

**Harvard University  
Divinity School**

Seminar:  
Paul's Epistle to the Romans

Fall term 2009  
Prof. François Bovon

# Creature or Creation?

An Analysis of Romans 8:19-22.

Submitted by:

Johannes Groessl (SS 1)  
on November 6, 2009

## 1. Introduction

In his letter to the Romans, Paul summarizes his theology, not only addressing the people living in Rome in the year 57 AD, but presenting his concepts of justification, sanctification and glorification to all Christians throughout church history. Since the writing is of an artistic literary form and is intended for the public, it is reasonable to call this theological work an epistle rather than a letter.<sup>1</sup>

In the eighth chapter of the epistle, Paul discusses the believer's privileges, having established his theory of justification, namely that through the faith (obedience) of Jesus those who are baptized on his death die with him and are therefore freed from sin, and are raised with him and therefore put into a right relationship with God. The themes of suffering and glory culminate in verse 18, where he defines glory as being something that is not only current happiness and grace (which are the first-fruits of glory) but is also located in the future.

How can it be that after the appearance of the Christ there is still suffering in the world? The gap between the creation and God has not been completely overcome. In the verses 19-30 Paul clarifies the origin and the character of this gap. There are varying ways to interpret this paragraph resulting from the different concepts of κτίσις, which can be translated as creature, creation, or even the act of creation. The word 'creature' can be regarded as being either simply human or it can refer to any living being. The word

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Deissmann, 218-220.

‘creation’ can mean the whole (physical and mental) world or the created order that is valid within creation; lastly it can be regarded as the process of creation which was either completed on the sixth day or still ongoing (*creatio continua* with a partially open future).

My goal in this paper is to present arguments for and against these possible translations, which mainly involve references to Jewish tradition and to Paul’s other letters. Subsequently, I want to relate the concept of creation in Romans 8 to Paul’s concept of *new creation* in 2 Cor 5. Finally, I will lay out some ethical consequences of translating κτίσις with a concept of creation which includes animals and even inanimate objects.

## 2. Translation

19: For the creation longingly expects the revealing of the sons of God.

20: For the creation [κτίσις] was subordinated under the perishability [ματαιότης], not voluntarily, but by [διὰ] the one who subordinated it, towards [ἐπι] hope.

21: That also the creation [κτίσις] itself will/shall be freed from slavery of destruction [bondage of decay] [φθορά] to the liberty of the glory of the children of God.

22: For we know that the whole creation groans (together) and suffers great pain (together) [συνωδίνω, as of a woman in childbirth] until now.

Since the abstract term ἀποκαραδοκία cannot be translated as the subject of a sentence with the predicate ‘to expect’, I chose to translate verse 19 changing the phrase *desire’s expectance* into the *creation’s expectance which is full of desire*. Nevertheless can an argument be made for a literal translation of this phrase which can in turn affect our interpretation: There is a desire manifested within creation. Since the whole world is

inanimate, it itself cannot literally expect anything; however it can bear living entities that have either intentional mental states of expectation (which would be a very literal translation) or have a non-intentional but conscious drive to achieve or avoid something (for example pain). The desire of the creation then can be regarded as the longing entities within the physical creation. Also, a completely literal interpretation can be supported, postulating a certain final state towards which the whole of creation moves.<sup>2</sup>

Ματαιότης in verse 20 can be translated as worthlessness or futility, or in a moral sense, depravity or perverseness. It can also have a more figurative meaning: what is devoid of truth and appropriateness.<sup>3</sup> Cranfield interprets this term in a wider sense: “the frustration of not being able properly to fulfill the purpose of [the own] existence.”<sup>4</sup> In the German Unified Translation the term *Vergänglichkeit* (perishability) is used. The possible translation of φθορά in verse 21 as decay or perishing gives evidence for translating ματαιότης as perishability and φθορά as perishing, both relating to the concept of Rom 5:12-17 where the origin of death is ascertained in the sin of Adam. Thus “the one who subordinated it” is God reacting to Adam’s sin making all creatures mortal and/or creation bear only perishable things. This was also the interpretation of the early Church.<sup>5</sup>

Wilckens however does not agree here, arguing that διὰ with accusative can not only be translated in a causal grammatical case (because of Adam’s sin), but can also denominate

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<sup>2</sup> One could, for example, justify the literal translations by interpreting the desire of the creation as the time-invariant physical laws in the universe, like the second law of thermodynamics: the creation is longing for maximal entropy. Because I don’t dare to interpret the revealing of the sons of God as the state of maximal entropy of the universe, I will abstain from following up this matter. Nevertheless I can see potential in this approach within the ontological frameworks of panpsychism and panexperientialism.

