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‘NEW CREATION’ IN PAUL

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INTRODUCTION

‘Creation’ and ‘new creation’ are familiar expressions to Christians. This familiarity is due not only to the direct meaning of the word ‘creation’ and its derivatives as found in the creation story in Genesis 1 and 2, but also to the connection with God’s work of restoration of His people and of the whole creation after the catastrophe of the Fall. At the very end of the drama of Scripture, we see God proclaiming ‘Behold, I am *making* all things new’ (Rev. 21:5), referring to the consummation of His great restoration. Throughout the Scripture, we find different writers describing God’s saving activity in the language of creation. ‘The objects of God’s saving activity are his rebellious creatures who, along with the entire created order, are cursed with futility and decay (Gen. 3:17, 18; Rom. 8:20, 21).’¹

The phrase *καὶνὴ κτίσις* is used only twice in Paul’s letters, in Galatians 6:15 and in 2 Corinthians 5:17. However, while the exact terminology might be missing, the idea and the theology of ‘new creation’ permeates the whole of Scripture. Generally speaking, we can understand the term ‘new creation’ used by Paul in three ways: ‘the soterio-anthropological meaning, the soterio-cosmological meaning or the ecclesiological meaning’.² If ‘new creation’ is taken anthropologically³, then the meaning would be the new nature that the Christian enjoys in regeneration. If the expression is taken ecclesiologically, then it refers to collective reality, that is the people of God, the Church. Finally, if it is taken cosmologically, then the expressions would be referring to the restoration of the whole cosmos and order of creation. In each of these views, Jesus Christ and His work are central, and the Holy Spirit and His work is vital in the realization of these three categories of new creation. The question to be asked in this article is ‘What did Paul mean by new creation in 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 6:15?’ In answering this question, I will sketch out a brief his-

¹ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, ‘New Creation, New Creature’, in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), p. 1544.

² Moyer V. Hubbard, *New Creation in Paul’s Letters and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 222.

³ Sometimes this view will be referred to in the article as ‘the individualistic view’.

tory of the interpretation of this expression. Then I will sketch the challenges for the anthropological view which started to rise in more recent scholarship. Finally, I will argue for the primacy of the anthropological view in the light of exegetical, contextual and theological evidences.

HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION

The following historical survey is not comprehensive, but it gives a brief history of the mainstream of the understanding Paul's term; new creation. As Hubbard notes, 'Any historical survey of Paul's new creation motif would have to grant pride of place to the anthropological interpretation'.⁴ Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215) applied an anthropological reading to the concept of the new creation in his *Stromata* 3.8.⁵ John Chrysostom (344/354-407; fl. 386-407) also held to the same reading.⁶ Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-394), agreed as well with the anthropological emphasis. He commented on 2 Corinthians 5:17, 'For, when the soul hates sin, it closely unites itself with God, as far as it can, in the regimen of virtue; having been transformed in life, it receives the grace of the Spirit to itself, becomes entirely new again and is recreated.'⁷ In addition to these early church fathers, this reading has support in a number of other early Christian writers like Tertullian, Jerome, Augustine and many others.⁸ Interestingly, Matta El Maskeen, an Egyptian monk, a prolific writer and the most important Coptic theologian in the 20th century argues for the primacy of the anthropological meaning in his commentary on Galatians.⁹

During the reformation, in his famous commentary on Galatians, Luther commented on Galatians 6:15, 'A new creature is one in whom the image of God has been renewed.'¹⁰ One of the finest biblical expositors of his age, John Brown (1784-1858) explained the term *καὶνὴ κτίσις* in his

⁴ Hubbard, *New Creation*, 2.

⁵ 'Quare si quis est in Christo, nova creatura est,' nec amplius peccatis dedita: 'Vetera praeiterierunt,' vitam antiquam exuimus: 'Ecce enim nova facta sunt,' castitas ex fornicatione, et continentia ex incontinentia, iustitia ex iniustitia. (English Translation: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature and no longer devoted to sin: 'The old things have passed away,' we put off the old life).

⁶ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, 11.4.

⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Christian Mode of Life*, FC 58: 141-42.

⁸ Hubbard, *New Creation*, p. 2.

⁹ Matta El Maskeen, *An Exposition of Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, (Wadi El Natroon: Anba Makar Monastery, 1996), pp. 686-87.

¹⁰ Martin Luther, *A Commentarie of M. Doctor Martin Luther Upon the Epistle of S. Paul to the Galathians* (London: Thomas Vautroullier, 1575), p. 280.

commentary on Galatians in connection with the other incident in 2 Corinthians. He saw ‘new creation’ in 2 Corinthians 5 ‘describing the whole change which takes place when a man becomes a Christian, the change of state, as well as the change of disposition, the change of relation, as well as the change of character, but only restricted it to the latter in Galatians 6’.¹¹ This anthropological reading continued as ‘the standard interpretation of the great German theologies and monographs of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.’¹²

However, this consensus dramatically shifted in the twentieth century. As more interest in the Jewish background of the New Testament arose, other categories started to prevail in interpreting the meaning of the ‘new creation’ by Paul. Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930) did not challenge the anthropological interpretation of *καὶνὴ κτίσις*, but he suggested that Paul was using a traditional rabbinic motif unfamiliar to his readers.¹³ Harnack argued that the best understanding of Paul is dependent on the socio-religious context of the pre-Christian Paul, rather than on Paul’s writings themselves. The new interest in the Jewish background was accompanied with the rise of the ‘apocalyptic Paul,’ in which we find more emphasis on the cosmological interpretation of ‘new creation.’ Wearing these interpretive lenses, ‘new creation’ became an expression that ‘refers to the creation being renewed and restored by God in the age to come’.¹⁴

