

A Review and Evaluation of J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*¹

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Debates about eschatology have continued unabated in evangelical theology up until the present time. Among those debates is the issue about how much continuity there is between the present earthly age and the eternal age to come. Some see no continuity: when we die we are spiritually raised from a material earth and body to a nonmaterial heaven and body, and remain there forever. Others see a lot of continuity, sometimes so much that the only difference between the two ages is that there will be an ethical cleansing of the old earth, and then an ethically cleansed earth will continue on into eternity, with believers being physically resurrected and residing there. Still others see the continuity/discontinuity residing in a destruction of the present earth and re-creation of its chaotic material into an eternal new heaven and earth. Other views that are variants of these three could also be mentioned. Richard Middleton has written his book to address these issues and to give what he believes is a biblical perspective on these thorny matters. He says the purpose of his book is to “sketch the coherent biblical theology

¹ A review of J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), pp. 332. This review was first read at the Biblical Theology Section at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in 2015 in Atlanta, Georgia. Some revision has been done since then.

... that culminates in the New Testament's explicit eschatological vision of the redemption of creation" (p. 15).

The outline of the book is as follows: Chapter 1 lays out the problem of the purported traditional Christian view of "heaven," which does not include a transformed earth as the final destiny of believers. Chapter 2 presents God's original intent for humans in God's image to inherit a transformed new earth (primarily involving cultural development and care for the environment). This divine intent was blocked by sin. Chapter 3 sketches the broad sweep of the biblical story, wherein God's purpose is to redeem earthly creation (rather than take us from earth to heaven). Chapters 4–5 address the holistic view of salvation in the Old Testament (esp. in Exodus and the Old Testament law, wisdom, and prophecy), particularly God's commitment to the flourishing of life in a concrete, physical, and societal earthly environment (i.e., the concerns of wisdom include speech, sexuality, family, work, debts, food, disease, wealth, and political governance [cf. p. 98]). Chapter 6 surveys typical Old Testament passages predicting the destruction of the cosmos and finds that all the descriptions are figurative in the sense that a complete and absolute annihilation of the earth is never envisioned. This means that God will redeem the old earth and transform it into a new earth. Chapter 7 discusses the inextricable link between resurrection and rule accomplished by Christ and to be expressed through all who are identified with his resurrection and rule. Chapter 8 focuses on the New Testament notion that sin and evil will be reversed, so that salvation includes not only moral redemption and transformation of people but also physical transformation and renewal of people and of the physical earth. Chapter 9 analyzes New Testament texts that typically are misunderstood to teach the annihilation of the cosmos, leaving room only for a "heavenly" nonearthly eternal salvific destination. Chapter 10 explores various texts that some wrongly contend show that a nonmaterialistic "heaven" is the central destination of saints. This also entails that there will be no "pretribulational rapture" of saints being with Christ in heaven until Christ's final coming and that there will be no intermediate spiritual state in heaven before the final transformation of the cosmos. Chapter 11 contends that the essence of Jesus's teaching on the kingdom is to be found in Luke 4, where Jesus says that the "good news" is primarily about renewal of the entire person and of the social order. Chapter 12 concludes with the ethical challenge presented by Jesus's "manifesto" in Luke 4, by which people are confronted with a "vision of the kingdom of God that is both applicable to every dimension of earthly life and open to the entire human family" (p. 282). There is an appendix that attempts to survey how an eternal heavenly and

nonearthly destiny came to dominate popular Christian eschatology. Included here are also those who throughout church history and especially recently have focused on the actual renewal of an everlasting earth wherein physically resurrected believers will live.

There are several strengths of the book. First, spot on is his holistic view of redemption, which culminates in physically resurrected believers living in a transformed newly created eternal heavens and earth. This is the main point of the book and its strength. This is his well-repeated point and apologetic against the popular notion that a non-earthly "heaven" is the eternal salvific destination of saints. He well substantiates his point that there is not a single reference to the righteous living in an eternal nonmaterial heaven as their final destination (e.g., pp. 72–73). His exegesis of various debated texts with respect to this issue is generally good.

