John H. Duff

"A Knot Worth Unloosing"

The Interpretation of the New Heavens and Earth in Seventeenth-Century England

V&R



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To Desiree — loving wife, fellow scholar, best friend

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Preface

When I was a child and even into my teen years, the topic of eschatology tended to scare me rather than comfort me. The theological tradition in which I was raised made it clear that before Christ would return, the world situation would deteriorate dramatically and I secretly hoped the Second Advent would not occur in my lifetime. Over time, my fear of the topic gave way to a studied indifference after becoming aware that not all Christians believed the way I had been taught. Hence it is somewhat ironic that I chose to write a dissertation on the subject of the new heavens and earth. Some course work in my doctoral studies aroused an interest in the history of biblical exegesis and a paper I wrote on the understanding of the millennium of Revelation 20:1–6, coupled with the renewed interest in the new heavens and earth in contemporary scholarship, all combined to spur the research contained in the following pages.

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Richard Muller, for his patience and wisdom throughout the dissertation process. Anyone who has read his works knows that his research is thoroughly grounded in the historical documents of an era. In this regard, I have endeavored to be his disciple. However, his greatest gift to me was the assurance and confidence that this study was worth pursuing to its completion.

John H. Duff November 2018

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Abstract

Scholars interested in the history of Christian eschatological thought have focused primarily on the theme of heaven or on the various interpretations of the thousand years mentioned in Revelation 20:1–6. Virtually no attention has been given to past interpretations of the biblical phrase *the new heavens and earth.* This dissertation uncovers the interpretations of this phrase that were extant in seventeenth-century England. These interpretations fall into two basic camps—those that understood the phrase metaphorically and those that understood the phrase literally.

One group of English divines believed the new heavens and earth was a phrase referring to the new age of the gospel that commenced in the first century CE. Subsequent to the earthly ministry of Jesus, God flung open the doors of salvation to Gentiles while at the same time bringing judgment to the Jewish nation for its failure to recognize and embrace Jesus as Messiah. This judgment culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE, bringing an end to the Jewish political and religious systems. Christianity replaced Judaism, bringing with it the hope of salvation for Gentiles. Such an epic event was fittingly described as a new heavens and earth.

A second group of English interpreters believed the phrase stood for a yet future time when the political and religious circumstances of the world would change for the betterment of the church for one thousand years. The new heavens and earth stood for a future millennium in which Christ would establish his reign over the world prior to the day of resurrection and final judgment. The papacy would fall and true religion would flourish in the world. Christ would reign over the earth either personally or via the church.

These metaphorical interpretations of the new heavens and earth existed alongside a more literal one. Theologians who accepted a literal understanding believed the new heavens and earth described the renovation of the physical creation at the final judgment. Adam's sin had introduced corruption into the created order and God would eventually purge creation from the effects of Adam's fall. Among this group, differences of opinion existed with respect to how

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much of the world would need cleansing, what creatures would be restored and of what use would a renovated world serve.

Two main opinions existed about the use of a renewed world. The majority of scholars believed the purged world would serve as a monument to God's glory, wisdom and power. God's people would be able to see this monument from their permanent abode in heaven. A few divines adopted the idea that the new heavens and earth would be home to Christ and his people for eternity. Christ would resign his position as head over the Father's kingdom and take up his own kingdom on earth in fulfillment of the promises to Abraham, David and the Old Testament prophets.

