

A RESPONSE TO NEW CREATION AND SUFFERING
A STUDY BASED ON THE INDONESIAN SOCIETY CONTEXT
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Introduction: A Highlight Review

In his paper, T. Scott Daniels provides an excellent description of the end of the story of this world through his experiences with his sons. Regarding this, at the end of history, the earth and all its cultures and human creations will be destroyed. It is bringing implications of neglecting the issues of poverty and justice, ecology, and harmony between humans. Also, Daniels gives an understanding that thinking theologically and biblically about the end of the story of creation should be understood under the umbrella of eschatology.¹

Related to this, Bird stated, in understanding the doctrine of eschatology with the same perspective among believers, how God's promise to bring justice, reconciliation, and peace into the earth has been fulfilled in the present and will reach its fullness in the future. This promise is an act of God to save the old creation that has been damaged from the fall of sin and restore it to a new creation.² It needs to be understood based on the understanding that when humans fail in their image-bearing vocation, the problem is not just that they face punishment. The problem is also the “powers” seize control, and the Creator’s plan for his creation cannot go ahead as intended.

The gap between God's original plan for the creation of humankind and the inability of man to fulfill that purpose (because of sin) was solved through the coming of Christ and His redemptive work on the cross. On page 7, Daniels stated that Jesus embraced not only the exile and abandonment of Israel but also the sin and brokenness of the world. In Christ’s resurrection, the hope of a ransomed, restored, and renewed people also became a reality.³ Daniel cited the statement of Wright and Bird that resurrection was not just about the restoration of Israel on the one hand and the newly embodied life of all YHWH’s people on the other, but it was a re-creation, the great event that would bring the ‘present age’ to a close and usher in the ‘age to come’. All of this was premised on the twin belief in YHWH as both the creator and the God of justice.⁴

One of the key verses that lay the basic understanding of new creation eschatology comes from 2 Corinthians 5:17, ***Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!*** As Daniels stated, the new creation has been inaugurated in the resurrection of Christ, and those who have put to death the old are now part of the new creation. The old is gone. The new has come.⁵

¹ Scott Daniels, “Finish Then Thy New Creation,” *Didache: Faithful Teaching* 22 (1) (n.d.): 7, <http://didache.nazarene.org>.

² Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013).240.

³ Scott Daniels, “Finish Then Thy New Creation.”7.

⁴ N. T. Wright and Michael F. Bird, *The New Testament in Its World*, Fourth (London: Zondervan, 2019).441.

⁵ Scott Daniels, “Finish Then Thy New Creation.”8.

The Goal of Response Paper.

The response to the paper written by Scott Daniels will focus on the main principles of new creation eschatology based on 2 Corinthians 5:17, *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!* and the correct understanding of suffering in Romans 8:17-18, *now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.* It means, in the present we suffer, but in the future we are together with God in His Glory.

As a Responder I have tried to take a closer look at this principle contextually and draw out its relevance for Christians in Indonesia to fulfill God's purpose as a new creation, and from this point, change the paradigm of thinking, which in the end can transform the non-Christian majority society.

Some Important Issues Need to Be Explored.

Several important issues in Scott Daniels' paper that need to be explored and relevant to the context of Indonesian society are:

New Creation

One of the foundations of the eschatological understanding of new creation is drawn from 2 Corinthians 5:17, *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!* Omanson and Ellington state that the term "in Christ" (*en Christ*) expresses that believers belong to Christ, has a good fellowship with Christ, live in Christ's power, united with Christ, and part of the body of Christ.⁶ Ridderbos states that the term 'new creation' (*kaine ktisis*) describes a change that happens to the believer.⁷

So, it should be understood that a person's change into a 'new creation' can only be possible if someone lives in Christ. Life outside of Christ does not allow a person to experience being a 'new creation'. It is a quality of life that is based on the quality of relationship with Christ, a life that expresses the character of Christ and the purpose of Christ.

