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Radically New Beginning—Radically New End: Creation and Eschatology in the New Testament

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The term "eschatology," derived from the Greek adjective *eschatos* ("last," "final"), is a word with many meanings.[1] Essentially, it designates the doctrine about "last things." Daley observes that the core of eschatology is "faith in final solutions," therefore the concept of hope is inherent to it.[2] He points out that eschatology appeals to "the hope of believing people that the incompleteness of their present experience of God will be resolved, their present thirst for God fulfilled, their present need for release and salvation realized."[3] Thus, eschatology reflects fundamental Christian convictions about God, the world and human existence. It deals with God's final, decisive acts toward His creation in which His created order becomes renewed, His kingdom comes and His will is done "on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt 6:10).[4]

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[1] Markus Mühling (*T&T Clark Handbook of Christian Eschatology* [trans. J. Adams-Massmann and D. A. Gillard; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015], 3–14) names at least five different ways the term is used in scholarly discussion, and calls our attention to the linguistic confusion which led to uncertainty in scholarly circles regarding the actual object of eschatology.

[2] Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: The Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 1.

[3] Daley, *Hope*, 1.

[4] G. C. Berkouwer (*The Return of Christ* [Studies in Dogmatic; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972], 9) points out that the goal of eschatology is "not to deal with unrelated, independent events that are yet to take place; instead, it focuses on the concentration of all these events in the promise of Him who is the Last." He acknowledges that the last things

This study sets out the thesis that the concept of creation is of fundamental significance for New Testament eschatology. It acknowledges the view of Hardy that an "eschatological theology cannot be carried out in isolation from a doctrine of creation."[5] Clearly, without the creation we would have no categories to think about the eschaton at all, since, as Volf notes, "the eschaton is an eschaton of the creation, or it is no eschaton at all."[6] Movement toward the eschatological goal is one of the major themes in the biblical storyline, since essential to God's promises is His "making all things new" (Rev 21:5). His major interventions in history follow a consistent pattern: (1) chaos, subdued by (2) creation, resulting in (3) God's kingdom established, His order realized. Such a chaos—creation—kingdom pattern was repeated from time to time in salvation history and it was characteristic of God's mighty acts: the creation, the flood, the exodus and the return from Babylonian exile.[7] Since the Old Testament plotline provided the substructure for New Testament theology,[8] and since God is consistent in dealing with His creation, the theme of creation is, I argue in this study, integral to New Testament eschatology. Dumbrell, Scobie and Emerson have recently argued for the prominence of creation as one of the key theological themes in the biblical canon,[9] while Beale advances the

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center on the future return of Christ, a decisive moment for all creation.

[5] Lee Hardy, *The Fabric of This World: Inquiries into Calling, Career, and Design of Human Work* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 195.

[6] Miroslav Volf, "Eschaton, Creation, and Social Ethics," *CTJ* 30 (1995), 130–143(134).

[7] For God's consistency and creativity in working according to this pattern in salvation history, see Jon Paulien, *Meet God Again for the First Time* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2003).

[8] The Old Testament is not only a preliminary stage to the New Testament, but its major biblical-theological notions and thought framework exercised a formative influence on the theological thinking of the New Testament authors. This has been convincingly demonstrated in e.g. C.H. Dodd, *According to Scriptures: The Sub-Structure of New Testament Theology* (London: Nisbet, 1952); Peter Stuhlmacher, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (2 vols.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprechts, 1992–1999).

[9] William J. Dumbrell, *The End of the Beginning: Revelation 21–22 and the Old Testament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001); Charles H. H. Scobie, *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003); Matthew Y. Emerson, *Christ and the New Creation: A Canonical Approach to the Theology of the New Testament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013).

thesis that creation is the single central theme of both Testaments.[10] Engaging into this discussion is beyond the scope of this study, since the focus of the examination will be on eschatology, precisely on its relationship to the creation theme.

For our investigation it is of critical importance to explore, first of all, how the New Testament authors understood the concept of the "end time": what was their eschatological outlook? After laying down the foundation for our enterprise, I will identify and discuss three cardinal components of New Testament creation theology which are integral to the eschatological thinking of the New Testament authors. The analysis of these three components will reveal the points of contact between eschatology and creation within New Testament theology. Finally, the relation between protology and eschatology will be explored from a canonical perspective, maintaining the presupposition that the Bible narrates a unified, coherent meta-story of God's ongoing work in creation, therefore it provides an inspired ground for doing biblical theology.

The Eschatological Nature of the New Testament

Scholarly research of the last hundred years has amply demonstrated that eschatology cannot be relegated to a mere epilogue of theology.[11] This is mainly because the message of the New Testament as a whole is deeply eschatological in character, since the framework of thought of the early Christians, for whom the basic standpoint for understanding the gospel was salvation history, was also eschatological. Their basic conviction,

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[10] G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

[11] The eschatological character of early Christianity began to be more fully recognized only in the early 20th century, due to the work of Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer, New Testament scholars whose views evoked heated discussions. As a result, a number of different eschatological models have been developed in interpreting Jesus' message (consistent eschatology, realized eschatology, proleptic eschatology and models de-emphasizing eschatology). For a critical evaluation of the different approaches to Jesus' eschatology, see A. L. Moore, *The Parousia in the New Testament* (NovTSup, 13; Leiden: Brill, 1966), 35-79. Somewhat later, in the second part of the 20th century, Jürgen Moltmann (e.g. *Theology of Hope* [trans. James W. Leitch; London: SCM, 1967]) and Wolfhart Pannenberg (*Systematic Theology* [trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; 3 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991–1998]) emphasized in their influential studies the fundamental significance of eschatology for understanding New Testament thought and Christian faith.

expressed in the earliest preaching, worship and confessions of faith, was that the end-time predictions of the Old Testament have begun the process of fulfillment in Jesus Christ.[12] They believed that in Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection the history of salvation reached its climax and the foundation stone was laid for establishing the Kingdom of God. For this reason, our enquiry needs to start with the figure and message of Jesus of Nazareth, who is "the starting point and focus of the New Testament proclamation, and without an adequate understanding of him we cannot arrive at an adequate interpretation of the New Testament kerygma."[13]

Jesus' proclamation was an eschatological proclamation. Even though the Gospels record sayings that have no eschatological significance, the main mode of Jesus' preaching was undeniably eschatological. His focal message was that His appearance announced the arrival of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:15): the old era is passing away, because in His person and ministry a new era, the time of salvation has dawned. His healings and exorcisms acted as the visible manifestation of the in-breaking of the power of God's kingdom into the earthly reality: "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the Kingdom of God has come to you" (Luke 11:20).[14] Jesus' kingdom sayings reveal His conviction that the eschaton was already effective in His own person and ministry. His eschatological language, as observed by Wright, heralded the arrival of "the climax of Israel's history," the fulfillment of the Old Testament eschatological expectations which became realized in defeating the rule of evil itself.[15] While the cross and the resurrection were the key moments in achieving the decisive victory, the full "implementation" of the effects of the Christ-event is still in the future. Therefore, essential to Jesus' eschatological paradigm is a tension between "already" and "not yet," which implies a dynamic process: God's kingdom is inaugurated, yet not consummated. The old age and the new age overlap: the first is still present,

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[12] Even the celebration of the Lord's Supper, held in remembrance of the death and resurrection of Jesus, has a significant eschatological emphasis in the liturgical texts that could reflect fragments of the early liturgy (Matt 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18; 1 Cor 11:26; Did. 9:4).

