

THE TWO MODES OF HUMANITY, PART 3: OBJECTIONS AND RESPONSES

PHILIPPE R. STERLING

Pastor
Vista Ridge Bible Fellowship
Lewisville, TX

I. INTRODUCTION

As stated in part one of this three-part series, most Evangelicals do not believe that there will be children born in the eternal state. In this article, I will consider the objections they raise and will respond to those objections.

The objections to the view from interpreters such as John Walvoord, Craig Blaising, Tony Garland, David L. Turner, Floyd S. Elmore, and Joseph Dillow will be considered. It will be proposed that a lingering influence of Platonism and Neo-Platonism may have contributed to some of the objections.

II. OBJECTIONS AND RESPONSES

The modern commentary tradition rarely addresses the view of two humanities in the eternal state. When it has been addressed, it has sometimes been misrepresented or simply mentioned, and then dismissed. Rarely has it been accurately represented and seriously engaged.

Among revised dispensational premillennialists, the possibility of two modes of humanity in the eternal state is rarely brought up. For example, in essays in a Festschrift dedicated to J. Dwight Pentecost, neither Donald K. Campbell nor Louis A. Barbieri Jr., address the possibility when writing about the

eternal state.¹ The pattern is usually simply to assert that all humanity will be in glorified bodies in the new heaven and earth. Barbieri reflects this in the following comment:

Though it cannot be dogmatically asserted, it appears that at this time there will be a total remaking of the present world system... Regenerated people in physical bodies who did not follow Satan in his rebellion could not survive such an intense refinement of the earth. Although the Bible does not say what will happen to these people while this process is taking place, it is reasonable to conclude that they will experience a “rapture” into the heavenly city, Jerusalem. In order for these people to enter the heavenly city, they must experience a change from human bodies to glorified bodies...With the completing of these events all mankind will be in one of two places: either eternally separated from God in the lake of fire, or eternally present with God in glorified bodies in the new heaven and the new earth.²

Someone as significant as John F. Walvoord, president of Dallas Theological Seminary from 1952 to 1986, misrepresented the view in his commentary on Revelation. He wrote:

Larkin introduces the startling point of view that children will be born in the eternal state who, unlike the posterity of Adam and Eve, will be sinless. There is no indication whatsoever in Scripture that resurrected and translated beings have the quality of human sex, much less the capacity to produce offspring.³

Larkin did not say, as Walvoord implies, that resurrected and translated beings produced offspring. He said representatives of the Millennial nations do so. Marty Cauley comments on Walvoord’s misrepresentation:

¹ Donald K. Campbell and Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, edited by Stanley D. Toussaint and Charles H. Dyer (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1986).

² *Ibid.*, 179.

³ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1966), 327.

This position does not argue that “resurrected and translated” human beings will have offspring. On the contrary, it is acknowledged that resurrected human beings will not be involved sexually or have offspring (Mk 12:25). What is argued, by the advocates of this position, is that some human beings who survive the millennium in flesh and blood bodies will be translated into the eternal state without undergoing death and thus without experiencing the resurrection or receiving glorified bodies. The change they undergo will be the removal of their sin nature, not the removal of their flesh and blood status or sexual ability. Larkin was neither the first nor the last interpreter to suggest this solution.⁴

Craig Blaising, a progressive dispensationalist who served as professor of systematic theology at Dallas Theological Seminary and is Executive Vice President and Provost of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, presents a fairly accurate summary of the two modes of humanity in the eternal state view without addressing its Scriptural support or specifically citing its adherents.⁵ He gives the impression that the view is generally representative of Classical Dispensationalism. He appears to summarily dismiss the view in this quote about the church in the eternal state:

One of the striking differences between progressives and earlier dispensationalists is that progressives do not view the church as an anthropological category in the same class as terms like Israel, Gentile Nations, Jews, and Gentile people. The church is neither a separate race of humanity (in contrast to Jews and Gentiles) nor a competing nation (alongside Israel and Gentile nations), nor is it a group of angelic-like humans destined for the heavens in

⁴ Marty A. Cauley, *The Outer Darkness: Its Interpretation and Implications* (Sylva, NC: Misthological Press, 2012), 645.

