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**What do we hope for?
A consideration of resurrection hope**

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Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Eschatological Outlooks.....	3
2.1	Realised Eschatology	3
2.2	Consistent Eschatology	7
2.3	Consequences.....	11
3	Hope	13
3.1	Personal Hope	13
3.1.1	Historical views on resurrection.....	15
3.1.2	The redeemed body	16
3.2	Creation's Hope	20
3.3	Present Hope	23
4	Conclusion.....	26
	Bibliography.....	27

1 Introduction

If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

(1Corinthians 15:19, NRSV)

What creation needs is not abandonment on the one hand, nor evolution on the other, but redemption and renewal; and this is both promised and guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This is what the whole world's waiting for.¹

This assertion by Tom Wright is underpinned by one of the key teachings in the New Testament – that Jesus was dead but is now alive. The New Testament witness could have stopped with the cross. After all, much theological thought and discussion has gone into exploring the purpose and effect of Jesus' crucifixion and marks it as the central event in salvation history. However, scriptural witness does not finish there but continues to witness to the resurrection of Jesus, an event which heralds a transformation in the focus of salvation. Yet it is also an event which can become sidelined or at least transformed into a more 'comfortable' metaphor. Science dismisses any thought of the dead coming to life and so any sense of new creation must be a transformative life now. Philosophy creates explanations that allow us to eschew the physical and promote the spiritual; the result of which has been to nurture a dualist perspective where this world and all things physical are to be endured until such times as we can become our 'true' selves. Medieval piety moved the focus away from resurrection altogether, emphasising instead heaven and hell, with, arguably, an over-emphasis on hell.

Yet scripture is quite clear in its expectation of resurrection; a promise which begins with the resurrection of Jesus. Furthermore, the Christian hope of resurrection is not restricted to individuals, but is a promise and hope for the entirety of creation. The implications of such an inclusive resurrection are manifold, with an impact on ecclesiology, ethics, ecology and more besides. There is insufficient space to explore all of these areas and so the primary focus of this dissertation will be in assessing Wright's assertion, with particular emphasis on the inclusiveness of creation in eschatological events.

¹ Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (SPCK Publishing, 2007), 119. Writing as N.T. Wright, his books are intended for a more academic audience. Under the name of Tom Wright his books are intended to appeal to a wider audience. They are no less challenging or informative for that.

The consideration of resurrection falls within the scope of eschatology – the doctrine which traditionally looks at the ‘last things’ including resurrection, judgement, heaven and hell.² The primary purpose of this dissertation is to explore the issues surrounding resurrection. Furthermore, this dissertation will examine Wright’s thoughts on resurrection and assess whether they offer an adequate response to some of the problems which other approaches may throw up. To set the scene for this discussion, two particular areas of eschatological thought will be considered. These might be termed ‘realised eschatology’ and ‘consistent eschatology’.³ It must be acknowledged that there is much common ground in the two approaches and that even within the broad categories there is significant disagreement over key details and their implications. These two areas of eschatological thought, and some of the possible consequences of following these paths, will be explored in the section Eschatological Outlooks.

Wright’s approach might best be described as falling within the area of ‘inaugurated eschatology’ and once again it is important to acknowledge the inadequacy of that categorisation. Inaugurated eschatology and, in particular, Wright’s ideas will be explored in more detail in the section entitled Hope.

² David Fergusson, “Eschatology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. Colin E Gunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 226

³ Richard Bauckham, “Eschatology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 307 Bauckham notes that, in the twentieth century, eschatology ceased to be simply one doctrinal topic among many and developed into a more overarching subject area. Two primary schools of interpretation of the New Testament emerged. ‘Consistent’ eschatology was always for a future time. ‘Realised’ eschatology was concerned about the present. ‘Inaugurated’ eschatology acknowledges, and attempts to maintain, the tension between these two positions.

2 Eschatological Outlooks

2.1 Realised Eschatology

The first area we will explore is that of ‘realised eschatology’. A crude characterisation might be to suggest that its focus is a ‘new life now’. Of primary importance is the idea that “if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2Corinthians, 5:17, NRSV). ‘New creation’ comes with faith in Jesus and is the result of the transformative power of the Spirit gifted to believers. Furthermore, as a consequence of a believer’s new creation, there is now an obligation laid upon them to bring about further change in others and in all creation.

Another concern of this approach is the sustainability of a doctrine which speaks of resurrection of the dead – a concept which seems to fly in the face of reason and science. The difficulties in reconciling ‘science’ to the future hope of physical resurrection from the dead has led to the situation where such resurrection has been almost entirely ignored. Garrett Green states that:

Many modern theologians... have sought to play down or even eliminate entirely the otherworldliness of Christian faith and doctrine, which has meant the elimination or radical reinterpretation of eschatology. They have felt an apologetic pressure to declare their loyalty to *this* world while eschewing the claims that another world might make upon us, including the ‘otherworldly aspects of Christian tradition.’⁴

The theologian’s ability to downplay, or even eliminate, ‘otherworldliness’ relies upon particular approaches to the interpretation of scripture. Rudolf Bultmann, whose work in ‘demythologising’ the New Testament in particular, has allowed resurrection to be treated in a much more metaphorical way. The resurrection of Jesus is a matter of faith rather than something to be considered as an actual historical event:

The meaning of Jesus’ resurrection is not that he is translated into the beyond, but that he is exalted to the status of Lord... It is as the risen Christ that Christ is present in [Paul] the apostle, for in bearing about in his body the dying of Jesus, Paul is manifesting in his body the life of Jesus.⁵

⁴ Garrett Green, “Imagining the Future,” in *The Future as God’s Gift: Explorations in Christian Eschatology*, ed. David Fergusson and Marcel Sarot (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 76.

