

Recent New Creation Conceptions and the Christian Mission*

Steven L. James
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Abstract

In the past few decades, there has been a rising theological interest in biblical descriptions of a new creation. Particularly in the last fifteen years there has been a growing discontent with conceptions that emphasize the nature of the final state as primarily spiritual in nature. A number of theologians from various faith traditions within broad evangelicalism have expressed a notable interest in the idea that the world will be renewed and that the final state will have relative continuity with the present creation. In addition to affirming continuity between the present creation and the new creation, these theologians argue that there is continuity with regard to individual persons and with regard to human society and culture. In some cases, they perceive what I have termed a correspondence of identity so that an identity exists between particular aspects of the present creation and particular aspects of the new creation. In correspondence of identity, the point is that a single definite thing or person, or set of things or persons as distinguished from others, maintains the same identity in the final state as it does in the present state. The purpose of this essay is to survey specific examples of continuity and correspondence of identity within select recent new creationists such as N. T. Wright, Richard Middleton, Howard Snyder, Douglas Moo, and Russell Moore. I will argue that the concepts of continuity and correspondence of identity present in these recent conceptions have direct relevance for Christians' participation in God's mission today and unites their present participation with their future participation in God's redeemed new creation.

* This paper was presented at the "Participation in God's Mission" interdisciplinary theological conference, sponsored by CETA, and held at Northeastern Seminary, Rochester, NY, on March 19, 2016

The world into which we shall enter in the Parousia of Jesus Christ is therefore not another world; it is this world, this heaven, this earth; both, however, passed away and renewed.

— EDUARD THURNEISEN¹

In the book *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, Craig Blaising argues that a survey of the history of Christian thought manifests two basic models for conceptualizing the final state of the redeemed.² The spiritual vision model tends to view the final state as a heavenly and timeless existence. The new creation model emphasizes an earthly, material, time-sequenced, and embodied existence in a new heavens and new earth.³ Though the two conceptions have their respective emphases, one should not think of the two conceptions as necessarily exclusive. Still, there is widespread consensus that the history of the church has been dominated by conceptions that could be categorized within Blaising's first model, the spiritual vision, and that the emphases of the new creation model generally have been ignored or rejected.⁴

However, over the past few decades there has been a growing discontent with

1 Eduard Thurneysen, *Eternal Hope*, trans. Harold Knight (London: Lutterworth, 1954), 204.

2 Craig A. Blaising, "Premillennialism," in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 157–227. Blaising explains an interpretive model as "a heuristic device for comprehending complex views." Ibid., 160. His description of the "two models of eternal life" as he calls them (160–64), along with his examination of the respective models throughout church history (164–81), serve as a foundation for his argument for premillennial return of Christ. Also see Blaising, "New Creation Eschatology and Its Ethical Implications," in *Ethics and Eschatology: Papers Presented at the Annual Theological Conference of Emanuel University*, ed. Corneliu C. Simut (Oradea, Romania: Emanuel University Press, 2010), 7–24. While the emphasis in the discussion of the two models is upon the final state, contemporary discussions of personal eschatology often revolve around passages of Scripture that inform a proper understanding of what occurs at the death of the believer when he is comforted in the presence of Christ, though without a body (e.g., Luke 23:43 and Phil 1:23). The term normally used to describe this state is heaven, a term that has a wide range of meaning in Scripture; see Mitchell G. Reddish, "Heaven," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:90–91.

3 The models that Blaising proposes are helpful in distinguishing tendencies throughout the history of the church. I use the word "tendencies" because there exists neither a strict definition of a spiritual vision view nor a new creation view. The various views, because of slight nuances, could be thought of as being positioned on a linear spectrum, where movement to either the left or the right would indicate a conception of the final state that emphasizes the spiritual and heavenly elements or, alternatively, one that emphasizes material and earthly elements.

