ENVIRONMENTALISM, RENEWABILITY, AND NEW COVENANT PERSPECTIVES FOR THE *TELOS* OF GOD'S *KOSMOS*

Introduction

To avoid the risk of superimposing the problems of our modern world on the world of the New Testament, an anachronistic reading to be sure, I begin with a lengthy quote from the work of McClellan and Dorn, *Science and Technology in World History: An Introduction*. Toward the end of their book and at the conclusion of a chapter called "Toolmakers Take Command," they write:

> The processes let loose by the Industrial Revolution continue to unfold across the globe. Industrial civilization has been accompanied by an expanded middle class and higher standards of living. Globalization has widened peoples' horizons, and the cultural impact of globalization has been huge in creating a single global culture. For a large number of people the results have been historically unprecedented lives with good health, comfort, and technological trinkets of amazing variety. By the same token, the material progress that many enjoy has not been achieved without heavy costs, not the least of which are the increasing stratification of rich and poor and a more hectic pace of life. Recent years have seen a drop in real wages in advanced countries particularly for the less well educated. Consumerism now represents the dominant values in many parts of the world. Current environmental problems with global warming or climate change, pollution, oil spills, lingering acid rain, the fragility of the ozone layer, waste disposal, loss of biodiversity, greenhouse gas emissions, extensive deforestation, and like concerns reflect the tremendous, and likely irreversible, ecological degradation accompanying industrialization. Population growth and increasing demands on limited resources such as fresh water, oil, and natural gas add to these pressures. The human impact on the planet has been so great since the onset of the Industrial Revolution that thinkers now designate a whole new geological era, the Anthropocene–the Human Epoch–for the period that began with civilization and took off with industrialization. The ultimate outcome of events that began with the Industrial Revolution in England not so long ago is not clear, but it seems unlikely that the world can long sustain further industrial intensification. The toolmakers have done their work. Now the peacemakers and the stewards of the Earth must do theirs.[1]

[1]James E. McClellan III and Harold Dorn, *Science and Technology in World History: An Introduction*, Third Edition (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 399-400.

These observations by McClellan and Dorn set environmentalism in its appropriate context–the post-Industrial Revolution period.[2] The writers and hearers of the New Testament did not and could not have in their experience the myriad problems faced by moderns concerning our environment. Of course, progress in human technologies and the offshoot of challenges these create is nothing new in history, not even for modern times. Earlier peoples in history, such as during the Greco-Roman era, had their share of difficulties due to technological breakthroughs.[3] But this is to emphasize at the outset of our study that, with respect to modern environmental concerns, the documents of the New Testament are not focused on care for God's *kosmos*. That is not their chief concern. Does this mean, however, that the New Testament says nothing about taking care of our "house" (*oikos*) or our environment?[4] The New Testament teaching about reconciliation of the *kosmos* indicates otherwise, and I will argue that the good news about Jesus of Nazareth, which is the chief concern of the New Testament, involves by implication not only care for humans but all of God's *kosmos*. As Donald Guthrie aptly states:

> It must be noted that according to the apostle Paul reconciliation extends beyond the human realm to the material creation. He writes about cosmic groaning for freedom

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[2]Compare Peter N. Stearns, *The Industrial Revolution in World History*, Third Edition (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2007), 269ff.

[3]For good historical overviews, see Daniel R. Headrick, *Technology: A World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), and Andrew Lees, *The City: A World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[4]The notion of "ecology" is derived from *oikos*, the Greek word for "household or living place" and "first used by Ernst Haeckel in 1873 for that branch of biology which deals with the interrelationships between organisms and their environment." Since that time, ecology has grown to include "in a more popular sense . . . concern for the protection of the environment from a wide range of pollutants." Alan Bullock and Stephen Trombley, editors, *The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*, Third Edition (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1999), 247.

> from present bondage (Romans 8.20ff.), which must reflect to some extent his approach to his environment. This might provide some indication of Paul's answer to the ecological problem, although he does not give any specific comment about human responsibility toward the environment. . . . For Paul, the fact that all things will in the end be united with Christ gives a dignity to the creation itself (cf. Ephesians 1.10).[5]

In light of this word about reconciliation in the New Testament, it is the intent of this paper to identify some perspectives from the New Testament that relate to God's concern for his *kosmos* and to argue that this should be our concern as well.

Definitions

Environmentalism. Environmentalism is the focus of the ethos or ethics[6] for God's *kosmos* and concerns "what we should do and be disposed to do regarding nature or the material universe."[7] This "relation of humans to nature and their behavior regarding it are ancient concerns," but "new knowledge about ecosystems along with increased power of humans through technology to impact the environment irreversibly, at a rate and scale that threaten severe damage to all life and destruction of the entire biosphere, have recently brought a qualitatively new dimension and an urgent note."[8] Issues involved in environmental ethics include "pollution of

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[5]Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 938-939.

[6]Two Greek words are transliterated *ethos* (one beginning with epsilon and the other with eta) and mean respectively "a way of doing things marked by recurring procedure, custom, practice" and "pattern of behavior that characterizes or distinguishes a group or individual, custom, way, manner, habit." Frederick William Danker, *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 108, 163.

[7]Terence R. Anderson, "Environmental Ethics," *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, edited by James F. Childress and John Macquarrie (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 196.

[8]Ibid.

air, water, and land; world human population levels and the rate of reproduction; increased demands for food and shrinking supplies of arable land, energy, and nonrenewable resources; the disappearance of whole species of animal and plant life; economic development and appropriate lifestyles on a finite globe; and the threat of nuclear holocaust."[9] Environmentalism wrestles with how best to address these complex issues.

Renewability. Renewability in the larger environmental context predominantly speaks to energy resources but can be applied to wider concerns as well. For our purpose, renewability will indicate the possibility of a greater vision for God's *kosmos*. Not only can the *kosmos* be renewed (in the sense of something old that is refreshed), it also can be recreated (in the sense of making something new and better).[10] Humans can be involved in the enterprise of renewability, but the initiative, conduct, and completion of renewability is of divine origin. Renewability of the *kosmos*, therefore, is in essence God's doing. It is theocentric not anthropocentric. It is from God who is "Lord of heaven and earth" (Matthew 11.25; Luke 10.21; Acts 17.24; cf. Acts 7.49; Hebrews 1.10).

New Covenant. The phrase "New Covenant" will be used as a preferred expression for "New Testament." The twenty-seven books of the New Covenant have been handed down and accepted by the Christian Church as Word of God. By a historical process with guidance from God's Spirit (see 2 Peter 1.20-21), the books of the New Covenant have been received as authoritative or canonical. This reliable Word gives testimony to a binding agreement, initiated

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[9]Ibid. On the ecological problem, compare Roger H. Crook, *An Introduction to Christian Ethics*, Second Edition (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990), 243ff.

[10]See Revelation 21.5; cf. 2 Corinthians 5.17.

by God (i.e., it is a gift from God), between God and humans and the entire created order. The Greek *diatheke* (translated "covenant") indicates "a formal arrangement or agreement for disposing of something in a manner assuring continuity" and reflects the "Old Testament perspective of God's unilaterally assumed obligation to confer a special blessing."[11] This New Covenant has been effected by Jesus Christ, and it is sustained by the Spirit of God.[12] It is a covenant or agreement that, as far as we know, cannot be revoked, and the mystery and wonder of such an agreement between God and his *kosmos* cannot be understood fully by humans. This is due to the secret and hidden essence of God's wisdom, revealed in part to us humans by the Spirit of God (see 1 Corinthians 2.6ff.). But this covenant can be embraced or accepted by humans with awe and reverence.

