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### In Search of the Key to the Theology of Paul the Apostle<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The Author of the paper looks for a key to the theological thought of the Apostle Paul. The fact that it lacks a clear definition results in authors radically differing in their perception, for instance, regarding the relationship between the Old and the New Testament, and as a result, whether or not the Old Testament has a decisive influence on the Pauline thought, continuing along this line: whether the Apostle in his view always remained a Jew, or whether he distanced himself from Judaism. The fact that we do not have a category clearly defining the relationship between the Old and New Testament salvific reality results in an abundance of contradictory opinions. That is also transferred to other areas of the Pauline theology. The interpretation of Paul's theology tends to be determined by preconceptions, built upon various ways of understanding the significance of the Old Testament, or various relationship to Judaism and its thought. The author of the paper indicates a concept, treated as marginal by scholars, of a new creation in Christ as the key to understanding the Pauline thought. It lays in the background of all themes treated by Paul and connects them into a single, coherent entity. (Scholars differ considerably in this subject which results in sometimes extremely opposed views on the degree the old and new covenants are related to one other, as well as on the degree Paul himself was linked to Judaism after his conversion. The answers offered by scholars thus far either focus on his main themes (eschatology, soteriology, and so on) or emerge from presumptions about Judaism, but not from the Epistles themselves. This paper points at the conception of the new creation in Christ which lays in the background of all themes treated by Paul and binds them into one coherent entity.)

**Keywords:** Paul's theology (the key), participation (in Christ), new creation (in Christ)

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At the centre of the religious thought of Paul the apostle, there is Jesus Christ, His person and His acts. However, the question arises of the key, in the apostle's view, to presenting the salvific work of Christ. One of the recent and most exhaustive expositions of Paul's theology, created by J.D.G. Dunn,<sup>2</sup> poses the question about the core or the heart of his thought. The author specifies that what he means by that is an element which organises, orders his message. However, Dunn redirects the answer into a manner of studying Paul's theology and into an attitude towards a comprehensive elaboration thereof.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, Dunn presents an outline of the state of research on this subject.<sup>4</sup> Over the last century, various proposals have been put forth, including: the tension between Judeo-Christians and ethno-Christians (F.C. Baur), justification by faith in Christ (R. Bultmann), a kind of mysticism (A. Schweitzer), the theology of the cross (U. Wilkens, and J. Becker), as well as eschatology/apocalyptic vision (E. Krentz). The above proposals indicate either the historical context, or the themes dealt with in the theology of Paul.<sup>5</sup> However, only the suggestion of mysticism fits within the range of what we are looking for here. For we are not interested in the main "theme" of Paul's theology, but in the "principle" underlying his thought—which does not even have to be expressly voiced at the level of the text (as the issues covered therein)—or one motivating the apostle's particular treatment of his subject and making his thought (more or less) coherent throughout its all various areas. Now, the notions of the centre, the core, or the heart of Pauline theology pertain to the main themes addressed by the apostle in his letters. This is not what we inquire about. Therefore, we put forth the term—"key."

Before we go on to suggest one such key to the theology of the Apostle Paul, we are going to discuss the current proposal (not mentioned above), that does qualify for the category that we wish to research.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, London–New York 2003, 19–23.

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., 21–6.

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., 19–21.

<sup>5</sup> The most important of these are Christology, soteriology, eschatology, and ecclesiology.

## 1. Current Proposal

The idea of participation requires a separate treatment. In the opening half of the last century, numerous authors—such as A. Deissmann,<sup>6</sup> and A. Schweitzer,<sup>7</sup>—turned their attention with various results to the typically Pauline expression: “in Christ” (ἐν Χριστῷ). The apostle frequently uses it to specify the reality of salvation. For instance, biblical Israel enjoyed the privilege of divine filiation, yet Christians share the very same privilege. Is it the same kind of divine filiation? The difference is indicated by the said phrase “in Christ.” The divine filiation enjoyed by Christians, as opposed to that of Israel, is the divine filiation “in Christ,” that is, it introduces a new type of relationship, unknown to the Jews, which allows us to address God: “Abba, Father!” (see Gal 4:6). The situation is similar in the case of any other privilege or theme. It has to be said that the direction of the above suggestion is valid. The phrase “in Christ” does express a novelty of the New Testament salvific reality, characterised by its overcoming of the reality of the Old Testament. This proposal fits within the “key” category that we are in search of here.