4 In addition to Blaising's essay, other works in which this dominance can be seen include Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History* (Princeton, NJ: Yale University Press, 1988); Bernard McGinn's series *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, 5 vols. (1 additional volume forthcoming) (New York: Crossroad, 1991–2005); Jeffrey Burton Russell, *A History of Heaven: The Singing Silence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); Howard Snyder, *Models of the Kingdom* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991); and Benedict T. Viviano, *The Kingdom of God in History*, Good News Studies, vol. 27 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1988).

conceptions that emphasize the nature of the final state as primarily spiritual and a rising theological interest in biblical descriptions of a new creation.⁵ While not eschewing all elements of a spiritual vision model, the recent new creationism emphasizes characteristics that have been absent—or at least minimized—in the spiritual conceptions of the final state which have dominated church history. The issues involved in recent dialogue include not only distinctions between the intermediate state and the final state of believers (and, hence, the relationship between heaven and the final state⁶), but also the relationship between this world and the next (including whether the present universe will be annihilated or renewed and purified), ethical concerns regarding the impact of human activity in this world to life in the new earth (including creation care, responsible stewardship of the earth, societal and cultural concerns, worldview, the built environment, and even an emphasis on urban renewal), the relationship of the new heavens and new earth to history, and the idea that the work of Christ includes not only the salvation of the individual, but also the redemption of the entire creation from the effects of sin.⁷

5 In *The Bible and the Future*, Anthony Hoekema argues that the world will be renewed and that the final state will have relative continuity with the present creation. Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979). See especially chapter 20, “The New Earth,” 274–87. Hoekema highlighted a traditional feature of Dutch Reformed thought that was new creationist in that it affirmed continuity between the present heavens and earth and the new heavens and new earth. Examples from the tradition include Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003–2008) (especially vol. 4); Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christ the Meaning of History*, trans. Lambertus Buurman (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966); G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ*, trans. James Van Oosterom, Studies in Dogmatics (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972); and Abraham Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie* (Leiden: Donner, 1902). Additionally, in his explanation of new creationism, Hoekema quotes the language of the Belgic Confession (Art. 37) that states that Christ will come to cleanse the old world in fire and flame. Although there seems to be dependence upon Hoekema among contemporary evangelical theologians arguing for a new creation conception, widespread discussion of the issue was not manifested in the literature in the two decades that followed the publication of Hoekema’s work. Within the last fifteen years, though, a number of theologians from various faith traditions within evangelicalism have expressed a notable interest in the issues that Hoekema addressed over thirty years ago.

6 See n. 2 above.

7 The growing discontent regarding the tendency toward a spiritual vision eschatology throughout history spans across various denominations and ecclesial traditions. A wide range of essays and articles from a Christian perspective have appeared within the last decade, each one emphasizing one or more of the issues mentioned here. Examples of brief non-technical articles and essays that embody a new creation emphasis include Charles P. Arand and Erik Herrman, “Attending to the Beauty of the Creation and the New Creation,” *Classical Journal* 38 (2012): 313–31; Rodney Clapp, “Animals in the Kingdom,” *Christian Century* 129, no. 13 (2012): 45; Eric O. Jacobsen, “We Can’t Go Back to the Garden: Critiquing Evangelicals’ Over-Ruralized Eschatology,” Christianity Today, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/thisisourcity/7thcity/ruralizedeschatology.html> (accessed August 23, 2013); Phil Hamner and Andy Johnson, “Holy Mission: The ‘Entire Sanctification’ of the Triune God’s Creation,” *Didache* 5 (2005): 1–8; Dan G. McCartney, “*ECCE HOMO*: The Coming of the Kingdom as the Restoration of Human Viceregency,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 56 (1994): 1–21; Jon Meacham, “Heaven Can’t Wait: Why Rethinking the Hereafter Could Make the World a Better Place,” *Time*, 16 April 2012, 30–36; Mark P. Surburg, “Good Stuff! The Material Creation and the Christian Faith,” *Classical Journal* 36 (2010): 245–62; Al Truesdale, “Last Things First: The Impact of Eschatology on Ecology,” *PSCF* 46 (1994): 116–22; Michael D. Williams, “On Eschatological Discontinuity: The Confession of an Eschatological

