

A RESPONSE PAPER TO ‘HOPE OF NEW CREATION’  
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Our understanding of the end, or *eschaton*, is crucial in the Christian faith. It is the end that guides, shapes, and transforms how we live as Christians. Hence T. Scott Daniels’ engaging opening of the paper which invites the readers to think of the biblical narrative as a story and to re-think the end of the story is apt.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Ivelisse Valentin-Vera’s quotation of Moltmann is on the spot. “In its fullness, and not just in an appendix, Christianity is eschatology.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, Christianity in its fullest sense is eschatological. But speaking of the significance of the end is one thing. Speaking of one’s perspectives and expectations of it is another.

To this matter, Daniels offers a brief historical overview of evangelical Christian eschatology in the last two centuries, a shift from an optimistic post-millennial view to a dispensational pre-millennial view.<sup>3</sup> The popularity of dispensationalism in the West in particular and globally in general molded Christianity into a somewhat individualistic, dualistic, and pessimistic faith while a social, material, and optimistic perspective of post-millennialists put too much trust in human agency. The former lacked solid biblical grounds while the latter proved itself untenable after the two world wars. From this theological landscape, the rise of new creation eschatology has brought some fresh, though not new, perspectives on a Christian understanding of the end in agreement with Daniels and Valentin-Vera’s papers. In response to the papers, I would like to discuss several features of new creation eschatology while constructively engaging with the points made by Daniels and Valentin-Vera. The discussion will be guided by the critical questions posed by Daniels: 1) ‘We need an eschatology of hope, but also one that realistically pays attention to the personal and systematic nature of sin’<sup>4</sup> and by Valentin-Vera: 2) In what sense can the hope of new creation be depicted as a “journey” or a “pilgrimage”?<sup>5</sup>

One of the key features of new creation eschatology, first and foremost, is that it is solidly grounded in the biblical vision of *eschaton* as Daniels rightly highlights in his paper.<sup>6</sup> The ultimate biblical vision of the end is envisioned by John, the Seer, who saw “a new heaven and a new earth” and “the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” (Rev 21:1-2). This vision of the glorious new creation echoes the oracle of Isaiah 65:17-25. Both visions take us to look back to the first creation (Genesis 1:1—2:4), but at the same time they lead us to look forward to the newness of the coming new creation. They invite us to see a new beginning of the end and to perceive “a radical transformation” of the created order as identified in Isaiah 65:25 (cf. 11:6-9).<sup>7</sup> They not only offer a broad vision of renewal which encompasses the whole creation in its scope, but also direct our attention to God’s work. In other words, a new creation

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<sup>1</sup> T. Scott Daniels, “Finish Then Thy New Creation,” *Didache: Faithful Teaching* 22:1 (Spring 2022): 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Ivelisse Valentin-Vera, “Hope of New Creation,” *Didache: Faithful Teaching* 22:1 (Spring 2022): 6.

<sup>3</sup> Daniels, 3-4.

<sup>4</sup> Daniels, 4.

<sup>5</sup> Valentin-Vera, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Daniels, 5.

<sup>7</sup> John Goldingay, *Isaiah*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2001), 368; Michael Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness: Following the Lamb into the New Creation* (Eugene: Cascade, 2011), 163-4.

is primarily a divine gift. Hence the visions are filled with the hope of restoration, renewal, and re-creation instead of destruction or abandonment of the old. Daniels affirms the goodness of creation<sup>8</sup> and Valentin-Vera directs our attention to the celebration of God's restoration, not destruction.<sup>9</sup>

Second, new creation eschatology is firmly rooted in the life, death, and particularly resurrection of Jesus. A biblical vision of *eschaton* follows the story of creation, exile, and anticipation of restoration in the OT. Daniels connects these themes with Jesus's life, death, and resurrection in his appreciation of new creation eschatology.<sup>10</sup> In fact, the account of Jesus' birth in the Gospels echoes the first creation account in Genesis (particularly Luke 1:35; John 1:1-18) and opens the possibility of a new creation of humanity (the last Adam in Paul's words) and a new creation of all that created in flesh (John 1:14). Along this line of thought, Jesus' earthly ministry is viewed as the embodied presence of new creation on earth. But more significantly, it is the 'bodily' resurrection of Jesus which inaugurated the *eschaton*, followed by the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' resurrection is a decisive marker of a new beginning of the end. The resurrection of the dead is an act of new creation. Hence Valentin-Vera's point is illuminating here: "the hope of new creation ... is based on the resurrection."<sup>11</sup>

In particular, Valentin-Vera's appreciation of new creation in terms of the body of the risen Lord which "bears the marks of human suffering" is thought-provoking.<sup>12</sup> It raises a critical question about the continuity and discontinuity of the old and new creation. To what extent or in what sense does the new carry the marks of the old? At what point does new creation depart from the old? Paul's long discourse on the bodily resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 may offer some helpful insights into these questions. On the one hand, the seed metaphor which Paul employs inevitably connects a "perishable" body to an "imperishable" body (1Cor 15:35-49).<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, Paul makes a clear distinction between earthly and heavenly bodies, or physical and spiritual bodies. There is continuity in that it is our mortal *bodies* that will put on immortality. There is a discontinuity in that we will be transformed into "the image of the man of heaven" (1Cor 15:49). Hence Jesus' bodily resurrection encapsulates what is already experienced in the present reality and what is anticipated in the coming new creation of the whole cosmos. This leads to the third point.

