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Will There Be *New* Work in the New Creation?

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THE SHINY GLASS and steel buildings seem to spring up like mushrooms in Bangalore, India, and the corporate signs of Epson, Microsoft, IBM, Texas Instruments, and the home-grown Infosys Technologies herald the presence of a new Asian 'Silicon Valley'. The newly globalized economies of Bangalore, Jakarta, Beijing, Hong Kong and other booming metropolises around the Pacific basin, based on software, brainpower, knowledge workers, and the outsourcing of service and information technologies, have been vividly described in Thomas Friedman's *The World Is Flat*.[1]

The question arises: will any of these activities of the new global economy be present in the New Creation? Will the redeemed people of God have any work to do in the world to come, or will worship be their exclusive preoccupation? Many Christians have traditionally expected that all work will cease in the life to come, and that life in this world is greatly discontinuous with human activity in the world to come—implicitly denying the intrinsic value of our 'secular' work in the present.

Many Christians seem to struggle with a sense that their 'secular' work has no eternal or intrinsic value, but at best, is only a platform for evangelism or a source of income to contribute to the church and foreign missions. Theologians have, of course, developed various theologies of work to undergird Christian witness in the workplace,[2] but little attention has been

1 Thomas L. Friedman, *The World Is Flat: a Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), pp.3-30.

2 See, for example, Robert Banks, *God the Worker* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1994) and *Redeeming the Routines: Bringing Theology to Life* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993); Dar-

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given to the biblical theme of the *New Creation*[3] and what implications it might have for our understanding of the value of work.

This essay will argue that there will be *new work* for the redeemed people of God to do in the New Creation, and that worship will be a central but not the exclusive activity in the world to come. Biblical and theological arguments for this thesis will be presented, the nature of this work explored, and various objections considered. Along the way, notice will be given to the changing nature of work in our rapidly changing, globalized economies, and to contemporary scientific cosmologies, insofar as these might shape our images of work in the world to come. Expanded visions of the cosmos in a post-Hubble age give vastly enlarged dimensions to the 'New Heavens' and make the entire cosmos a potential 'workplace' for a redeemed humanity journeying to the stars.

This proposition that there will be new work to do in the New Creation, if correct, would be a further basis for investing human work in both western and non-western contexts with lasting meaning and significance. Admittedly, all attempts to foresee specific conditions in the world to come are somewhat speculative, and this must be recognized at the outset. Nevertheless, such exercises in speculative theology can have significant value insofar as they raise fresh questions and re-energize the Christian imagination with respect to both the meaning of work and the realities of the New Creation.

Before examining the biblical and theological arguments for the proposition that there will be new work in the New Creation, it will be helpful to note, if only briefly, some highlights from the history of Christian understandings of heaven and the world to come, to provide perspective for what is to follow.

A Very Brief History of Heaven

In their valuable scholarly survey, *Heaven: A History*, Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang argue that Christian understanding of the future life has tended to fall into one of two broad categories: the 'theocentric' and 'anthropocentric'.[4] 'Theocentric' conceptions

rell Cosden, *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation* (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 2004); Lee Hardy, *The Fabric of This World: Inquiries into Calling, Career Choice and the Design of Human Work* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990); Michael Novak, *Business as a Calling* (New York: Free Press, 1996); Alan Richardson, *The Biblical Doctrine of Work* (London: SCM Press, 1963); Leland Ryken, *Redeeming the Time: A Christian Approach to Work and Leisure* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995); R. Paul Stevens, *The Other Six Days: Vocation, Work, and Ministry in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999); Doug Sherman and William Hendricks, *Your Work Matters to God* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1987).

3 Notable exceptions are Darrell Cosden, *op. cit.*, note 2 above, and Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (New York: Oxford Univerity Press, 1991).

4 Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988). Their general conclusions are summarised on pp. 353-58, 'Paradise Found: Themes and Variations'. Less comprehensive but also helpful is Alister E. McGrath, *A Brief History of Heaven* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2003).

focus on the fulfillment of the believer's relationship to God and see worship and praise as the primary if not exclusive activities of heaven. 'Anthropocentric' conceptions, while not excluding worship, tend to emphasize reunion with family and friends, social relationships, and activities of service and work. McDannell and Lang see the 'theocentric' model exemplified in the New Testament, the earlier Augustine, medieval scholasticism, the Protestant Reformers, the Puritans, and much of contemporary theology, both Roman Catholic and Protestant.[5] 'Anthropocentric' conceptions can be found in Irenaeus, the later Augustine, the Renaissance, and in various eighteenth and nineteenth century authors.[6]

McDannell and Lang show how differing social and historical conditions have affected conceptions of the future state. Authors whose social locations have reflected more optimistic worldly conditions and less alienation from the social order have tended to favour more anthropocentric conceptions. Since the First World War, both liberal and conservative Protestants have tended toward some form of 'theocentric minimalism', but for very different reasons. Theological conservatives note that the biblical texts give very little specific detail about heaven, and theological liberals, perhaps influenced by the scientific naturalism of the age, seem prone to believe that concrete knowledge of any future life is essentially unknowable.[7] Unlike the doctrines of Christology, the Trinity, or justification, the doctrines of heaven and the New Creation have not been the focus of major confessional attention in the history of the church, and as a result have remained somewhat undeveloped in matters of detail.[8]

The point of view advanced in this essay could be characterized as a 'theocentric maximalism'. Praise and

5 McDannell and Lang, *Heaven*, pp.353-54. At times this has taken the form of a 'theocentric minimalism' in which there is little envisioned except the believer in the presence of God, apart from the created order. Augustine, for example, speaks of the happiness of heaven as a condition in which God will be all in all, and where '… there will be no weariness to call for rest, no need to call for toil, no place for any energy but praise': *City of God*, Bk.xxii, chpt.30. Chapter xxxiii of the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), in speaking of the Last Judgment and the world to come, states that '… then the righteous shall go into everlasting life, and receive that fullness of joy and refreshing which shall come from the presence of the Lord', but gives no further details of the nature of the heavenly state.