I would point out here that interest in these issues can be seen through a survey of recent presentations/sections at the meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society, the Canadian Evangelical Theological Association, and the Society of Biblical Literature, respectively.⁸

Representatives of Recent New Creationism

The first example of the recent interest in new creationism is N.T. Wright. Wright's new creationism is most explicitly stated in his 2008 work *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, in which he confronts the idea that the Christian hope is going to heaven when one dies and the idea that heaven is the ultimate destination or final home for the Christian.⁹ According to Wright, the NT is concerned more with life *after* life after death than it is with life after death. Another example is J. Richard Middleton, who has emphasized a redemption that is holistic in nature. In his work *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, he describes his vision of salvation as follows:

[T]he redeemed human race will once again utilize their God-given power and agency to rule the earth as God intended—a renewal of the human cultural task, but this time without sin. . . . Far from being the end or cessation of history, this is history's true beginning, free from the constraints of human violation vis-à-vis God, or other

Reactionary,” *Presbyterion* 25 (1999): 13–20; Idem, “Rapture or Resurrection,” *Presbyterion* 24 (1998): 9–37; and Idem, “Regeneration in Cosmic Context,” *Evangelical Journal* 7 (1989): 68–80. Recent books that have emphasized the issues above include Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2004); Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation*, Sarum Theological Lectures (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010); Idem, *Living With Other Creatures: Green Exegesis and Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011); Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care*, Engaging Culture (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001); David Bruce Hegeman, *Plowing in Hope: Toward a Biblical Theology of Culture* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 1999); Eric O. Jacobsen, *Sidewalks in the Kingdom: New Urbanism and the Christian Faith*, The Christian Practice of Everyday Life (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003); Idem, *The Space Between: A Christian Engagement with the Built Environment*, Cultural Exegesis (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012); David Lawrence, *Heaven: It's Not the End of the World* (London: Scripture Union, 1995); Paul Marshall and Lela Gilbert, *Heaven is Not My Home: Living in the Now of God's Creation* (Nashville: Word, 1998); Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Engaging God's World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Michael D. Williams, *Far as the Curse is Found* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005); Micheal E. Wittmer, *Heaven is a Place on Earth: Why Everything You Do Matters to God*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004); and Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). An investigation into what might be the cause or causes behind the growing discontent is needed, along with a thorough analysis of the literature included in the growing discontent.

8 The academic interest in these issues is even evidenced by shifts in the curricula in many Seminaries as seen in the findings of the “Report on Faith and Ecology Courses in North American Seminaries” done by The Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development. For the report see www.interfaithsustain.com/engaging-seminaries/.

9 N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008).

humans, or the earth itself. The climax of the biblical story, which many have called the “eternal state,” is fundamentally this-worldly. When God brings his original purposes to fruition, we find not escape from creation, but rather new (or renewed) creation.¹⁰

In a number of brief articles and essays, and in the section on Eschatology in *A Theology for the Church*, Russell Moore argues that the picture of the restoration of all creation “is not of an eschatological flight from creation but the restoration and redemption of creation with all that entails: table fellowship, community, culture, economics, agriculture and animal husbandry, art, architecture, worship—in short, *life* and that abundantly.”¹¹ Like Wright, Moore argues against the idea that the point of the gospel is that we go to heaven when we die.¹² Rather, the gospel points to God winning back his good creation by restoring and recreating “a world that vindicates his original creation purposes.”¹³ While he seems to be more cautious than Wright in keeping the redemption of human beings at the heart of God’s plan, and evangelism as the church’s primary goal, Douglas Moo proposes “that the attitude of an ‘either/or’ when it comes to evangelism and environmental concern is a false alternative.”¹⁴ A significant contribution of Moo to recent discussion is an article in which he argues that Paul’s use of the phrase “new creation” in Gal 6:15 and 2 Cor 5:17 should be understood primarily as the description of a new age that

10 J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 70.

11 Russell D. Moore, “Personal and Cosmic Eschatology,” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B and H Academic, 2007), 859. Moore’s analysis of what the church has believed (873–92) manifests the dominance of what Blaising calls the spiritual vision understanding of eternal life, and thereby parallels the histories in n. 4 above. It is also in general agreement with Middleton’s description of the hybrid idea that consists of a belief in bodily resurrection, and a final state that is essentially spiritual and heavenly, implying non-materiality.