His sevenfold summary of what will happen when Israel is restored from exile (according to OT prophetic visions) is excellent, including both spiritual and physical dimensions of that restoration (pp. 105–7): 1) return to the land; 2) restoration and healing of God's people in society; 3) flourishing of the natural world, including peace among animals; 4) new relationship to the nations, centered in Zion; 5) forgiveness of sin and new heart, enabling God's people to keep Torah; 6) restoration of righteous leadership for Israel; and 7) God's presence among his people in the renewed land.

The discussion of the image of God, based primarily on his earlier book, *The Liberating Image* (2005), is very good, including emphasis on a functional view of the image (pp. 39–55). Adam is God's priest and image placed in the sanctuary in Eden. The image is reflective of God, and it reflects God out to others like a prism. Adam's task was to subdue and rule as God's viceroy and fill the earth with God's presence, thus expanding the sanctuary of Eden to cover the whole earth, a theme that I also discussed in my 2004 book, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*.² God's presence is especially spread through farming and culture building (which presupposes faithfulness to God and his word, and which needed to be discussed more by Middleton). I had never considered Middleton's excellent observation that God's activity of planting a garden was to be imaged by Adam and his progeny's similar activity, which expresses that culture building is an aspect of reflecting the divine image. There is no "sacred-secular" split in the fulfilling of Adam's commission, which is passed down to others and finally achieved in Christ and his people. All of reality, both spiritual and

² G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

physical, immaterial and material, is to be subdued and ruled over. All this is very good.

Middleton traces the storyline of Scripture well. When Adam disobeyed the mandate to reflect the divine image, his commission devolved onto the patriarchs and Israel, and when they disobeyed, Jesus finally fulfilled it and his people fulfilled it by faith in identifying with him (chapter 3). Just as Adam was to build and widen the temple of Eden by reflecting God's presence, so was Israel and Jesus, the latter finally accomplishing this mission (see pp. 166–68). The fulfillment of the entire cosmos becoming one huge temple is presented in Revelation 21:1–22:4, where, for example, the whole cosmos is portrayed as the holy of holies (pp. 168–71), a major point for which I have also argued throughout *The Temple and the Church's Mission*. This is a very good tracing of one of the major plot lines of Scripture.

The book also rightly recognizes an “already and not yet” eschatological outlook of Scripture.

As always with any book, there are some quibbles that I have with parts of this book. First, the reason for writing the book is the author's belief that a vast swath of Christians, though believing in a final resurrection body, view the final, eternal destiny of believers to be in a nonmaterial heaven. Some well-known hymns are adduced in support. Middleton cites Origen as an early church father who believed that the eternal destiny of Christians is in a nonmaterial heavenly dimension. Middleton surveys some of the second, third, and fourth century premillennialists (or temporary millennialists) as examples of authors that were unclear about whether or not they supported the final destiny of saints being in a nonmaterial heavenly sphere (pp. 284–90). Middleton says that this early premillennialism testifies to the ongoing biblical witness of a form of this-worldly redemption (p. 291). He appeals to Augustine as the first major figure since Origen to hold that the final destiny of the righteous is in an acosmic and atemporal sphere (pp. 291–93). In the medieval period, Augustine's view dominated, though there was some continuation of premillennial belief (pp. 293–95). While Calvin and Luther gave lip service to a renewed eternal earth, they also inconsistently referred to “heaven” as the eternal state (pp. 295–96). This survey of the medieval and Reformation periods is too brief and leaves much to be desired. Middleton notes that from the Reformation to the modern period, emphasis on heaven as the eternal state continued, with some exceptions being John Wesley, Ellen White, and the Stone-Campbell movement (pp. 297–99).