[13] Hans Schwarz, *Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 68.

[14] All Bible texts are quoted from the NRSV unless otherwise noted.

[15] N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God, 2; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996).

while the second has been brought by the first advent of the Messiah. While the eschatological kingdom has invaded history in the person of Jesus bringing people freedom in the age of sin and death, the full consummation is in the future.[16]

The authors of the New Testament wrote with the conviction that the ministry of Jesus was the climactic fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, and they embraced Jesus' typological thinking according to which the "time of the antitypes had arrived" in Him.[17] Consequently, their writings present Jesus as a messianic figure whose ministry has not only redemptive, but also eschatological significance. Likewise, they present the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as a fulfillment of Old Testament eschatological promises, the sign of the eschatological age in which salvation is granted to all who call on the name of the Lord (Acts 2:1–21; cf. Joel 2:28–32). LaRondelle notes that "the whole New Testament is essentially characterized by the typological and eschatological application of the Old Testament, motivated and directed by the Holy Spirit."[18] It is a testimony about the fulfillment of God's promises concerning the coming of God's kingdom, the realization of Israel's hope about God's decisive intervention in history. Cullmann considers the transformative ministry of Jesus as the eschatologically interpreted "center of time," which redefined essentially the meaning of history.[19] Moore builds on this insight when he argues: "From the centre, Jesus Christ, the line of salvation history runs backwards through the covenant to creation and beyond, and forwards

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[16] For the "already but not yet" tension in Jesus' proclamation, see Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (trans. S.H. Hooke; London: SCM, 1954); Werner G. Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfillment: The Eschatological Message of Jesus* (trans. D.M. Barton; SBT, 23; London: SCM, 3rd edn, 1961); George E. Ladd, *Jesus and the Kingdom: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (London: SPCK, 1966).

[17] Hans K. LaRondelle, *Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation* (Andrews University Monographs–Studies in Religion, 13; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983), 37. LaRondelle (*Israel of God*, 54) claims that typology and prophecy are twin sisters, both pointing forward to the same realities in the future. He explains their internal connection by referring to Fritsch: "Typology differs from prophecy in the strict sense of the term only in the means of prediction. Prophecy predicts mainly by means of word, whereas typology predicts by institution, act or person."

[18] LaRondelle, *Israel of God*, 38.

[19] Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History* (trans. Floyd V. Filson; Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1950).

through the church and its mission to the Parousia and beyond."[20] Thus, biblical eschatology is grounded in Jesus and it is focused on His person and acts in relation to God's creation.

In light of the salvation-historical standpoint of the early Christians, it is not surprising that the New Testament authors perceived the beginning of Christian history as the beginning of the end times. The phrase "latter days" and its synonyms appear approximately 30 times in the New Testament, and rarely refer to the very end of history, but rather to the era starting with the ministry of Jesus in the first century.[21] As Beale convincingly argues, the "end-times" phrases of the New Testament have their roots in the language in the Old Testament, even though eschatological expectations are expressed in the Old Testament sometimes without using the vocabulary of "latter days," "end-times" and similar phrases. He concludes:

The New Testament repeatedly uses precisely the same phrase "latter days" as found in the Old Testament prophecies. And the meaning of the phrase is identical, except for one difference: in the New Testament the end-days predicted by the Old Testament are seen as beginning their fulfilment with Christ's first coming. All that the Old Testament foresaw would occur in the end-times has begun already in the first century and continues on into our present day . . . The establishment of His kingdom have (sic) been set in motion by Christ's life, death, resurrection and formation of the Christian church.[22]

Ample textual evidence demonstrates that the end-times are not limited to a future point in history, but that they extend throughout the entire Christian era. The first occurrence of the expression "last days" in the New Testament is found in Acts 2:17 (*en tais eschatais ēmerais*), where Peter interprets the experience of speaking in tongues at Pentecost as the fulfillment of Joel's end-time prophecy: "Indeed, these are not drunk . . .

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[20] Moore, *Parousia*, 90.

[21] For Beale's in-depth study on the question, see G.K. Beale, "The Eschatological Conception of New Testament Theology," in *'The Reader Must Understand': Eschatology in Bible and Theology*, ed. K. E. Brower and M. W. Elliott (Downers Grove, IL: Apollos, 1997), 11–52. For a shorter version of this essay, see idem, "The New Testament and New Creation," in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. S. J. Hafemann (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity; Leicester: Apollos, 2002), 159–173.

[22] Beale, "Eschatological Conception," 14.

No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh . . ." (2:15–17). In 1 Corinthians 10:11, at the end of a section in which Paul refers typologically to the events of Exodus (10:1–11),[23] he instructs the Corinthian Christians about the manner of their life with an exhortation that upon them "the ends of the ages have come" (*ta telē tōn aiōnōn*). In Galatians 4:4 Paul speaks of the "fullness of time" (*to plērōma tou chronou*) referring to the time of Jesus' birth, while in Ephesians 1:10 the expression "fullness of times" (*tou plērōmatos tōn kairōn*) designates the time when He began His rule over the cosmos as a consequence of His resurrection. These last two almost identical expressions in Greek point to God who has control over the flow of time, appointing major events in history according to His divine plan.