12 Ibid., 912. He argues further, “Eternity means civilization, architecture, banquet feasting, ruling, work—in short, it is eternal *life*. The new earth is not the white, antiseptic, hyperspiritual heaven some Christians expect as their eternal home. Nor is it simply the everlasting family reunion with calorie-free food and super powers, as some hope.” Ibid.

13 Ibid., 913. For Moore, this idea should impel the Christian to action in the present life. For his understanding of the effects of a new creation eschatology upon the Christian’s present life (hope, ethics, social and political action, and corporate witness), see especially Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), and the section on how the doctrine of eschatology impacts the church today in “Personal and Cosmic Eschatology,” (917–25). One may also consult the various articles at <http://www.russellmoore.com/papers/> that speak to these issues.

14 Moo, “Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49 (2006): 454. He likens this dichotomy to that of evangelism versus social concern during the 1960s and 1970s, and understands both to be “profoundly out of keeping with the witness of Scripture” (454). Cautioning against subordinating Scripture to environmental concerns, Moo points out that evangelicals have responded at times “by retreating to a kind of rigid historical exegesis that deliberately brackets out the concerns of our own world.” He calls this “a mistake in the opposite direction, in its extreme form creating an unbridgeable ditch between the Bible and the issues that press upon us so insistently.” Douglas J. Moo, “Creation and New Creation,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 20 (2010): 40.

has come through Christ's first coming and will be consummated upon his return.¹⁵ Moo attempts to provide justification for using the phrase "new creation" to refer to something wider than individual human transformation—the renovation of the cosmos and the fulfillment of new heavens and new earth prophecies such as Isa 65 and 66, including transformed Christians who live in perfected relationships with God, one another, and with the world of nature.¹⁶

A final example is Howard Snyder. In his *Salvation Means Creation Healed*, Snyder argues that as a result of the wide scope of sin, redemption has a wide scope as well.¹⁷ Because sin is comprehensive, the cure has to be comprehensive as well.¹⁸ The goal, Snyder concludes, "is not to reach heaven, but to have full fellowship with God and one another now and in the final new creation. Creation healed! This is salvation, true healing salve. It is the good news."¹⁹

While the emphases vary from theologian to theologian, the focus upon certain biblical themes can be seen throughout the conceptions of the recent new creationists. Three of these themes are the coming of God's kingdom, the reality of the resurrection of the body, and the reconciliation of all things. Overall, though, and what is most important for the present discussion, is the common affirmation that, instead of being annihilated, the present creation will be renewed and transformed (or regenerated and restored). Arguing that texts such as 2 Pet 3 and Rom 8 teach that redemption upholds the existence of the present created order in its materiality, these new creationists affirm that the present heavens and earth have an enduring role in God's plan of redemption.²⁰

15 Moo, "Creation and New Creation."

16 Moo writes, "'New Creation' is manifested in the present through transformed Christians who live in transformed relationships with God, with one another, with all people, and with the world of nature. 'New Creation' will be consummated when these relationships are perfected by God himself and when he brings his created world to its final state of glory." Moo, "Creation and New Creation," 59. Regarding the Isaianic prophecies and their relation to the Pauline passages in which he is interested, Moo writes that "in his familiar prophecies about a 'new heavens and new earth,' Isaiah envisages an ultimate salvation that extends beyond the people of Israel or even the land of Israel to include the entire cosmos [*sic*]: a 'new heavens and new earth' (Isa 65:17–22; cf. 66:22–24). It is quite unlikely, given the usual meaning of 'creation' in Paul, that he would use 'new creation' to allude to this Isaianic expectation without some reference to the cosmos." Ibid., 45–46.

