

T. RYAN JACKSON

New Creation
in Paul's Letters

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*
272

Mohr Siebeck

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T. Ryan Jackson

New Creation in Paul's Letters

A Study of the Historical and Social Setting
of a Pauline Concept

Mohr Siebeck

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In Memory of

Professor Graham N. Stanton

*No epitaph could increase the honor he deserves
for how he lived his life.*

Preface

This monograph is a slightly revised version of a Ph.D. thesis submitted to the Faculty of Divinity of Cambridge University on the 5th of June 2008. I would like to express my thanks to Prof Dr Jörg Frey for accepting this thesis into such a fine series, and to Dr Henning Ziebritzki and his editorial staff for their professionalism and courtesy in bringing it to publication. I would also like to thank my examiners, Drs Simon Gathercole and Edward Adams. Their helpful suggestions made this work sharper than it would have been.

The 12th century philosopher Bernard of Chartres is reputed to have originated the phrase later picked up by John of Salisbury and Isaac Newton, “We are like dwarfs on the shoulders of giants.” The production of this thesis has proven to me that I am, indeed, supported by a number of giants without whom this study would not have been possible. Professor Graham N. Stanton’s gentle guidance was much more gracious than I deserved. His scholarship and, more importantly, his character have been an inspiration to me. He was a wonderful supervisor, mentor, and friend. He will be greatly missed.

The thrill of studying in Cambridge was greatly enhanced by the staff and readers of Tyndale House library. The Tyndale community embodies the statement, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom...” (Prov 9:10). Many of my colleagues there have been a band of brothers to me.

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I am also immensely thankful to Rev Dr John Hedgepeth and the church family of Northwood Temple Church, USA for allowing this goal of mine to be an extension of their ministry. Their prayers and support have been sure foundations for me. Their kindness and sacrificial giving are overwhelming. I am also grateful for the generous grants awarded me by the Faculty of Divinity of the University of Cambridge, St. Edmund’s College, and the Panacea Society.

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The most wonderful thing I received in Cambridge was my baby girl, Liliann Sarah. She is the apple of her daddy’s eye.

My greatest debt of gratitude is owed to my wife, Emily. She has been God's gift to me. This book is a product of her loving encouragement. She has truly been a helper suitable for me, and this husband rises to call her blessed. I dedicate this work to her. Emily, "*Chaque jour....*" *Soli Deo Gloria!*

T. Ryan Jackson
Raleigh, NC
5 August 2009

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Abbreviations

SBL abbreviations apply throughout. The following abbreviations are also used in this thesis:

ANS	American Numismatics Society
BDAG	Danker, Frederick W., ed. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000.
BDF	Funk, Robert W., ed. <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1961.
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum, 1862–</i> . Edited by Theodor Mommsen, Otto Hirschfeld and Alfredus Domaszewski, Berlin: George Reinger.
IG	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae, 1873-1998</i> . Edited by Guilelmus Dittenberger et al., 14 Vols., Berlin.
JAL	Jewish Apocalyptic Literature
LCL	<i>Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.</i>
LS	Liddell, H.G., and R. Scott, eds. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon with a Revised Supplement</i> . Oxford: Clarendon, 1996.
OCD	Hornblower, Simon, and Antony Spawforth, eds. <i>The Oxford Classical Dictionary</i> . Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
PG	Migne, J.-P. <i>Patriologiae Cursus Completus (series Graeca)</i> , Paris: Migne, 1857-1866.
RIC	<i>The Roman Imperial Coinage, Volume 1: From 31 BC to AD 69</i> . Edited by C.H.V. Sutherland, Rev. ed., London: Spink & Son, 1984.
RPC	<i>Roman Provincial Coinage, 1992–</i> . Edited by Andrew Burnett, Michel Amandry and Pere Pau Ripollès, London: British Museum.
Sherk	Sherk, Robert K., ed. <i>The Roman Empire: Augustus to Hadrian</i> . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
Smallwood	Smallwood, E. Mary, ed. <i>Documents Illustrating the Principates of Gaius, Claudius, and Nero</i> . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967.
SNTW	<i>Studies of the New Testament and its World</i>
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>

On the third day the friends of Christ coming at daybreak to the place found the grave empty and the stone rolled away. In varying ways they realized the new wonder; but even they hardly realized that the world had died in the night. What they were looking at was the first day of a new creation, with a new heaven and a new earth; and in a semblance of the gardener God walked again in the garden, in the cool not of the evening but the dawn.