Telos. The Greek word *telos* has a variance of nuances, depending on its use in context, but the basic meaning is "end, goal, completion." Danker defines *telos* as "a point in time that marks culmination, with focus on termination, end . . . with focus on culminating mode, outcome, end."[13]

Kosmos. I will use the Greek word *kosmos* (translated "world") as all-encompassing. As a reference to God's created order, it includes humans, animals, other organic forms of life, and inanimate or inorganic material stuff. Unless the argument requires it, I do not intend to distinguish any moral or ethical use of *kosmos*. In his lexicon, Danker prefaces his meanings for

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[11]Danker, *Concise Greek-English Lexicon*, 90.

[12]On Jesus and the new covenant, see Hebrews 7.22; 8.6; 9.15; 13.20; cf. Matthew 26.28; Mark 14.24; Luke 22.20; 1 Corinthians 11.25. On Jesus and the creation, see Colossians 1.16; cf. John 1.1-4.

[13]Danker, *Concise Greek-English Lexicon*, 350.

kosmos with these comments: "A component of admirable order can be discerned in all uses of *kosmos* and is dramatically exhibited in contrast to 'cosmic' disorder especially in the moral sphere."[14]

Two Problems or Challenges

First, as indicated above, there is no reasoned or thorough approach, in the modern sense, to care for the environment in the New Covenant. The writings of the New Covenant are not a textbook about environmental concerns. We have only snippets of data and bits and pieces of information that we can use to guide us in our endeavor to care for God's creation. These come from a different time of human history, long before modern technological revolutions. So we must be cautious in connecting the dots, and we must not be dogmatic. General observations and guidelines can be adduced. But about specifics, we must be flexible.[15]

A second problem seems more difficult than the first, at least on the surface. The writings of the New Covenant have an inherent eschatological and, to some extent, apocalyptic focus. This forward-looking perspective that is "other-worldly" views God's *kosmos* as "passing away" (1 John 2.17). The apostle Paul writes, "The present form of this world is passing away," and he can speak of himself and his fellow believers in Christ as those "on whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Corinthians 7.31; 10.11). The apostle Peter expects the heavens to "pass

[14]Ibid., 206.

[15]See, for example, the discussion about environmental ethics in Dennis P. Hollinger, *Choosing the Good: Christian Ethics in A Complex World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2002), 177-178. He concludes, "Many differences in ethical judgments about the environment are not the result of varying theology or ethical principles but of divergent sets of data or interpretations of the data. When experts in the field offer varying empirical renditions, all supposedly based on scientific data, the task for the average Christian seeking to make sound ethical judgments and pursue an accompanying lifestyle is not easy."

away" and to " be set ablaze and dissolved" and the elements to "be dissolved with fire" and to "melt with fire" so that "the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed" (2 Peter 3.10-12). He urges his listeners, "The end of all things is near" (1 Peter 4.7). All these expectations reflect what Jesus himself had said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Matthew 24.35; Mark 13.31; Luke 21.33; cf. Matthew 5.18; 2 Peter 3.10).[16] Thus, in the New Covenant writings, there is clear distinction between the present state of things and what is to come at some future time, and this involves a radical, even cataclysmic, alteration of heaven, earth, the elements–God's *kosmos*.

But this is not the whole story. While on the one hand the prospect for God's *kosmos* seems grim (i.e., gloom, doom, utter destruction), on the other hand the prospect for God's *kosmos* is upbeat (i.e., hopeful, exciting, complete renewal). God himself provides the solution to this apparent demise of the *kosmos* in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and all along it was planned by God and not an afterthought. As Peter tells us, "He [Christ] was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake" (1 Peter 1.20). With the coming of God's Messiah, God's rule over the *kosmos* has been inaugurated in a new and fantastic way. This is the "already but not yet" outlook of the New Covenant documents, what some have labeled "realized eschatology."[17] This notable characteristic of early Christian

[16]Scriptures quoted unless otherwise noted are from the NRSV.

[17]See "The Tension Between the Already and the Not Yet" in Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 68ff.; also "The Debate Over Eschatology" in George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 3ff.

teaching has been recognized widely since the work of C. H. Dodd on the parables of Jesus,[18] and the focus it provides for God's *kosmos* is that there is continuity and perhaps even benefit due to a thorough cleansing or renewing process that even now is at work. In other words, God, his Christ, and the Holy Spirit are working to redeem the *kosmos*.

What does this say for the cause of environmentalism, according to the New Covenant? This tells us that the "other-worldly" dichotomy (i.e., this world, the world to come; this passing age, the coming age), with the inherent eschatological and apocalyptic tensions, does not define fully what God is doing with his *kosmos* (see Romans 11.33; cf. 1 Corinthians 2.9). There are limits to our understanding, because "we know only in part . . . we see in a mirror, dimly" (1 Corinthians 13.9, 12). But with respect to the *kosmos*, there is the covenant "promise" of God to rely on (see 2 Peter 3.4, 9, 13). So why care for, why work to maintain a *kosmos* that is perishing? God, his Christ, and the Holy Spirit lead the way. They are working to provide for us a home for the ages (John 14.1-4; cf. Ecclesiastes 12.5; Tobit 3.6; Luke 16.9). And we too, as good stewards (see 1 Corinthians 4.1-2), must work to take care of the *kosmos* that we all inhabit.[19]

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[18]C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961).

[19]The tune by Jim Reeves, "This World Is Not My Home" (1962), certainly reflects at a basic level what Jesus says in Matthew 6.19-21 (parallel Luke 12.33-34) and what Paul says in Colossians 3.2. But its other-worldly dominance fails to draw out the continuity and the tension of God's work in his *kosmos* according to the New Covenant (i.e., what we do in this world to anticipate the world to come, e.g., the selling of possessions, the giving of alms, and the making of purses according to Luke 12.33-34, and the hidden life with Christ in God and the glorious revealed life in Christ according to Colossians 3.3-4).

Presuppositions

Based on my understanding of the biblical writings and the Christian faith, I presuppose the following. First, God created the *kosmos* and still actively creates in the *kosmos*.[20] Second, what was good about God's *kosmos* was and is disrupted (i.e., the "Fall"). Third, God renews and recreates the *kosmos* (see, for instance, Hebrews 9.11). Fourth, Jesus is the beginning of God's new creation (Revelation 3.14; cf. Colossians 1.15; John 1.1-5). Fifth, Jesus calls us to follow in this renewal of God's creation (2 Corinthians 5.17; cf. Galatians 6.15). Sixth, this work of God is forward-looking and Spirit-guided.[21] We see this work of God in the care of Jesus, while he lived on earth, for the community of the twelve, the seventy, the multitudes (the 4,000 and the 5,000), and the interactions of Jesus with Jewish leaders, Samaritans, Gentiles (i.e., Greeks, Romans), and all his followers. We see this too in the call of Jesus to be about the Father's business (Luke 2.49; cf. John 14.8-14), the call of Jesus to rethink (i.e., change our minds or "repent") and believe the good news about God's rule on earth (Mark 1.15), and the call of Jesus to receive the Holy Spirit as comfort, help, and power (John 20.22; cf. Acts 1.8; 2.33, 38; 8.15, 17, 19; 10.44, 47; 19.2).