The "fullness of time," therefore, refers to the climax of all earthly times, the approaching of the eschatological time of Christ in which God's purposes became realized and revealed. In 1 Timothy 4:1 the expression "later times" (hysterois kairois) is related to the apostasy in the church, while in 2 Timothy 3:1 reference to the "last days" (*en eschatais ēmerais*) comes in the context of the problem of deception. In these two texts, the eschatological expressions refer not to the distant future, but rather to the time when these problems arose in the life of the early church. That this first century context is in mind is confirmed by the fact that in the same epistles ample evidence is found concerning the presence of deceptive teaching and apostasy (1 Tim 1:3–7, 19–20; 4:7; 5:13–15; 6:20–21; 2 Tim 1:15; 2:16–19, 25–26; 3:2–9). Hebrews 1:2 relates the ministry of Jesus to the beginning of the "last days" (*eschatou tōn ēmerōn*), when God spoke to humanity and acted through His Son, while Hebrews 9:26 similarly states that "he has appeared once for all at the end of the age" (*epi synteleia tōn aiōnōn*).

Peter reflects the same salvation-historical thinking when he refers to Christ's death and resurrection as an event that took place "at the end of the ages" (*ep' eschatou tōn chronōn*; 1 Pet 1:20). He also warns the church that "in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and indulging their own lusts"

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[23] For an argument in favor of the typological character of this passage, see Richard Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical TYIIOΣ Structures* (AUSDDS, 2; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981), 193–297.

(2 Pet 3:3). That the phrase *ep' eschaton tōn ēmerōn* refers to his time, and not to the future, is evident from the fact that Peter speaks openly about the threat of scoffers spreading heresies in the church he is addressing (2 Pet 2:1–22; 3:16–17). The text in Jude 18 similarly reflects the challenges of the church in the first century: "In the last time (*ep' eschatou chronou*) there will be scoffers, indulging their own ungodly lusts." Likewise, fighting the deception of false teaching in his churches, John qualifies his time with an expression carrying a strong eschatological overtone: "Children, it is the last hour! As you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. From this we know that it is the last hour" (*eschatē ōra*; 1 John 2:18). In addition to these eschatologically charged texts which refer to the present as the time of the end, a number of texts deal with the coming "last day" as the *eschaton* and with the events related to it. Thus, it is stated that the eschatological end will be preceded by the last plagues (Rev 15) and it will bring the annihilation of death as the "last enemy" (*eschatos echthros*; 1 Cor 15:26), the resurrection of the dead, last judgment and salvation (John 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 11:24; 12:48: *en tē eschatē ēmera*; 1 Pet 1:5: *en kairō eschatō*), and also the destruction of the present cosmos (2 Pet 3:10–12).

The discussion in this section has demonstrated that the end-times predicted in the Old Testament began with the Christ-event, which accounts for the eschatological nature of the New Testament. The concept of new creation, as will be shown below, has a significant role in developing the New Testament eschatological outlook. The prominence of the idea is explicit particularly in the Pauline writings and Revelation, but it is present also in other New Testament writings. In the following we will indicate how three basic aspects of New Testament creation theology are integral to the New Testament's eschatological perspective: (1) Christ's resurrection as the initiation of the new creation; (2) the creation of a new humanity which advances God's eschatological purposes in the world; and (3) the consummated new creation, the final realization of God's endeavors to create all things new. We will explore these aspects under separate headings.

Christ's Resurrection: The Initiation of the New Creation

The New Testament presents Christ's resurrection, together with His death, as the key event of salvation history. This event initiates God's new

creation, and defines the basis of Christian faith and hope. It is the climax of all the Gospel accounts, it features as a dominant thought in Pauline theology and it holds an eminent place also in other New Testament writings. The significance of Christ's resurrection is most clearly articulated by Paul: "and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain" (1 Cor 15:14). During the two thousand years of the Christian era much ink has been spilled over the question of Christ's resurrection. It has often been demonstrated that precisely this belief was the focal point of early Christianity which kept its faith alive until today.[24] Discussing the various aspects of the topic of Christ's resurrection is beyond the scope of this study, since our enquiry is focused here on the question: What is the relation of Christ's life, death and resurrection to the creation theme?

The death of Jesus on the cross is the appropriate starting point for understanding His resurrection. Christ's death "carries connotations of the beginning destruction of the old world which paves the way for the new."[25] That the death of Jesus is not just an ordinary death becomes clear particularly during the last three hours of the crucifixion. The supernatural events at Golgotha (darkness, earthquake, resurrection of dead, dividing of the temple curtain) indicate that the moment has arrived for God's major, unparalleled intervention in salvation history. For our purposes, what is particularly significant is the darkness lasting from noon to three o'clock (Mark 15:33). The Egyptian plague of darkness (Exod 10), or the cosmic judgment language of Amos 8:9, have both frequently been suggested as Old Testament events illuminating what happens in the darkness at Golgotha.

In light of these passages, the phenomenon of the crucifixion darkness has usually been interpreted as the mark of God's displeasure and judgment.[26] While we acknowledge these connections, the suggestion of Ortlund and Beale also merits attention. They argue that "from the broadest

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[24] For an overview of recent discussions on the topic, see George Hunsinger, "The Daybreak of the New Creation: Christ's Resurrection in Recent Theology," *SJT* 57 (2004), 163–181.

[25] Beale, "Eschatological Conception," 20.

[26] See e.g. Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (BNTC; London: Black, 1991), 375-376; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), 651.

perspective, Mark 15:33 culminates a trajectory that is launched not in Amos or even in Exodus but in Gen 1."[27] Thus, the darkness descending at noon, together with the return of light, seems to echo the creation narrative in which the darkness of chaos is subdued by the dawning of primordial light (Gen 1:3–4). The background indicates that the darkness over Golgotha was a phenomenon of de-creation, because crucifying the incarnated Son of God, an act of utmost evil, was the expression of chaos, the reflection of the fact that the relation of humanity with its creator is fractured. The light returning symbolically in Jesus' resurrection heralded the inauguration of the new creation, since light in the Genesis creation narrative appears not as an abstract brightness only, but the personification of God's creating power by which He orders chaos.[28] The kingdom of God dawned when Jesus fundamentally defeated Satan and his kingdom. The effect of this act is that "the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining" (1 John 2:8). God was doing something new through the events of the death and resurrection of Christ.

Jesus' resurrection from death was more than a public acknowledgement that God has accepted His sacrifice as a ransom for sin. It was the key event signaling the dawning of the age which brought qualitative newness to God's creation. As the first day of the new creation, the resurrection was the indicator of the renewal of everything, like the spring flowers whose appearance on the earth reveals that "the time for singing has come" (Song 2:12).[29] In New Testament creation theology, Christ appears as "the firstborn of all creation" (Col 1:15), through whom God becomes reconciled with "all things, whether on earth or in heaven" (Col 1:20). The resurrection event was, therefore, no mere revivification of Jesus' dead body, but the manifestation of divine power in an act comparable to the creation of the world. The world began with God's act of creation out of chaos (Gen 1:2). Similarly, God's raising of Jesus from death was an act of ordering announcing a new beginning after the chaos

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[27] Dane C. Ortlund and G. K. Beale, "Darkness Over the Whole Land: A Biblical Theological Reflection on Mark 15:33," *WTJ* 75 (2013), 221–238(224).