<sup>3</sup> It is possible that Paul relates to the famous quote in Eccl 1,2: “τὰ πάντα ματαιότης”, where the writer states that in this world all things are as vanity and nothing, literally a (perishable) breath, and therefore condemns the opinions of those who set happiness in anything but in God alone. Cf. Geneva Bible Notes.

<sup>4</sup> Cranfield, 413f.

<sup>5</sup> Wilckens, 154.

the origin of an action (that is the *efficient cause*), which is normally expressed by *διὰ* with genitive. This was indeed widely used when referring to divine actions.<sup>6</sup> Rudolf Bultmann also favors this translation, although he admits that this question cannot be clearly decided.<sup>7</sup>

### 3. Creation or creature?

#### First possibility: act of creation

There are two usual endings to nominal derivatives of verbs in Greek: *-σις* and *-μα*. The former emphasizes the action itself, the latter the product of the action.<sup>8</sup> While *κτίσμα* is rarely used in the NT<sup>9</sup> and always denotes creatures or created objects, *κτίσις* is used frequently, having only once unambiguously referred to the act of creation (Ro 1,20). Usually it denotes, like *κτίσμα*, the result of a creative act: that which is created.<sup>10</sup> In the context of Romans 8:20, 21 and 22, *κτίσις* is always used as the subject of a sentence with a transitive verb, which makes the translation as the *act of creation* very implausible.

#### Second possibility: creature

The King James Version<sup>11</sup> of the Bible translates Ro 8:20 “For the creature was made subject to...” and Ro 8,21 “Because the creature itself also shall be delivered ...”. From an anthropocentric viewpoint (in the tradition of Descartes’ dualism of matter and mind),

<sup>6</sup> As in Plutarch, Dionysios, Sir, 3 Macc, etc. Cf. BDAG lexicon, article ‘dia’ 2.d. β. Here Rom 8,20 is explicitly mentioned.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testamentes*, 230.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Taylor, 11.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Ti 4,4; Rv 5,13; 8,9.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. BDAG, Art. *ktisma*, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Also: 1833 Webster Bible, 1889 Darby Bible, 1899 Douay-Rheims Bible, 1965 Bible in Basic English.

only conscious subjects can expect or groan or suffer; animals are merely biological machines. Today some fundamentalist Christians still prefer this translation by engaging this argument.<sup>12</sup>

The NT indeed gives examples where κτίσις is likely to be translated as creature. For example, although St. Francis might disagree, it is hard to justify that in Mk 16:15 (“Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to every creature”) Jesus wants his disciples to evangelize and baptize animals or even inanimate objects such as trees and stones. Similar verses are Col 1:23 and Hebr 4:13.

If we make the distinction between creatures as “living entities created by God” and the creation as the inanimate physical world, then we can in- or exclude plants and/or sentient but non-self-conscious animals, depending on our definition of “living entity”. This distinction is reflected by the ethical theories of biocentrism, pathocentrism and anthropocentrism. An argument for pathocentrism is the usage of the verbs ‘to groan’ and ‘to suffer’. An argument for anthropocentrism is the verb ‘to eagerly expect’. An argument for biocentrism is the verb ‘made subject to futility’ (when futility is interpreted as perishability: death came into the world for all life forms.).

