NEW CREATION AND RESURRECTION IN THE BIBLE AND IN A NEW SOUTH AFRICA

An Old Testament scholar's perspective

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Abstract

'New creation' and 'resurrection' are discussed from the perspective of an Old Testament scholar, and interpreted in terms of the function of culture, world-view and religion for a new South Africa. The obstacles, opportunities and other important issues pertaining to a relevant hermeneutical approach as well as some possible religious educational models for our context are discussed critically.

The meaning of life, the problem of death, and the hope of the resurrection have been consciously or unconsciously at the centre of world religions from time immemorial. In our Judeo-Christian tradition, the hope of a new creation or resurrection has been anticipated in the present life as a criterion for faith.

1. An old and a new South Africa: religion and education

1.1 A situation analysis

A new South Africa presupposes an old one. What is the difference between the two? What do they look like? I think what is generally understood when one speaks about 'a new South Africa' is that in the minds of some is the sharing of political power and that in the minds of others is the taking over of that power by blacks. Most, however, agree that it actually means the dismantling of apartheid, as Le Roux (1987:216) states in the first sentence of his inaugural lecture: Op 31 Januarie 1986 is apartheid as politicke beleid afgeskaf. ('On 31 January, 1986 apartheid was abolished as political policy').

Nicol in his monthly column in the Afrikaans newspaper *Beeld* (27 August 1985) describes the old South Africa grimly - as translated by Bosch (1986:160) - as follows:

It has now become clear that our (Afrikaner - JJB) designs of recent decades did not work out, but have, rather, merely aggravated South Africa's

problems. We have torn apart families, uprooted communities, made discriminating laws and enforced them with harshness. We have made millions of people into enemies. We have estranged our coloured fellow-believers, with whom we should have experienced the most intimate unity. Why did our fine-sounding designs have such a negative result? Because group selfishness has been one of the main motives which urged us on and blinded us. Why did we persist so long with our impracticable and unjust designs? Because we believed that enforced racial segregation was consistent with the Christian gospel; we sometimes even went so far as to think that our faith demanded racial separation. We have hurt millions of people, hurt them deeply ... The gulf of misapprehensions, fear and hatred between white and black has reached alarming dimensions

Apartheid is the essence of the old South Africa. And the new one ...? It must be rid of the one big sin ... apartheid! If this analysis is correct, what then can we as the Biblical Society of Southern Africa do? Will whatever we endeavour to do not be 'a classical case of an exercise in futility'? - to quote Bosch (1986:161). I further agree with Bosch in this regard when he emphatically states: '.... this is a real possibility, and one of which we constantly have to be aware.'

1.2 The 'mission' of education and religion in a new South Africa

We have only one foundation to build on: the religiosity of the South African population as is clear from the 1980 census in this regard (Krüger s a:3):

Christianity	22 603 000	(77%)
Hinduism	512 000	(1,7%)
Islam	319 000	(1,1%)
Judaism	119 000	(0,4%)
Other	522 000	(1,8%)
Unknown	5 285 000	(18%)
Total	29 360 000	100,0%

Except for 19,8%, our population belongs to one or other religion. Keeping in mind that the 18% 'unknown' might include a large number of people who still adhere to their African traditional beliefs, we may conclude that 'religiosity' is the one characteristic that most South Africans share. Therefore we must know what the function of religion is to build up a common strategy to teach religion, which can give religious educators a common goal and perhaps may play a major role in binding us together as a nation.

However, there are major obstacles to overcome, since we are not only divided by religion, but also by cultural differences resulting in diverse world-views and value systems.

To bind our pluralistic religious society and our multi-cultural community together in one nation we must know each other to be able to treat one another with respect. This we could consider as the 'mission' of our future national education policy and especially of teachers of religion. For this purpose we must know more about culture, world-view, religion and their functions.