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Introduction

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed a resurgence of interest in the teaching of Scripture about the end of this world, interest fueled by the notion that the papacy was the Antichrist whose days, in the eyes of many Protestants, seemed to be numbered. That interest is very evident among seventeenth-century English divines, many of whom believed that the prophecies of Scripture concerning the end of the age would be fulfilled within their generation or soon after. While a robust scholarship has explored the rise of millennial thought in seventeenth-century England, other aspects of the eschatology of that time have received much less attention.[1] One area that has been virtually ignored is seventeenth-century interpretations of a phrase that occurs four times in the Bible—*new heavens and a new earth*.[2] This phrase occurs in texts often understood as describing the end of the present world and the beginning of the world to come. The first two occurrences appear in the book of Isaiah. In Isaiah 65:17, the author reports God as saying, "For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the

1 Although millennialism in all periods of church history has been studied by historians, the following pay special attention to its presence among the English in the seventeenth century: Bryan W. Ball, *A Great Expectation: Eschatological Thought in English Protestantism to 1660* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975); Peter Toon, ed. *Puritans, the Millennium and the Future of Israel: Puritan Eschatology 1600 to 1660* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1970) and Crawford Gribben, *The Puritian Millennium*, (Portland: Four Courts Press, 2000). Other works give it considerable attention even though it is not their only focus: see Richard Kyle, *The Last Days Are Here Again* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998); Charles Webster, ed. *The Intellectual Revolution of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Trevor Aston, Past and Present Series (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974); and Katharine R. Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain 1530–1645* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

2 Although historical reasons account for why scholarship has scrutinized the idea of a millennium, that idea is based largely on its appearance in one text of scripture—Revelation 20:1–6—where the phrase "a thousand years" is mentioned six times. The "new heaven(s) and new earth" is mentioned four times in three different biblical books written over the span of several centuries.

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former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind."[3] In the next chapter, the thought is repeated: "For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain" (66:22). The second set of occurrences appears in the New Testament, one in 2 Peter and one in Revelation. After prophesying that the world will undergo a great conflagration, Peter encourages his readers with another prophecy: "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13). Finally, John reports a vision in Revelation 21:1: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea."[4] This dissertation will focus on the understanding of this promise in seventeenth-century England. In particular, it will demonstrate that, in spite of a fairly stable hermeneutical method amongst English scholars, the interpretation of the new heavens and earth was not monolithic but considerably varied with respect to how and when this promise would be fulfilled.[5]

The topic of the new heavens and earth has received some recent attention among contemporary theologians. Cornelis Venema devotes an entire chapter to the new heavens and earth in his *The Promise of the Future*.[6] He includes one brief paragraph in which he asserts that the new heavens and earth has been understood in two basic ways in church history; they will be brand new with no connection to the present world or they will be an overhauled version of it.[7] Michael Wittmer presents a case for a renewed earth where Christians will live forever pursuing a variety of cultural pursuits.[8] This thesis receives an expanded treatment by Randy Alcorn in a volume which attempts to address specific

3 All scripture citations in this dissertation are taken from the King James Version to be found at www.blueletterbible.org.

4 It may be noticed that the first three occurrences of the phrase contain the plural "heavens" while Revelation 21:1 uses the singular "heaven." This distinction does not appear to have been deemed important in the primary or secondary sources consulted for this dissertation. Both forms will be used interchangeably in this study.

5 For a thorough treatment of pre-critical hermeneutics, see Richard Muller, *Holy Scripture: The Cognitive Foundation of Theology*, vol. 2 of *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, Ca. 1520 to Ca. 1725* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).

6 Cornelis P. Venema, *The Promise of the Future* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 454–488.

7 Venema, *The Promise of the Future*, 460. Venema cites Herman Bavinck's *The Last Things* as his source for examples of adherents to the belief in a completely new world. These sources include Origen, Lutherans, Mennonites, Socinians, Beza, Junius and the Remonstrants. Venema does not give examples of those who held to some form of continuity between the present world and the world to come.

8 Michael E. Wittmer, *Heaven Is a Place on Earth: Why Everything You Do Matters to God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 201–207.

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questions about the activities and characteristics of the renovated world.[9] As valuable as these and similar contributions are to a systematic and practical understanding of the new heavens and earth, their focus is not to elucidate its history of interpretation.