6 McDannell and Lang, *Heaven*, pp.355-56. More activistic conceptions of heaven can be found in authors as theologically diverse as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

7 McDannell and Lang, *Heaven*, p.350. In the brief concluding section on 'The Eternal Abode of the Righteous,' Louis Berkhof states that '… the joy of each individual will be perfect and full', and that there will be 'social intercourse on an elevated plane', but adds little specific detail: *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1941), p. 737. The somewhat more detailed descriptions of the future state offered by Millard Erickson and Wayne Grudem will be noted below.

8 This point has been made by Jerry L. Walls, *Heaven: the Logic of Eternal Joy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 9. Pp. 3-9 in this work present a helpful overview of historical and contemporary trends in beliefs about heaven.

worship in the unclouded presence of God is understood to be the central but not exclusive activity of the world to come. If 'theocentric' orientations have tended to reflect the first Great Commandment (love of God), and 'anthropocentric' orientations have tended to emphasize the second (love of neighbour), then 'theocentric maximalism' would argue that love of God, love of neighbour, and *care for creation* (and culture) must be envisioned together as redeemed activities in the New Creation.

It seems that a major defect of historic 'theocentric' views of the world to come has been that *creation* as such tends to disappear or become marginalized in Christian eschatologies—there is not, as it were, enough 'creation' in the New *Creation*! A more robust theology of the New Creation should inform Christian visions of the future.

A biblical view of the consummation of God's redemptive work involves a universe in which humans are rightly related to God, to other humans, and to creation—the latter broadly understood to include both the biosphere and, by extension, the world of culture. Stated in a different way, it could be said that 'theocentric maximalism' envisions a future state in which both the Great Commandments *and* the Cultural Mandate (Gen.1:28) will be fulfilled—and continue to be fulfilled in the New Creation in obedient and joyful acts of worship, service, and work.[9]

Work in the New Creation

In this section arguments for the validity and existence of new human work in the New Creation will be presented on the basis of the biblical doctrines of God, work, the history of the Flood, Old and New Testament images of the New Creation, and the doctrine of man as *Imago Dei*. Several possible objections to this conclusion will also be considered.

The biblical doctrine of God teaches that all three persons of the Trinity are involved in the works of creation, providence, and redemption. While the work of redemption was completed in principle at the Cross and will be finally consummated at the end of history, it can be argued that God's works of creation and providence can be expected to continue into the New Creation and even beyond. With respect to the work of providence, God works to sustain the present creation by the word of his power (Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:17; Acts 17:28). The creation as such, whether in its original or fallen state, is not self-sufficient or self-sustaining; every creature is maintained in being by the omnipotence and sovereign will of God. The New Creation will still be a *creation*: that is, a creaturely reality that will continue to be sustained by God. It will still be true in the New Creation that a redeemed human being will need to confess that 'In him we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:28). God will continue his work of sustaining and maintaining creatures in the new creation.

With respect to the divine work of creation, it can be argued that God the Creator is essentially creative in his being. God's original act of creation

9 The Cultural Mandate, instituted before the Fall, and renewed after the Flood (Gen. 9:1), is here understood to have continuing validity into the New Creation (procreation excepted: Matt. 22:30).

was a free act, an act of divine love and freedom, not one necessitated by any lack or need on God's part. In the words of Karl Barth, God, '… under no other inward constraint than that of the freedom of His love, has in an act of the overflowing of His inward glory, posited such a reality which is distinct from Himself'.[10] Or as Colin Gunton has observed, '… like a work of art, creation is a project, something God wills for its own sake and not because he has need of it'.[11] God's essential nature as a free, creative, and omnipotent being will never change throughout eternity; God the Creator will still be creative in the New Creation. God will be free to create new things in the New Creation, and even to create new worlds beyond the existing one, should he so desire.

Since man, as the image of God, was created to mirror the nature and works of God, it follows that if God continues to work in acts of creation and providence, redeemed humans in the New Creation will continue to reflect the Creator by caring for fellow creatures and by engaging in new, creative acts of art, invention, culture, and worship.

But is it not the case that in some sense the creative work of God is finished, not continuing, and that God's people have entered a 'Sabbath rest' (Heb.4:3,4,9)? It is certainly the case that the biblical texts speak of God resting subsequent to the originating acts of creation (Gen. 2:2); however, biblical texts also speak of God continuing to create in a continuing sense in the present (Ps. 104:30, animals created by the Spirit of God). Jesus says that the Father 'is always at work to the present day' in works of mercy and providence. Jesus' healing on the Sabbath reflects God's acts of mercy and care for his creatures throughout history. The work of redemption was finished at the Cross, and God's people can enter into that spiritual rest now by faith, but God's works of providence, mercy, and creation continue.

