be said to be the consensus view among scholars and theologians holding a high view of Scripture. It is not the least bit eccentric or suspect. The following quotations should be sufficient to make the point. They also will serve as a preview of the biblical basis for materialistic eschatology.

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<sup>11</sup> George W. MacRae, "Apocalyptic Eschatology in Gnosticism" in David Hellholm, editor, *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1983), 323.

<sup>12</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 13.

<sup>13</sup> Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 726-727.

<sup>14</sup> Middleton, for example, says "This holistic vision of God's intent to renew or redeem creation is perhaps the Bible's best-kept secret, typically unknown to most church members and even to many clergy, no matter what their theological stripe." J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 24. Wright states (p. xi-xii):

At the first level, the book is obviously about death and about what can be said from a Christian perspective about what lies beyond it. . . . I approach the question as a biblical theologian, drawing on other disciplines but hoping to supply what they usually lack and what I believe the church needs to recapture: the classic Christian answer to the question of death and beyond, which these days is not so much disbelieved (in world and church alike) as simply not known.

<sup>15</sup> Oscar Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? The Witness of the New Testament* (London: Epworth, 1958), 9, 37, 59.

The creation of new heavens and new earth completes the divine regeneration of all things spoiled through sin. . . . In this final act, the very structure of the universe is transformed. The old will be disrupted to make room for the new. . . . This must not be interpreted as an annihilation. Rather, as in all of God's regenerative acts, the old must die to be created anew, but continuity is retained.<sup>16</sup>

One gets the impression from certain hymns that glorified believers will spend eternity in some ethereal heaven somewhere off in space, far away from earth. . . . On the contrary, the Bible assures us that God will create a new earth on which we shall live to God's praise in glorified resurrection bodies. . . . For heaven and earth will then no longer be separated, as they are now, but will be one (see Rev. 21:1-3). . . . The total work of Christ is nothing less than to redeem this entire creation from the effects of sin. That purpose will not be accomplished until God has ushered in the new earth, until Paradise Lost has become Paradise Regained.<sup>17</sup>

Man was created "a living soul" an organic unity of the breath of God and the dust of the earth (Gen. 2:7). His organic relation to the whole of creation is so real that biblical theology is unable to think of a complete redemption that does not include "the whole creation" (Rom. 8:22), earth as well as man and the animals. One of the leading Old Testament theologians of the past generation [H. Wheeler Robinson], speaking of the vivid visions of a future transformation of nature, has spoken solid truth: "These pictures are to be taken realistically, not allegorically; if they seem strangely impossible to us, it is partly because we come to nature with an inveterate prejudice in favor of its fixity and virtual independence of God."<sup>18</sup>

The final restoration includes the material world. Creation awaits the disclosure of the children of God when they will experience the redemption of their bodies, for creation itself will be freed from the bondage to decay and will experience freedom from the evil to which it has been subjected (Rom. 8:19-23). Thus the redemption of the natural world from evil and decay is the corollary of redemption of the body. While Paul does not develop this truth, it is built upon the same profound biblical theology that is found in the OT. The prophets constantly described the establishment of God's kingdom in terms of a redeemed world (Isa. 11:6-9; 65:17-25); the NT shares the same theology. Creation is never viewed as something evil that must be escaped. Man as body is a creature of God. A person is not sinful because he or she is a creature but because he or she has rebelled against God. In the final consummation the whole person and the world of which he is a part will be delivered from the curse of evil.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Robert L. Saucy, "The Eschatology of the Bible" in Frank E. Gaebelin, editor, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 1:119.

<sup>17</sup> Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 274-275.

<sup>18</sup> Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth: A Summary of Christian Doctrine Based on Biblical Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 566-567.

<sup>19</sup> George E. Ladd, "Eschatology" in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, editor, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 2:142.

The new heaven and new earth have through the centuries of biblical proclamation comprised the apogee of the eschatological hope of the pious Jew and the devout Christian, a hope for an age of complete blessedness in which the destruction of evil would be complete. The biblical hope, however, is separated from the surrounding religious expectations by the conviction that man's emancipation could not occur apart from the redemption of the created order, for Heaven as well as earth was implicated in the revolt against God.<sup>20</sup>

No New Testament writer envisages the salvation of the soul or spirit with the visible material world abandoned to oblivion. The liberty to be enjoyed by the children of God (Rom. 8.21) does not consist of the emancipation of the soul from the body conceived of as a material prison-house or as the seat of the flesh. It consists of the body's liberation from the rule of the flesh through a transformation into Christ's image (Rom. 8.23, 29). . . . Creation's longing to regain its original integrity will be fulfilled when it is subjected to Christ (Phil. 3.21) instead of to futility and frustration (Rom. 8.20 . . .). Just as the resurrection of man will restore him to his original openness and responsiveness to the Spirit of God, so the rebirth of nature will restore it to its original harmony and liberty (Rom. 8.21).<sup>21</sup>

The ultimate 'destination' of God's people is a transformed universe, 'a new heaven and a new earth' (Rev. 21:1).<sup>22</sup>

At the same time the whole creation, which has been subjected to futility, waits with longing for the final redemption of our bodies (Rom 8:11, 19-23). The resurrection of the children of God will signal the final redemption and renewal of the whole creation. This involvement of the physical body along with the physical creation in the regeneration is one reason why regeneration should not be thought of exclusively as God giving new life to our spirits. The New Testament constantly repudiates the Greek Gnostic notions of salvation of the immortal soul alone. . . .

Once we accept that Jesus rose bodily, even though his resurrection body was not exactly as it has been before, the physical component of the kingdom is clear. Those texts that support the idea of souls going to heaven (for example, 2 Cor 5:1-10) see it as a purely temporary situation. Peter's description of the new heaven and new earth is drawn directly from Isaiah 65:17 (2 Pet 3:13), which is based on Genesis 1:1. Likewise, the marvelous description of the kingdom in Revelation 21-22 is based on a number of Old Testament passages. But there is no suggestion that it is mere symbolism that must be interpreted in a spiritualized way.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Calvin R. Schoonhoven, "Heaven, New" in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, editor, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 2:656.

<sup>21</sup> Murray J. Harris, *Raised Immortal: Resurrection and Immortality in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 170-171.

<sup>22</sup> S. H. Travis, "Eschatology" in Sinclair B. Ferguson et al., editors, *New Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 230.

<sup>23</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 229.

One of the standard features of apocalyptic eschatology is the transformation of the created order under the effects of the emerging age to come. This cosmic redemption is also reflected at several key points within the Pauline letters, demonstrating a close connection between the ideas of creation and redemption. Cosmic redemption is also intimately connected to anthropological redemption within the Pauline letters. The destiny of both the created order and the human race are determined by Christ's resurrection from the dead, and both find their fulfillment in his lordship. Thus Paul concludes his short excursus on creation in Romans 8:19-22 with the proclamation that this redemption includes the adoption of his children via the activity of the Spirit (Rom 8:23).<sup>24</sup>

The doctrine of God as creator implies the goodness of creation. . . . There is no place in Christian theology for the Gnostic or dualist idea of the world as an inherently evil place. As we shall explore elsewhere, even though the world is fallen through sin, it remains God's good creation, and capable of being redeemed.

This is not to say that the creation is presently perfect. An essential component of the Christian doctrine of sin is the recognition that the world has departed from the trajectory upon which God placed it in the work of creation. It has become deflected from its intended course. It has fallen from the glory in which it was created. The world as we see it is not the world as it was intended to be. The existence of human sin, evil, and death are themselves tokens of the extent of the departure of the created order from its intended pattern. For this reason, most Christian reflections on redemption include the idea of some kind of restoration of creation to its original integrity, in order that God's intentions for his creation might find fulfillment.<sup>25</sup>

When referring to [the eternal state], Christians often talk about living with God "in heaven" forever. But in fact the biblical teaching is richer than that: it tells us that there will be a new heavens *and a new earth* – an entirely renewed creation – and we will live with God there.<sup>26</sup>

The biblical picture of the renewed cosmos differs from the vision many Christians articulate. They conceive of an eternal home as an entirely spiritual, non-material locale. To distinguish it from earthly, physical existence, they commonly call it "heaven." Consequently, they picture eternity as a realm inhabited by purely spiritual beings.

As the texts we cited indicate, however, the prophets of both Testaments anticipated a new earth blanketed by a new heaven (Isa. 65:17; Rev. 21:1). Rather than resurrected believers being snatched away to live forever with God in some heavenly world beyond the cosmos, the seer of Revelation envisioned exactly the

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<sup>24</sup> Larry J. Kreitzer, "Eschatology" in Gerald F. Hawthorne et al., editors, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 264.

<sup>25</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 235.

<sup>26</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1158.

opposite. God will take up residence in the new creation (Rev. 21:3). The dwelling of the citizens of God's eternal community, therefore, will be the renewed earth.<sup>27</sup>

For Paul, redemption includes creation. His frame of reference here is Genesis 1, with its repeated declaration that God's creation is good (see 2 Tim. 4:4; cf. 1 Cor. 8:6). However pervasive and perverse sin is in the world, it is still an alien force not inherent to the cosmos (see Gen. 3). Therefore, along with the Judaism of his day, Paul believed that God would someday reclaim his world by recreating out of it a new heaven and a new earth (see Isa. 65:17-25).<sup>28</sup>

The idea of new heavens and a new earth is explicitly noted in Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13; and Revelation 21:1. . . . This imagery is set in prophetic-apocalyptic texts that hold forth future hope for a redeemed world that transcends the sinful world we know. It is especially noteworthy to observe how the closing chapters of Revelation reflect the motifs of Genesis 1-3. The world God originally created suffered the catastrophe of sin and all of its consequences but the future new world will be a perfect world in which the effects of sin are no longer present. . . . Revelation 21-22 provides the crescendo to prophetic-apocalyptic biblical revelation. It is interesting that the imaging of eternity has humankind on a restored earth, not in God's heavenly realm. . . . Human history climaxes where it all began: on the earth.<sup>29</sup>

For Paul, redemption is finally to be understood in bodily terms; there is no thought here [Rom. 8:18-25] of "redemption *from* our bodies," as though the body itself were evil. On the contrary, Paul passionately awaits the Creator's final act of liberating the whole creation from "bondage to decay." . . . Paul's gospel proclaims the redemption of all creation; it is not an otherworldly hope of escape from material reality.<sup>30</sup>

With the final achievement of human salvation there will come also the liberation of the whole material creation from its share in the curse of sin (Rom. 8:19-23). The Christian hope is not for redemption from the world, but for the redemption of the world. Out of judgment (Heb. 12:26; 2 Pet. 3:10) will emerge a recreated universe (Rev. 21:1; cf. Is. 65:17; 66:22; Mt. 19:28), 'a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells' (2 Pet. 3:13).<sup>31</sup>

In glorified bodies we will enjoy a restored and improved Eden, a place of pristine beauty and unbroken fellowship. . . . The new heaven and new earth will provide

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<sup>27</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 840-841.