Deissmann and Schweitzer, mentioned above, and subsequently also E. Käsemann<sup>8</sup> were among those who pointed out the new and intimate unification of Christians with Christ/God, through the participation in His life. Throughout their publications, this state is referred to as the participation,<sup>9</sup> that is, taking part in the life of Christ. It is a notion related to, but not identical with that of Schweitzer’s “mysticism.” According to the recently cited Sanders, the notion of the participation lays at the foundation of Pauline theology.<sup>10</sup> However, this concept is not exclusively Paul’s. In the Johannine tradition, we likewise come across the mentions of abiding or resting in Christ (John 15). We are dealing here with the early Christian perception of the new salvific reality, which is

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<sup>6</sup> *Paulus. Eine kultur- und religionsgeschichtliche Skizze*, Tübingen 1925.

<sup>7</sup> *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, London 1956, Eng. trans. of a 1931 book.

<sup>8</sup> *Leib und Leib Christi*, Tübingen 1933.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. also E.P. Sanders, *Paul and the Palestinian Judaism. A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*, Minneapolis 1977.

<sup>10</sup> *Op. cit.*, 502.

not directed towards the past (expiation of sins), but towards the present and the future (life with Christ). The idea of participation binds together all the themes reflected upon by Paul, and does so to such an extent that it is impossible to determine which of those plays the most important role therein. The communion with God in Christ, and the introduction into His life must be considered in their every aspect: both that of Christology and soteriology, as well as that of ecclesiology and eschatology.

The idea of participation is focused on the currently occurring introduction of Christians into the life of God (the gift they were given); however, it does not determine how it differs from the Old Testament salvific reality (which only transpires indirectly), and that could help capture the novelty and the greatness of the divine gift, which is expressed, among other things, by the Pauline phrase “in Christ.” It is our belief that a category has to be searched for to further specify the greatness of the reality of salvation in the New Testament.

## 2. New Proposal

At this juncture, we would like to turn our attention to the Pauline concept of the new creation (καινή κτίσις) in Christ. This is not a frequently recurring topic in the apostle’s Epistles. It comes directly to the fore on several occasions (Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:15; 4:24; Col 3:9–11), but on others it serves as the foundation or the backdrop of Paul’s expressions (Rom 6:4–6; 8:1–2; Gal 3:27–28; 5:6; 1 Cor 5:7; 7:19.29–31; 12:13; 2 Cor 3:10–11; 4:16; Phil 3:6–8; Titus 3:5, etc.). The apostle speaks of the “new creation” in a double meaning, i.e., the ontological and the moral one. We are primarily interested in the former, that is, in the extent to which Christ made the redeemed man a new entity, new being, and the influence it has on the presentation of the Gospel preached by Paul.

The subject of the new creation in Christ is poorly represented in academic publications. Apart from the monograph by M.V. Hubbard,<sup>11</sup> which proves dissatisfactory in its treatment of the issue (particularly the moral aspect), in the monumental work by

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<sup>11</sup> *New Creation in Paul’s Letters and Thoughts*, SNTSMS 119, Cambridge 2002.

E.P. Sanders<sup>12</sup> the notion of new creation barely gets a mention (p. 468). Whereas in the eight hundred pages of theology of the Pauline thought by Dunn,<sup>13</sup> it appears twice and in passing (p. 404, 411–12). Hence, it is clear that it is treated as secondary or subordinate to other themes. The most emphasised aspect thereof is the moral, not the ontological one. The notion of the new creation also tends to be associated with the idea of the transformation in Christ.<sup>14</sup> In relation to the salvific work of Christ, the idea of transformation does not measure up to what is conveyed by the idea of a new creation. A transformation means a change introduced to the existing reality; however, creation means bringing something into existence from the very beginning.

We will use two sample passages from Paul's Epistles that will illustrate the import of the issue. In the Epistle to Galatians, the notion of the new creation emerges in the sentence summarising the argument of the entire Epistle. In 6:15, the apostle writes: "For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation (καινή κτίσις) [in Christ] is everything!"<sup>15</sup> In his discussion of the importance of the Mosaic Law and its regulations, Paul concludes that all these practices lose their significance compared to the new salvific order brought about by God in Christ. What constituted the advantage of Jews over gentiles is no longer important. There is a new and only condition (faith in Christ) for a Jew and a gentile. If a Jew has to meet the same condition as a gentile to acquire salvation, that means we are dealing with a new being that replaces the earlier one. This is not merely a correction or a refinement of the Old Testament order (as Jews would still be in an advantageous position then), but its replacement with an entirely new order.<sup>16</sup> Not only does the terminology of creation chosen by the apostle befit the new salvific situation, but it was used in order to properly convey it.

