



The new heavens and new earth

In his *Weight of Glory and other essays*, C.S. Lewis compares the insurmountable challenge any Christian faces when speaking of heaven, the final state awaiting the children of God, to a schoolboy struggling with the difficulties of grammar and syntax. Such a schoolboy has difficulty enough with the simplest demands of ordinary prose, but finds the greater challenge of writing poetry beyond his reach:

*'The Christian, in relation to Heaven, is in very much the same position as this schoolboy. Those who have attained everlasting life in the vision of God doubtless know very well, that it is no mere bribe, but the very consummation of their earthly discipleship; but we who have not yet attained it cannot know this ... Poetry replaces grammar, gospel replaces law, longing transforms obedience, as gradually as the tide lifts a grounded ship.'*¹

If it is true of hell, the final state of the unbelieving, that no one who hasn't been there knows its reality, then it is likewise true that, short of having entered its glory, no one knows what the final state of the blessed will be like. Certainly, no one would be so bold as to think that the reality of heaven could be described in anything more than the most inadequate of words. Here one can only stammer like a little child. When it comes to the subject of the new heavens and earth, we face a dimension of the future of which it may be said without exaggeration, *'Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him'* (1 Corinthians 2:9).²

However, while acknowledging the unspeakable mystery that is the final state of the people of God, we must also be wary of the false modesty and ingratitude that would prevent our saying anything about something of which the Bible does speak. Not only do the Scriptures provide us with a window upon the glory and splendour of heaven, but they also teach us that believers even now have tasted something of the glory that awaits them (1 Corinthians 2:10). Consequently, without a consideration of heaven, a study of the promise of the future would be incomplete, for at least two compelling reasons.

First, in keeping with a theme that has recurred throughout our treatment of the future, we must acknowledge that the Bible does reveal, albeit in language that is symbolic and rudimentary, something of the splendour of the final state of believers. Though we must always avoid the temptation to go beyond the limits of what the Scriptures disclose, we may not ignore what they do tell us. Here, as elsewhere, we must honour the limits of Scriptural revelation, while echoing what is told us. To say more about heaven than we are permitted would be proud presumption, to be sure; however, to say less than the Scriptures say would be a false modesty.

Second, the newness of life in the Spirit that believers presently enjoy is of a piece with the fullness of immortal life that is yet to come (2 Corinthians 5:4-5). As with many other aspects of the Bible's teaching about the promise of the future, the future of the new heavens and earth is a reality whose firstfruits are the present experience of those who share fellowship with the risen and ascended Christ. The great future of the fullness of life in communion with the Triune God, promised to those who already enjoy the beginnings of salvation in this life, is not a complete mystery shut off from all human reflection. Though we know in part, we truly do know something of what awaits the child of God in the life to come. *'For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known'* (2 Corinthians 13:12). And what we know, even if but dimly, is something on which it is impossible to be silent.

All new things? Or all things made new?

Any reflection upon the Bible's teaching about the final state of the believer must treat an issue raised at the outset of this study. What is the relation between the first creation and the second creation? If one of the great themes of the Scriptures is that 'paradise lost' will become 'paradise regained', what does this tell us about the continuity between God's first creation of the 'heavens and earth' and his work of recreation? For the Bible speaks not only of 'heaven' as the final state of the righteous, but also of the '*new heavens and the new earth*' (2 Peter 3:13).

1. The meaning of 'heaven'

Christian understanding and popular piety have tended to view the final state in a way that almost suggests a denial of the goodness of creation. Life in the new creation is portrayed in terms that are so unlike life in the present state of creation that all continuity between the present and the future is denied. For example, in a considerable body of Christian hymnody, the portrait of heaven is so 'spiritualized' and ethereal that life in the renewed creation has a barren, almost sterile, quality. Familiar is the picture of believers dressed in white robes flitting about in an indefinable space, playing harps and singing in a celestial choir. The expectation for the life to come is so radically other than the richness and concreteness of life in the creation as it is now experienced that heaven takes on a surreal, even dreamlike, quality.

Undoubtedly, some of these popular portraits of heaven have been shaped by the imagery of Scripture. But they do not adequately reflect the biblical understanding of heaven and the promise of the life to come. In particular, they often show a failure to understand how the term 'heaven' is used in the Scriptures. The term 'heaven' in the Scriptures is commonly used in at least three ways.³

First, the term 'heaven' is often used in conjunction with the 'earth' to describe the fullness of what the Triune God has created. To say that God is the Almighty Maker of 'heaven and earth' is equivalent to saying that he is the Creator of all things. Heaven in this sense is a part of creation, distinguishable from the earth but nonetheless, like the earth, a place that God has created to reveal his glory. In Genesis 1:1, we read that '*in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*'. In the New Testament Gospels, frequent references to the 'heaven and earth' confirm that heaven is a dimension of God's creation corresponding to, but distinguishable from, the earth.⁴ In this first use of the term 'heaven', heaven in conjunction with the earth constitutes an essential part of the created world or cosmos.

Second, the term 'heaven' can be used as a synonym for God himself. In the Gospel of Matthew, the kingdom of God is referred to as the '*kingdom of heaven*', a usage that probably reflects Matthew's deference to Jewish readers who were reluctant to use the name of God for fear of misusing it. When the prodigal son returns to his father and confesses his sins before him, he says, '*I have sinned against heaven and in your sight*' (Luke 15:18, 21). In Matthew 21:25, Jesus asks the Pharisees whether the baptism of John was '*from heaven or from man*'. And in John 3:27, John the Baptist declares that a '*man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven*'. In these passages, heaven is simply another way of referring to God.

And third, heaven in its most significant use in the Scriptures refers to the peculiar place of God's dwelling in the midst of his creatures. Though God fills heaven and earth and cannot be restricted to any particular place, he has purposed to draw near to the creation from his special dwelling in heaven. Illustrations of this use of heaven are not difficult to find in the Scriptures. When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he taught them to address God as '*Our Father who art in heaven*' (Matthew 6:9). In conformity with this form of address, he also often spoke to them of '*your Father who is in heaven*' (Matthew 5:16, 45; 6:1; 7:11; 18:14) and of '*my Father who is in heaven*' (Matthew 7:21; 10:32, 33; 12:50; 16:17; 18:10, 19). The same idea is expressed by the term '*heavenly Father*' (Matthew 5:48; 6:14, 26, 32; 15:13; 18:35). Because God's dwelling is in heaven, the Scriptures also speak of Christ's coming '*from heaven*', whether it be his first coming or his second coming at the end of the age (John 3:13, 2 Thessalonians 1:7). The angels who stand in

the presence of God and do his bidding are likewise commonly described as being in or coming from heaven (Matthew 28:2, Luke 22:43, Isaiah 6:1-6, Psalm 103:19-20).