17 Snyder describes the scope of sin as "alienation from God, from ourselves, between persons, and between us and our physical environment." Howard A. Snyder and Joel Scandrett, *Salvation Means Creation Healed: The Ecology of Sin and Grace: Overcoming the Divorce Between Earth and Heaven* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), xvi.

18 Thus, "If salvation means creation healed, then salvation must be as deep and wide, as high and broad, as creation itself." Ibid., 146. Snyder also writes, "As mind-boggling as the thought is, Scripture teaches that this reconciliation even includes the redemption of the physical universe from the effects of sin, as everything is brought under its proper headship in Jesus (Rom 8:19–21)." Ibid., 99.

19 Ibid., 227.

20 The focus of 2 Pet 3 is upon vv. 10–13, in which it states that in the day of the Lord the present heavens and earth will experience destruction, with the results that the heavens are burned and the elements are melted. The disagreement of interpretation primarily concerns the meaning of the language which describes the destruction (In recent decades, the discussion has revolved around

The Concept of Continuity in Recent New Creationism

John's vision in Rev 21 describes the new heavens and new earth in ways that are radically discontinuous from the present heavens and earth. However, this radical discontinuity, according to new creationists, does not require that the present heavens and earth be obliterated. Wright relates the problem of continuity/discontinuity to the image of birthing labor:

This is no smooth evolutionary transition, in which creation simply moves up another gear into a higher mode of life. This is traumatic, involving convulsions and contractions and the radical discontinuity in which mother and child are parted and become not one being but two. But neither is this a dualistic rejection of physicality as though, because the present creation is transient and full of decay and death, God must throw it away and start again from scratch. The very metaphor Paul chooses [in Rom 8] for this decisive moment shows that what he has in mind is not the unmaking of creation or simply its steady development, but the drastic and dramatic birth of new creation from the womb of the old.²¹

According to Middleton, in salvation God is not doing something completely new, but is “*re-doing* something, fixing or repairing what went wrong.”²² Snyder quotes

the issue of textual variants, specifically of the discovery of texts that use the verb εὑρεθήσεται. For a discussion of the recent discussion, see Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, vol. 50 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 316–21; Blaising, “The Day of the Lord Will Come: An Exposition of 2 Peter 3:1–18,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 169 (2012): 397–400; R. Larry Overstreet, “A Study of 2 Peter 3:10–13,” *BibSac* 137 (1980), 354–71; Wim Rietkerk, *Millennium Fever and the Future of This Earth: Between False Expectations and Biblical Hope* (Rochester, MN: Ransom Fellowship Publications, 2008): 26–34; Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, NAC, vol. 37 (Nashville, Broadman & Holman, 2003), 383–87; Aaron Tresham, “A Test Case for Conjectural Emendation: 2 Peter 3:10d,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 21, no. 1 (2010): 55–79; David Wenham, “Being ‘Found’ on the Last Day: New Light on 2 Peter 3.10 and 2 Corinthians 5.3,” *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987): 477–79; and Al Wolters, “WorldView and Textual Criticism in 2 Peter 3:10,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 49 (1987): 405–13. Ultimately, the interpretive question is whether Peter is describing the new heavens and earth as utterly new or whether he is envisioning the new heavens and new earth as a renewed and purified present heavens and earth. New creationists have sided with those who argue that Peter envisions a renewed or purified cosmos, themselves arguing that the text should be read in light of the Noachic flood (see 2 Pet 3:5–6) and that the verb should be translated “shall be found” rather than “shall be burned up,” because of the context of the passage, and because of the OT metaphorical usage of the language of burning to refer to a purifying process that is a part of judgment. Regarding Rom 8, new creationists have argued that vv. 19–22, which speak to the sufferings and groaning of creation in hopes of a redemption, point to cosmic redemption rather than the annihilation of creation. New creationists agree that, according to these two passages, the way that deliverance of the present creation is to take place is through a transformation of the present creation.