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<sup>12</sup> *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*.

<sup>13</sup> *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*.

<sup>14</sup> For instance, Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 468–9.

<sup>15</sup> See J.L. Martyn, *Galatians*, AB 33A, New York–London 1998, 564–5.

<sup>16</sup> We will return to the matter in the section 3.5.

The other passage is that of Eph 2:15.<sup>17</sup> In Christ, God created the new and only man from a Jew and a gentile (cf. 4:24). It is a man clothed in Christ (Gal 3:27b). God created him of a Jew and a gentile. In him, in the salvific aspect a Jew is no longer a Jew, nor a gentile is a gentile (ethnically, they remain who they were). The new creation wipes out the Jewish or gentile past before God. They both become new being in Christ. Thus, there are no grounds for boasting of who one was before. However, this new man is at the same time one man, which means that in Christ a Jew has become the same as a gentile, whereas a gentile the same as a Jew. This is the truth of the new creation in Jesus: a Christian as a “new man” is no longer who he was, and as the “new man” he is the same as another Christian. By believing in Christ, a Jew and a gentile become someone new and some-one in Christ. In order to describe this new situation, Paul uses the terminology of creation (“that he might create [κτίσῃ] in himself one new humanity [lit. man: ἓνα καινὸν ἄνθρωπον] in place of the two; Eph 2:15”). It is the only idiom able to convey what has occurred in Christ. The language and the concept of creation refer to the original creation, and are fashioned after it, they constitute a bringing it into existence anew, as if from nothing.

The terminology of creation, chosen by Paul, underscores the entire novelty of Christianity. As a result of God’s activity in Christ, not only the relationship with God is new, but man himself becomes a new being. A Christian “in Christ . . . is a new creation (καινὴ κτίσις): everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new” (2 Cor 5:17).<sup>18</sup> Paul the apostle conceives of the new salvific order (of Christianity) as the “new creation in Christ.” It is not a mere correction or melioration of the previous order, but bringing an altogether new being into existence. In that sense, it is a creation modelled after the original creation. Admittedly, it does not involve calling into being from nothing, but the condition of mankind immersed in sin was even more tragic than non-existence. The redeemed man received a greater gift from God than Adam.

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<sup>17</sup> See A.T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42, Dallas 1990, 143–4. Admittedly, the Epistle is the work of Paul’s disciple, who lived several decades later; nevertheless, it reflects the Apostle’s thought closely.

<sup>18</sup> See R.P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, WBC 40, Waco 1986, 152.

The work of redemption required a greater act of God (incarnation, redemption, the gift of the Spirit) than bringing it into existence from nothing.

It is worth adding that this “new creation” established by Christ will be fulfilled in the future. It means, that it currently does not possess its fullness, but it is directed at its fullness in the future (the proleptic dimension; see Col 3:10). However, it does not undermine the fact of the new calling for the man and the world to exist in Christ. Consequently, the current status of being as a new creation will not be subject to another creation, once the Kingdom of Heaven is achieved, it will only acquire the fullness of its new being.

### **3. “The New Creation in Christ” as the Foundation of Pauline Theology**

Here, we will present as evidenced in several examples how the concept of a new creation provides the foundation for Pauline theology and allows for a better understanding thereof. We will use as examples some traditionally identified themes dealt with by Paul, and issues falling within their range.

#### **3.1. The relationship between the Old and the New Testament**

The message of both Testaments and their keystone is one and the same God, who reveals himself in his Son. We are dealing with a continuity of the salvation history, which consist in the announcement of the coming Messiah, and its subsequent fulfilment. However, this continuity involves the category of difference. The person of Christ is the foundation of both the continuity and the difference between the two Testaments; however, the indicated difference is greater than the continuity. The continuity involves the announcement of the coming of Christ together with its fulfilment; the difference—the lack of Christ, and then His presence. In the entire theology and the teaching of the Church, this difference defines the human condition before and after the coming of the

Messiah. The category of difference trumps over the category of continuity.

This state of affairs is expressed by the Apostle Paul in 2 Cor, when he refers to the glory of the Old and the New Covenant. In 3:10, he declares: “Indeed, what once had glory [the Old Covenant] has lost its glory because of the greater glory [of the New Covenant].” The glory of the New Covenant is so magnificent that it entirely overshadowed the glory of the Old Covenant, which had seemed overwhelming in its time.<sup>19</sup> The difference between both Testaments is similarly overwhelming. It pertains to the revelation of God in His Son, but also to the condition of mankind in relation to God. The apostle illustrated this contrast by juxtaposing both realities at their greatest possible heights: the letter of the Law against the Spirit, the ministry of death (and the ministry of life), the ministry of condemnation (and the ministry of justification) (2 Cor 3:6–9). The glory of the New Testament, which obliterates that of the Old Testament, is a proof of a new being coming into existence. It is not a mere continuation of the glory of the Old Testament: “Everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (5:17). God’s covenant with man in Christ is brought to life anew; therefore, it is the new creation.