Third, new creation eschatology draws the tension between the continuity and discontinuity of the old and new, between the 'already' of new creation and 'not yet', and between this worldly present reality and the coming one. The new humanity in Christ co-exists with the old humanity in Adam. There is tension between the present life and the future glorified life. Here Valentin-Vera's use of a journey motif in the discussion of the hope of new creation is particularly pertinent. She constructively explores the tension in line with the identity of the

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<sup>8</sup> Daniels, 6.

<sup>9</sup> Valentin-Vera, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Daniels, 7.

<sup>11</sup> Valentin-Vera, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Valentin-Vera, 4.

<sup>13</sup> Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (London: SPCK, 2007), 168. Paul contrasts *corruptible physicality* and *non-corruptible physicality*, not physical and non-physical.

church, “a community of hope”.<sup>14</sup> She calls for the church’s embodiment of new creation and a transformative role within the society here and now. Hence the hope of new creation shapes our faith and guides our actions here and now. It offers a perspective not only on our future destiny, but also on our present life. Once again, Paul’s discourse in 1 Corinthians 15 is helpful here. In view of the reality of the bodily resurrection and of the ultimate defeat of death, Paul concludes his discourse by bringing the readers back to the present reality. He connects the future glorified reality with the present reality by urging Corinthian Christians to keep good work in Christ, for their labor in Christ here and now is not in vain (1Cor 15:58).<sup>15</sup> Hence the active embodiment of Christian identity as new creation here and now is crucial in that this is one of the most visible ways to live out the hope of new creation both in realization and in anticipation.

Last, but not least, the key theme of the papers, “In the Power of the Spirit”, reminds us of the role of the Holy Spirit in the discussion of the hope of new creation. Both papers assume the key role of the Spirit in the new creation, but do not discuss it in-depth. In what sense does the Spirit bring about a new creation, empower us while living in tension, and lead us to the ultimate future? First, the Spirit is an active agent which brings about creation and new creation through resurrection. The prophetic oracle of Ezekiel envisions the life-giving spirit most vividly in his vision of dry bones in the valley (Ezek 37:1-14). The oracle recalls the creation account in which spirit (*ruach*; breath) plays a central role. It also anticipates re-creation and resurrection. The Lord, the giver of life, asks: “Can the dead live again?”<sup>16</sup> (Ezek 37:3) It is the spirit of the Lord that reanimates dry bones and that brings life to the dead (Ezek 37:11, 14). Moreover, in our groaning with the whole creation, while living in the tension between present and future reality, the Spirit joins us and the whole creation and intercedes for us (Rom 8:18-27). Paul in Romans 8 not only broadens a vision of the resurrection of the individuals in Christ to that of the renewal of the whole creation, but also places the role of the Spirit in the renewal of the whole creation at the center.<sup>17</sup> Without the indwelling presence of the Spirit, the hope of new creation remains as an empty promise. In the power of the Spirit, those in Christ as individually and corporately find the strength to live out the hope of new creation.

Finally, I would like to pose a couple of questions that were prompted by the papers for further reflection. 1) Where is the place of judgment in the discussion of hope of new creation? Rightly, the end is not about a successful escape from destruction or about a celebration of the destruction of evil. Yet, the ultimate divine judgment is inevitably part of the story in our perception of the end as the immediate and wider contexts of the biblical vision of new creation indicate. Neither Daniels nor Valentin-Vera tackles this issue directly. Perhaps, Daniels’s question about eschatology which realistically pays attention to the personal and structural nature of sin could be further explored in this regard.<sup>18</sup> 2) In what sense does the church shape and reshape her present life in light of the end of the story? How might the hope of new creation as a pilgrimage shed light on the corporate witness of the church in relation to her understanding of the hope of new creation in practice?

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<sup>14</sup> Valentin-Vera, 6.

<sup>15</sup> See Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 174 further elaborations on this point.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Jenson, *Ezekiel* (London: SCM, 2009), 281.

<sup>17</sup> John W. Yates, *The Spirit and Creation in Paul* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 151-2.

<sup>18</sup> Daniels, 4.