2. The function of culture, world-view and religion

2.1 Culture (cf Kraft 1979:53-54; Burden 1986:96)

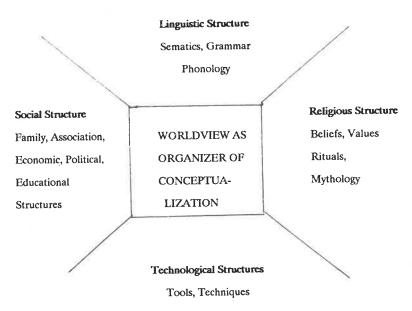
Biologically there is not much difference between humankind, plants and animals: they all breathe, eat, grow, procreate and die. But humankind differs from all other living creatures in one essential aspect: humankind is creative. The 'moreness' of human beings lies in this 'spiritual' ability. Our creativeness is expressed in our language, socio-economic systems, art, et cetera. These expressions of creativeness are called 'culture' (Kultur) to designate 'the total non-biologically transmitted heritage of man' (Kraft 1979:45f). Whereas we respond biologically to reality in the same way as plants and animals, we also have an 'extra' ability to respond 'spiritually'. We do not only perceive of reality, but we also form conceptions of reality which do not precisely correspond to reality. These conceptualisations of reality are not only expressed in the various material elements of culture, but are also organised in a central system, which we call world-view.

2.2 World-view (cf Kraft 1979:53-54; Burden 1986:96)

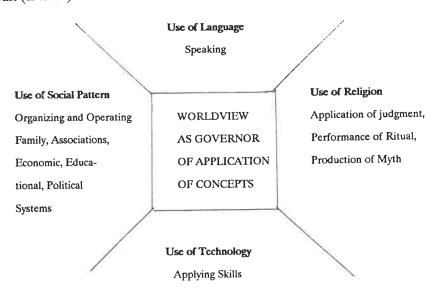
World-view therefore, lies at the very heart of culture. It touches, interacts and strongly influences every aspect of a culture. It creates a specific value system for a group of people. We can define world-view as the central systematisation of conceptions of reality to which the members of a specific culture assent and from which their value system stems (Kraft 1979:53).

World-view acts as an 'organiser' of the concepts of a culture in a specific structure of a given society as well as filling the role of 'watchdog' over the application of these concepts in that society. A society is, therefore, structured according to the behaviour or performance of the participants prescribed by their world-view. It is imposed upon the children by the education system of that community. For example, people, who grow up in a community that sees disease as the result of personal interference by malevolent spirits will find it hard to adapt to and be cured in a hospital where disease is ascribed to impersonal germs. The world-view of a culture is 'the central control box' of that culture (Kraft 1979:53).

Kraft (1979:54) uses the following diagram to illustrate how world-view acts as an 'organiser' of the concepts of a culture in a specific structure:



Kraft (1979:54) also illustrates the performance of culture by the following diagram:



Charles Kraft (1979:54-57) distinguishes the following five major functions of the world-view of a culture:

(a) The explanatory function

World-view gives an explanation of the origin of things; it supplies the answer to the how and why of realities according to the conception of that society. Of course this especially concerns the ultimate things on which they build their lives. If the universe is controlled by supernatural beings in the conception of reality of a community, as in the Old Testament or in Africa, heavenly beings like angels and spirits will play an important role in their lives. If, however, the universe is operated by cause-and-effect laws according to a certain society, as with Westerners, gods, angels, spirits and fore-fathers will tend to disappear from such a world-view.

(b) The validating function

One culture often evaluates another in the light of its own value system and judges it as inferior or inappropriate. Usually the evaluation is done by the community on ultimate grounds which are found in the uniqueness of their God or gods. Israel is a good example: their God Yahweh is incomparable to the gods of the neighbours. Marguerite G Kraft (1978:4) formulates the validating function as follows:

... it (world-view) sanctions the goals, institutions, and values of a society and provides them with a means of evaluating all outside influences as well as activities and attitudes within the society. It gives one perspective on life.

(c) Reinforcement function

When a group experiences anxiety or crisis in life, its world-view provides security and support for its behaviour. It provides encouragement for action and prescribes the form of action in cases of illness, death, initiation, *et cetera*. Usually the action takes the form of a ritual or ceremony in the Old Testament and in Africa.

(d) Integration function

Daily and new experiences must be 'filed' into a 'retrieval system'. It systematises and orders perceptions of reality and helps to interpret them. Like a computer it can 'store' in its 'memory' the necessary data, integrate it with existing data and provide the necessary information and answers as if at the press of a button. In this way it provides a persistent picture of conceptualised reality.