Christian Understanding of Suffering

The second important point is the suffering experienced by Christians in the world before the second coming of Christ. Paul wrote in Romans 8:17-18, *now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.* Present Suffering and Future Glory. The purpose of suffering is so that at the end of suffering, believers are glorified together with Christ.

Suffering is a fact that must be faced. What Paul's explanation above emphasizes that believers are in the already and the not yet they can experience suffering. Suffering can occur because there is still the power of sin that makes the physical body experiences weakness, damage, and death. The power of sin makes humans hurt each other, so wars arise, the universe is undergoing decay resulting in floods, landslides, and a chaotic climate, and the presence of

⁶ Roger L. Omanson dan John Ellington, *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians - A Guide to Bible Interpretation*. Translated by MK Sembiring (Jakarta-Indonesia: LAI, 2013). 36.

⁷ Herman Nicolaas Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*. Translated by Hendry Ongkowidjojo (Surabaya: Momentum, 2008). 234.

government makes believers experience persecution from those who are hostile to Christ. It is understood that present suffering does not compare to the glory that believers will receive in the future when believers live in heaven and new earth (Rev. 21).

In the context of Asia (as in Indonesia), Wonsuk Ma wrote that daily suffering is the primary context. In addition to the political struggles which Asian nations faced in the later part of the twentieth century, simple daily survival is the greatest challenge Asia has faced.⁸ Countries in Asia are struggling with a decent standard of living, most people still live below the poverty line. A corrupt government system creates various problems such as limited access to sufficient income, good education, decent housing, and scarce resources as capital for a decent life.

Other sufferings come from a society of intolerance and from social pressure. Paul Tahalele through his research about The Church and Human Rights in Indonesia found that turning to the Christian scene, for about three years since 1996, 275 Christian churches were closed, vandalized, destroyed or burned by Muslims in Indonesia. Close to one-half (121 churches) of them were Pentecostal churches and next on the list are Catholic churches (18). Christian worship is still illegal, thus, subject to state punishment including death. An average first-generation Christians in Asia have to overcome much marginalization and even persecution from family and society.⁹

Building a Foundation for Understanding to Transform Society

An understanding of the new creation doctrine under the umbrella of eschatology needs to be addressed with a proactive faith, not just passive, waiting and surviving. Christians need to show their responsibility as a new creation to be able to bring many people to Christ and eventually become a new creation in Christ as well. This cannot be done in silence, but actions need to be taken, based on correct theological understanding.

Christian as a Peacemaker.

In Luke 12:49, Jesus said that his presence in the world carried a 'sword'. Christians need to realize that being a follower of Christ carries the consequence of being persecuted and suppressed by the enemies of Christ. The values that Christ brought to the world are often at odds with the world's values. This brings Christians to a condition of being excluded and suppressed, but, from the other perspective, Parahala and Busro stated that Jesus is a source of peace.

This message provides inspiration for Christianity and the church as followers of Jesus to continue to bring and struggle for peace, even ~~though~~ in the world around us, even in the smallest units, such as families, attitudes of division and conflict arise.¹⁰ Even if Christians are

⁸ Wonsuk Ma, "Pentecostal Eschatology: What Happened When the Wave Hit the West End of the Ocean," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* Vol. 12 No (2009): 95–112.

⁹ Paul Tahalele, *The Church and Human Rights in Indonesia* (Surabaya: Indonesia Christian Communication Forum, 1998).

¹⁰ Yohanes Parahala and Busro, "Reclaiming Jesus as Source of Peace in Luke 12:49–53 Through the Perspective of Religious Pluralism in an Indonesian Context.," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 76(4) (2020): 6–7, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i4.6088>.

oppressed, excluded, and ~~oppressed~~, it is necessary to remain a peacemaker for the world. Be light and salt to the world so that the world may see the qualifications of a disciple of Christ.

The Providence of God.