As distinct from the systematicians, historians of Christian thought have tended to explore three other avenues in eschatology. The first avenue winds through works concerned with heaven as it has been conceived in Christian history. The title of Ulrich Simon's study, *Heaven in the Christian Tradition,* suggests that the broad sweep of Christian history will be previewed.[10] In reality it is a study of heaven looking at Old Testament and New Testament texts, supplemented with references to inter-testamental literature, rabbinic sources, and the apostolic fathers; the title notwithstanding, this eschatological road stops far short of the seventeenth century. In *A History of Heaven: The Singing Silence,* Jeffrey Russell covers more ground than Simon.[11] Russell explores Christian concepts of heaven from 200 BCE to the early fourteenth century when Dante published the *Divine Comedy* in 1321. He chose to end his history with the *Divine Comedy* since he thinks it is the "highest expression of the tradition."[12] These two studies not only do not embrace the seventeenth century but they do not discuss the promise of a new heavens and a new earth.

Two other histories of heaven attempt to cover the topic from the time of Christ to the present. Drawing on sources from all ages, Alistair McGrath approaches the topic of heaven thematically instead of chronologically.[13] His primary interest is in how heaven has been portrayed in literature as opposed to theological works. Since his interest is literature, he briefly engages the works of Bunyan, Baxter and Milton, but the topic of new heavens/new earth does not arise in his survey.

Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang provide the second attempt at surveying the history of heaven within the Christian tradition.[14] In chapter 6, the authors discuss sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth-century Protestant and Catholic conceptions of life after death for the saints. McDannell and Lang assert that both Calvin and Luther believed in a coming renovation of the earth, noting that Luther speculated that the saints might visit the earth in the eternal state, but

9 Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004). The title is slightly misleading for, as it turns out, the new earth is "the book's central subject." See Alcorn, *Heaven,* xvi.

10 Ulrich Simon, *Heaven in the Christian Tradition* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958).

11 Jeffrey Burton Russell, *A History of Heaven: The Singing Silence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

12 Russell, *A History of Heaven,* xiv.

13 Alistair McGrath, *A Brief History of Heaven*, Blackwell Brief Histories of Religion (Blackwell Publishing, 2003).

14 Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

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it would not be their home. Calvin did not allow for any earthly existence in the eternal state, be it temporary or permanent.[15]

Though Luther and Calvin believed the earth would continue to exist in a renovated form, McDannell and Lang assert that the Puritans largely gave up the idea. The great upheaval of the seventeenth century led to attention on the world to come and not this present one. Therefore,

> Heaven for the pious could never be a replica of the existing world. The old Reformation doctrine about the renewed world as a place of life everlasting was abandoned. Even those who predicted a fruitful earth during the millennium returned the righteous to their proper heavenly existence after the end of time. The other life, either immediately after death or after the millennium, freed the saints from the world; it did not continue their existence there.[16]

Later the authors claim that "[i]n the early seventeenth-century Protestant theology, belief in a new earth virtually disappeared" and "later Puritans had no real use for the concept."[17] Irrespective of the accuracy of this assessment, McDannell and Lang do not appear to have utilized any primary sources that attempted to exegete new heavens and earth biblical texts to substantiate their claim about the diminution of the earth in Puritan thought.[18]

Rather than attempt to write a history of heaven covering centuries of the Christian tradition, Philip Almond deals with just one century in his *Heaven and Hell in Enlightenment England*.[19] Almond's primary emphasis is on the conceptions of life after death that were extant between 1650 and 1750. Almond does not discuss interpretations of the new heaven and new earth as a main point. His main focus is on the journey of a soul/body from its origin to its future destiny, with a great deal of time being given over to the fate of the wicked. That being said, some seventeenth-century interpretations of the new heavens and new earth appear as part of Almond's discussion of the conflagration of the earth and its aftermath. Some of those interpretations include the earth becoming hell, becoming a comet, falling into the sun, or hosting a rational form of life that is not human. As beneficial as Almond's research is, it leaves room for expansion. First, he does not consider the first half of the seventeenth century at all, and second, his research into the interpretation of key texts is limited to Calvin's commentary

15 McDannell and Lang, *Heaven*, 154.

16 McDannell and Lang, *Heaven*, 172. The quote implies that it was standard fare during the Reformation to believe that the earth would be the home of the saints. Though the eschatology of the Reformation era is not the focus of this study, that conclusion seems hastily drawn.