Six Competing Models

The remainder of the paper will overview a few key eschatological and apocalyptic texts from New Covenant writings that have implications, I believe, for the *telos* of God's *kosmos*. By giving this general summary in light of modern-day environmental understandings, I do risk the

[20]In other words, the *kosmos* has no reason for being and has no being apart from God.

[21]For an excellent and brief treatment of "ecological pneumatology," see Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2002), 159-164.

possibility of taking statements out of their Greco-Roman context. But for the sake of trying to derive meaning from the New Covenant for environmental issues, broadly speaking, I am willing to take the risk.

(1) Spatial versus Nonspatial. In John 14.2-3, Jesus says, "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also." The words used here by Jesus are instructive–"house" (from *oikos*), "dwelling places" (from *mone*), and "place" (from *topos*). All indicate a spatial reality, especially *topos*, a common word for "place," which Danker describes as "a spatial area" or "location for some object, activity, condition, or phenomenon, place, space."[22] And there is a sense of permanence in this spatial "abiding" or "dwelling," which seems to be noted by the use of *mone*, a rare word in the New Covenant used only by John (14.2, 23).[23] That this spatial *topos* in the Father's house is the final goal that Jesus intends for his disciples is clear from the passage. Of course, in the New Covenant there is much said by Jesus and his followers about "heaven" (from *ouranos*), a lot of which has been understood as nonspatial or without confinement or restriction to place or space. My point, however, is not to debate the uncertainties but rather to

[22]*Concise Greek-English Lexicon*, 355.

[23]For extrabiblical examples of *mone*, see James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1930), 416; William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Second Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 527.

emphasize the role of space, whether it be on earth or in heaven, that we occupy or will occupy as creatures of the Almighty.[24]

Helpful here are occurrences of *ouranios* ("heavenly"),[25] defined by Danker as "relating to a transcendent realm, heavenly,"[26] and *epouranios* ("heavenly" or "celestial"),[27] a favorite of Paul and the writer of Hebrews, about which Danker notes, in reference to Ephesians 1.3: "[it] may refer to a transearthly realm where the drama of salvation is played out at a transcendent level and where Christ is triumphant over a variety of powers, thus ensuring victory for the believers."[28] Likewise, the use of *skene*, the Greek word for "a moveable habitable structure" or "dwelling, tent, hut,"[29] for the place of Christ's work after his ascension (Hebrews 8.2; 9.11), the place of God's temple and his throne (Revelation 15.5), and the place where God in the new heaven and new earth will dwell with humans (Revelation 21.5), speaks to the spatial characteristic of the final goal that God intends for us. And, the beautiful and intriguing saying of Jesus in his parable about the judicious and shrewd use of "riches" (from *mamonas*) in the here and now indicates this spatial understanding. He says,"I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings"

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[24]Compare the intriguing discussion of the "Beatific Vision of God" by Anthony C. Thiselton, *Life After Death: A New Approach to the Last Things* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 185-215.

[25]See Matthew 5.48; 6.14, 26, 32; 15.13; 18.35; 23.9; Luke 2.13; Acts 26.19.

[26]*Concise Greek-English Lexicon*, 259.

[27]See Matthew 18.35; John 3.12; 1 Corinthians 15.40, 48, 49; Ephesians 1.3; 2.6; 3.10; 6.12; Philippians 2.10; 2 Timothy 4.18; Hebrews 3.1; 6.4; 8.5; 9.23; 11.16; 12.22.

[28]*Concise Greek-English Lexicon*, 148.

[29]Ibid., 322.

(Luke 16.9, NIV). The "eternal dwellings" could be translated "permanent tents" or "lasting tabernacles." It indicates a home or a space that will continue forever.[30]

From all these references, the notion of spatial continuity, from this present world to the world to come, seems relevant. What we do now, by way of care for God's *kosmos*, will impact what occurs then. This comes out rather sharply in the parable of Jesus about the shrewd manager (Luke 16.1ff.; cf. 14.14). Aside from the interpretive difficulties of this parable and the challenge of how best to translate "unrighteous mammon" (verses 9, 11; NKJV), the lesson of Jesus in verse 9 is clear. Management of resources now (i.e., what has been given to us from God's *kosmos*, "his possessions" of verse 1) will determine how we will be received ("welcomed" in verse 9; cf. verse 4) into our permanent tabernacles. The subsidiary point for the purpose of New Covenant environmentalism and renewability is that, because of this continuity between here and now and there and then, care for our space, our home, is paramount. To be good stewards, even shrewd keepers, of God's *kosmos* is necessary.[31]

(2) Tangible versus Nontangible. In two passages, the New Covenant speaks of the promise of "new heavens and a new earth" (2 Peter 3.13) and the appearance of "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21.1), both a reflection of the expectation of the prophet Isaiah in

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[30]On *aionios*, "relating to time without boundaries or interruption, eternal" or "relating to a period of unending duration, permanent, lasting," see Danker, *Concise Greek-English Lexicon*, 12.

[31]The cutting edge of this parable of Jesus–"you cannot serve both God and money" (verse 13; NIV) and "what people value highly is detestable in God's sight" (verse 15; NIV)–speaks to "true riches" (verse 11) and "what is your own" (verse 12; that is, what we will receive as permanent in the world to come) and does not indicate complete abandonment of the enterprise of environmentalism and renewability in the here and now. It is a matter of perspective.

the Old Covenant (65.17; 66.22).[32] All three provide tangible attributes about the Lord's final goal for his *kosmos* but especially so the vision of John in his Apocalypse. Fittingly, the vision of John, just like in Isaiah, comes at the conclusion of his written work and is packed with specifics that are tangible. "Tangible" derives from the Latin *tangere*, meaning "to touch," hence, "what can be touched or felt," or by extension, "assets having real substance and able to be appraised for value."[33] Synonyms include "definite, actual, concrete, material, palpable, perceptible, positive, real."[34] This emphasis on the tangible is not to minimize the visionary character of John's work and the need for figurative or symbolic interpretation.[35] Rather, it is to give prominence to what John is telling us about the final goal for God's *kosmos*.

In Revelation, the verisimilitude of human experience in the here and now ("this world") runs throughout John's explanations and anticipates in the there and then ("the coming world")

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[32]See G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, editors, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 1060, 1150. Carson notes that in Isaiah "the language is spectacularly evocative."

[33]Michael Agnes, editor, *Webster's New World Dictionary*, Fourth Edition (New York: Pocket Books, 2003), 658.

[34]Emma McDade, Jennifer Sagala, and Paige Weber, editors, *Collins Pocket Webster's Thesaurus*, Second Edition (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 558.