For a proper understanding of the final state, these uses of the term heaven in the Scriptures are most significant. Just as the totality of creation comprises heaven and earth together, so the work of redemption embraces heaven and earth together. Sin has disrupted the harmony and peace between the Triune God and his creatures, a disruption that encompasses heaven and earth. Even in heaven itself, the enemies of God have rebelled against his gracious rule. Indeed, the rebellion of the creature against the Creator began in heaven and spilled over to the earth.⁵ Consequently, when God's work of redemption reaches its consummation, not only will every rebellious creature be cast out of heaven, but the earth itself will be cleansed of every vestige of sin. Heaven and earth, rather than being estranged from each other, will once more be reunited in a new heaven and new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13).

Though the teaching of the Bible regarding heaven is much richer than this brief sketch suggests, this should suffice to show that redemption's reach is as broad as the creation itself, embracing heaven and earth. The future of the believing community will be one in which the original harmony between heaven and earth is restored. The peace or shalom that mark the life of the renewed creation will be expressed in the reconciliation of heaven and earth. Heaven, the place of God's special dwelling, will come down to the earth and God will dwell in the midst of his people. The promise of the future for believers finds its focus in heaven, but it does not exclude the earth. Rather, all things will be united in Christ, whether things in heaven or things upon the earth (Ephesians 1:10).

2. All things made new

Consistent with the biblical emphasis upon the reconciliation of heaven and earth, the future state will be one in which all things, whether in heaven or on earth, will have been renewed. The whole creation, heaven and earth, will undergo by the Triune God's working, a process of renewal and transformation. Through this process the creation will be wholly sanctified, cleansed of every stain and remainder of sin. The new heavens and the new earth will be more glorious and resplendent of God's power, wisdom and grace, than the creation at its beginning. Once more, but now in a surpassing way, the creation will be a temple fit for the dwelling of God with his people, a place suitable for the enjoyment of communion and friendship between the Creator and the creature.

One question that naturally arises at this juncture is: will the new creation be radically unlike the present creation? Or will it be substantially like it though having undergone a transformation? To state this question somewhat abstractly, what will be the measure of continuity or discontinuity between the present state of the creation and the final state?

In the history of the church, both of these views have had advocates. Some have argued that the new heavens and earth will be altogether new; the present creation will be destroyed, and a new creation will take its place, one that is quite unlike the present. Others have maintained that the new heavens and earth will be this creation made new, one that is similar in substance to the present.⁶ The second of these views — that the new heavens and earth will be substantially similar to the present heavens and earth — seems more likely for several reasons.

First, when we considered the subject of the resurrection of the body, a decision was made in favour of the view of substantial similarity between the present body and the resurrection body. Now just as the resurrected body represents the transformation of the present body of the believer, so the new creation represents the transformation, not the annihilation, of the present creation. However new and glorious this resurrection body may be, it does not involve a radical breach with what has gone before. Rather, like the seed that must die before it produces fruit, so the dissolution of the body is a prelude to its glorification (1 Corinthians 15:35-49). In the biblical understanding, the future of the believer, or individual eschatology, corresponds to the future of the creation, general or cosmic eschatology. The resurrection in newness of life that the believer undergoes parallels the resurrection that the whole creation will undergo at the consummation of all things.

Second, if the new heavens and the new earth will be substantially unlike the present heavens and earth, then we would have to conclude that the Triune God's redemptive work discards rather than renews all things. Though this is a rather general consideration, the teaching that the new creation involves a radically new beginning would suggest that sin and evil have become so much a part of the substance of the present created order that it is unrelievedly and radically evil. The original pronouncement of God regarding the created heavens and earth — that they were 'very good' — would no longer have any validity regarding their now fallen condition. But such an implication seems incompatible with the doctrine of the integrity and goodness of the creation, however much it may have been corrupted and distorted through sin. It would even imply that the sinful rebellion of the creation had so ruined God's handiwork as to make it irretrievably wicked. On such a view of things, the rebellion of Satan and the subsequent fall of the human race into sin would overwhelm God's capacity to restore and redeem the work of his hands.⁷

These considerations notwithstanding, advocates of the view that the new creation will be altogether different from the present creation appeal to a number of passages in the Scriptures that seem to imply this view. In the pronouncements of Old Testament prophecy regarding the new heavens and earth, language is used that seems to imply the destruction and removal of all things. In Psalm 102:26, the old heavens and earth are compared to a garment that wears out and perishes: *'Even they will perish, but Thou dost endure; and all of them will wear out like a garment; like clothing Thou wilt change them, and they will be changed.'* The prophet Isaiah describes the wearing away of all the host of heaven as being like a leaf that withers from the vine or the fig tree (34:4). Like the vanishing of smoke, the sky will vanish and the inhabitants of the earth will die (Isaiah 51:6). When the prophet goes on to speak of the new heavens and earth, he speaks of them as something God will 'create', *'the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind'* (65:17; compare 66:22). In a similar way, New Testament passages that describe the work of recreation employ the imagery of perishing or wearing out like a garment (Hebrews 1:11), of a fire that consumes (2 Peter 3:10), of a changing of all things (Hebrews 1:12), and of the present order of things passing away (Matthew 5:18; 24:35, 2 Peter 3:10, 1 John 2:17, Revelation 21:1). The implications of these images seem to be that the present world will be extinguished to make way for the introduction of something altogether new.

However, the vivid imagery and language of these passages ought not to be pressed too literally. Though they convey the thought of a radical renovation or renewal of all things, they do not require the conclusion that this renewal will mean the complete annihilation of the present cosmos. Indeed, some Scriptural passages describing this renewal require the alternative — that this renewal will involve a process of purification and cleansing of the old making all things new, but not all new things. Two of these passages are especially significant and deserve particular attention.

Romans 8:18-25

We had occasion to consider this passage earlier in connection with our discussion of the resurrection of this body. We saw that it not only illustrates the analogy between the resurrection of the believer and the resurrection-renewal of the whole creation, but that it also describes the new creation in terms that confirm its substantial continuity with the present creation.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one also hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

Several features of this passage are relevant to the question of the continuity between the present and the future state of the creation.

First, it reminds us that the introduction of sin into the creation has affected not only the human race but also the whole creation. The curse upon Adam and his posterity is one that includes the creation itself. As the apostle expresses it, the creation has been subjected to 'futility', to 'vanity' or 'pointlessness' because of the sinful rebellion of God's image-bearers. Though we are not told how this futility is to be understood, undoubtedly the cosmos itself has been adversely affected by sin and evil. Without becoming unrelievedly evil, sin has brought distortion and corruption to the entirety of God's handiwork. The fabric of creation has been torn and broken, corresponding to the humiliation and weakness that now affect the human body (1 Corinthians 15, Philippians 3:21).