Through the Book of Genesis, it is known that God is the Creator and Initiator of the creation of the world and all that is in it. God saw that everything He had done was very good. The New Testament states through 1 Timothy 4:4 stated the same thing that what God has done is very good and needs to be responded to through thanksgiving. God also did creation for a mission. From The Nazarene Essential, it is known that God's mission is very important and we derive our mission from God, who makes up the vast universe. Throughout history, God created man in His image and likeness so that divine love could flourish. When sin contaminates creation, nature's redemptive mission is declared, dubbed "the restoration of the entire creation to God's purpose".¹¹

After the fall of man into sin, the world is in a non-ideal place, but Christians need to remember the providence of God, who is constantly at work to care for His followers. This understanding is based on Taylor's thought that the references to creatorship present a double strand, one asserting God as Creator and the other designating God's role in creation. The synoptic materials speak indirectly about God's relationship to the cosmos. For example, believers are urged not to be anxious about their daily existence, for God surely will care for them since He brought everything into existence and He sustains it (Matt. 6:25-34; Luke 12: 22-30).¹²

Reinforcing this understanding, Purkiser wrote that God Is the Creator and Sustainer of All. Among the reasons why God is the Lord, the supreme Sovereign, is that He is the Creator and Sustainer of all... "God is the personal being who made the universe and keeps it going." By the eternal Logos, the rational principle or structure of the universe, "all things consist" or hold together. He upholds "all things by the word of his power ..." (Heb. 1:3).¹³ Referring to the doctrine of creation that deals with the relation of God to the beginning of the physical universe, providence is the term usually employed in theology to describe God's present relation to the world. It deals with God's control, care, and continued preservation of the universe.¹⁴

Purkiser states that God's providence is expressed through three characteristics inherent in God, namely: (1) **Immanence**, God's actual presence, and power in the ongoing universe. Matt. 6:26-30 writes that God cares for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. God is in His universe, but not coextensive with it. God is both superior to His universe and involved in its processes. God is transcendent as Creator. He is immanent as Sustainer; (2) **Preservation**, God's power is at every moment the reason for the preservation of both nature and its processes. He uphold all things "by the word of his power" (Heb. 1:3). Purkiser cited Paul and refers to the same concept when Paul says that "by him, all things consist" (Col. 1:17). "Consist" means to cohere or

¹¹ Sealnd Field Literature Departement, *Jati Diri Nazarene (Nazarene Essential)* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius Publisher, 2016). 44-45.

¹² Willard H. Taylor W. T. Purkiser, Richard S. Taylor, *God, Man, and Salvation. A Biblical Theology.* (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press, 1977).

¹³ W.T. Purkiser and friends, *Exploring Our Christian Faith.* (Kansas City – Missouri: Beacon Hill Press, 1978). 18.

¹⁴ W.T. Purkiser and friends. 133-134.

to hold together. In a sense, God is continually creating the universe according to the laws of time and change; (3) **Uniformity**, God in nature is the basis of law and order. God's operations are consistent, rational, and coherent. The divine source of the regularity of nature is implied in God's beautiful promise to Noah: "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease" (Gen. 8:22).¹⁵

Still in line with the view described earlier, Wesley through his sermon "On Divine Providence" connected God's power with His wisdom and goodness. Enter into a deeper understanding, the Bible tells us that God's strength is never without wisdom and goodness.¹⁶ God's providence and His loving care are expressed in three basic ways in His creation: First, God created the world, and the world is consistently dependent on God's power. Second, God rules the world, always interacts with His creation, and oversees the activities and what happens in the world. This is what Wesley understood as the providence of God. Third, God is always involved in redeeming fallen creation.¹⁷

Wesley's thought is sufficient to provide understanding to believers that God's Providence is a guarantee for the continuity of His creation in a power that is exercised in His wisdom and love. This understanding needs to be believed by believers as a response to be grateful, rejoice and live in hope in this non-ideal world. The Kingdom of God needs to be understood as a quality of life for believers that can not only be enjoyed in eternal life, but also in this life, through God's providence for believers.

Engaged Christians in Society.