[35]Neither does emphasis on what is tangible nullify the invisible aspect (e.g., what is unseen) of many things we as Christians believe and expect for our future existence. That what we can see is only a reflection of what we cannot see (e.g., a copy, a shadow) is a cogent argument (see Hebrews 8.5; 9.24; 10.1; 11.3; cf. 2 Corinthians 4.18; 1 Corinthians 13.12). Compare the chapter on "Things Not Seen" in Thiselton, *Life After Death: A New Approach to the Last Things*, 16-33.

the experience of those who believe and follow Jesus.[36] For example, in God's new *kosmos* the following will no longer exist: tears from crying or pain from death (21.4), thirst for water (21.6), human weakness and sinfulness (21.8), the temple in the city (21.22), the enclosed walls of the city or its shut gates (21.25), and the darkness of night (21.25). Conversely, with the passing away of "the first heaven and the first earth" (21.1), the following will be experienced: the dwelling of God among humans (21.3), access to the water of life (21.6), the glory of God in the holy city (21.10ff.), continuous light in the holy city and the glory of the nations (21.26), and access to the tree of life, its abundant fruit, and its therapeutic leaves (22.1ff.). It is through God's angels or the angel of Jesus (see 21.9, 15, 17; 22.1, 6, 8, 16) that John is permitted to "see"[37] or "touch" the heavenly realm (see 4.1), and by doing this he allows us to touch and foresee our own participation in these tangible benefits promised to those who are victorious in Jesus. These are not nebulous (i.e.,"hazy, vague, indistinct, or confused"[38]) promises.

In light of this vision about the *telos* of God's *kosmos*, how does this tangible eschatology translate to environmental and renewable concerns? Once again, some sense of continuity between what we have now with what we receive then is important. The things that will be "no more," whether in a literal or figurative way, mostly are things that are not beneficial to and

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[36]"The whole vision alludes again and again to sayings in the Old Testament. Many of the Bible's greatest words appear: creation, heaven, earth, Israel, Jerusalem, the people, the nations, God, Face, glory. Image crowds on image, promise on promise–and all of it under the auspices of redemption and fulfillment." From chapter titled "The City of Dreams" in Gerhard Lohfink, *Is This All There Is? On Resurrection and Eternal Life*, translated by Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press Academic, 2020), 194-202.

[37]This is John's preferred word to express the immediacy and intimacy of his visions.

[38]"Nebulous," Dictionary.com (2024); online at: <www.dictionary.com/browse/nebulous>; accessed 22 May 2024.

never were intended for God's original creation.[39] What will be prominent is God making his home or tabernacle (from the Greek *skenoo*) "among mortals" (21.3). The holy God no longer will be distant, as it were, and we "will see his face" (22.4).[40] God himself has worked and will work toward renewing his *kosmos* and providing a proper environment or home for us all, and this includes a proper environment (i.e., a holy environment) for his presence as well. John reports: "And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new'" (21.5). If God has worked and will work to fashion from his *kosmos* all the incredible details, tangible entities or concrete realities, that we see through John's vision (see 21.9ff.), we too should feel compelled to work heartily for this environment and its renewal or recreation.

(3) Corporeal versus Incorporeal. Two readings from apostle Paul, 2 Corinthians 4.16–5.10 and 1 Corinthians 15.35-57, highlight this observation about corporeal versus incorporeal which is indicated in the New Covenant promise about the resurrection of the body.[41] In his second letter to Corinth, notice Paul's immediate contrast: "We do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day" (2

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[39]John also excludes the sea, the celestial bodies that illuminate (i.e., sun, moon, stars), and night from the new heaven and new earth. These have an important role in God's original creation (see Genesis, chapter 1), and the *kosmos* without such seems incomprehensible to us.

[40]Compare Genesis 3.8, "They [Adam and Eve] heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden."

[41]For the Greek backdrop on these passages, see Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, Second Edition (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2014), 494-496, 506-507. For the resurrection of the body as a core Christian teaching historically, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995). On the "resurrection of the flesh" in early Christian thought, see Lohfink, *Is This All There Is? On Resurrection and Eternal Life*, 172-177.

Corinthians 4.16).[42] "Outer nature" literally is "our outward man" (*ho exo hemon anthropos*), and "inner nature" literally is "our inward [man]" (*ho eso hemon*).[43] Paul calls the outward "the earthly tent we live in" (5.1; literally "our earthly house of the tabernacle," *he epigeios hemon oikia tou skenous*).[44] It is in this tabernacle (5.4) that "we are at home in the body" even though "we are away from the Lord" and "would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (5.6, 8). Paul is talking about corporeal existence, as the words for tent or tabernacle (*skenos*), house (*oikia*) or home (*oiketerion*), and body (*soma*) parallel nicely. And it is this outward corporeal existence that "is wasting away" (4.16), so that "we groan under the burden" (5.4; cf. verse 2). But we do not despair, says Paul. This is because of God's promise: if the current "earthly tent is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (5.1). It is clear that our corporeal existence will continue. God himself[45]

[42]ESV reads, "We do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day."

[43]Robert K. Brown and Philip W. Comfort, translators, *The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament*, edited by J. D. Douglas (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1990), 631.

[44]ESV translates, "the tent that is our earthly home."

[45]This is the essence of *acheiropoietos* in 5.1, "not made by hands" or "not of human production." Danker, *Concise Greek-English Lexicon*, 65.

will provide us an eternal building or structure (*oikodome*) or house (*oikia*). This is the "eternal weight of glory beyond all measure"[46] that overcomes any "slight momentary affliction" (4.17).

Paul, though, is not oblivious to the challenge and the angst that we face in making this transition (e.g., out of our body, home, tent). He likens this passage through death ("away from the body" in 5.8) to "being found naked" or being "unclothed" (5.3, 4), something we are not comfortable with. Thus, we strongly desire (from *epipotheo*) to be clothed with (from *ependuomai*) our dwelling from heaven (*to oiketerion hemon to ex ouranou*; 5.2). This desire or longing is to avoid being unclothed or without corporeal existence (i.e., without a body, home, tent), and it is a desire "to be further clothed" with a new and unending corporeal existence (5.4). This latter situation, Paul's "eternal weight of glory beyond all measure," is "so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life" (5.4). He puts this exclamation point on the death of our outward corporeal existence (i.e., "what is mortal") and focuses on the overriding or consuming (i.e., "swallowed up" from Greek *katapino*) power of "life."[47] And this continuity in our corporeal existence is by the design and the grace of God, because it is God "who has prepared us for this very thing" and "has given us the Spirit as a guarantee" (5.5). This is why our inner self

[46]This is an unusual phrase by Paul but full of meaning. The Greek literally reads, "from excess unto [more] excess an eternal weight of glory" (*kath' huperbolen eis huperbolen aionion baros doxes*). Brown and Comfort, translators, *New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament*, 631. Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 506, notes, "By Paul's day many Platonists thought that bodily things were heavy and weighed down the soul (cf. even Wisdom of Solomon 9.15), but that the soul was light; once freed by the body's death, it would soar up to the pure heavens from which it had originated. Paul here invents the image but perhaps partly for a play on words that a few Jewish readers skilled in Hebrew exposition might catch: 'glory' and 'weight, heaviness,' represent the same Hebrew word."

[47]Even though he does not use *aionios* here, Paul no doubt intends *zoe* ("life") as everlasting or eternal and as a power that destroys (i.e., eats or swallows) death.

is renewed "day by day" (4.16). But there is a tension, maybe even an ambiguity, in what Paul is saying to the Corinthians. The uneasiness, however, is lessened by the fact that "we walk by faith not by sight" (5.7), for what is seen is only temporary, but what is not seen is eternal (4.18).