<sup>28</sup> C. Marvin Pate, *The End of the Ages Has Come: The Theology of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 62.

<sup>29</sup> Gary T. Meadors, "New Heavens and New Earth" in Walter Elwell, editor, *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 563-564.

<sup>30</sup> Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), 26.

<sup>31</sup> Richard J. Bauckham, "Eschatology" in I. Howard Marshall et al., editors, *New Bible Dictionary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 339.

an environment conducive to the most precious values we know – just and loving relationships, fellowship, beauty, and significant activity.<sup>32</sup>

There is an out-of-jointness about creation which its human creatures share (8.22-23). But as creation shares in humankind's futility, so it will share in humankind's liberation from "the slavery of corruption" (8.21).

The point to be underlined here is the solidarity of humankind with the rest of creation, of *adam* with the *adamah* from which *adam* was made. . . . The recognition of the nature of humankind as a corporeal species leads directly to the confident hope that God will provide also an appropriate environment for embodiment in the age to come.<sup>33</sup>

[T]he afterlife is pictured as the final and complete return of God's people to the land, which was such a prominent mark of blessing in the OT. It is, according to Revelation 22:1-6, a return of sorts to the Garden of Eden, the original land of blessing. We see here the redemptive story of the Bible come full circle: deliverance in Christ is for the ultimate purpose of returning to God's people the original Edenic blessedness. The promise of the land in the OT was merely prelude to the heightened realization of the fulfillment of this promise of the afterlife in Revelation 21 and 22.<sup>34</sup>

Biblical eschatology likewise includes a restoration theme. It is most explicitly stated in a sermon by Peter, who predicts that Christ's return will be "the time of universal restoration that God announced long ago through this holy prophet" (Acts 3:21 NRSV). The whole structure of the Bible embodies this pattern, as we move from an original perfection down to the misery of fallen human history and then up to a restoration of perfection – even a paradisaical perfection (Rev 22:1-2; *see* Garden). The same motif underlies the argument of Romans 8:18-25, which speaks of the human and natural worlds groaning under the burden of fallenness, waiting for an eventual redemption or restoration.<sup>35</sup>

The New Testament witnesses envision a consummation of the world which is not primarily destruction. It is rather the universal incorporation into the creative and transforming act of Christ's resurrection. No one has expressed this more clearly than Paul in his Letter to the Romans, where he writes that "the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God," that it will be "set free from its bondage to decay," and that we ourselves wait for adoption as God's children, "the redemption of our bodies." . . .

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<sup>32</sup> Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology: Historical, Biblical, Systematic, Apologetic, Practical*, 3 vols. in 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 3:469.

<sup>33</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 100-101.

<sup>34</sup> "Afterlife" in Leland Ryken et al., editors, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 19.

<sup>35</sup> "Restore, Restoration" in Leland Ryken et al., editors, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 710.

Since Jesus is the exalted Christ, the Pantocrator, salvation in the eschaton pertains to our whole being, to the whole cosmos, and to the whole creation. It is a redemption from transitoriness.<sup>36</sup>

Paul sees Christ's redemptive activity as effecting not just the reconciliation of humanity with God but also, through that reconciliation, the consummation of the entire created order. The non-human creation part of creation is not merely a backdrop to the human drama of salvation history but is itself able to share in the 'glorious liberty' which Paul envisages for the covenant community. . . .

This hope for the whole creation is graphically portrayed by the apocalyptic vision of the book of Revelation. John promises not a spiritual eschaton, but a new heaven and a new earth. This typically Jewish idiom clearly refers to the transformation and renewal of creation as a whole.<sup>37</sup>

The biblical doctrine of the created universe includes the certainty of its final redemption from the domination of sin. The finally redeemed universe is called "the new heavens and new earth." . . .

The new heavens and new earth will be the renewed creation that will fulfill the purpose for which God created the universe. It will be characterized by the complete rule of God and by the full realization of the final goal of redemption: "Now the dwelling of God is with men" (Rev. 21:3).

The fact the universe will be created anew shows that God's goal for humans is not an ethereal and disembodied existence, but a bodily existence of a perfected earth. The scene of the beatific vision is the new earth. The spiritual does not exclude the created order and will be fully realized only within a perfected creation.<sup>38</sup>

In the new age the consequences of human sin will be reversed, and creation itself will be renewed. . . .

The basic principle in these [Old Testament] visions of cosmic salvation is the correspondence between the beginning and the end, between creation and new creation, a theme emphasized in the work of H. Gunkel, *Urzeit and Endzeit* (= primordial time and end time). "Ktisiology and eschatology, the beginning and the end, are co-ordinate" (Linkeskog 1953: 8). The end will be a return to the beginning, to creation as God originally intended it to be, though the end will also bring something more (cf. Jacob 1958: 142). In the descriptions of a renewed earth, "almost every sentence is related to creation and corresponds to something in primal history, Genesis 1-11. No one can fail to see that here primal time and end time correspond to each other. The end time is described as creation made whole again" (Westermann 1972: 19).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Hans Schwarz, *Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 389.

<sup>37</sup> Lawrence H. Osborn, "Creation" in T. Desmond Alexander et al., editors, *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 435.

<sup>38</sup> Fernando Q. Gouvea, "New Heavens and New Earth" in Walter A. Elwell, editor, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 828-829.

<sup>39</sup> Charles H. H. Scobie, *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 169-171.

We must emphasize that this renewed creation is a real space/time universe, and the earth on which we will dwell is a solid, bodily place located in the space of this universe. It is a place perfectly coordinated with and adapted to the nature of our (and Christ's) new glorified bodies. We will be perfectly at home in this new environment. Thus will Jesus' promise be fulfilled, that the meek and gentle "shall inherit the earth" (Matt 5:5). OT Israel's possession of the "promised land" was but a symbolic type of the fact that Abraham and his spiritual seed "would be heir of the world" (Rom 4:13), i.e., the entire universe.<sup>40</sup>

Finally we should note that resurrection in its biblical context is a cosmic hope. We hope not simply for our own salvation but also for the redemption of the cosmos. We look forward not only to heavenly glory but also to the renewal of the world. . . . "Resurrection hope is a total hope that embraces the future of society and the world. Its scope is universal and cosmic" [quoting Carl E. Braaten].<sup>41</sup>

John's vision in Revelation, indeed, in the whole New Testament, does not depict salvation as an *escape* from earth into a spiritualized heaven where human souls dwell forever. Instead, John is shown (and shows us in turn) that salvation is the *restoration* of God's creation on a new earth. In this restored world, the redeemed of God will live in resurrection bodies within a renewed creation, from which sin and its effects have expunged.<sup>42</sup>

The new creation will be a place where the effects of Adam's transgression against God's command are reversed. . . . The effects of human sin reach to the creation generally as it has been "subjected to frustration" and put "in bondage to decay" so that "all creation lets out a groan in common pain" (8:20-22).

In the coming new creation, however, all these "first things" will pass away, yielding to a new order in which God will make "everything new" (Rev. 21:4-5; cf. 2 Peter 3:13). God's people will regain the glory they lost after Adam sinned, and all of creation, now liberated from its bondage to decay, will enjoy that glory (Rom. 8:21). . . .

In summary, the new creation will return the earth to a condition qualitatively like its condition prior to Adam's sin. Death and rebellion against God will disappear, and God's creatures will live together in peace, united by their worship of God.<sup>43</sup>

The phrase "heaven and earth" is a merism that refers to the entire universe. As Greg Beale points out, therefore, Rev 21:1 predicts "not merely ethical renovation but transformation of the fundamental cosmic structure (including physical

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<sup>40</sup> Jack Cottrell, *The Faith Once for All: Bible Doctrine for Today* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2002), 565-566.

<sup>41</sup> Donald G. Bloesch, *The Last Things* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 132.

<sup>42</sup> Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 211.

<sup>43</sup> Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 716-717.

elements)." This language warns us against the persistent tendency in Christian tradition to picture the saints' eternal home as an ethereal and immaterial place up above somewhere. In fact, the NT, contrary to popular Christian parlance, does not usually claim that we will spend eternity in heaven, but in a new heaven and a new earth: a material place suited for life in a material, though of course transformed, body. Jesus' resurrection signals God's commitment to the material world.<sup>44</sup>

Christian hope that reflects the world-view of the Bible is hope for the whole of created reality. It does not divide creation into the immortal and the perishable, that which can transcend the mortality of this world and that which cannot. All too often, however, eschatology, influenced by Platonic or Cartesian dualism, has made precisely such distinctions, promising eternal life for the spirit but not the body, for the individual but not human society, for the personal but not the historical, for humanity but not the non-human creation, for the enduring but not the ephemeral. There are several reasons for resisting such eschatological reduction.<sup>45</sup>

We may summarize Christian thinking about the resurrection, taking account of its homiletic aspect, under four rubrics. . . .

Third, the resurrection is understood as a *cosmic* event, since it marks the appearance of the true *imago Dei* and hence the beginning of God's ultimate purposes for creation: 'The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God. . . . We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies' (Rom. 8: 19-23). Resurrection hope, in patristic and scholastic elaboration, anticipates life in bodies that are both sentient and impassible (knowing pleasure without pain), agile and subtle (fully responsive to the soul), glorious and spiritual (participant with the soul in the life of the Holy Spirit). It also looks forward to 'the renewal of all things' (Matt. 19:28; Rev. 21-2), which will involve a widening or extending of creaturely capacities and responsibilities through unhindered communion with God. The appearance of the church is already evidence of this widening or extending (Eph. 2-3; cf. Irenaeus, *Heresies* 4-5). Resurrection hope is not directed away from the created order, then, but towards its restoration and consummation in the unity of man with God.<sup>46</sup>

Believers are not merely promised resurrected bodies, for God also promised his people a new creation (Rom. 8:18-25). Presently the creation labors under the

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<sup>44</sup> Douglas J. Moo, "Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49:3 (2006), 464.