– G. K. Chesterton,
The Everlasting Man

Chapter 1

Introduction

The concept of new creation is a fascinating component of the apostle Paul's theology even though the actual phrase occurs only twice in his writings (Galatians 6:15; 2 Corinthians 5:17). This study is an attempt to interpret how this concept was understood by Paul and how it functions in his letters. Considerable amounts of ink have been spilled on the theme of new creation, but few authors in recent scholarship have undertaken to provide sustained explanations of its significance in the context of Paul's thinking as a whole. The two most noteworthy exceptions in contemporary scholarship are the monographs by Ulrich Mell and Moyer Hubbard.¹ These monographs represent two poles of understanding Paul's thinking with regard to the concept of new creation.

A. Brief History of Research

Both Mell & Hubbard have made positive contributions to the discussion and their work will be addressed where appropriate throughout this thesis. They provide the main dialogue partners with which this study interacts. Mell gives a painstaking overview of the occurrences of the phrase "new creation" in Jewish literature; but this strength is also his weakness. His work fails to do justice to the contexts in which new creation appears in Paul's letters and his approach is limited by the well-worn pitfalls of a strictly *traditionsgeschichtliche* method. Focusing on those Jewish texts which support a cosmological understanding of new creation, Mell ignores texts which might have influenced Paul to think of new creation from an anthropological perspective.² As Hubbard aptly criticizes, "this prejudicial selectivity not only affects Mell's conclusions, it was probably the *func-*

¹ Mell 1989; Hubbard 2002. See the earlier work of Schneider 1959:257-70; Stuhlmacher 1967:1-35.

² The term "anthropological" is used in the classical sense of systematic theology rather than the social scientific way of anthropology. In this thesis, "cosmic" and "cosmological" refer to the way in which Paul's theology has implications for all the created order.

tion of these (predetermined?) conclusions, and further illustrates the *de facto* circularity of [his] approach.”³

In an attempt to avoid this error, Hubbard begins with an examination of the commonly acknowledged origin of new creation themes in the prophecies of Isaiah and incorporates the anthropologically focused promises of the new heart and new spirit in Jeremiah and Ezekiel.⁴ Rather than attempting an exhaustive examination of the usage of the phrase “new creation” in the literature of Second Temple Judaism, Hubbard takes a comparative approach focusing on the presence of the theme in two works from the period: *Jubilees* and *Joseph and Aseneth*. Through a keen application of social theory to Paul’s letters, Hubbard helpfully reminds us of the importance of the individual in Paul’s soteriology. However, if Mell could be criticized for a pre-determined cosmological slant, Hubbard’s work surely falls into the opposite error. He too allows his discussion to be pressed into mutually exclusive distinctions with which Paul may not have been comfortable. In my estimation, Paul’s conception of the new creation has both anthropological as well as cosmological dimensions.

Hubbard is not the first to be led astray by the false dichotomy which understands Paul’s concept of new creation in *either* anthropological (individual or communal) *or* cosmological terms. A brief perusal of the history of research on this issue makes clear that the discussion of new creation has largely focused on one or the other of these emphases. Such a history has been adequately traced elsewhere, but some repetition would prove instructive for our purposes.⁵

The *anthropological* aspect of Paul’s thinking about new creation has received the most emphasis in the long history of interpreting the apostle’s thought. Calvin and Luther both focused on the anthropological components of this concept. Calvin, for example, translated the phrase as “new creature” in his commentaries on 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 6:15. This aspect of Paul’s thinking about new creation became predominant throughout the subsequent history of interpretation well into the modern period.

