
A New Earth

Philip Eveson

As evangelicals we all believe in the return of Christ as judge, in the resurrection of the body and in the life everlasting. But how do we view the life everlasting? Most of us think of the future ultimate state in other-worldly terms. Even when confronted with texts which speak of a new earth as well as a new heaven it is still common to think of a spiritual, non-material existence. This is not only the position of Christians generally, it is also true of preachers and scholars. You will look in vain for an adequate treatment of the new creation in, for instance, Steve Travis' books on the Christian hope, James Boice's FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH, Paul Helm's THE LAST THINGS; even Berkhof in his SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY is weak on the subject.

Why Such Confusion?

There are many reasons why people are confused about the eternal state, thinking of it as another term for heaven, or as something which is entirely other worldly: **Scriptures which suggest a bodily existence in heaven.**

1. Jesus ascended into heaven in his resurrected body and his resurrected body was of a different order from his pre-resurrected body. It was a spiritual body that could materialise and dematerialize at will.

2. Paul says in Phil 3:20-21 that our citizenship is in heaven from where we look for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the next breath he speaks of our bodies being changed to be like his glorious body. Coupled with this is the verse in 1 Thess 4:17 which states that at Christ's coming, when the dead in Christ shall arise, those who are alive will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord and so to be with Christ for ever. It seems to point to an ethereal, other-worldly state.

3 The OT saints Enoch and Elijah went bodily into heaven.

Salvation and the kingdom are thought of as totally other-worldly

1. The kingdom - Because God's rule is sometimes called the 'kingdom of heaven', this is often mistakenly thought of as a heavenly place beyond this space-time environment. Again, Jesus said to Pilate that his kingdom was not of this world. Take this with Paul's statement that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, and it is easy for people to think of the resurrection hope and the life everlasting as something beyond this space-time continuum.

2. Salvation - This is generally thought of negatively as deliverance from sin and hell and positively as forgiveness, acceptance with God and everlasting glory in heaven. It is seen in purely personal terms with little or no consideration of the rest of creation. Berkouwer speaks of 'a religious and soteriological self-centredness'.

Millennialism

Many evangelical people have had their minds so captivated by the idea of a

thousand year reign of Christ on this earth that they have no real interest in the eternal state. One person I know confessed sadness that the glorious reign of Christ would have to come to an end after the thousand years!

The influence of Darwinism and liberalism

Berkouwer quotes this comment from a German scholar: 'This cosmic aspect of redemption was increasingly lost to Western Christendom since the Age of Enlightenment, and to this day we have been unable to restore it to its strength and clarity'. Because Gen 1-3 has been taken to be non-literal, the whole idea of a future new creation is regarded as non-literal. Added to this, if with Bultmann, the Resurrection and Ascension need to be demythologised it is hardly surprising that the future hope must be demythologised. All this has rubbed off on many evangelicals so that the future is thought of in non-physical, spiritual terms.

Why this is so important

The earth has presently become the subject of considerable interest. Last year the first ever Earth Summit took place in Rio, Brazil. The New Age movement and the Green movement have stimulated fresh interest in the earth and environmental issues. Along with this, there are calls for an 'earth spirituality'. Paganism is re-emerging in the West, supported by feminists, environmentalists, and animal-rights activists, and people are seriously thinking of the earth itself as a living creature. The Greek earth goddess Gaia suddenly has a new lease of life. Gaia has become respectable through the philosophies of certain scientists working in the field of sub-atomic physics and microbiology. At a time when there is a new tendency to print God with a small 'g', it is becoming fashionable to print earth with a capital 'E'. As the end of another millennium draws closer we are also likely to find all kinds of millennial ideas suggested. We already have the New Agers' message that we are entering the age of Aquarius.

These are the times in which we live and we need to remember this in our presentation of the gospel. We must be on our guard against the danger of making the gospel fit the prevailing philosophies, science and standards of the day. We are not in the business of making the gospel acceptable to our generation by twisting it, or ignoring some parts that are unacceptable, but we are in the business of applying the gospel to the situation in which we find ourselves. This is therefore a good time not only to clarify our thinking about the new creation and the new earth, but also to preach and write about it. While we must point out the errors in what the world is saying, our task is to offer a clear biblical alternative. My concern in this article is not with the present state of the earth but with its future as a material reality, although, as we shall see, it is impossible not to look at the one without the other.