Thus, Middleton sees a belief in an eternal immaterial heaven dominating Christendom from the time of Augustine up to around some point in

the mid-twentieth century. I think it would be a dissertation topic to investigate this issue in any of the above authors, so I think Middleton's conclusion ought to have registered much more reserve about his brief survey. For example, Augustine does give some testimony to a renewed physical earth in which believers live:

Wherefore it may very well be, and it is thoroughly credible, that we shall in the future world see the material forms of *the new heavens and the new earth* in such a way that we shall most distinctly recognize God everywhere present and governing all things, material as well as spiritual.³

Beginning with the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, scholars from different theological traditions began to express belief in an eternal new earth (pp. 303–12). Despite the ongoing popular belief in an eternal heaven as the ultimate destiny of believers, these other scholarly voices indicate that we are in the midst of a paradigm shift toward affirmation of belief in an eternal material earth.

He says the “time is ripe” to forge a robust vision for a renewed eternal earth wherein live resurrected believers, and Middleton hopes his book will cast such a vision.

But another problem with Middleton's historical survey is that dispensational premillennialism, which has dominated twentieth and probably even twenty-first century popular Christian belief, has always believed in an eternally renewed earth after the millennium and destruction of the first heavens and earth. Such belief may not have produced the motivation for the kind of Christian cultural activity that Middleton urges, but it has still maintained a solid belief in a final physical cosmos, for which Middleton also is mainly arguing. (Middleton acknowledges this to some degree in passing, but sees it as a de-emphasis [p. 301].) There was thus much more belief in the twentieth century supporting a renewed physical earth than Middleton acknowledges. It is especially classic dispensationalism's emphasis on a pretribulation rapture to which Middleton negatively reacts. He sees this doctrine as unfortunate, since he believes it “contributes to the otherworldly, escapist attitude” (p. 301) and leads to a “lack of concern for our earthly future” in the eternal new cosmos (p. 303). Accordingly, this is not good because it blunts motivation for Christians to involve themselves in affecting the culture of the present world (pp. 300–301).

Nevertheless, Middleton is probably right that there are a substantial number of Christians, especially among laypeople (and, I would add, above

³ Augustine, *The City of God* 22.29 (NPNF¹ 2:509, my italics).

all, nominal Christians), who think the only destiny after death is a nonmaterial spiritual existence in a nonmaterial eternal heaven.

Another issue is that Middleton reacts against a view that emphasizes eternal spiritual salvation over a notion of eternal salvation that affects soul, body, and the physical world. But he reacts so much that there is a de-emphasis on the spiritual facet of salvation. Page 79 is the only place where he comes close to having any significant discussion of spiritual “salvation,” and that discussion takes up only half a page. Included in that discussion is “justification,” which he briefly defines as “being made right with God through forgiveness of sins,” and as “a beginning of a right relationship with God through deliverance from the penalty of sin (anticipating that we will stand with confidence before God in the final judgment).”⁴ He then says, “Although this [view of spiritual salvation] is certainly an important part of salvation, it is limited by both its individual focus and its fixation on the notion of deliverance.” Such a spiritual view for Middleton is too limiting, since “salvation” comprehends present and future and “affects every aspect of existence.” He then concludes that “the most fundamental meaning of salvation in Scripture is twofold: it is God’s *deliverance* of those in a situation of need from that which impedes their well-being, resulting in their *restoration* to wholeness ... Both ... are crucial to salvation” (he says the same thing in abbreviated form on p. 269, n. 7). Likewise, a little later he says, “Salvation cannot be limited to deliverance from external circumstances; it must include what we might call ‘sanctification’” (p. 88). On page 83 Middleton says that Christ’s death and resurrection have defeated powers hostile to God and defeated death itself.

Thus, as far as I have been able to tell, he briefly discusses individual spiritual salvation on only about four pages out of 312 pages, and even some of these discussions are abstract or unclear.