In Genesis 2:15 it is said that the 'Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it'. The word translated as 'take care of' (*shamar*) has the sense of 'watchful care and preservation'.[12] The narrative continues by saying that God also brought the animals to the man '… to see what he would name them' (Gen. 2:19,20). The man is not only given the task of preserving the garden, but also functions as a 'naturalist' and 'knowledge worker' who classifies and assigns nomenclature to God's creatures, in keeping with the mandate to exercise dominion (Gen. 1:28). The naming of the animals is an expression of the human ability to use symbols and to make a 'cultural' world from the raw materials of a 'natural' world; the animals become part of man's cultural world by the very act of naming. A 'cow' is no longer just a 'natural'

10 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, III.1, The Doctrine of Creation* (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1958), p. 15.

11 Colin Gunton, 'The Doctrine of Creation', in Gunton, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 142.

12 William Dyrness, 'Stewardship of the Earth in the Old Testament', p. 54 in Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, ed., *Tending the Garden: Essays on the Gospel and the Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987).

object, but a part of a human domestic economy. The power of naming constitutes a 'second act of creation' that completes, as it were, God's originative act of creation, unlocking and developing the potentials inherent in the creature.

The first man is assigned the task of tending the garden *before the fall*. In biblical theology, work predates the fall, and is not a consequence of sin. The burdensome and painful aspects of work that are the consequences of sin (Gen. 3:17) are not inherent in the nature of work itself. Work was assigned in an unfallen world as an activity reflective of man's nature as the image of God, who is himself 'worker'. Just as it was 'not good' for the man to be alone (Gen. 2:18)—man being by nature a social being—so, by implication, it was *good* that man should work and care for God's creation. Viewed in this perspective, work is not inherently burdensome, much less a punishment, but rather a privilege and opportunity to reflect the character, activity, and creativity of the Creator. Consequently, if this is true of the nature of work in the first or original creation, and if the New Creation is the fulfilment of God's original intention, then it would follow that new work would be a feature of the new world to come.

In the narrative of the Genesis Flood the post-Deluge world can be seen as a type of the New Creation. Noah and his family emerge from the ark subsequent to God's judgment on the old sinful order and enter not into a period of perpetual rest, but resume the work of the cultural mandate and development of God's creation. Human culture advances from agriculture in general to viticulture (grape cultivation; wine making) in particular. The mandate to work is not revoked, but continued into the 'New Creation' after the Flood. This analogy from redemptive history would again suggest that work will characterize redeemed human life in the world to come.

Some of the imagery of the New Creation in the Old Testament prophets points in a similar direction. In Isaiah's vision of a new heavens and a new earth the prophet foresees a new world in which the redeemed will '… *build houses* and live in them' (Is. 65:21). The obvious question, of course, is to what extent such imagery is to be taken in a literal or physical sense, or whether only a metaphorical sense of 'secure relationships' or the like is intended. The interpretation favoured here is that both senses could be understood: the people of God will indeed enjoy eternally secure relationships with God and one another, but as *embodied*, physical beings will still live not in caves or in the open fields, but in structures which they themselves have shaped. Building houses—and countless other constructive activities—can be envisioned as enjoyable experiences in the New Creation.

The expectation that redeemed humans will have new work to do in the world to come is also implied by man's essential nature as *Imago Dei*. Human beings will continue to exist as image-bearers of God in the New Creation. Man was created to reflect, in a finite and analogical sense, the character of God, and his works of creation, providence, and redemption. Just as Jesus the Son reflected the Father's work (Jn. 5:17, 19), so the redeemed daughters and sons of God can be expected to

reflect God's work in the life to come.

Man creates, of course, not in the absolute, *ex nihilo* sense of God's creation, but through 'adding value' to creation, by transforming that which already exists, through invention, discovery, innovation, and by the production of new artistic, musical, and literary works.

Humans reflect the providential work of God when they serve their fellow creatures, care for the biosphere, and maintain the existing physical and cultural orders. Humans imitate the redemptive work of God when they act in such a way as to mitigate the effects of sin, e.g., a doctor serving her patients, or a reformer working to remove social injustices. While in the New Creation the need for *redemptive* actions would be unnecessary, works of creativity and providence would still obtain. The damage done to the divine image in man having been fully restored (cf. Col. 3:10), the creativity and energy entailed in that image would be fully expressed in the New Creation.

Works of providence or provision will also still apply, since humans, animals, and plants, though redeemed and transformed, still remain *creatures*. Creatures, by definition, have needs that are met by others.[13] God alone has the attribute of aseity or metaphysical independence; all creatures depend on God and, secondarily, on other creatures for their existence, life, and health. When houses are built in the world to come (Is. 65:21), they will presumably be built not by owners struggling alone, but by a team of willing helpers. Even the fruit yielded every month by the tree of life planted by the river of life in the New Jerusalem, as envisioned by John (Rev. 22:2), would plausibly not be 'self-harvesting', magically falling off the tree and rolling to a final destination, but would be joyfully harvested by the people of God who 'tend the Garden' (cf. Gen. 2:15) in the New Eden. Works of service would continue throughout eternity, as the people of God care for one another and for God's redeemed creation.[14]

The presence of the image of God in man and the cultural mandate (Gen. 1:26-28) imply that human beings are inherently shapers and creators of culture. The concept of culture, so crucial as a mediating category between man's inner and outer worlds, can be further developed here with insights from the disciplines of modern cultural anthropology and paleoanthropology.[15]

13 Even though God could meet the needs of creatures *immediately*, i.e., without any mediaries, he chooses in his providence to meet these needs *mediately* through others. This mediate provision of human needs is consistent with our finite and social human nature and reminds us of our dependence on others. This mediated provision for creaturely needs will plausibly continue in the world to come.