Both the Pre- and Post-millennialists have a wonderful future for the earth in its present form and all of them make use of such passages as Is 2:2-4, 11:6-9 and 65:17-25. At one extreme are the heretical 'JWs' with their brand of millennial teaching, which is proving quite attractive in many Third World countries as well as in the West. The realised eschatology of the Health and Wealth gossellers puts a great deal of emphasis on Christians inheriting the earth and reigning as kings now. In place of the old social gospel of the Lord Soper type there is renewed interest among some evangelicals in seeking to bring about Christ's kingdom in

a this-worldly setting by transforming culture, etc. Then we have the Reconstructionists with their programme of rule and authority who look for God to restore peace and harmony to this present earth. All these views fall far short of the reality which Scripture teaches.

In concentrating attention on the earth I do not wish to despise or ignore heaven. Heaven and earth are both spoken of together on many occasions in the Bible, beginning in Gen 1:1 and ending in Rev 21:1. In other places they stand over against each other. God is associated with heaven. It is his home, 'our Father who art in heaven'. Earth is man's dwelling place, 'God is in heaven and you are on earth' Eccl 5:2. Heaven in these cases points to God's greatness and that he is above the created order. *Heaven for believers* is associated more with the intermediate state, with the souls of just men made perfect and where Jesus is now seated at the right hand of the Father. But in the new creation, the new Jerusalem is seen coming down out of heaven from God, Rev 21:2. Then heaven and earth are united and we read of God dwelling with men. This is interesting, in the light of those within the environmental movement who are anti-Christian. It has become conventional wisdom among many environmentalists that Christianity encourages a destructive use of creation. This belief arose from a paper published by a medieval historian, Lynn White, in the magazine SCIENCE in 1967. Her paper entitled *The Historic Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis* calls Christianity 'the most anthropocentric religion the world has ever seen' and it is claimed that through such ideas as human dominion, the desacralizing of nature, and the belief that ultimate human destiny is with God (and not the Earth) Christendom has encouraged a destructive use of creation. To confront such twisted thinking, a great deal of teaching on every biblical subject is needed. We cannot take anything for granted. But how relevant the subject is! The last book of the Bible depicts the ultimate future of humanity, and yes, it is with God, but it is on the earth! The question then is, **what sort of earth will it be?** How will all this come about?

The Biblical Background

The OT itself speaks of a new heaven and earth, (Is 65:17-25; 66:22ff). Is 24-26 foretells that the earth is to undergo a judgement which lays it waste and uninhabited, as at the beginning of creation. But the same passage speaks of the swallowing up of death in victory and a wiping away of every tear, and of dead bodies living again. Is 35 paints a picture of the renewed world. In Is 2:2-4 the well-known description of peace on earth is portrayed (cf Mic 4:1-3) and in Is 9:1-7 and 11:6ff this eternal peace on the earth is associated with the messianic king of David's line. The words of 11:6ff are, in fact, repeated in the passage relating to the new creation in Is 65:25. The Psalmist speaks of the meek inheriting the earth (Ps 37:11); of God redeeming his life from the power of the grave (Ps 49:15); while Daniel 12 predicts that those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life and others to everlasting contempt.

In first century Judaism, there were three basic positions:

1. **The Sadducees.** They would have nothing to do with a future life beyond death. They did not believe in the soul's immortality nor did they believe in the resurrection of the dead.
2. A minority of Jews had become influenced by Platonic ideas. They hoped for

a non-physical or spiritual world where the righteous would be blessed after death and where the wicked would be tormented in a non-physical place of damnation.

3. The majority of Jews, including the Pharisees, believed in the bodily resurrection of the dead. Most Jews of 1st century expected an end-time renewal of the whole space-time order, themselves included. They also expected that those who had died in the struggle to bring in a new world would be raised to enjoy it. For them resurrection and the renewal of the whole of creation went hand in hand. Contrary to much 19th and 20th century scholarship concerning the apocalyptic literature, there is hardly any evidence that Jews were expecting the end of the space-time universe. They believed that the present form of world order where pagans held sway would come to an end, but they definitely looked for a renewal of the space-time universe. They hoped to live on earth whence all their enemies and the Lord's enemies had been removed, with peace and serenity finally secured for ever. In their fight for the restoration of Israel, mainstream Jews were not looking to be in heaven permanently, but to be raised in new bodies when the kingdom came as a this-world peace, security and prosperity. While later generations of rabbis began to separate the messianic era from the world to come, in Judaism of the first century AD the Messiah was thought of as the one who would bring in the new world order.