(e) Adaptive function

A change in culture because of political, economic and religious circumstances necessitates a change in world-view and *vice versa*. Therefore it must have the ability to adapt. It must reconcile old understandings with new concepts. Reinterpretation may be sometimes necessary. Under socio-political pressure, it may be necessary to alter supernatural beliefs, to adjust origin myths, to change rituals or ceremonies, *et cetera*. The Old Testament provides witnesses to such adaptations as well as does cultural history in Africa.

2.3 Religion (cf Gous s a: 36-38)

We have already seen that religion is only one aspect of the world-view of a cultural group. It must therefore be interpreted in relation to the other elements of that specific culture. We have also noticed that religion is used for the application of judgment, the performance of ritual and the production of myth. We must now look at the function of religion or faith in people's lives. Why do people believe? What purpose does religion serve? We can expect that the function of religion will overlap with that of world-view of which it is a constituting element. However, we shall have to be more specific in determining the function of religion.

2.3.1 Religion brings people in contact with God

We can say this is the theological dimension of religion. It helps us to experience the supernatural, intangible, transcendental world of God. This is the principle of orientation of our lives.

2.3.2 Religion organizes the world around us in an orderly way

People fear chaos or disorder more than anything else, because it creates anxiety. We want tranquility. Order, predictability and the ability to interpret experiences and events are essential for human beings to live in an orderly way. Mythology plays a major role in establishing a world around us that we can understand. Religion provides us with a grip on the celestial world which we may call its cosmological dimension. Faith in God provides people with an explanation for deviations from the normal, such as suffering. When religion provides a perspective on the terrestrial world around us we may call it the ecological dimension of religion.

2.3.3 Religion provides us with an ethos (cf Motlhabi 1986:87)

We are in need of basic concepts and principles to help us judge between good and evil, right and wrong, the obligatory and the optional. The direction towards certain goals and the disposition of our lives are constituted by our ethos. Some scholars distinguish between 'ethics' and 'morals' as 'theory' and 'practice' respectively. Morality includes both character and behaviour. The first is generally attained through up-bringing, education or 'conditioning' and the second is its application. The function of religion in this case may be described as teleological or ethical.

2.3.4 Religion creates for us a system of symbols to explain the supernatural

People 'translate' their thoughts, experiences, desires and beliefs in 'symbols', which could be objects such as a cross, or a ritual such as baptism. The meaning of these symbols is clear to the group by whom they are used. Usually these symbols enhance communication.

2.3.5 Religion creates a communion of believers

One of the basic needs of any person is a feeling of belonging. Religion creates such a secure haven, which we usually call a 'congregation'. Such a congregation serves as a community of love, of worship, of reconciliation, and of prayer.

2.3.6 Religion gives meaning to our lives

As one of the constituting elements of world-view religion gives meaning to our lives. Animals are different from us human beings; they are created with instincts which 'programme' them to survive. Human beings have no such aids. We must be taught our place in reality and in life. But when we have found our place in reality life becomes worthwhile and meaningful.

Let us now consider examples of the function of religion in the life of Israel regarding new creation and resurrection especially during the exile and thereafter.

3. The Old Testament tradition: an overview

3.1 New creation (cf Deist 1981:73-78)

The conception of God in the Sion theology of the southern kingdom revolved mainly around the patriarchal promises and the Davidic kingdom. They saw the king, Jerusalem or Sion and the temple as proofs of God's permanent presence. During the exile in 586 BC the Babylonians banned the people of Judah from their patriarchal heritage, captured their king, occupied Jerusalem and burnt the temple.

The Deuteronomist was one of the first who started to ask questions about the exile: why did God reject Israel? What is Israel to do now? In his view Israel sinned and is to be blamed and not God. They must repent and God will create something new. Salvation did not lie in the restoration of the Davidic kingdom, but in the observance of the Law of God.