17 McDannell and Lang, *Heaven*, 377.

18 The ensuing chapters will undermine the accuracy of McDannell and Lang's judgment about the place of the earth in Puritan thought.

19 Philip C. Almond, *Heaven and Hell in Enlightenment England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

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on Isaiah, the annotated Bible produced under the auspices of the Westminster Assembly in 1645 and Henry More's works on Daniel and Revelation—hardly a large sample of the available exegetical material.

In addition to the road that explores histories of heaven, a second avenue that leads to eschatological thought in the seventeenth century wends its way through studies on apocalyptic thought in general and on millenarianism in particular.[20] Joy Gilsdorf published her dissertation on the apocalyptic ideas of New England Puritans with her chief concern being how their apocalyptic orientation significantly shaped their conceptions of church polity and philosophy of history.[21] Gilsdorf offers useful background material for understanding Thomas Brightman and Joseph Mede as well as the general apocalyptic tenor of England and especially New England in the seventeenth century.[22] In addition, she provides a helpful discussion of the influence of the commentaries on Revelation written by Brightman, Patrick Forbes, and Henry Alsted. However, it is their influence with respect to the millennium that is the concern of Gilsdorf, not their interpretations of the new heavens and earth.

Eugen Weber writes about the history of apocalyptic beliefs from John the Apostle to the twentieth century.[23] Acknowledging that he is offering more of a narrative than an interpretation,[24] Weber's treatment of the seventeenth century consists of cataloging the signs of the eschatological fervor of the times: self-

20 The review of scholarly literature that follows is primarily focused on English millenarianism, a potent force in the years leading up to and embracing England's civil war and its aftermath. But it should be noted millennial expectations were not confined to English soil. On the Continent, Johannes Piscator, Johann Amos Comenius and Johann Heinrich Alsted all espoused some version of a future millennium. In 1999, Maria Rosa Antognazza and Howard Hotson stated that "…continental millenarianism still remains a relatively little studied topic…" and partially addressed this gap by comparing Alsted and Leibniz on the millennium. The next year, Hotson published an entire monograph on Alsted, devoting a large section to the influences on Alsted's developing millennial expectations. See Maria Rosa Antognazza and Howard Hotson, eds., *Alsted and Leibniz: On God, the Magistrate and the Millennium*, Wolfenbutteler Arbeiten zur Barockforschung 34 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1999), 127–128 and Howard Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted 1588–1638: Between Renaissance, Reformation, and Universal Reform* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 182–222. A classic study of northern and central European medieval millennial hopes is Norman Cohn's *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974, reprint 1974). His study focuses on the eleventh-sixteenth centuries with an appendix devoted to the Ranters in seventeenth-century England, who were the heirs of the Free Spirit heresy.

21 Joy Gilsdorf, *The Puritan Apocalypse: New England Eschatology in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. John Murrin, Outstanding Studies in Early American History (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1989), n.p.

22 Brightman and Mede both wrote influential commentaries on the book of Revelation. Their interpretation of the new heavens and earth will be examined in chapter 2.

23 Eugen Weber, *Apocalypses: Prophecies, Cults, and Millennial Beliefs through the Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

24 Weber, *Apocalypses*, 5.

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proclaimed prophets and messiahs preached the end of the age, speculations about the millennium abounded, and identifications of the Antichrist centered on the Pope. His only reference to the new heavens and new earth comes in connection with his discussion of Milton's *Paradise Lost.* According to Weber, in this work God claims that the aftermath of the final conflagration will be a purified earth.[25]