<sup>45</sup> Richard Bauckham, "Eschatology" in John Webster et al., editors, *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 315.

<sup>46</sup> Richard Farrow, "Resurrection and Immortality" in John Webster et al., editors, *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 219-20.

burden of sin, so that the created order groans and strains because of the impact of human sin. God's promises will be fulfilled in their entirety when the new creation dawns and the limitations of the present created order are transcended. . . . The present heavens and earth will be burned up with fire (2 Pet. 3:10, 12). What is unclear is whether the present heavens and earth are destroyed and then God creates a new heavens and new earth, or whether the burning of the present heavens and earth constitutes a transformation and purification of the present world, so that the new heavens and new earth stand in continuity with the current universe but are completely transformed. Certainty on the matter is impossible, but it seems more likely that Peter refers to the purging and transformation of the old creation so that it becomes a new creation.<sup>47</sup>

My point for now is to notice that in many parts of the world an appeal to a Christian view of the future is taken to mean an appeal to the eventual demise of the created order and to a destiny that is purely "spiritual" in the sense of being completely nonmaterial. That remains the popular perception, both from inside and outside the church, of what we Christians are supposed to believe when we speak of heaven and when we talk of the hope that is ours in Christ.

Over against both these popular and mistaken views [myth of progress and myth of the demise of physical creation], the central Christian affirmation is that what the creator God has done in Jesus Christ, and supremely in his resurrection, is what he intends to do for the whole world – meaning, by *world*, the entire cosmos with all its history. . . .

What I am proposing is that the New Testament image of the future hope of the whole cosmos, grounded in the resurrection of Jesus, gives as coherent a picture as we need or could have of the future that is promised to the whole world, a future in which, under the sovereign and wise rule of the creator God, decay and death will be done away with and a new creation born, to which the present one will stand as mother to child.<sup>48</sup>

Just as John's vision does not involve the exchanging of earthly pleasures for heavenly boredom and asceticism, so also it does not entail a disembodied shadowy existence. The new creation is precisely that – a new creation involving persons in resurrection bodies and an earth that has been renewed and made permanent. . . .

Richter rightly stresses that the finish line in the Bible is never "dying and going to heaven." Instead, it is heading for the New Eden, the new Jerusalem, which transpires after Christ returns, the dead are raised and the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of God once and for all. This is unsurprising, since human beings are earth creatures – flesh and bone. It follows that a material place would

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<sup>47</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 856, 863-864.

<sup>48</sup> N. T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope* (New York: Harper, 2008), 91, 107.

need to be the finish line for this sort of creature. We are not angels. Thus heaven comes down, and there is a return to Eden for the earth creature in the end.<sup>49</sup>

One of the theological reasons for Jesus' return is connected in a fundamental way with God's creation and the fall. . . .

Thus one of the theological reasons that Jesus will return is this: God will restore his perfect creation in which all things will be new (Rev. 21:5) and which will be inhabited by people who are righteous and holy and who will never die (Rev. 21:4, 27; 22:3). . . . God will restore his perfect creation in a new heaven and a new earth in which death, mourning, crying, and pain will be no more (Rev. 21:1-4).<sup>50</sup>

Where will heaven be in the end? It will be right here on earth, in the end. The Bible does talk of a place where the disembodied souls are. But after the resurrection and the renewal of the cosmos, the universe will be born again. It's not all new things; it's all things new. The earth will be reclaimed, and the cosmos will be born again. We will dwell there in glorious, resurrected bodies in a garden-temple that will make the original garden pale by comparison.<sup>51</sup>

I lament that many Christians today think of the afterlife more in line with Plato than with Jesus or Paul. Some devout Christians are captured with a vision that when they die, they will float about heaven like Caspar the friendly ghost, play volleyball with the angels on the clouds, and glide between stars like a mannequin in outer space. To which we say, "No," for the resurrection of the body and dwelling in a terrestrial and glorified new creation are our destiny. Though the soul or the spirit may depart to be with the Lord – more on that in a minute – it is only an interim arrangement. One goal of contemporary Christian theology, then, should be to deplatonize and reapocalypticize Christian hopes for the future – to bring our congregations back to the language of resurrection, new creation, a unity of body and soul, and an end state in order show that the inherent goodness of creation carries over into a new heaven and a new earth. . . . The final state is a heaven that descends to earth and an earth that receives the heavens, so that both heaven and earth are transformed into something other than what they were before. Heaven and earth are changed into the new creation. Heaven does not swallow up earth and earth does not simply absorb heaven. The earth is transfigured and transformed into a heavenly plane of existence, and the dividing line between heaven and earth is obliterated. Heaven becomes earthly and earth becomes heavenly. Though heaven is life after death, the new creation is life after life after death.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ben Witherington III, *The Indelible Image*, 2 vols. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 2:419-420, 799-800.

<sup>50</sup> Eckhard Schnabel, *40 Questions About the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 248-249.

<sup>51</sup> Richard D. Phillips, "A Pastoral Guide to Life After Death" in Richard D. Phillips and Gabriel N. E. Fluhrer, editors, *These Last Days: A Christian View of History* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011), 147.

<sup>52</sup> Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction*, Kindle ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), Kindle Locations 6973-6977, 7318-7321.

Paul's description of Jesus's own resurrection from the dead as the "first fruits" of those who have fallen asleep (1 Cor. 15:20) signifies that the harvest of new creation has begun, the expected reversal of sin and death is inaugurated. This reversal is to be consummated when Christ returns in glory climactically to defeat evil and all that opposes God's intent for life and shalom on earth (1 Cor. 15:24-28). Then the words of the book of Revelation will be fulfilled: "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah" (11:15). At that time, explains Paul, creation itself, which has been groaning in its bondage to decay, will be liberated from this bondage into the same glory that God's children will experience (Rom. 8:19-22).

The inner logic of this vision of holistic salvation is that the creator has not given up on creation and is working to salvage and restore the world (human and nonhuman) to the fullness of shalom and flourishing intended from the beginning.<sup>53</sup>

The final goal of God's redemptive purposes, planned from eternity, is the uniting of all things in heaven and earth in Christ (Eph. 1:9-10). In Ephesians and elsewhere in Paul (see Col. 1:15-20), Christ as God the Son incarnate is the one in whom God chooses to sum up (*anakephalaiōsis*) all things, the one in whom reconciliation of this disrupted, fallen creation will take place. Sin and its effects in both the angelic and human realms have disrupted God's good universe. However, in Christ reconciliation and restoration have not taken place in his death and resurrection (Col. 1:20-22), but it still awaits the not-yet realities of the consummation. But it is important to note, given the believer's covenantal union with Christ, that our future hope and final state is intimately bound up with him. What he has achieved is now ours; what he will complete and consummate is ours – a future, certain hope that entails nothing less than our bodily resurrection, transformation, and glorification in a renewed new creation.<sup>54</sup>

Our resurrection will involve a complete renewal of our present persons – body and soul. And just as we will not be destroyed but renewed, so it is with God's creation. We are a microcosm of the macrocosm of creation. Even as we long for final salvation, so does the creation, personified as an expectant mother. The creation is eager to "be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" [Rom. 8: 21]. The creation longs for the curses removal (vv. 20-22). This is not destruction and re-creation but great renovation of the present world.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 26-27.

<sup>54</sup> Stephen J. Wellum, "Heaven in Paul's Letters" in Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, editors, *Heaven* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 98.

<sup>55</sup> Robert A. Peterson, "Pictures of Heaven" in Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, editors, *Heaven* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 163.

## View within Churches of Christ

Many notable figures in the history of churches of Christ subscribed to a materialistic eschatology. This includes Robert Haldane, Alexander Campbell, Moses Lard, David Lipscomb, J. W. McGarvey, and James Harding.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, "it was the dominant perspective among churches of Christ in the late nineteenth century, particularly as articulated by David Lipscomb and James A. Harding, co-founders of the Nashville Bible School (now Lipscomb University)."<sup>57</sup> It seems, however, that this eschatological view was a casualty of the war over premillennialism that was waged in the church in the 1930s and 40s. Though materialistic eschatology does not entail premillennialism, as often happens in theological battles, relevant distinctions were cast aside and the new-earth baby was thrown out with the premillennial bathwater, presumably because both involve a material state.<sup>58</sup> To this day, many in churches of Christ have a reflexive aversion to materialistic eschatology which pushes them toward unlikely readings of the relevant texts and to speak as though materialistic eschatology is beyond the theological and exegetical pale.

## Basis for Materialistic Eschatology

As many of the quotations provided above make clear, materialistic eschatology is rooted not just in isolated texts but in biblical theology, in the overarching storyline of Scripture. It is a storyline that begins with God creating all things, including the earth and humankind, and declaring that his completed creation was "very good" (Gen. 1:31). It was an idyllic and blessed existence in which all things were functioning in the way God desired. There was no death, and Adam and Eve, the first humans, were in harmony with God, each other, and the rest of creation.

But soon Adam and Eve, who were to be God's representatives on earth, rejected his rule by disobeying him, and in so doing they corrupted or spoiled God's very good creation. As a result of their sin, they were immediately alienated from God, the source of all life, which is reflected in their attempt to hide from him. They were alienated from each other, as suggested by the sense of shame that drove them to seek bodily covering. They also were alienated from

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<sup>56</sup> John Mark Hicks, "Heaven on Earth" – A Stone-Campbell Tradition" posted on 1/27/12, available at <http://johnmarkhicks.com/2012/01/27/heaven-on-earth-a-stone-campbell-tradition/> and footnotes 95-98 below. See also, Bobby Valentine, "Alexander Campbell & the Regeneration of Creation" posted on 2/13/12, available at <http://stonedcampbelldisciple.com/2012/02/13/alexander-campbell-the-regeneration-of-creation/>.