Second, the redemption for which the children of God eagerly wait and the redemption of the creation itself are intimately connected.⁸ Individual eschatology and cosmic eschatology are so joined together that what is true for believers holds true for the creation itself. Just as believers who, by the first fruits of the Spirit, eagerly anticipate the fullness of redemption, so the creation itself looks forward to its release from the futility to which it has been subjected. When the children of God are revealed in glory and freedom, a similar glory and freedom will be granted to the creation itself. Its present corruption and distortion will be removed. Its torn fabric will be mended. Remarkably, the language describing the restoration of creation corresponds exactly to, the language describing the restoration of the children of God. The same process of renewal that promises the transformation the believer's present bodies of humiliation into bodies of glory will transform the creation itself.⁹

And third, the metaphor of childbirth that dominates this passage suggests that the transformation of the creation will be in substantial continuity with its present state. The creation groans, according to this passage, like a woman in childbirth prior to the delivery of her child. Though it may be inappropriate to press this metaphor too far, certainly it requires the idea of a substantial likeness between that which gives birth and that which is born. Like gives birth to like. So the new creation, born of the old, will bear a resemblance and similarity to the original. To suggest that the new creation will be radically other than the former creation would violate the clear implication of this passage.

2 Peter 3:5-13

This passage is also of special importance to the question of the continuity between the present creation and the life to come. The Apostle Peter is answering those 'in the last days' who conclude, because Christ has not returned and the universe continues uninterruptedly, that the promise of his coming is untrue. To this the apostle responds:

For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be discovered. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat. But according to his promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

The gist of the apostle's answer to these mockers is clear. The Lord will indeed fulfil his promise, but in his own time and in accord with his desire to grant to all an opportunity for repentance. In his patience and mercy, the world continues as before so that the gospel might be preached and the day of salvation prolonged. No one, however, should misjudge the Lord's patience and conclude that the day of his coming will not arrive. For our purpose, we do not need to go into the question that often captures the attention of interpreters of this passage — whether it teaches that God

sincerely calls all to repentance, though he does not choose to save all to whom the gospel is preached. This certainly is the most natural reading of the passage. What interests us is the teaching of this passage about the present and future state of creation.

Two features of this passage speak directly to this issue.

First, the Apostle Peter compares the destruction of the world in the days of the great flood with the future destruction of the world at the '*day of God*' (verses 6-7, 10-12). The language of destruction is used in both instances. Though we may be inclined to take this to mean the complete annihilation of all things, this cannot be the case, at least in the first instance. When God's judgement fell upon the world at the time of the flood, the world was destroyed only in the sense that its wicked inhabitants were subjected to judgement and the earth cleansed of its wickedness. The destruction, however, did not involve the removal of all things and the provision of all new things.

And second, the imagery used in this passage to describe the creation of the new heavens and earth suggests a process of refinement and purification, but not of utter annihilation. Imagery drawn from the field of metallurgy — the refining process that produces a pure grade of metal — is used to describe what God will do to create a renewed world '*in which righteousness dwells*'. To be sure, the language of this passage speaks of a violent and destructive process: '*the heavens will pass away with a roar*'; '*the elements will be destroyed with intense heat*'; '*the earth and its works will be discovered*'; '*the heavens will be destroyed by burning*'; and '*the elements will melt with intense heat*'. These descriptions undoubtedly suggest a process of extraordinary power and destructiveness.¹⁰ However, they ought not to be taken to describe a process of annihilation. Rather, they describe a process by which the present creation is purified, refined, and cleansed, all of the impurities of evil and sin removed, and the creation left in a state of pristine purity. Just as the refiner's fire is used to produce the highest and purest grade of gold or silver, so the refining fire of God's judging and sanctifying this sin-cursed creation will yield a new heavens and earth where all is holy and pure. In this process, far from being eliminated, the integrity of the creation is restored, all the unnatural impurities having been removed.

An interesting confirmation of this reading of the passage may be found in the seemingly odd expression in verse 10, '*and the earth and its works will be discovered*'. Many of the later Greek manuscripts use a different verb in this verse, 'burned up', so that it conforms to the language of verse 12 and the idea of the working of fire. However, the word used in the older and better manuscripts conveys the idea of a process that does not so much destroy or burn up, but uncover or lay open for discovery the creation, now in a renewed state of pristine purity. What to us may seem an odd or difficult expression — the earth and its works are 'discovered' or 'found' — is actually just the right expression to convey the idea of a process that does not destroy but restores the creation to a state of integrity. In the same way the process of refining precious metals 'discovers' or 'lays bare' the metal in all of its purity, so God uncovers by removing every impurity the beauty and glory of the created order.¹¹

2 Peter 3:5-13 confirms, then, the basic idea also expressed, though in different language, in Romans 8. The new heavens and earth will issue from God's sovereign and redemptive work. Though this work is unimaginably powerful, beyond anything within the reach of our present experience, it will involve the renewal of all things, not the creation of all new things. This creation will undergo a process of cosmic sanctification, so that every remainder and vestige of sin will be removed. All of God's renewed creation- temple will be holy unto the Lord (Zechariah 14:20-21), a place suitable for his dwelling with his people and for their service to him.¹²

Life in the renewed creation

Considering the substantial continuity between the present and new creation, it follows that the life to come in the new creation will be as rich and full of activity in the service of the Lord as was intended at the beginning. Just as humankind was originally placed in God's creation-temple to fulfil a particular office and calling, so the new humanity, in union with Christ, the second Adam, will live in unceasing joy in the presence and service of God.

Though there is some danger of speculation in speaking too much of the life to come in the renewed creation, the Scriptures provide some indications of what that life will entail. These indications are often negative, denying to the life to come those features of life which are the result of sin and the curse of God. Nonetheless, the Scriptures do provide something of a portrait of the splendour and beauty of life in the renewed creation.

1. The blessings

The blessings of the life to come for the redeemed people of God will be a consummation of those blessings enjoyed already now in fellowship with Christ. These blessings represent the fruition of the work of redemption already experienced through the indwelling Spirit of Christ. However, in the life to come, these blessings will flower forth in the most beautiful manner. What believers now know and experience only in part will then be theirs in fullness. Those who today can praise God that their '*cup overflows*' (Psalm 23) will in the life to come drink unendingly from the inexhaustible riches of their inheritance in Christ.