The natural consequence of the new creation in Christ is the expiry of the Old Testament salvific order. The announcement of the gift is a proof of its absence; the granting of the gift—ends the promise. The Old Covenant did prepare the New, but when the New Covenant came to be, the Old expired. The new and perfect salvific order inevitably removes the old and imperfect one. This is expressed in our practice of calling the books of the first covenant—the Old Testament, and of the second one—the New Testament. What is old gives way to what is new. In the same vein as Paul, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews claims: “In speaking of «a new covenant,» he has made the first one obsolete. And what is obsolete and growing old will soon disappear (ἐγγὺς ἀφανισμοῦ)” (8:13).<sup>20</sup> He does not write that it is falling into decay, but that it will soon disappear—it ceases to exist. The Old Covenant had announced the

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<sup>19</sup> See Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 63–4.

<sup>20</sup> See W.L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, WBC 47A, Dallas 1991, 210–11.



coming of Christ, but it expired once what it had foreseen was fulfilled.

According to some authors, the Old Testament order expired only in part, for, say, the moral law continues to be binding.<sup>21</sup> Such a state of affairs does not contradict the concept of the new creation. However, this argument is based on a false assumption. The moral law which remains binding does not prevail in Christianity due to it having been adopted from the Old Testament, but due to the revelation of it by Jesus. The principle of the Christian demeanour rests not on the Decalogue nor any other regulations stipulated in the Old Testament, but on Jesus's commandment, i.e., the new (and only) greatest commandment of loving thy neighbour as Jesus has loved us<sup>22</sup> (John 13:34). Christ's greatest commandment requires of us more than all the commandments of the Old Testament, proving that it has not been adopted from there, but that it is a new commandment (and Jesus himself refers to it thus: ἐντολή καινή). If the New Testament moral order is founded on a new principle (the new commandment), it cannot be a continuation of the old order.<sup>23</sup> Hence, there is nothing in the way for the salvific order of the Old Covenant to expire in its entirety. Now, owing to the fact that it does expire in its entirety,<sup>24</sup> the New Covenant may come into existence as an entirely new being, as the new creation, that is, as something brought to being anew. Were we dealing with a correction or melioration of the Old Testament salvific order, it would not have expired, and consequently the New Testament order would not constitute new creation.

The expiry of the Old Covenant in its entirety and the calling into being of the New one, instead of a mere correction of the first one, proves that the New Covenant is the new creation. Neither the

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<sup>21</sup> See. H. Hübner, *Das Gesetz bei Paulus. Ein Beitrag zum Werden der paulinischen Theologie*, Göttingen 1978, 77–80; H. Räisänen, *Paul and the Law*, WUNT 29, Tübingen 1983, 23–8.

<sup>22</sup> Admittedly, the Old Testament speaks of loving thy neighbour, but only as we love ourselves (cf. Lev 19:8). Still, one may be deficient in loving oneself.

<sup>23</sup> That in turn explains why the Apostle Paul does not structure his moral teaching upon the commandments of the OT (see section 3.6.).

<sup>24</sup> Therefore, speaking of God's covenant with the Israelites at Mount Sinai as everlasting—which does recur at times—proves unfounded.

forementioned concept of the participation, nor any other, allows one to precisely capture this relation. For the *novum* of the Gospel does not lie in the Old Testament beliefs being fulfilled, but in the proposal of something new, admittedly something stemming from the Old Testament, but concurrently surpassing it.