Scripture Doctrines

We shall now survey some of the important doctrines of Scripture to help our understanding of the new creation.

1. The Doctrine of Creation

Genesis insists that the whole cosmos is God's creation. 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth'. Earth, when compounded with heaven, stands for the entire creation. The biblical revelation, moreover, presents us with the truth of the Triune God active not only in the initial creation of the universe but also in upholding, preserving and renewing it. (Heb 1:2-3; Col 1:17 & Ps 104:30). We do not believe in a 'god of the gaps'. God is involved in the realms men think they understand as well as in those they cannot understand.

The Bible focuses from start to finish on what happens here on the earth. To that extent it is very earth-centred. This planet earth is the scene of the most tremendous happenings. When we consider that our sun is only one of millions of stars in the vast universe, not to mention the unseen spirit-world of God's heaven, it is truly amazing that the drama which takes place on our planet has such important repercussions for the whole of God's creation. In Gen 1:2 our attention is immediately directed towards the earth, 'Now the earth was . . .' And in the new order foretold in Revelation 21 the earth continues to be the centre of activity. Earth does not go up to heaven, heaven comes down to earth.

A new creation is needed because rebellion against God entered and spoiled the original creation. Spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies has had its evil effects on earth. While some forms of death are integral to the created order which God called good, this did not include man and animals, as some evangelicals suppose. Theistic evolutionists suggest that pre-fall creation always was a rough place and

that God's idea of goodness is much wilder than our own. This is to fly in the face of clear scriptural statements to the contrary. Death for man is the wages of sin and the death of animals is a further consequence of man's fall. What is more, at the beginning, both man and animals were vegetarian (Gen 1:29-30). G J Wenham suggests that the prophets reflect this original situation in their description of future peace on the earth (Is 11:7 and Hos 2:18). Environmentalists, both pagan and Christian, also need to remember that a curse has been put on the ground itself. Not only are our present woes due to man's sinful abuse of the earth (cf Hos 4:3) but the creation itself is not fulfilling its function; God subjected the creation to futility; it is in bondage to decay. Creation cannot stop this process of corruption and death (Rom 8:20-21). Ecclesiastes is a powerful testimony to this truth: 'Vanity of vanities, says the preacher, all is vanity'. It is what our own eyes see all around. So, however much we try 'to restore proper relationships to the earth to make it one of mutual blessing', we shall always be fighting a losing battle (cf Is 24:6). The God who has subjected creation to futility, however, has done so with the long-term objective of restitution ('in hope', Rom 8:20). It is significant that after the Flood the bow in the clouds testifies to God's covenant not only with man but with all creation (Gen 9:8-18). The whole creation is waiting with eager longing (Rom 8:19); it is groaning in travail, as if in the pangs of child-birth (8:22) until liberated from this bondage (8:21). The hope is of a cosmic redemption where there will be no more curse (Rev 22:3, cf Zech 14:6-11). The destiny of creation is closely related to the destiny of man and it is to this doctrine that we now turn.

2. The Doctrine of Man

God created man to live on the earth (Gen 1:28). The garden of Eden was one small patch of the earth, the paradise of God where the tabernacle of God was with man and the first couple communed with God. From here man was told to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and have dominion over the entire earth. Man created in God's image was to be king over the created order, ruling the world on behalf of God. That was the creation blessing and mandate but it was never fulfilled as God intended. An enemy from outside the garden tempted the couple and they rebelled against God. As a result of the Fall, man was driven out of the garden of God, fellowship was broken and death entered. God did not, however, take away the creation blessing concerning multiplying, filling the earth and having dominion over it. Now, however, man was corrupt and would use his authority wrongly. Pain is promised to the woman and toil to the man. A curse was placed on the ground and there was the general curse of death. Creation's bondage is directly due to man's sin. Man cannot find paradise and lasting enjoyment in that which he now rules over (Ps 8). Even after the judgment of the Flood, though man's unique status is re-asserted (Gen 9:6-7) and the creation blessing renewed, man is still a sinner and the post-fall practice of killing for food is ratified (Gen 8:17; 9:3; 1:29f). Despite Lamech's hopes concerning his son, Noah did not give the world comfort and rest, although his hope of a future blessing was no vain hope and Noah in one sense was a type. This hope was first given by God at the moment of judgment in Gen 3:15. Ultimate victory over the devil and his brood, who had helped bring the peace of paradise to an end, is promised through the seed of the woman. The hope of the deliverance of creation

