

BOOK REVIEW

T. Ryan Jackson, *New Creation in Paul's Letters: A Study of the Historical and Social Setting of a Pauline Concept* (WUNT II, 272; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010). xiii + 232 pp. Pbk. US\$117.50 (€9.00).

The notion of new creation in the Pauline letters has often been viewed according to two polarized lenses: cosmological and anthropological. In recent years these positions have been championed in Ulrich Mell's *Neue Schöpfung*, taking a cosmological stance, and in Moyer Hubbard's *New Creation in Paul's Letters and Thought*, taking an anthropological stance. Jackson's published PhD thesis, presented to the Faculty of Divinity at Cambridge University, refuses to uphold such a 'false dichotomy', providing a mediating rejoinder to these two works. Paul's concept of new creation, as exemplified in the Pauline *Haupt-briefe*, is argued to be a soteriological category involving the individual, community and entire cosmos—a soteriology that is eschatologically informed (p. 6).

This book is to be commended for its readability, especially considering its former existence as a doctoral dissertation. Jackson's prose is concise and not given to superfluity (though at times extraneous details creep in). From a readers' perspective, it is difficult to lose track of the main argument of the book as Jackson consistently reiterates his goals and thesis at key points throughout. Jackson's arguments are clear and to the point, and maintain consistent contact with his main conversation partners (especially Hubbard), making his work an important contribution to the discussion of new creation in Paul.

For this study Jackson adopts what he terms a socio-historical approach, appreciating the historical development of new creation concepts as they reflect the social situation affecting Paul's thought and the perceptions of his readers. Divided into two main sections, this work delves into: (1) potential Jewish backgrounds through the Hebrew prophets and Second Temple writers (including the Dead Sea

Scrolls) and possible Roman Imperial influence, prior to (2) an exegetical examination of three key Pauline passages: Gal. 6.11-18, 2 Cor. 5.11-21, and Rom. 8.18-25.

Jackson's historical approach begins with a chapter devoted to new creation in the Old Testament. Exhaustive treatment of this theme would be near impossible, leading Jackson to focus in the book of Isaiah while briefly acknowledging the impact of additional prophetic works. Zeroing in on select Isaianic passages, Jackson illustrates the dual cosmological-anthropological elements of Israel's predicted restoration as realized through the new heavens and new earth.

In the second chapter, Jackson situates new creation themes within the apocalyptic response to the Persian and Hellenistic persecution in the Second Temple Period. The book of Jubilees is representative of this literary mode that creatively furthers soteriological notions in terms of sin, exile and restoration. Such future expectation fits well into Jackson's cosmological-soteriological rubric. The latter half of this chapter delves into representations of new creation in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Jackson's treatment is broad and appropriates the insights of a variety of scrolls that together seem to look forward to an end-time renewal that would eliminate the presence of evil—an effort already started by the community's withdrawal.

Jackson declares from the outset that his study is framed in socio-historical perspective. While he brings significant historical considerations to bear on his exegesis, it is difficult to discern where the social dynamic comes into play. Social backgrounds could have been more clearly articulated. The historical nature of the study raises some concerns as well. Excellent treatment is given to the outlook of Isaiah and *Jubilees* as historical and theological background. However, it remains unclear whether these two works are truly representative of the literature and time period they are deemed to represent. Additional reference to other works may help to bolster Jackson's positions. Despite its strong articulation, the influence of historical backgrounds upon exegesis is not made explicit. It remains unclear whether Paul is drawing on these texts for his new creation ideas or whether they simply provide a milieu into which Paul speaks.

The final chapter of the first section examines the place of new creation within Roman Imperial ideology, which would have been widespread within the locales of Paul's various audiences. Jackson's treatment of this relatively under-appreciated area (at least among previous

discussions of new creation) avers that the ideology of the Roman Empire would have played an important role in the interpretation of Pauline doctrine. Using a wealth of primary and secondary sources Jackson points to Imperial propaganda that promoted the Empire as a renewer of order and peace—the re-creation of an idealized society and a new world order. Jackson is unsure whether such ‘new creation’ language coloured Paul’s own thought, but suggests that it would influence how his readers would hear the message of new creation. *New Creation in Paul's Letters* stands out among other analogous treatments in its focus on related Roman Imperial ideology. Even so, the impact of this ideology upon Paul and his audiences within the exegetical sections is lacking. Jackson is able briefly to contrast Paul’s worldview with a Roman Imperial one in the concluding remarks of his exegetical chapters, yet a Roman influence does not play any significant part in the midst of his exegesis—perhaps a disappointing feature for the readers of this journal.