Bryan Ball chronicles the eschatological zeal of English Protestants up until 1660.[26] He argues that the preeminent cause of the fervor of the century is "the inherent religious feeling of the age" fueled by Reformation theology and the belief in Scripture as God's word to humanity.[27] Appropriately then, Ball does not neglect exegetical works in his analysis. In chapter 2 he examines the interpretations given to Daniel and Revelation offered by John Napier, Brightman, Arthur Dent and Mede. Yet this examination does not cover their understandings of the new heavens and new earth. His only comment about the new heavens and new earth appears at the beginning of chapter 5:

> Men could aver with equal conviction that the promises of a new heaven and a new earth were to be realized, either temporally in a glorious state of the church that would prevail in the latter days prior to the final consummation of all, or eternally in a literal new creation when the earth would be restored to its primitive glory.[28]

Ball correctly identifies two interpretations of the new heavens and earth among English Protestants, but he leaves unexamined the exegetical conversation which surrounded those two interpretations. It is also worth noting that while Ball claims there were advocates of a renovated earth in the eternal state prior to 1660, McDannell and Lang assert that in the early part of the seventeenth-century belief in a restored earth "virtually disappeared." This discrepancy of thought with respect to the prevalence of belief in a renovated earth in the early seventeenth century suggests that a closer analysis of the relevant data is needed.

In an older work, D. H. Kromminga presents an historical overview of the millennium.[29] He traces chiliastic ideas from the patristic writers to the first half of the twentieth century. His treatment of sixteenth and seventeenth-century millenarian thought is limited to its political manifestations of the time—mainly the Anabaptists on the Continent and the Fifth Monarchy Men in England. How the interpretation of new heavens and earth texts may have contributed to po-

25 Weber, *Apocalypses*, 74.

26 Bryan W. Ball, *A Great Expectation: Eschatological Thought in English Protestantism to 1660*, ed. Heiko A. Oberman, Studies in the History of Christian Thought, vol. 12 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975).

27 Ball, *A Great Expectation*, 5–7.

28 Ball, *A Great Expectation*, 157.

29 D. H. Kromminga, *The Millennium in the Church: Studies in the History of Christian Chiliasm* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1945).

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litical chiliasm is absent from his analysis. The same can be said for Timothy Weber's very brief account of the influence of millennial thought on the political developments in England in the 1640s and 1650s.[30]

In a book edited by Peter Toon, several scholars contribute essays on Puritan views of the millennium.[31] These essays chronicle the shift from a dominant Augustinian historicist approach to the millennium to the belief in a future millennium, accompanied by a conversion of the Jews and collapse of the papacy.[32] The book's narrow focus prevents the authors from dealing with seventeenth-century understandings of the consummation in general or the new heavens and new earth in particular.

James Davidson's *The Logic of Millennial Thought: Eighteenth-Century New England* is the final stop on the apocalyptic/millennial avenue. Although Davidson is concerned with millennial ideas during the eighteenth century, he does not exclude some forays into intellectual antecedents in the seventeenth century.[33] His research focuses on whether the book of Revelation and its interpretation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries "disposed people to think or act in certain consistent ways."[34] His analysis does not touch on the interpretation of new heavens and new earth except in one small passage where he describes the view of Charles Chauncy who held to the belief that the earth was the home of the saints in eternity.[35]

The third highway to traverse in order to investigate seventeenth-century conceptions of a new heavens and earth travels through the territory of history of interpretation of specific biblical texts. This particular highway is rather short. Of the handful of works interested in past interpretations of biblical texts, only a few focus on seventeenth-century thought, and none of those include the passages mentioning the new heavens and earth. More general works include those of Kenneth Newport, Jonathan Kirsch, and Katharine Firth. Newport examines the interpretation of the book of Revelation between the years 1600–1800. His focus is on Baptist, Methodist, English Anglican and Roman Catholic readings.[36] He specifically states that his work is not within the genre of the history of biblical interpretation or the genre of the history of biblical research. "Rather, we are

30 Timothy P. Weber, "Millennialism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, ed. Jerry L. Walls (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 374–375.