According to this apocalyptic view of Paul, the resurrection of Christ was the initiation of the new age, which will only be fully recognized at the *parousia*. In this way, the new creation is defined through a cosmological category, in which the old world is replaced through the apocalyptic shift of the Christ event by the *καὶνὴ κτίσις*. Douglas Moo observes this view is common in contemporary interpreters.¹⁵

Another recent view is the ecclesiological one. According to this view, ‘new creation’ is a collective term referring to the people of God, the church. Proponents of this view point to number of key texts from Isaiah 40-55 and Isaiah 56-66. We will look at this more closely below. According to this view, new creation in Galatians 6:15 is illustrated in Galatians 6:16 by ‘the Israel of God.’ ‘The New Creation (Gal. 6:15-16) are

¹¹ John Brown, *Galatians*, Geneva Series of Commentaries (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), p. 379.

¹² Hubbard, *New Creation*, p. 2.

¹³ Hubbard, *New Creation*, p. 3.

¹⁴ Yongbom Lee, ‘New Creation’, in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. by John D. Barry et al., (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

¹⁵ Douglas J. Moo, ‘Creation and New Creation’, *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 20, no. 1 (2010), p. 41.

(collectively) God's Israel.¹⁶ For the ecclesiological view, another phrase that is closely connected to 'new creation' in Paul is the term *new man* in Ephesians 2:15. 'Peace has been made by a new man having been founded in Christ: again, a collective image (Eph. 2:15)'.¹⁷ 'This phrase signifies the community of those who are "in Christ," regardless of ethnicity'.¹⁸ Richard Hays sees the church as an aspect of the new creation in his book *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*.¹⁹

Other Options

Many scholars argue that choosing between the three categories of the meaning of 'new creation' in Paul is unnecessary. For instance, Gottfried Nebe combines the anthropological and ecclesiological interpretation together as he says, 'In Corinthians the new creation is as in Galatians an ecclesiological collective and individual term'.²⁰ Others see the scope of 'new creation' in Galatians 6:15 and 2 Corinthians 5:17 as cosmic and anthropological.²¹ While Jerry L. Sumney argues for the primacy of the cosmological and ecclesiological as he comments on 2 Corinthians 5:16-17.²²

Other scholars refuse to choose any category to have the primacy over the others. Levison contends that, 'it is not possible to choose definitively between these options. Nor is it necessary, for all three mutually illuminate each other'.²³ The same view is held by Douglas Moo who argues for 'a broad view that includes all the three categories'.²⁴ This last view sees the new creation as a new state of affairs inaugurated by the Christ event. Accordingly, the new creation is a reality that Christians become

¹⁶ J. Duncan M. Derrett, 'New Creation: Qumran, Paul, The Church, and Jesus', *Revue de Qumran* 13, no. 1-4 (October 1988), p. 602.

¹⁷ Derrett, 'New Creation', p. 602.

¹⁸ Lee, 'New Creation'.

¹⁹ See Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*, edition. (London: T & T Clark International, 1997), p. 198.

²⁰ Gottfried Nebe, 'Creation in Paul's Theology', in *Creation in Jewish and Christian Tradition* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), p. 123.

²¹ Elwell and Beitzel, 'New Creation, New Creature', p. 1546.

²² Jerry L. Sumney, "'In Christ there is a New Creation': Apocalypticism in Paul', *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 40, no. 1 (2013), p. 42.

²³ John R. Levison, 'Creation and New Creation', in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. by Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), p. 190.

²⁴ Moo, 'Creation and New Creation', p. 42.

partakers of.²⁵ This last option does not deny the individual transformation within the scope of the new creation. However, many times it denies that the primary notion that the new creation is anthropological.²⁶

This begs the question: Are each of the three categories of new creation present in Paul's letters, but with the primacy of one particular aspect more than the others, that is the anthropological, as the church has predominantly claimed for many centuries?

ARGUMENTS AGAINST ANTHROPOLOGICAL PRIMACY

The phrase 'new creation' appears only twice in Paul's letters, in Galatians 6:15 and 2 Corinthians 5:17, and it never occurs in the Old Testament. Although this precise phrase is not an exact quote, there are many interesting parallels found in the Old Testament, especially the cases in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. In fact, one of the main arguments that downplays the primacy of the anthropological interpretation of Paul's new creation depends primarily on the Jewish background of Paul in understanding his expressions.

Isaiah

The book of Isaiah is considered by many commentators to be the most important Old Testament background for Paul's new creation motif.²⁷ 'The pervasiveness of creation language in Isa 40-55 is resonated in Paul's use of creation language to describe the 'new things' that God is doing among his new covenant people'.²⁸ The language of newness is also present in Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22. In these texts, 'Isaiah envisages an ultimate salvation that extends beyond the people of Israel or even the land of Israel to include the entire cosmos'.²⁹ The parallelism between Isaiah 43:18-19 and 2 Corinthians 5:17 is quite significant. In fact, the LXX translation uses the same words for 'old' and 'new', similar to what Paul uses in 2 Corinthians 5:17 (ἀρχαῖα & καινὰ). G. K. Beale comments on this parallelism, 'especially striking is the contrast found nowhere else

²⁵ G. K. Beale, 'The Old Testament Background of Reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5-7 and Its Bearing on the Literary Problem of 2 Corinthians 6.14-7.1', *New Testament Studies* 35 (October 1989), p. 556.

²⁶ e.g. John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), p. 395.

²⁷ Peter Balla, '2 Corinthians', in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed by G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), pp. 765-66.

²⁸ Moo, 'Creation and New Creation', p. 54.