The theme of the new things which God can create was worked out by Deutero-Isaiah in chapters 40-55 of the book of Isaiah. He preached about God as the Creator-god who rules over heaven and earth. Previously the faith in God consisted mainly of three elements: the patriarchal times, the events of the exodus, and the Davidic dynasty. These older views on God were questioned during the exile, since they were redundant. In the circle of Deutero-Isaiah the national-historical view gives way to a world-historical view of God. History starts right back at the creation and not merely with the exodus or the calling of the patriarchs. God is the god of the whole earth and not only the God of Israel and Judah. We note a kind of 'universalism' in Deutero-Isaiah: Yahweh, the Creator of the universe, directs world events, including the victorious career of Cyrus, the Persian king, who allowed the Jews to return to their country. This deliverance is described as a 'new creation' (Is 41:20;45:8). The prophet sees Judah's liberation from exile as the beginning of the great era of salvation, in which all things will be made new. Yahweh's salvation is

even extended to the nations and not restricted only to Israel as during the era of 'particularism'.

Israel's traditions are now reinterpreted in the light of God's work of creation. For example in Isaiah 51 the prophet sees the return to their land as a 'new exodus' (see also 43:16ff; 48:21). In this chapter images from the Babylonian creation story are used to give the exodus a creation setting. According to the Babylonian creation story there was also a tremendous conflict between their creator-god and the forces of chaos. But the creator-god won the fight.

God is going to create something new: a new Israel. God is indeed going to start again with Israel, but not to found a political kingdom. Israel instead is going to be God's servant and witness. God's powers in creation will be demonstrated to the whole world and will astound everyone. It is in this context that Israel is called God's servant (see Is 42:1-7; 49:1-7; 52:13-53:12). As his servant Israel is going to be God's representative, the witness of his power to save and to create. Actually God is not to establish the kingdom of Israel, but his own.

3.2 Resurrection

The Old Testament contains little about resurrection. It does not mean that it is not there. It is, but it is not prominent. The people of the Old Testament were concentrating on serving God in the present life, leaving little time for speculation about the next. Sometimes they used the idea of resurrection to express the national hope of the re-birth or re-creation of the nation like for example Ezekiel in chapter 37 (see Le Roux 1987:221). The plainest statement in the Old Testament on the resurrection of the individual we find undoubtedly in Daniel 12:2. 'Many of those who have already died will live again: some will enjoy eternal life, and some will suffer eternal disgrace.' This clearly expects a resurrection both of the wicked and of the righteous. The eternal consequences of people's actions are clearly envisaged.

It is interesting to note that the belief in resurrection started during the exilic period, which was characterised by a major change in world-view and therefore also of religious belief. During the same period apocalypticism, which too is - as resurrection - a crisis phenomenon, also developed. Resurrection would develop fully during the New Testament era, especially in the resurrection of Christ.

During the exile major changes in the world-view of Judah took place due to the catastrophe which struck them. In this process their religion, socio-political life and even their language changed. As far as religion is concerned, we notice changes such as the change from the classical prophets to the apocalyptists as well as the renewal of older traditions, such as the creation tradition, and also the development of new beliefs such as resurrection. These 'paradigm shifts' were of great importance for the faith of the Jews.

4. In search of a relevant hermeneutical starting point

4.1 Major obstacles and opportunities

A new South Africa will not only face us with major obstacles, but will also present us with new opportunities. I am going to mention a few even at running the risk of incompleteness or irrelevance in the eyes of some. First of all, the ghost of apartheid is going to haunt us with the hatred it unleashed as well as the fears its abolishing will create. Two quotations in this regard will suffice. The first comes from Govender (1986:204) in his opening address at the 1984 Black Theology conference:

I have, like you, been shaped by my life so far. And at this point in time I know that I hate with all my might what is going on in this country of ours. I cannot and will not accept that this untold and intolerable suffering should have the name of Jesus Messiah dragged into it. It is more than heretical, it is demonic and must be condemned and judged for what it is.

He adds, however:

I, like you, am desperately searching for something new, and like you, am constraint to do so from out of my faith.

The second quotation comes from the archbishop of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu (1990:239):

The Church can show forth that we are in the business of forgiveness for those especially among whites who fear that blacks will do to them what they have done to blacks if the situation is reversed. Many whites fear being caught in a vicious spiral of revenge.