Already Chrysostom argued against the anthropocentric interpretation by referring to the Old Testament.<sup>13</sup> For example, Psa 96:12 says: “All the trees of the forest shall exult”, similar Psa 104:16; Joel 1:18 says: “How the animals groan [תִּנְּנָן]!” Another argument against the anthropocentric view is that Ro 8,20 says that the creatures are (or the creation is) subordinated *not voluntarily*; if κτίσις only referred to humanity, the subordination

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. <http://www.Godandscience.org/youngearth/romans8.html> (accessed on Oct 28, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Wilckens, 153.

would have been carried out voluntarily, in the sense that the fall of mankind was provoked by a voluntary decision of Adam. It only makes sense to emphasize “not voluntarily” in verse 20 when the object which is subordinated is not congruent with the reason for the subordination.<sup>14</sup> A third argument is the use of κτίσις in a singular form: if an author wants to make clear that he denotes creatures, he should use κτίσεις instead.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, there is also the possibility to read creation as the sum of all living beings (or of all humans) *except* the Christians. According to Ulrich Wilckens, the context of this passage (namely verse 18,19 and 23<sup>16</sup>) favors this interpretation: The Christians who are (or are going to become) the sons of God cannot at the same time expect their own revealing; verse 23 (“not only it [the creation], but we ourselves [Christians]...”) makes even more obvious that the Christians are not included in κτίσις; therefore it makes sense to define creation in Romans 8 as the *old creation*.

What about the Non-Christians? Paul saw himself as the Apostle to the Gentiles, and one major purpose of writing to the Romans was to present his missionary theology and how it relates to the people of Israel. It would be inconsistent, if Paul on the one hand pleaded for universalism, meaning that he “kept everybody a prisoner to disobedience, with the purpose of having mercy on them all.” (Rom 11:32) If we accept the argument that individuals with free will cannot be referred to in verse 20 (“not willingly”), everybody who descends from Adam (including Jews and Gentiles) have to be treated equally. Since the revealing of the sons of God seems to take place in the future, it is still possible that everybody will be saved (*universal reconciliation*: e.g. 1 Tim 4,10: “we hope for a living

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Wilckens, 153.

<sup>15</sup> Jewett, 513f.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Wilckens, 152.

God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.”) . The idea that the Non-Christians only participate in the act of revealing of the sons of God and eagerly wait for this to happen (verse 19) does not comply with the ordinary concept of mission.<sup>17</sup>

Wilckens states that for some of these reasons the majority of exegetes reads κτίσις neither as humanity nor as Non-Christian humanity. He also asserts that the concept of creation is primarily used as not including humans – in the remaining parts of the NT<sup>18</sup> as well as in the Apostolic Fathers, the Septuagint and in post-biblical Jewish literature.<sup>19</sup>

### **Third possibility: created order**

It is very likely that Paul’s concept of creation originates in the Hebrew Testament. In Gen 1,1 the term נָצַח not only means ‘to create’ but also ‘to frame’, ‘to form’ or ‘to shape’.<sup>20</sup> It is thus possible that κτίσις denotes something like the *cosmic order* in the universe. This order, which was originally attributed by God as ‘good’ (Gen 1), got somewhat disarranged by the fall of mankind: sin and death came into the world.

However, the context of Ro 8,19-22 does not allow this translation, since an order cannot groan, suffer or expect anything. But the concept of what can be regarded as the essence of creation may help us to understand how to read κτίσις as (inanimate) creation in the context of groaning, suffering and subordination.

### **Forth possibility: creation**

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 153.

<sup>18</sup> E.g. Hebr 9,11; Mk 10,6; 13,9; 2Petr 3,4; Offb 3,14.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Taylor, 153, footnotes 657-660.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Taylor, 20.



The whole creation includes all created objects. Restricting the creation to living creatures or to mankind when translating is a constriction that is in greater depth to be justified than a global interpretation. We have seen so far that there are problems with a literal interpretation of the verses in Romans 8 because of the role of creation as an acting entity. How can the inanimate creation be understood as being in need for salvation?

When we take a look at Genesis 3:17, we can see that after Adam's sin God "cursed the ground" on account of Adam. It is quite difficult to receive an adequate translation for **מְאָרָה** which is the derived noun from **אָרַר** used in this verse, since there are six different Hebrew words which all are usually translated with *curse*.<sup>21</sup> An advanced translation would be "to bind (with a spell), hem in with obstacles, render powerless to resist"<sup>22</sup>. Comparing with Gen 4:11, Cain is cursed/banned (**אָרַר**) *from* the soil, which means that he is banned from enjoying its productivity.<sup>23</sup> Louis Taylor renarrates Genesis 3 that "God sentenced [Adam] to hard labor as the means of livelihood for the rest of his natural life, and cursed the earth to the end that it should be rebellious to Adam's demands or appeals"<sup>24</sup>. Also the relation between man and animals changed with Adam's fall: Originally friendly and obedient toward him (Gen 1:26)<sup>25</sup>, they now "snarled their defiance at his approaches or fled his presence in fear"<sup>26</sup>.