⁵ Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 1 (New Y: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1951), 306

By presenting Jesus' resurrection in such a way, by extension, the resurrection of believers is not some indeterminate future event, but is a description of the present reality for a believer:

For with the sending of Christ "when the fullness of time was come" (Gal. 4:4) it decisively began. So that it can already be said now: "the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (II Cor. 5:17). Eschatological "righteousness" and "adoption" are already present realities.⁶

Bultmann argues that talk of resurrection of the dead is not to be rooted in descriptions of a natural phenomenon. Rather, it is a way of expressing the concept that our present reality is "the life of the striving, willing self which is always after something and is always faced with its various possibilities, but is constantly faced with those two basic possibilities: to live "according to the flesh" or to live "according to the Spirit" – to and for one's self or to and for God or the Lord."⁷

The 'resurrected' life, then, is one which is an already present reality and reflects the transformed self which is now focussed on God rather than on self. Jesus' resurrection is the source of this transformed life. It is "the origin of the resurrection life of all believers, which necessarily proceeds from it and hence can be regarded as already present in origin."⁸ As the source of resurrection life now, Jesus' resurrection is not the model for the *future* resurrection of believers. Arguing from 1 Corinthians 15:12-16, Bultmann suggests that the "logic of the argument is not that the possibility of any resurrection is proved by *one* case of resurrection such as demonstrably occurred with Christ; rather the resurrection of all believers is comprised in that of Christ, which is the origin of theirs, as [1 Corinthians 15] v.21f. clearly shows."⁹

Drawing heavily upon the thought behind realised eschatology, Liberation Theology has become increasingly more popular as theologians seek to engage with contemporary issues of injustice, inequality, oppression and discrimination. Catherine Keller is particularly interested in reinterpreting apocalyptic musings, which, she claims, are "crucial dialectic correctives to the vicious cycles of complacent optimism and self-defeating pessimism to which life in 'first world' inclines us."¹⁰ An eschatological focus on current existence coming to an end offers no imperative

⁶ Ibid., 306-7

⁷ Ibid., 331

⁸ Ibid., 347-8

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Catherine Keller, "Why Apocalypse, Now?," *Theology Today* 49, no. 2 (July 1992): 185-6

to fix currently broken political or social systems. Rather, “it demonizes multiplicity, creates human passivity as to the fate of the earth, desacralizes the earth itself and all of its flesh.”¹¹ Nor does current thinking bode well for a future existence as it all too often seems to imply a recreation of current order rather than the revolutionary change required to make all things new. Again, in Keller’s words:

The notion of a unifying and conclusive goal as the basis for meaning in history has pervaded classical and modern Christian culture. The sense of a single end, reinforced by postbiblical dogma of a creation out of nothing, depends upon the image of a controlling and independent deity whose identity precedes “the world” and who draws it towards its end, where the same God, the God of sameness who abhors the fleshly varieties (Augustine versus James) awaits it. This image of the creator and endtime judge has fostered passive acquiescence in relation to authority and, thus, a modernism with terrifying totalitarian capacity.¹²

This damning indictment of one strand of eschatological thought highlights the need for a rediscovery of the thought behind the biblical worldview of resurrection. Keller does offer some pointers to how apocalyptic vision might be more fruitfully interpreted. Rather than hope for a new world, her hope also lies in the transformation of this one. Resurrection is not just of the dead, but of new life now.

Bultmann and liberation theologians appear to part company however on the issue of theodicy. Where liberation theology seeks to address issues of suffering in the world and to relieve it, seeing it as an imperative stemming from a realised eschatology, Bultmann appears more accepting of suffering. Suffering, he suggests, “makes man aware of his weakness and insignificance, becoming a compulsion, indeed a help, to the believer, who, in the ‘obedience of faith’, has basically renounced his own strength to make real this renunciation and his radical surrender to ‘grace’ in concrete living”.¹³ What appears to make suffering ‘bearable’ is that through “the ‘fellowship of suffering,’ the sufferer is released from the holiness of his suffering”.¹⁴

¹¹ Ibid., 193

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 349.

¹⁴ Ibid., 350-1 Bultmann explains the ‘fellowship of suffering’ not as a historical relationship between believers and Jesus (or between believers) or as a simple imitation of Jesus, but rather as an encompassing of all humanity’s afflictions, brought to the cross, where “sufferings are overcome and become things to boast of.”

If Bultmann appears to focus on a realised eschatology, it would be unfair to suggest that he does so to the exclusion of any future resurrection. In exploring Paul's distinction between body (*soma*) and flesh (*sarx*), Bultmann notes that Paul often steers a course perilously close to Gnostic dualism, but nevertheless manages to hold the distinctions in tension. As for resurrection, Paul's hope is not to "expect a release of the self from its bodily prison but expects instead the 'bodily' resurrection – or rather the transformation of the *soma* from under the power of the flesh into a spiritual *soma*, i.e. a Spirit-ruled *soma*".¹⁵ However, this is a process that begins in this life. Faith itself is a "*transition into eschatological existence*"¹⁶

In the midst of the world the believer is lifted out of a secular existence – though he is still 'in the world,' he is no longer 'of the world' ([John] 17:11, 14, 16). He has already gone through the Judgement and gone over into Life ([John] 3:18, 5:24f.). He already has death *behind* him ([John] 8:51; 11:25f.); he already has Life ([John] 3:36; 6:47; 1 Jn. 5:12).¹⁷

'Eschatological existence' is a theme which will be picked up on later in this dissertation. For the moment, we turn to the second broad area of eschatological thought mentioned earlier, that of consistent eschatology.

¹⁵ Ibid., 201

¹⁶ Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 78

¹⁷ Ibid.

2.2 Consistent Eschatology

Whilst it may be the case that realised eschatologies can follow different trajectories, they can still be characterised as flowing from the same root – that change and transformation is primarily for the ‘now’ rather than the future. Consistent eschatology, with its focus always on the future, raises very different problems for the ‘now’. The aspect of consistent eschatology that I wish to focus on here is that strand of thought which sees resurrection as an ‘escape’ from embodiment or as a ‘moving on’ to better things. If realised eschatology insists that it our responsibility to enact change now for the betterment of all creation because the eschatological future is the one we ourselves usher in, then the consistent, or futurist, perspective may be characterised as looking beyond our present circumstances to ‘something better’. Our present physicality is a matter of temporary inconvenience or perhaps part of a process of ‘refinement’. Much of this thought flows from philosophy rather than Christian teaching. However, it has had an impact on Christian eschatological thought and so must be dealt with.