⁵ Craig A. Blaising, “The Extent and Varieties of Dispensationalism,” in *Progressive Dispensationalism*, eds. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 23-24.

contrast to the rest of redeemed humanity on the earth.⁶

Tony Garland, in a commentary on Revelation, engages the two humanities view.⁷ He quotes Seiss, Larkin, Thomas, and others. He summarizes his objections to the view:

The proposal that human beings, in natural bodies, continue to populate the eternal state as separate peoples from the glorified saints seems to raise as many issues as it attempts to solve. Nor does it account for the ultimate unity among the redeemed of eternity in its proposal that flesh and blood *can* inherit the eternal kingdom of God. Neither does it provide additional insight into the purpose of the tree of life in the eternal state because it proposes conditions no different than those in the Garden of Eden for which the mystery of the need for a tree of life during conditions of sinless perfection remains. As intriguing as the view may be to some, it seems to go beyond Scripture and fails to provide significant benefit in an understanding of eternity.⁸

Garland's objections are adequately answered in the definition of the two classes of humanity. One class consists of those who rule and reign (inherit the kingdom), while the other class consists of those in natural and transformed bodies who inhabit the new earth. His objections seem to be simply rooted in a personal preference for the single united humanity view in eternity.

David L. Turner raises the question of the nature of life in the New Jerusalem and in doing so addresses the two humanities view.⁹ While discussing the book of Revelation, he comments:

⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁷ Tony Garland, *A Testimony of Jesus Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, Vol. 2 (SpiritAndTruth.org, 2007), notes on Rev 21:24 and 22:2. The notes are available on the internet at http://www.spiritandtruth.org/download/revelation/TestimonyOfJesusChrist_vol2.pdf. Accessed 12/11/12..

⁸ *Ibid.*, 168 (pdf file).

⁹ David L. Turner, "The New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:1–22:5", in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, eds. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 289.

This matter is particularly challenging because of the mention of such features as the glory of earthly kings being brought into the city (21:24-27) and the evident need for the healing of the nations (22:3)...One possible approach to this question would be that the saved individuals who survive the Tribulation and enter the Millennium in an unglorified state will remain in such a state when the Millennium gives way to the new heaven and earth. If that were the case, however, all things would not have been made new (21:4), and flesh and blood would have inherited the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:50).¹⁰

Again, the simple answer to his objections is found in the definition of the two humanities as being composed of a glorified humanity who inherit the eternal kingdom and a transformed natural humanity rendered incapable of sin who inhabit the new earth. Such a view of eternity could also accurately be described as completely “new.”

Floyd S. Elmore addresses the question of the two modes of humanity in the eternal state in his 1990 Dallas Theological Seminary dissertation, *A Critical Examination of the Doctrine of the Two Peoples of God in John Nelson Darby*. He asserts that, “two people of God as to mode of existence will continue through the millennium. This is a necessity of premillennial interpretation.”¹¹ Concerning the eternal state, however, he concludes:

With the arrival of the eternal state, two positions are possible concerning the continuation of the two people of God. On the one hand, the eternal distinction between the two modes of life is suggested theologically by the ultimate fulfillment of God’s original creative purpose. This position affirms humanity as originally created to be an *eternal* purpose of God, and not a mere means to the end of having glorified humans in fellowship with God forever on a new

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Floyd S. Elmore, *A Critical Examination of the Doctrine of the Two Peoples of God in John Nelson Darby* (PhD Diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1992), 310.

earth. Such an eternal state with two peoples would be dynamic and expanding...On the other hand, the position holding to one people of God in eternity as to mode is suggested theologically by the necessity for the salvation of all who enter that final state. If they are called and justified, they must also be glorified, which implies a transformation of their natural humanity. Such an eternal state would be static, however, having “locked” all who arrive into a mode of existence which precludes propagation of the race. The adoption formula associated with the resurrection and ascension of Christ (Ps 2:7 used in Acts 13:33, Heb 1:5; 5:5) is applied to all “overcomers” who enter the eternal state (Rev 21:3, 7), possibly suggesting that all occupants of the New Jerusalem will be in a resurrected-glorified state...Although the distinction among classes of saints in the eternal heavenly mode is suggested by Scripture, the utility of such distinction is hard to determine. The historical categories of Heb 12:22-24 may be reporting who arrives at the eternal state without intending to infer that those classifications are eternal. This seems reasonable in the light of the omission of such categories from Rev 21:1-7...Although Darby and many dispensationalists give good reasons for two eternal modes of life, one people as to mode in the New Jerusalem on earth seems to this writer to be the most likely alternative. Therefore, the bride of Christ may include all the redeemed and glorified from all dispensations brought together in one sphere of existence upon the inauguration of the eternal state.¹²