It is thus possible to regard the curse on the ground as a metaphor expressing the way God *changed* the physical world with the purpose of executing the curse on Adam? His

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<sup>21</sup> TWOT, Art. m'era

<sup>22</sup> From Akkadian arāru. Cf. *ibid*.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *ibid*.

<sup>24</sup> Taylor, 46

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Taylor, 46.

<sup>26</sup> Calvin, Comm. on Genesis I, 131f.

sin resulted “in the distortion of the unity and peace of the whole creation”<sup>27</sup>. After the world was corrupted, the beauty of the paradise was gone.<sup>28</sup> There are three ways to see how the distortion of the cosmos induces sin: (1) Sinful man worships the things of the subhuman cosmos because of their seeming superiority to him.<sup>29</sup> (2) It is not possible to survive without harming life.<sup>30</sup> (3) The human refusal to accept limitations (which is the essence of Adam’s sin, since he wanted to become like God) actually ruins the world; man’s greed and gluttony result in the exploitation of nature, animals and other humans, using up the limited natural resources and pollution destroys the means of livelihood for current and future generations.<sup>31</sup>

Incorporating the affects of sin on the whole (animate and inanimate) creation can explain the use of ‘not voluntarily’ and ‘vanity’ in Romans 8,20. Because it does not have free will, the creation is an innocent victim of the fall of man. Jewett notes:

When the creatures are made the food and fuel of our lusts, they are subject to vanity, they are captivated by the law of sin. And this *not willingly*, not of their own choice. All the creatures desire their own perfection and consummation; when they are made instruments of sin it is not willingly. Or, They are thus captivated, not for any sin of their own, which they had committed, but for man's sin.<sup>32</sup>

Louis Taylor states likewise:

As Paul explicitly declares that Adam let sin into the world by his willful disobedience of God’s law, and that his disobedience wrought the havoc of distortion of the sub-human

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<sup>27</sup> Taylor, 46.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Jewett, 511-518.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Rom 1,24.

<sup>30</sup> According to Albert Schweitzer’s biocentric ethics, harming and killing any life is sinful. A clear conscience cannot exist and is “a invention of the devil”, because one has to harm life in order to survive. Cf. Globokar, Roman: *Verantwortung für alles was lebt. Von Albert Schweitzer und Hans Jonas zu einer theologischen Ethik des Lebens* (Tesi Gregoriana Serie Teologia 92), Rome 2002, p. 206.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Jewett, 513, and Hawthorne / Martin, 189.

<sup>32</sup> Mathew Henry Commentary, Romans Chapter 8.

cosmos, so he also declares by implication that sinful man today is responsible for the continued groaning and suffering of the creation ...<sup>33</sup>

When Paul says in 2 Cor 5:19 that “in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself”, it is not clear if κόσμος refers to the universe or to the whole of mankind. Reading it in the context of Col 1:20 (and Eph 1,10) we can make an argument for the former: “... and through him to reconcile to himself *all things* [τὰ πάντα], whether on earth or in heaven.” Romans 8,20-22 can be interpreted in this way: “The whole creation was subordinated under the perishability / vanity” may say that all things are affected by Adam’s sin.<sup>34</sup> The “slavery of destruction” or respectively the “bondage of decay” can also be applied to creation, which as a whole and as the sum of all objects in it is perishable.<sup>35</sup>

Above I stated some arguments why the term creation in Romans 8 does not include humans. Most exegetes agree here; the Mathew Henry Commentary for example defines creation as “the whole frame of nature ..., the compages of inanimate and sensible creatures, which, because of their harmony and mutual dependence, and because they all constitute and make up one world, are spoken of in the singular number as the creature.”<sup>36</sup>

However, there are still the above mentioned arguments against an interpretation as inanimate creation. How can creation that “suffers the pain of childbirth” be understood? Wilckens outlines some parallels this formulation has in Hellenistic literature, being used

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<sup>33</sup> Taylor, 56.