Adolf von Harnack’s important study on rebirth and related experiences of renewal took special interest in the Jewish background material and considered this material indispensable for understanding Paul’s terse phrase.⁶ The ensuing emphasis on the importance of the rabbinic sources for understanding Paul suggested that the apostle’s conception of new

³ Hubbard 2002:6-7.

⁴ Hubbard does not acknowledge how even the more anthropologically focused promises of Jeremiah and Ezekiel maintain a connection between people and the world in which they live. I address this point briefly in Chapter 2.

⁵ See Mell 1989:9-32; Hubbard 2002:2-5.

⁶ Von Harnack 1918. Cf. Hubbard 2002:3.

creation must have been focused on a change in the life situation of the individual.⁷

In an attempt to expand the individual anthropological perspective of Paul's new creation language, some scholars understood Paul's language in terms of a new community. Driven by heightened interest in the corporate elements of Paul's thought, Wolfgang Kraus has championed the idea of a communal referent.⁸ Though this perspective is not widely accepted, it does have the merit of taking seriously the connection between the community and the cosmos in the highly charged new creation language of Isaiah 65-66.⁹

The *cosmological* aspect of Paul's thinking began to receive greater emphasis after the recognition of the importance of Jewish apocalyptic literature for interpreting Paul. Albert Schweitzer's assertion that this material was influential in the development of Paul's eschatological perspective catalyzed an important debate in Pauline studies that would continue to the present.¹⁰ Rudolf Bultmann attempted to *demythologize* the apocalyptic influence and sought to recover the anthropological emphasis which he felt to be central to the message of Paul. Ernst Käsemann came to the defense of the apocalyptic background material and famously dubbed it, "the mother of Christian theology."¹¹ Efforts were made to return to the anthropocentric perspective of Bultmann,¹² but the cosmological influence of the apocalyptic literature would prove to be an influential voice in the study of Paul – one that still commands a great deal of attention from scholars.¹³

The distinction between between anthropological and cosmological elements of Paul's thinking has actually muddied the waters and led to a generally unhelpful way of approaching Paul's letters because he would not have divided his thinking so neatly into these categories. I shall argue that both of these are aspects of the eschatological soteriology at play when Paul employs the concept of new creation in his writing.

A similar point has been made in the unpublished doctoral dissertations of J. H. Hoover and A. J. D. Aymer.¹⁴ Hoover's work maintains the con-

⁷ Cf. Sjöberg 1950; Schwantes 1962.

⁸ Kraus 1996:247-52. Hubbard also cites the similar work of Klaiber 1982:97-101.

⁹ For a fuller discussion on the theme of new creation in Isaiah, see Chapter 2.

¹⁰ Cf. Schweitzer 1911; Schweitzer 1930. See Matlock 1996 for a critique of the "apocalyptic fervor" in Pauline scholarship.

¹¹ Both Bultmann's and Käsemann's positions are supported by different emphases within Jewish apocalyptic writings – forensic and cosmological – and this supports the claim of this thesis that Paul's thinking should be limited neither to a strictly anthropological nor to a strictly cosmological perspective. For a summary of that discussion, see De Boer 1989:169-90. Cf. Minear 1979:405.

¹² For example, see Baumgarten 1975.

¹³ See, e.g., Beker 1980; Martyn 1997.

¹⁴ Hoover 1979; Aymer 1983.

nection between the inner new creation of mankind and the cosmic change which occurred in the Christ event. Furthermore, his thesis recognizes the importance of including Rom 8 in the discussion of Paul's conception of new creation. However, his work completely excludes the Greco-Roman background material and, in my opinion, does not sufficiently secure the exegetical basis for the connection between the anthropological and cosmological elements of Paul's thought in the light of current research. Aymer's work suffers from similar problems. It is no real surprise that neither Hoover nor Aymer address the importance of Roman imperial ideology for understanding Paul's hearers.¹⁵ Further, although Aymer helpfully discusses analogous themes in Paul's writings, his work suffers from inadequate detailed analysis of the most important new creation texts in Paul's letters: Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17; Rom 8:18-25.