21 Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 103–104.

22 Middleton, “A New Heaven and a New Earth,” 91. The problem, Middleton argues, is that many readers of Scripture get lost or overwhelmed in the details, and “tend to overlook the overall structure of the biblical plot (specifically its grounding in creation). But unless we have an understanding of the initial state (creation) and the nature of the problem (fall), we will systematically

approvingly David Field who writes, “Creation will be cleansed and transformed, yet this new creation will stand in continuity with the old.”²³

For Snyder, the foundation of the continuity between the present creation and the future creation is the continuity between the testaments:

The continuity from Old Testament to New Testament here is crucial. We stress this because Christian theology often over-spiritualizes God’s saving plan The New Testament pictures not a divine rescue from earth but rather the reconciliation of earth and heaven—of “all things, whether on earth or in heaven,” things both “visible and invisible.” God is “making peace through [Jesus’] blood,” shed on the cross (Col 1:16–21). God’s plan in both the Old and New Testaments is to bring *shalom* to the whole creation. In this sense Christians are still “being saved,” because ultimately no one experiences *shalom* in its fullness until the whole creation enjoys *shalom*.²⁴

Moore writes that the Christian does not simply look forward to “a heavenly city of refuge for flown-away souls, but an entire universe of rocks and trees and quasars and waterfalls—everything created in which [God] takes delight.”²⁵ The reality of God’s good design of creation, for Moore, necessitates continuity between the present cosmos and the future cosmos: “The material universe . . . was designed to declare the Creator’s glory. In the new creation the heavens will declare this glory with unimagined brilliance, now freed from the bondage to decay.”²⁶ For Moore, this even includes the existence of animals in the new heavens and earth.²⁷

In discussing the meaning of “new creation” in Gal 6:15 and 2 Cor 5:17, Moo concludes the following: “Paul does not see ‘new creation’ as a simple replacement of this creation. The transition from this creation to the next will be discontinuous to some extent, but Paul’s language of ‘liberation’ and ‘reconciliation’ requires a basic continuity as well.”²⁸ For Moo, there is continuity between the

misread the nature of this repair (redemption)—and thus the nature of the final fulfillment of God’s purposes. Indeed, it will be difficult to see it as repair at all—that is, as fixing something that has gone wrong.” Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 38.

23 Snyder, *Salvation Means Creation Healed*, 60. The source of the quote is David N. Field, “Confessing Christ in the Context of Ecological Degradation,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no 98 (1997): 40.

24 Snyder, *Salvation Means Creation Healed*, 127–28.

25 Moore, “Personal and Cosmic Eschatology,” 913.

26 Ibid., 914.

27 He writes, “The prophetic vision of Scripture is insistent, for instance, that nonhuman life is a part of God’s eternal purposes, with Isaiah seeing a restoration of the original harmony of the animal order. . . . we must insist that the new earth will contain animals.” Ibid., 913.

28 Moo, “Creation and New Creation,” 60.

present creation and the creation to come, such that it “is not a ‘creation out of nothing’ (*creation ex nihilo*) but a ‘creation out of the old’ (*creation ex vetere*).”²⁹

Continuity between the present creation and the one to come is evident in Middleton’s understanding of the atonement of Christ. Regarding Col 1:19–20, he writes, “Paul does not myopically limit the efficacy of Christ’s atonement to humanity. Rather, the reconciliation with God effected by Christ’s shed blood is applied as comprehensively as possible to *all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven*.”³⁰ After pointing out that Jesus is the firstfruits as a result of his resurrection, Snyder concludes that “Jesus is the prototype as well as the redemptive basis of new creation. He is the point of coherence between the visible and invisible worlds (Col 1:17).”³¹