Transforming society, changing mindsets and thinking paradigms, and reaching them for Christ will not be possible if Christians are not connected to society, especially non-Christian communities. Christians need to involve themselves with other people, neighbors and communities for connection. It is necessary to build bridges of communication to carry out dialogue and build peace.

Parahala and Busro added that mutual transformation has brought new hope to religious relations. In mutual transformation, religious adherents also have a great chance to understand and interact deeply with other religious people.¹⁸ Parihala added that Christianity is called to participate in the mega-friendship created by God by making mega space and befriending the Other. Mega-friendship in the table fellowship is to sustain life in love, equality, compassion, peace, and transformation.¹⁹

¹⁵ W. T. Purkiser, Richard S. Taylor, *God, Man, and Salvation. A Biblical Theology*. 136-137.

¹⁶ *Kehidupan Dan Pemikiran John Wesley (John Wesley His Life and Thought)*, Translated by Timothy J. Crutcher (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2015).

¹⁷ *Kehidupan Dan Pemikiran John Wesley (John Wesley His Life and Thought)*, Translated by Timothy J. Crutcher.

¹⁸ Yohanes Parahala and Busro, "Reclaiming Jesus as Source of Peace in Luke 12:49–53 Through the Perspective of Religious Pluralism in an Indonesian Context."

¹⁹ Yohanes Parihala, "Making Mega-Space for Others: Towards Theology of Mega-Friendship from the Table Fellowship Story According to Luke 5:27–32," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 42 (1) (2021): 1, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v42i1.2292>.

The Essence of the Church in the Context of Ecclesia.

In his paper, Daniels also wrote about a new temple – the church; the location where heaven and earth meet; being restored to a proper dominion within the renewed and life-giving garden.²⁰ Based on what Wright and Bird stated that the temple in Jesus' period was of course the heart and center of Judaism, the vital symbol around which everything else circled. It was supposed to be where YHWH himself dwelt, or at least had dwelt and would do so again. It was the place of sacrifice, not only the place where sins were forgiven but also the place where the union and fellowship between Israel and its God were endlessly and tirelessly consummated.²¹

Based on the context above, the church is not an exclusive and separate Christian communication from the world. It is not a place of escape from the stresses of life, nor spiritual value is enjoyed by the believer alone. The Church must go out. The principle of ecclesia must be carried out by the church not through waiting for people to come to the church, but the member of the church should be going out and bringing others to Christ.

The majority of Muslims in Indonesia are very sensitive to the presence of the Church. Various efforts were made to create a condition: no church is to be built in the community. Many acts of love from the Christian community are seen as Christianization actions, but they are not, and these are prone to religious conflict. This condition should make Christians in Indonesia be wiser and more careful. The believers need to connect more with the community through a personal approach, rather than an organization.

Make a Bridge to Build a Dialog.

Discussing more deeply about life after death in the context of eternity, Wright and Bird have conducted a study of Roman, Greek, and Jewish thought, and found some common principles: (1) death is permanent, (2) heroes get translated into heaven without dying, and (3) the faithful who die are returned to life!²² Like other Abrahamic religions, Islam as the religion of the majority of Indonesian people also holds the same view.

Getting a Meeting Point.

Based on the study of Shia Islamic eschatology, Wejak stated that in the hereafter a very special human child – the Messiah – will appear to the world named Imam Mahdi. Imam Mahdi represents the redeemer or political leader, who will rectify all wrongs and injustices by spreading God's rules throughout the world.²³ From an Islamic perspective, their version of the Messiah is a figure named Imam Mahdi. This character will come towards the end of time and become the savior of mankind for all the hardships of life they face.

The sufferings experienced by humans in the last days can only be overcome by Imam Mahdi. Imam Mahdi is the final solution to the problems of human life on earth. The problems of life include the difficulties of human daily life to systemic socio-cultural problems such as corruption, injustice, and arbitrary oppression from other parties.

²⁰ Scott Daniels, "Finish Then Thy New Creation."