### 3.2. Church as the Body of Christ

The church is a convocation of people in Christ. Such is the etymological meaning of the Greek term ἐκκλησία, which had its origin in the community of Israel making their way to the promised land (Hbr. *qahal*). The expression: the church of the Lord, or of Christ, means that Christ constitutes its essence, its *corpus*. The church is the Body of Christ (Col 1:18.24), the Body we are incorporated into as God's people. Because Christ is one with his church, it is referred to as the Mystical Body of Christ.<sup>25</sup> This expression perfectly reflects the nature of the church: it is Christ Himself, and we as incorporated into Him. The church does not constitute a gathering of people around Christ, but their communion with Him—the incorporation into His Body.<sup>26</sup>

The reality of salvation, into which God introduces people in the church, the Body of Christ, is entirely new. Indeed, it was announced in the Old Testament, but it is not a complement of anything that existed at that stage of the history of salvation, but it constitutes a new being, a new creation.<sup>27</sup> The relationship with God “in Christ,” by virtue of which Christians may address God: “Abba, Father!” (Gal 4:6), is something unprecedented in the Old Testament. Nothing that had occurred before could be equated to the salvific situation in Christ. Not only is it new, but also the very Christian person is a new creation. The man created in Christ is new (Eph 2:14–15), for the Body that he belongs to, the church, is new. This matter is so obvious that it merely requires to be signalled. On the example of the church, the Body of Christ, one can clearly

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<sup>25</sup> The encyclical of Pius XII *Mystici corporis*.

<sup>26</sup> For instance J.D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, London–New York 2003, 548–52.

<sup>27</sup> One has to underscore at this point such gifts as the Eucharist and the Holy Spirit.

observe that we are dealing with a new being. The novelty of this being is so extraordinary that the only category able to convey it is that of a “new creation.” The idea of participation does similarly account for the nature of the new life in Christ, but it does not equally well highlight its novelty and greatness. It comes to be seen as the result of a new creation.

### 3.3. Justification by faith in Christ

One would suppose that Jews, who developed a higher level of cognisance of God and morality than gentiles, should have a much better access to salvation in Christ and on more favourable terms. Their advantage over gentiles with regard to that matter was unquestionable. However, it turns out to look differently.<sup>28</sup>

According to Pauline teaching on justification by faith, it is grace that introduces one into this filial relationship with God, and not the Old Testament knowledge of God or the moral condition of man. Whoever accepts this grace, regardless of their acts, becomes a new man in Christ, a new creation (Gal 6:15; Eph 2:15; 2 Cor 5:17).<sup>29</sup> The value of the redemptive death of our Lord is not relative, that is, it does not depend on the grade of our knowledge of God or the moral condition of man. The lack of any advantage of a Jew over a gentile in their access to salvation in Christ proves that it is a new being. Otherwise, his achievements would ensure his more favourable terms of access. It is true that the knowledge of God and moral life have unchanging value in the eyes of God, but these do not constitute the decisive criterion—as the latter is the acceptance of Christ. At the moment of receiving Christ, one does not have to prove with one’s own acts that one has already become a new man,

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<sup>28</sup> Such understanding of the condition for salvation is the result of the revelation experienced by Paul on the way to Damascus (J.D.G. Dunn, “Paul and Justification by Faith,” in: R.N. Longenecker, ed., *The Road from Damascus: The Impact of Paul’s Conversion on His Life, Thought and Ministry*, Grand Rapids, Mich. 1997, 85–101).

<sup>29</sup> See also Rom 13:14; 2 Cor 3:6; Eph 4:23–24; Col 3:10.

for we become new men thanks to God.<sup>30</sup> This is where the new creation manifests itself. We become just in the eyes of God not owing to what we have done (abiding by the commandments), but owing to what God performs in us, once we have accepted Christ. That is why a gentile who has believed in Christ, in spite of having been an idolater or having lived an immoral life, finds himself in a better situation salvation-wise than a pious Jew, who has not believed in Him. And if they both have, the previous differences between them lose all significance.

The concept of the new creation also explains why a gentile does not have to complement his faith in Christ by accepting the Old Testament order, whereas it is not enough for a Jew to abide by that order: he has to believe in Christ. If the salvific reality in Christ were not a new creation, a gentile would have to make his faith complete by accepting the Old Testament order, whereas a Jew would enter into it on more favourable terms (the criteria would be less demanding than those required of a gentile). A new and identical condition to be met both by a Jew and a gentile (with the concurrent difference between them in their knowledge of God, and their moral life) proves that the salvific reality in Christ is a new creation. Only a new being can explain this new and universal condition.

Pauline teaching on justification by faith in Christ is founded on the fact of a new creation in Christ and it is the evidence of this new creation. We are dealing with a new principle guiding how a sinful man may enter into relationship with God, which means that the very salvific reality is also new. The concept of a new creation provides the teaching of the justification by faith with a solid foundation, one that the idea of participation or any other fails to do.

### 3.4. The so-called fulfilled eschatology

By that term we understand the practice of attributing to the present what we commonly refer to the future. It predominantly means the claims made by Apostle Paul in Col (2:12; 3:1), and

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<sup>30</sup> This model remains constantly present in the sacrament of reconciliation, in which God conciliates with Himself each, mild or heavy, sinner, not on the basis of how they have lived, but on the basis of the justifying grace of Christ.