14 My colleague Scott Hafemann has pointed out that since faith, together with hope and love, are eternal (I Cor. 13:13), and so characterize the world to come, and since faith expresses itself in love for the neighbour (Gal. 5:6), this aspect of Pauline theology provides yet another reason to expect the continuation of such works in the future life.

15 Paleoanthropology is the discipline that studies the ancient hominid species, now extinct, such as the Australopithicenes, *Homo habilis, Homo erectus, Homo Neanderthalis*, and so forth, together with the remains of *Homo sapiens* from the prehistoric Paleolithic peri-

Traditional theological discussions often speak of 'man' and 'creation' without recognizing *culture* as an essential intervening variable. As already noted, human beings rarely if ever relate to 'nature' as such apart from the mediation of culturally defined symbols and artifacts. Even backpackers on a hike in a remote virgin wilderness in Alaska are carrying backpacks, stoves, food supplies, maps, sleeping bags and other artifacts that are products of human culture; the very categories of 'wilderness' and 'backpacking' are themselves culturally defined and historically situated.

One contemporary anthropologist, Amos Rapoport, defines culture as 'a system of symbols and meanings transmitted [from one generation to another] through enculturation.'[16] It is through such culturally defined frameworks that human societies give meaning to particulars, and organize the domains of space, time, meaning, and communication.[17] Roads, maps, boundary lines, houses, office buildings, 'Keep Out' signs, calendars, clocks, anniversaries, laws, stop signs, musical notation, mathematical symbols, hymns, prayers, clothing styles, conventional greetings, and language itself are just a few examples of the many ways in which humans build their own cultural environments through the use of symbols. In modern information-driven economies, most 'work' involves the manipulation of symbols. A chimpanzee or a beaver[18] can relate to the world in a 'natural' environment, but *Homo sapiens* relates to nature and works through the mediation of 'built' or culturally-created environments.

Another anthropologist, Tim Ingold, has noted that a human being is by nature '… a designer, imposing symbolic schemes of his own devising upon the world of inanimate objects'.[19] The aesthetic aspect of human cultural and symbolic activity, expressed in art and music, seems so deeply embedded in human nature that humans will spend hours honing their skills and practising, not primarily for some external reward, but for the intrinsic satisfaction of mastering the skill involved.[20]

ods. See John Reader, *Missing Links: the Hunt for Earliest Man* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988) for a helpful historical overview.

16 Amos Rapoport, 'Spatial Organization and the Built Environment', pp. 460-502 in the *Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, op. cit., at p. 474. Enculturation can involve any process that transmits learned, symbolic meanings from one generation to another: myths, stories, rituals, holidays, formal education, training, apprenticeship, mentoring, and so forth.

17 Rapoport, 'Spatial Organization', p.465.

18 While it is true that a beaver in building a dam is 'building' an environment, such behaviour is instinctive or 'hard-wired', rather than 'cultural' in the sense used here. Human culture and processes of enculturation are not merely 'hard wired' or instinctive, but have a history and change dynamically over time, incorporating new learned behaviours and meanings in response to changing circumstances and individual creativity.

19 Tim Ingold, *Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, op. cit., p. 26.

20 David Premack and Ann James Premack, 'Why Animals Have Neither Culture nor History', in Tim Ingold, ed., *Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, op. cit., p. 359. Such artistic and musical propensities distinguish humans from the lower animals.

This connection of the 'human' and the 'cultural' is so strong and so integral that Clifford Geertz has asserted that 'Most bluntly… there is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture'. Human beings without culture would not be so much like the clever young savages in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, but more like 'unworkable monstrosities' with few useable instincts, few recognizable human emotions and sentiments, and little intellect as we know it.[21]

It is precisely this uniquely human ability to form culture through symbolic activity that paleoanthropologists have used to identify the emergence of modern *Homo sapiens* in the history of the hominid fossil record. The remarkable Cro-Magnon cave paintings at Lascaux and other sites in the Pyrenees region of southwestern France and northern Spain are among the earliest examples of human art. Such examples of art, music, and symbolic activity have been dated to at least 30,000 years before the present. The Cro-Magnons, who were biologically and anatomically modern *Homo sapiens*, left other evidences of symbolically and culturally defined behaviours such as burial of the dead with ritual and ceremony, body decoration and ornamentation as signs of social status, and the use of eyed boned needles for the production of carefully tailored clothing.[22]

One leading paleoanthropologist, Ian Tattersall, has stated that such symbolic activity '… lies at the very heart of what it means to be human'. The ability to generate complex symbols and to transform them, to use symbols to 'create a world in the mind and to re-create it in the real world' outside the mind is at the very foundation of the uniquely human powers of imagination and creativity.[23] Earlier hominid species show little or no evidence of complex symbolic behaviours. *Homo erectus* used standardized stone tools and may have harnessed the use of fire as early as 700,000 years before the present, but left no evidence of art or musical instruments.[24] Neanderthal man, while having a cranial capacity larger on the average than modern *Homo sapiens*, left no clear evidence of art or other symbolic activity.[25]

Both the hominid fossil record and the biblical accounts of human origins and early human history (Gen. 1,2,4)

21 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); 'The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man', p. 49. Geertz goes on to say that we '… are in sum incomplete or unfinished animals who complete or finish ourselves through culture—and not through culture in general but through highly particular forms of it… Javanese, Hopi, Italian, upper-class and lower class, academic and commercial': ibid.