After providing a comprehensive assessment of the historical background and social situation applicable to the Pauline doctrine, Jackson turns to an in-depth exegetical section tracing the theme in three specific passages: Gal. 6.11-18, 2 Cor. 5.11-21 and Rom. 8.18-25. Jackson’s treatment of Gal. 6.11-18 centres on a distinction between the message of Paul and that of his opponents. His perception of Paul’s opponents seems to fall along the lines of the so-called New Perspective, namely, a view of works of the law as community boundary markers. Paul presents the cross of Christ and subsequent resurrection as central to his message and frames it in cosmological terms. This ‘eschatological matrix’ provides the basis for Paul’s inaugurated eschatology, which has already begun ushering in a new age that includes both individual/community and the cosmos, thus new creation.

The next chapter, focused around 2 Cor. 5.11-21, begins by highlighting the influence of Isaiah in Paul’s expression and is thus able to recall work done in a previous chapter. Far from being brief digression, Paul’s discussion of resurrection and new creation directly serves his motive of apostolic defense and reconciliatory ministry. As in Galatians 6, the death and resurrection of Christ provide the epicenter for eschatological new creation, an inaugurated reality enabling new criteria for evaluating Paul’s apostolic authority. By describing those ‘in Christ’ as a new creation they serve as a microcosm of the larger cosmological renewal. Both exegetical discussions are brought into focus

through the phrase *καινή κτίσις*, seen as Pauline theological shorthand for his eschatological soteriology.

The final exegetical chapter digresses from passages containing the phrase *καινή κτίσις* to the only place where *κτίσις* appears by itself in the undisputed letters—Romans. Despite the Epistle's lack of the phrase, Jackson posits a movement from creation to new creation in the first eight chapters of Paul's argument. Jackson follows fairly traditional lines by suggesting that Paul sees an inevitable link between the Adamic Fall and the corruption of the cosmos. The fate of the cosmos is thus linked to the fate of humanity to the extent that Paul can envisage a common redemption. Although his argument here is fairly standard in terms of typical exegetical treatments of this passage, Jackson does an outstanding job of systematizing and consolidating these prior treatments while effectively infusing his own particular slant.

There is a recognizable tension in these chapters with respect to the place of lexis in his exegesis. Early on in the book, Jackson explicitly sets out to avoid restricting his study to the phrase *καινή κτίσις* yet in these latter exegetical chapters, significant treatment is given to certain words—especially *κτίσις* and *κόσμος*. Despite an effort to avoid the pitfalls of simple word-study, Jackson's exegetical moves at times exhibit lexical fallacy. Such tension is understandable as concepts are communicated through words and phrases yet are not restricted to a particular word at all times (e.g. the concept of new creation may not always appear via the phrase *καινή κτίσις*). Even so, Jackson might have managed this tension with a greater degree of sophistication. What is needed, therefore, seems to be an established set of criteria for determining when and where biblical authors articulate the notion of new creation. This may help to avoid circular argumentation where the phrase 'new creation' is deemed to refer to certain theological ideas and the presence of those theological ideas in a text suggests an implicit reference to 'new creation'. Perhaps something along the lines of semantic domain theory would help to sophisticate his investigation.

A larger issue may be at play in Jackson's work, namely, an unfamiliarity with developments in the study of biblical languages. Assuredly, Jackson's work is primarily historical and as may be expected his historical treatments are very strong. However, certain linguistic fallacies creep in at times, such as the function of Greek tenses (e.g. the role of the 'aorist tense' in denoting a particular historical occasion) and the presence of reductionistic theological lexicography. It seems slightly

problematic, in light of well articulated and accessible linguistic theory, to call the phrase *καινὴ κτίσις* 'theological shorthand'.

The final chapter is a summary, effectively providing a Pauline theology of new creation in light of the above considerations. From beginning to end, Jackson's thesis is maintained and defended and so his conclusions come as no surprise. Some further considerations are put forth in the form of future areas of research including the role of the undisputed letters in a Pauline theology of new creation (especially in Colossians and Ephesians) even when the phrase is never used.

New Creation in Paul's Letters represents an important step forward in Pauline research through its refusal to promote potentially false dichotomies on such issues as new creation. Jackson therefore employs historical, social and exegetical tools to argue for his eschatological-soteriological perspective sensitive to individual, community and cosmos. Jackson's mediating position, clear argumentation and excellent interaction with previous new creation literature recommends this work as an important contribution to Pauline theology. This work is sensitive to traditional concerns yet is intent on pushing a viable alternative in this discussion.

Gregory P. Fewster
McMaster Divinity College