²¹ N. T. Wright and Michael F. Bird, *The New Testament in Its World*. 320.

²² N. T. Wright and Michael F. Bird. 407.

²³ Justin L Wejak, "SHIA ISLAMIC ESCHATOLOGY: A TWO DIMENSIONAL ESCHATOLOGY," *JURNAL LEDALERO*, Vol. 17, N (2018): 219.

The understanding of the Indonesian Islamic community about the figure of Imam Mahdi is often used as a bridge to build communication and preach the gospel to this community. Some similarities between Imam Mahdi and Jesus Christ are the good meeting point for creating relationships.

The Islamic community also believes in life after death. The principles of 'heaven' and 'hell' are understood as two choices of consequences that humans get regarding their responsibility for what they have done while living on earth. AA Yewangoe through his research on 'Christian Hope in Context - an Indonesian Perspective' found that, for Christians, starting at the same point about life after death, there is hope for Christians because the believers take part in the resurrection and victory of Christ over death.²⁴ Departing on a common base, life after death becomes a meeting point that can help Christians build bridges of communication with Muslims.

Christian Involvement in Environmental Issues.

Another hot issue in this century is the issue of ecological damage. Where is the church's position in addressing this issue? In 2021, a research conducted by a responder with the research team studies about how the involvement of the local church (The Church of the Nazarene) in the districts of Java and Bali found that the involvement of the local church was only at the stage of the pastor preaching about the responsibility of Christians in caring for the environment.

The congregation's actions are limited to sorting the types of waste and planting crops, but they have not yet come up with ideas for wider environmental management. The research results adequately reflect the need that the Church of the Nazarene community in Java and Bali needs to provide a deeper understanding of ecological issues and involve the congregation in various environmental conservation actions.²⁵ Caring for the environment is a Christian cultural duty and mandate that needs to be intensified.

It is similar to what Setyawan gave about the ecological crisis in Indonesia. The churches need to implement an ecclesiological reconstruction based on the church as an ecological community. The churches are an inseparable part of Indonesian society and cultures which emphasize respect for nature, while at the same time reconstructing their identity in the Christian faith tradition rooted in the Triune God, faith in Christ as Savior, and an eschatological dimension. Ecclesial praxis will promote ecological awareness among church members, involvement in conservation efforts, and in making public policies related to ecological issues.²⁶

Conclusion

Based on an understanding of the eschatological doctrine of new creation, Christians need to respond wisely to the events leading up to the second coming of Christ through:

²⁴ A.A. Yewangoe, "Christian Hope in Context – An Indonesian Perspective," in *Christian Hope in Context II* (Brill, 2000), 155, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004389120_011.

²⁵ Seri Damarwanti and friends, "Evaluasi Keterlibatan Gereja Kristen Nazarene Di Pulau Jawa Terhadap Isu Eco-Theology Di Era 5.0," *AngelionJurnal Teologi Dan Pendidikan Kristen* Vol. 2 No. (2021): 129–46, <https://e-journal.sttberitahidup.ac.id/index.php/jan/article/view/193/135>.

²⁶ Y. B Setyawan, "The Church as an Ecological Community: Practising Eco-Ecclesiology in the Ecological Crisis of Indonesia," *Ecclesiology* 17(1), (2021): 91-107., <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1163/17455316-bja10009>.

- 1 The process of becoming a new creation is only made possible by a life that is pleasing in Christ. There is no new creation outside of Christ.
- 2 Suffering and hardships of life in various forms today are a fact, but it is necessary to realize that God's providence applies to believers. Believers need to deal with adversity and suffering properly according to biblical principles.
- 3 Have a correct theological understanding of eschatological doctrine. As a new creation, Christians have a mandate to preach the gospel to non-Christians as a reflection of love and responsibility, and reach out to others for Christ, so that they also can experience new creation.
- 4 Christians as churches need to be connected with the community, actively build bridges of communication to spread the gospel, engage in dialogue and be connected, and make an impact through active faith, as part of efforts to transform society.