The importance of corporeal existence, for ourselves and for the *kosmos*, comes into sharper focus through Paul's statements in 1 Corinthians 15.35-57. Using the image of the planting of seed, what Bynum calls "the oldest Christian metaphor for the resurrection of the body,"[48] Paul writes:

> So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body (verses 42-44).

Paul does not shy away from the corporeal aspect of our existence, whether it is perishable (i.e., "physical body," *soma psychikon*) or whether it is imperishable (i.e., "spiritual body," *soma pneumatikon*). Nor does Paul fail to include the entire *kosmos* in this seed-sowing, that is, the dying and coming to life, process (see verses 36ff.).[49] There is a wider range of God's activity than just the resurrection of the bodies of humans, as there are different types of "flesh" (e.g., birds, fish, animals, humans) and different types of "bodies" (e.g., earthly and heavenly such as sun, moon, stars). But God, according to Paul, is the decisive factor in the resulting growth and transformation (cf. 3.6-7). Paul emphatically says that from "bare seed . . . God gives it a body as

[48]Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 3.

[49]Compare "The Whole Creation" in Lohfink, *Is This All There Is? On Resurrection and Eternal Life*, 184-193.

he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body" (verse 38).[50] In producing an immense variety of corporeal life from diverse seed (cf. Genesis 1), God eventually will bring his *kosmos* to its proper goal.[51] Consequential for us when reflecting on the environmental endeavor in the here and now is to embrace this idea of corporeal existence. Shall we neglect the "body" (e.g., of humans, of animals and plants on earth, of the earth itself) of God's *kosmos* when he has taken great care to provide for its primal formation, its continuation to the present, and its ultimate destiny through resurrection? Is it not better, even though we leave the end result up to God, for us to be involved in the "planting" or the "watering" of the seed (cf. 1 Corinthians 3.6ff.)?

(4) Expectation versus Condemnation. The attitude of our Lord toward the apparent demise of the *kosmos* is significant. Jesus refuses to ascribe any consistent and ongoing chaos or disorder (e.g., "entropy" in modern thought)[52] to the *kosmos* of his heavenly Father.[53] He prefers instead to value the *imago dei* ("image of God") in humans and the redemptive work of God as a

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[50]Paul does not speculate about the specifics of the resurrection body. We do get hints about the resurrection body of humans from the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus in Matthew 28, Luke 24, and John 20 and 21. Paul, for his part, is content to view the resurrection body as imperishable, immortal, and as victory over death (verses 50ff.). Compare "On the Nature of the Spiritual Body as the Ongoing Work of the Spirit" in Thiselton, *Life After Death: A New Approach to the Last Things*, 122-128.

[51]"It is clear that the resurrection of all the dead, the return home and transformation of the world, God's *new creation* that is the goal of all history–all that has 'already' begun in Jesus' resurrection. . . . The resurrection of the dead . . . is giving form to that for which creation was intended from the beginning: to be a world before God, created out of incomprehensible and unjustifiable love, and always meant to find its way home to God." Gerhard Lohfink, *Is This All There Is? On Resurrection and Eternal Life*, 123, 128.

[52]See Bullock and Trombley, editors, *The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*, 274.

[53]This perspective is not negated by the apocalyptic predictions of Jesus in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21.

guiding principle. When pressed with the old issue regarding the connection between human sinfulness and suffering, Jesus gives an answer that is dismissive of the typical reply (i.e., we suffer because we sin). According to Luke 13.1ff., Jesus discusses two tragic events that happened in Jerusalem. The first incident involved "Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices" (verse 1).[54] The interlocutors of Jesus are not identified, but they bring up the matter of the Galileans, and Jesus replies, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?" (verse 2). The second incident involved eighteen persons "who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them," and Jesus again pointedly asks his listeners, "Do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem?" (verse 4).[55] While the answer seems simple based on an axiom of strict justice–you sin, you suffer–Jesus says, "No!" He strictly denies any automatic link between human sinfulness and suffering. Jesus remarkably takes an innovative approach to this perplexing and persistent issue. And he adds, "No, I tell you; unless you repent, you will all perish as they did" (verses 3, 5). All of us, none excluded, are in the same condition as the Galileans and the eighteen at the pool of Siloam. All need "repentance" or all "will perish."

Jesus is forward-looking not backward-looking. What did they do is not as important as what can you do! His attitude–expectation rather than condemnation–comes from his mission to

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[54]"Pilate's cruelty here fits the sort of conflicts he had with the Jewish community; his known brutality (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.60-62); the presence of Galilean pilgrims at the holy days celebrated in Jerusalem; and the governor's practice of coming to feasts to maintain order." Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 215.

[55]"The 'tower in Siloam' may have been on Jerusalem's city wall above the pool of Siloam; some suggest it may have been associated with Pilate's construction of an improved water-supply system for the city." Ibid.

call us to "rethink" or "change our minds" (i.e., "repent") toward God and concerning his *telos* for the *kosmos*. At the beginning of his ministry on earth, Jesus "came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news'" (Mark 1.14-15). To repent, from the Greek *metanoeo*, means to "have a serious change of mind and heart about a previous point of view or course of behavior, especially in the face of extraordinary developments."[56] And repentance in the New Covenant sense always is "toward God" (*eis theon*; see Acts 20.21). It is God who is bringing about what is extraordinary. Through the coming of his Messiah to earth and the outpouring of his Spirit at Pentecost, God works to bring about his rule on earth in order to effect harmony in his *kosmos*, namely, the doing of his will on earth as it is in heaven (see Matthew 6.10). Thus, we are called by Jesus to expect God to work to make all things new (Revelation 21.5). Jesus calls us to change our minds, to believe the good news that God is busy renewing and recreating, and to get on board and join the endeavor.

This fervent expectation is applicable to all of creation as well, as suggested by Luke's inclusion of the Parable of the Barren Fig Tree at this point in his narrative (13.6-9; cf. Matthew 21.18-22; Mark 11.12-14, 20-25). The fig tree has abundant meaning for Israel, both ancient and

[56]Danker, *Concise Greek-English Lexicon*, 230.

modern, as a symbol for safety, prosperity, and for Israel itself.[57] But the fig tree after all is a tree and is part of God's created order. It too, like humans, must fall in line with God's direction for the *kosmos*. It must bear fruit worthy of the *telos* that God is working to bring about, otherwise it is to be cast aside (cf. Hebrews 6.7-8).[58] The reply of the owner of the vineyard to his gardener, "Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?" (verse 7), simply is an indication of the fact that God's work moves forward not backward. Even though the owner of the vineyard (i.e., God) is patient (verses 8-9), his purposes will not be thwarted. The *telos* or goal is to produce a healthy and productive vineyard. All creation, therefore, is summoned to press forward in expectation, instead of sliding backward in judgment, in this matter of God making sure his *kosmos* is a suitable environment or dwelling place. When we fail to care for God's *kosmos*, we consequently are sliding backward or regressing.