Eph (2:6a) about our rising from the dead together with Christ.<sup>31</sup> The apostle did not wish to say by that that our bodies have been transformed and become glorified, nor that we no longer live on Earth. He wanted to demonstrate how strongly our present life is connected with the heavenly Christ. This is not a metaphor! If our present life is inherently associated with Christ due to our being members of the church, the future resurrection has already been commenced in us. The process of our rising from the dead was initiated with Jesus's rising from the dead, and it will be completed at the end of times: "Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day" (2 Col 4:16). That is why we can say that one day we will be resurrected, but also that together with Christ we are now rising—or have already risen—from the dead. The salvific reality does not change, it is only our emphasis that shifts from the future stage of our rising to the present one.

It is consistent with our currently occurring salvation, which is both a reality already accomplished and one constantly being accomplished. No one will be surprised by the claim that we have been redeemed, even though our salvation is constantly being achieved and we cannot be sure whether or not we will ultimately reach it. The situation is similar in the case of our rising from the dead: initiated with the resurrection of Jesus, it will one day be completed at His *parousia*. The Pauline claim of our being risen from the dead together with Christ makes us aware of the great extent to which the very salvation is a reality we are already experiencing. The situation of a man redeemed in Christ is entirely new. The apostle writes about it in Col 3:3b: "your life is hidden with Christ in God." By participating in the life of their Lord, Christians also participate in His resurrection. That does not mean their complete participation therein, but at the same time it is a participation to an extent exceeding our earthly notions.

In the Pauline theology, there is a shift of balance in the life of a Christian from the earthly to the heavenly existence, which is instantiated in the church, the Body of Christ. Being closely

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<sup>31</sup> See for instance P.T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, WBC 44, Waco 1982, 118–21, 159–63.

connected with Christ, their Lord, Christians already participate in the life of heaven (though not in its fullness): their current life is hidden with Christ in God. And what awaits them in the future is the revelation of the fullness of that life (Col 3:4).<sup>32</sup> The so-called fulfilled eschatology sheds light on the earthly existence of man. He does not live far removed from God, but has been introduced into His life. This is an entirely new situation. There are no precedents of it in the Old Testament; hence, the phrase to fully denote it is “the new creation.” The concepts of the “new creation,” and “the participation” complement one another in explaining that new salvific reality, but the latter appears to be the result of the former.

### 3.5. The concept of conversion [repentance]

The question here is whether a Jew who accepts Christ does convert or whether the notion pertains solely to gentiles. Because of Jews’ belief in the true God, a different terminology is oftentimes used when speaking of their adherence to Christ (e.g., a calling or a complement of the faith in Christ).<sup>33</sup> But is that a valid practice?

The answer to the above question has already been indirectly given in what has been said about the justification by faith in Christ. In the New Testament, conversion means man’s turn towards God in Christ—in response to His calling.<sup>34</sup> Hence, we define the nature of the New Testament conversion as the choice of Christ. Conversion is a soteriological category, that is, it leads in Christ to salvation. That is why everyone, whether a Jew or a gentile, needs conversion, for everyone needs Christ. This choice of Christ is absolutely necessary (cf. John 5:39–40). That is why the texts of the New Testament address the very same call to convert (repent) both

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<sup>32</sup> See op. cit., 164–69.

<sup>33</sup> See for instance K. Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles and other essays*, Philadelphia 1976, 7–23, and J.Ch. Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought*, Philadelphia 1980, 3–10.

<sup>34</sup> See W. Rakocy, “Pawłowe doświadczenie Chrystusa pod Damazkiem: nawrócenie czy powołanie?,” in: *Więcej szczęścia jest w dawaniu niżeli w braniu. Księga Pamiątkowa dla ks. prof. W. Chrostowskiego*, Warszawa 2011, vol. 3, 1256–71.

to Jews, and gentiles (e.g., Mark 1:15b; Acts 2:38–39; 20:21; 26:20; Rom 2:4; 2 Cor 3:16).<sup>35</sup>

In the New Testament, conversion is more than a mere change of religion, a supposed meaning of the term that would consequently rule out the use of this terminology with regard to Jews. The conversion we are speaking about is something superior to a change of religion (as it is possible to change one's religion without choosing Christ: for instance, converting from Islam to Judaism). The meaning of the New Testament conversion surpasses the change of religion by so much that it transforms it into a notion overarching religious differences, universal in its nature, encompassing everyone. Hence, it is of no importance whether or not someone turns to God as a "better" Jew, or a "worse" gentile, for the only thing that matters is that he chooses Christ. Since the moment of the choice of Christ, the status of being "better" or "worse" becomes a thing of the past, it is nullified.