<sup>57</sup> John Mark Hicks, "What Will Become of the Earth: A Nashville Bible School Perspective" posted on 8/8/15, available at <http://johnmarkhicks.com/2015/08/08/what-will-become-of-the-earth-a-nashville-bible-school-perspective/>. It was during this same era that the Presbyterian theologian Charles Hodge wrote: "The Bible concerns man. The earth was cursed for his transgression. That curse is to be removed when mans' redemption is completed. The κτισις that was made subject to futility for man's sin, is our earth; and our earth is the κτισις which is to be delivered from the bondage to corruption. The change to be effected is in the dwelling place of man." Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946 [reprint 1873]), 3:854.

<sup>58</sup> John Mark Hicks, "From Lipscomb to Wallace on 'New Creation' Theology" posted on 2/3/13, available at <http://johnmarkhicks.com/2012/02/03/from-lipscomb-to-wallace-on-new-creation-theology/>. One can see this concern over premillennialism in Burton Coffman's comment on Rom. 8:19. After acknowledging that Charles Hodge's logic in arguing that the verse refers to nature, to the subhuman creation, "is persuasive and difficult of refutation," he adds, "but Hodge himself admitted that 'In the early Christian church, this opinion was prevalent, and was the germ whence the extravagance of the Millenarians arose.'" Available online at <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/bcc/view.cgi?book=ro&chapter=008>.

creation as a result of God's cursing the ground so that it would now be in rebellion to mankind as mankind was in rebellion to God. Paul makes clear in Rom. 8:19-23, a text I discuss below, that the effect of the fall was cosmic in scope; creation itself was subjected to futility and to the bondage of corruption. Moreover, mankind at that point became unconditionally mortal in that God would no longer sustain their physical lives in perpetuity, as he would have done if they had not sinned. Physical death became the lot of all mankind.

In Genesis 4-11 one sees the alienation caused by sin becoming an incubator for greater sin. Sin intensifies and spreads like a plague. In chapter 4 Cain murders his brother Abel, and Lamech, after bragging about having killed a young man for striking him, claims a right of unlimited retribution and violence. By chapter 6 the sin Adam unleashed on the human world had thoroughly corrupted God's very good creation. As a result, in chapters 6-8 God destroyed the earth by a cataclysmic flood and killed everything on dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life (Gen. 7:22). Before doing so, he had mercy on righteous Noah, calling him to build an ark through which he, seven others in his family, and representatives (breeding pairs) of the various kinds of land animals and birds would be spared.

In chapter 9 God entered into a covenant with all creation, with Noah and his sons but also with all the creatures that came out of the ark, that he would never again destroy the whole earth with a flood. The covenant text of Gen. 9:8-17 is followed immediately by a report of sin – Noah's drunkenness and Ham "seeing his father's nakedness." Chapter 10 reports nations that were descended from Noah, and then in chapter 11 there is an account of large-scale human rebellion in the story of the Tower of Babel. Rather than filling the earth, as commanded in Gen. 9:1, people are congregating in the land of Shinar determined to make a name for themselves, to seek greatness through their own accomplishment. God confuses their language and disperses them over the face of all the earth.

By the end of Genesis 11, the fundamental question of sin and its corrupting effect on God's very good creation remains unresolved. The creation is not the way it is supposed to be. It is no longer a paradise where all things work together in peace and harmony under God's rule. Instead it is infected with things like anger, division, hatred, violence, destruction, disease, death, decay, suffering, sorrow, and pain. In that sense, it is a creation that is sick and broken as a result of sin. It has fallen from its original state of glory.

God's judgment in the flood revealed not only God's holy wrath against sin but also showed in a powerful way the depth and extent of sin's grip on mankind. Despite the opportunity for a new beginning that God provided in bringing righteous Noah and his family through the flood and in expressing his mercy by making his covenant with creation, mankind continued on its sinful course, living in rebellion to God.

Clearly some kind of extraordinary work was going to be necessary to recover from the "sin plague" that Satan induced humans to bring into their world. What the answer would be begins to surface in the last half of Genesis 11 where there is a genealogy that goes from Noah's son Shem down to Terah, the father of Abram (later Abraham), Nahor, and Haran. Abraham, of course, is a key person in God's plan of healing the sin-sick world, restoring the broken creation that it might be all that God intends it to be. God calls this man and promises to bless him with

multiple descendants living securely in a bountiful homeland and promises to bless all the nations of the world through him.

The veiled statement of Gen. 3:15 that a man, a descendant of Eve, would win the ultimate victory over Satan is narrowed by God's election of Abraham. Of all the people of all the nations, this Messiah who would bless the world through the defeat of Satan is going to come in the lineage of Abraham. The family line of the Messiah is, of course, further traced through Abraham's son Isaac (Gen. 26:4), through Isaac's son Jacob (Gen. 28:14), through Jacob's son Judah (Gen. 49:8-10), and through Judah's descendant David (2 Sam. 7:12-13).

The story of the Bible is the story of God's work through the people of Israel to rescue his creation, which includes mankind, from its fallen state. People are the high point of God's creation, but his rescue effort includes all of creation because all of creation was harmed as a result of sin. That is why Paul in Rom. 8:19-22 says that creation itself looks forward to the day it will be freed from the futility and bondage of corruption to which it was subjected by God at the fall.

Jesus is the center of this entire effort. His sacrifice is the key to healing all the consequences of sin, even the damage it caused to the nonhuman creation. Thus Paul in Col. 1:19-20 speaks of Jesus as the one through whom God the Father reconciled *all things* to himself, making peace by the blood of his cross. According to Eph. 1:7-10, God's will for the handling of the end of history, his will for the management of the completion of the ages, is to unify *heaven and earth* in Christ. "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him" (2 Cor. 1:20).

The paradise that was lost in Genesis is regained in Revelation and regained to a transcendent degree, regained in even greater form. Revelation pictures the restoration of all things promised by God through the prophets, the restoration mentioned by Peter in Acts 3:21. The curse that followed sin in Genesis is removed in Revelation (22:3), the creation that was defiled by sin in Genesis is transformed into the new heaven and new earth in Revelation (21:1-4; see also 2 Pet. 3:13), and the tree of life from which mankind was banished in Genesis because of sin is part of the eternal home of the redeemed in Revelation (22:2, 14, 19). The continuity is hard to miss.

The crucial point is that the problem with creation is *not its materiality*; that is a Gnostic perspective. After all, God is the one who made humans and the earth of material substance and then pronounced his physical creation "very good." Rather, the problem with creation is the corrupting, ruinous effect of sin that was introduced into the human realm, the physical world, by Satan through Adam and Eve. Eliminating creation rather than rescuing it would mean Satan had succeeded in damaging God's good creation beyond remedy. As Michael Goheen observes:

In the temptation in the garden Satan sought to thwart God's plan. Sin and its consequences now touch all of creation. If the presence of sin in the creation leads God to destroy his creation saving only some human souls, Satan will have gained a tremendous victory. Satan's work will have been quite successful. J. A. Seiss puts it this way: ". . . if redemption does not go as far as the consequences of sin, it

is a misnomer, and fails to be redemption. . . . The salvation of any number of individuals . . . is not the redemption of what fell but the gathering up of a few splinters. . . . Satan's mischief goes further than Christ's restoration.' [J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, n.d.), 483]. The story of the Bible moves toward that time when God's restorative work will go as far as Satan's mischief.<sup>59</sup>

Anthony Hoekema likewise remarks:

If God would have to annihilate the present cosmos, Satan would have won a great victory. For then Satan would have succeeded in so devastatingly corrupting the present cosmos and the present earth that God could do nothing with it but to blot it totally out of existence. But Satan did not win such a victory. On the contrary, Satan has been decisively defeated.<sup>60</sup>

Goheen illustrates the point this way:

Imagine a child who is healthy in every way contracts some disease that begins to have a devastating effect on her body. The doctor diagnoses the disease and seeks to prescribe a remedy that will remove the disease and its debilitating effects from her body. The doctor that destroys the patient and proclaims victory over the disease would be a poor doctor indeed! We can speak here of the healing of the creation. God's redemptive remedy has the goal of destroying sin and its effects so that the creation can be healthy again, the way it was supposed to be. Salvation is the healing of the creation not an escape *out of* the creation.<sup>61</sup>

The materiality of the eschaton is indicated in a number of texts. Indeed, it is implicit in the phrase "new earth" mentioned by Isaiah (Isa. 65:17, 66:22),<sup>62</sup> Peter (2 Pet. 3:13), and John (Rev. 21:1). The "earth" (*gē*) is quintessentially physical. The word carries the notion of materiality in all of its senses,<sup>63</sup> and there is no reason to think the modifier "new" (*kainos*) is

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<sup>59</sup> Michael W. Goheen, "(Re)New(ed) Creation: The End of the Story," 5, available at [http://www.biblicaltheology.ca/blue\\_files/\(Re\)New\(ed\)%20Creation-The%20End%20of%20the%20Story.pdf](http://www.biblicaltheology.ca/blue_files/(Re)New(ed)%20Creation-The%20End%20of%20the%20Story.pdf).

<sup>60</sup> Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 281.

<sup>61</sup> Michael W. Goheen, "(Re)New(ed) Creation: The End of the Story," 4, available at [http://www.biblicaltheology.ca/blue\\_files/\(Re\)New\(ed\)%20Creation-The%20End%20of%20the%20Story.pdf](http://www.biblicaltheology.ca/blue_files/(Re)New(ed)%20Creation-The%20End%20of%20the%20Story.pdf).

<sup>62</sup> Some critics assert that Isaiah's references to the new heavens and new earth are about the church and have nothing to do with creation, but that certainly is not obvious. None of the following sees it that way: Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 408; Geoffrey W. Grogan, "Isaiah" in Frank E. Gaebelien, editor, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 6:351; J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 529-531; Ronald F. Youngblood, *The Book of Isaiah: An Introductory Commentary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 170-171; Barry G. Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*, Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 244-245; John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 40-66*, New International Commentary of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 655-657; John Goldingay, *Isaiah*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 367-369; Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 537-539; Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 715-720.

<sup>63</sup> Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 196.

intended to strip the word of that fundamental aspect rather than indicate a difference relating to something other than materiality. Describing a physical thing as "new" (new house, new ropes, new cart, new garment, new bowl, new courtyard, new altar, new wineskins, new tomb, new cloth) is nowhere taken to refer to something nonphysical. A nonphysical earth, new or old, is an oxymoron.