²⁹ Moo, 'Creation and New Creation', p. 45.

between τὰ ἀρχαῖα and καινὰ which is connected by ἰδοὺ plus creation vocabulary'.³⁰

Therefore, the argument against the primacy of an anthropological interpretation of the new creation in Paul goes like this: Paul's background for the new creation language comes from Isaiah. Isaiah's allusion to a new creation is more concerned with 'a future era when God transforms this sinful world into a completely new creation'.³¹ For them, 'Paul interprets Isaianic material as prophecy of eschatological salvation which God has accomplished in Christ'.³² With this background, Paul must have used the term 'new creation' in a broad way, in which human transformation is not excluded but still not the point of focus.

Jewish Apocalyptic Writings

Another possible background for Paul's use of 'new creation' is extra-biblical Jewish literature. 'We meet the concept of new creation infrequently in Jewish literature like 1QS 4:25, 2 *Baruch* 32:6, 2 *Baruch* 44:12, 4 *Ezra* 7:75, 1 *Enoch* 72:1, *Jubilees* 1:29 and 4:26'.³³ By way of example, 2 *Baruch* 32:6 speaks about the day when 'the Mighty One will renew His creation'.³⁴ 1 *Enoch* 72 also refers to the luminaries of the heaven and the way that they will remain as they are, 'till the new creation is accomplished which dureth till eternity'.³⁵ *Jubilees* 1:29 talks about the day of renewal in a cosmological sense.³⁶ Having this background as a highly educated Pharisee, it can be argued that Paul's use of 'new creation' must have been guided by Jewish apocalypticism.³⁷

Pauline New Creation

Approaching Paul himself now, should we start with the expression 'new creation' in Galatians first or 2 Corinthians first? Would it make a difference? Some scholars looking into the same issue, like Douglas Moo, chose to start with Galatians because 'he thinks that it was written some

³⁰ Beale, 'The Old Testament Background of Reconciliation', p. 553.

³¹ Gary V. Smith, 'Isaiah 65-66: The Destiny of God's Servants in a New Creation', *Bibliotheca sacra* 171, no. 681 (January 2014), p. 42.

³² T. Ryan Jackson, *New Creation in Paul's Letters: A Study of the Historical and Social Setting of a Pauline Concept* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2016), p. 123.

³³ Nebe, 'Creation in Paul's Theology', p. 121.

³⁴ *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, ed. by Robert Henry Charles, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), p. 499.

³⁵ Charles, *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, p. 237.

³⁶ Charles, *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, p. 13.

³⁷ Moo, 'Creation and New Creation', p. 46.

years before 2 Corinthians’.³⁸ In her book review of Moyer Hubbard’s monograph *New Creation in Paul’s Letters and Thought*, Susan Eastman believes that Hubbard’s conclusion—that ‘new creation’ in Paul is primarily anthropological—is due to approaching 2 Corinthians first.³⁹ Had he started differently, the results could have differed. According to Eastman and Moo, understanding the new creation first from Galatians then to 2 Corinthians would lead easily to downplaying the primacy of the anthropological interpretation of new creation. A necessary presupposition for this line of thought is that ‘new creation’ has the same meaning in both instances. As we are discussing the arguments against the primacy of the anthropological interpretation, we will follow Moo and Eastman’s order; Galatians then 2 Corinthians.

Galatians 6:15

In the closing section of the letter (Gal. 6:11-18), Paul is wrapping up the most important issues that he wanted to communicate to the Galatians. The centrality of the Christ event for Paul is not debated in Galatians 6:14. Participation in the death of Christ which Paul raised earlier in Galatians 2:20 is the critical point that makes all the difference.

For the opponents of the anthropological interpretation, ‘Christ’s death effects the transfer from ‘old age’ to new, so, as believers identify with Christ, they find themselves transferred from the old age to the new;⁴⁰ that is, the new creation. According to this view, Paul contrasts belonging to the world with belonging to the new creation. Compelling circumcision is an expression of enslavement to the law, ‘which Paul portrayed in Galatians 3:23-4:3 as enslavement to στοιχειᾶ τοῦ κόσμου’.⁴¹ Therefore, relativity of circumcision is an expression of belonging to the new creation. James Dunn describes this contrast as he comments on Galatians 6:15

‘World’ is a term Paul confines to the present age, but ‘creation’ (like ‘age’) can also be used for the age to come (cf. Rom. 8:19–22 and 2 Cor. 5:17— ‘new creation’). By ‘new creation’ he presumably means the world of existence made new, recreated, to serve as a fitting context for God’s children (cf. Rom. 8:21); the word can mean ‘creature’, but the contrast with ‘world’ suggests the larger

³⁸ Moo, ‘Creation and New Creation’, p. 47.

³⁹ Susan Grove Eastman, ‘New Creation in Paul’s Letters and Thought’, *Review of Biblical Literature* 5 (2003), p. 461.

⁴⁰ Moo, ‘Creation and New Creation’, p. 48.