Among these blessings are such things as: perfection in holiness (Revelation 3:4, 5; 7:14; 19:8; 21:27); the complete experience of the joy and benefit of adoption (Romans 8:23); the fullness of salvation from sin (Romans 13:11, 1 Thessalonians 5:9, Hebrews 1:14; 5:9); unbroken and unbreakable fellowship with God and his Christ, together with all the saints (John 17:24, 2 Corinthians 5:8, Philippians 1:23, Revelation 21:3; 22:3); conformity to Christ (Romans 8:29, 1 John 3:2, Revelation 22:4); eternal life (Matthew 19:16, 29); and the glory of full redemption (Luke 24:26, Romans 2:10; 8:18, 21, 2 Thessalonians 1:10).¹³ Believers who presently bless God for '*every spiritual blessing in Christ*' (Ephesians 1:3), will enter into the perfection of these blessings in the life to come. Every vestige and remainder of sin will be utterly expunged. Every obstacle to fellowship with the Triune God will be removed. No impediment or weight of sin will stand in the way of wholehearted communion and love for God.

Consistent with the completion of the sanctifying work of the Spirit and the enjoyment of the fullness of every spiritual blessing, believers will also enjoy the blessings of freedom from every effect of the curse. Life within the renewed creation will be freed from culpable ignorance and error (John 6:45), from the fear and reality of death (Hebrews 2:15, 1 Corinthians 15:26, Revelation 2:11; 20:6, 14), from every form of futility and frustration, from sickness and affliction, from hunger and thirst, cold and heat (Matthew 5:4, Luke 6:21, Revelation 7:16-17; 21:4), and from all weakness, dishonour and corruption (1 Corinthians 15:42). Believers will stand in the glory of resurrection bodies in the presence of God and all his people, unbowed by the burden of sin's devastation. The God who forgives all the sins of his people, who heals all their diseases (Psalm 103:3), will renew the youth and strength of his people. Believers will know what it is 'to take up wings like eagles' and experience the exhilaration of never growing weary in well doing.

Even though the language is negative, telling us more about what will not characterize the life to come, the vision of John in Revelation 21:1-4 stirs the hearts of God's people in their anxious longing:

*And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain: the first things have passed away.'*¹⁴

Surely no one can adequately describe all that this stirring vision promises God's people. No child of God, however, who has felt deeply the pain and brokenness of sin and the curse — in sinful indifference to God and others, broken relationships, the terror of crippling disease, the boredom and barrenness of life without God, the injustice among people and nations, and so much more — can read these words without being stirred. For they fan into flame an eagerness and longing, like that of a little child who waits expectantly, even impatiently, for the fulfilment of a parent's promise.

One of the blessings of the life to come that must not go unnoticed in the Scriptures is the blessing of communion or fellowship. Though we will later focus upon the epitome of this communion — namely, communion with the living God, dwelling in his presence and looking upon his face — here I would focus only upon the communion among the people of God. Unlike hell, which is a place of utter isolation, separation from God and others,¹⁵ life in the new creation will be marked by friendship and love, perfect fellowship with God and those who belong to him. Though some might be tempted to regard the cessation of marriage to be loss, the beauty of the marriage relationship, of self-denying love between a man and a woman, will be surpassed by the beauty of the marriage between Christ, the bridegroom, and the church, his bride. Whatever loss of brothers, sisters and loved ones that loyalty to Christ may bring in this life, will be more than matched by an increase of spiritual brothers and sisters, not only in this life, but also in the life to come (Mark 10:29-30, Matthew 12:50, Hebrews 12:22-24). No words can adequately express what it will be like when all of God's people will dwell together in the most perfect friendship. Petty jealousies, vying for supremacy, bitterness over wrongs committed — these marks of sinful hostility will be vanquished and replaced with perfect joy in one another. When the Psalmist exults, *'How good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity'* (Psalm 133:1), he leads the people of God in singing of what someday will be their experience. The second table of the law will be fulfilled, when all of God's people dwell together in the most intimate and rich communion. The sinful brokenness and division that so often mar the beauty of Christ's bride, the church, in this present age, will give way to the glory for which Christ prayed, when he asked the Father for the oneness of his people, even as he and the Father are one (John 17:21).

One question that sometimes surfaces is whether the blessings of the life to come will include the creaturely pleasures of life in the body as we presently experience them.¹⁶ Though the Scriptures plainly teach that in the kingdom of heaven they will neither marry nor be given in marriage, they nonetheless use imagery that suggests that many of the ordinary pleasures of life in the body will characterize life in the new creation.

Some of the most common imagery speaks of the saints eating and drinking, enjoying table fellowship with God and others. In the prophetic descriptions of the Old Testament, life in the new heavens and earth is depicted as a rich banquet, lavishly furnished with the best of foods. Isaiah, for example, pictures the day of redemption as one in which *'the Lord of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; a banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, and refined, aged wine'* (25:6). This picture is drawn in a context that clearly refers to the final state when *'the Lord God will wipe tears away from all faces, and he will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth'* (verse 8). Jesus, on the occasion of the institution of the Lord's supper, spoke of the time when he would drink anew with his disciples from the fruit of the vine in the kingdom (Matthew 26:29). Revelation 19:9 speaks of the coming *'marriage feast of the Lamb'*. We also are told in the Gospels that Christ, after his resurrection, not only appeared to his disciples but enjoyed eating and drinking with them (Luke 24:43, John 21:9-14). Do these descriptions support the conclusion that life in the new creation, then, will include also the creaturely pleasures of eating and drinking and the like?

Though some might be inclined to deny this outright, it might be that this denial is borne out of an over-spiritualized view of the final state. If, as we have argued, life in the new creation will be in substantial continuity with life in the present creation, then there is no reason that this might not be the case.¹⁷ Just as our eating and drinking today is to be done to God's glory (1 Corinthians 10:31), so it may well be in the new heavens and earth that the blessings of food and drink, sanctified through the Word of God and prayer (1 Timothy 4:5), will be the occasion for worshipping and serving the living God. It is wise not to be too dogmatic on this question one way or the other. Nevertheless, life in the new creation will undoubtedly be like a rich banquet at which the saints of God will sit down together and enjoy the richest of foods. The joy and happiness that we have known in this life on the occasion of the wedding of a man and woman is but a foretaste of the joy and happiness that will be ours when Christ receives his bride on his wedding day. The wine Christ served at the wedding of Cana is surely a foretaste of that best of wines that he will furnish on that day.

2. Life as worship

When describing the blessings of the life to come, we face the danger of losing sight of what is central to every aspect of that life — the worship and service of the Triune God. The blessings enjoyed by the children of God in the new heavens and earth have their meaning only within the context of the worship of God. True life for the child of God is first and foremost a life of worship. So it will be in the life to come.

One prominent way in which this is emphasized throughout the Scriptures is the promise of a Sabbath rest for the people of God. At the conclusion of his work of creation, God himself rested from his creative labours and entered into the enjoyment of his handiwork (Genesis 2:2-3). That rest was not a state of inactivity but of active pleasure in the work of his hands and in communion with his image-bearers. For their part, Adam and Eve were placed in a circumstance of peace and joy in fellowship with their God and with each other. All was in a state of peaceful harmony or shalom. The life of the covenant between God and humankind was to be a life of heartfelt service and praise. The dominion which Adam and Eve were to exercise over the creation, under God and in his service, was to flow from a life of worship, an unending and full-orbed offering of themselves in loving obedience to their Creator and Friend, the living God.