Of course, physical things can be used to symbolize or represent spiritual realities. But if the "new earth" is a symbolic representation of the saints' eternal abode, it more likely represents a physical rather than a nonphysical place. If, despite the physical nature of resurrection bodies, the intent were to communicate that the eternal state will be a purely ethereal, nonphysical realm, why refer at all to the "new earth," with its implication of material substance, instead of speaking only of the "new heaven"? Moreover, *kainos* tends to express newness qualitatively rather than temporally, that is, it tends to refer to a new quality of an existing thing rather than something that newly came into existence.<sup>64</sup> That favors the view that the "new earth" is the present earth with new qualities, a transformed or reconstituted earth, rather than the label for a previously nonexistent spiritual realm that was brought into being after the annihilation of the present earth.

Romans 8:18-25 proves most vexing to those wed to a nonphysical eternity. They often label the text obscure and then declare that it must be interpreted in conformity with the "clear teaching" of other texts that allegedly establish the nonmateriality of the eschaton. But as will be shown below, no text clearly teaches a nonmaterial eschaton, whereas Rom. 8:18-25 is widely and rightly understood to teach the contrary. It shows that Paul's eschatological expectation includes a cosmic renovation.

<sup>18</sup>For I consider that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy [compared] to the glory that is going to be revealed in us. <sup>19</sup>For the intense expectation of the creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup>For the creation was subjected to frustration, not willingly but on account of the one who subjected [it], in hope <sup>21</sup>that the creation itself will also be freed from the slavery of decay into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup>For we know that all the creation groans and experiences birth pains together until the present; <sup>23</sup>and not only [that], but even ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, we ourselves also groan in ourselves while eagerly awaiting [our] adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup>For in hope we were saved; but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he sees? <sup>25</sup>But if we hope for what we do not see, through endurance we eagerly await [it].

Paul says in v. 18 that what Christians suffer in this present life is insignificant compared to the glory that is going to be revealed in us. Here he moves beyond suffering directly connected to our confession, to our being Christians, to all suffering attendant to our existence in this fallen world. As Douglas Moo points out, "The word Paul uses here refers to 'sufferings' in any form;

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<sup>64</sup> Moisés Silva, editor, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 2:585.

and certainly the 'travail' of creation, with which the sufferings of Christians are compared (vv. 19-22), cannot be restricted to the sufferings 'on behalf of Christ.'"<sup>65</sup>

In vv. 19-25, he elaborates on the future revelation of glory mentioned in v. 18 by showing that both creation and Christians suffer at present from a sense of incompleteness and even frustration, and both eagerly yearn for a culminating transformation. Creation itself, meaning the "subhuman" creation, keenly anticipates the unveiling of the true nature of Christians. Though we are "sons of God," that nature is not apparent in this life because we experience suffering and weakness like everyone else. On the last day, however, our real status will be publicly manifested.

The reason the "subhuman" creation is eagerly anticipating this revelation is that it too is not what it should be or what God intended it to be. God subjected creation itself to frustration when he cursed it as a consequence of Adam's sin (Gen. 3:17-18). It was no longer able to be what it was originally created to be. But this decree included the hope, signaled in the promise in Gen. 3:15, that creation itself will be freed from its slavery to decay and will enter into the end-time glory to be enjoyed by God's children. We and it both are getting the "ultimate makeover."

Up to the present, all parts of creation have together been groaning and experiencing birth pains in anticipation of deliverance into glory. And Christians, we who have the Spirit as a down payment on salvation, share this same anticipation. We too groan or sigh inwardly, nonverbally, in that our attitude is one of longing to be free from the corruption and infirmities that are part of life this side of glory. We do so because, just as creation was subjected to frustration "in hope," we were saved "in hope." To be saved "in hope" is to be saved in the expectation of that which is not seen, which is "not yet." Such hope causes us to steadfastly await its object (our resurrection) with eagerness. It sustains us in this overlap of ages (and our endurance, in turn, strengthens our hope – Rom. 5:4).

Some critics contend Paul means the creation will be freed from its slavery to decay when it is annihilated. But it makes no sense to claim the creation was subjected by God to frustration *in hope* it would be annihilated and that it is *eagerly anticipating* its own annihilation. Neither does this fit the statement that all the creation experiences *birth pains* together,<sup>66</sup> which implies its various elements will pass into a new state of existence not go out of existence. Paul says creation itself *also (kai)* will be freed from the slavery of decay into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. It will be freed as will the children of God, so one cannot claim resurrection glory for the one and annihilation for the other.

Others claim Paul's statements about the material creation in Romans 8 are analogous to personifications of elements of creation in texts like Psalm 114, but that comparison fails under scrutiny. Certainly Paul is personifying creation in Romans 8, but the question is what he is teaching through that personification. He clearly refers to the curse at the fall in Genesis 3 as the

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<sup>65</sup> Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 511.

<sup>66</sup> *Sunōdinō* is a compound of *sun* (with) and *ōdinō* (to have birth pains, be in labor). It can refer to a more general suffering together, but the sense of shared birth pains is rightly brought out by NAS, NEB, NKJV, NAB, NJB, NASU, REB, NRSV, ESV, TNIV, CSB, NIV.

time when God subjected creation to futility and the slavery of decay, so his statements are anchored in biblical history. Since it was the creation that was subjected to this futility and decay, when Paul says the creation is eagerly awaiting the revelation of the sons of God because creation will itself also be freed from the curse and thus share in the glory of the children of God, he is speaking of creation's continuation in a transformed, curse-free state, just as the saints will continue in a transformed, resurrected state.

When the poet writes in Ps. 114:4 that the mountains jumped like rams and the hills like lambs, it is a symbolic depiction of either joy or alarm that accompanied Israel's exodus and arrival in Canaan (vv. 1-2). It is a metaphorical expression of the magnitude of the event. But the Romans text cannot be read that way, read as a metaphorical depiction of the grandeur of the consummation of God's redemptive plan, because creation was actually cursed at the fall and that curse is referenced in Rom. 8:20. Being released from that literal curse is necessarily what is meant by creation's being freed in the future from the slavery of decay. It is a statement about what is to happen to the cursed creation. One can claim Paul means the cursed creation will be freed by being annihilated, the flaws of which I have already explained, but one cannot pretend the text says nothing about the future state of creation.

This is all the clearer when one understands the Jewish apocalyptic writings that form the background of Paul's brief statements. Harry Hahne concludes in his major study of the issue:

The eschatological redemption of creation is an important and frequent theme in most Jewish apocalyptic writings (BW 6-16; 17-36; AB; AA; AW; En. Noah; *Jub.*; 2 *En.*; BP; 4 *Ezra*; 2 *Bar.*; *Apoc. Mos./LAE*). God does not plan to leave his creation in its present damaged state. Even some writings that do not refer to the corruption of creation refer to its redemption.

Paul has the same perspective in Rom. 8.19-22. Christ's redemption is not simply for humanity, but has cosmic consequences. The futility of nature will be removed so that it fulfils the purpose for which it was created. Hope for the future creation runs strongly through the passage. . . .

Romans 8.19-22 is consistent with that strand of Jewish apocalyptic thought that looks forward to a renovation of the present creation (BW 1-5, 6-16; BP 2; *Jub.*; 4 *Ezra*; 2 *Bar.*). Nothing in this passage suggests the destruction of the world or the creation of a new world. Creation eagerly looks forward to the future changes, which would be unlikely if the world were to be destroyed and recreated. The present creation will be delivered from slavery to corruption and futility, and will share in the glory of the glorified children of God. Thus the present creation will fulfil the purposes for which it was created, but which were blocked by the damage caused by human sin.<sup>67</sup>

Douglas Moo comments:

Hahne shows that these verses [Rom. 8:19-22] adopt a widespread motif from apocalyptic Judaism about the ultimate transformation of the earth. The created

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<sup>67</sup> Harry Alan Hahne, *The Corruption and Redemption of Creation: Nature in Romans 8:19–22 and Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Library of New Testament Studies 336; London: T. & T. Clark, 2006), 215-216.

world – probably the nonhuman created world – has, because of human sin, been subject to decay and frustration. But the revelation of God's children in glory will bring liberation to creation's degraded state. The attempt of a number of interpreters to downplay the significance of this text by arguing that it is a kind of "apocalyptic hangover" that Paul uses to make his *real* point about the destiny of Christians ignores the degree to which apocalyptic categories are central to Paul's thought. Indeed, the way Paul introduces the idea, without explanation or defense, suggests that he may assume that his readers are already familiar with a standard early Christian eschatology that includes cosmic renovation.<sup>68</sup>

It thus is not surprising that the overwhelming majority of commentators on Romans understand Paul to be saying in 8:18-25 that creation will be healed at Christ's return not dispatched into oblivion. These include William Sanday and Arthur Headlam,<sup>69</sup> Anders Nygren,<sup>70</sup> C. K. Barrett,<sup>71</sup> John Murray,<sup>72</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield,<sup>73</sup> Ernst Käsemann,<sup>74</sup> F. F. Bruce,<sup>75</sup> Leslie Allen,<sup>76</sup> Leon Morris,<sup>77</sup> James Dunn,<sup>78</sup> Paul Meyer,<sup>79</sup> James Edwards,<sup>80</sup> Joseph Fitzmyer,<sup>81</sup> John Stott,<sup>82</sup> Peter Stuhlmacher,<sup>83</sup> Robert Mounce,<sup>84</sup> Douglas Moo,<sup>85</sup> Jack Cottrell,<sup>86</sup> Thomas Schreiner,<sup>87</sup> Craig Hill,<sup>88</sup> N. T. Wright,<sup>89</sup> Grant Osborne,<sup>90</sup> Robert Jewett,<sup>91</sup> Everett

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<sup>68</sup> Douglas Moo, "Creation and New Creation," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 20:1 (2010), 56.

<sup>69</sup> William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *The Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary, 10<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), 204-209.

<sup>70</sup> Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans*, translated by Carl C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1949), 331-335.

<sup>71</sup> C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Harper's New Testament Commentaries (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1957), 165-166.

<sup>72</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 301-305.

<sup>73</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 1:413-417.

<sup>74</sup> Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, translated and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 233-234.

<sup>75</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Romans*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 159-164.

<sup>76</sup> Leslie C. Allen, "Romans" in F. F. Bruce, editor, *The International Bible Commentary*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 1331-1332.

<sup>77</sup> Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 320-322.

<sup>78</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 469-472.

<sup>79</sup> Paul W. Meyer, "Romans" in James L. Mays, editor, *Harper's Bible Commentary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 1152-1153.