⁴¹ Jackson, *New Creation in Paul’s Letters*, p. 89.

meaning (cf. Isa. 65:17; 66:22). Paul in fact speaks in apocalyptic terms of 'two different worlds'.⁴²

Therefore, the 'world' for this team is not just the created world. Κόσμος is 'the fallen sinful world, with particular focus on the value system of that world. It functions as a close equivalent to the term "old age" in Galatians 1:4'.⁴³ Jesus Christ gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age. 'The cross of Christ shatters every ordered system of norms, however embedded in the seemingly 'natural' order of the 'world' (cf. Galatians 4:3)'.⁴⁴ This present evil age in Galatians 1:4 is contrasted with the new creation inaugurated at the resurrection. The vital point that puts an end to this world and inaugurates a new creation with a new state of affairs, new values, new kind of life is the death and resurrection of Christ. Dunn explains this turning point as follows: 'With Christ's death the exclusive rule of sin and death has been broken; with Christ's resurrection the new age/creation has already begun'.⁴⁵

Galatians 5:6 is an almost identical verse to Galatians 6:15. They are similar in the syntax and in the terminology used. The only difference is that the last part in which 'new creation' is substituted with 'faith working through love.' Moo argues that both verses 'assert that the coming of Christ introduces a whole new state of affairs in the world'.⁴⁶ For opponents of anthropological interpretation, the contrast highlighted in Galatians 5:6 is between 'a community and a mind-set determined by a rite which divided humanity into two thus sharply distinct classes ("the circumcision" and "the uncircumcision") and another mind-set and community characterized by the openness of faith and the spontaneity of love'.⁴⁷ Accordingly, 'new creation' is the title of this new community and this new mind-set that is characterized by faith working through love. In conclusion, opponents of the anthropological interpretation did not deny the anthropological aspect of the new creation in Galatians 6:15, at least not all of them.⁴⁸ Therefore, they saw 'new creation' primarily pointing to a new objective reality that was inaugurated by the Christ event and

⁴² James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, Black's New Testament Commentaries; 9 (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1993), pp. 342–43.

⁴³ Moo, 'Creation and New Creation', p. 48.

⁴⁴ Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, p. 394.

⁴⁵ Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 343.

⁴⁶ Moo, 'Creation and New Creation', p. 48.

⁴⁷ Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 271.

⁴⁸ e.g. Moo and Jackson argue the 'new creation' is primarily objective, but also view it as having an anthropological application. See. Moo, 'Creation and New Creation', p. 41 and Jackson, *New Creation in Paul's Letters*, pp. 89, 101–2.

believers partake of this new reality when they are united with Christ (cf. Gal. 2:20 and Gal. 6:14).

2 Corinthians 5:17

When it comes to 2 Corinthians 5:17, denying the primacy of the anthropological soteriological interpretation of *καινή κτίσις* becomes harder. The reason is the individualistic language that Paul uses ὥστε εἴ τις ἐν Χριστῷ, *καινή κτίσις*. The εἴ and the τις translated 'If anyone' stresses the anthropological sense of the verse. Literally, the text means 'If anyone is in Christ, new creation'. Because of the individualized sense and the soteriological context, many interpreters think that 'new creation' here refers to individual regeneration.⁴⁹ Murray Harris argues, 'The εἴ and the τις combine to give *καινή κτίσις* a personal reference relating to an individual's faith-union with Christ.'⁵⁰ Consequently, many English translations translate 2 Corinthians 5:17 as follows: 'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away; behold, the new has come.' However, reading it in the light of Galatians 6:15 and in the light of Isaianic background led opponents of the anthropological view to understand 'new creation' differently.

As noted earlier, the parallelism between the Isaianic tradition and 2 Corinthians 5 can hardly be denied. Opponents of the anthropological primacy can highlight at least three main points that contribute in understanding the 'new creation' in 2 Corinthians 5:17. First, in both texts, we can see a radical change from old things to new things. Isaiah 43:18-19 stresses the wondrous newness that God will create to the extent that the old will not be remembered.⁵¹ Similarly, Paul says that 'the old has passed away; behold the new has come'. Second, Paul quotes from Isaiah 49:8 in 2 Corinthians 6:2 as he refers to 'the day of salvation'. Thirdly, Isaiah's promise of renewal clearly points to the restoration of Israel as His covenant people and to a cosmic renovation (cf. Isa. 43:19, Isa. 65-66). Definitely, individual transformation is implied, but 'Isaianic background does not focus on this point, which shows that the individual renewal is part of a larger picture'.⁵²

The question then, in the eyes of these opponents, is: why did Paul use the new creation motif in 2 Corinthians? Paul had a difficult time as

⁴⁹ Vilson Scholz, 'New Creation in Paul', *Missio apostolica* 7, no. 2 (November 1999), p. 91.

⁵⁰ Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2005), p. 432.

⁵¹ Jackson, *New Creation in Paul's Letters*, p. 120.

⁵² Moo, 'Creation and New Creation', p. 55.

an apostle with the church in Corinth. Most probably, under the influence of rival teachers (2 Cor. 5:10-10-12, 11:4-5, 11:12-15, 11:19-23, 12:11), the Corinthians questioned Paul's apostleship.⁵³ For the Corinthians, 'Paul's appearance did not match the powerful and authoritative image which they felt should be characteristic of an apostle'.⁵⁴ According to the opponents of the anthropological view, Paul defended his apostleship by encouraging the Corinthians to change their epistemology so that their views might be shaped according to the new age inaugurated by Christ.⁵⁵ In 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 a clear basis is set which is the Christ event, upon which life should change. A turning point is strongly expressed in verse 16 'ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν' 'from now on,' which refers to the new age the church started to live in.⁵⁶ The contrast between the two ages is even more stressed at the end of verse 16: 'we regard him thus *no longer*.' Entering this new age necessarily means that the Corinthians' standards of evaluation should change to fit this new age. Participation in the new creation inaugurated by the Christ event means that their evaluation of Paul's ministry should be according to the standards of the 'new creation'.⁵⁷ This line of thought becomes clear in the next verse as Paul says that if anyone is in Christ there is 'a new creation' and that the 'old things have passed away'. 'The new era that is present in the church demands a new way of thinking, a new way of evaluating Christ, ministers, and all things'.⁵⁸

A great emphasis is put unto the death and resurrection of Christ as the turning point of history upon which 'new creation' is inaugurated. This view includes a necessary change in those who are ἐν Χριστῷ that results in a reorientation of their values and priorities.⁵⁹ However, for them, καινὴ κτίσις 'does not speak in the first place of personal, individual regeneration, the individual past and the personal renewal. It is a matter here of redemptive-historical categories of old and new'.⁶⁰

ARGUMENTS FOR ANTHROPOLOGICAL PRIMACY

This section will present the main arguments for the anthropological interpretation with some responses for the counter arguments that were

⁵³ Moo, 'Creation and New Creation', p. 53.