[28] In contrast to this position, Ortlund and Beale relate the motif of returning of light to the passing of the darkness after Jesus' death (Ortland, "Darkness," 221–238). However, in none of the Gospels we have reference to light returning on Friday afternoon, after Jesus' death.

[29] Berkouwer, *Return*, 102.

that came on the Earth as the consequence of rejecting God's rule (Gen 3). Thus, resurrection and creation belong together, since in the new creation God's original purposes come to completion, his creation is becoming restored and extended.

The significance of Christ's resurrection for the theological perspective of the early church cannot be overemphasized. As Wright notes, the early followers of Jesus, in light of His rising from the dead reshaped "their worldview around the resurrection as the new central point."[30] This outlook is formulated clearly in Galatians 6:14–16, where Paul stresses the reality of the new creation as the principle of utmost significance:

> May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! As for those who will follow this rule peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

This passage highlights the transformative effect of Jesus' death and resurrection which define the future of the world, but also the nature of Christian discipleship. It emphasizes that as the result of the Christ-event the world became a different place, therefore the question concerning the distinction between Jews and non-Jews ceases to be a relevant issue. In the background of Paul's argument lies the Genesis creation account, since he appeals to the one creator God, who by His creative activity exercises sovereignty over all against the disorder in the world.[31]

Christ's resurrection was an event of not only historical, but also eschatological significance. The eschatological aspect surfaces in at least three respects. First, the resurrection as the climax of salvation history was the foundational act for the recreation of the world into its true form. As "the great turning point from death to life, for all men and for all creation," it was an act initiating the era leading toward perfect and eternal creation (Rev 21:1–8).[32] Second, the events of that resurrection morning marked the

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[30] N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God, 3; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003), 27.

[31] Wright, *Resurrection*, 223–224.

[32] Martin Franzmann, *The Word of the Lord Grows* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1961), 15.

difference between the old and new creations. Christ's resurrection constitutes the "borderline"[33] between the two realities which will exist side by side until the parousia when the old age will be terminated.[34] The believers, therefore, live in an eschatological tension, since the end is already present in one sense, yet it will come in the future, because the old age is still here. Third, a fundamental consequence of the resurrection is the ultimate coming of the kingdom of God in the *parousia*. The expectation of that day, repeatedly presented in the New Testament in positive terms, is the major hope of Christians, and endows their life with new meaning (e.g. Titus 2:11–14). Ridderbos notes the close relation between Jesus' resurrection and his His *parousia*, arguing that in one sense they form a unity: "His announcement of the *parousia* of the Son of Man is. . . provisionally fulfilled in his resurrection."[35] Thus, the resurrection of Christ provides the basis for an ultimate and lasting eschatological hope which comes from the assurance of Christ's second coming, and from the fact that the new creation has already been initiated.

The new creation is closely tied also to the concept of salvation achieved by Christ. In the Old Testament God is presented in strictly monotheistic terms, as a Lord whose supremacy in heaven and on earth is seen in the fact that He is the creator (e.g. Ps 96:4–5). A basic conviction of Old Testament writers, and also first-century Jews, was that God has not only created the world, but that He also works actively within it. Wright notes that the Old Testament picture of God presupposes not only "creational," but also "providential" and "covenantal" monotheism.[36] These modifiers point to the fact that Israel's God is not intrinsically detached, but that He is involved within His creation. He is not indifferent toward evil in the world, but He has a plan according to which He acts decisively to eliminate it and restore His created order. The New Testament writings

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[33] Hans Burger, *Being in Christ: A Biblical and Systematic Investigation in a Reformed Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 553.

[34] For a comparison of the New Testament view of the two ages with the Jewish apocalyptic views of history, see Jon Paulien, *What the Bible Says about the End-Time* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1994), 65–83.

[35] Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (trans. H. de Jongste; Philadelphia, PA: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1962), 468.

[36] N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God, 1; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992), 248–252.

unanimously point to Jesus of Nazareth as the divine restorer, who overcame evil with His sacrifice on the cross, opening the door of salvation for humanity. By His resurrection from death He himself became the center and goal of the new creation, because in Him the barriers between humanity and God are knocked down: "in him things in heaven and things on earth" are made one (Eph 1:10).[37]

However, the effect of salvation is not merely undoing the work of evil and returning to the good-old-days, but it is striving toward a new and unprecedented reality defined by God's creative activity. Schwarz notes that the eschatological promises act as a "driving force" for the vision of salvation, because "salvation calls for a totally new creation."[38] In Jesus, therefore, in whom a completely new world came, "the hope of humanity was realized toward something final and absolute, namely, toward a new creation."[39]

The new creation has started with Christ's resurrection, which was, together with His death, the foundational event in God's work of healing the world. No wonder then that the early Christians considered these events the central point of history which reshaped their perception of reality. God's creative activity, however, extends beyond the cross and the resurrection of Jesus. It involves the church which is called to experience the work of the new creation and to participate in its realization. In the following section we will discuss this aspect of God's creative activity, which came as a direct consequence of the initiation of the new creation through the Christ-event.

Creation of a New Community: Living as the People of God

According to the witness of the New Testament, the interval between

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[37] Paul in Romans 8 shows that God's redemption is not limited only to an individual's salvation, but it includes the totality of God's creation, because both are subjected to frustration due to the presence of sin ("the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now"; 8:22). This is a statement about the worth of creation, which stresses the fact that the world is not merely an unimportant material, but a reality made by God and belonging to Him. As John G. Gibbs (*Creation and Redemption: A Study in Pauline Theology* [NovTSup, 26; Leiden: Brill, 1971], 34–35) observes, "The two realities are bound together by the one redemptive purpose at work in both, as evidenced by the 'hope' which is characteristic of both creation and Christians (8:20, 24)."

[38] Schwarz, *Eschatology*, 160.

[39] Schwarz, *Eschatology*, 161.