Sin, however, radically broke these bonds of fellowship between God and his people. Rather than the whole creation being a temple in which God dwelt in harmony with his covenant children, it became a place of brokenness and disharmony. The Sabbath rest of God and the shalom of his people were disrupted. Humankind's labour became a toilsome burden. The care over the creation assigned to God's image-bearers degenerated into a state of sinful misuse and cultural development in the service of the creature rather than the Creator. Heaven and earth no longer sang in harmony to the praise of the Triune God.

The work of redemption aims to restore fellowship between the Triune God and his covenant people. This restoration promises a renewal of rest and shalom in the relations between God and his people, and between his people and the creation under their care. The ordinance of the Sabbath among the people of Israel was a sign of this renewed fellowship and service. The rest promised Israel in the land that the Lord gave to her was only a prefigurement of that eternal rest that awaited her at the consummation of God's saving purposes in Christ. Canaan was a type of the true promised land, the new heavens and earth wherein righteousness dwells. The writer to the Hebrews emphasizes this theme throughout his epistle. Israel, though promised rest, never entered fully into the promise (Hebrews 3:11, 18). Joshua, an Old Testament type of the Saviour, Jesus, was unable to bring God's people into the rest promised her. *'There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest (Jesus Christ, the Mediator of the new covenant) has Himself also rested from His works, as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall through following the same example of (Israel's) disobedience'* (Hebrews 4:9-11).¹⁸ The peace, joy and rest that God's Old Testament people enjoyed in their Sabbath day worship and festivals were only a foretaste of what God's New Testament people enjoy in their Lord's Day worship. However, even the Lord's Day, in which the people of God gather for worship and praise, resting in the finished work of the crucified and risen Saviour, remains a promissory note of the Sabbath rest that still awaits them. The worship of the Lord's Day is but a foretaste of the eternal Sabbath yet to come, an emblem of eternal rest.

Though this is a mere sketch of these themes in the Scriptures, it reminds us of what will characterize the life to come. That life will be one wholly devoted to the worship and service of God, an unending Sabbath of peaceful rest and joyful praise. The disruption and brokenness in the relationship between God and his people will be ended. All toil and burdensome labour will give way to gladhearted service of God. The life of God's people will be one of unending, thankful worship. This worship will take place within the setting of the new heavens and earth.

For this reason, in the book of Revelation, the visions of the life to come are full of the imagery of worship and praise. What the prophet Isaiah glimpsed in a vision of the Lord seated upon his throne, surrounded by the seraphim and the host of heaven who unceasingly declare his holiness (Isaiah 6), John witnessed again and again in his visions of heaven. In Revelation 4, he describes the throne of God in heaven as surrounded by twenty-four elders and the four living creatures.

Representing the whole company of the people of God and every living creature, this heavenly assembly falls down before God in worship, saying, *'Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honour and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created'* (verse 11). An equally vivid picture of the worship of God is given in Revelation 19: *'And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude and as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns ... for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready"'* (verses 6-7). When the new Jerusalem descends from heaven to earth, the whole creation will become a dwelling place for God in fellowship with his people. There will be no temple there, for the Lord God himself and the Lamb will be in the midst of the people (Revelation 21:22). The sanctuary in which God dwells and in which he is served and worshipped will be the new heavens and earth.

No doubt there is a danger in speculating too much about the nature of this creation-temple worship that will characterize the life of the redeemed. However, this worship will surely include the two facets that characterize the worship of God among his people already now. In the Scriptures, the worship of God includes not only the worship of the cultus but also the worship of the whole of life. God's people assemble at specific times and places for official worship. They gather on the Sabbath or the Lord's day for the purpose of entering the sanctuary of God's presence, to offer corporate sacrifices of thanksgiving to him. Such worship includes elements like singing his praise, presenting thank offerings, prayer, the reading and hearing of his Word, and the sacraments. In obedience to God's command and in gratitude for his saving work, God's people gather in worship to acknowledge the Triune God's worthiness to receive the thankful praise of all creation.

This does not exhaust the worship or service of the people of God, however. In the two tables of the law, commanding love for God and for neighbour, the life of God's people is described as a life of worship. As royal priests, believers in union with Christ respond to God's mercy and grace by offering their selves wholly to God (1 Peter 2:9, Romans 12:1). No legitimate activity of life — whether in marriage, family, business, play, friendship, education, politics, etc. — escapes the claims of Christ's kingship. In fellowship with Christ, the second Adam and obedient servant of the Lord, the redeemed of God are renewed unto the service of their Creator in every area of life. Though we are not told what life as worship in the new creation will involve, certainly those who live and reign with Christ forever will find the diversity and complexity of their worship of God not less, but richer, in the life to come. Every legitimate activity of (new) creaturely life will be included within the life of worship of God's people.

This helps to answer a frequent puzzle: will the people of God not become weary, perhaps even bored, in a life that has no end?¹⁹ It is difficult to imagine a life of worship, whether in the narrow or broad sense, that never concludes but ceaselessly continues. In a creation that has no night (Revelation 21:25) and in which God is perpetually praised, will not God's people find the ways and means to serve God ultimately limited and eventually so familiar as to become contemptible?

Admittedly, this question, though sometimes asked, is difficult to answer. We lack the imagination necessary to grasp with any adequacy the richness and texture of the life to come. There is so much we do not know about the worship of God's people in the new creation. However, if the Sabbath rest of God's people, far from being an inactive and listless passing of time, is full of activity in the worship of God, we have the beginning of an answer to this puzzle. In our present experience, we know what it is for time to pass with painful slowness. No parent travelling a distance with children on vacation is unaware of the common lament, 'Are we there yet?' Sometimes time seems to come to a halt, and the movement of the clock seems imperceptible. On the other hand, who has not known the rapid passage of time? When we are engaged in an exhilarating activity time seems to fly by so that we almost lose track altogether of its passing. If we allow our imaginations some freedom, what child of God cannot imagine something of what it will be in the life to come to glorify God and enjoy him forever? No child of God who has experienced something of the unspeakable joy of knowing Christ need fear that the life to come will end in boredom or tiresome repetition. Though the language is poetic and somewhat general, the hymn writer well expressed it — *'When we've been there ten thousand years ... we've no less days to*

sing his praise'. The inexhaustible glory and splendour of their God will be more than enough to furnish the praise of God's people in the life to come.²⁰

3. A rich inheritance

Consistent with our argument that the life of the redeemed in the new creation will be rich and diverse, one of the descriptions in the book of Revelation speaks of the rich inheritance that awaits God's people. In Revelation 21, John's vision of the new heaven and earth includes a vision of the nations walking together by the light that is the Lamb. The nations will walk together and, the vision adds, *'the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it (the holy city)'* (verse 24). According to this vision, the rich diversity of peoples, together with the works and accomplishments of those who have been among the leaders of the nations, will contribute significantly to the glory and splendour of the new heaven and earth.