31 Peter Toon, ed., *Puritans, the Millennium and the Future of Israel: Puritan Eschatology 1600 to 1660* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1970).

32 Toon, *Puritan Eschatology*, 6–7.

33 James West Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought: Eighteenth-Century New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), ix.

34 Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought*, x.

35 Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought*, 110.

36 Kenneth Newport, *Apocalypse and Millennium: Studies in Biblical Eisegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), n.p.

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concerned here with the history of *popular* exegesis and the interaction between the biblical text and the *non*-critical interpreter of it."[37] Newport provides some background to the interpretation of Revelation as a whole during the seventeenth century, but never studies the interpretation of Revelation 21. One of Newport's key themes is that Revelation was subject to considerable eisegesis, providing a scriptural foundation for the demonization of particular social or religious groups. In a similar vein, Jonathan Kirsch attempts to reveal how the book of Revelation has been appropriated for dubious purposes. He argues that the book is and always has been "a potent rhetorical weapon in a certain kind of culture war, a war of contesting values and aspirations, that has been waged throughout human history."[38]

Katharine Firth has provided a finely grained monograph on apocalyptic thought in Britain between 1530 and 1645.[39] Though apocalyptic is her broad category, a significant portion of the study covers the interpretation of Revelation. Firth's chief interest lies in how certain writers saw the relationship between the prophecies of Revelation and historical events. The bulk of the work deals extensively with John Bale, John Foxe, John Napier, John Knox, Hugh Broughton, Thomas Brightman, Walter Raleigh and George Hakewill. The topic of the new heaven and new earth surfaces very briefly on a few occasions when Firth mentions the views of John Bale and Walter Raleigh, the former from the sixteenth century and the latter from the seventeenth century. Both apparently affirmed a transformation of the existing material world.[40]

Historical analysis of specific texts in Revelation includes David Brady's examination of the interpretation of the number 666 between 1560–1830.[41] Rodney Petersen investigates the extant explanations of the two witnesses in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[42] Although other texts could be added to this list, suffice it to say that the exegetical history of the new heavens and new earth has

37 Newport, *Apocalypse and Millennium*, 3. Newport adds: "This is an area that has been much neglected, but its potential significance in the field of social and religious history suggests that it is worthy of considerable further research."

38 Jonathan Kirsch, *A History of the End of the World: How the Most Controversial Book in the Bible Changed the Course of Western Civilization* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 17.

39 Katharine R. Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain 1530–1645* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

40 Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition.* See pages 56 and 181 for her comments on Bale and Raleigh respectively.

41 David Brady, *The Contribution of British Writers between 1560 and 1830 to the Interpretation of Revelation 13.16–18 (the Number of the Beast): A Study in the History of Exegesis*, ed. Oscar Cullmann et al., Beitrage zur Geschichte der Biblischen Exegese, 27 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1983). See the introduction, especially 5–6.

42 Rodney Petersen, *Preaching in the Last Days: The Theme Of "Two Witnesses" in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

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yet to be examined.[43] The purpose of this study is to amend that situation with respect to seventeenth-century England.

No studies have been found that dedicate themselves to the understanding of this promise of a new heavens and earth in the eschatologically-charged world of seventeenth-century England. Scholars that do mention the promise give it scant attention and they ignore the exegetical tradition that lay behind it. This dissertation proposes to help fill this void in historical theology and, in so doing, provide a more nuanced picture of eschatological thought in England between 1600–1700.[44] Hence this dissertation could be classified as a work on the history of interpretation of the new heavens and earth as it existed in England in the seventeenth century. Such a study will not only shed light on that period's understandings of that particular phrase, but it will also contribute to how the broader topic of eschatology was understood during one of England's most turbulent centuries.