If the essence of conversion lies in the choice of Christ, it is not important what one is turning away from (the past), but who he is turning to. The "mechanism" of conversion is founded on the teaching of the justification by faith. The choice of Christ introduces both a Jew, and a Greek, to the relationship with God, which surpasses anything they might have achieved beforehand. In Christ, God makes everyone a new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:15). And it is for the reason that everyone becomes a new creation that we should not attach any significance either to the past of a Jew, or that of a gentile (see Rom 3:9). Accordingly, one should not introduce any differentiation between them regarding the concept of conversion. The same word should be used in relation to a Jew, and to a gentile. Thus, it means that we can use the term "conversion" about a Jew. Now, when we introduce a difference between them, we shift our attention to their past, i.e., to what they were without Christ. However, that period of their lives and the status related thereto becomes meaningless at the point of their adherence to Christ.

The New Testament conversion is directed at who we become in Christ (the present and the future). Who we were earlier (the past) is

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<sup>35</sup> See *op. cit.*, 1257–67.

not a factor that could determine either our access to the new salvific reality, nor our participation therein. Such situation can only take place if we are dealing with a new salvific order. That is exactly how the concept of the new creation operates: it makes everything new, regardless of the character of our past. That is why, at the moment when we chose Christ, the past of a Jew and that of a gentile become nonexistent. The idea of participation explains the nature of our life after the metanoia, but it does not—unlike the concept of the new creation—clarify the very principle of metanoia (conversion) and, as a result, whether or not the past of a Jew or a gentile in any way determines their access to the faith in Christ.

### 3.6. General teachings on morality

Practical application of the concept of the new creation in Christ can be observed in Apostle Paul's moral teachings. According to the Old Testament, the Decalogue and the entire Law appeared to be an inviolable foundation of the relationship with God. The commandments constituted the ultimate<sup>36</sup> and timeless<sup>37</sup> gift for Israel. Perfection was attributed to them (e.g., Ps 19:8), and the entire Law was glorified (e.g., Ps 119; Sir 24). The commandments guarded the relationship with God. Hence, the moral teaching was based upon them. The evaluation of the role of the commandments in the New Testament is different. What guards the relationship with God is Christ's grace. The commandments were not meant to make man just before God (for they would not be able to achieve such a goal), but to make him aware of his own sinfulness (Rom 3:20b; 7:7). As a result, they passed a condemning verdict about him (Rom 4:15a; 5:16b). They have no power to protect one against sin, but they are able to make one a sinner (Rom 5:20; 7:9; Gal 3:19). That is why commandments do not serve as the basis for moral teaching in Paul.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> For instance Deut 4:8; Ps 147:19–20; Sir 24:23–29.

<sup>37</sup> For instance Sir 24:9; Wis 18:4.

<sup>38</sup> His Epistles feature only a single mention of the need to obey the commandments (1 Cor 7:19).



Let us take as an example the word of the Apostle addressed to the grave sinners from Corinth, who solicited the services of prostitutes.<sup>39</sup> In such a case, we would hear from a church pulpit of transgressing against the commandments, of life incompatible with God's will, and of the impending punishment. Now, what does the Apostle Paul write to the Corinthians? Instead of speaking of breaking the commandments, or threatening them with God's punishment, he teaches them in the following way: "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?" (1 Cor 6:15), and he continues: "Or do you not know that your body is a temple[a] of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?" (v. 19). The members of the faithful are the members of Christ; furthermore, they are inhabited by the Holy Spirit. Having been endowed with such great honour, it is inappropriate for one to behave in ways that do not befit this relationship. It is worth stopping for a moment on the latter half of the sentence: "you are not your own." The union with Christ is presented here as a value acquired by the cross of Christ, and given as a gift, as corroborated by the following verse: "For you were bought with a [great] price" (v. 20a). This great price is the blood of Christ, that everyone has been redeemed and anointed with: hence, we are not our own. We belong to Christ, who redeemed us from the slavery of sin, and gave us the new life. The quality of that new existence in Christ obliges us to live as it requires. That is why, the apostle concludes: "therefore glorify God in your body!" (v. 20b). Our bodies—anointed with the blood of Christ and deified by the Holy Spirit—belong to God and ought to glorify him, instead of yielding to things contrary to their calling.