Dualism, where body and spirit are viewed ‘separately’ has been a feature, and a controversy, in Christian thought since the earliest Christian communities. Drawing primarily on Plato, a number of early Christian theologians developed the idea of the ‘soul’. In Origen, for example, we find “Platonist principles... endemic in his thought.”¹⁸ This influence allowed Origen to develop his ideas of an eternal soul, over which God is ruler. Furthermore, Origen also believed in a hierarchy of that which produces and that which is produced. Eternal souls are not perfect and the Fall, he argues, is a result of apathy and sloth. The consequence of the Fall was that eternal souls became encased in physical bodies.¹⁹ From this, it is obvious how an understanding of the physical as ‘lesser’ or ‘undesirable’ can be achieved.

This theme of an immortal soul is picked up by contemporary theologians such as John Hick. In his book *Death and Eternal Life*, Hick proposes a possible eschatological future which is highly reliant on this dualism, where the soul continues and the physical body ceases to be relevant. The goal of humanity, he suggests, is “to come full circle, though on a higher level, culminating in a new corporateness in which egoity has been transcended.”²⁰ Hick is here acknowledging that we are

¹⁸ “Origen (c. 185 - c. 254),” in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000)

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 455

individualistic creatures but he suggests that salvation is also a corporate activity. Our current physicality is a time during which “existing individuals... must freely transcend their own egoity.”²¹ However, this corporate dimension gives a further insight into Hick’s thoughts. Hick does not fully agree with the idea of an immortal soul continuing to exist as an ‘entity’. That idea, he says, has “profound conceptual difficulties”²² and so he must use the corporate aspect of salvation to provide a ‘destination’ or continuity for souls. Drawing from other religions, Hick suggests that a form of reincarnation best holds the tension between spiritual continuity and individual identity. The form that it takes is an ever-ascending ‘growth’ towards “self-transcending perfection.”²³ It is the ‘self-transcending’ aspect that maintains the tension between the corporate and the individual.

Hick’s conceptual approach to immortality begs the question of what this transcendent, ‘corporate’ existence will be like. Hick offers no description of it other than in a purely conceptual way. He draws on the relational model of the Trinity as a starting point for a description, describing it as “three centres of consciousness [that] just *are* three different persons in some ultimate metaphysical sense [yet] they nevertheless exist in a totally harmonious relationship to one another so as to constitute a complex personal unity.”²⁴ The primary characteristic then of this immortality is that “the ego-aspect of individual consciousness has been left behind and the relational aspect has developed into a total community which is one-in-many and many-in-one, existing in a state which is not embodied and probably not in time.”²⁵

Hick’s assessment of our current physical existence is not a very positive one, describing it as a “‘fallen’ or illusion-bound existence, in which the human fragments look at each other through the slits of separate ego-masks.”²⁶ The Christian hope for a more positive (post-mortem) future is seen in the model of Jesus Christ, who “as perfect man... was love incarnate, living in ideal relationship

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 456. In an earlier chapter (Chapter 20, section 4) of the book, Hick explores the possibilities which would allow us to speak of an immortal soul as an individualistic ‘entity’. The basic problem is that of individual identity. Our identity (or ‘ego’), he argues, does not derive exclusively from our soul but is as much a function of our physicality as well as our locality and contextuality. To speak, therefore, of the immortal soul as a continuum is problematic. It is no less problematic to attempt explain it through reincarnation or even ‘rebecomings’ in alternative existences. Herein lies the ‘profound conceptual difficulties’ he refers to.

²³ Ibid., 458

²⁴ Ibid., 462

²⁵ Ibid., 464

²⁶ Ibid.

to Ultimate Reality so far as this is possible for a single individual prior to the perfecting of humanity as a whole.”²⁷

From a traditional Christian perspective there are many problems with Hick’s views, particularly with reincarnation and also with his role for Jesus. However, one of the main problems with this approach is that it significantly devalues our current physical existence. It calls into question the creative activity of God, seeing our current existence as some sort of ‘transit lounge’ which we need to pass through in order to get to a final destination. Such issues will be dealt with shortly. Whilst it may be argued that Hick does not represent mainstream Christian thought, there is also evidence of a similar downplaying of our current existence in contemporary biblical scholarship.

Bruce Milne, in his exposition ‘*The Message of Heaven and Hell*’²⁸, emphasises the ‘heavenly inheritance’ which awaits Christians. This inheritance is assured by two means. The first is by “the work of the Holy Spirit, as he morally renews [Christians] and frees them to approach God. Second, God’s triumphant purpose, as it can be seen working out in creation, and in Christians, the children of God who are the personal objects of his invincible love.”²⁹ The problem here is not so much the content but the language. It speaks of the ‘special’ place of humankind and suggests that the rebirth experienced by a Christian is a moral refocusing with the primary purpose of enabling the person to ‘be with God’. Whether intentional or not, the focus becomes that of personal salvation with the rest of creation sidelined as though it were inconsequential and that the Christian’s heavenly inheritance was all that mattered. In a later chapter entitled ‘Why live differently?’, this perspective seems to be further reinforced. The forward-focused Christian uses this current existence as personal preparation for the new life to come. “We are therefore wise to prepare ourselves for that holy world by embracing holiness as our lifestyle here and now,”³⁰ Milne states. The chapter ends with the triumphalist declaration, “When we consider this promise, then hope wells up irrepressibly within us. Amen! Come, Lord Jesus! We are looking forward!”³¹

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Bruce Milne, *The Message of Heaven and Hell*, *The Bible Speaks Today: Bible Themes* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 2002)

²⁹ Ibid., 243

³⁰ Ibid., 292

³¹ Ibid., 294

Such rhetoric reinforces the duality that runs through much contemporary Christian thought, particularly in some of the more evangelical churches. The goal of church becomes ‘saving souls’ so that they might claim their ‘inheritance’. Lying behind this positive goal is the constant threat of, not eternal life, but eternal damnation or punishment. When the ‘options’ have such highly personal consequences, it must surely be obvious that people will, first and foremost, seek their own security; all else ceases to be important in the striving to ensure personal survival (or the avoidance of eternal punishment). Such morally dubious aims have knock-on effects on how we interact with the world around us. These issues will be dealt with in the remainder of this paper and so it is now an appropriate time to consider the consequences of these theological positions.