<sup>80</sup> James R. Edwards, *Romans*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), 212-215.

<sup>81</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 504-511.

<sup>82</sup> John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 237-241.

<sup>83</sup> Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, translated by Scott J. Hafemann (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 133-135.

<sup>84</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 183-185.

<sup>85</sup> Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 513-517.

<sup>86</sup> Jack Cottrell, *Romans Volume 1*, The College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1996), 487-491.

<sup>87</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 433-439.

Harrison and Donald Hagner,<sup>92</sup> Arland Hultgren,<sup>93</sup> and Colin Kruse.<sup>94</sup> One could add to this list such notable scholars of the Restoration Movement as Robert Haldane,<sup>95</sup> Moses Lard,<sup>96</sup> J. W. McGarvey,<sup>97</sup> and David Lipscomb.<sup>98</sup> This is also the understanding of Jimmy Allen, a longtime Bible teacher at Harding University.<sup>99</sup>

In Mat. 19:28 Jesus refers specifically to what the disciples will have "in the regeneration" (*en tē palingenesia*), when the disciples will sit with him on their thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. "[A]lmost all interpreters recognize that in this passage *παλιγγενεσία* functions as an eschatological term, denoting an event that will take place when the Son of Man appears in shining splendor as judge. Both the title of majesty 'Son of Man' and the reference to judgment connect the 'regeneration' with the end time (cf. Rev 21:1-5)."<sup>100</sup>

For example, Craig Blomberg states, "Here the concept [of 'regeneration' or 'new birth'] reflects a completely Jewish background (cf. Isa. 65:17; 66:22; and in the New Testament, 2 Pet 3:10-13; Rev 21-22). Nothing less than new heavens and a new earth await Christ's followers after he returns in glory."<sup>101</sup> Donald Hagner states, "*παλιγγενεσία*, which literally means 'rebirth' or 'regeneration' . . . refers here to the eschatological renewal of the world at the end of the present age . . ."<sup>102</sup> R. T. France states, "In 25:31-46 the scene is apparently of the final judgment, and that eschatological perspective seems required here, too, by the term *hē palingenesia*, 'the rebirth' (translated 'new age' above), a term . . . which aptly sums up the OT eschatological hope of 'new heavens and a new earth' (Isa 65:17; 66:22, etc.)."<sup>103</sup> And David Turner states:

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<sup>88</sup> Craig C. Hill, "Romans" in John Barton and John Muddiman, editors, *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1098-1099.

<sup>89</sup> N. T. Wright, "The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections" in Leander E. Keck, editor, *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 10:596.

<sup>90</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Romans*, IVP New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 210-213.

<sup>91</sup> Robert Jewett, *Romans*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 513-518.

<sup>92</sup> Everett F. Harrison and Donald A. Hagner, "Romans" in Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, editors, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 11:137-138.

<sup>93</sup> Arland J. Hultgren, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 320-323.

<sup>94</sup> Colin G. Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 344-346.

<sup>95</sup> Robert Haldane, *Exposition on the Epistle to the Romans*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (Edinburgh: William Oliphant and Co., 1874), 369-374.

<sup>96</sup> Moses E. Lard, *Paul's Letter to Romans* (Lexington, KY: Transylvania Printing and Publishing Co., 1875), 268-273.

<sup>97</sup> J. W. McGarvey and Philip Y. Pendleton, *Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians and Romans*, Standard Bible Commentary (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Company, 1916), 361-362.

<sup>98</sup> David Lipscomb, *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles: Romans*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1943), 152-154.

<sup>99</sup> Jimmy Allen, *Survey of Romans*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Searcy, AR: Harding College, 1980), 79-80.

<sup>100</sup> Moisés Silva, editor, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 1:573. For clarity, I changed the abbreviations "eschat." and "ref." in the original to eschatological and reference.

<sup>101</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 300-301.

<sup>102</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 565.

<sup>103</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 742-743.

The prospect of the gloriously enthroned Jesus anticipates 25:30-31. The terminology focusing on the twelve tribes of Israel is remarkable (cf. Luke 22:30; Rev. 21:12; . . .), as is the description of the eschaton as a time of regeneration. Eschatological renewal of the transitory present world (Matt. 5:18; 24:35) is part of the messianic salvation accomplished by Jesus (1:21; 20:28; 26:26-29; cf. Rom. 8:18-23). Cosmic eschatological renewal is linked to Jesus's previous stress on the priority of the created order in Matt. 19:4, 8. . . . The end will renew the beginning; eschatology restores protology.<sup>104</sup>

The only other New Testament occurrence of *palingenesia* is in Tit. 3:5, where it refers to the regeneration of human beings by the Holy Spirit's work associated with their baptism into Christ. But these two perspectives are connected.

Even though Matt 19:28 and Titus 3:5 present two different perspectives, the connection between them is important, for the individual who is by nature dead and enters new life by the working of the Holy Spirit is not the only or final goal of salvation history. The NT is bounded by the horizon of the new creation that is already here (2 Cor 5:17) and the restoration of all things in the future (Acts 3:21), i.e., the promised new heaven and new earth (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev 21:1-5).<sup>105</sup>

In Mat. 5:5 Jesus alludes to this promised regeneration, this complete and final healing of the sin-sick creation, when he promises disciples (described as "the meek") that they will "inherit the earth" (see also Rom. 4:13). Their future is eternal resurrection life on a new earth, a creation that has been purged of sin and all of its effects so as to be the dwelling place of God and man. Donald Hagner states, "The 'earth' (*τὴν γῆν*) originally referred to the land of Israel, i.e., what was promised to the Jews beginning with the Abrahamic covenant (cf. Gen 13:15). But in the present context of messianic fulfillment, it connotes the regenerated earth (19:28; cf. Rom 4:13, where *κόσμος*, 'world,' replaces *γῆ*), promised in the eschatological passages in the prophets (e.g., Isa 65-66)."<sup>106</sup> D. A. Carson similarly explains:

There is no reason to interpret the land metaphorically, as having no reference to geography or space; nor is there need to restrict the meaning to "land of Israel." Entrance into the Promised Land ultimately became a pointer toward entrance into the new heaven and *the new earth* ("earth" is the same word as "land"; cf. Isa 66:22; Rev. 21:1), the consummation of the messianic kingdom. While in Pauline terms, believers may now possess all things in principle (1Co 3:21-23; 2Co 6:10) since they belong to Christ, Matthew directs our attention yet further to the "renewal of all things" (19:28).<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 475.

<sup>105</sup> Moisés Silva, editor, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 1:574.

<sup>106</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 92-93.

<sup>107</sup> D. A. Carson, "Matthew" in Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, editors, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 9:164. See also, Blomberg, 99 and Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew, A Commentary, Volume 1* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1987), 141.

It is this promised regeneration for which disciples are instructed to pray in Mat. 6:10. The prayer in 6:9 is that God bring about the sanctification of his name, the honoring and revering of himself as holy. Whereas God is exalted to some degree in the spread of the gospel and in the Christ-like conduct of his children, the ultimate sanctification of his name will be when Christ returns to finalize or consummate the kingdom he inaugurated with his first coming. This is the final assertion of God's kingly rule in which everything is brought into harmony with his will and all sin and its products are eliminated. It is the eternal state, the goal of God's creation.

Thus, the prayer in 6:10a ("Your kingdom come") is for God's kingdom to come *in its consummated form*, a prayer for the kingdom to come in its fullest and final expression.<sup>108</sup> It is this expectation that was behind the early church's Aramaic prayer *Marana tha* – Come Lord! – that you see in 1 Cor. 16:22. The same idea is expressed in Greek in Rev. 22:20, the next to the last verse of the book and of the entire Bible – Come, Lord Jesus!

As disciples of Christ, we recognize that God's kingdom already has invaded this reality through the work of the Lord Jesus. The kingdom is a present reality, and we who have embraced and entered into that work through faith in Jesus are the church. But we long for "that Day" when Jesus returns, when heaven and earth will merge, so to speak, and God's sovereignty will be expressed in a way different from the present. Charles Quarles writes:

Jesus' followers pray fervently and frequently for the coming of Christ's kingdom for good reason. The consummation of the kingdom will bring about the complete fulfillment of the great blessings promised in the Beatitudes. Although Jesus' disciples now enjoy a partial fulfillment of each of these promises, they will experience the complete and final fulfillment of these promises only after Jesus' return.<sup>109</sup>

Matthew 6:10b ("your will be done on earth as it is in heaven") is an explanatory description of the request for God's kingdom to come. At Christ's return, when the kingdom he inaugurated is consummated, creation will be "heavenized," the picture painted in Revelation 21. It will be brought into complete harmony with God's ultimate will and purpose. The new heavens and new earth will be the divine utopia, a reality in which there will be no death, mourning, crying, or pain. Sin and all of its destructive consequences will have been purged. Michael Wilkins writes, "The complete experience of God's will on earth will occur only when his kingdom comes to earth in its final form, causing an overthrow of all evil rule (Rev. 20:1-10) and completing the regeneration of this earth (cf. Rom. 8:18-25)."<sup>110</sup> Robert Guelich likewise states, "Therefore, to pray 'let your will be done' does point to the future when Satan and the forces of disobedience will be totally destroyed, the wicked and enemies judged, and God rules supreme 'on earth as in heaven.'"<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> For background on the "kingdom of God," see "The Parables of Jesus" (pp. 4-18) available at <http://theoutlet.us/TheParablesOfJesusTOC.pdf>.

<sup>109</sup> Charles Quarles, *Sermon on the Mount: Restoring Christ's Message to the Modern Church* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2011), 200.

<sup>110</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 277.

<sup>111</sup> Robert Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1982), 311.