In addition to continuity in the areas related to the natural order of the cosmos, new creationists argue that there is continuity with regard to individual persons and with regard to human society. Moore’s description of the final state of the redeemed in the new heavens and new earth includes certain societal features and a variety of other activities which, excepting the presence of sin, are somewhat continuous to the features and activities that are present in the current age. Moore states,

The new earth is not simply a restoration of Eden but a glorious civilization with a *city*, and the glory of the nations redeemed and brought into it. One can expect that the new earth would be abuzz with culture—music, painting, literature, architecture, commerce, agriculture, and everything that expresses the creativity of human beings as the image of God. We can also expect in the eternal state, of all things, politics. Believers are promised a reigning function with Christ that is everlasting.³²

In this conception there is culture, work, and creativity. Affirming that the sphere of activities in the final state is not limited to the individual but extends to groups of individuals, Middleton writes, “The logic of biblical redemption, when combined with a biblical understanding of creation, requires the restoration and renewal of the full complexity of human life in our earthly environment, yet without sin. . . . [E]schatological redemption consists in the renewal of human cultural life

29 Ibid. Moo references Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 265, and John Polkinghorne, *The God of Hope and the End of the World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 31.

30 Middleton, “A New Heaven and a New Earth,” 87–88.

31 Snyder, *Salvation Means Creation Healed*, 107. After stating this, Snyder quotes approvingly from Wright’s *Surprised by Hope*.

32 Moore, “Personal and Cosmic Eschatology,” 914–15.

on earth.”³³ God promises that he will dwell in the midst of his people but there is no reason to think that the other relational elements of humanity’s existence will not endure. So, Moore concludes, “Relationships begun in this life continue in the new creation We can expect to live life with friends, family members, mentors, and disciples forever; and we have forever to build new friendships as well.”³⁴

While one should be careful in making hard conclusions about the level of continuity in recent new creation conceptions, it seems justified to conclude that there is consensus that certain elements, both material and immaterial, that are a part of the present world will also be a part of the final state. Some elements perhaps are best described in terms of a general continuity in the sense that there is an undefined or unknown (yet to be revealed) relationship. Others can be described in terms of what I would call a correspondence of identity, meaning that there is an identity which exists between particular aspects of the present creation and particular aspects of the new creation. The foremost example of a correspondence of identity is that of the heavens and earth itself. Another example is the resurrection of individual bodies so that the person who is resurrected corresponds in identity to the person who exists/existed prior to death. In new creation conceptions the correspondence of the individual as it relates to the resurrection of the body is intimately connected to the correspondence of the cosmos. Wright states that “despite the discontinuity between the present mode of corruptible physicality and the future world of non-corruptible physicality, there is an underlying continuity between present bodily life and future bodily life.”³⁵ The redemption of the cosmos, like the resurrection of the body, will improve but not replace the original good creation (e.g., Rom 8 and 2 Pet 3).

The idea of correspondence of identity also informs Moore’s belief that human relationships endure into the final state because the persons involved in the various relationships have the same identity both prior to and in the new creation. The

33 Middleton, “A New Heaven and a New Earth,” 77. Middleton’s argument regarding the renewal of human culture is related to his understanding of proper worship. He writes that “while various psalms (like 148 and 96) indeed call upon *all* creatures (humans included) to worship or serve God in the cosmic temple of creation (heaven and earth), the distinctive way *humans* worship or render service to the Creator is by the development of culture through interaction with our earthly environment (in a manner that glorifies God).” Ibid., 81. He develops his point in a corresponding footnote: “This [understanding of worship] is not meant to exclude what we call ‘worship’ from the appropriate human response to God. My point is twofold. First, the cultural development of the earth, rather than ‘worship’ narrowly conceived, is explicitly stated to be the human purpose in biblical texts recounting the creation of humanity. ‘Worship’ in the narrow sense may be understood as part of human cultural activity. Second, we should not reduce human worship/service of God to verbal, emotionally charged expressions of praise (which is what we usually mean by the term). Note that Paul in Romans 12:1–2 borrows language of sacrifice and liturgy from Israel’s cult in order to describe the full-orbed bodily obedience (which, he says, is our true worship). This is the Bible’s typical emphasis.” Ibid. 81, n. 17.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid., 359.

way in which the new creation proponents discuss the biblical language of “restoration,” “renewal,” “transformation,” and “redemption” to refer to various aspects of the present earthly existence (such as culture, society, work, government, etc.) points in the direction of correspondence of identity so that elements of each of these endures into God’s new creation.