<sup>34</sup> This interpretation would also explain why the verb ὑποτάσσω is used twice in the sentence. If the ones subordinated are congruent with the ones who are responsible for the subordination, there would be easier ways to formulate the sentence.

<sup>35</sup> This issue has to be explained in detail: From the perspective of cosmology, all complex aggregations and compounds will cease to exist one day, since the entropy of an isolated system can only increase with time. From the perspective of rationalistic philosophy, the world is contingent and lacks necessity.

<sup>36</sup> MHC Romans Chapter 8.

metaphorically.<sup>37</sup> To the pain of animals (and maybe to human babies not yet having free will) can be literally referred to; but it is very unlikely that Paul writes κτίσις only denominating sentient animals, since the distinction between things, inanimate and animate life never explicitly occurs when the word creation is used. Jewett notes that the concept of a *corrupted nature* was common not only in Judaism but also in the Roman civic cult.<sup>38</sup> But instead of the “nature’s joy at its deliverance through Augustus and his successor, Paul hears only agonized groans.”<sup>39</sup>

Similarly Robert Jewett defines creation as “a holistic, interdependent system with a life and development of its own, yet anticipating appropriate human intervention to counter Adam’s fall.”<sup>40</sup> And although Christians are already subject to salvation, they are still included in the interdependence of suffering within creation.<sup>41</sup> Paul here expresses the eschatological theology of “already ... not yet”.<sup>42</sup>

When God subordinated the creation, He already had “in mind” to reconcile it to Him again at one time. This is what ‘towards hope’ in verse 20 might express. The disposition of reconciliation was already laid into creation in the process of subordinating.<sup>43</sup> From this background the image of childbirth can be comprehended along with verse 18 saying that creation is in a state of giving birth:<sup>44</sup> The new creation is only partially born, the old creation suffers great pain because of the process of birth; but when the new creation is

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. Wilckens, 150.

<sup>38</sup> E.g. in Hesiod or Virgil. Cf. Jewett, 516, footnote 85.

<sup>39</sup> Jewett, 516.

<sup>40</sup> Jewett, 517.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Wilckens, 158.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Jewett, 517.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Wilckens 155.

<sup>44</sup> Wilckens 155: Die Schöpfung „liegt in den Wehen, d.h. befindet sich in einer Situation gesteigerter Erfahrung von Nichtigkeit und Vergänglichkeit, mit der sich der bevorstehende eschatologische Umbruch nach apokalyptischer Vorstellung ankündigt.“

finally born, the old creation does not suffer pain anymore and is therefore rescued, too. One could extend this image by claiming that the old creation was pregnant from the beginning. Ulrich Wilckens explains the groaning of creation like this:

As His Creator God Himself is present in His creation and therefore creation as well ‘groans’ and ‘suffers pain’ about the contradiction between its nature (*Sosein*) and the goal God has set for creation; likewise creation entertains expectance and hope that God will neutralize this contradiction in due course.<sup>45</sup>

It is quite interesting that Paul’s theory can also serve as a theodicy argument, which can be seen in this quote and will also play a role in the next chapter. It can be concluded so far: *Ματαιιότης* can best be translated as *perishability* in a physical sense. *Κτίσις* can best be translated as *non-human creation*, “die den Christen als mit-leidende, mit-wartende und mit-zu-verherrlichende Heilspartnerin zur Seite ist, zugleich aber auch gegenübersteht.”<sup>46</sup> The use of ideas like „expecting“, „being freed“, „groaning“ and „giving childbirth“ can best be understood as anthropomorphisms.<sup>47</sup> The *συν*-prefix used with some of these terms seems to be important to understand these anthropomorphisms also as analogies: Non-human creation suffers *together* with the Christians as the Christians suffer together with Christ; therefore the non-human creation will be glorified together with the humans as the humans are glorified together with Christ.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Wilckens, 156 (own translation).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. also Chang, 85-90. This passage can’t be translated without losing a large part of its content. A literal word-by-word translation would be: “which also stands on the side of [supports] the Christians as with-suffering, with-waiting, and with-to-be-glorified salvation partner, but at the same time also is in opposition to them.”