The very heart of Middleton’s argument is that Scripture affirms a physically transformed eternal new earth toward which we should ever look. This is a wonderful truth and strength of the book, as I mentioned earlier. However, there is some significant ambiguity here. He well shows that many Old and New Testament prophecies of the destruction of the world are figurative to one degree or another to indicate “transformation” and not to be understood as a literal “annihilation” of the old cosmos “but rather a new world cleansed of evil ... extreme language is often used to emphasize the radical nature of the purging required for salvation” (p. 125). The discussion of 2 Peter 3 is a good place to focus on this question (pp. 189–200).

⁴ He also mentions “forgiveness of sins and a new heart” on p. 106.

Middleton concurs with a view that the destruction pictured there is both figurative of destroying demonic powers and literal of destroying part of the upper layer of the cosmos. Furthermore, Middleton concurs also with a view that the “melting” in 2 Peter 3 has a metallurgical smelting background, so that the picture there is “ultimately cleansing and not destructive.” He says that this cleansing is like the cleansing of Noah’s flood, which Peter has compared with the coming fire and melting.

But what kind of “transformation” is this? Middleton says it is not “annihilation” or “obliteration,” but he says it is really only unbelievers who will be destroyed, while “the earth and its human works will be found” (pp. 193–96). Richard Bauckham understands the word “found” (*heurethēsetai*, εὑρεθήσεται) in the phrase “the earth and its works will be found” to refer to God laying bare the sinful works of sinful people and judging them. This is based on the OT use of the verb “to be found” (*heuriskō*, εὕρισκω) in the sense of “to be detected” or “to be discovered” as criminals or evil doers (e.g., Exod 22:8; Deut 22:22, 28; Jer 50:24 [= LXX 27:24]; Ezra 10:18).⁵ Thus, according to Bauckham’s view, sinners at the end of time will not be able to hide themselves or their sins from the gaze of God the Judge.

Middleton believes that it is viable to see 2 Peter 3:8–10 in light of the image of a smelting process, whereby the dross is removed from gold or silver, with only the gold and silver remaining. This would make what is “found” positive, so that the “works” are positive and remain on into the new creation. But even so, this smelting image could be generally metaphorical or literal for a radical transformation from the old earth to that of the new. The smelting image here would be supported by 1 Peter 1:7: “that the genuineness of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, *may be found* to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Middleton is dependent here on an article by Al Wolters,⁶ who concludes that in contrast to “the present created order as expendable in the overall scheme of things,” “our interpretation ... stresses ... the permanence of the created earth, despite the coming judgment.”⁷ On balance, Wolters’s view that a smelting picture is in mind may be preferable to that of Bauckham. But does such a smelting picture demand the notion of “the permanence of the created earth, despite the coming judgment”? And, we can ask, what is meant by “the permanence of the created earth”? Some have seen 2 Peter’s language here to indicate an

⁵ Richard J. Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, WBC 50 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 319.

⁶ Al Wolters, “Worldview and Textual Criticism in 2 Peter 3:10,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 49 (1987): 405–13.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 413.

ethical cleansing that does not destroy the earth or the cultural works of believers living on the old earth but renews the earth ethically, leaving its material basically intact (on analogy with the pre- and post-flood world). Others have seen the transformation to be a literal material destruction (not annihilation) of the earth and a re-creation of a new earth from the chaos of the old destroyed earth. To which does Middleton hold? I am not sure. He mentions the latter view (p. 197, n. 38), but he does not commit himself to it. It seems that Middleton leans toward the former, as Wolters clearly does, especially in the light of his conclusion about 2 Peter 3:

Taking all the complex layers of meaning in 2 Peter 3 together, we find a picture of radical judgment on the last day, in which God destroys corrupt demonic powers, metaphorically strips back the sky, then comes to judge the earth—a judgment intended to purge the world of evil so that it might be renewed, and ultimately, saved. *This means that whatever vivid language of destruction Peter uses to portray the final judgment, there is no good reason to take any of it as referring to the literal obliteration of the cosmos.* (p. 196, my italics)