While the distinction between expectation and condemnation may be subtle in Luke, the difference perhaps is expanded and broadened in John, chapter 9. The question, that of human sinfulness and suffering, remains the same. The answer of Jesus, similarly negative about the

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[57]See "The Symbolism of Figs in the Bible," One For Israel (Grapevine, Texas: One For Israel, 2024), online at: <www.oneforisrael.org/bible-based-teaching-from-israel/figs-in-the-bible/>; accessed 04 June 2024; cf. Asaph Goor, "The History of the Fig in the Holy Land from Ancient Times to the Present Day," *Economic Botany*, Volume 19, Number 2 (April - June 1965): 124-135. In this parable in Luke, "the meaning of the fig tree is reinforced by its being placed (somewhat incongruously) in a vineyard, for the vineyard also is a symbol of Israel; we have, therefore, a double symbol of Israel." Henry Wansbrough, *The Gospel of Luke*, Doubleday Bible Commentary (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 103.

[58]It is worthy of note that the fig tree is the only identifiable tree in the Garden of Eden, God's original creation. After realizing their nakedness before God, Adam and Eve sew together fig leaves for loincloth coverings (Genesis 3.7). "Fig leaves are the largest found in Canaan and could provide limited covering for the shamed couple." John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2000), 32.

assumed connection between sin and suffering, illuminates his preference for expectation over condemnation. John writes:

> As he [Jesus] walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (verses 1-5).

Explicit in the reply of Jesus is emphasis on the revelation of God's working to bring health and wholeness to his *kosmos*. This poor beggar was born blind for a definite purpose, declares Jesus, "so that God's works might be revealed in him." And as the chapter indicates (verses 1-41), expectation for God thereby to intervene indicates openness to seeing (versus blindness), belief in revelation (versus concealment or stubborn adherence to tradition), and commitment to vision (versus indifference or obliviousness). Jesus also adds the imperative, "We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work." It is necessary to follow God's lead in this redeeming of the *kosmos* (cf. Ephesians 5.15-17). Of course, just as with the fig tree, there is a sense of judgment (i.e., condemnation) on those who refuse to accept and commit to this work of God for his *kosmos*, as uttered by Jesus in this enigmatic contrast, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind" (verse 39). Judgment does come into play for those who resist and attempt to stop the work of God (verse 41; cf. 15.22-24).[59] God will not force anyone against their will.

[59]Compare the sections on "Death as Judgment," "Judgment as Mercy," and "Purification in Death" in Lohfink, *Is This All There Is? On Resurrection and Eternal Life*, 144-165.

The tenor, however, of the approach of Jesus to these consequential matters is that of expectation for God to act to bring about a beneficent *telos* for his *kosmos*.[60]

Furthermore, as we noticed in Luke with respect to the fig tree, here in John the inanimate or material creation once again is summoned to follow God's lead. Jesus proclaims, "I am the light of the world." Notice next what Jesus employs to effect God's illuminating and revealing work in this blind one:

> When he [Jesus] had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see (verses 6-7).

Jesus uses his own spit or saliva, the dirt of the ground, and the water from one of Jerusalem's pools. Saliva, dirt, and water are simple and common material things, none of which have any inherent therapeutic value.[61] Keener notes, however, "Spittle was sometimes associated with healing in pagan circles, so it would naturally represent an agent of healing in popular thought. . . . [and] healing through washing appears in the account of Naaman in 2 Kings 5.10-14."[62] But the power to heal, to transform, and to renew comes from the One who originally called all things into existence by the spoken word (Psalm 33.9; cf. Romans 4.14), who formed all humanity "from the dust of the ground" (Genesis 2.7; cf. 1 Corinthian 15.47). It is important, therefore, to know, to believe, and to expect that "nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke

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[60]See too comments about "Waiting and Expecting in the Biblical Writings" in Thiselton, *Life After Death: A New Approach to the Last Things*, 53ff.

[61]There is evidence, however, on the cleansing or purifying benefits of saliva, dirt, and water.

[62]Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 276.

1.37; cf. 18.27; Matthew 19.26).[63] God in his creative power works both with and within the scope of the entire *kosmos* and makes use of a variety of material things whether they be simple, unusual, normal, mundane, and so forth. Nothing is out of reach for the Almighty (see Ephesians 3.20). That alone should stir us to be emboldened about God's work (see Philippians 4.13), whether it is kingdom work (i.e., church work) or environmental work (i.e., *kosmos* work) or any other work fit for the Creator as he pushes along the *kosmos* toward a proper *telos*.[64]

(5) Renovate or Renew ("Laid Bare") versus Dissolve or Destroy ("Burn Up"). This observation rests on the apocalyptic message of 2 Peter, chapter 3 (especially verse 10), which admittedly is a difficult text. Peter here is addressing the problem of "scoffers" who "in the last days" will question the return of Christ, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since our ancestors died, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation!" (verses 3-4). Note Peter's repeated use of the word "promise" in this chapter (verses 4, 9, 13), an indication of God's control of history and movement toward a concluding goal or *telos*.[65] By way of response to the mockers or scoffers, Peter reminds his fellow believers of the work of God in both creating and deluging "the world of that time" ("the world that then existed," NKJV).[66] He says:

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[63]Luke 1.37 literally reads, "because will not be impossible with God every word" (*hoti ouk adunatesei para tou theou pan hrema*). Brown and Comfort, translators, *New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament*, 196. NIV translates, "For no word from God will ever fail."

[64]I would argue that environmental work is kingdom work, but I have separated the two, since that is a common, but probably misguided, understanding that rests on an artificial sacred / secular divide.

[65]See the interesting sections on "Promise and Language" and "Promise and Covenant" in Thiselton, *Life After Death: A New Approach to the Last Things*, 26-33, 38-45.

[66]Peter's Greek is quite terse here, literally "the then world" (*ho tote kosmos*). Brown and Comfort, translators, *New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament*, 827.

> They deliberately ignore this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago and an earth was formed out of water and by means of water, through which the world of that time was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the godless (verses 5-7).

Peter also emphasizes the patience of the Lord, which does not indicate any "slowness" (from *bradutes*)[67] of the Lord's promise (verses 8-9). Rather, the patience of God gives all of us the opportunity "to come to repentance" (*pantas eis metanoian choresai*). The word Peter chooses that is translated "to come" is a bit unusual. According to Danker, *choreo* means "move forward to a position, go, head for" and is used as an image in 2 Peter 3.9.[68] By being patient with his coming in judgment (i.e., part of his *telos* for the *kosmos*), God is allowing us the opportunity to change our minds (i.e., repent), to move forward, and to follow along in this matter of remaking the *kosmos*.

But Peter reminds us that God does not reckon time the same way mortals do (verse 8; cf. Psalm 90.4), and the *telos* eventually will come as the Lord has promised (verses 4, 9, 13).[69] Echoing the words of Jesus and the Hebrew prophets about "the day of the Lord," Peter describes its sudden coming (e.g., "like a thief")[70] and its catastrophic nature. He writes:

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[67]Danker, *Concise Greek-English Lexicon*, 74, defines *bradutes*, a New Covenant hapax, as "slowness in taking action."

[68]Ibid., 386.

[69]See comments by Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 704. Compare "On the Relativity of Time" in Lohfink, *Is This All There Is? On Resurrection and Eternal Life*, 203-212.

[70]On the coming of the Lord like a thief, see Matthew 24.42-44; Luke 12.39-40; 1 Thessalonians 5.2, 4; Revelation 3.3; 16.15.

