

**Vlach, Michael J. *The New Creation Model: A Paradigm for Discovering God's Restoration Purposes from Creation to New Creation*. Cary, NC: Theological Studies, 2023. 405pp. + 6pp. (front matter) + 15pp. (back matter).**

Michael Vlach's *The New Creation Model* argues that eternity involves nations, culture, government, and more as mankind fulfills God's mandate to rule the earth. The book interacts with theological journal articles and monographs, but Vlach keeps a direct, first-person tone and intends this book for a wider Christian audience than scholars and seminarians.

The book unfolds in five parts. The first explains the two models, and the second further expounds the New Creation Model and contrasts it with the Spiritual Vision Model. The third traces the models through church history. The fourth and fifth parts trace how the models interact with millennial views and with various theological systems.

Vlach begins part one by tracing Scripture's use of new-creation language, which he divides into three categories. First, Scripture describes redeemed persons in terms of new creation (2 Cor 5:17; cf. Rom 5:12–21; Eph 4:22–24; Col 3:9–10). Second, Scripture describes the church with new-creation language (Gal 6:15; Eph 2:11–3:6; Col 3:10–11; cf. Isa 19:16–25; Zech 14; Rev 21:1–3, 24, 26). Third, the Bible speaks of the restoration of the physical world with new-creation language (Isa 43:19–20; 65:17–25; Matt 19:28–30; Acts 3:21; Rom 8:19–23; Col 1:20; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1, 5, 24, 26). In chapters 5–9, Vlach argues that Christ's office of King means that he will rule over all nations (Ps 2:8–9; Isa 2:2–4; Zech 9:10; 14:9, 16–19; Rev 19:15) and will be "*Restorer of creation*" (Isa 11; Hos 2:18; Rom 8:19–20) (59). Christ's priestly role is also not limited to spiritual salvation—it brings about the resurrection of the body and the restoration of all creation (Col 1:15–20). This comprehensive nature of salvation is also needed because of the comprehensive nature of sin. Sin afflicts the individual, but it also has effects on the family, society, and the natural world. Thus, salvation must extend as far as the effects of sin. In chapters 6 and 7 Vlach outlines sixteen elements of the present creation that will characterize the new creation: "1. Earth as Man's Destiny," "2. Resurrection of the Body," "3. Restoration of Earth," "4. Nations and Ethnicities," "5. Israel," "6. Land," "7. Governments," "8. Society," "9. Culture," "10. Eating/Drinking/Celebration," "11. Houses and Farms," "12. Economic and Agricultural Prosperity," "13. Relationships and Friendships," "14. Animals, Birds, Fish," "15. Natural Resources," "16. Time" (112). Vlach turns to survey key texts in chapters 8 and 9. These include foundational texts about the purpose of creation, such as Genesis 1:16–28; texts about the Messiah's reign, such as Psalms 2, 8, 72; and texts that speak directly about the new creation, such as Romans 8:19–22, Colossians 1:15–20, and Revelation 20–21. In the end he surveys almost forty texts from all parts of the Old and New Testaments.

Vlach's exegetical case for the New Creation Model was helpful, but it also fell short in several areas. The interpretation of several of the texts surveyed is disputed. Engaging those disputes would have made Vlach's case stronger. Second, many of the texts surveyed were millennial texts, and a premillennialist holding to the Spiritual Vision Model could argue that those texts apply only to the millennium. Some indication in this part of the book about how the millennium and eternal state relate would have helped address those concerns. Third, Vlach did not engage with texts used to argue

against his position. Even among those who hold to the New Creation Model, there is debate about whether the present earth will be destroyed prior to the new creation. Engaging with the texts relevant to that debate and with other texts that are used to argue against the New Creation Model would also have been helpful.

Vlach introduces the Spiritual Vision Model in chapter 2 and then circles back to further expound it in chapters 10 and 11. He seems to poison the well by identifying the Spiritual Vision Model with Hinduism and Buddhism—before granting, “Christian versions of the Spiritual Vision Model are less severe and less dualistic than those of the eastern religions.” Instead of connecting the Spiritual Vision Model to Hinduism, why not engage with fellow dispensationalist John Feinberg’s arguments for a heavenly eternity? A failure to engage with Spiritual Vision proponents directly is a deficiency of Vlach’s treatment. He quotes only from secondary sources already aligned with his viewpoint. A final problem in Vlach’s presentation is a tendency to present what he acknowledges to be a spectrum of viewpoints as a binary. The Spiritual Vision Model is often presented in extreme forms not held by any evangelical scholar (e.g., evangelicals who hold to the Spiritual Vision Model do not embrace “cosmic dualism,” cf. p. 165), while the New Creation Model is presented in an idealized version (e.g., many who hold to the New Creation Model do not hold to a millennial kingdom or to the future importance of national Israel).