⁵⁴ Jackson, *New Creation in Paul's Letters*, p. 128.

⁵⁵ Jackson, *New Creation in Paul's Letters*, p. 128.

⁵⁶ Sumney, "'In Christ there is a New Creation'", p. 42.

⁵⁷ Beale, 'The Old Testament Background of Reconciliation', p. 558.

⁵⁸ Sumney, "'In Christ there is a New Creation'", p. 42.

⁵⁹ Moo, 'Creation and New Creation', p. 54.

⁶⁰ Herman N. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of his Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 194.

mentioned in the previous section. Noticeably, proponents of the anthropological interpretation do not necessarily deny other aspects of 'new creation'.⁶¹ For instance, Hubbard contends, 'Both new-creation texts are expanded either ecclesialogically (Gal. 6:6), or anthropologically-universally (2 Cor. 5:18-20) so as to preclude a narrowly individualistic perspective'.⁶² However, he also affirms the primacy of the anthropological interpretation of 'new creation' in Galatians 6:15 and 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Old Testament Background

Proponents of the anthropological interpretation affirm that the new creation motif employed by Paul finds its roots in the later prophets, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Isaiah 40-55 has the highest concentration of creation language in the whole Bible, and that language is employed precisely to communicate a message of redemption.⁶³ God is promising that he will deliver His people by doing something new (cf. Isa. 48:19, Isa. 51:9-10). Then Isaiah goes further with the language of newness especially in chapters 65 and 66 with more emphasis on the renewal of the creation. One may say that the whole emphasis in Isaiah is about the renewal of the creation, but this claim would not accurately reflect the promises of Isaiah. God's act of new creation, 'involves a complete reorganization of life; the hazards of life are removed (65:19-20, 23, 25). The God who has seemed far off will now be near (65:24), and the existence of His people will no longer be precarious and uncertain but perpetual and safe (66:22)'.⁶⁴

Other texts in Ezekiel and Jeremiah also communicate the idea of inner renewal.⁶⁵ The well-known text in Jeremiah 31:31-34 contains a promise of a new covenant with its emphasis on an inward renewal of God's people. In fact, the central point of the new covenant is the inward cleansing and renewal of God's people, which solves their central plight, that is their sin.⁶⁶ Ezekiel also wrote about a similar promises of a new spirit (11:19, 36:26), a heart of flesh (11:19), a new heart (36:36), His Spirit (36:27) and God's accompaniment with His people (11:20, 36:28). There-

⁶¹ Dan Liroy, 'New Creation Theology in 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2', *Conspectus: The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary* 17, no. 03 (March 1, 2014), p. 61.

⁶² Hubbard, *New Creation*, p. 232.

⁶³ Hubbard, *New Creation*, pp. 12, 14.

⁶⁴ Philip H. Towner, 'New Creation', in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. by Walter A. Elwell, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), p. 562.

⁶⁵ Lee, 'New Creation'.

⁶⁶ Hubbard, *New Creation*, p. 18.

fore, both prophets looked forward for the time when God would perform an act of new creation in the heart of His redeemed people.⁶⁷

Extra Biblical Literature

While anthropological new-creation texts can be deduced from the Old Testament, similar evidences are scarcer in extra biblical Jewish resources, but not absent. In fact, Moo points to the reality that 'older interpreters regularly shed light on Paul's new creation language by citing rabbis' application of "new creation" language to inner renewal and forgiveness'.⁶⁸ Nebe argues that the story in 2 Maccabees 7:23,⁶⁹ about the martyrdom of a Jewish family for the sake of the law, connects creation and resurrection, and that this story provides an interested reference related to 'new creation' in 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 6:15.⁷⁰

Another related reference is the Hellenistic-Jewish romantic narrative *Joseph and Aseneth*, which was contemporary to the New Testament writings.⁷¹ In this narrative, the conversion of Aseneth to Judaism is understood to be a new creation as described by a heavenly man.⁷² The text says in *Joseph and Aseneth* 15:4-5 'Behold, from today, you will be renewed and formed anew and made alive again, and you will eat blessed bread of life, and drink a blessed cup of immortality, and anoint yourself with blessed ointment of incorruptibility'.⁷³ Definitely this idea of conversion is not identical to Paul's or to any of the New Testament writers. However, the possible common point is that an individual conversion can be rendered as a new creation.

Accordingly, to claim that interpreting 'new creation' in Paul anthropologically is invalid because his Jewish background did not teach this interpretation is an inaccurate claim. Truly, the expression 'new creation' is not used verbally in the Old Testament and was generally used to denote cosmological renovation in extra-biblical texts. However, the idea of conversion was well known and connected to God's act of creation whether in the Old Testament or in Jewish extra biblical texts.

⁶⁷ Hubbard, *New Creation*, p. 24.

⁶⁸ Moo, 'Creation and New Creation', p. 46.

⁶⁹ 'Therefore, the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of human-kind and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws.' (NRSV)

⁷⁰ Nebe, 'Creation in Paul's Theology', p. 124.

⁷¹ Hubbard, *New Creation*, p. 55.

⁷² Levison, 'Creation and New Creation', p. 189.

⁷³ Cited in Lee, 'New Creation'.