2.3 Consequences

A question worth considering here is where this diversity of opinion has led theology to. The descriptions of two high-profile camps outlined above are very sweeping. I acknowledge that, to a large extent, I am taking a liberty with the broad range of views expressed and the crossover that can be found within them. My intention is not to caricature, but to provide us with a number of areas where it is useful to consider how particular approaches might lead to particular consequences, not all of which are necessarily desirable or, arguably, entirely compatible with the Christian faith.

Firstly we might suggest that there are those who would deny, or at least downplay, a future resurrection, suggesting that it is a metaphor for change or revolution that has to happen now, both at an individual and a structural level. Eschatology is ‘fully realised’ in the present. The coming of Jesus heralded the coming of God’s kingdom and the Christian must play their part to effect its influence in the world today. Sallie McFague, for example, makes use of a realised eschatology to allow her to say that “we have been decentered as the point and goal of creation and recentered as God’s partners in helping creation to grow and prosper in our tiny part of God’s body”³². The effect of being a new creation in Christ is to effect whatever change we are capable of within our own context and situation.

Encouraging changed lives to effect change now is not, by any measure, an undesirable goal. However, if all effort is to be made now and if eschatology is a change in the now, then serious questions need to be asked about the continued violence, oppression, discrimination and intolerance that persists in so many areas of the world and within society. If God’s eschatological future is already manifest then the current picture is not a pretty one. Furthermore, it flatly contradicts the vision of a better future promised in scripture.

“See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them;

they will be his peoples,

and God himself will be with them;

he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

³² Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 197

Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.”

(Revelation 21:3-4, NRSV)

Regardless of whether these verses are taken literally or metaphorically, they are difficult to reconcile with the idea of God’s Kingdom being present on earth already, at least in a fully realised manner. There exists, then, a tension between bringing about God’s Kingdom in our ‘now’ and that there is hope to be found in scripture that allows the ‘now’ to be less than perfect.

Secondly, we might suggest that there are those who would accept a future resurrection, but as a new life in heaven (however that may be described), becoming a truly spiritual being (however *that* may be described) in God’s everlasting presence (wherever that may be). Eschatology is solely for the future and marks the end (cataclysmic or otherwise) of this physical creation and heralds an era where heaven is our new abode. Whilst this general viewpoint may well find itself echoed across the spectrum of eschatological beliefs, the aspect I would highlight is that there can be an element of ‘devaluing’ our current creation. Whether the source of this is the body/soul dualism or the emphasis on personal salvation, it sets the focus clearly on a better future existence – ‘pie in the sky when you die’ being a common description of it.³³

Such a self-centred and forward-focused outlook has serious consequences. David Fergusson offers a succinct criticism of just such a stance: “If the physical world is a transient stage for the drama of this life only, then we need not worry unduly about its preservation in perpetuity.”³⁴ Whilst ‘perpetuity’ may be an unnecessarily long time to preserve the physical world, the criticism is nevertheless well justified. Humanity’s abuse of natural resources is well documented. Adding insult to injury is the misuse of scripture to suggest that humankind, in its privileged position as stewards of creation, is at liberty to use it as it sees fit. Ecology and ethics are every bit a part of a life of faith as morality and theology.

³³ Fergusson, “Eschatology,” 226. Fergusson notes that the reference comes from a rallying song, ‘The Preacher and the Slave’ (1911).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 227.

3 Hope

Neil Gillman, in an article on eschatology³⁵, presents a Jewish perspective. From the Genesis accounts of creation, it becomes clear that creation is about order.³⁶ The biblical story witnesses to the ‘cycle’ of chaos and order. This, says Gillman, sets the focus on a future time when God will redeem the current disorderliness of creation and the “flaws will disappear”³⁷ leaving a perfected creation. Even science, especially cosmology he says, has an eschatological aspect. Whether the Big Crunch³⁸ or a gradual dissipation into an energy-less vastness, the ‘end times’ are of interest to science. Gillman also notes many other “less optimistic eschatologies”³⁹ involving asteroids, climate change or global pandemics. What is missing, he suggests, is ‘hope’ and “the ultimate hope is eschatological hope.”⁴⁰ The question then is “What do we hope for?”

In offering an answer to this question, I will return, in due course, to the thoughts of N.T. Wright. His approach not only accounts for personal resurrection, but also accommodates the entirety of creation. Furthermore, Wright does not reserve his proposals for some future time alone, but gives thought to the implications for our present time. I will now turn to a consideration of these three main areas, beginning with the hope of a personal resurrection.

3.1 Personal Hope

Perhaps the biggest question a person will have is about what happens to them when they die. In his book based on the BBC television series⁴¹, Richard Holloway records the thoughts of a number of prominent public and media figures on the subject of “When I Get to Heaven”. Almost without exception⁴² each person interviewed expressed some sense of a hereafter. For some it was a part of their faith; for others it was a way of making some sense of the present world’s circumstances. Few of the views expressed would be considered conventionally Christian. Some, indeed, were not Christian at all. Joanna Lumley, actress and writer, offers two views of life after death. The first is

³⁵ Neil Gillman, “How will it all end? eschatology in science and religion,” *Cross Currents* 57, no. 1 (Spr 2007): 38-50

³⁶ This, of course, comes from the perspective that creation is not *ex nihilo*, but that ‘something’ pre-existed which God ‘ordered’ into creation. It is the ordering which is the act of creation.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 42

³⁸ The idea that the universe will, at some point, cease its expansion and will gradually collapse in on itself.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 43

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 47

⁴¹ Richard Holloway, *When I Get to Heaven* (Basingstoke: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1988)

⁴² Jonathan Miller, the author and producer, being the notable exception. For him, death is seen as a final end. Life is “a strange provincial incident in the universe... one of those things that happened at one part of the universe when these rather odd, selfish molecules called DNA got together and became so rapacious with proteins (p50).