In Acts 3:21 Peter says that Jesus will remain in heaven until the times of restoration of all things, about which things God testified long ago through the prophets. In other words, when Jesus returns creation will be restored in the sense it will be purged of all the effects of sin (see Rom. 8:18-25; Rev. 21:1-4) in accordance with God's promise in the Old Testament to create a new heaven and new earth. The curse will be lifted (Rom. 8:21; Rev. 22:3) so that the new, redeemed creation will be a suitable place for God and redeemed mankind to dwell together eternally. It does not mean there will be no condemnation of unforgiven sinners. The same God who testified about the new heaven and new earth has made clear that it is the home of the righteous. "This statement [in Acts 3:21] accords with the eschatological messianic hope of OT prophecy and Judaism. The ἀποκατάστασις πάντων does not mean the conversion of all human beings, but the restoration of all things and circumstances that the OT prophets proclaimed, i.e., the complete renewal of the earth."<sup>112</sup>

This understanding enjoys strong scholarly support. For example, Paul-Gerd Müller states, "In accord with the Jewish principle that end time = primeval time, the Messiah is expected to bring about the eschatological return of things to their original state, the universal renewal of the world which reestablishes the original integrity of creation. The Christ of the Parousia will bring about the promised restoration of the cosmic universe."<sup>113</sup> David Peterson states, "But 'restoration' is quite suitable (NRSV, ESV, TNIV, KJV, NKJV, 'restitution'), reflecting the conviction that the end will be as the beginning: 'God, through Christ, will restore his fallen world to the purity and integrity of his initial creation'" [quoting Barrett].<sup>114</sup> And Darrell Bock likewise states:

The anticipated end was seen as establishing again the original creation's pristine character. This restoration is what Jesus brings with his return, an idea given later development in Rev. 19-22 but whose roots Peter declares here are already evident in that "of which God spoke through the holy prophets of old." . . . In the NT this idea is discussed in Matt. 19:28; Rom. 8:18-23; and Heb. 2:5-8. The point is that God has already indicated what the end will be like. So, to learn about the future, Peter urges them to read what God has already said through the prophets about the new era the eschaton would bring.<sup>115</sup>

In Heb. 12:25 the writer warns his readers not to turn from the Christian faith, the truth of Christ. As George Guthrie expresses the point, "If those of the old covenant did not escape the wrath of God when they turned from his Word, the judgment on those who reject the message of

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<sup>112</sup> Moisés Silva, editor, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 1:355. For clarity, I changed the abbreviations "eschat." and "Jud." in the original to eschatology and Judaism.

<sup>113</sup> Paul-Gerd Müller, "ἀποκαθιστημι, ἀποκαθιστάνω" in Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, editors, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 130.

<sup>114</sup> David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 182.

<sup>115</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 177. See also, George Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 369; James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 47; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 289;

salvation received in the new covenant era is even more certain (2:1-3)."<sup>116</sup> The author says in 12:26-28 that the one whose voice shook the earth at Sinai has promised in the future to remove or "shake out" from all of creation whatever is not destined for eternity, whatever is inconsistent with that perfect eternal state. This future "shaking" is so that "the things that are *not shaken* may remain," leaving the "unshakeable [consummated] kingdom" of the eschaton. This is the writer's way of describing the redemption or "heavenization" of creation that will occur at the end, the making of the new heavens and new earth referred to in Isa. 65:17, 66:22, 2 Pet. 3:13, and Rev. 21:1. Philip Hughes explains it this way:

*Then, at Mount Sinai, the voice of God shook the earth* in such a way "that the whole mountain quaked greatly" (Ex. 19:18; cf. Judg. 5:5; Ps. 68:7f.). This awesome moment when God communicated his law before which our fallen and disobedient world stood condemned, portended the much greater terror of the last judgment when, in the words borrowed from Haggai 2:6, God *will shake not only the earth but also the heaven*, that is to say, the whole created order (as in Gen. 1:1, where "heaven and earth" stand for the totality of creation; . . .). But, terrifying though such a prospect is, it is also good news for those who are God's faithful people, for the final shaking, which is the completion of judgment, is also the completion of salvation. . . .

Our author adds the explanation that the expression "*Yet once more*" points clearly to *the removal of what is shaken*, and therefore of what is shakable and as such unreliable and impermanent, by which the created order in its fallenness is intended (*as of what has been made*). This accords well with the passage from Psalm 102 cited earlier in the epistle (1:10-12), which declares that earth and heaven, the work of God's hands, will perish, that is, as they are presently known to us, and will be changed, whereas God remains eternally the same (cf. Heb. 13:8). The purpose of this ultimate shaking is *in order that what cannot be shaken may remain*. For the people of God, who belong to the order of things which are unshakeable, the removal of all that is insecure and imperfect, is something to be eagerly anticipated; for this final shaking of both heaven and earth is necessary for the purging and eradication from the universe of all that is hostile to God and his will, for the establishment of all that, being in harmony with the divine mind, is permanent, and for the inauguration of the new heaven and the new earth, that is, the renewed or "changed" creation, in which all God's purposes in creation are brought to everlasting fulfillment at the consummation of the redemption procured in and by Christ (Rev. 21:1ff.; 2 Pet. 3:10-13); and this will take place with the return of Christ in glory and majesty (Rev. 19:11ff.). Thus Gregory of Nazianzus [Bishop of Constantinople 379-381] explains that "this last shaking is none other than the second coming of Christ, when the universe will be transformed and changed to a condition of stability which cannot be shaken."<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 422.

<sup>117</sup> Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1988) 557-558.

## Arguments Against Materialistic Eschatology

In the remainder of this paper, I address some of the arguments made in opposition to materialistic eschatology and hope to show they lack the force they often are thought to have. Before turning to that task, it is important to note that spiritualizing the eternal state readily leads to denying the bodily nature of the resurrection. That is a serious error, something contrary to the historic, orthodox Christian view. I document this at some length in my paper "The Resurrection of the Body," so I will not repeat that information here.<sup>118</sup> Those who assume the resurrection body is noncorporeal and then parlay that assumption into an argument against a material eternal state have built on a foundation of sand.

Critics of materialistic eschatology sometimes bring up the fact various heretical groups, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons, believe the eternal state will be one of material substance. But it is not their belief in the materiality of the new earth that makes them heretical. As shown above, belief in a physical eternity is the traditional Christian view and the consensus view of modern scholars who have a high view of Scripture, so there is no need to apologize for its adherents. One might say the matter is so clear from Scripture that even heretics can see it.

Some suggest the idea of a transformed or renewed earth comes not from Scripture but from intertestamental apocalyptic literature. But the case for materialistic eschatology is based on appeals to Scripture not on appeals to noncanonical writings, so asserting the belief is not found in Scripture simply assumes the fact in dispute, which is not helpful. It should be noted, however, that intertestamental literature forms part of the intellectual and theological milieu of the New Testament. It thus can shed light on how an inspired speaker or writer would expect to be understood and thereby shed light on the speaker or writer's intended meaning, as it does in the case of Rom. 8:18-25.

Critics sometimes portray materialistic eschatology as an assault on what they claim is the traditional view that heaven is a spiritual, nonphysical realm, and thus present themselves as defenders of orthodoxy against a theological innovation. But again, the early church overwhelmingly understood the Scriptures to teach that the eternal state will be one of material substance.<sup>119</sup> It was the Gnostic heretics who denied the materiality of the new earth. The historic belief faded in emphasis during the Middle Ages, but it was never lost, certainly not among scholars and theologians. Belief in a nonmaterial eternity filled the teaching void and became a kind of "pop-theology" among average churchgoers, a development that is still felt today and lamented by scholars. As already noted, the traditional view of a material eternal state held sway in most churches of Christ in the late nineteenth century, only to be driven out as collateral damage of the war against premillennialism.

It does not help to point out that heaven is the place of our reward (Mat. 5:11-12), our treasure (Mat. 6:19-21; 19:21), our inheritance (1 Pet 1: 4-5), the place where our hope is laid up (Col 1: 5), and the place of the eternal "house" with which we long to be clothed (2 Cor. 5:1-2). The fact our future blessings presently are kept in heaven does not mean that is where they will

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<sup>118</sup> The paper is available at <http://theoutlet.us/TheResurrectionoftheBody.pdf>.

<sup>119</sup> Thus, Allison refers to the view as "the traditional church doctrine," "the historic church position," and "the traditional doctrine." Allison, 729-730.

be received or experienced. It means they are for now kept in the security of heaven so that no power can deprive us of them. As N. T. Wright explains:

[H]eaven is the place where God's purposes for the future are stored up. It isn't where they are meant to stay so that one would need to go to heaven to enjoy them; it is where they are kept safe against the day when they will become a reality on earth. If I say to a friend, "I've kept some beer in the fridge for you," that doesn't mean he has to climb into the fridge in order to drink the beer. God's future inheritance, the incorruptible new world and the new bodies that are to inhabit that world, are already kept safe, waiting for us, not so that we can go to heaven and put them on there but so that they can be brought to birth in this world or rather in the new heavens and new earth, the renewed world of which I spoke earlier.<sup>120</sup>

Speaking elsewhere of 2 Cor. 5:1-2, he says the fact the building from God, the eternal house with which we long to be clothed, is *in the heavens* means it is in

*the place where the divinely intended future for the world is kept safely in store, against the day when, like props being brought out from the wings onto stage, it will come to birth in the renewed world, 'on earth as in heaven.' . . . The future body, the non-corruptible (and hence 'eternal') 'house', is at present 'in the heavens' as opposed to 'on earth' (epigeios) (5:1); but it will not stay there. For us to put it on top of our present 'house' (clothes, bodies, houses, temples and tents; why mix two metaphors if four or five will do?) will require that it be brought from heaven (5:2).<sup>121</sup>*

Paul's point in Phil. 3:20a is that the Philippians are to be imitators of him because (*For*) he and those who follow his example (v. 17) have their commonwealth or citizenship in heaven. In other words, their conduct is to be emulated because the governing force or executive authority by which they are ruled is in heaven, whereas the allegiance of the enemies of the cross (vv. 18-19) is elsewhere. Gordon Fee writes:

Although Paul's language will not quite allow the translation, "we are a colony of heaven" (Moffatt), the point of the imagery comes very close to that. Just as Philippi was a colony of Rome in the province of Macedonia, so the citizens of the "heavenly commonwealth" were to function as a colony of heaven in that outpost of Rome.<sup>122</sup>

Paul certainly is not suggesting that the saints' eternal dwelling will be a nonphysical existence. On the contrary, he makes clear in 3:20b-21 that they are eagerly awaiting Christ's coming *from* heaven at which time he will by the working of his power transform their

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<sup>120</sup> N. T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope* (New York: Harper, 2008), 151-152.

<sup>121</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 368.

<sup>122</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 379.

corruptible bodies into bodies that are like his glorious resurrection body, the physical nature of which is beyond dispute (see "The Resurrection of the Body" noted above).