Jesus' ascension and His *parousia* is an eschatological end-time period in which the work of Christ continues by extending on the Earth the kingdom that was inaugurated in His earthly ministry. This is an era characterized by the presence and work of the Spirit on Earth. Significantly, Acts presents the outpouring of the Spirit as a sign of the End, "a gift of the end time,"[40] the eschatological fulfillment of the Old Testament promises of God (Acts 2:15–21; cf. Joel 2:28–32).[41]

The Spirit's primary office is revealing and mediating the presence of Christ to people. As Hamilton notes, "The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ because his office is to communicate the benefits of Christ's work."[42] As the result of His work people who are open to His influence experience radical transformation: they receive "resurrection life in the present,"[43] in anticipation of the final resurrection at the *parousia*. Like Christ's resurrection, the "resurrection life" of believing Christians is the work of God's new creation, since "new creation is in mind wherever the concept of resurrection occurs."[44] The link between Christ's resurrection and the Christian experience of inner transformation is explicit: our Lord's resurrection serves as the foundation for the believers' experience of new creation.[45]

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[40] Jerry L. Sumney, "'In Christ There is a New Creation': Apocalypticism in Paul," *PRSt* 40 (2013), 35–48(40).

[41] Pentecost also marked the starting point of Jesus' messianic reign. His enthronement is described in the throne-room scene of Revelation 5, and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost was the visible confirmation of His rule in the end-time messianic age. Ellen G. White (*The Acts of the Apostles* [Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2005]) states: "The Pentecostal outpouring was Heaven's communication that the Redeemer's inauguration was accomplished. According to His promise He had sent the Holy Spirit from heaven to His followers as a token that He had, as priest and king, received all authority in heaven and on earth, and was the Anointed One over His people." For an extended argument that the event in Revelation 5 is Christ's enthronement in the heavenly temple, see Ranko Stefanovic, *The Background and Meaning of the Sealed Book of Revelation 5* (AUSDDS, 22; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1996), 206–225.

[42] Neill Q. Hamilton, *The Holy Spirit and Eschatology in Paul* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1957), 15.

[43] Wright, *Resurrection*, 304.

[44] Beale, "Eschatological Conception," 19.

[45] Paul expresses the relation between the resurrection of Christ and that of the believers by using a metaphor and a typological correspondence: first fruits offerings and Adam (1 Cor 15).

The identification of the inner transformation with the new creation is clearly made in a number of New Testament texts. Although the phrase *ōkainē ktisis* ("new creation") occurs only twice in the New Testament (Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17), the motif of newness in Christ pervades the atmosphere of the New Testament writings (the adjective *kainos* occurs 49 times in 16 New Testament writings).[46] As pointed out above, Galatians 6:15 highlights the major significance of the principle of new creation which fundamentally defines the thinking and lifestyle of Christians. Somewhat differently, 2 Corinthians 5:17 directly states that the personal renewal of an individual in Christ is an act of new creation: "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" The terms "old" (*archaios*), "behold" (*idou*) and "new" (*kainos*) appear together also in Isaiah 43:18–19 (LXX) which lies in the background of the passage. Paul's argument echoes the Isaianic promise of restoration in which the renewal is related to the motif of new creation.[47]

The phrase *kainē ktisis* shall be treated together with other renewal terminology of the New Testament (*paliggenesia, anagennaō* and *anakainoō*). The term *paliggenesia* ("regeneration," "rebirth") occurs twice in the New Testament, and refers like *kainē ktisis* to the concept of new creation. It designates the future renewal of the world in Matthew 19:28, but for our purposes it is more significant that in Titus 3:5 it is related to the spiritual and moral renewal of an individual. The inner change is the result of the work of the Spirit who "recreates" the individuals for new life in Jesus Christ. Similarly, *anagennaō* ("regenerate," "bring to birth again") also occurs twice in the New Testament and in both references it designates the "new birth" experienced by believers. These references appear in the same context: first it is stated that believers are given the experience of new birth by God, due to the resurrection of Jesus as an event which opened up

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[46] For an in-depth study on the theological significance of the motif of newness in biblical literature, see Nikola Hohnjec, *Novo stvaranje: teologija novosti u Svetom pismu i njezin odraz u crkvi* (Biblioteka riječ, 37; Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 2000).

[47] Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22 are seen also as forming the background to the Pauline text (see e.g. Peter Balla, "2 Corinthians," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic; Nottingham: Apollos, 2007], 753–783[765–766]). It seems, however, that these texts refer not to a "new exodus," but to a new creation of a different sort, to the cosmic new creation at the end of history.

vistas of hope (1 Pet 1:3), while later it is pointed out that this experience takes place "through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Pet 1:23). The term *anakainoō* ("renew," "make new"), which also occurs twice in the New Testament, likewise refers to the renewal of the "inner man" (2 Cor 4:16), the "new self" which is modelled on "the image of its creator" (Col 3:10). For delineating God's work of new creation in believers, attention also needs to be given to texts in which His activity is referred to using *ktizō* ("to create"), without an adjective, and it is applied clearly to renewal in Jesus Christ (Eph 2:10; 4:24).

The divine work of transformation lies also in the background of a number of texts which lack an explicit reference to "creation." These include the *kainos* texts, and those which point to the qualitative newness in the Christian's life. A good example of the latter is 2 Corinthians 4:6: "For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." This text is a reference to the Genesis story of creation. Paul emphasizes his point by drawing a parallel between the creation "in the beginning," and the transformation brought by the light of the gospel into the hearts of those who receive Christ. Thus, in light of the Old Testament background, experiencing the inner renewal needs to be interpreted in terms of God's creative activity. Also, Paul's *ev christō* ("in Christ") language implies living in a new world, in the reality of the new creation, since as Strachan points out, "There is a new creation whenever a man comes to be in Christ."[48] Paul's death–life symbolism, the idea of "dying to" a certain way of life and "living to" God (e.g. Rom 6:1–11; Gal 2:20), serves the same purpose. Hubbard observes that this concept functions as "part of the interpreting framework for his new-creation statements."[49]

The people experiencing God's work of new creation make up a new, transformed community. Their life is characterized by a qualitative newness, since their former relationship to the world has ended: the old

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[48] R. H. Strachan, *2 Corinthians* (MNTC; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1935), 113. Similarly, Jeffrey A. Gibbs ("Christ is Risen, Indeed: Good News for Him, and for Us," *CTQ* 40 [2014], 113–131[126]) points out that the "in Christ" status of the believers reflects their "participation in the new creation."

[49] Moyer V. Hubbard, *New Creation in Paul's Letters and Thought* (SNTSMS, 119; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 89.

man belongs to the time "before Christ" and "without Christ."[50] The difference between old and new is emphasized by different analogies: the old yeast should be cleaned out, because a new batch is prepared (1 Cor 5:7); the old self must be crucified that we may live in newness to God in a "resurrection life" (Rom 6:1–11). The visible testimony to the realization of God's new creation work is baptism, in which believing Christians have "clothed" themselves "with Christ" (Gal 3:27), and have become part of a "new" community which seeks to live in "newness of life" as people of God (Rom 6:4).