However, when Desmond Tutu (1990:238-239) writes about a post-apartheid South Africa he becomes almost ecstatic:

This land has truly significant people ... I never cease to be amazed that there are so many white people who genuinely want fundamental change in South Africa ... when the present dispensation ensures that they enjoy quite substantial privileges simply because they are white ... What a marvelous country we would be if apartheid were ended. Just think off all the resources that are wasted in opposing or defending apartheid which would be released to be used for the good of South Africans, black and white ... What a marvelous launching pad a liberated South Africa would be to help the subcontinent, indeed the whole of Africa ... We would provide the world with a paradigm to solve its own problems because in South Africa we have nearly all the problems of the world in miniature ...

Desmond Tutu (1990:238-239) sees the Church as the instrument of change according to the analogy of the Bible.

The second obstacle, to my mind, is the notion of cultural relativism, which holds that one culture is basically inaccessible to a member from another culture. I, however, concur with Deist (1991:10) that Africans, like Westerners conceptualise

through the categories of time and space, and form likewise judgments by the application of logic. However, according to Deist (1991:10)

... differences concern cultural assumptions inherent in the respective thought categories of space and time themselves, which necessarily affect the outcome of logical judgments.

The problem of different cultures gave rise to the defining of Hermeneutics as a discipline of understanding between cultures (Kiwiet 1974:1-14). In cultural hermeneutics we prefer cultural relativity above cultural relativism, since we hold that culture is accessible to someone from another culture, albeit that his/her perception is strongly coloured by his/her own. In this regard Gqubule (1974:18 [cf Mosala 1986:181]) states:

Black Theology is not an attempt to localize Christ in the black situation, but to make him so universal that the Red Indian, the Pygmy, the Maori, the Russian, the Hungarian, the Venda and the American may say: 'This man Jesus is bone of my bone; he speaks in my own accent of things that are true to me!'

The third obstacle is religious pluralism, which at the same time provides us with a common foundation to build on. We are going to come back to the religiosity of South Africans.

4.2 Possible hermeneutical approaches

There are two possible approaches which have lately been proposed for the South African situation. Mosala (1986:181) who is quite critical of Black Theology expresses himself as follows:

Black Theology needs a new exegetical starting point if it is to become a material force capable of gripping the black working class and peasant masses. Such a starting point needs to be rooted in the kind of epistemology that underlies the words of Marx and Engels when they declared: 'The task of history therefore, once the world beyond the truth has disappeared, is to establish the truth of this world.' The social, cultural, political and economic world of the working class and peasantry constitutes the only valid hermeneutical starting point for a Black Theology of liberation.

Mosala's viewpoint calls for a few critical questions: firstly, is such a hermeneutic not reducing religion or theology to socio-economic production factors only? Secondly, who decides what is valid and relevant for the working class and peasantry: they themselves or the theologian? If they decide for themselves, does it mean that 'the people' become the ultimate judge on the correct exposition of the Bible? If it is the theologian or minister of religion who decides, the question is: how can they know what the needs of the workers and the peasants really are and when are these needs satisfied? Thirdly, since a materialist (Marxist) analysis is once more a European analysis of society, can it possibly represent the only valid hermeneutical point of departure for a Black Theology of liberation? Fourthly, are these materialist assumptions, which are lately rejected by those East European societies for which they were devised originally, still be valid for Africa in future?

The second possible hermeneutical approach for our South African society has been propounded by Deist at this very meeting. Therefore I need not go into detail. Although I agree with him wholeheartedly on the complementariness of the African and Western poles of our differing epistemologies as well as the deconstructive manner in which they should interact, I must also draw the attention to some important issues which need urgent consideration.

4.3 Important issues in a comprehensive approach

4.3.1 A comprehensive approach to religion as such

Since we live in a multi-religious country we must consider our pluralistic society seriously in the religious education of our children, which is of utmost importance in the development of their individual personalities, and which lies at the basis of culture and society. This common religiosity must be taken into account in the teaching of Biblical Studies with a view to the year 2000 when our school children are estimated to exceed 10 million in number and over 400 000 teachers will be necessary (cf Krüger 1990:3).

The formulation of a national religious policy as well as a national religious education policy will be a high priority for our government whose policies should give expression to the strong individual and societal side of religion (cf Krüger 1990:2). A good start has already been made with the freedom of religion being protected by the constitution. Education policies will have to provide for education in the various other religions as well as the own religion, which pursue the transfer of knowledge of religion in general; the acquisition of social abilities, such as the knowledge and understanding of the religion of fellow citizens to such an extent that children will be able to adapt to other religious viewpoints while standing by their own; and the inculcation of an ethos, which include values and attitudes(cf Krüger 1990:6).