In the pages that follow, it will be shown that the interpretive labors of English divines produced varying accounts of the new heavens and earth. These accounts appear within several literary genres: commentary, catechism, sermon, tract and treatise. The authors of these documents encompass the well-known figures of the day as well as figures who, for whatever reasons, chose to remain anonymous. The religious loyalties represented by the authors range from Anglicans to Presbyterians to Independents to Baptists. These differences reveal the knottiness of trying to write the history of interpretation of the new heavens and earth.

Before turning to the study itself, it is helpful to be familiar with what could be considered to be the general eschatological outlook of that age as it is reflected in the contemporary creeds and bodies of divinity of the century. None of the major creeds produced in the century ever mentions the new heavens and earth. These statements of faith reveal a reticence to advocate for any particular eschatological scheme other than supporting a resurrection and judgment of all of humanity at

43 One of the reasons for the paucity of scholarly work on the history of interpretation of any single biblical text has likely been the difficulty of obtaining primary sources from the seventeenth century. One was restricted to the works of major figures whose works have been reissued from time to time, or one needed to travel to, or live near, the few libraries that hold original copies. Fortunately, the vast array of documents from the seventeenth century is now available through online databases such as, to give one example, Early English Books Online. These databases make it possible for scholars to construct a more nuanced assessment of any topic that was discussed in a given time frame.

44 It should be noted that while the focus will be on the seventeenth century, a degree of latitude on either side of that century will be permitted. The periodization of history into one hundred year blocks is an artifice that provides a convenient starting point for the research but need not be followed strictly. Thus documents that precede or follow the seventeenth century may be surveyed if they are determined to be relevant to the research.

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the return of Christ.[45] Crawford Gribben bears this out in his examination of several major confessions—the Scots Confession (1560), the Irish Articles (1615), the First London Confession (1644), the Westminster Confession (1647), the Savoy Confession (1658), and the Second Baptist Confession (1677/1689). Gribben clearly shows that confessional pronouncements with respect to the end times are "remarkably conservative."[46] He concludes that "Puritan confessions repeatedly refuse to endorse the radical eschatologies defended in the individual writings of some of the very theologians who composed them."[47] Although some of the "radical eschatologies" were deeply held by their proponents, they must have believed that the inclusion of these beliefs was not fitting for corporate affirmations. Framers of these confessions consistently opted for a less-is–more approach with respect to their creedal statements about the end times.[48]

Discussion of the new heavens and earth in summaries of doctrine written by individuals rather than by groups is slightly more detailed, as the following examples will demonstrate. Elnathan Parr wrote a work in catechetical fashion exploring basic Christian doctrine.[49] He comments that in preparation for the final judgment of mankind, the heaven and earth will be consumed with fire. He qualifies this statement by adding that the fire will not annihilate the substance of the heaven and earth "but only the figure changed, and the vanity purged out."[50] Two years later, another catechism, written by Thomas Cartwright, broaches the

45 Hence, if one compares the creedal affirmations about the end of the world found in the first few centuries of church history with the affirmations found in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, one discovers that they are remarkably consistent.

46 Crawford Gribben, "The Eschatology of the Puritan Confessions," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 20, no. 1 (2002): 77.

47 Gribben, *Puritan Confessions*, 78.

48 Gribben implies that this methodology continued that of the Reformation era. He argues that the early Reformed thinkers repudiated the eschatological complexities that had arisen within the church during medieval times. Instead, they streamlined their explanations of the end of the world. See Gribben, *Puritan Confessions*, 56–57.

49 Elnathan Parr, *The Grounds of Diuinitie Plainely Discouering the Mysteries of Christian Religion, Propounded Familiarly in Diuers Questions and Answeres: Substantially Proued by Scriptures; Expounded Faithfully, According to the Writings of the Best Diuines, and Euidently Applyed by Profitable Vses, for the Helpe and Benefite of the Vnlearned Which Desire Knowledge. To the Which Is Prefixed a Very Profitable Treatise, Containing an Exhortation to the Study of the Word, with Singular Directions for the Hearing and Reading of the Same. By Elnathan Parr Minister of the Word, at Palgraue in Suffolke*, (London : Printed by N. O[kes] for Samuel Man, and are to be sold at his shop, in Pauls church-yard, at the signe of the Ball, 1614), *Early English Books Online*, Bodleian Library.