The mission of the church is defined by its horizon of newness and the horizon of the end-times it is existing in. As an eschatological community, the church is called to proclaim to all the nations the prospect of a "transition from suffering and fragmentariness to fulfilment and completeness" in Christ.[51] This task is eschatological in nature, since the church serves in the eschatological era of end-times, but even more because in its mission the eschatological hopes of the Old Testament are realized through the gathering of the scattered remnant of Israel.[52] By the proclamation of the gospel, God's work of new creation is being extended, because the number of those accepting Christ's Lordship and experiencing transformation multiplies. Thus, the church becomes an agent in God's new creative work, but the realization of its mission is made possible only through the generative power of the Spirit who makes the kingdom of God present (Acts 1:8). At the same time, the church continues to be the recipient of God's transforming creation, since He never ceases to work on the inner renewal of believers' lives, and by so doing he enables them to remain faithful in their call and commission (2 Cor 4:16–18).

In a similar way to the resurrection of Jesus, in God's creative work of inner transformation of people a chaos—creation—kingdom pattern can be discerned. The believers' life "without Christ" is referred to as a life of darkness which is being transformed by God's interference who "called" them "out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet 2:9). The life of darkness is described in Titus 3:3 in terms of moral and existential chaos. However, the description is followed by God's saving intervention resulting

[50] Hohnjec, *Novo stvaranje*, 61.
[51] Schwarz, *Eschatology*, 208.
[52] For an argument, see e.g. LaRondelle, *Israel of God*, 98–123.

in "rebirth" and "renewal" (3:4–5):

> For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

The experience of "rebirth" (*paliggenesia*) is followed by the realization of God's kingship in the lives of transformed people, which is the essence of Jesus' concept of the Kingdom of God; in Pauline terminology the new life is life "in the Spirit" (e.g. Rom 8). Since the gift of the Spirit is essential to God's new creational work in the eschatological messianic era, it is significant that the events at Pentecost are in Acts 2 presented in terms of an antithesis to the Babel story (Gen 10).[53] The chaos of languages at Babel is in antithetical parallelism with the order which came as the result of the Spirit's work: understandable languages. The antecedent of the Babel story is a rebellion against God, while the results of Pentecost are renewed lives in Christ: three thousand people confessing faith in Christ and being baptized in one day (Acts 2:41). The reversal highlights the radical newness of the eschatological messianic era, in which God made provision for the turnaround from chaos to His kingship through His work of new creation.

New creation which has been inaugurated in Christ's ministry and continues to take place in the eschatological messianic era through the ministry of the Spirit will extend forward until it reaches completion at the very end of history when the "old age" will be terminated. We turn now to the exploration of the third cardinal aspect of this divine creative work in which God makes "all things new" (Rev 21:5).

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[53] For scholars viewing Acts 2 as the reversal of the Babel story, see Jud Davis, "Acts and the Old Testament: The Pentecost Event in Light of Sinai, Babel and the Table of Nations," *CTR* 7 (2009), 29–48(30 n. 3). For an analysis of the parallels and differences between the two stories, see Barna Magyarosi, "Etnicitás és etnocentrizmus Bábel és pünkösd fényében," in *Keresztény egyetemesség és Nemzettudat*, ed. Tibor Tonhaizer (Pécel: Adventista Teológiai Főiskola, 2015), 9–29.

The Consummated New Creation: Making all Things New

The goal of God's new creational work is the restoration of life on earth. Human beings have been created from earth, they were made to live on the earth—they belong to the earth and the earth was given to them as a territory which they are to "subdue," "fill" and "have dominion" over (Gen 1:28). It was also on earth that Christ was born and crucified, on earth He experienced resurrection, and it is on earth that the people of God experience deliverance from evil and the final resurrection. Clearly, God does not give up the earth as a lost territory, but He works on its restoration which will culminate in creating a "new earth" (Rev 21:1; cf. 2 Pet 3:13). This will not come as a renewal through a process of gradual transformation, but it will be the result of an act of creation following a cosmic destruction (Rev 20:11). This major creative act of God will be, however, preceded by the millennium, starting with Christ's second coming. During this time, the saints, who came alive at the first resurrection, will reign with Christ and participate in judgment (Rev 20).[54]

The qualitative distinction between the two worlds is indicated by the use of *kainos* ("new"), which designates newness in nature, qualitative superiority; *neos* signifies rather newness in time ("what was not there before," "what has only just arisen"), though the two terms could sometimes be synonymous.[55] The contrast between "first" (old) and "second" (new) expresses a qualitative antithesis in other texts of Revelation also, indicating contrast between incompleteness and completeness.[56] However, in spite of the sharp discontinuity between the two creations, continuity will also be maintained to some degree, since "the new cosmos will be an identifiable counterpart to the old cosmos and a renewal of it, just as the body will be raised without losing its former

[54] On interpretation of Revelation 20, a text which generated much discussion and conflict in the Christian era, see e.g. Joel Badina, "The Millennium," in *Symposium on Revelation: Exegetical and General Studies, Book 2*, ed. Frank B. Hoolbrook (DARCOM Series, 7; Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 225–242; Peter M. van Bemmelen, "The Millennium and the Judgment," *JATS* 8 (1997), 150–160; Eric Claude Webster, "The Millennium," in *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (SDA Commentary Reference Series, 12; Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 927–946.

[55] E.g. Matt 9:17.

[56] G. K. Beale, *Revelation* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 1006, 1040.

identity."[57]

God's eschatological intervention will bring redemption also for the non-human creation as a whole, which suffers the effect of sin and God's judgment. The renewing of the moral order and the natural order are closely connected, sine human evil has consequences not only regarding humans, but also the rest of God's creation on the Earth. While in the Old Testament a series of passages depict all the creatures offering praise to their Creator (e.g. Ps 148), at the same time, in number of passages the mourning of the Earth is referred to because of the effect of human wrongdoing (e.g. Jer 12:4; Hos 4:1–3; Joel 1:10–12, 17–20).[58] In New Testament this Old Testament image is taken up in Romans 8:18–23 in which reference to Genesis 3 is made. The connection indicates that "because of human sin, God set creation on course for un-creation."[59] According to the words of Paul, the deliverance of the creation from corruption will happen at second coming of Christ when the children of God will attain their full salvation in the glory of the resurrection (Rom 8:21–23).