22 Ian Tattersall, *The Human Odyssey: Four Million Years of Human Evolution* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1993), ch. 12; 'The Human Spirit', pp. 153-171, is a succinct description of the evidence, with illustrations of art and other material artifacts.

23 Ian Tattersall, *Becoming Human: Evolution and Human Uniqueness* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1998), p. 177.

24 Richard Leakey and Roger Lewin, *Origins Reconsidered: In Search of What Makes Us Human* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), p. 47.

25 Christopher Stringer and Clive Gamble, *In Search of the Neanderthals: Solving the Puzzle of Human Origins* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993), p. 160.

portray those whom we would recognize as 'like ourselves' as culture-forming, symbol-manipulating beings. The first man of Genesis is portrayed in the cultural terms of a Neolithic farmer (cf. Gen. 2:15), and cultural activities such as music, metalworking, and animal domestication are mentioned soon thereafter (Gen. 4). The implication of these considerations is that if man, historically, in the 'first' creation is essentially a culture-maker, then man in the second or New Creation will be a shaper of culture as well. In both the first and New creations, humans bearing the image of God relate to God, to other humans, and to the natural environment not immediately, but mediately through symbols that they themselves have shaped and transmitted. Redeemed human beings in a new creation, then, can be expected to produce new cultural artifacts as they do new work in the world to come.

Images of Work in the New Creation

This final section of the essay will attempt to explore what types of work and activity might characterize life in the New Creation. Can we expect that there will be new works of art, music, and scientific discovery? What about business and finance? Will there be an 'economy' in the world to come? Eating and drinking? Manufacturing or maintenance activities? Farming or wildlife conservation? Will the fundamental laws of physics be entirely different in the world to come? Such questions may seem speculative and even bizarre, but are posed not so much with a view to developing definitive answers, but somewhat provisionally, in the hope of providing new perspectives and questions for further reflection in the areas of eschatology and Christian understandings of work.[26]

These questions will be explored from the standpoint of a 'theocentric maximalism' that attempts to take the notion of New Creation seriously. Such a standpoint is contrasted with various forms of 'theocentric minimalism'. A more extreme form of theocentric minimalism would be represented by various Gnostic eschatologies in which the future life involves only disembodied spirits in the presence of God, apart from all matter and the lower creation. A less extreme form of theocentric minimalism is found in Aquinas, who anticipated the renewal of the earth and the heavenly bodies, but believed that animals and plants would have no place in the eternal state, because of their corruptible nature.[27]

In the theocentric maximalism presupposed here, the New Creation is envisioned as a state of affairs in which redeemed humans are rightly related to God, to other humans, to the world of culture, to the biosphere, and to the cosmos as a whole. This reference to

26 Just as the 'other worlds' of C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia and the Space Trilogy* and the works of J.R.R. Tolkien have enriched the Christian imagination and Christian living in the present, so, hopefully, might explorations of the issue of new work in the New Creation.

27 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Supplement, Q.91, Art.5; 'Whether the Plants and Animals Will Remain in This Renewal?' Aquinas' conclusion—that plants and animals will have no place in the world to come-seems inconsistent will the *intrinsic value* of the biosphere in Gen. 1, and with God's preservation of animals on the Ark during the Flood.

the *cosmos* is a recognition of the fact that in a post-Hubble world the Christian eschatological imagination must encompass not only a new earth, but a new *cosmos* as well. The New *Heavens* have been vastly expanded since the discoveries of Galileo, Einstein, and Hubble; the 'playing field' of redemption, so to speak, has been vastly enlarged for the Christian in this era of human history.

The questions noted above will be explored from an interpretative perspective that could be called 'hermeneutical maximalism', i.e., a hermeneutical perspective that posits elements of both continuity and discontinuity between the old and new creations; that presupposes the fundamentally *analogical* nature of religious language;[28] and that posits 'inclusionary maximalism'. This last term is shorthand for the following working supposition: All things and human activities from the old creation are expected to be found in the New Creation except those clearly excluded, e.g., a) things logically impossible; b) things clearly sinful;[29] c) things explicitly excluded by New Testament revelation. The principle of maximal inclusiveness would seem to be consistent with the intrinsic goodness of the original creation and the divine preservation of representatives of the biosphere through the Genesis Flood. In the New Creation it will be just as impossible for it to be true that 2+2=5 as it is in the present creation. Clearly sinful activities such as murder, rape, theft, envy, idolatry, or blasphemy could have no place in the world to come.

The statement of Christ in Matt.22:30 that in the resurrection there will be no marrying or giving in marriage would seem to exclude sexual activity and procreation in the life to come. Admittedly, such a prospect might not seem desirable to many in modern cultures saturated with sexual images and expectations! However, it is not the case that the cessation of sexual activity would imply a diminishing of pleasure per se in the world to come. On the contrary, the New Creation can be expected to entail a state of affairs in which right pleasures—physical, emotional, relational, intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual—would be intensified, not diminished, in a context in which redeemed human beings are in right relationships with God, other humans, and the entire cosmic environment.[30]

The cessation of sexual and procreative activity would not imply the cessation of gender distinctions;

28 An analogical understanding of religious language holds that such language, while not, in a given case necessarily being strictly *literal*, is not, at the same time *equivocal*; rather, it is supposed that language used in normal human contexts has some points of similarity and correspondence to actual states of affairs when used of things in the world to come.

29 Citing 1 Cor. 3:12-15, Volf refers to a final judgment on human works, expecting that those works done not in cooperation with God, but 'in cooperation with the demonic powers that scheme to ruin God's good creation' (Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, p.120) will be burned up at the end and not enter the New Creation.