is tied to this hope for man. The creation, says Paul, is waiting with eager longing for the revelation of the sons of God and to be brought into their glorious freedom (Rom 8:19,21). The line of promise through Seth seemed to offer no hope. There is nothing but death and yet, even in those early days, Enoch was a pointer to a life with God that cannot end and to a victory over the very devil who holds the power of death. Lamech was looking for an end to the curse on the ground. The experience of Noah and his family coming through the judgment of the Flood into a new beginning and the promise made to Shem renewed that hope, despite the continuing sin. After the judgment at Babel and the division of mankind into many languages and nations God made promises to one member of a Semite family, in accord with his original promise, that through the seed of Abram blessing might come to all nations. Abram would have descendants as numerous as the stars above and the sand on the seashore. Tied to this promise is the inheriting of land, which leads to our third doctrine.

3. The Doctrine of the Land

There is a close correspondence between what the Bible has to say about Israel and her land in the context of the covenant and what it has to say about man and the whole earth in the context of creation. The patriarchs are promised land as a gift from God although they possess nothing but a small graveyard in Canaan. They leave the land for four hundred years and yet Genesis ends with the thought of a return to it. Exodus to Deuteronomy then 'generates tremendous suspense concerning the land; as Chris Wright puts it. The land is described in terms that remind us of Eden, 'a good land' well watered, with plenty to eat ('flowing with milk and honey') and a place where God will dwell among them: 'I will walk among you' (Lev 26:11f). Under Joshua there is conquest and a gaining of the land. But it remains God's land and they cannot do as they like in it (Lev 25:23). In addition, though the land is given to Israel, the promised rest still evades them. Sin spoils, divides and brings various judgments, so that by the end of Judges one wonders whether they will ever survive as a people in the land. The David/Solomon era brings new successes and the promises seem to be realised (1Kgs 4:20-21, 24-25, 34; 10:23-25). But it is short-lived: the kingdom is divided and eventually the people are removed from the land. However, the David-Solomon era becomes a powerful symbol of future blessing for the land at a time when all that glory was a thing of the past (Ps 45:72). The prophets who speak of removal from the land in line with the covenant curses, also look beyond the exile to a new exodus, a new covenant, a new conquest, and a final possession of the land with a new David as their king. The old land theocracy (along with the OT people of God) functions as a prototype. Old Israel and its Davidic king still formed part of the old humanity and the land still part of the cursed earth, but they are foretastes of something bigger and better. The people of God are to come into their inheritance and dwell safely for ever in a renewed earth (Is 2:2; 11:6-9; 35:1-10; Jer 31:1-14; Hos 2:18-23).

There is a question. **Is all this talk of future land or earth to be spiritualised, or does it have a physical space-time fulfilment?** A strong body of opinion would say that it must not be forced to mean 'heavenly Canaan' beyond the clouds. It is fulfilled, so the argument runs, in the thousand year reign of Christ on earth.

Actually, the only reference to the thousand year reign is in Rev 20:1-8 and it is by no means clear that the saints reign with Christ on the earth. On the other hand, Heb 11:9-10,13-16 might suggest that the patriarchs looked for a final spiritual fulfilment: 'a heavenly, better country'. But this city and country that they were looking for which has foundations, is the heavenly or new Jerusalem (Heb 12:22; Gal 4:26) which will come down out of heaven and be found on a new earth (Rev 21:2). Earthly Zion and Canaan are types of the New Jerusalem and the New Earth. What poetic, metaphorical or symbolic elements there are in the prophets and the NT concerning the future inheritance and worldwide blessing must not lead us to dismiss these passages of Scripture as being non-physical. They are describing what is beyond our present human experience but not unlike the situation before the Fall. The big difference in the new creation is that it will never be affected by any future Fall. The historical people of God and their land were part of a process in God's saving, redemptive purpose. It is to this doctrine of salvation that we now turn.