With the consummation of the new creation God's program of restoration reaches its culmination. The most detailed portrayal of the renovated universe occurs in the final vision of Revelation (chs. 21:1–22:5), in which the New Jerusalem appears as the reversal of sin, death, agony, futility and discord. The vision is an appropriate conclusion not only to the Book of Revelation, but also to the story of the entire Bible. Dumbrell demonstrates in his insightful biblical-theological study that major theological ideas of the biblical story-line such as new Jerusalem, new temple, new covenant, new Israel and new creation find their ultimate fulfillment in the panoramic concluding vision of the biblical canon.[60] With the transformation of the universe, redemption is complete and everything that does not serve God's glory is terminated. Thus, a state of universal *shalōm* is established.

The cosmic new creation involves a fundamental reshaping of the structure of the universe. "New heaven" is also created, not only "new earth," since the governmental center of the universe is relocated from

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[57] Beale, *Revelation*, 1040.

[58] Strikingly, the morning is directed to God, similarly to praising (Jer 12:11).

[59] Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology* (London: Darton, Longmann and Todd, 2010), 97.

[60] Dumbrell, *The End of the Beginning*.

heaven to the new earth (21:1–5; 22:1–5). Throughout the book of Revelation God's throne, along with the Lamb's throne and the thrones of His allies, is located exclusively in the heavenly realm, whereas the thrones of God's adversaries are limited to the earth. The new creation terminates this pattern, since evil is "no more" and "the first things have passed away" (21:4). The transfer of the center of space and time to the earth clearly indicates the disappearance of the distance between God and humanity, and the establishment of a new order in the universe. This development seals God's victory and stands as a lasting reminder of the vindication of His reputation.[61]

The structure of the New Jerusalem vision is linear. It is introduced by a thematic statement of the new creation (21:1–8), which is followed by its description in terms of a temple-city of New Jerusalem, a Holy of Holies in which God lives (21:9–27), and finally the city center is portrayed as the new Garden of Eden (22:1–5). The language of the vision is drawn first of all from the Old Testament prophetic literature, primarily from the eschatological passages of Isaiah and Ezekiel 40–48.[62] In Revelation 22:1–5, Garden of Eden imagery is added which ties the description of the renovated cosmos to the creation–fall narrative (Gen 1–3). Five parallels can be established between the creation–fall narrative and the new Garden of Eden vision. First, the river of the water of life (*potamon hydatos zōēs*; Rev 22:1) recalls the river flowing out of Eden (*potamos*; Gen 2:10). Second, the tree of life appears in both contexts (*xylon zōēs* in Rev 22:2; *xylon tēs zōēs* in Gen 2:9). Third, the curse (*katathema*; Rev 22:3) is banished from the New Jerusalem, while in the Fall narrative it appears as a consequence of sin (*epikataratos*; Gen 3:14, 17). Fourth, the promise of seeing God's face (Rev 22:4) reflects the undoing of the Fall's consequence of banishment from the divine presence (Gen 3:23). Fifth, the promise of the reign of saints (*basileusousin*; Rev 22:5) reflects Adam's original commission to rule over the created world (*archete*; Gen 1:28). The five

[61] For the macrodynamic of the throne motif's development in Revelation, see Laszlo Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation* (LNTS, 487; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark 2014), 257–268.

[62] For a detailed study of intertextual links, see Jan Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and their Development* (JSNTSup, 93; Sheffield: JSOT, 1994); Jeffrey M. Vogelgesang, "The Interpretation of Ezekiel in the Book of Revelation" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1985).

allusions do not have equal strength. Whereas the first two are supported by verbal parallels, the other three reflect only thematic correspondence. John does not identify the new creation with the Garden of Eden, but describes the New Jerusalem in the language of Paradise. Such an approach is not new, since in the Old Testament and particularly in the Jewish apocalyptic literature, Garden of Eden imagery and the motif of an eschatological temple/city are related to one another.[63]

The purpose of adding the Garden of Eden imagery as a fresh symbolic element in the final scene of the vision, which functions as the conclusion to all of ch. 21, lies in generating a sense of climax. The climactic tone not only of the New Jerusalem vision, but also of the entire book is generated first of all by the emphasis on the centrality of the throne of God and the Lamb in the new creation (22:1, 3). The throne imagery points here to the fact that the New Jerusalem functions as the governmental center of the new creation. Not less significantly, it is also made clear that God's kingship is a life-giving reality (the throne is closely related to two life-images: the "water of life" and the "tree of life"). Setting the divine throne in the context of the Garden of Eden emanates a rhetorical energy which makes it a fitting conclusion to the book. As Deutsch points out, Paradise functions as "the symbol of primeval completeness, a completeness which follows the defeat of . . . chaos. Thus, it is only fitting that the perfection of a restored or new order be symbolized by the image of Paradise. End-time has become primeval time, assuring communities under crisis of the ultimate victory of life and order."[64]

In this cosmic renewal of the universe, a chaos—creation—kingdom pattern can be discerned, just as in the case of the two previously discussed cardinal aspects of God's new creation: Christ's resurrection and the transformation of human lives into "resurrection life" in the present age.

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[63] In the Jewish literature just as it is stated that the earth shall return to a state of primeval chaos, the New Jerusalem is sometimes linked with Paradise itself, not only with the new creation (*2 Bar*. 4:1-7; 1 *En*. 90:33-36). In the description of the consummation of the ages in *T. Dan*. 5:12, Eden and the New Jerusalem are set in parallel: "Saints shall refresh themselves in Eden, the righteous shall rejoice in the New Jerusalem." It is also said that Paradise was sometimes hidden only to be revealed in the future (*2 Bar*. 59:8; *4 Ezra* 7:123; 8:52; *2 En*. 8:1-6).

[64] Celia Deutsch, "Transformation of Symbols: The New Jerusalem in Rev 21.1–22.5," *ZNW* 78 (1987), 106–126(117).

The consummated new creation takes place because of the disorder in God's created world, which culminates in the moral chaos of Babylon's dominion and the anarchy following its collapse (chs. 17–18). God establishes a new order, because human sin brought His creation to the verge of collapse. The degradation caused by evil on the earth is clearly expressed in the judgment series of the Seven Trumpets (8:6–11:18), which pictures the course of human history in terms of progressive de-creation.[65] Destruction is followed by renewal, and the result is the establishment of a new cosmos oriented toward God's throne, which is located in the center of the temple-city, a location where His people will worship him and "will see his face" (22:4). The theocentricity of heaven, pictured in chs. 4–5 comes into focus again in the New Jerusalem vision, but this time the location is the new earth and God's people are pictures as participating in His rule: "For the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever" (22:5). The reign of the saints will be, however, freed from all associations of human rule, since it materializes in service in perfect freedom and in seeking God's glory. Thus, seeing God's face and ruling by serving "will be the heart of humanity's eternal joy in their eternal worship of God."[66]

After discussing the three cardinal elements of the New Testament theology of new creation and their eschatological character, the relation between protology and eschatology will be examined in the following.