Part three is a historical survey. The most significant aspect of this survey for Vlach’s argument is his claim that the roots of the Spiritual Vision Model are “(1) Non-Christian influences—eastern religions, Platonism, and Neo-Platonism; (2) Gnosticism and Marcion; and (3) Augustine” (173). While repeatedly raising Hinduism and Buddhism as exemplars of the Spiritual Vision Model, Vlach does not demonstrate that these religions influenced Christians. His case is more plausible with Platonism and Neo-Platonism. Vlach notes that Plato influenced Philo and Neo-Platonism influenced Augustine. Through these significant figures the Spiritual Vision Model entered the bloodstream of Christian theology. There may be truth to what Vlach is arguing, but he did not make his case. General claims about Platonism’s influence on early Christian theologians are not helpful; they are used in many different ways to further many different theological agendas. The effort to discredit certain teachings due to the alleged influence of Greek thought can be traced back to Adolf von Harnack’s claim that orthodox theology had abandoned the “Hebraic” thought of the Bible for “Hellenistic” thought. Von Harnack’s argument has not stood the test of time. More careful scholars note that Neo-Platonic thought did influence the church, but they also argue that Christian theologians adapted and transformed Greek thought in light of Scripture. Thus, any charge of a Platonic infection or early Christian theology—or, on the other end of the spectrum, any claim that Christians must embrace Platonism—needs to be tested by the details of what Platonism taught, what the church fathers in question taught, and what the Scriptures teach. The closest Vlach approaches to this is in chapter 15, which claims that Neo-Platonic influences led Augustine to see heaven as the eternal destiny of believers, to reject premillennialism, to remove “the kingdom of God from history and the physical realm” (208), and to engage in allegorical interpretation. But these claims are not rooted in Augustine’s writings, countervailing factors in his theology are not mentioned, and no link to Platonism is demonstrated. Vlach’s claims regarding Platonic influence are too sweeping and are ungrounded in

data. This does not mean Vlach is wrong about a Platonic influence; it does mean, however, that he did not present evidence to demonstrate that his claims are true.

In part four Vlach turns to millennial systems. He observes that there are four different ways of relating the millennium and the eternal state: “1. Spiritual Millennium and Spiritual Eternal Kingdom (Thomas Aquinas; medieval scholastics) 2. Earthly Millennium and Spiritual Eternal Kingdom (Jonathan Edwards; some Puritans) 3. Spiritual Millennium and Earthly Eternal Kingdom (New Earth Amillennialists; Hoekema, Poythress) 4. Earthly Millennium and Earthly Eternal Kingdom (Revised and Progressive Dispensationalists; Historic Premillennialists)” (261). From this enumeration, it would seem that both positions 3 and 4 would fall within the New Creation Model. Vlach grants that many modern amillennialists have a new-creation view of eternity. He asserts, however, that they still fall short because they do not have a place for a restored Israel or (in the case of Poythress, who does have a place for a restored Israel, do “not assert a unique functional role for Israel in the future, as dispensationalists do,” 295). In addition, Vlach alleges that they cannot see a fulfillment of Genesis 1:26–28 in the new creation because they have spiritualized the kingdom of Christ. He concludes that dispensational premillennialism is the most consistent with the New Creation Model. He does not, however, reckon with contemporary dispensationalists, like John Feinberg, who hold to the Spiritual Vision Model of eternity. He will grant in the next section that classical dispensationalism did hold to a heavenly destiny for the church.

In the final section, Vlach relates the New Creation and Spiritual Vision models to the theological systems of dispensationalism, covenant theology, progressive covenantalism, and New Christian Zionism. Vlach concludes that dispensationalism (apart from classical dispensationalism), non-Laddian historic premillennialism (e.g., some at the Westminster Assembly, the Bonar brothers, Robert Murray M’Cheyne, and J. C. Ryle), and New Christian Zionism are the most consistent with the New Creation Model. He raises the issue of new-earth amillennialism, but he argues that it falls short in its view of the millennial kingdom (though he grants that it holds that “many physical promises will be fulfilled in the Eternal State”) and in not interpreting prophecies about Israel. He concludes, “A system cannot be consistently new creationist if it spiritualizes Israel” (387).

As one who holds to a new-creation eschatology, I found this book a disappointment. First, the exegetical case of the New Creation Model could have been stronger. Second, Vlach did not engage primary sources arguing for the Spiritual Vision Model. He did engage Michael Allen’s book *Grounded in Heaven* in an appendix, but Allen, while critical of certain presentations of the New Creation Model and while seeking to place more emphasis on God himself and the beatific vision, does not reject the New Creation Model. Third, Vlach worked too hard to tie the New Creation Model to dispensationalism. This is difficult to do since classical dispensationalism, key revised dispensationalists such as Ryrie and Walvoord, and important contemporary dispensationalists such as John Feinberg all held (or hold) to the Spiritual Vision Model. On the other hand, important non-dispensationalists such as Herman Bavinck, Anthony Hoekema, Vern Poythress, Michael Horton, Russell Moore, N. T. Wright, Richard Middleton, and others hold to the New Creation Model. One can argue, as Stephen James does effectively in *New Creation, Eschatology, and the Land*, that a consistent New Creation

viewpoint should have a place for nations and a restored Israel in its land.<sup>1</sup> However, it is difficult to argue that these theologians do not adhere to the New Creation Model when some of them have been some of the most significant promoters of the model. Furthermore, Vlach's attempt to link millennial views to the New Creation Model is not successful. As he notes, there are premillennialists who hold to a Spiritual Vision viewpoint and amillennialists who hold to the New Creation Model. It is only by defining the New Creation Model idiosyncratically as including a millennium and a restoration of Israel within the land that Vlach is able to exclude new-creation amillennialists from his New Creation Model. It is with some regret that I register these critiques. I have greatly benefited from Vlach's other writings, and I am in agreement with his positive articulations of the New Creation Model.

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<sup>1</sup> See Layton Talbert, review of *New Creation Eschatology and the Land: A Survey of Contemporary Perspectives*, by Steven L. James, in *JBTW* 1, no. 1 (Fall 2020): 108–10.