Since the language of this vision does not elaborate upon the meaning of this inheritance of God's people, we are left to surmise what it might mean. It has been plausibly suggested that it describes the way the new creation will receive all of the appropriate fruits of human culture and development that have been produced throughout the course of history. Every legitimate and excellent fruit of human culture will be carried into and contribute to the splendour of life in the new creation. Rather than the new creation being a radically new beginning, in which the excellent and noble fruits of humankind's fulfilment of the cultural mandate are wholly discarded — the new creation will benefit from, and be immensely enriched by, its receiving of these fruits. Far from being an empty and desolate place, the new creation will be enriched with the sanctified fruits of human culture. Nothing of the diversity of the nations and peoples, their cultural products, languages, arts, sciences, literature, and technology — so far as these are good and excellent — will be lost upon life in the new creation. Life in the new creation will not be a starting over, but a perfected continuation of the new humanity's stewardship of all of life in the service of God.

Though some have argued that this reading of John's vision is speculative and unwarranted,²¹ the language of Revelation 21:24 can scarcely be read otherwise.²² The alternative — denying that life in the new creation will be enriched by the presence of these fruits of human culture — seems unlikely and problematic. Life in the new creation will not be a *repristination* of all things — a going back to the way things were at the beginning. Rather, life in the new creation will be a *restoration* of all things — involving the removal of every sinful impurity and the retaining of all that is holy and good.²³ Were the new creation to exclude the diversity of the nations and the glory of the kings of the earth, it would be impoverished rather than enriched, historically regressive and reactionary rather than progressive. To express the point in the form of a question: is it likely that the music of Bach and Mozart, the painting of Rembrandt, the writing of Shakespeare, the discoveries of science, etc., will be altogether lost upon life in the new creation?

4. To enjoy God forever

The *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, one of the better known catechisms of the Reformation, begins with a justifiably famous question and answer: *'What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.'* If our lives find their chief end in glorifying and enjoying God, it should not surprise us that the epitome of life in the new heaven and earth will consist in the worship and enjoyment of the true God. The life to come, because it will bring the fruition of human blessedness, will consist in finding joy in God, living before his face.

Consequently, one of the most beautiful ways in which the life to come is summarized in the Scriptures is in terms of the believer's vision of God. In the traditional language of Christian theology, the joy of heaven will consist essentially in the contemplation (*visio*), knowledge (*comprehensio*) and enjoyment (*fruitio*) of God.²⁴ When believers see God in the life to come and know him even as they are known, their joy in God will have no measure or end. Indeed, remove the joy of God's presence and the sight of his face, and all of the blessings of the life to come that we have described would amount to very little. For the confession of every believer is that of the Psalmist, *'Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth'* (73:25). The restlessness of the human heart finds no end, unless we find our rest in God (Augustine). The

deepest longing and thirst of every image-bearer of God can be quenched only by God himself (Psalm 42:1-2; 63:1-2).²⁵

When the Bible speaks of the believer's future, it is this enjoyment of God, this '*seeing God face to face*' that is most emphasized. Whereas sin has brought shame upon the human race so that we cannot look upon God's face without averting our eyes (Genesis 3:7-11, Luke 18:13), redemption promises the restoration of direct communion between God and his people. The work of Christ as Mediator, not only in justification but also in sanctification, restores those who are united with him to favour with God (1 Corinthians 1:30, Romans 8:1, 33). Sanctified by the work of Christ and his indwelling Spirit, Christ's people are enabled to see God (Hebrews 12:14). When the work of redemption is completed, believers will stand unbowed before God, confident again in his presence that they are acceptable to him (Hebrews 10:19-22). The smile of God's countenance will shine upon the glorified members of Christ throughout all eternity. The pure in heart will see God (Matthew 5:8). Those who have purified themselves even as he is pure, will be like him for they shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2).

As with other dimensions of the life to come, this joy of seeing God stands out in the depictions of the new heaven and earth in the book of Revelation. In the last chapter of the Bible, John sees a vision of this enjoyment of God. Using language drawn from the picture of paradise in Genesis, he writes,

'And he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, and in the middle of its street. And on either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bondservants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face, and His name shall be upon their foreheads. And there shall no longer be any night; and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever.'

(Revelation 22:1-5)

Central to this vision of the future is the believer's direct communion with God, basking in the light of his presence and favour, enjoying fellowship with him in the midst of the splendour of the new creation.

That the vision, knowledge and enjoyment of God stand at the centre of life in the new creation is undeniable. But how we are to understand this vision of God is a more difficult matter. In the history of the church, particularly in the Roman Catholic doctrine of the beatific vision and the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of *theosis* or deification, this vision involves an unmediated knowing of God's being. Though Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox teaching differ on the nature of this vision of God, common to these traditions is the idea of an immediate participation in God's nature or communion in the divine energy. In the Roman Catholic understanding of the beatific vision, believers will know God as he is in his innermost being.²⁶ In the Eastern Orthodox understanding of deification, believers will become so much like God as to be, in some sense, participants in his divine life. Believers, indeed, will become 'god-like'.²⁷ Just as God became man in the incarnation, so through mystical union with Christ believers will become partakers of the divine nature. In each view, it is claimed that believers will no longer depend upon any creaturely medium or Mediator in order to see God. The vision of God will be a literal seeing of God as he is in his essential nature. All the limitations presently upon our knowledge will fall away when God is known by us in the way we are known by God.

Those who teach this idea of an immediate vision of and participation in the being of God often appeal to 2 Peter 1:4.²⁸ In this text, the Apostle Peter declares that God 'has granted to us his precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust'. This text seems to lend support to the view that redemption ultimately involves a separation from the being of this world in order to participate directly in the being of God. Upon first reading, this strange text seems clearly to suggest the idea of an absorption into the being of God himself.²⁹

Two considerations, however, lead me to reject the teaching of an immediate seeing of the being of God in the life to come. The first relates to the meaning of the language of 2 Peter 1:4. The second has to do with the broader issue of the difference between God as Creator and all creatures, a difference that renders suspect any teaching of an immediate participation in the being of God.