Therefore, this thesis maintains that a balanced approach to the apostle Paul's conception of new creation will reveal that this idea is an expression of his eschatologically infused soteriology which involves the individual, the community and the cosmos and which is inaugurated in the death and resurrection of Christ.¹⁶ Moreover, the phrase serves as an encapsulated expression – a kind of theological shorthand – for this soteriology.¹⁷ Before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the ensuing attempts to understand the influence of Jewish apocalyptic writings on Paul, most exegesis focused on the individual perspective of Paul's use of *καινή κτίσις*.¹⁸ However, already in the patristic era there was a breadth in the understanding of this expression which contemporary scholarship would do well to reconsider.¹⁹

¹⁵ This omission is certainly understandable given the relatively recent increase in interest in applying it to Pauline studies. However, this background in particular provides important evidence in the discussion of Paul's new creation texts and its inclusion in this study is an important contribution of this thesis.

¹⁶ For a discussion of the eschatological importance of the concept of newness in the NT, see Harrisville 1955.

¹⁷ Hays uses the phrase "new creation" as his own "shorthand signifier for the dialectical eschatology that runs throughout the NT" without acknowledging how the phrase functions in a similar way in Paul. While the claims of this thesis are far more modest than Hays's, I take the phrase *καινή κτίσις* as a tip of Paul's eschatological iceberg (to borrow G. Stanton's imagery). See Hays 1996:198. Cf. Stanton 2004:49-52.

¹⁸ Cf. Hubbard 2002:2-3.

¹⁹ This contradicts the claim that the fathers invariably held to a strictly anthropological view as argued in Hubbard 2002:2. Riches, too, argues that what the fathers have in common is an individual rather than cosmological understanding of *καινή κτίσις* in Paul in Riches 2007:326-7. See his forthcoming work: Riches 2008.

B. Early Christian Understandings of New Creation

The phrase *καινή κτίσις* does not appear in the extant works of the apostolic fathers. Early Christian literature, however, did use creation language to speak about conversion. The *Epistle of Barnabas* 16:8 indicates how the believer becomes the glorious temple of God, “Having received the forgiveness of sins, and having put our hope in the name [of the Lord], we have become new, created again from the beginning (*λαβόντες τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν καὶ ἐλπίσαντες ἐπὶ τὸ ὄνομα ἐγενόμεθα καινοὶ πάλιν ἐξ ἀρχῆς κτιζόμενοι*).”²⁰ When the phrase *καινή κτίσις* appears for the first time in post-NT Christian literature, in Clement of Alexandria, it is also applied to the individual believer.²¹ This application has support in a number of early Christian writers.²²

The conception of new creation in the early church, however, was not limited to an individual conversion experience. One striking example of this occurs when Clement uses the phrase in reference to Jesus, “...What exceptional thing does the new creation (*καινή κτίσις*), the Son of God, reveal and teach?”²³ The use of *καινή κτίσις* in reference to Christ indicates that there is something more than conversion at play in the early church’s understanding of this phrase. The application of this idea to Jesus is not unique to Clement of Alexandria. Gregory of Nyssa, for example, calls Christ the “firstborn of the new creation.” He understood Christ to be the agent of the original creation which had grown old (*παλαιόω*) and had become unrecognizable (*ἀφανίζω*).²⁴ The new creation was necessitated because the first creation had been made “unavailing (*ἀχρειόω*) by our disobedience.”²⁵ In this way, we find in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa a strong link between the state of humanity and the created order. Christ brought about a new creation in which he took the lead by being the first-born of “all the creation of men.”²⁶ Christ accomplished a two-fold regen-

²⁰ This translation is my own.

²¹ Cf. Exhortation 11.114; Miscellanies 3.8.62.