> The day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed. Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home (verse 10-13).[71]

The words chosen in verse 10 to foretell this tremendous upheaval are from *parerchomai* ("move spatially from one position to another . . . pass away"; concerning the heavens), from *kausoo* and *luo* ("be consumed by heat, burn up"; concerning the elements or *stoicheia*), and from *heurisko* ("reach a conclusion based on investigation, chiefly [in a legal sense], find"; concerning the works, *erga*, in the earth).[72] This violent and sudden alteration will occur with great crashing sound, that is, "with a rushing hissing sound, with a whoosh."[73] So Peter assures his hearers, "All these things are to be dissolved in this way" (verse 11).[74] And by this he exhorts them to live a holy and godly life.

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[71]The NIV translates verses 10-13, "The day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells."

[72]Danker, *Concise Greek-English Lexicon*, 155, 271; Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 425.

[73]The word Peter uses, *hroizedon*, is onomatopoeic and only occurs in 2 Peter 3.10. Danker, *Concise Greek-English Lexicon*, 314. Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 737, define it, "with a hissing or crackling sound, with a roar, with great suddenness."

[74]Compare the NIV rendering, "Everything will be destroyed in this way."

Perhaps the distinction between "laid bare" (renovate or renew) and "burn up" (dissolve or destroy) for the coming *telos* of the *kosmos* is an artificial one and a moot point, since both ideas seem to be present in the text. It could be that God will strip away the heavens and burn up the elements[75] in order to lay bare, that is, to discover or reveal the works (i.e., all of them) that have been done in the earth. The precise meaning intended by Peter gave ancient interpreters and scribes considerable difficulty. That is why we have variant readings in the manuscripts, particularly at verse 10.[76] How God brings about the *telos*, though, is not as significant as why he brings it about. Yes, fire for our *kosmos* will be a powerful and effective purging or purifying agent, just like water cleansed and renewed the *kosmos* that existed in the days of Noah.[77] The "day of God" will be accompanied by episodes, or maybe just one episode, of destructive force. But the destruction is not ultimate. Rather, it is preparatory, it is cleansing, it is purifying. On the day when God orchestrates the *telos* of his *kosmos*, he will make a new dwelling place for righteousness ("in which righteousness dwells," *en hois dikaiosune katoikei*).[78] And there will

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[75]The "elements" (*stoicheia*; cf. Galatians 4.3, 9; Colossians 2.8, 20; Hebrews 5.12) are "part of a complex whole." Danker, *Concise Greek-English Lexicon*, 329. For the various interpretations of these "elements" or "celestial bodies," see J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, Black's New Testament Commentary (reprint; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1969), 364.

[76]"At the close of verse 10 the extant witnesses present a wide variety of readings, none of which seems to be original. The oldest reading, and the one which best explains the origin of the others that have been preserved, is *heurethesetai*. . . . In view of the difficulty of extracting any acceptable sense from the passage, it is not strange that copyists and translators introduced a variety of modifications." Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 636. See too the discussion and alternative readings in Kelly, *Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, 364ff.

[77]Fire and water are recognized as destructive as well as reconstructive forces.

[78]Brown and Comfort, translators, *New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament*, 828.

be, according to Peter, "a new heaven and a new earth." How then does this renovate or renew versus dissolve or destroy relate to environmental concerns of the New Covenant? It may be a subtle distinction, but it is an important distinction. God's *telos* is not aimless or without purpose. It is intentional. So is God pleased when we destroy his *kosmos* for no good reason, for no beneficial purpose? Is God honored when we abuse, misuse, or neglect to take care of his and of our environment?

(6) Redemption versus Abandonment. Paul in Romans 8.18-25 spotlights the progressive work of God toward a *telos* for the *kosmos* and the mystery of this work. Paul contrasts the "sufferings" of the present time with the "glory" to be revealed (verse 18), and he underscores the rationale for this contrast by noting that "the creation waits with eager longing" for God's people to be revealed (verse 19). Then he describes an incredible truth about the *kosmos*. He writes:

> For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience (verses 20-25).

In this eighth chapter of his letter, the idea of "adoption" is at the forefront of Paul's comments (verses 15, 23).[79] The apostle's main focus seems to be on "the redemption of our bodies" (*ten apolutrosin tou somatos hemon*, verse 23) as a key feature of "the revealing of the children of God" (*ten apokalupsin ton huion tou theou*, verse 19; cf. "the glory of the children of God" in

[79]Paul uses the word *huiothesia* which means "condition of one who is adopted as a son, with nuance of special status, adoption, in NT gender non-specific with focus on gift of special relationship with God." See Romans 8.15, 23; 9.4; Galatians 4.5; Ephesians 1.5. Danker, *Concise Greek-English Lexicon*, 360.

verse 21) with emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit as producer of "first fruits" (*aparchen*, verse 23). Perhaps this revelation concerning God's people will be the pinnacle or culminating aspect for the *telos* of God's *kosmos*. But if that is the case, it will not be a solitary occurrence independent of "the creation itself" (*aute he ktisis*, verse 21) or "the whole creation" (*pasa he ktisis*, verse 22).[80]

Note Paul's heavy use of *ktisis* ("creation") in this short section, four times, by which he structures comments about creation or the *kosmos*. The underlying meaning is that God did not give up on his *kosmos*. There is no abandonment of the *kosmos*. Rather, there is adoption or redemption (from *apolutrosis*).[81] Paul does not draw out his use of the word *mataiotes* ("purposelessness") for creation.[82] But he does say that it was "subjected" (from *hupotasso*) to this purposelessness or futility "not of its own will" (*ouch ekousa*) "but by the will of the one who subjected it" (*alla dia ton hupotaxanta*).[83] Paul's Greek here is terse, perhaps intentionally

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[80]On uses of *ktisis* in the New Covenant, see Mark 10.6; 13.19; 16.15; Romans 1.20, 20; 8.19, 20, 21, 22, 39; 2 Corinthians 5.17; Galatians 6.15; Colossians 1.15, 23; Hebrews 4.13; 9.11; 1 Peter 2.13; 2 Peter 3.4; Revelation 3.14. W. F. Moulton and A. S. Geden, editors, *A Concordance to the Greek Testament*, Fifth Edition, revised by H. K. Moulton (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1978), 564.

[81]For other uses of *apolutrosis* in the New Covenant, see Luke 21.28; Romans 3.24; 1 Corinthians 1.30; Ephesians 1.7, 14; 4.30; Colossians 1.14; Hebrews 9.15; 11.35.

[82]Danker, *Concise Greek-English Lexicon*, 223. Two other occurrences of *mataiotes* in the New Covenant are Ephesians 4.17 and 2 Peter 2.18. On alternate translations of *mataiotes* here, see Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Romans* (London, England: United Bible Societies, 1973), 159.