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 353.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 356.

#### 4. The New Creation

Paul uses the term ‘new creation’ in 2 Cor 5:17 and Gal 6:15: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a *new creation*.” and “It does not matter if one is circumcised or not, [it only counts that he is] a *new creation*.” It should be noted that *καινός* cannot only be translated ‘new’ but also ‘renovated’.<sup>49</sup> Adolf Deissmann points out the parallels to Paul’s own life, which he himself divided into two parts – an old Saul and a new Paul.<sup>50</sup> The idea of the expectation of a new creation already occurred in Judaism as the transformation into original goodness.<sup>51</sup> For Paul, the new creation is at the same time already present but also a future reality. New Creation(s) can be interpreted either as individual converts or as communal reality<sup>52</sup> or as the cosmos as a whole.<sup>53</sup>

Accepting the arguments for interpreting *κτίσις* in Romans 8:21 as the entire creation, we can read “be freed from slavery” as the process of transforming the *old creation* into the *new creation*. This transformation already began with the coming of Jesus Christ by transforming (some?) men by baptism. But humans are still captured within the old creation which is still perishable and includes death and suffering.<sup>54</sup> Justification as the process of bringing man into a right relationship to God can only be completed by transforming the sub-human cosmos which lets us (in its current state) remain sinners “according to the flesh” – although already freed from sin “according to the spirit” by the faith of Jesus Christ when living in Christ.

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<sup>49</sup> Taylor, 71.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Taylor, 75.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. 4 Ezra 7:75, 2 Apoc Bar 73f.

<sup>52</sup> A new community of Jews and Gentiles, compared to the old community of Jews only.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Hawthorne / Martin, 189.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Taylor, 110: “It has already been seen that Paul considered those converted to Christ as living in two ages: this present evil age and the age to come.”

How can this transformation be understood? This ‘final transformation’ might be identical to the coming *apocalypse* which is commonly referred to in both testaments and in Christian literature.<sup>55</sup> Is the apocalypse as a cosmic redemption a retransformation of the creation back into its original state which was approved by God as “good” (Gen 1) ? There are two ways of interpreting the end of time: either annihilation or renovation.<sup>56</sup> Annihilation is preferred by most modern writers, since it seems to be more compatible with the scientific theories of the *big crunch* or the *entropy death* of the universe; it will take many billions of years until this happens, and actually quite some time before that no complex life forms will exist in the universe any more. According to this theory of annihilation God will create a new heavenly paradise, spiritual and eternal.

The idea of the apocalypse as renovation is different. It is common knowledge for exegetes that Jesus himself and the first generation of Christians might have expected the apocalypse to occur within their lifespan. Louis Taylor writes:

It is notable also that the renovation in its ultimate stage in Pauline and other New Testament thought takes place in time. There seems to be no proof that time, in the sense of sequential events and existence, will be done away in the Kingdom of God after Parousia of Christ.<sup>57</sup>

There is a lot of evidence that Paul’s view was that the Kingdom of God (or as it is called in the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum: “the life of the world to come”) is actually located in the future of *this* universe. It is even likely that Paul “would agree to the idea that the

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<sup>55</sup> For example 1 Mos 3,15, Book of Daniel, “your kingdom come” in the Lord’s prayer, the Book of Revelation

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Taylor, 126.

<sup>57</sup> Taylor, 127.

renovation shall be by fire.”<sup>58</sup> Taylor starts a speculation interpreting this fire as events that lead to the entropy death<sup>59</sup> of the universe.

This speculation is not new. The French Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) introduced the term *omega point* to describe the maximal level of complexity and consciousness towards the universe is evolving.<sup>60</sup> [The contemporary physicist Frank Tipler extends Chardin’s theory in his book *The Physics of Christianity*. Accordingly, consciousness in the universe will not vanish due to the laws of thermodynamics as complex matter will.] This final state of the universe will be pure consciousness.