²² Hubbard cites: Tertullian, On Modesty 6; Against Marcion 4.1.6; 4.11.9; 5.4.3; 5.12.6; Jerome, To Oceanus; Augustine, On the Baptism of Infants 1.44; Reply to Faustus 11.1; 19.10; Grace and Free Will 20; Sermons 26.12; 212.1. Cf. Ambrosiaster, Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians 5.17; Epistle of Paul to the Galatians 6.15, “Nova creatura est regeneratio nostra....”

²³ Who is the Rich Man that Shall Be Saved? 12.1. The translation is mine.

²⁴ Cf. Heb 8:13.

²⁵ Against Eunomius 2.4.3.

²⁶ Against Eunomius 2.2.8.

eration involving baptism and resurrection by which he is seen to become the “firstborn of the new creation.”²⁷

The early church believed the Christ event to have had effects on all of creation.²⁸ Its effects were not simply limited to the sphere of the individual experience but in him, “all things are redeemed and the new creation wrought afresh (τὰ πάντα λελύτρωνται, καὶ πάλιν τὴν καινὴν εἰργάσατο κτίσιν).”²⁹ Athanasius goes so far as to say, “in [his] flesh has come to pass the beginning of our new creation (καινῆς κτίσεως).”³⁰ What he means by this becomes clear elsewhere in an elaboration on 2 Cor 5:17, “But if a new creation has come to pass, someone must be first of this creation; now a man, made of earth only, such as we are become from the transgression, he could not be. For in the first creation, men had become unfaithful, and through them that first creation had been lost (δι’ αὐτῶν ἀπώλετο ἡ πρώτη); and there was need of someone else to renew the first creation, and preserve the new which had come to be.”³¹ Though Athanasius surely understood the individual importance of the new creation, this passage shows how he saw it as part of the renewal of creation as a whole which had been destroyed (ἀπόλλυμι) because of sin.³²

Chrysostom’s commentary on 2 Cor 5:17 gives a fine example of how some fathers could think more broadly of the concept of new creation than simply a reference to the individual’s conversion experience. Chrysostom cites the new creation as the ground for Christian virtue “not because we are not our own only, nor because He died for us only, nor because He raised up our firstfruits only, but because we have also come unto another life.”³³ This is perceived as a new birth by the Spirit in which a person comes “to another creative act (εἰς ἑτέραν ἦλθε δημιουργίαν).”³⁴ The broader soteriological emphasis of the phrase is clear in the description of what is to become new in the new creation: note especially his emphasis of *both* soul (internal) *and* body (external), “But behold, both a new soul, (for it was cleansed,) and a new body, and a new worship, and promises new,

²⁷ Gregory has an in-depth discussion of the meaning of πρωτότοκος (Against Eunomius 2.4.3) in which he associates new creation with the resurrection. See Theodoret, The Letters 146. Theodoret speaks of the new creation in the sense of the resurrection. Cf. Irenaeus, Against Heresies 5.36.1.

²⁸ Cf. Panagopoulos 1990:169.

²⁹ Athanasius, Four Discourses Against the Arians I.5.16.

³⁰ Athanasius, Four Discourses Against the Arians II.21.70. This is especially important in the light of my understanding that the new creation actually began in the Christ event.

³¹ Athanasius, Four Discourses Against the Arians II.21.65.

³² Athanasius also spoke of 2 Cor 5:17 in terms of believers coming into a new way of life in Questions about Holy Scripture, PG 28:760, ll. 51-6.

³³ Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, PG 61:475, l. 34.