to remain as an eternal, spiritual individual; the second is to “become part of an enormous bank of soul and spirituality, from which more people are drawn.”⁴³ Such ambiguity, whether found at an individual level or within the wider populace, appears to reflect a ‘need for something’ to follow this life, even if it is only continued existence in a “cosmic soup” as Holloway describes Lumley’s outlook. However, even within recognisably Christian ideas, there are still some ‘problems’ with the idea of bodily resurrection. Lord Soper, Methodist minister and activist, seems unconvinced:

... even the evidence that we have in the New Testament is not evidence of resurrection in the same body...I believe that the spiritual meaning of the resurrection is that Jesus came back to his friends. But beyond that it’s difficult to make any explanation that’s worth making... but it doesn’t make sense to me to think that in the future realms, which are spaceless and timeless, we have to have some kind of body.⁴⁴

In more academic vein, Daniel Migliore offers this observation:

Beliefs in “life after death” have been subject to penetrating philosophical, psychological and sociological criticisms. They have been explained as wish-fulfillments (sic) and compensatory ideologies. Some of the most forceful objections have been raised within theology itself.⁴⁵

Migliore offers examples of the work of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and Raymond Moody. Each, he explains, has investigated the “experiences of people who have been declared dead but were later revived.”⁴⁶ It would appear that those who have gone through such an event report that there is ‘something’ there rather than nothingness. Migliore rightly points out that this perhaps raises more questions about our understanding and definition of death than about an afterlife.⁴⁷ It is also worth pointing out that such ‘evidence’ does not, in any way, give support to any ideas about a physical resurrection.

What this does demonstrate is that ‘life after death’ is something that people do think about and they will often create their own sense of what it will be like. Drawing from common culture, philosophy, ethnic myth and diverse theology, the very mixed, and often underdeveloped, if not

⁴³ Ibid., 111

⁴⁴ Ibid., 16-19

⁴⁵ Daniel L. Migliore, “Life Beyond Death,” *Theology Today* 34, no. 2 (July 1977): 178

⁴⁶ Ibid., 179

⁴⁷ Ibid., 180

downright illogical and ‘unscientific’, understandings demonstrate that there is scope for a more developed expression of life after death to be put forward. Furthermore, in the light of the criticisms of both realised and consistent eschatology, any development of resurrection theology must always have an eye to its implications for the ‘now’ as much as for the future.

3.1.1 Historical views on resurrection

The Jewish thought-world was itself unclear on the nature of resurrection. Hahne, in his assessment of Jewish apocalyptic work, identifies “two types of idealized earthly dwelling places for the righteous.”⁴⁸ In the first, Messianic rule brings a “golden age of prosperity on earth.”⁴⁹ In the second, it is “an eternal dwelling of the righteous on the new earth or in a restored earthly paradise or Eden.”⁵⁰ Regardless of which form is taken, what is clear is that ‘resurrection life’ is radically different from present reality. In a new reality, all of nature is transformed with death defeated and corruption eliminated.⁵¹

In Romans, Paul holds to “the dominant apocalyptic perspective that the transformation of creation will be a decisive eschatological event”⁵² and that the resurrection of believers will occur at the time of this decisive event. Hahne does not explore, in any great detail, the issue of resurrection itself. Rather, he is noting the Jewish expectation of transformation. That this might include resurrection, even if only for ‘the righteous’, is a given. In Paul’s time, the two principal religious groups were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Although it is difficult to get a truly comprehensive picture of their beliefs, the one thing that does seem to be agreed upon is that the Pharisees believed in some form of resurrection whilst the Sadducees did not. The Sadducee dismissal of resurrection may be behind their question to Jesus as recorded in Mark 12:18. Similarly, Paul’s appeal in Acts 23:6-8 is based on the difference of opinion on this matter between the two groups. But one key question is the nature of the resurrection expected by the Pharisees (and bearing in mind that Paul himself was trained as a Pharisee). From their perspective Jesus’ resurrection was absurd (and so

⁴⁸ Harry Alan Hahne, *The Corruption and Redemption of Creation: Nature in Romans 8.19-22 and Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, Library of New Testament studies 336 (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 161

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 162 There are nuances still to be found within this transformed reality. ‘Death defeated’ could be seen as either eternal existence or simply a radically increased lifespan. The elimination of corruption encompasses both physical (affliction and disease) and moral (sinfulness).

⁵² Ibid., 216

too, any witness to it) as any resurrection was a matter for a future redeemed creation, as we have already noted. The issue for them was whether Paul had witnessed “someone who, though not yet bodily raised, is presently in the intermediate state between death and resurrection, and whose existence in that state, and communication with the living from that state, provides evidence (they would say) that they *will* be raised in the future.”⁵³ However, it is worth noting that the issue of resurrection may not have been a critical doctrine held by both sides. Josephus saw “no incongruity in people switching allegiance between Pharisees and Sadducees.”⁵⁴

Other eschatological views were to be found with the Essenes⁵⁵ and Samaritans⁵⁶. There are also the influences of Greek and Eastern philosophy to consider but these are beyond the scope of this paper. Wright notes that the earliest Christian communities could easily have reflected the variety of thoughts already noted; but this was not the case.⁵⁷ Rather, the critical question that could be asked is why was there “an almost universal affirmation of that which pagans said could not happen, and that which one stream (albeit the dominant one) of Judaism insisted would happen, namely resurrection?”⁵⁸ Most importantly, this was not some metaphorical code for the exalted status of Jesus or his influence on a new body – the church. It meant precisely what it said; bodily resurrection.⁵⁹ The next part of this paper will consider what can be said of bodily resurrection in light of this witness by the early church and the record of that witness in scripture.

3.1.2 The redeemed body

The New Testament bears witness to Christ’s resurrection and that must therefore be our starting point for our understanding of resurrection, both that of Jesus and the promise of resurrection for others. The first point to note is that scripture witnesses to a bodily resurrection. The physicality of the resurrected Jesus is recorded in a number of places. The first witnesses of the resurrected Jesus heard him speak to them (Matthew 28:9-10, Luke 24:13ff), saw him eat with them

⁵³ N. T Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 1st ed., Christian origins and the question of God v.3 (Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress Press, 2003), 133-134

⁵⁴ “Sadducees,” in *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1996)

⁵⁵ “Essenes,” in *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1996). Josephus notes that the Essenes appeared to believe in fate and immortality of the soul; probably a reference to their belief in determinism and life after death as suggested by some writings in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

⁵⁶ “Resurrection,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Cambridge: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000). The dictionary article notes that, like the Sadducees, Samaritans did not believe in bodily resurrection, although the evidence for this is sparse.