4. The Doctrine of Salvation

Salvation is a big term and covers the whole field of God's purposes for his creation. The OT concept of salvation is very concrete and regularly denotes more than spiritual blessings. Negatively it includes the healing of diseases, deliverance from enemies and death, whilst positively it refers to a general state of well-being. Paul is the great exponent of salvation in the NT. It is for him both a present possession and a future hope. We have already passed from death to life, we are regenerate, redeemed from the bondage and rule of Satan and sin, and are new creations. But it is the eschatological aspect that predominates. Our present enjoyment of salvation is characterised by hope. The Spirit is both the beginning and the guarantee of the promised glorious future, and the love of Christ poured into our hearts by the Spirit enables us to rejoice unashamedly in hope. We are not only saved from sin and hell but we are saved unto righteousness and glory. But is this salvation to be seen in totally spiritual terms? Too often it has been assumed that the future state of glory will comprise some other-worldly, non-physical state of bliss. Paul's doctrine of salvation goes beyond the individual, beyond even the church. It embraces the entire creation. In Rom 8:21 he sees the whole creation experiencing a great exodus of which the exodus from Egypt was a foretaste. This exodus will take place in the context of man's ultimate salvation, when the true nature and status of the redeemed sinner will be obvious to all and will include the resurrection of the body. Ultimate salvation for Paul means a very down-to-earth situation where the deliverance and transformation of all creation includes the redemption of our whole selves. We shall be transformed not by release from the physical in Greek, Gnostic, Hindu or Buddhist fashion but by redemption of our bodies. Likewise in 1 Cor 15 he speaks of the consummation of Christ's kingdom and the abolition of the last enemy, death itself, and the subjugation of everything to Jesus and ultimately to the only true God. This sure and certain hope is tied to the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The Centrality of Christ

All that we have examined points us to Christ Jesus in whom all the promises of God find their Yes and Amen. His place in the whole scheme of God's plan cannot be over-emphasised. Under the symbol of the opening of the seals in Rev 5 our Lord Jesus, the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Root of David, is seen as the one who controls all history; through his death, as the Lamb slain, God's decree concerning the final glorious kingdom is worked out. Let us now see how significant he is for each of the four doctrines we have already considered.

1. Jesus Christ is central to the Doctrine of Creation. He is the one through whom and in whom the whole creation comes into being, the supreme Lord over all creation, the upholder and sustainer of all things (Col 1:15ff; Heb 1:2-3). Through the blood of his cross he has reconciled all things to himself, things in heaven and things in earth, so making peace (Col 1:18-20). This is an amazing statement. It is taken for granted that the unity and harmony of the original creation has suffered dislocation and is in need of reconciling. It is Jesus who is the reconciler of all things. God's plan through Christ is to bring all things back to their pre-fall state, to restore the original harmony between heaven and earth and the peace that existed on earth. The powers in the heavenlies opposed to God, the devil and his hosts, he has stripped of their power through the cross (Col 2:14ff). Phil 2:9-11 and 1 Cor 15:24-28 are also important in this, showing that where his victory is not freely accepted it will be imposed. He has established a righteous peace.

These verses confirm the words of Paul in Rom 8 that it is this created universe which is to be set free. It is reconciled through the cross. The very place where man's redemption and reconciliation are achieved and his curse removed, is the place where the whole created universe is reconciled and its curse removed. The original promise in Gen 3 is fulfilled at the cross. The devil, that old serpent, gains no final victory. God brings this creation back to its original glory and harmony and the full dimensions of Satan's defeat will be seen globally as well as in the lives of individual people. It should not be thought fanciful and over-literalizing to speak of humans and animals eating only vegetables again. Paradise is regained never more to be lost. The Son of God was manifested in the flesh that he might destroy the works of the devil. Christ does not fail in his purposes. He who brought all things into being brings creation back to its pristine state. This is not a throw-away universe. 'If God would have to annihilate the present cosmos, Satan would have won a great victory. For then Satan would have succeeded in so devastatingly corrupting the present cosmos and the present earth that God could do nothing with it but to blot it totally out of existence' (A A Hoekema). Jesus speaks of the time of regeneration when he, as the Son of Man, will sit on his glorious throne with his followers also ruling with him (Mt 19:28). This regeneration is, as the NIV puts it, 'the renewal of all things'. Similarly, in Acts 3:21 Christ will return at 'the times of restitution of all things', the time for God to restore everything in accordance with the promises made to the holy prophets since the world began.