Some sort of clarification was needed here on the nature of the cosmic transformation. Does “obliteration” mean that nothing at all will be left of the first creation, or does it mean that the “obliteration” reduces the earth to chaotic material, from which a new creation is made? It appears that he holds to some version of the former view. Accordingly, he appears to view the new creation as something at least comparable to the material earth left after Noah’s flood. He appears to see that the earth itself will not be reduced to rubble but will undergo only some kind of ethical cleansing and continue on eternally as the same material, but ethically renewed, earth. The gist of Middleton’s work seems to point to godly humanity’s culture building being carried over into the new creation.⁸

One important reason that there needs to be clarity on the precise nature of the transformation is that it underlies the ethical motivation issue. For example, some postmillennialists in the past have said there will be no significant material transformation at the end but only an ethical cleansing. Therefore, the godly cultural progress made throughout the church age will also be carried over into the new eternal eschatological age. This gives much motivation to believers to build culturally in this age, since their efforts will be rewarded by having such cultural efforts carried right over into the new age. I am under the impression that Middleton’s motivation fits into a paradigm comparable to this. Indeed, that this is Middleton’s

⁸ A similar need for clarification on this issue is mentioned by another reviewer (J. P. Davies, *Review of Biblical Literature* [08/2016]).

position is apparent in his “Appendix,” where he states that a significant segment of classical dispensationalists

affirmed the idea of a replacement of heaven and earth after the annihilation of the present cosmos (citing 2 Pet. 3:10 and Rev. 21) without any awareness of possible implications for holistic living in the present. (p. 301)

However, if the old earth is to be destroyed literally and is to be re-created from its own chaos (which is my own position), then such cultural efforts by the godly will not be carried over *concretely* into the new eternal earth. In this case, what is the motivation for affecting culture for Christ? Is Middleton correct in saying that such a view provides little ground for motivation to involve oneself in godly culture building? I will address this issue in a concluding excursus, since the focus of this review is on Middleton's positions.

Middleton also addresses the issue of how to define the “gospel” in the light of Luke. “Proclamation of the gospel” for Middleton entails the following: “communicating the teachings of Jesus about the nature of the kingdom, and especially what God has done in the life, death, and resurrection of the Messiah” (p. 69). When he explains what is the content of the gospel, he focuses on Luke 4:18–19, where Jesus quotes Isaiah 61:1–2 as what Middleton calls the “manifesto” of Jesus's mission (pp. 249–82). The crucial phrases cited in Luke 4 are all taken to refer to “the concrete, this-worldly nature of the salvation proclaimed” by Jesus (p. 253): “(1) to bring good news to the poor, (2) to proclaim release to the captives (3) and recovery of sight to the blind, (4) to let the oppressed go free, (5) to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.” Middleton says, “We need to take seriously that he [Jesus] literally meant to include those who were economically impoverished and politically marginalized in first-century Israel” (p. 261). He concludes: “God's kingdom impacts the entirety of our lives—our bodies, our work, our families, all our social relationships, even our relationship to the earth itself” (p. 262).

But where is any mention by Middleton of the spiritual healing that Jesus came to bring? He says “this holistic vision [in Luke 4] is a powerful antidote to our narrow, constricted understandings of salvation.” But does not Middleton's view do the opposite by, at least, greatly underemphasizing the spiritual forgiveness of sins? It is telling, for example, that in his explanation of Isaiah in relation to the New Testament he says virtually nothing about the forgiveness of sins brought by the suffering servant in Isaiah 53. Among four references in the index to Isaiah 53, only one possibly touches on the mission of the servant there: “the Suffering Servant's ... humiliation (and even death) will accomplish salvation for others (see esp. 53:4–6, 10–12)” (p. 85). But even here he does not describe what “salvation” is or “how” the

servant brings salvation. He says that Luke 4 has been overly “spiritualized” by others, but he seems to take it too far in the other direction by “physicalizing” it (p. 267). The problem with constricting Christ’s salvation to the physical sphere is that this is not a “holistic” view of Christ’s redemption, which is both physical *and spiritual*. At the least, Middleton should have made some significant mention of the spiritual dimension of Christ’s redemption in order to present a holistic view of it.