⁵⁷ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 209

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

(Luke 24:43) and were able to touch him (Luke 24:39). This does not seem to have been a matter of debate in the early church. Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians (generally agreed to be as early as 49/50CE) states, almost offhandedly, that God raised Jesus from the dead (1Thess. 1:10). The subject then crops up in much of Paul's writing and subsequent letters.

So, if bodily resurrection is accepted, then the main questions revolve around the nature of the resurrected body. What is also clear from the early witness accounts is that whilst Jesus may have been present in bodily form, that form was nevertheless very different from a 'normal' physical form. The redeemed body is physical but transformed. Consider the witness accounts which note: that Jesus appeared in a room which had been locked (John 20:19); his resurrection body still bore the scars of crucifixion (John 20:27); his 'sudden' appearances and disappearances (Matthew 28:9); the inability of his followers to recognise him (Luke 24:16). Taken all together, these things point to a physical presence, but a physicality which is ontologically different. As Wright describes it, a body which has "passed *beyond* death, not just in the *temporal* sense... but in the *ontological* sense of no longer being subject to sickness, injury, decay and death itself."⁶⁰ For Jesus it meant that the wounds were present but no longer 'relevant' other than in the sense of being marks of what his body had undergone; they no longer impaired his physical 'functionality'. Appearing in a locked room was simply a matter of 'being' there. Yet physicality, as we might term it, remained. Jesus ate and drank with those who saw him and had conversations with them. Both acts require a degree of 'substance' in order to interact with and influence objects (or in the case of speech, the movement of air to transmit sound). It may be little wonder that the disciples had trouble recognising such a transformed body as they "were looking at the first, and so far only, piece of incorruptible physicality."⁶¹ Such a body is "more real, more firmed up, more *bodily*, than our present body as our present body is more substantial, more touchable, than a disembodied spirit."⁶² Michael Welker expresses it in similar terms, stating that:

The resurrection of Christ is not a mere reanimation of the pre-Easter Jesus. In no case do the biblical witnesses give the impression that the post-Easter Christ lived together with his disciples or with other persons in the same way the pre-Easter Jesus did.

Although they claim that there is both identity and continuity between the pre-Easter and

⁶⁰ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 172

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 173

⁶² *Ibid.*, 166

post-Easter Jesus Christ, they point to a complex identity and continuity that need to be unfolded... On the whole, the resurrection witnesses very calmly acknowledge that his presence is not a simple empirical reality, although it bears several characteristics of such a reality.⁶³

However, Welker's observation about the nature of Jesus' resurrection is not carried over with the same enthusiasm for the resurrection of humanity. Rather, Welker speaks more in terms of cultural, or canonic, memory as the means to 'resurrection'. "In the canonic memory, and in faith, the incarnated life of Christ is present in a way that allows the witnesses to gain a share in this life."⁶⁴ Memory, though, in and of itself is insufficient to be counted as 'eternal life'. The fulfilment of hope comes in our living as Christian witnesses. "By this life [Christians] are ennobled and made holy. Participation in this life is the ground of Christian hope."⁶⁵

If resurrection is a fulfilling life of Christian witness, what, then, are we to make of the resurrection from the dead recorded in the Gospels? In particular there is Lazarus of Bethany (John 11), Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:49ff) and the raising of the saints (Matthew 27:52-53). In the case of Jairus' daughter, it might be argued that this is a healing miracle rather than a resurrection miracle. However, many of the features of the story foreshadow some of the events at Jesus' own resurrection. "The astonishment of the parents... mirrors that of the women at Jesus' tomb... Jesus' request that the girl be given something to eat... provides a distant echo of his own request for something to eat, in Luke's story of the upper room."⁶⁶ What is interesting to note here though, as with the other examples mentioned, is that the resurrected person (or people) do not share the same or similar characteristics found in the description of the resurrected Jesus. In these instances, resurrection is more of a restoration to the same, former, bodily existence rather than a transformed new reality. Such a 'raising from the dead' is, it would seem, ontologically different from the eschatological hope of resurrection.

⁶³ Michael Welker, "Resurrection and Eternal Life," in *The End of the World and the Ends of God: Science and Theology on Eschatology*, Theology for the twenty-first century (Harrisburg, Pa: Trinity Press International, 2000), 283-284

⁶⁴ Ibid., 287

⁶⁵ Ibid., 288

⁶⁶ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 405.

We can see that the Biblical witness shows two ontologically different resurrections and so the question that must be addressed is whether it is the example of Lazarus of Bethany or Jesus which sets the pattern for humankind's resurrection. There is, of course the related issue of whether there is any resurrection in either case, but in addressing the first, the second can also be resolved. In one sense, the first question will be answered in the next section as we look at Creation's Hope. Paul, in his letter to the Romans writes of the "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" (Romans 8:20-21, NRSV). There is, however, no need to rely on the 'catch-all' provided by creation's hope. Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians devotes some considerable space to discussing resurrection, not just of Jesus, but of humanity as well. In fact, one of the questions Paul addresses is, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" (1Cor. 15:35, NRSV) There then follows a lengthy discourse answering this question. The crucial answer comes in verse 49, "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven" (1Cor. 15:49, NRSV). Wright observes that in the intervening verses Paul draws heavily on Genesis 1 and 2. As God is the Creator in Genesis, so too is it God's work of new creation. According to Wright, by drawing both creation and new creation together in this way, Paul is making the point that:

The new, resurrected body will be in continuity and discontinuity with the present one, not least because the present one is 'corruptible' whereas the new one will be 'incorruptible'.