When it comes to the meaning of 2 Peter 1:4, the key to interpretation lies in the three Greek terms that are commonly translated, '*partakers of the divine nature*'. In a recent study Al Wolters has offered a persuasive argument for a different translation of these terms.³⁰ Wolters notes that the second term used in this phrase is a noun whose common meaning is that of 'partner' or 'companion'. He also argues that the first and second terms, usually translated abstractly as 'the divine nature', ought better be translated concretely as 'of the deity'. Peter is speaking, on this translation of the text, of the promise that the redeemed people of God will become his 'partners' or 'companions'. Based upon a comparative study of the use of this language in other biblical and extra-biblical literature, Wolters concludes that Peter is using covenantal language. The goal of our redemption, consistent with the general teaching of Scripture, is covenantal fellowship with the Triune God. Rather than conveying the strange idea of a commingling of the being of the creature and the Creator, this language conveys the idea of communion between God and those who are his. Redemption will find its consummation in the restoration of perfect friendship between God and his people.

This translation and understanding of 2 Peter 1:4 corresponds to the teaching of Scripture of an unbridgeable difference in being between the Triune Creator and the creature, even the creature bearing God's image. For the creature to know and enjoy God, God must take the initiative and condescend to the level of the creature. Throughout the entire course of creation and redemption, God is the One who comes to us, speaking language we can understand and appearing in a creaturely form within our reach. Accordingly, when God in the fullness of time comes to dwell with us (John 1:14), he does so by way of a Mediator, the Word become flesh. The miracle of the incarnation is not that we climbed our way up to God. The miracle is that God came down to us, assuming our flesh and blood. Through all of his acts of condescension, and chiefly through the incarnation of his beloved son, God is able to be known and loved by the creature. However, at no time does the creature know and enjoy God *immediately*, that is, apart from any creaturely means of communion. God manifests his power and wisdom, not directly or immediately, but through the means of his handiwork (Psalm 19, Romans 1:18-20). God manifests his mercy and grace through the Person and work of Jesus Christ, the Mediator. To see God one must see his glory in the Son (John 1:18; 14:9; 17:24).

In the same way, when God's fellowship with his people in the new heaven and earth is complete, God will be God and his people will still be creatures. The people of God will not be absorbed into or partake in an immediate way of the being of God. In order to do so, they would have to cease to be who they are as creatures. Nor will they know God with a perfection that knows no boundaries. Though their knowledge and enjoyment of God will be perfected, untainted by the culpable ignorance of sin, it will not be a knowing that fully exhausts who God is in his incomprehensible greatness. To know God even as he knows himself will ever remain outside of the reach of the creature.

How are we to understand, then, what it will be for God's people to see God? If it does not mean that we become as God is, knowing him as he alone knows himself, then what is meant by the expression, 'They shall see his face'?

Though believers have only a small inkling of what this means, what they do know is full of the promise of the future. To see the face of God means at least this: that believers will dwell in God's presence without any hint of fear or shame. In the new heaven and earth, God will be as pleased with his people — his face will shine upon them — as they are with him. God's joy in his people will be reciprocated by their joy in him. But more than that, God's people will see him without any of the sinful limitations of the present. No sin-induced stupor, no failure of hearing, no blindness of vision will obscure the beauty of God from their knowledge. Though believers will still be creatures, limited in their capacity to know God as he knows himself, their knowledge of God will be pure and

undiminished by sin. Though God's majesty, splendour, holiness, love, wisdom, and all that he is, surpass the knowledge of any creature in inexhaustible richness, still believers will see God as they have never seen him before. This seeing will be of one piece with what they have already seen in this life, to be sure (2 Corinthians 4:6). But it will be so much richer and fuller as to leave room only for unending praise and thanksgiving.

Such is the great promise of the future for which the children of God wait — to dwell in God's blessed presence, glorifying and enjoying him forever.

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¹ (1949; repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 3.

² Perhaps this explains the relative brevity with which many studies of biblical doctrine treat the subject of heaven. Louis Berkhof, for example, in his *Systematic Theology*, devotes only a little more than one page to it.

³ See Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), pp. 1226-7. For a summary of the biblical teaching about heaven in distinction from the earth, see Klaas Schilder, *Heaven: What is It?*, trans. Marian M. Schoolland (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), ch. 4, 'The History of Heaven', pp. 39-57.

⁴ See, for example, Matthew 5:18; 11:25; 24:29, 35, Luke 4:25; 16:17.

⁵ It is therefore not surprising that in the visions of God's triumph in the book of Revelation, heaven is the place where this triumph is first achieved, and only thereafter is it accomplished upon the earth. See, for example, Revelation 12:7-12; 20:1-10. The same idea is expressed by the motif of angelic descent from heaven (10:1; 18:1; 20:1), and by the note that the new Jerusalem will come down 'from heaven' to the earth (21:2).

⁶ Herman Bavinck, *The Last Things*, p. 156, cites the following as representatives of the first view: Origen, the Lutherans, the Mennonites, the Socinians, Vorstius, the Remonstrants, and 'a number of Reformed theologians like Beza, Rivet, Junius, Wollebius, and Prideaux'. Compare G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ*, p. 220, n. 18, who lists a number of Lutheran advocates of the discontinuity position.

⁷ Speaking of this implication, Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, p. 281, 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 blot it out totally of existence. But Satan did not win such a victory. On the contrary, Satan has been decisively defeated. God will reveal the full dimensions of that defeat when he shall renew this very earth on which Satan deceived mankind and finally banish from it all the results of Satan's evil machinations.'

⁸ This does not mean, however, that the redemption of the children of God is the only real interest of this passage. For a treatment of this, passage that argues against an exclusively 'anthropological-, soteriological' reading of it, see John Bolt, 'The Relation Between: Creation and Redemption in Romans 8:18-27', *Calvin Theological Journal*, 30/1 (April 1995), pp. 34-51.

⁹ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; 1959; repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 304-5, makes the following comment on this coincidence of cosmic and individual transformation: 'The creation is to share, therefore, in the glory that will be bestowed upon the children of God. It can only participate in that glory, however, in a way that is compatible with its nature as non-rational. Yet the glory of the children of God is one that comprises the creation also and must not be conceived of apart from the cosmic regeneration — the glory of the people of God will be in the context of the restitution of all things (cf. Acts. 3:21).'

¹⁰ Anyone familiar with the process still used today of producing a high grade of steel from iron ore will acknowledge that the process is a violent and destructive one. This destructiveness, however, aims to remove impurities, not to annihilate.