Elmore affirms that the two modes of humanity in the eternal state are suggested theologically by the fulfillment of God’s original creative purpose and by Scripture. His objection is based on the theological supposition that all who enter the eternal state must be glorified. This is an inference which is adequately answered by the definition of the two modes of humanity in the eternal state. He states that the utility of such distinction is

¹² Ibid., 310-11.

hard to determine. That utility is found in his statement that an eternal state with two peoples would be dynamic and expanding, and an eternal state with one mode would be static. His adoption of the one-mode view appears to be simply a personal preference.

Joseph Dillow adopts the one-mode view in his book *Final Destiny*.¹³ His argument rests on the theological inference that 1 Cor 15:50-58 refers to a postmillennial transformation of the living and the resurrection of the dead who died during the millennium. It does not refer to a pre-tribulational rapture. He provides his answers to objections but his view remains an inference and not an explicit teaching of the text. He states in a footnote, “There is no room here for two kinds of bodies in the eternal state, enhanced mortal bodies...and the glorified resurrection bodies mentioned elsewhere.”¹⁴ The two-mode view does not maintain that natural humanity in the eternal state merely have enhanced mortal bodies. Millennial natural humanity has an enhanced mortal body but in the eternal state is rendered immortal and incapable of sin, though still natural and capable of propagation.

Both the one-mode view and two-mode views of humanity in the eternal state are theological inferences from Scriptural texts. Both advance plausible answers to objections and positive arguments. An interpreter’s predisposition concerning the natural and spiritual state may influence which view he finds most attractive.

III. LINGERING INFLUENCE OF PLATONISM AND NEO-PLATONISM?

A lingering influence of Platonism and Neo-Platonism may account for some interpreters’ predisposition to a one-mode view of humanity in the eternal state.¹⁵ Vlach discusses both of these philosophical systems. First, he addresses Platonism:

¹³ Joseph Dillow, *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings* (The Woodlands, TX: Grace Theology Press, 2013), 99-119.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 118.

¹⁵ A helpful article by Michael J. Vlach, “Platonism’s Influence on Christian Eschatology,” can be found at http://theologicalstudies.org/files/resources/Platonism_and_Eschatology_article_%28PDF%29.pdf (accessed

Platonism is rooted in the ideas of the great ancient Greek philosopher, Plato (427–347 BC). Plato was one of the first philosophers to argue that reality is primarily ideal or abstract. With his “theory of forms,” he asserted that ultimate reality is not found in objects and concepts that we experience on earth. Instead, reality is found in “forms” or “ideas” that transcend our physical world...One result of Platonism was the belief that matter is inferior to the spiritual... This perspective naturally leads to negative perceptions concerning the nature of the physical world and even our human bodies.¹⁶

Platonism had a direct impact on Neo-Platonism. Vlach comments:

Platonism also influenced its more religious counterpart, Neo-Platonism. Neo-Platonism was a complex system for understanding reality that was founded by the Roman philosopher Plotinus (AD 204–270). The Egyptian-born Plotinus carried on some of the main ideas of Plato such as (1) there is an immaterial reality that exists apart from the physical world; (2) a strong distinction exists between an immaterial soul and the physical body; and (3) the immortal soul finds its ultimate fulfillment as it becomes one with an eternal, transcendent realm. According to Plotinus, the lowest level of reality is matter. Thus, matter is viewed very negatively in Neo-Platonism. Plotinus himself held such disgust for physical things that he even despised his own body.¹⁷

Vlach relates Platonism to Christian eschatology by discussing two broad models of eternal life held by Christians since the time of the early church. Craig Blaising has contributed to

12/11/12). See also the Appendix “Christoplatonism’s False Assumptions” in Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2004), 459-66.