Implications for Participation in God’s Mission

To be sure the new creationists do affirm at least two examples of discontinuity between the present heavens and earth and the new heavens and earth. The first has to do with those elements which are taken away or removed—i.e., sin, the wicked, etc. The second has to do with the addition of elements that are not a part of the present heavens and earth—i.e., peace, immortality, justice, etc. This addition may be understood as development, a development which allows for continuity and correspondence of identity. Middleton writes the following:

[I]t is clear that redemption is not a simple return to primal origins. The Bible itself portrays the move from creation to eschaton as movement from a garden (in Genesis 2) to a city (in Revelation 21–22). Redemption does not reverse, but rather embraces, historical development. The transformation of the initial state of the earth into complex human societies is not part of the fall, but rather the legitimate creational mandate of humanity. Creation was never meant to be static, but was intended by God from the beginning to be developmental, moving toward a goal.³⁶

What is that goal? New Creationists believe that it is life lived in the created order, an order which looks radically different from the present order not because the present order in and of itself is displeasing to God, and thereby needing to be annihilated or obliterated, but because the elements that make up the present order are negatively affected by the sin and futility that are a result of the Fall of humankind. One might say that much of what makes up the present created order—culture, architecture, community, music, art, fellowship, nature, politics, work, relationships, economics, our bodies, animal life, land, society, etc.—is inherently pleasing to God, but, in its current reality, this order is necessarily affected by sin and corruption such that the order itself must be renewed. As such, one could envision a world in which the makeup of the present created order endures in God’s new creation. Is this not the reconciliation of all things?

I like Eduard Thurneysen’s bold description of the final state. Thurneysen wrote in 1954 the following:

36 Middleton, “A New Heaven and a New Earth,” 76.

The world into which we shall enter in the Parousia of Jesus Christ is therefore not another world; it is this world, this heaven, this earth; both, however, passed away and renewed. It is these forests, these fields, these cities, these streets, these people, that will be the scene of redemption. At present they are battlefields, full of the strife and sorrow of the not yet accomplished consummation; then they will be fields of victory, fields of harvest, where out of seed that was sown with tears the everlasting sheaves will be reaped and brought home.³⁷

Though I have not argued the point here, followers of the Lord Jesus Christ are to be doing all that they do for the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). This means that as Christ followers live in the present created order they are participating in God's mission in the present created order. If, as the new creationists argue, it is God's desire to reconcile the present created order, does this participation carry even greater weight than we might initially think? Does Christ followers' participation not actually move beyond the present created order into the new creation order?

In his interpretation of 1 Cor 13, N. T. Wright states the following:

[T]his exquisite chapter looks forward . . . to the final discussion [chapter 15], which will concern the resurrection, the new world that God will make, *and the continuity between the resurrection life and the life here and now*. The point of 13.8–13 is that the church must be working *in the present* on the things that will last *into God's future*. Faith, hope and love will do this; prophecy, tongues and knowledge, so highly prized in Corinth, will not.³⁸

As we look toward the future and contemplate our participation, or lack thereof, in God's mission, it is my hope and prayer that we might consider that our participation in God's mission in this life is only the beginning, and that our participation not only has lasting effects that endure into the new creation but that it also informs our conception of our role in the new creation. May we look forward to the return of our Lord Jesus Christ with expectancy, saying Come, Lord Jesus and do so quickly, but not to the point that we miss or ignore what His coming might entail for our life in the new creation.

37 Eduard Thurneysen, *Eternal Hope*, trans. Harold Knight (London: Lutterworth, 1954), 204.

38 Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 296.