30 Millard Erickson suggests the term 'suprasexual' in reference to the surpassing pleasures of the world to come: *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), p. 1240.

redeemed humans would still be recognizably male or female in the New Creation. The transcendence of sexual activity would, however, have a specific benefit for women: with the cessation of pregnancy, labour, childbirth, and childcare responsibilities, women would be freed to pursue the full range of artistic, scientific, and cultural activities that have historically been dominated by men.

A key assumption made in this discussion is that there will be some measure of continuity (as well as discontinuity) in the ways in which the basic laws of physics and biology operate now and in the new world to come. For example, it can be supposed that space will still have three dimensions, not one or two. A complex world of human and animal life could not be possible in a world of only one or two dimensions. If the law of gravity or the fundamental subatomic forces were substantially different, carbon-based life as we know it would not be possible.[31] Redeemed human bodies will still be transformed physical bodies that are subject to a form of gravity, rather than floating freely through space. The New Creation is a transformed creation, an ordered and law-governed world, not a world of magic and mythical fantasy, free from all creaturely constraints.

Biblical images found in texts such as Revelation 22:2 ('tree of life… yielding fruit *every month*') and Is. 65:21 ('plant vineyards… eat their fruit') would seem to apply a state of affairs in the New Creation in which biological and metabolic processes—including eating—are still occurring. This last inference concerning *eating food* seems consistent with the gospel accounts of Christ, with a resurrection body, preparing a meal for the disciples (Jn. 21:13). To demonstrate the material reality of his resurrection body, Christ takes a piece of broiled fish and eats it in the presence of the disciples (Lk. 24:42, 43). The Pauline statement that the Kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking (Rom. 14:17) does not prove that eating and drinking are inconsistent with existence in the New Creation—for eating and drinking can be done to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31)—but rather, that disputes about clean and unclean foods (Rom. 14:13-16) should not disrupt the unity of the Christian fellowship.

With these general hermeneutical considerations in mind, we can now proceed to explore more specifically the question, 'What types of work might be expected in the New Creation?' As a point of departure, the divine work-triad of creation, providence, and redemption can be used as a heuristic model. The works of the Triune God in time are constituted by acts of creation, providence, and redemption; man, as the image of God, reflects the activities of 'God the Worker' imperfectly in the first creation, and more adequately in the age to come.

It is not hard to imagine that *creative* human activities such as art, music, lit-

31 Recent scientific discoveries have shown how the fundamental constants of nature are 'fine-tuned' for life: see, for example, Barrow, John D., and Frank J. Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); Paul Davies, *The Mind of God: Science and the Search for Ultimate Meaning* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1992); Michael J. Denton, *Nature's Destiny: How the Laws of Biology Reveal Purpose in the Universe* (New York: Free Press, 1998).

erature, drama, and scientific discovery would flourish in a renewed creation. Such activities are pursued for the intrinsic values and enjoyment[32] they produce, and as humans move from a 'kingdom of necessity' to a 'kingdom of freedom,' it seems plausible to suppose that such activities would be even more widely practised and enjoyed. The aesthetic values constituted by art, music, and literature, for example, and produced by humans as image-bearers of God, can be said to reflect in a finite way the nature of God, whose 'glory' epitomizes all true beauty. God is a *beautiful* and glorious being; the New Creation is a glorious and beautiful creation, and redeemed humans in the world to come will enjoy activities that add new (aesthetic) values to the world and conserve values that already exist.

Aesthetic values can be thought of in terms of the variables of complexity, variety, harmony, and intensity.[33] Other things being equal, a musical composition, for example, characterized by greater complexity, variety, harmony, and intensity would have greater aesthetic value than one characterized by less complexity, variety, harmony, and intensity. The tune 'Twinkle, twinkle little star' has some degree of musical value, but far less than the *Ode to Joy* in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Insofar as the New Creation, suffused with the beauty and glory of God, is a preeminently *beautiful* creation, then it is to be expected that the human environment in the world to come would be characterized by increasingly greater degrees of complexity, variety, harmony, and intensity. The movements toward greater complexity and variety, for example, would be consistent with the overall biblical metanarrative that moves from the 'Garden' to the glorified 'City,' and with the 'complexification' of human civilizations moving from agricultural to industrial to information-based economies from the Neolithic eras to the present.

These variables of complexity, variety, harmony, and intensity, while originating in a context of esthetic values, could be further generalized to apply to redeemed human relationships with God, fellow humans, and the biosphere. New and varied ways of praising God, experiencing human friendship, doing work, and enjoying the lower creation would flourish in the world to come, and continue to unfold without foreseeable limit.

It does not seem that 'redemptive' work—activities such as medicine and nursing, for example, that repair the effects of sin and the curse—would have any place in a fully redeemed world where sin and the effects of sin

32 Insofar as sports and athletics are intrinsically enjoyable, there would seem to be no reason to suppose that such activities, freed from egoism and violence, would be absent from the new creation. Sporting events at their best display human enjoyment of the pursuit of excellence, and are characterized by variety and *unpredictability* that humans also find enjoyable.