[83]"The great majority of commentators agree that the one who subjected the world to futility was God himself." But for other possibilities, e.g., Satan, Adam, see John Ziesler, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, TPI New Testament Commentaries, general editors, Howard Clark Kee and Dennis Nineham (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989), 219-220.

so, as he is delicate but direct with his remarks. And the comments by Denney are appropriate, who notes:

> For creation was subjected to vanity, etc. *mataiotes* is not classical, but is often used in the LXX, especially for *chabal*. The idea is that of looking for what one does not find–hence of futility, frustration, disappointment. *mataiotes mataioteton* is the "vanity of vanities" in Ecclesiastes, the complaint of the utter resultlessness of life. Sin brought this doom on creation; it made a pessimistic view of the universe inevitable. *hupetage*: the precise time denoted is that of the Fall, when God pronounced the ground cursed for man's sake. Creation came under this doom *ouch ekousa alla dia ton hupotaxanta*: the last words seem best referred to God. It was on account of him–that his righteousness might be shown in the punishment of sin–that the sentence fell upon man, carrying consequences which extended to the whole realm intended originally for his dominion. The sentence on man, however, was not hopeless, and creation shared in his hope as in his doom. When the curse is completely removed from man, as it will be when the sons of God are revealed, it will pass from creation also; and for this the creation sighs. It was made subject to vanity on the footing of this hope; the hope is latent, so to speak, in the constitution of nature, and comes out, in its sighing, to a sympathetic ear.[84]

Even though subjected to futility, there is hope for the *kosmos* according to Paul because of God's *telos* of redemption. The futility or purposelessness that we see and experience in the *kosmos* is oriented toward a goal, that is, its redemption.[85]

In reference to this redemption, Paul makes four amazing statements about creation, and the implications for the *kosmos*, for environmentalism, and for renewability are tremendous. He tells us that: (1) creation waits; (2) creation was subjected to futility; (3) creation will be set free;

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[84]James Denney, "St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans," *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, Volume II, edited by W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), 649. Although in basic agreement that "we cannot brush aside notions of a cosmic fall," Thiselton believes that "'cosmic fall' is an ambivalent notion." See his interesting comments in Anthony C. Thiselton, *Discovering Romans: Content, Interpretation, Reception*, Discovering Biblical Texts Series (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 175, 177.

[85]"Through Christ creation (Greek *ktisis*) may recover its intended orientation (verse 19)." Thiselton, *Discovering Romans*, 173.

and (4) creation has been groaning. To reverse Paul's order and to highlight how Paul qualifies each of these statements is instructive. The creation has been groaning "in labor pains until now."[86] The expectation is that God will bring the *kosmos* through this process of travail to a rebirth or new birth. The creation will be set free "from its bondage to decay."[87] The expectation is that God will liberate the *kosmos* from "a process of disintegration or deterioration."[88] No longer will God's creation be subject to decay. As a result, there is expectation, there is hope, because the creation was subjected to futility . . . "in hope" (from *elpis*). Thus, the creation waits "with eager longing."[89] And while this expectation is linked to what Paul calls the revealing or unveiling of the children of God, it is hard to miss the overriding point that Paul is making about

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[86]Literally, "that all the creation groans together and travails in pain together until now" (*hoti pasa he ktisis sustenadzei kai sunodinei achri tou nun*). Brown and Comfort, translators, *New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament*, 553. Compare Paul's use of this image for "we ourselves" in verse 23 (i.e., "we . . . groan inwardly"). Walter Luthi, *The Letter to the Romans: An Exposition*, translated by Kurt Schoenenberger (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1961), 113ff., insightfully discusses the three groanings outlined by Paul–the whole creation, the children of God, and the Holy Spirit. He calls all three "mysterious" and concludes, "It is not only unconscious creation, not only the community of the faithful children of God who are longing for the glorious day of redemption. The apostle says–and who can comprehend this–that even the Holy Spirit joins in the crying and groaning and hoping. Just as Christ, when he was a man of flesh and blood, called out with prayers and tears and finally died with a cry on his lips, so now the Holy Ghost has humbled himself to holy solidarity with us by joining in our crying."

[87]Literally, "that even itself the creation will be freed from the slavery of corruption" (*hoti kai aute he ktisis eleutherothesetai apo tes douleias tes phthoras*). Brown and Comfort, translators, *New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament*, 553.

[88]So Danker, *Concise Greek-English Lexicon*, 372, on the meaning of *phthora*.

[89]Literally, "for the anxious expectation of the creation" (*he gar apokaradokia tes ktiseos*). Brown and Comfort, translators, *New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament*, 552. This is "eschatological tension" for Paul to describe creation as "stretching forward or craning the neck to see in anticipation" (a possible meaning for *apokaradokia*). Thiselton, *Discovering Romans*, 173.

God's creation. In each of his statements about the *kosmos*, there is hope–hope that God has not abandoned the *kosmos* but is working actively through the presence of his Spirit to bring his *kosmos* to a beneficial and glorious *telos*.[90]

I suppose, when we consider the negative things we observe in our *kosmos* (e.g., decay, destruction, and death along with much that seems meaningless), that we can understand from a human point of view the futility Paul is talking about. Should this make us despondent and pessimistic about our environment and the need to care for it? It is tempting to give up on or abandon efforts for care of the environment and its renewal, especially when we feel as if these attempts are pointless and not effective. But the watchword for the New Covenant of God with his *kosmos* is otherwise. It is full of hope both for the present and for the future. It is good news that God works diligently (apart from us, through us, and in spite of us) recovering and reclaiming his rightful rule over the *kosmos*. It is good news that Jesus came to live as one of us and bring us hope for life in an environment that defies all decay, corruption, and death. And it is good news that the Holy Spirit comforts and empowers us and even struggles with us in this matter of renewability. The Father, Son, and Spirit certainly are not finished at this point in time, and according to the New Covenant they plan to bring the *kosmos* (i.e., this environment, home, or dwelling place) to a proper and fitting *telos*.

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[90]Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 440, notes, "Greek tradition declared that the world had been declining from its past Golden Age to the present. Jewish tradition debated whether it was good that humanity had been created and suggested that Adam's sin had brought harm and the domination of evil power to all creation. Stoic philosophers believed that the elements would come unraveled and nothing but the primeval fire was really eternal. Cosmic pessimism was rampant in the first few centuries A.D.; many people believed that decay and Fate reigned supreme."

Conclusion

The *telos* of our *kosmos* begins in a new and vital way with the passion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus and with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. This is according to God's New Covenant with his people and with all creation, something that God planned from the beginning of time. From start to finish, God has been and will be passionately involved in the *kosmos*. But it is a *kosmos* that is passing away or perishing. This we know and experience on a daily basis. So why care for, why work to sustain this *kosmos* that we understand will one day be set aside by a fiery *telos*? What is our responsibility to this present but perishing *kosmos*? Several reasons have been offered for us to have hope and to work together with God toward a new and glorious environment. To these perspectives I would like to add the idea of holiness, a prominent New Covenant, as well as Old Covenant, theme.

Danker defines *hagios* ("holy") as that which or those who are "set apart for dedication to the interests or expectations of deity."[91] It is a chief interest of the Almighty to reestablish his sovereignty over the *kosmos*. This includes refashioning out of the *kosmos* a new heaven and a new earth, an environment where the Holy God can dwell intimately with his people. We believe this because of the testimony of Jesus and of the prophets and the apostles of former days. This will involve the holiness of space, the holiness of touch or what is tangible, and the holiness of the body, the corporeal. The means by which God will bring about this holiness involves a holy expectation for God to so work, a holy renewal or laying bare of the *kosmos*, and a full, complete, and holy redemption of the *kosmos*. This environmental enterprise by God for the *telos* of his *kosmos* demands our involvement as well.

[91] *Concise Greek-English Lexicon*, 3.

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