50 Parr, *The Grounds of Diuinitie*, 235. [Note: unless otherwise indicated, all direct quotes taken from primary sources will retain the spelling and typeface formatting of the original. Seventeenth-century documents mixed italics and roman typeface in the printing of the work, often with no discernible reason to the modern reader. Spelling was also not yet standardized and a word might be spelled multiple ways, sometimes within the same document.]

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topic.[51] While discoursing on the second coming of Christ, Cartwright briefly mentions the fate of creation: "Yes; that the heavens, and the earth, and all the creatures of God, shall be put in a new liverie against the coming of Christ; and therefore that we should much more cleanse our selves, thereby to bee fit to inhabit such changed and cleansed places as the heavens are."[52] Unfortunately, Cartwright does not expand on the idea of "a new liverie" or in what manner the godly will "inhabit such changed and cleansed places as the heavens are." He is clear that the righteous will inherit the kingdom of God and "every godly one shall bee a king in heaven."[53] From heaven, the godly will be able to compare their own glory with the glory of the immortal "dumbe creatures" that will possess "a kind of glory."[54] The ungodly will be condemned and cast into hell, following which Christ will ascend to heaven taking the elect with him.[55]

In William Ames' *Marrow of Theology*, Ames makes two propositions (out of 34) about the material world.[56] While never mentioning the new heaven or new earth explicitly, the first proposition claims the "fire that is appointed to purge and renew the World" will follow the judgment of mankind.[57] The second proposition states that the elements will change but not be "taken away", obviously a phrase implying renewal rather than destruction.[58]

51 Thomas Cartwright and William Bradshaw, *A Treatise of Christian Religion. Or, the Whole Bodie and Substance of Diunintie* [sic]. *By T.C* (At London : Imprinted by Felix Kyngston, for Thomas Man, 1616), *Early English Books Online*, Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery. Cartwright died in 1603 but several of his works were published posthumously. This work was initially published in 1611 but apparently contained many errors. It was reissued in 1616 for the express purpose of amending those errors. See *To the Christian Reader* at the beginning of the 1616 edition. For the 1611 edition, see Thomas Cartwright, *Christian Religion: Substantially, Methodicalli[E,] [Pla]Inlie, and Profitablie Treatised* (London : Printed by Felix Kingston for Thomas Man, 1611) *Early English Books Online*, British Library. John Hunt calls Cartwright "the first who gave tangible form and expression to the Presbyterianism of the Church of England" as well as "the earliest complete incarnation of Puritanism." See John Hunt, *Religious Thought in England: From the Reformation to the End of the Last Century*, vol. 1 (London: Strahan & Co., 1870; reprint, 1973), 49.

52 Cartwright and Bradshaw, *A Treatise of Christian Religion*, 303.

53 Cartwright and Bradshaw, *A Treatise of Christian Religion*, 306.

54 Cartwright and Bradshaw, *A Treatise of Christian Religion*, 311.

55 Cartwright and Bradshaw, *A Treatise of Christian Religion*, 309.

56 William Ames, *[the] Marrow of Sacred Divinity Drawne out of the Holy Scriptures and the Interpreters Thereof, and Brought into Method / by William Ames… ; Translated out of the Latine, for the Benefit of Such Who Are Not Acquainted with Strange Tongues ; Whereunto Are Annexed Certaine Tables Representing the Substance and Heads of All in a Short View, Directing to the Chapters Where They Are Handled; as Also a Table Opening the Hard Words Therein Contained ; a Worke Usefull for This Season*, Early English Books, 1641–1700 / 1114:23 (London: Printed by Edward Griffin for Henry Overton…, 1642).

57 Ames, *[the] Marrow of Sacred Divinity*, 189.

58 Ames, *[the] Marrow of Sacred Divinity*, 189.

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