Protology and Eschatology

The biblical story-line starts with creation (Gen 1–3) and ends with the descent of the New Jerusalem which signals the consummation of the new creation (Rev 21–22). These two great events in history serve as two related poles of the biblical meta-story. The connecting link is not only the theme of creation, but also the motif of God's presence. The story ends with a

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[65] Jon Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets: Literary Allusions and the Interpretation of Revelation 8:7-12* (AUSDDS, 11; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1987), 229–230; Roy C. Naden, *The Lamb Among the Beasts: Finding Jesus in the Book of Revelation* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1996), 141–142; Hans K. LaRondelle, *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible* (Sarasota, FL: First Impressions, 1997), 176.

[66] Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (New Testament Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 142.

vision of God who moves His governmental center from heaven to the new earth, coming to dwell with redeemed humanity in the New Jerusalem. The beginning of the biblical narrative resembles this picture. Genesis opens by portraying the creation of the earth which was designed to be a place where God meets with His people. For this reason, both Eden and New Jerusalem are pictured in terms of a temple: as a temple-garden and a temple-city.[67]

Since the divine plan was disrupted due to the disobedience of the first couple, humanity lost the privilege of enjoying God's presence directly. The complex story that follows in the biblical narrative centers on God's redemptive mission, due to which the earth will be turned into a place where God and humanity can dwell together again. So, the biblical story is structured around the movement from creation to new creation, and the process of redemption is seen as a means leading to the restoration of the original creation. The original creation is, therefore, "the assumption in the Old Testament from which all theological movement proceeds," and its restoration is the final goal toward which everything eventually moves.[68] The strong link between the two ends of the canon suggests that these passages frame the entire biblical narrative, therefore they serve as two poles which have a critical interpretive significance for all biblical material. Consequently, everything in the biblical canon is to be seen as having its roots in Genesis 1–3, and also moving toward the final goal in Revelation 21–22.[69]

The relation of Gen 1–3 and Rev 21–22 reflects the well-known *Urzeit–Endzeit* or protology–eschatology schema. As Aune notes, the essence of this pattern of thought is that "the conditions of eschatological salvation are usually conceptualized as a *restoration* of primal conditions rather than an entirely new or utopian mode of existence with no links to the past."[70] The conception that the end is recapitulating the perfect and

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[67] For Eden as the first earthly sanctuary, see Gordon J. Wenham, "Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story," in *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Division A: The Period of the Bible* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986), 19–25. For the New Jerusalem as a temple, see G.K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (NSBT, 17; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity; Leicester: Apollos, 2004), 23–26, 365–373.

[68] Dumbrell, *The End of the Beginning*, 189.

[69] Beale, *Biblical Theology*, 59.

[70] David E. Aune, "Eschatology (Early Christian)," *ABD*, II, 594–609(594–595).

paradigmatic beginning is foundational for the apocalyptic worldview.[71] The point of the parallel lies in emphasizing the restoration of the blessings of an earlier idyllic period. At the *eschaton* a new order is set up in a new environment, but it is the original creation fulfilled and restored to its Edenic origins. Still, John does not identify the new creation with the Garden of Eden, but rather, he describes the New Jerusalem in the language of Paradise. While in his vision the end resembles the beginning, a significant change is also evident: in Genesis the earth is presented as a site in which some "building" (creative human activity) is expected to occur, while Revelation presents a city.[72] The imagery of city by no means suggest that the endeavors of the humanity "build" an idyllic future. This holy city comes from the heaven, from the divine sphere, "in the sense that all good comes from God."[73] Namely, in the ancient world the ideal city was a motif with a strong rhetorical force embodying the ideas of security and prosperity; it was pictured as a place with the divine in its midst.[74] Thus, both creation and the *eschaton* flow freely from God, and His sovereignty is manifested in both events in which His creative activity is at work.[75]

Conclusion

Creation and eschatology are intrinsically interconnected in New Testament theology. To address one without the other risks distortion of both topics. It is impossible to separate creation and eschatology since both are part of the same process by which God orders the world subduing chaos by turning it into an enjoyable place for his people. It has been demonstrated in this study that the end-times were launched by Christ's death and resurrection, the pivotal events of salvation history. These events

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[71] For the *Urzeit–Endzeit* pattern in Jewish apocalyptic tradition, see David E. Aune, "From the Idealized Past to the Imaginary Future: Eschatological Restoration in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature," in *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic in Early Christianity* (WUNT, 199; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 13–38(31–34).

[72] T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: Exploring God's Plan for Life on Earth* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity, 2008), 14.

[73] Bauckham, *Theology*, 135.

[74] For an extended argument, see Eva Räpple, *The Metaphor of the City in the Apocalypse of John* (SBL, 67; New York: Lang, 2004), 139–178.

[75] Eric W. Baker, *The Eschatological Role of the Jerusalem Temple: An Examination of the Jewish Writings Dating from 586 BCE to 79 CE* (Hamburg: Anchor Academic Publishing, 2015), 31.

were the laying of the foundation stone of the new creation, which was a necessity because evil was so ingrained in the present order that a new creation was the only means of dealing effectively with it. Thus, in the eschatological messianic era, God is involved in the world through His new creational work, directing the course of history toward the ultimate and comprehensive restoration at the very end. In this study an argument has been offered in favor of the suggestion that God's new creational activity is being realized through three cardinal works which follow a chronological order: (1) Christ's resurrection as the initiation of the new creation; (2) the creation of a new humanity which is the recipient of, but also the agent in, God's new creational endeavors; and (3) the consummated new creation which leads to the final restoration of the universe. In all three events a chaos—creation—kingdom pattern can be observed, which reveals consistency in God's work with His creation. Also, all three events are eschatological because they occurred/occur/will occur in the eschatological era of the end-times and because they are events of eschatological significance as major milestones in advancing God's work of "making all things new" (Rev 21:5). The fact that the biblical story-line starts and ends with creation accounts (Gen 1–2; Rev 21–22) gives an eminent role to creation as a major theme in biblical theology. While in the New Testament the theme of new creation dominates the creation theology of biblical authors, they developed it as rooted in the Old Testament in conviction that God has spoken "and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm" (Ps 33:9).

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