¹⁶ Vlach, “Platonism,” 1-2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

the discussion.¹⁸ The first is the “spiritual vision model” which is influenced by Platonism. In this model, heaven is viewed primarily as a spiritual entity, the realm of spirit as opposed to base matter. Blaising explains, “This is the destiny of the saved, who will exist in that non-earthly, spiritual place as spiritual beings engaged eternally in spiritual activity.”¹⁹ The second is the “new creation model”:

This model is contrary to Platonism and the spiritual vision model and emphasizes the physical, social, political, and geographical aspects of eternal life. It emphasizes a coming new earth, the renewal of life on this new earth, bodily resurrection, and social and political interactions among the redeemed...A new creation model emphasizes the future relevance of matters such as renewal of the world and universe, nations, kings, economics, agriculture, and social-political issues. In sum, a new creation model operates on the belief that life in the future kingdom of God is largely similar to God’s purposes for the creation before the fall of Adam, which certainly involved more than just a spiritual element.²⁰

Vlach observes that premillennialists today often stress a new creation approach to the coming earthly millennium, but often drift toward a spiritual vision approach to the eternal state or fail to specifically address the eternal state. They offer “little discussion of the social, political, economic, agricultural, geographical, and other physical dimensions of the eternal state.”²¹ In his view, there is significant material from Isaiah 60–66 and Revelation 21–22 for the study of the eternal state and premillennialists should specifically address the continuities and discontinuities between the millennium and the eternal state. Vlach does not bring up the topic of the two modes of humanity in the eternal state but one must wonder how much a

¹⁸ See Craig A. Blaising, “Premillennialism” in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 27

²⁰ Vlach, “Platonism,” 6-7.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 16

lingering influence of Platonism and Neo-Platonism may affect the neglect or rejection of the view on the part of many modern premillennialists.

Randy Alcorn may have been thus influenced. In the “Will There Be Marriage, Families, and Friendship?” chapter of his book *Heaven* he states:

If human marriage existed on the New Earth, by all means I would expect it to include sex. Sexual relations existed before the Fall and were not the product of sin and the Curse; they were God’s perfect design. Since the lifting of the Curse will normally restore what God originally made, we would expect sex to be part of that. Given what we know about continuity between this life and the next, marriage and sex seem natural carryovers...However, as we’ve seen, Christ made it clear that people in Heaven wouldn’t be married to each other. He wasn’t talking merely about the intermediate Heaven, but “in the resurrection.” He was specifically saying there will be no marriage among resurrected people on the resurrected Earth. This appears to be then an exception to the principle of continuity.²²

Alcorn goes on to say:

Certainly we should reject all christoplatonic assumptions that sex, which God called “very good,” would be unworthy of Heaven. Rather than viewing marriage and sex as bad things to be replaced by good ones, we should view them as good things somehow transformed or resurrected into better ones.²³

Alcorn is right that Christ taught that glorified humanity will not enter into marriage. He does not consider the possibility of a second mode of humanity that would not be glorified but enter into a perfect natural state for which marriage and procreation would continue to be a reality. One wonders if he is merely ignorant of that teaching among those that were listed earlier in this series. However, it is also possible that he neglects

²² Alcorn, *Heaven*, 338.

²³ *Ibid.*

or rejects the view because of a lingering “christoplatonic” influence on himself, despite his critique of it.

IV. CONCLUSION

From earliest times mankind has sought for immortality in a natural state. Perhaps this goes back to God’s original intention at the creation of man. The Fall brought death. Will God’s restoration of creation involve an eternal future for a natural, perfected humanity? Many dispensational premillennialists from the 19th Century to the present have taught from Scriptural texts and theological inference that there is an eternal future in the New Jerusalem and the new earth for both a glorified humanity and a natural perfected humanity. There are those who object to this view. Could the objections be more rooted in lingering Platonic and Neo-Platonic influences than upon the clear teaching of Scripture and theological inference?

No matter what an interpreter’s personal conclusion is after considering the Biblical and theological arguments, the view of two modes of humanity in the eternal state is one that should be accurately represented, respectfully engaged, and humbly acknowledged as a possibility. In discussing the matter, George N. H. Peters probably expressed the attitude we should possess when he said, “So far as the ordering of God in the matter is concerned, we are willing cordially to accept of the same, whatever it may be.”²⁴

²⁴ George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1972), 3:538.