¹¹ I am indebted for this suggestion to Al Wolters who, in an excellent discussion of this term and passage (Worldview and Textual Criticism in 2 Peter 3:10, *Westminster Theological Journal*, 49/2, Fall 1987, pp. 405-13), argues that translations of this text have often been influenced by a worldview that denies the continuity between the present and future state of creation. Wolters also suggests that the Apostle Peter's use of this term in two other instances corresponds to this metallurgical use in 2 Peter 3:10: 'It is striking that for the two occurrences of the absolute use in the letters of Peter, the context in both cases evokes the image of a metal's purification in a melting pot or crucible. Could it be that the common Greek verb *heuriskesthai* ("to be discovered", "to be found") has a precise technical sense in the vocabulary of the smelter and refiner? Its meaning would then be something like "emerge purified (from the crucible)", with the connotation of having stood the test, of being tried and true. In a word, the technical sense would be equivalent to the English "to show one's mettle", an idiom which also originates in the world of metallurgy. A number of passages in extra-biblical Greek authors dealing with the refining of metals use *heuriskoo* in a way which is consistent with this hypothesis.' For a similar treatment of this passage, see Gale Z. Heide, 'What is New about the New Heaven and the New Earth? A Theology of Creation from Revelation 21 and 2 Peter 3', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 40/1 (March 1997), pp. 37-56.

¹² Hoekema, in his treatment of the Bible's promise of a new heavens and earth, argues at some length that this answers the common dispensationalist complaint that Amillennialism 'spiritualizes' the concreteness of the future kingdom (*The Bible and the Future*, pp. 275-9). Ironically, the future millennium of dispensational expectation is in some ways a less literal fulfilment of the biblical promise of the new heavens and earth than that of Amillennialism.

¹³ I am indebted here to the discussion of Bavinck, *The Last Things*, p. 161. Bavinck cites many more passages from Scripture for these manifold blessings.

¹⁴ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, p. 280, observes that in this passage and in 2 Peter 3:13, the Greek term used for 'new' is *kainos* rather than *neos*, a term meaning new in nature or in quality. This is consistent with the idea that the new creation is 'not the emergence of a cosmos totally other than the present one, but the creation of a universe which, though it has been gloriously renewed, stands in continuity with the present one'.

¹⁵ See C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), pp. 8-9. Lewis, in his imaginative portrayal of hell, describes a place whose streets are empty and whose residents live at an impossible distance from each other — otherwise they would only quarrel!

¹⁶ For an extended treatment of this and related questions, see Peter Kreeft, *Every Thing You Ever Wanted to Know About Heaven — But Never Dreamed of Asking!* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990), pp. 841-32. Kreeft's study is as fascinating as its title suggests.

¹⁷ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, p. 252, appeals to 1 Corinthians 6:13 ('Food is for the stomach, and the stomach is for food; but God will do away with both of them') to support the claim that 'the digestive functions of the body will no longer be necessary in the life to come'. Hoekema may be correct in his conclusion, but I doubt that this text, in its context, can bear the weight he places upon it.

¹⁸ For a summary of the biblical typology of the land of Canaan in relation to the new earth, and of the motif of Sabbath rest in the Scriptures, see Patrick Fairbairn, *Typology of Scripture* (1845-47; New York: Funk and Wagnals, 1900), i, pp. 329-61; Klaas Schilder, *Heaven: What is It?*, ch. 7, 'Fulfilled Sabbath Rest', pp. 101-18; and Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*, pp. 138-43.

¹⁹ The fear of boredom is reinforced by the bland and unimaginative ideas many have of heaven which were mentioned earlier. Regis Martin, *The Last Things* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1998), p. 161: 'The reason (so few long for heaven) is that for most people the only idea they have of Heaven is the everlastingly boring one of men and women seated forever on a cloud playing harps and shouting Hosannas.' Martin also quotes Dorothy Sayers' observation about the circumstance of the damned by comparison — 'nothing to do and all eternity to do it in' (p. 149). Written from a Roman Catholic point of view, Martin's study is beautifully written and rich in citations from Christian tradition.

²⁰ I am assuming here that time as a succession of moments will continue to characterize the life of God's creatures in the new creation. Only God is by nature eternal, transcending the limitations of created time. Though in popular piety some Christians have the strange (and unorthodox) idea that 'time will be no more' in the final state, this would be a serious denial of the difference between God as Creator and the creation. For a recent discussion of this issue, see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), pp. 172-3, 11-62.

²¹ See, for example, Klaas Schilder, *Heaven: What is It?*, pp. 11-12.

²² For examples of interpreters who read the passage in this way, see: B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (Harper's New Testament Commentaries; New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 280; A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, pp. 285-6; Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christ the Meaning of History* (1966; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), pp. 188-92; A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie* (Amsterdam: Hover & Wormser, 1902), I:pp. 454-94; and Al Wolters, *Creation Regained* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), pp. 57-71. H Berkhof (p. 191) translates the following representative quote from Kuyper (*De Gemeene Gratie*, 1, pp. 482-3): 'If an endless field of human knowledge and of human ability is now being formed by all that takes place in order to make the visible world and material nature subject to us, and if we know that this dominion of ours over nature will be complete in eternity, we may conclude that the knowledge and dominion we have gained over nature here can and will be of continued significance, even in the kingdom of glory.'

²³ See Al Wolters, *Creation Regained*, p. 63, to whom I am indebted for this language.

²⁴ For a brief summary of this traditional understanding, see Bavinck, *The Last Things*, p. 162.

²⁵ For a study of heaven written from the standpoint of the 'heart's deepest longing', see Peter Kreeft, *Heaven: The Heart's Deepest Longing* (1980; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989).

²⁶ For an exposition of the traditional Catholic doctrine of the beatific vision, see Joseph Pohle, *The Catholic Doctrine of the Last Things: A Dogmatic Treatise* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1917), pp. 34-7. For a classic statement of the doctrine, see *Introduction to St Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Anton C. Pegis (New York: Random House, 1948), pp. 467-77. Speaking of this vision, Aquinas maintains that 'if God's essence is to be seen at all, it must be that the intellect sees it through the divine essence (*per essentiam*) itself; so that in that vision the divine essence is both the object and the medium of vision' (p. 468).

²⁷ For a representation of the view of Eastern Orthodoxy, see T Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1980), pp. 236-42. For a sympathetic treatment of this doctrine by an evangelical theologian, see Daniel B. Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), chap. 6, 'The Deification of Humanity', pp. 117-37. Clendenin maintains that Eastern Orthodoxy does not teach a literal fusion with the divine essence. Needless to say, the language of Orthodoxy does not seem to guard sufficiently against this idea.

²⁸ T. Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, calls this 'the famous text of 2 Peter' that supports the Eastern Orthodox teaching of *theosis* or participation in the being of God. In fairness to the position of Eastern Orthodoxy, it should be noted that this participation is in the divine 'energy' (*energeia*) and not in the divine 'being' (*ousia*) as such.

²⁹ See Al Wolters, "'Partners of the Deity': A Covenantal Reading of 2 Peter 1:4", *Calvin Theological Journal*, 25/1 (April 1990), p. 29, for references to commentators who have noted the strangeness of this text.

³⁰ "'Partners of the Deity'", pp. 28-44; and 'Postscript to "Partners of the Deity"', *Calvin Theological Journal*, 26/2 (November 1991), pp. 418-20.