Teilhard saw the process of organic evolution as a sequence of progressive syntheses whose ultimate convergence point is that of God. When humanity and the material world have reached their final state of evolution and exhausted all potential for further development, a new convergence between them and the supernatural order would be initiated by the Parousia, or Second Coming of Christ. Teilhard asserted that the work of Christ is primarily to lead the material world to this cosmic redemption, while the conquest of evil is only secondary to his purpose. Evil is represented by Teilhard merely as growing pains within the cosmic process: the disorder that is implied by order in process of realization.<sup>61</sup>

Teilhard’s theory can therefore not only be used to explain the apocalypse as a renovation rather than an annihilation, but it can also let us understand Romans 8 from a new perspective. The last sentence of the quote almost seems like an interpretation of verse 18 (“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. Taylor, 129: “... if one reads [1 Cor 3:12-15] in conjunction with Romans 8:19-22 with the very prevalent idea of cosmic conflagration in both the Old Testament apocryphal works and the New Testament apocryphal works such as the Acts of Paul (...) and the Apocalypse of Peter (...), it is not at all difficult to assume that the Apostle would agree to the idea that the renovation shall be by fire.”

<sup>59</sup> In German this term is actually translated ‘Wärmetod’ which means ‘heat death’.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. e.g. Chardin, Teilhard: *The phenomenon of Man, Man’s place in nature or The future of Man*.

<sup>61</sup> Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre. (2008). Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopaedia Britannica 2008 Ultimate Reference Suite. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica.



with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”) and verse 22 (“For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers great pain [of childbirth] until now.”).<sup>62</sup>

## 5. Implications

All current suffering can be understood as a partaking in Christ’s suffering. Thus Romans 5,1-5 can be seen in a different way and also translated in a more literal way: “We rejoice in our sufferings” (Rom 5:3), because in the suffering there is “hope of the glory of God”. In the knowledge / the hope of being rescued, the suffering as an unavoidable aspect part of ‘being in the flesh’ or even as commiseration with creation is a sign of connection and interdependence of the new creation (namely the Christians) and the old creation (the rest of the world which is still bound to the slavery of decay). This connection lets us expect and hope for a universal salvation which includes not only our spirit but also our flesh, the animals and the remaining inanimate creation.

For me this is a first small step to understand the Christian concept of the ‘resurrection of the body’ respectively ‘resurrection of the flesh’. The Christian concept does not seem to be compatible after all with the Platonic dualism which makes the soul the prisoner of the body and the goal for the soul to be freed from it. Regarding the new creation as a continuation of the old creation, rather renovated than actually new, the implication for our lives can be that we give this world a much greater value, while at the same time are not conformed to this world (cf. Rom 12:2), expecting its completed renewal.

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<sup>62</sup> One final speculation: If we – humans living on the planet earth – want to survive and “make it” to be a part of the omega point, we have to put effort in this venture (which may include dealing with climate change, building starships to colonize other worlds when our sun is dying, etc.), but we also have no guarantee that by our works this kind of justification will occur.

“Man, thus renovated, has a definite relationship to the present age and to the age to come-NOW! This relation includes a sort of psychic bond with the sub-human cosmos.”<sup>63</sup>

Personally, I remain cautious about the interpretation presented in this paper. When I think of resurrection, I usually don't think of a final state of united consciousness in the universe, but of personal resurrection. It seems to me a lot easier to guarantee personal resurrection by imagining heaven as a separate place 'outside' of the physical universe where – already now – our souls are located, although they are bound to human bodies which are located in the material world; at the end of each life, the body dies, the soul lives on, eternally, without suffering and restrictions, in unison with God.

It is always a special moment finding similarities of the presumable world view of a biblical author and either philosophical theories or some contemporary world views which have emerged from modern cosmological theories. But when doing an exegesis of a text, one should not try to obtrude the own preferred belief system on a text but rather find out what the belief system of the author was. Since platonic ideas are deep-seated in our culture and understanding, it is hard to read Paul without them, especially when he is writing to Hellenistic recipients which themselves are partly influenced by this philosophy. The challenge for philosophers and theologians nowadays seems to be to establish a theory of the essence of man, including its past and future in an evolutionary process, in the connection to other living and non-living things in the universe – overcoming anthropocentrism, especially in ethical theories, while not crossing over all the way to a nihilist world view, in which we are just a (locally and temporally) tiny piece of complex matter in a large universe, without any meaning and obligation.

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<sup>63</sup> Taylor, 100.

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