2. Jesus Christ is central to the Doctrine of Man. He is the image of God, the last Adam, the second man. Man's destiny is bound up with him as Rom 5, 1 Cor 15

and Heb 2:8ff make clear. In fact it is already realised in Christ. Man's dominion over the earth becomes a reality in and through Christ who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour. In order to bring many sons to glory the Son of God partook of our nature that he might taste death and through death destroy the devil who had the power of death and release those subject to bondage. Ps 8, based on the original creation mandate, will become a reality for those who are eagerly awaiting Christ's second coming when he will appear a second time for salvation (Heb 9:28) and then Satan will be finally crushed under our feet (Rom 16:20). Creation also is eagerly awaiting this revelation of the sons of God.

Jesus Christ's resurrection is the firstfruits of those who sleep in Jesus. It has already inaugurated the future hope. A new bodily life the other side of the grave, which cannot be reduced to Platonic immortality, was everywhere taken for granted by the Early Church. Despite the fact that the pagan world all around them insisted that what mattered was the immortality of the soul or a state of non-physical bliss, Christians clung to the hope of the resurrection of the body. Already the believer has been raised spiritually but one day he is to be raised physically. What kind of a body is the resurrection body? Phil 3:21 tells us it will be like our Lord's glorious body.

There has recently been a heated debate in print between Norman Geisler and Murray Harris on this question of what the Lord's resurrection body was like. Geisler may have over-reacted to Harris' original work which was a scholarly defence of Jesus' bodily resurrection against the demythologising, spiritual interpretation of it by David Jenkins, the Bishop of Durham. Geisler insists that the nature of Jesus' post-resurrection body is closer to that of his pre-resurrection body than Murray would allow. British evangelicals tend to be less precise and to speak of the future glory in less down-to-earth terms than their American counterparts. Geisler speaks of the resurrection of the flesh and of a supernatural body and questions whether the resurrection body of Jesus did dematerialise and materialise. He objects to the idea that the corpse of Jesus in the tomb vanished and that Jesus then appeared to people with his heavenly body. It was in that flesh that lay in the tomb that he arose. He says that soon after eating with his disciples and while they looked intently on him, Jesus ascended into the sky and disappeared 'like a rocket in space'. There I think he overstates his case. He fails to mention the cloud.

The transfiguration scene is helpful for there before the eyes of his three disciples the body of Jesus was glorified. That is what Peter expects to see when Jesus returns (2 Pet 1:16-18). The same body, but glorified. Because he is God in the flesh and because his divine glory will be seen in his resurrected body, we shall not be the same as him in that respect. As far as his humanity is concerned, however, we shall be as he is with one important difference, he will still bear the marks of the cross (Jn 20:20,27; Rev 5:6).

We shall be embodied. The fact that Paul calls it a spiritual body (1 Cor 15:44-50) must not make us think that Christ's body is an immaterial one and that ours will be too. Spiritual is not opposite to physical but to natural (cf 2:14). Hoekema states, 'Spiritual here does not mean nonphysical. Rather it means someone who is guided by the Holy Spirit . . . The natural body . . . is one which is part of this

present, sin-cursed existence; but the spiritual body of the resurrection is one which will be totally, not just partially, dominated and directed by the Holy Spirit'. Likewise Schep comments, 'If Paul had meant a body not consisting of flesh but of spirit, the Corinthians under the influence of Hellenistic thought would have had no problem.' In 1 Cor 15:50 the phrase 'flesh and blood' is a reference to the body subject to decay, weakness and death, unsuited in its present form to the future earth. Hoekema makes the point that 'if the resurrection body were nonmaterial or nonphysical, the devil would have won a great victory, since God would then have been compelled to change human beings with physical bodies such as he had created into creatures of a different sort, without physical bodies (like the angels)'.

We shall have a permanent body. Jesus Christ was raised never more to die and that will be true of every believer in Jesus. The resurrection body is not subject to decay. The unending life will be with bodies that are immortal (1 Cor 15:42,50ff; 2 Cor 5:1-2) and we shall reign with Christ for ever and ever (Rev 22:5).

Murray Harris confuses things by saying that 'heaven is the natural habitat of the resurrection body, its normal sphere of operation . . . (A resurrected body and a non-spacial heaven are irreconcilable)'. He then goes on to speak of a new creation. But that is not the picture we get from the Bible. The setting for this future bodily resurrection is not heaven, even though it be thought of as an actual place, but a renewed earth. New embodied beings require a new world in which to live and Jesus died and rose again to bring that about. Rev 21-22 speaks of that renewed world order in very colourful language. The beatific vision is not in heaven but on this earth where there will be no curse. Heaven and earth will be united in a single embrace.