In fact, if one examines the broader context of Luke, the word “release” (*aphesis*, ἀφεσις) found in Luke 4, alluding to some degree to the Levitical proclamation of the Jubilee Year (Lev 25:10), “is used exclusively in reference to those who are captive to sin as a release, or to forgiveness, from that state of captivity (Luke 1:77; 3:3; 7:47; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18).”⁹ Thus, “release” is not only release from physical bondage; rather, Luke stresses even more “release” from spiritual bondage.

Such is also the case with Jesus’s reference to “recovery of sight to the blind” in Luke 4. It refers both to recovery of literal sight (so Luke 7:21–22; 18:35–43) and also recovery of spiritual sight (Luke 6:39; 8:10; 10:23–24). Both should be highlighted, though the inaugurated era focuses more on the spiritual.

Thus, both physical and spiritual healing are in mind in Luke 4:18–19. The redemptive-historical rationale that includes both is that Jesus has come to inaugurate the new creation, which reverses both the spiritual and physical curses brought with Adam’s primal sin. Middleton does not discuss much at all the problem of human sin and its spiritual ramifications (an observation made by Dane Ortlund at the Biblical Theology session where Middleton’s book was reviewed). Could this be part of the reason he does not highlight the spiritual release from sin in the redemption wrought by Christ at the cross, who paid the penalty for this sin?

Indeed, Jesus’s first coming begins to fulfill all the various OT prophecies spiritually, and at his final coming these prophecies are consummately fulfilled both spiritually and physically, as stated in 2 Corinthians 1:20 and particularly John 5. This two-stage fulfillment, the latter of which shows the prophesied resurrection of Daniel 12:2, is spiritual in Jesus’s first coming and physical at the very end of the age. All the various prophecies follow this two-stage process. The two-stage fulfillment of the Year of Jubilee is another example of such a two-stage fulfillment. This is what I tried to

⁹ See Daniel M. Gurtner, “Luke’s Isaianic Jubilee,” in *From Creation to New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and Benjamin L. Gladd (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2013), 140. Acts 13:38 and 26:18 are respectively direct allusions to Isaiah 49:6 and 42:7, 16.

develop throughout my *New Testament Biblical Theology*.¹⁰ By the way, as noted above, this does not mean that in the first stage there is no relation of fulfillment to physical and societal realities; rather, the focus of fulfillment is not in that sphere. However, those experiencing spiritual renovation should affect societal and physical realities and institutions as a witness to their faith, as well as the motivation of beginning to behave now in the way they will consummately behave in the eternal new creation, which includes being stewards of that physical creation.

Middleton is opposed to too much talk of immaterial, spiritual notions of salvation because he appears to think they might divert attention from the coming material new creation. In this respect, he argues against any notion of an intermediate heavenly and immaterial state where believers dwell consciously with God and Christ (pp. 227–37).¹¹ He cites typical references adduced to support such a belief and proceeds to refute each one. It is not my purpose to attempt here to argue against Middleton, but it would have been useful if he had addressed the work of Anthony A. Hoekema, who has a significant chapter on this subject in his *The Bible and the Future*.¹² Likewise, his contention that Revelation 6:9–10 does not refer to conscious believers appealing to God in heaven because it is “imaginative apocalyptic symbolism” is not a sufficient argument.¹³

It is interesting that Middleton (who has been influenced to some degree by a Reformed Kuyperian background, though he presently teaches at a Wesleyan school¹⁴), refers to the ultimate goal of Scripture’s plot line as being the full establishment of God’s presence (or “glorious presence,” which he mentions three times in the book). That is, his special revelatory presence will be finally spread throughout the earth, which has become the cosmic holy of holies. But, according to especially a Reformed framework,

¹⁰ There I have 70 pages toward the end of the book highlighting the inaugurated and then consummated fulfillment of OT prophecies with respect to the importance of both the spiritual and physical dimensions. G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 887–957.