Pauline Material

Now it is time to examine the meaning of 'καινή κτίσις' in the light of its literary-theological context in Galatians and 2 Corinthians.

Galatians 6:15

Previously, we saw that the main argument in Galatians, according to the opponents of the anthropological interpretation, is the contrast between an old and a new state of affairs, with the Christ event as the turning point at which the new aeon was inaugurated. On the other hand, those who hold to the anthropological interpretation argue that central to Paul's argument in the letter is the antithesis between internal spirituality and external spirituality, the flesh and the Spirit, faith and works of the law. Another way of framing the debate would be: Does Paul argue about soteriology or ecclesiology?

Although, ecclesiological and sociological dimensions existed in the situation in Galatia that Paul was addressing (cf. Gal. 3:28, 6:16), his main point was more soteriological.⁷⁴ For example, in the introduction to the letter, Paul's language is quite strong. He warns against accepting a different *gospel* and even pronounces anathemas against whoever preaches a different gospel (Gal. 1:7-9). Noticeably, the agitators are mentioned in Galatians 1:7 and in Galatians 6:12-13. For Paul, compelling the rite of circumcision upon Gentiles was considered to be preaching another gospel. Also, in Galatians 2:16-21 after referring to the debate with Peter, Paul uses this instance to illustrate the antithesis between nomistic observance and faith in Christ as the means to the right standing before God. Therefore, the main thesis then can be summarized as: 'no one is made right with God on the basis of external ceremonies or human efforts of any kind but only through the unilateral action of God in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the object of the believer's trust and the One whose Spirit liberates and empowers all those whose sins are forgiven.'⁷⁵ In this soteriological context, Paul makes reference to the new creation motif. Paul's main issue is: What really matters for being a Christian? Is it an external performance or a right standing before God and a new creation by the Holy Spirit? As Timothy George summarizes, 'Justification by faith is not a legal fiction but a living reality that manifests itself in the new creation.'⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Hubbard, *New Creation*, p. 200.

⁷⁵ Timothy George, *Galatians*, The New American Commentary v. 30 (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman & Holman, 1994), p. 438.

⁷⁶ George, *Galatians*, p. 438.

External vs. Internal

This antithesis between external performance or legalism and internal transformation through union with Christ will be a controlling theme throughout the whole letter up to Galatians 6:11-18. In Galatians 6:12-13 Paul describes the mindset of a legalist as a person who seeks boasting and tries to avoid shame and persecution. The cross of Christ is a stumbling block for those seeking to boast in our performance and avoiding persecution. Justification by faith in Christ means abandoning any merit through our works and depending totally upon Christ. Moreover, following the crucified Christ means sharing in His suffering and rejection, a position which contradicts the mindset of boasting before men. By beginning verse 6:14 with ἐμοὶ δὲ, Paul puts himself and true believers (6:14-15) in opposition to the agitators in Galatians 6:12-13.

Paul as a Paradigm

Paul expresses this boastful mindset by describing the agitators as 'those who want to make a good showing in the flesh' (6:12). This description is a clear reference to those who are more concerned with external appearance. He reiterates the same idea in 6:15 when he relativizes circumcision. The other alternative for Paul is boasting in Christ and His death (6:14) and being a new creation (6:15).⁷⁷ In fact, in Galatians Paul used his own life as a paradigm of this antithesis. In Galatians 6:12-18, 'Paul returns to the paradigmatic first-person singular, underscoring the importance of the autobiographical narrative in chapter 1 and 2'.⁷⁸ He was someone who used to boast in the flesh and in his religious life (Gal. 1:14). But when he met the risen Christ, that encounter made him someone new no more seeking any praise from men. On the contrary, we see him confronting Peter for trying to avoid shame for the sake of Christ (Gal. 2:11-12). Following this line of thought, we can see that,

Paul's rejection of his Torah-oriented way of life was the result of his transforming encounter with Jesus Christ (1:15-16; 2:19-20), and it is difficult not to see these crucial themes (formerly/now, external vs. internal) crystalized in the words 'neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, but *new creation*'.⁷⁹

Faith and Spirit

This antithesis between the external and internal is expressed in the following chapters in Galatians in terms of faith versus law and the Spirit

⁷⁷ Towner, 'New Creation', p. 562.

⁷⁸ Hubbard, *New Creation*, p. 91.

⁷⁹ Hubbard, *New Creation*, p. 226.

versus the flesh. Paul seeks to define the true people of God who are changed internally by the work of the Spirit through hearing the gospel of Christ by faith. Among their descriptions are the following: They received the Spirit by hearing with faith (Gal. 2:2); they are sons of Abraham (2:7); they are sons of God (3:26); they are heirs of the promise of Abraham (3:29); they are children of the free woman (4:31). From chapter three through chapter five verse twelve, 'Paul is keen to define God's people in terms of faith and the Spirit and to move them away from the law and nomistic observance'.⁸⁰ After putting this doctrinal foundation in place and showing the fallacy of the agitators, Paul moves to ethical exhortations showing the difference between a life led by the Spirit and life guided by the flesh (Gal. 5:13-26).⁸¹