This will be because the new body will be brought into being, and held in incorruptible being, by the Spirit of the creator God, as a result of the life-giving work of the final Adam.⁶⁷

A full investigation of all that Paul argues is beyond the scope of this work. However, for our purposes here, we note that the resurrection body is not merely reanimation of our existing body, but a transformed body, created by the Spirit and fashioned after what was seen in the resurrected Christ.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 341

3.2 Creation's Hope

Personal hope of resurrection, as a future event, may lay one open to a charge of selfishness. As has been noted in the discussion of the consequences of consistent eschatology, faith which becomes a matter of personal salvation, and where all that matters is that “I” will be fine after death, can result in selfishness and disregard for others and for the rest of creation. Another problematic strand of ‘personal salvation’ can be found in some contemporary Evangelicalism, where saying the ‘sinner’s prayer’ or responding to an altar call becomes all important and the focus of mission is ‘saving souls for Christ’. It can often seem that little beyond this point is of consequence because the person is now ‘saved’ and destined (or even predestined) for heaven. Perhaps this betrays the influence, as already noted, of Platonic dualism where the biggest ‘reward’ a person can gain is to be ‘saved’ from this existence.

However, the Biblical account of redemption and resurrection does not endorse this selfish, anthropocentric view. We have already seen that in Jewish eschatology, creation is not ‘abandoned’ and that the resurrection life is continued in a redeemed creation. Paul also does not abandon creation. Like those theologians before him, he ensures that all of creation is included in the transformational resurrection modelled by Jesus. As we have already mentioned, if humanity is itself to be redeemed and resurrected, then it is as part of God’s overall scheme for the redemption of all creation.

To counter the somewhat selfish focus of personal salvation, Wright ensures that redemption of the entirety of creation is not forgotten. This too has present and future aspects and the hope for the present creation is a subject that will be dealt with shortly. Wright argues that “according to the early Christians, the purpose of this new body will be to rule wisely over God’s new world.”⁶⁸ Having considered the question of the nature of the redeemed body, the issue that we now address concerns the nature of the redeemed creation; the ‘new world’ that redeemed humankind is to rule over wisely.

Dualism, as already mentioned, emphasises an ‘escape’ from this world; that its ‘substandard’ status leaves ultimate destruction as the only option. The focus is on a ‘better place’ in the sense of ‘somewhere else’ rather than an improvement or transformation of what already exists. Very often,

⁶⁸ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 173

the 'somewhere else' is considered to be heaven. However, Wright points out that this is not the promise found in scripture. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul declares that, "When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God will be all in all." (1Cor 15:28, NRSV) It is the final few words that contain the core of the promise, "God will be all in all." This, claims Wright, is "one of the clearest statements of the very centre of the future-orientated New Testament worldview."⁶⁹ The plain promise is that God will "fill all creation with his presence and love."⁷⁰ This does not, of course, mean that creation is 'deified'. Wright draws on work by Jurgen Moltmann who offers some consideration of how this 'filling' is to be done without creation 'becoming' God. The issue, according to Moltmann, is not one of 'becoming' but 'indwelling':

... the finite world finds space in the infinite God, but the infinite God does not find space in a finite world. But if we follow the Jewish teaching about the Shekinah, God's 'indwelling', and the Christian doctrine about the incarnation of the Son of God and the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit, then the infinite God can 'indwell' his finite creation, its salvation history and its consummation, as once he indwelt Solomon's temple, and can interpenetrate everything human as in the God-human being Jesus Christ.⁷¹

This insight gives us a further perspective on how the 'redeemed body' might also be achieved. The transformation of resurrection is achieved through the indwelling of and by the power of the Holy Spirit as exemplified in Jesus. We must also note that this transformation, for humanity at least, takes place after death, just as the transformed Christ was only in the fullness of glory after his death. This is not to suggest that the fullness of the Spirit did not reside in Jesus before his death. Rather, it was only after death, and its defeat, that this 'purpose' of the Spirit might be made manifest. As a further side note, it also reveals that death is not to be 'avoided'. Death's defeat does not imply that we do not die, but that death's hold upon us is broken. To continue this line of thought just a little further, we also see that Jesus' death and resurrection not only provides us with the model of our future hope, but also the very source of that hope. It is through Jesus' death and resurrection that the Christian can, with assurance, say that they have "passed from death to life"

⁶⁹ Ibid., 112

⁷⁰ Ibid., 113

⁷¹ Jurgen Moltmann, "The World in God or God in the World?," in *God Will Be All in All: The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999), 37

(John 5:24, NRSV) and can give wholehearted agreement to Paul when he says, “For the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.” (Romans 8:2, NRSV)

At the root of transformative change then is the work of the Spirit. This, says Wright, is not a New Testament ‘phenomenon’ but has its foreshadowing in the Old as well. In Isaiah 11, for example, the prophet says “for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” (Isaiah 11:9, NRSV) This, says Wright, “looks as though God intends to flood the universe with himself; as though the universe, the entire cosmos, was designed as a receptacle for his love.”⁷² If we follow through the consequences of this thought, then not only does it give an indication of God’s purposes, the redemption of creation, but it also addresses the issue arising from dualism – the value, or worth, of creation. This world is not something to gain escape from. It is not some inferior, unworthy prison, but is “beautiful, not just because it hauntingly reminds us of its creator, but because it is pointing forwards: it is designed to be filled, flooded, drenched in God.”⁷³

And so, having established the source of transformation and the purposeful existence of creation, we now consider what transformed and redeemed creation might be like. Wright’s suggestion here now draws from the book of Revelation and, in particular, chapters 21 and 22. The strong imagery in these chapters presents us with a marriage, with “the new Jerusalem, coming out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” (Revelation 21:2, NRSV) The startling aspect of this image is that “it is not we who go to heaven; it is heaven that comes to earth.”⁷⁴ This image stands in stark contrast to much Christian talk of ‘going to heaven’ after death. The ‘new world’ in which humanity is to rule wisely is nothing less than God’s kingdom come on earth. Though not in a ‘realised eschatology’ sense where ‘some’ good can be brought to bear in our present world, but in a truly eschatological and transformed sense when creation too is no longer subject to death or decay. Wright notes that this is indeed transformation, for there would be no wedding ‘celebration’ if the slate was wiped clean by God and he started again.⁷⁵ Creation’s hope lies not in being eradicated, but transformed into a new creation, filled by God’s presence and fulfilling its role as home to a redeemed humanity.