³⁴ Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, PG 61:475.

and covenant, and life, and table, and dress, and all things new absolutely.”³⁵

His comments on Galatians 6:15 display similar soteriological breadth. Chrysostom explains that Paul uses the idea of new creation to describe the new life of the believer. This new life is intimately related to the past act of baptism (conversion) as well as the future resurrection. Chrysostom explains that Paul calls this a new creation “both on account of what is past, and of what is to come; of what is past, because our soul, which had grown old with the oldness of sin, hath been all at once renewed by baptism, as if it had been created again. Wherefore we require a new and heavenly rule of life. And of things to come, because both the heaven and the earth, and all the creation, shall with our bodies be translated into incorruption.”³⁶

Theodoret recognizes this breadth in both 2 Cor and Gal in his ability to see that the new creation which applied to the individual at baptism was actually part of a larger soteriological thrust.³⁷ This is clear in his assertion that “the strict meaning of new creation is the transformation of all things which will occur after the resurrection from the dead.”³⁸

Several points become clear after an examination of the teaching of the early church on the concept of new creation. First, they applied the concept to individual conversion initiated at baptism. Secondly, they understood the relation of this to a broader soteriology which encompassed all of creation. The association of the resurrection with the new creation indicates how this is the case. Although various writers in the early church could focus on one aspect or another of Paul’s new creation, it is clear that many could hold together both an individual as well as a cosmological thrust to this concept. This thesis attempts to argue that Paul is best understood within such a soteriological paradigm.

C. Limitations

It should go without saying that Paul’s own letters are the most important evidence in this investigation. Accordingly, the two Pauline usages of the phrase *καινή κτίσις* (Galatians 6:15 and 2 Corinthians 5:17) are obvious candidates for inspection. Further, our understanding of Paul’s thinking is

³⁵ Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, PG 61:475f.

³⁶ Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians, PG 61:636, l. 17. The translation is mine. For a further association of the use of new creation language with baptism, see Theodoret, Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians 317; Basil, Letters 8.

³⁷ Note his comment on 2 Cor 5:17, “Those who believe in Christ have entered a new life. They must be born again in baptism and renounce their former sins.” Cited in Bray 1999:249.

³⁸ Theodoret, Epistle to the Galatians 6:15 (CPE 1:363-4) cited in Edwards 1999:103.

considerably clearer if we move beyond a simple word study approach to incorporate other passages where the concept is clearly employed even if the terminology itself is not. This necessitates the inclusion of Romans 8 into the discussion if we expect to get a balanced picture of what Paul might have had in mind when he thought about new creation.³⁹ I focus mainly on the three texts mentioned above because they are the clearest and most obvious expressions of Paul's conception of new creation. The fact that these three passages occur in the *Hauptbriefe* will enable me to avoid lengthy discussions of authenticity and provide a helpful cross-section of Paul's usage in the context of various social settings. The closely related conception of resurrection will be incorporated into the discussions of these texts.

Ideally, the enquiry could be broadened to observe how the new creation relates to Paul's use of the theme of newness in general, as well as a fuller exploration of his views of creation. Among other important analogous themes, the discussion could include Paul's death-life imagery, renewal, newness of life, new covenant, new Spirit, new man and new exodus.⁴⁰ A discussion of Jesus traditions (e.g. Matt 19:28) and other NT writings (e.g. Col 1:15; Eph 2:15; 2 Pet 3:10-13, Rev 21:1-2) would also prove helpful. Further study in these areas would offer a promising way forward in our understanding of Paul's thought in comparison with other NT writers. Unfortunately, limitations of space will prohibit adequate discussion of these topics but careful exegetical considerations of the most relevant texts in Galatians, 2 Corinthians and Romans alongside passages which are directly related to them will provide an informative study of Paul's thinking regarding this subject.

D. Overview

This thesis is in two parts. After a brief introduction, Part I addresses both Jewish and Greco-Roman backgrounds to Paul's understanding of new creation. It will be argued that the primary background to understanding Paul's concept of new creation is Isaiah. Though other prophetic themes are important to the apostle (such as passages in Jeremiah and Ezekiel), none is as demonstrably crucial to his understanding of new creation as Isaiah. Isaiah's new creation is a mixture of the cosmological/anthropological soteriology also attested in Paul. The new creation

³⁹ Both Hubbard and Mell exclude significant discussions of Rom 8. It is, however, included in the unpublished doctoral work of J. Hoover. See Hoover 1979.

⁴⁰ Hubbard trades heavily on Paul's death-life imagery and gives helpful attention to the Spirit in the course of his discussion.