What is striking in this teaching of Paul is that not once does he refer to the Decalogue, even though Corinthians had obviously broken one of its demands. The Apostle does not support his stand with the Decalogue, for it is an instrument drawn from the Old

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<sup>39</sup> More on that subject, see W. Rakocy, "Moc Pawłowego słowa w obliczu grzechów Koryntian. Od przykazań Bożych do nowej jakości życia w Chrystusie," in: B. Migut – A. Piwowar, eds., *Moc słowa Pańskiego. Adhortacja Apostolska Verbum Domini w refleksji biblijno-teologicznej*, AnBibLub 8, Lublin 2012, 67–79.

Testament. The new salvific reality requires a new instrument. Therefore, the apostle uses a pedagogy adequate to the new salvific situation. He makes his addressees aware of their Christian dignity, that is, their elevation to the life with God. He awakens in them the awareness of what it means to be a Christian: that our bodies are the members of Christ; that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us, and who we have received from God; that we were redeemed at a great price—that of the blood of Christ, that we have all been anointed with it, and therefore we ought to glorify God in our bodies. Christians need “to clothe [themselves] with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph 4:24; cf. Gal 3:27b).

The Pauline argument is consistent with the new salvific reality in Christ—it has a profoundly personal dimension. The commandments of the Old Testament, as belonging to the bygone religious order, do not accord with the new reality.<sup>40</sup> The emphasis is now placed on the relationship that connects us with Christ, which becomes the source of moral attitudes, not on the commandments that instruct us how to behave. The motivation for just behaviour lies in the awareness of the bond that we have with our Lord (personalism), and not the dos and don'ts of the commandments (the legal aspect). A Christian, like a Jew, avoids evil; however, he does so not because he is prohibited by the commandments (under certain coercion),<sup>41</sup> but because of Christ who he loves and whom he remains united with.

Both in the cited passage of 1 Cor 6, and in other texts, the Apostle Paul avoids Old Testament pedagogy (commandments), for it has become inadequate in the new quality of the relationship with God. Instead, he opts for the New Testament pedagogy. This new pedagogy, centred around Christ, confirms that the very salvific

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<sup>40</sup> Christians do not live by the Decalogue, but by Jesus's commandment, the new and only commandment of love, fashioned after His love for us (John 13:34). The Decalogue proves insufficient to fulfil the greatest commandment. The commandment of love requires attitudes beyond all demands of the Decalogue and of the entire Old Testament (see section 2.1.). The new principle, which overshadows the commandments of the Old Testament, proves a new salvific reality has come into being.

<sup>41</sup> The commandments are phrased in the imperative form.

reality, in which Christians live, is in fact new. The degree of its novelty is indicated by the fact that the salvific means glorified in the Old Testament (commandments) prove to be helpless in the new salvific order, and are replaced with a new and efficient one (the Spirit). Between the salvific inefficiency of the commandments and the effectiveness of Christ's grace there opens such a difference that what we are now dealing with is an entirely new being, whose quality is best expressed by the category of a new creation. The concept of participation accounts for the nature of the new life in Christ in a similar vein; however, it does not fully explain its novelty and greatness. In that, as in the earlier cases, the idea of participation appears to have resulted from the new creation.

### **Conclusion**

The idea of participation (within soteriology), proposed by some authors, constitutes the core of the Christian life, but it does not completely explain many motifs present in the Pauline theology. Meanwhile, the concept of "the new creation in Christ" put forth here is able to explain, first of all, the powerlessness and the expiry of the Old Testament religious order. It also enables us to better capture the greatness of the new salvific order, such as the belonging to the church as the Body of Christ, as well as our current part in the salvific reality (the so-called fulfilled eschatology). The "new creation" also explains, as opposed to every other proposal, why a gentile has an equal as Jew access to justification and salvation by an act of faith in Christ, and why their earlier life does not determine their access to God. Thus, it allows us to answer the question whether a Jew who accepts Christ also converts, or whether he is merely, say, called. The "new creation in Christ" also serves as the background for the Pauline moral teaching. Hence, the source and the principle of the new life are no longer the commandments, but it is the Spirit granted to us. The concept of the "new creation" explains the entire soteriology, and all the subjects related thereto. The notion of "participation" appears to be a result of the new creation in Christ. The subject of a new creation, only marginally treated by other authors, and discussed very briefly with relation to other issues, in our view constitutes the category that organises

entire Pauline thought. It lies at the foundation of his theology and provides us with the key to interpret it correctly.