Critics claim Jn. 14:2-3 establishes that the eternal dwelling of Christians is a nonphysical heaven rather than a material earth, but that is not the case. Jesus says in those verses that he is going to prepare a place for the disciples and that he will return, not to take them to the place to which he went but to take them *to himself* so that they may be with him. "Nothing is said about the nature of the place that [he] prepares."<sup>123</sup> His point is that through his death, resurrection, and ascension (his going) he will make it possible for them to spend eternity with God the Father (will prepare dwelling places in God's house). Having done that, he will come again, not to take them away to some nonphysical heavenly realm but to receive them to himself in the consummated kingdom, in the new heaven and new earth that will be created at his return. As Middleton states, "the unveiling of what has been prepared will be on earth, since that is where Christ will be (though that is not stated here)."<sup>124</sup> This fits the apocalyptic pattern of New Testament eschatology of a preparation in heaven and a subsequent unveiling on earth.<sup>125</sup>

When Jesus said in Jn. 18:36 that his kingdom was not "of this world," he was not saying it had nothing to do with this physical world. He was saying his kingdom does not originate or derive from this world. As Colin Kruse notes, he was saying that "[h]is kingdom is given by God, not established by human struggle. His kingdom is active in this world, and will one day come with power, but its power is not of this world, it is of God."<sup>126</sup>

The reference in 1 Thess. 4:17 to resurrected and transformed saints being caught up together in the clouds to meet the descending Lord in the air does not mean they will be taken away to a nonphysical heaven. Nothing is said about their ultimate destination, and the phrase translated "to meet" (*eis apantēsin*) is understood by many to be a technical term that refers to the ancient civic custom of going out to welcome important visitors and accompanying them back into the city. Daniel Lewis, for example, states, "What this word envisions is Christians leaving the 'gates of the world' to welcome Christ back as he returns to earth."<sup>127</sup>

Jesus' statement in Mat. 24:35 that "heaven and earth will pass away" does not mean they will be completely done away with. Rather, "they are destined to pass away *in their present form* with the dawning of the eschaton."<sup>128</sup> The verb "pass away" is *parerchomai*, and one sees from Paul's use of it in 2 Cor. 5:17 that it can describe transformation rather than obliteration: *So if anyone [is] in Christ, [there is] a new creation; the old things passed away [parerchomai] – Look! New things have come to be.* Middleton remarks:

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<sup>123</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, New International New Testament Commentary, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 568.

<sup>124</sup> J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 217.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 212-221.

<sup>126</sup> Colin Kruse, *John*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 359.

<sup>127</sup> Daniel J. Lewis, *3 Crucial Questions About the Last Days* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 114. See also, Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 226-228 and J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 223-224.

<sup>128</sup> Donald Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 715 (emphasis supplied).

Here Paul uses the verb *parerchomai* for the ending of the old life, which is then replaced by a new life in Christ. Are we to believe that Paul thinks that the passing away of the old life is equivalent to the obliteration of the person, who is then replaced by a doppelgänger? All the Pauline writings, not to mention common sense, suggest that no matter how radical the shift required for conversion to Christ, this describes the transformation rather than obliteration of the person.<sup>129</sup>

Likewise, when James states in Jas. 1:10 that the rich man will "pass away" (*parerchomai*) like a flower of the grass, he is not saying the rich man will be annihilated, will pass out of all physical existence. The flower of the grass does not cease to have physical existence; rather, it changes from a robust and beautiful physical form to a different physical form when scorched by the sun (v. 11).

The claim that 2 Pet. 3:10-13 establishes the nonphysical nature of the eternal state is incorrect. The verb "pass away" in v. 10 is again *parerchomai*, so it could refer to a transformation rather than an annihilation. And even if one understands "elements" to be the stuff of which the physical things in this world are made and takes the apocalyptic imagery literally, both steps being debatable, the connection between the "dissolved" or "melted" elements and the "new heavens and new earth" that follows (v. 13) is unstated. There is no basis for insisting that the dissolved or melted elements are not reconstituted by God into the new heavens and new earth, thus maintaining a continuity between creation and new creation that parallels the continuity between one's decayed mortal body and one's resurrection body.

This continuity is hinted at in the final clause of v. 10, which under the most likely textual reading, states: *and the earth and the works in it will be exposed [heuriskō]*. This suggests it is a purifying fire that functions to reveal the quality of earthly works, similar to the imagery Paul employs in 1 Cor. 3:12-15. Rather than annihilating creation, it purges from creation all that is inconsistent with God's eternal vision and leaves what is of lasting value. As the sphere of human activity, creation is bound up with the fate of its human occupants and thus participates in the purging. As explained long ago by Robert Haldane, a noted scholar of the early Restoration Movement:

Some suppose that the word delivered [in Rom. 8:21] signifies an entire annihilation, and in support of this opinion allege such passages as 2 Peter iii. 10; Revelation xx. 11. But as a tendency of all things in nature is to their own preservation, how could the creation be represented as earnestly expecting the manifestation of the sons of God, if that manifestation were to be accompanied with its final ruin and destruction? Besides, the Apostle promises not merely a future deliverance, but also a glorious future existence. The Scriptures, too, in various places, predict the continued subsistence of the heavens and the earth, as 2 Pet. iii. 13; Rev. xxi. 1. Respecting the passages quoted above, as importing their annihilation, it ought to be observed that the destruction of the substance of things differs from a change in their qualities. When metal of a certain shape is subjected to fire, it is destroyed as to its figure, but not as to its substance. Thus

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<sup>129</sup> J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 206.

the heavens and the earth will pass through the fire, but only that they may be purified and come forth anew, more excellent than before. In Psalm cii. 26, it is said, 'They shall perish, but Thou shalt endure; yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shall Thou change them, and they shall be *changed*.' That the Apostle Peter, when he says that the heavens shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, does not refer to the destruction of their substance, but to their purification, is evident from what he immediately adds, — 'Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness;' A little before he had said, 'The world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished,' although its substance remains as at the beginning.<sup>130</sup>

Douglas Moo similarly points out:

[T]he language of burning and melting that is found in verses 7, 10, and 12 must be read against the background of the OT, where the language is often a metaphorical way of speaking of judgment. And even if some reference to physical fire is present, the fire need not bring total destruction.

And that brings us to our third and most important point: the Greek word for "destroy" in verses 10, 11, and 12 is λύω, a verb that denotes, as Louw-Nida put it, "to destroy or reduce something to ruin by tearing down or breaking to pieces." While semantically distinct from the more common words for "destroy" or "destruction" in the NT (ἀπόλλυμι and ἀπόλεια), therefore, it is similar in meaning. "Destruction" does not necessarily mean total physical annihilation, but a dissolution or radical change in nature. The widespread metaphorical sense of the venerable English verb "undo" might accurately convey something of the sense.<sup>131</sup>

Beyond that, even if Peter had made clear that creation will be annihilated rather than radically transformed or reconstituted, it would not establish that the new heavens and new earth, the eternal abode of the redeemed, is nonphysical. Annihilation of the prior creation says nothing about the physical nature of the new creation. Indeed, some Jewish apocalypses and early Christian writers conceived of the new earth as a newly created physical realm that followed an annihilation of the old creation. This is the debate over whether the new creation will be a renewal or a replacement of the present creation, but that is separate from the claim the eternal state will lack material substance.

John's statement in Rev. 21:1 that the first heaven and first earth had "passed away" (*aperchomai*) likewise need not mean the first creation went completely out of existence.<sup>132</sup> It

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<sup>130</sup> Robert Haldane, *Exposition on the Epistle to the Romans*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (Edinburgh: William Oliphant and Co., 1874), 3-373.

<sup>131</sup> Douglas J. Moo, "Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49:3 (2006), 468.

<sup>132</sup> Middleton states, "Although the verbs are slightly different (*parerchomai* in the Olivet Discourse; *aperchomai* in Rev. 21), the prefixes *par-* and *ap-* do not indicate any discernible difference in meaning." J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 205.

could have passed away *in its present form*, having been transformed into something radically different. Douglas Moo comments:

[W]hile the "passing away" language of Rev 21:1 could suggest the destruction of the physical universe, it could also suggest that it is the sinful "form" of this world which is to pass away rather than the world itself. And there are other pointers in this context to the idea of renovation. In Rev 21:5, God proclaims, "I am making everything new!" He does not proclaim "I am making new things." The language here suggests renewal, not destruction and recreation.<sup>133</sup>

No one would think it objectionable to say a caterpillar passed away when it had morphed into a butterfly. This sense is confirmed by 21:4 where John speaks of the "passing away" of the former things in terms of the removal by God of all causes of sorrow and suffering. This is the "heavenization" of creation, the removal of the curse (Rev. 22:3; see also, Rom. 8:20-21), not its annihilation.

In John's vision in Rev. 20:11, the earth and sky are pictured as fleeing from God's awesome presence. This may be poetic way of expressing the fear of the corruptible in the presence of God. Or it may symbolize the dissolution of the universe *as we know it* in preparation for the new heaven and new earth (21:1). In its flight, the universe could find no place to hide from God. In neither case, however, is annihilation demanded. Middleton comments:

Whether or not the two texts [Rev. 20:11 and 21:1] are equivalent, we should note that the report in Revelation 20 comes just one verse before the dead stand before God's throne (in heaven, which therefore has not been obliterated) and the sea gives up its dead (so the sea still exists). In the judgment scene of Revelation 20, we are therefore justified in taking the fleeing of heaven and earth as a vivid representation of the cosmic shaking that accompanies God's righteous presence. Not even the physical cosmos can bear the awesome presence of the Holy One, who has come to judge the world.<sup>134</sup>

## Conclusion

There are solid theological and exegetical reasons for believing the redeemed will spend eternity with God in resurrected bodies on a new earth of material substance. That is why it is the traditional Christian understanding and the consensus view of theologians and Bible scholars. The view has a long pedigree in churches of Christ and at one time was the dominant understanding in our brotherhood. One suspects that but for the war over premillennialism that was waged many decades ago, it would still hold that position. If nothing else, I hope this study will dispel any sense that materialistic eschatology is the least bit heterodox or something that must be exterminated. Peace.

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<sup>133</sup> Douglas J. Moo, "Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49:3 (2006), 466.

<sup>134</sup> J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 204-205.