33 This schema is from John B. Cobb, Jr., and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: an Introductory Exposition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), pp. 64, 65. Cobb and Griffin have developed the process metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead. The usefulness of the schema in question (complexity, variety, harmony, intensity) would not, however, necessarily imply agreement with process theology or metaphysics.

are no longer present. However, it might be suggested that acts of Christian *service* that 'memorialize' the acts of the Son of Man who came 'not to be served but to serve' and give his life as a ransom for many (Mk. 10:45), are, in that extended sense, redemptive acts. Redeemed humans will continue to help and serve one another in the world to come, as inherently social beings who can then more fully enjoy the satisfaction of free, altruistic action.

The continuation of redemptive work in the world to come would obtain more directly under a more radically speculative scenario: the existence of other world or universes. Should other universes exist, and should there be fallen and redeemable sentient beings in such universes, then it is hypothetically possible that God would enlist redeemed humans in this world to announce the message of a cosmically valid redemption (cf. Col. 1:19) to such beings.[34] 'Cross-cultural missions' become 'cross-galactic missions'; the Great Commission is extended to all possible universes. In such an admittedly bizarre scenario, God uses redeemed human, not angels, as 'missionaries', bearing the redemptive message to creatures in other worlds.

What about 'maintenance' work in the New Creation? Would redeemed humans still be engaged in farming, forestry, wildlife conservation, recycling, and the manufacturing of replacement goods in the world to come? In the prophet Isaiah's vision of the new earth (Is. 65:21) he envisions a state of affairs in which 'they will plant vineyards and eat of their fruit'. This text clearly presupposes a continuation of eating, drinking, the growth of grapes, harvesting, and the biological processes involved. If redeemed humans are still eating and drinking in the New Creation, this would seem to imply the continuation of cooking, food processing, restaurants, and entire industries associated with the culture of food.

Does it make any sense to think of 'consumer goods' in the world to come? For example, are we to think that shoes and clothing will last forever, never wear out, and never need replacement? Or will they still be subject to wear and tear, and so need to be replaced with similar manufactured items?[35] Some writers have supposed that the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which states that disorder has a tendency to increase, and that available energy in a machine or living being inevitably dissipates over time, is a consequence of sin, and would not

34 On the implications of Col. 1:19 for the cosmic scope of the Cross, see John Jefferson Davis, 'The Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence and the Christian Doctrine of Redemption,' in Davis, *Frontiers of Science and Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), pp. 141-157. For a history of the discussion of the existence of other worlds, see Steven J. Dick, *Plurality of Worlds: the Origins of the Extraterrestrial Life Debate from Democritus to Kant* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

35 The discussion of this questions assumes, of course, that clothing will be worn in the world to come—not as a sign of shame (cf. Gen. 2:25), but as signs of gender distinctions, cultural diversity, personal adornment and self-expression, and for purely utilitarian considerations of maintaining bodily comfort.

have applied before the Fall.[36] It might be thought that Rom. 8:21, where the apostle Paul speaks of the creation itself being liberated 'from its bondage to decay' in the world to come, supports such a notion.

There are, however, good reasons to believe that the Second Law is not a product of sin and is in fact a normal and essential feature of creation as God originally intended it. The Second Law implies that all living beings need to eat and have energy replenished from external sources, because heat and other forms of energy naturally tend to dissipate and move from warmer to cooler areas. From the beginning God provided plants as food for animals and humans (Gen. 1:29,30), having created them as beings that needed to eat. This implies, as Alan Hayward has noted, that '… they were subject to the Second Law from the moment of their creation.'[37]

Viewed in this light, it could then be understood that the naturally dissipative and disordering tendencies implied by the Second Law, that applied from the time of creation, were then directed by God for the particular judicial punishment of human sin e.g., death (Rom. 6:23). The removal of the curse envisioned in Romans 8:21 implies not a revocation of the Second Law, but rather, the ending of human death and all forms of alienation of God's creation from the Creator.

Scripture provides other examples of 'natural' processes being redirected by God for a specific redemptive or judicial purpose. Rainbows presumably existed from the time that rain showers and sunshine existed, but were invested with new meaning after the Flood as a sign of the covenant with creation (Gen. 9:13). The law of gravity that caused the millstone to drop on Abimilech's head and crack his skull was both present from creation, and used of God in judgment of Abimilech's wicked deeds (Judges 9:53, 56). In Thomas Aquinas' view, thorns and thistles grew on earth before the Fall, but afterward were used of God for the punishment of human sin.[38]

The upshot of this discussion is that some form of the Second Law could be expected to apply in the New Creation. Energy will still dissipate, living creatures will still eat, and shoes and clothing will experience wear and tear and eventually need replacement. Redeemed humans could still be expected, in the world to come, to be involved in the manufacturing and repair of such consumable items as are necessary for the maintenance of human life and culture. Such 'maintenance work' would be a reflection of the activity of 'Christ the Maintenance Worker', who even now is 'upholding the universe by the word of his power' (Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:17).[39]

Finally, consider the question, 'Will

36 See, for example, Henry Morris, *The Twilight of Evolution* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1963), pp. 56, 57, cited by Alan Hayward, *Creation and Evolution: Rethinking the Evidence from Science and the Bible* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1985), p. 183.

37 Hayward, *Creation and Evolution*, p. 184.

38 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Pt.1, Q.69, art. 2.