3. Jesus Christ is central to the Doctrine of the Land. The symbolism of old Canaan, with each man dwelling under his vine and fig tree and the whole earth coming to the wise king, finds its fulfilment in Jesus the messianic king. Paul takes up the promise of the land and speaks of Abraham as inheritor of the world. Through Jesus, Christians are the people of God. They are the new, transformed family of Israel, the Jerusalem which is above. Our inheritance is incorruptible, it does not fade away and is reserved for us in heaven. Our citizenship is in heaven and it is from there that we look for the coming of the Lord Jesus who is able to subdue all things to himself when our lowly bodies are transformed to be like his glorious body. We belong to the heavenly Jerusalem which does not remain in heaven when the number of the elect is complete. John sees it coming down out of heaven.

Even though we shall inherit the earth, we are not to set our affection on things on the earth, nor on any present holy land or city or material object but on things above where Christ is. One of the reasons for this is, that this present state of the earth is to be cleansed by fire and experience the greatest earthquake of all time (Ps 102:26; Is 34:4,51:6; Heb 12:26-29; 2 Pet 3:7,10-13). Like the old covenant, the present form of things has had its day. But just as there is continuity between the old covenant and the new, and between our present bodily existence and its future, so there is continuity between the old and the new heaven and earth. NIV translates 1 Cor 7:31 as, 'this world in its present form is passing away', which

reflects the words of Jesus in Mt 19, Peter in Acts 3, and Paul in Romans 8. We are to think of a renewal, a transformation through fire, but not annihilation. Some wonder whether the land mass of this renewed earth will be too small for all God's people. The present world population is some 5,400 million living on just over 52 million square miles. If there are under 2,000 million 'Christians' in the world today and this is more than in all other centuries put together, then there is plenty of room, even on the present size of the planet!

4. Jesus Christ is central to the Doctrine of Salvation. He is Jesus, Jehovah is salvation, the Saviour of the world. Salvation is the term often used in connection with the mighty works of Jesus in healing people of their diseases. While these miracles were visual aids to emphasise Jesus' message concerning his coming to save people from sin and Satan, we must not limit their significance. They also point to the fact that with the coming of Jesus the kingdom of God had broken upon a world in rebellion against God. Sin had brought untold disaster and suffering. Jesus the Messiah has come to do battle with Satan, and his healing miracles are one indication that he will make all things new. But the end is not yet, as those promoting the health and wealth gospel need to remember.

Christians also groan and look forward to the consummation. There is healing in the atonement and a time is coming when all physical disabilities and troubles will be no more and death itself will be removed. All these things foretold in the OT, put very poetically sometimes, but nevertheless speaking of what is physical, were seen happening in the ministry of Jesus in anticipation of the end (Is 35:5-6). The miracles are foretastes of the new world order under the rule of King Jesus when he returns in power to make all things new. Social gossellers and liberation theologians also need to get their eschatology right. Jesus has certainly come to deliver from all our enemies. In his first coming he dealt with the two basic spiritual enemies that affect everything else. By his death he has gained that decisive victory over sin and Satan. When he returns and the universe is renewed and righteousness dwells on the earth, then and only then will people be free from hunger, poverty and the threat of war, with a perfect state of well-being covering the world. But the end is not yet. In the mercy of God the whole world still groans so that its people might repent and believe the gospel and escape the suffering which is everlasting (2 Pet 3:9,15; Acts 17:30). The eternal torments of the wicked in hell will include bodily suffering, as physical as the blessings of the righteous will be on the new earth. Where hell will be is not known. It is outside the blessings of the new creation; it is a place of outer darkness. One theologian likens hell to a black hole, but we must not speculate.

The Church must not lose sight of its calling to prepare people for eternity. At the same time, Christians must not abuse their present lowly bodies nor the earth in which they live. The earth is the Lord's and everything that belongs to the Lord belongs to the Christian, for in Christ, 'all things are yours' (1 Cor 3:21f). We are to be examples and pointers to a better way (Mt 5:13-16).

Philip H Eveson MA is minister of Kensit Evangelical Church and Resident Tutor at the London Theological Seminary.