The role of the Spirit as a clear identifier of who true Christians are and of the way the Spirit works in the life of the true believers is prominent in Galatians. The contrast between the flesh and the Spirit is plain in the letter as well. In Galatians 3:3 Paul puts the Spirit and the flesh against each other where nomistic obedience, including circumcision, is a synonym for perfection by the flesh. Surprisingly, Paul never mentions the word 'Spirit' in his closing section; however, he clearly refers to the agitators as 'those who want to make a good showing in the flesh' (Gal. 6:12). He points to circumcision in particular as the expression of this boasting. Then in 6:15, after abolishing any fleshly cause of boasting, whether circumcision or uncircumcision, he asserts what really matters is 'new creation,' which is the work of the Spirit. Therefore, the absence of *καινή κτίσις* in the whole letter previously and the absence of the Spirit in this closing section may imply that an interchangeability exists between the Spirit and 'new creation' in Paul's mind. By interchangeability, I do not mean that 'new creation' and the Spirit are the same thing, but I mean that 'new creation affords possession of the Spirit (3:3; 4:6) and life lived in dependence on and submission to the Spirit (5:16-18, 25; 6:8)'.⁸²

More light can be shed on the antithesis between the relativity of circumcision and 'new creation' in Galatians 6:15 by referring to corresponding texts (Gal. 5:6 and 1 Cor. 7:19) in which Paul uses the same phrase 'neither circumcision nor uncircumcision' to relativize the importance of circumcision. The three verses are:
Galatians 6:15 'For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.'

⁸⁰ Hubbard, *New Creation*, p. 200.

⁸¹ George, *Galatians*, p. 374.

⁸² Towner, 'New Creation', p. 563.

Galatians 5:6 'For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.'

1 Corinthians 7:19 'For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision but keeping the commandments of God.'

Comparing these three verses, we see that new creation in Galatians 6:15 is replaced by 'faith working through love' in Galatians 5:6. In other words, 'new creation' is expressed in the life of the Christian by faith working through love.⁸³ 'Faith is the result of God's new creation work; it cannot be attributed to the autonomous work of human beings but is a creative and miraculous work of God.'⁸⁴ This faith is not a dead faith but must produce fruit in love. This fruition is expressed in 1 Corinthians 7:19 in which 'new creation' is replaced by 'keeping the commandments of God.' In other words, keeping God's commands is the consequence of faith, the result of being a new creation. 'Such obedience is not the basis of justification, but the result of justification and an expression of the new life granted to believers.'⁸⁵

Opponents of the anthropological interpretation of 'new creation' do not deny the antithetical nature of this section in Galatians (6:12-18). However, they stress the antithesis between the cosmos and 'new creation' instead of the old life characterized by boasting in appearance and 'new creation' characterized by boasting in the cross of Christ. The question is Why would someone choose one of these two views? In fact, the emphatic personal pronouns of 6.14 should play a significant role in deciding which way to go. 'In verse 14 Paul's personal pronouns are placed in the emphatic position (ἐμοὶ ... ἐμοὶ ... κἀγὼ), while in verse 15 new creation receives the emphasis, and it seems only reasonable to relate the two'.⁸⁶ In other words, the antithesis in 6:14-15 is not between the new creation and the world but between new creation and the old self that is crucified with Christ.

On the other hand, adopting the anthropological interpretation of the new creation does not negate the antithesis between being a new creation and the present evil age (cf. Gal. 1:4). However, 'new creation' in Galatians 6:15 is not set as the opposite pole of the old age, rather, Paul speaks of 'new creation' that exists in this old age; and because of union with Christ, this new creation is dead to this world (6:14).

John Brown summarizes the meaning of new creation in Galatians as follows:

⁸³ Brown, *Galatians*, pp. 380–81.

⁸⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), p. 317.

⁸⁵ Schreiner, *Galatians*, p. 318.

⁸⁶ Hubbard, *New Creation*, p. 223.

It is that new mode of thinking and feeling which, growing out of faith of the truth respecting the Cross of Christ – produced by the Holy Spirit, and manifesting itself in love and its fruits, – constitutes the essence of true Christianity. [...] It (new creation) is a new way of thinking, of feeling, and of acting – a new system of sentiments, affections, and habits, all of them the work of the Holy Spirit, growing out of faith of the truth, which he produces in the soul, – faith working by love.⁸⁷

2 Corinthians 5:17

Coming to 2 Corinthians 5:17, Proponents and opponents of the anthropological meaning of 'new creation' agree on the reason that provoked Paul to write this letter. The Corinthians had a low view of Paul's ministry and even questioned his authority for lacking a showy ministry.⁸⁸ In response, Paul is exhorting the Corinthians so that their actions and their life may be in conformity to their identity as 'new creation.' The following arguments support the claim that Paul's main aim of using the expression 'new creation' in 2 Corinthians 5:17 is to point to the individual transformation that included a new way of evaluation.

Individual Language

First of all, the singular pronoun of the protasis τις employed in 2 Corinthians 5:17 governs the apodosis and therefore, it implies that καινή κτίσις is referring to anyone who is in Christ. The other option would be to disconnect the protasis from the apodosis and in this case the text reads 'If anyone is in Christ, then the creation is renewed.' In that case, new creation becomes an objective reality rather than a subjective one, which would be at odds with the whole context. For instance, in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, Paul speaks about the reality of union with Christ and what it implies. To be united with Christ means that one has died with him and becomes alive for him. In 5:17, Paul repeats the same idea of union with Christ using the expression ἐν Χριστῷ. Therefore, Paul's use of this pronoun affirms that Paul has individuals in mind. He is referring to a subjective experience that takes place at conversion.⁸⁹

Paul as Paradigm

Again, Paul gives his own conversion as a paradigm for the transformation from an old creation to a new creation. In 2 Corinthians 5:16, he

⁸⁷ Brown, *Galatians*, p. 379.

⁸⁸ Lioy, 'New Creation Theology in 2 Corinthians 5', p. 70.