⁷² Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 113

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 116

⁷⁵ Ibid., 116-117

3.3 Present Hope

When hope is in a bodily resurrection and also encompasses the entirety of creation, Wright argues that there are consequences for the present as well as the future. Future hope, be it a purely spiritual existence or a new 'life' in heaven, that is disembodied from this one creates a 'disconnect' with our current world. If personal hope without a hope for creation creates selfish hope, so too, a focus solely on the future relegates our present creation to a temporary place, of no particular value and to be moved away from when death takes us. In devaluing this world, such Christian hope is worse than the most avowed atheist whose only hope lies in making the best of their time in this world. If there is no connection between future hope and the present, then there seems to be little point in existence here at all. But of course this is not the message of scripture. The present creation is very much valued, if not by us, certainly by God.

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians brings a large teaching section on the resurrection to a close with the words:

"Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labour is not in vain." (1Cor 15:58, NRSV)

As Wright argues, if this present reality is worthless, Paul could so easily have concluded his teaching on resurrection by saying that the present is irrelevant if the future is taken care of.⁷⁶ Rather, what we do in the present, Wright says, is valuable because it is "part of what we may call *building for God's kingdom*."⁷⁷ As we have seen, resurrection is not some future event disconnected with our present life; it is a transformation of what we know now. Nor is it disconnected with the world; that same transformation awaits all of creation. Present and future cannot be separated as though one matters and the other doesn't (and which one matters is down to a stance on 'realised' or 'consistent' eschatology). Inaugurated eschatology seeks to hold the two in tension, but to do this it requires a radical reinterpretation of a key aspect of Christian doctrine. This, claims Wright, is the understanding of 'salvation'.

In the light of previous discussion, salvation can no longer be treated simply as "going to heaven when you die."⁷⁸ If it is, then "the main work of the church is bound to be seen in terms of

⁷⁶ Ibid., 205.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 206

saving souls for that future.”⁷⁹ But, says Wright, this cannot be the work of a church which proclaims the Biblical teaching of the new heaven and new earth, of bodily resurrection, all transformed to a gloriously greater reality.⁸⁰ Our present reality cannot be dismissed as irrelevant but must be seen as the “essential, vital time, place and matter into which God’s future purposes have already broken in the resurrection of Jesus and in which those future purposes are now to be further anticipated through the mission of the church.”⁸¹ Salvation, suggests Wright, needs to be redefined as “being raised to life in God’s new heaven and new earth.”⁸² With this revised understanding of salvation, we can see that the Bible is not speaking about salvation as an exclusively future event but is part of our present as well. It is not legitimate to speak of ‘being saved for’ or even ‘being saved from’ but only of ‘being saved’. Salvation is a work of God which initiates transformation now and sustains it in order to bring about the kingdom of God here and now. It is an ongoing work which cannot be kept to oneself but must find its outworking in interaction with the rest of creation.

When God ‘saves’ people in this life, by working through his Spirit to bring them to faith, and by leading them to follow Jesus in discipleship, prayer, holiness, hope and love, such people are designed – it isn’t too strong a word – to be a sign and foretaste of what God want to do for the entire cosmos. What’s more, such people are not just to be a sign and foretaste of that ‘ultimate’ ‘salvation’; they are to be *part of the means* by which God makes this happen in both the present and the future.⁸³

This now/later tension when speaking of the kingdom of God is not simply a result of finding a ‘middle way’ in eschatological thinking. Jesus’ own teachings often presented this same tension. Jesus asserted that “in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.” (Luke 20:21, NRSV) Yet there is also the sense of future glory in the great Christian prayer, “Your kingdom come.” (Matthew 6:10, NRSV) This is not indicative of confusion on Jesus’ part. Rather, the explanation, according to Craig Hill, lies in the tension that is “inherent in the symbol itself, since the *basileia* (“dominion”) of God refers both to God’s active reign (already present in Jesus) and to God’s universal rule (yet

⁷⁹ Ibid., 209

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., 210

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 212-213

to come).”⁸⁴ Integrating present and future aspects of salvation and linking it closely with the work of the kingdom is the affirmation of Jesus’ ministry which “was itself the true inauguration of the kingdom which would shortly be established.”⁸⁵ Future hope and present hope are inseparable.

⁸⁴ Craig C Hill, *In God's Time: The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 162

⁸⁵ N. T Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian origins and the question of God v.2 (London: SPCK, 1996), 472

4 Conclusion

Christian eschatology has perhaps suffered from influences beyond Christianity. Philosophy and science have each exerted their influence, distorting the Biblical message of resurrection, its purpose and its implications for our immediate context. In the arguments over realised and consistent perspectives, entrenched opinions are used to promote a particular agenda. The middle ground, if it could be called such, is often a “we just don’t know the what, how, where or when” position and abrogates itself of the theological responsibility to wrestle with the issue. In a sense, the middle ground can be too focussed on the ‘now’ to give time to think of the implications of an eschatological future for that ‘now’; real life gets in the way.

Others have attempted to put a more robust theology in place for this middle ground and ‘inaugurated eschatology’ is not a compromise position but a properly developed standpoint. Wright articulates this ‘middle ground’ very effectively, drawing together Biblical understanding from the past, the life of faith now and the hope of the Christian for the future. He manages to give enough weight to each aspect, holding them all together in tension and making clear the implications for ethical and ecological responsibility encompassing all of creation; all the while ensuring that personal hope is maintained in a way that removes selfishness and brings freedom, given through hope, to enable action, made worthwhile, through faith.

The legacy of Jesus’ ministry is, of course, Christian disciples. The responsibility for bringing about the kingdom and pointing to its future fulfilment does not rest with Jesus alone. Jesus’ ministry provides the starting point and example. His death and resurrection provide the source of hope and the power to act. God’s incorporation of all creation into his salvation plan gives the scope of the responsibility for Christian disciples. As Wright puts it:

... if you want to help inaugurate God’s kingdom, you must follow in the way of the cross; and if you want to benefit from Jesus’ saving death, you must become part of his kingdom-project... Heaven’s rule, God’s rule, is thus to be put into practice in the world, resulting in salvation in both the present and the future, a salvation which is both *for* humans and, *through* saved humans, for the wider world.⁸⁶

Is this what you hope for?

⁸⁶ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 217

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