39 Christ would presumably continue to maintain the New Creation in being, since the New Creation is still a *creation*, and as such lacks the property of aseity or metaphysical self-sufficiency that is true of God alone.

there be *business* and *economic* activities in the New Creation?' Jesus' parable of the Ten Minas[40] (Lk. 19:11-27), noted previously in this essay, would seem to indicate a positive answer to this question. The servant who managed the master's resources well is rewarded by being given charge of ten cities (Lk. 19:17). As with the case of Joseph in the Genesis narrative (Gen. 39-50), wise administration of worldly responsibilities is rewarded by God with greater responsibility, and is seen as a way of serving God's purposes and God's people. The parable presupposes that business and financial activities that are done in accordance with God's commands are consistent with the overall plan and purposes of God; the very fact that Jesus chooses such an illustration to illustrate Kingdom life undercuts any false dichotomy between business and 'spiritual' activities. The reference to management of *ten cities* would imply not only business activities, but also the administrative, governmental, legal, financial, banking, and information-technology services as well that are associated with modern information-based economies. 'Tom' could still freely choose to enjoy serving others by networking computer systems in a New Creation, and would not need to enroll in some heavenly seminary in order to be involved in meaningful work.

Now it might seem counter-intuitive that *money* and *economics* could be thought to have a continuing place in 'heaven' or the New Creation. Is it not the case that economics only reflects a situation where *scarce resources* have to be allocated among competing uses and users?[41] The point here is that in the New Creation material resources, though presumably abundant, will still not be *infinite*, and choices will still need to be made. Presumably the building of a new home (Is. 65:21) would not be attended by the delays, conflicts, injuries, or even fraud that sometimes characterizes construction projects in the present age; however, desirable lakefront property for building a home at a given lake is still limited, and choices would need to be made.

In the New Creation, it is postulated that human beings will still need to eat, to grow food, to harvest and process it, and to replace consumables because of normal wear and tear. A given plot of farmland could be planted with apples or pears or cherries, and the actual choice could reflect the aggregate preferences of the users and producers. Human beings in the world to come will still be *creatures*—not gods—and will have choices to make, having only so many hours in the day, and not having the ability to be everywhere at once or

40 In the currency of the day, ten minas was an amount equivalent to approximately two or three year's average wages; one mina was about three month's wages.

41 According to the economists James Gwartney and Richard Stroup, the basic ingredients of economic theory are scarcity and choice: 'Since scarcity of productive resources, time, and income limit the alternatives available to us, we must make choices. Choice is the act of selecting among restricted alternatives. A great deal of economics is about how people choose when the alternatives open to them are restricted.': James D. Gwartney and Richard Stroup, *Economics: Private and Public Choice*, 3rd ed. (New York: Academic Press, 1982), pp. 4, 5.

to do all things simultaneously.

Providing food would still require human effort and the exertion of energy; the grapes in the vineyards in Isaiah's new earth (Is. 65:21b) would not harvest themselves, but would still need to be picked from the vine. Choosing to raise apples rather than cherries, choosing to practise soccer rather than writing a book, choosing to bid for a prime lot by the lake rather than a beautiful new painting, are all economic choices, in that such choices allocate individual and societal resources through a continuing 'auction' that reflects the varying preferences and valuations of the parties to the auction. The diversity of preferences is not necessarily a result of sin, but can reflect the created diversity of human personality, temperaments, and interests.

This discussion presupposes that private property and economic competition are not inherently sinful or inconsistent with a redeemed state of human affairs. The prophet Micah looks forward to the messianic age when swords will be beaten into plowshares and each man will sit under 'his own vine and under his own fig tree' (Mic. 4:3,4). Micah envisions the conditions of the age to come, not in images of a vast collective farm, but smaller farms individually held. The reference to 'plowshares' is an indication that Micah, like Isaiah, expected agriculture to be a feature of the world to come. People in the New Creation will still need to eat.

In the present world competition is often notably characterized by sinful greed and pride. However, competition per se need not be inherently sinful. The apostle Paul can use the athletic imagery of running a race (1 Cor. 9:24) as a positive illustration for the Christian life. Lawful, rule-based, and nonviolent competition can be expressive of an intrinsic human enjoyment of 'play' and the sense of satisfaction derived from the achievement of excellence in the use of a human ability or skill.

It could be postulated that the economic inequalities that now result from the impersonal operations of market economies would, in the world to come, be mitigated both by a 'cosmic Jubilee' principle (cf. Lev. 25:8-55), which would, as needed, correct any disproportionate distributions of property and wealth, as well as by Spirit-prompted acts of generosity that freely share with those with less (cf. Acts 2:44, 45).

If it seems strange or even bizarre to contemplate an 'economy of heaven', consider some possible alternatives: Would all finite goods be distributed randomly by some heavenly lottery? Or would all economic decisions be made by divine fiat, with no human involvement whatsoever? Neither of these alternatives would seem to be consistent with either the general way that God has providentially delegated most such decisions throughout the course of human history, or with God's purpose of fostering human responsibility, rightly exercised. In the New Creation we can expect more responsible human choices and decisions, not fewer.[42]

42 This latter conclusion seems consistent with the parable of the Ten Minas: the faithful manager is rewarded with greater responsibility, not less, or with a life of ease and inactivity.

As this essay is drawn to a close, it also needs to be stated that the scenario envisioned here involves not just new work in the New Creation, but a *new Sabbath* as well. The regular rhythm of work alternating with rest, celebration, and worship that characterized the divine creation week in the first creation would also apply in some way in the world to come. The redeemed people of God would not be involved in ceaseless work, but the worship of the Triune God would forever be the highest and most pleasurable of all experiences, as they delight in their glorious redeeming God, and right relationships with other humans and the entire created cosmos. Such a vision of the New Creation, it is here suggested, energizes and valourizes all forms of human work in the present that are done for the glory of God, until that time when the kingdoms of this world have become '… the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.'