Biblical scholars, educationists and scientists of religion will have to work together to formulate a viable and acceptable religious educational model. Krüger (1990:4-5 critically discusses the following models:

- a) A secular model in which there will be no place for religious education in public schools. Such a model will be foreign to such a religious community as ours; it will leave potential to create community values unused; it will not be neutral, as is usually argued, but will actually harbour a positivistic value system.
- b) A mono-religious model, which would be the result of a declaration of one religion as state religion. The element of compulsion and domination, which is foreign to religion, makes this model unthinkable and unacceptable in a pluralistic country such as ours.
- c) A particularistic-pluralistic model means in its extreme form that students will receive religious education only in their own religion. Despite this positive element it will lead to isolation and possible conflict in stead of building bridges through

understanding of the different religions of fellow citizens and the fostering of one's own.

d) An integrated-pluralistic model, which means the study of the own as well as all the other or at least the most important religions of society. This would need much tolerance and wisdom: younger children would need to feel secure within their own religion, while from older pupils more knowledge and understanding of other religions could be expected.

4.3.2 The hermeneutic of the sacred

'The experience of the sacred' is basic to all religions according to Eliade (1969; 1987 [1958]). Since Deist adequately worked out this theme in an article 'The hermeneutic of the sacred and the task of Biblical Studies in a secularised world', which was published in *Scriptura*, I am only mentioning in passing the importance of this view for our topic.

4.3.3 The sacredness of nature and life

To distinguish between 'sacred' and 'profane' is untenable for scientists of religion such as Eliade (1987:1-4). This dualism is denied by the belief that God created everything. Anyone who has the slightest knowledge of traditional African or Old Testament beliefs will realize the sacredness of nature and life as is clear from this quotation from Deist (1990:7):

For instance, if agricultural festivals and accompanying rites of Old Testament times are not understood in terms of ancient people's idea of the sacredness of nature and from their consequent logical urge to participate in the rhythm of nature, such festivals and rites will be interpreted as superstition, and not as an expression of true religion.

'New creation' and 'resurrection', the essential elements of our topic, are based on the belief in the sacredness of nature and life. Without such a belief there is no hope to curb ecological piracy and the decimation of human lives in Africa or the world.

4.3.4 The sacredness of being human

It will suffice to quote Tutu (1990:239-40) here:

Africans believe in something which is difficult to render in English. We call it ubuntu, botho. It means the essence of being human. You know when it is there, and you know when it is absent. It speaks about humaneness, gentleness, hospitality, putting yourself out on behalf of others, being vulnerable, it embraces compassion and toughness. It recognises that my humanity is bound up in yours, for we can be human only together. It means not nursing grudges, but willing to accept others as they are and being thankful for them. It excludes grasping competitiveness, harsh aggressiveness, being concerned for oneself, abrasiveness - all these are excluded.'

5. Conclusion

We have gone the full circle from our situation to the biblical examples and back to the South African society. Your question might be: what relevance these examples from the Bible have for our situation? I have used 'new creation' and 'resurrection' as examples, as analogies, as metaphors since

One of the most important paradigm shifts in recent theology has been to move away from understanding theological statements as normative or dogmatic propositions regarding metaphysical realities ...

(Burden 1990:13).

This means I have been using these biblical ideas here as examples to evaluate practical conduct, as Africans would do, and not to draw from them authoritative principles for faith, as we Westerners usually do (cf Deist 1990:19).

The relevance of the biblical idea of a 'new creation' for South Africa is particularly clear from Marais' D Th thesis (1989:6-19) on the interpretation of the exodus narrative by liberation theologians in the N G Sendingkerk:

Die bevrydingstema word steeds as 'n paradigmatiese teks beskou, maar word al meer teen 'n skeppingsmatige agtergrond beskou (The liberation theme, still considered to be a paradigmatic text, is more often interpreted against a creation background).

Since 'resurrection' is totally a new concept in the Old Testament, I leave it to my New Testament colleague, where it actually belongs.

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