¹¹ Of course, most who hold this position believe that Christ is present in the heavenly dimension in his resurrected and exalted body.

¹² Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 92–108.

¹³ See further on Rev 6:9–11, G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 390–95, where the overall argument points best to a conscious existence of saints in an intermediate state. Likewise, a classic amillennial reading of Rev 20:4–6 envisions a conscious existence of saints during the interadvent age (ibid., 995–1021).

¹⁴ His reference to “freedom” of “our will” on p. 207 would appear to reflect a Wesleyan perspective. Middleton is an adjunct professor at Roberts Wesleyan College and is a full faculty member at Northeastern Seminary, an “Approved Seminary of the Wesleyan Church International.”

this is a penultimate goal. Is not the ultimate goal of humanity giving glory or honor to God for his magnificent consummated end-time presence? Middleton, as far as I can tell, never speaks of that notion in the book.¹⁵

Despite my above caveats, which have been the substance of this essay, I do not want to forget the important strengths of the book noted earlier. I learned a lot from the book, and it provides an important corrective to overly spiritualizing views of consummative eschatology.

Excursus: The Motivation for Culture Building Even If the Earth Is to Be Destroyed

Middleton, as I argued above, appears to root motivation for cultural activity during the present age in the hope that there will not be a catastrophic eschatological destruction of the physical earth. So, the question arises, is there a basis for motivation for godly culture building if one believes in a final catastrophic earthly destruction that results in chaotic material (like the chaos of Genesis 1:2), out of which the new creation is made? My answer is yes. I believe that there is a basis for motivation by Christians to involve themselves with culture on this earth to affect it positively.

My own motivation for cultural development and ecological care arises out of the fact that believers presently participate in the inaugurated eschatological new creational rule. This eschatological rule will be consummated in the earthly new creation. Therefore, the believers' pattern of behavior on the present earth is connected with and should be an anticipation of their consummated perfect behavior in the new earth. Since part of our consummated task in the new cosmos will be to be king-priest stewards of the new earthly creation, our present task as believers should include being a beginning steward of this creation, even if it is to be destroyed (though not annihilated). Since we should be stewards in the consummated image of God in the final new creation, should we now not be such stewards, since we are in his inaugurated renewed image? In support of this later point is Middleton's outstanding observation that God's activity of planting a garden in Eden was to be reflected by Adam and his progeny's similar activity, which expresses that stewardship of the creation is an important facet of reflecting the divine image. What Adam did in the first Garden is to be replicated on an escalated scale in the final Garden, and that replication commences even in this age.

¹⁵ A point observed by another reviewer, Chris Beetham, in *Themelios* 40.2 (2015): 317–19.

A good illustration of the kind of stewardship over creation that we are to begin to have now is to be seen in the attitude and care that we are to have toward our own body, which is a part of the old creation. Paul alludes to this in 1 Corinthians 6:13–20. Our old bodies will be done away with at the final resurrection of the saints (vv. 13–14). But believers are to remember that their bodies “are members of Christ” and “they are one spirit with him,” so that they should not become “members of a harlot” (vv. 15–17). On this basis, believers should “flee immorality,” since “the one who practices immorality sins against his own body” (v. 18). Furthermore, believers should flee immorality because their “body is a temple of the Holy Spirit” and “you are not your own” (v. 19). Because of this and because “you have been bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body” (v. 20).

Thus, though we still live in old bodies, we are to care for them and do nothing to hurt them. We should be good stewards of our decaying physical bodies. This is because we are even in the present time part of the eschatological temple of the Spirit, the consummation of which is in the renewed eternal earth. If we are so to treat our own body with care now—though it will be destroyed—should we not similarly care for the old earth—though it too will be destroyed? Part of the basis for such care of both our bodies and the earth now lies in that there is continuity between our present bodily existence and our future transformed consummated bodily existence on the new earth; and there is continuity between the old earth’s existence and its consummated transformed existence into the new earth.