⁸⁹ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, The New American Commentary v. 29 (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman & Holman, 1999), p. 286.

speaks of the change of one's standards of assessment. This change can be identified by his use of the temporal references 'from now on ... now ... on.' He used to regard people and to regard Christ himself in a wrong way that has been now changed. The resemblance between Paul's former misconception of Christ and His mission and the Corinthians' misconception of him and his mission is unavoidable here.⁹⁰ Paul called this wrong way of assessment κατὰ σάρκα, which is translated 'according to the flesh.' We can infer that when he says 'no longer', his intention was he now knows Christ κατὰ πνεῦμα.⁹¹ Therefore, a subjective experience in the spiritual life of Paul himself is in view here. Because of Christ's death and resurrection, and because Paul's own conversion to Christ, he ceased to make superficial assessments of others as he once did before even with Christ Himself.⁹²

Creation and New Creation

Although Paul did not use the word creation or any of its derivative in 2 Corinthians except in 5:17, the principle of creation is referred to in different ways. In 2 Corinthians 4:6, Paul depicted his own conversion as a creatorial act of God, using the analogy of creation of light in the creation narrative. Is it justifiable then to understand Paul's expression 'new creation' in the following chapter in soterio-anthropological terms? Definitely, yes!

Another reference to the creation narrative is the allusion to the man's creation in the image of God. In 2 Corinthians 4:4, Paul described unbelief as being blind from seeing God's glory in the face of Christ and he referred to Christ as εἰκὼν τοῦ Θεοῦ. With Christ described as the image of God, the figure of Adam in the creation story as the image of God is lurking in the background.⁹³ At the same time, a few verses earlier, in 2 Corinthians 3:16-18, Paul describes conversion in 3:16 in terms of removing a veil and that through its removal we are enabled to κατοπτριζόμενοι 'behold as in a mirror' God's glory (3:18). This mirror is the face of Jesus Christ (cf. 4:4,6), who is the image of God. Moreover, Paul goes on to describe sanctification as transformation to this very same image of Christ (3:18). Therefore, creation is seen Christologically where Christ is the origin of creation, the pattern of creation and the goal of creation.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Hubbard, *New Creation*, p. 177.

⁹¹ Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 294.

⁹² Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 427.

⁹³ Hubbard, *New Creation*, p. 158.

⁹⁴ G. W. H. (Geoffrey William Hugo) Lampe, "New Testament Doctrine of Ktisis", *Mid-Stream* 4, no. 2 (1964), p. 76.

New Covenant

One final point in this context is the relation between the work of Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit and the new covenant. The transformative work of the Spirit described in 3:16-18 has a Christological goal (cf. 3:18; 4:4).⁹⁵ '2 Corinthians 3:18 is a powerful summary of the passage on the new covenant ministry that began at 2:14'.⁹⁶ This new covenant language with all the references to the inner transformation of human hearts by the agency of the Spirit (cf. 3:3; 3:6; 3:15; 3:18) is echoing the promises of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. As we mentioned earlier, both of these prophets, argued that Israel's main problem resided in the heart and presented the solution in terms of God's new work in the heart. Paul saw himself as a minister of the new covenant (3:6) whom God used to fulfill this pneumatological restoration based on the Christ event. Here we see the centrality of the soterio-anthropological aspect of Paul's ministry in which the promises of the prophets are fulfilled in the transformational work of the Spirit described in creational language.

Commonalities

In the last analysis of the meaning of 'new creation' in Galatians 6:15 and 2 Corinthians 5:17, many common features can be identified. First of all, in both texts, the centrality of the Christ event is crucial. Second, the role of the Spirit in transformation is vital in the literal context of both verses. Another similarity is the antithetical nature between the old and new, the flesh and Spirit, the external and the internal, and life and death. Moreover, both texts expand the meaning of new creation either ecclesialogically or anthropologically-universally, thus avoiding the narrow understanding of new creation as merely anthropological. Finally, Paul's autobiography is central to the argument of both letters in which his conversion is highlighted.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, although there are many views in understanding the meaning of 'new creation' in Paul, most of them agree that generally speaking new creation is a broad expression. Moreover, there is a consensus on the centrality of the death and resurrection of Christ and the agency of the Holy Spirit in creation. The real distinction between the different views though, lies in the primary meaning of 'new creation'. I lean more to agree with the mainstream of theologians through all the ages, that *καὶνὴ κτίσις* is primarily soterio-anthropological without denying that other

⁹⁵ Hubbard, *New Creation*, p. 156.

⁹⁶ Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 204.

aspects of renewal are included in the broad meaning of 'new creation.' I would agree with Harris as he says:

Like the Johannine γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν (John 3:7) and the Petrine ἀναγεννηθῆναι ('to be born anew/again,' cf. 1 Pet. 1:3, 23), the Pauline καινὴ κτίσις refers to individual rebirth or regeneration (παλιγγενεσία, Tit. 3:5) as God's sovereign and creatorial act. Yet it is true that the renewal of the individual in conversion prefigures the renewal of the cosmos at the end (cf. ἐν τῇ παλιγγενεσίᾳ, Matt. 19:28; also Rom. 8:19–23).⁹⁷

Even in texts like Colossians 1:15ff and Romans 8:19–22, with the clearest eschatological expectations of cosmic renovation, man's restoration is still central in that final renovation.⁹⁸ This final scene is called 'a new heaven and a new earth' (Rev. 21:1); however, 'new creation' is clearly related to Paul's belief that the new age (salvation, life in the Spirit) has broken into the old age. The idea of a new heavens and earth or of a renewal of the universe may be behind Paul's concept. If there is a direct relationship, what we have is Paul's anthropological and soteriological application of the broader future promise to the life of individuals in the present age. New creation status implies newness of life and a new manner of life that accords with God's will. The two concepts are inseparable.

⁹⁷ Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 432.

⁹⁸ Lampe, 'New Testament Doctrine of Ktisis', p. 81.