**Paul’s Hermeneutical Art in Explaining the New Creation**

This conference deals with Reformation and women’s ordination in Estonia. In the very beginning of the Reformation we see the essential first theses of Luther’s 95 theses. It is the starting point of the reformation: “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said ’Repent’, he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance”. We bear this in mind for further reflection.

Hermeneutics is derived from the Greek word meaning “to interpret”, but the variety of meanings and use of hermeneutics itself goes beyond every attempt to reach any agreement or sketch a summary what it is. Still three perspectives are critical to a proper understanding of the interpretive task. First, hermeneutics is a science. Second, hermeneutics is an art. Third, if used by the Church, hermeneutics depends upon the leading of the Holy Spirit. It is most convenient to describe my today’s approach as a look at Paul’s technique as an art, a creative enterprise to reach his readers and listeners.

Creation and new creation are not frequent themes in the Bible but act as a kind of framework for the Scripture. Though creation does not have a visible place in the New Testament, all New Testament texts assume that the world is God’s creation.

New creation is one of the topics Paul interwove into the theological exposition of his gospel and mentioned it explicitly in Gal 6:15: “**For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!”** and 2Cor 5:17 “**So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”**

I approach the topic with some general questions: How did Paul express his views of new creation, what did he mean by it and how did he fit this concept in with his personal experience? What can we learn about Paul’s hermeneutics on the topic? Did Paul imagine the new creation as an event emerging abruptly or rather evolving gradually as an ongoing process?

Paul, the Hellenistic Jew, made use of the cultural environment of his time when developing his ideas of the new creation. First, Paul based his argumentation on traditions. Second, his personal experience was of great importance. , even substantial if look at the ways he developed his thoughts. Paul’s rejection of the Torah-oriented way of life was the result of his transforming encounter with Jesus Christ (Gal 1:15-16): **But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me / in me! / so that I might proclaim him among the gentiles, ...**.

1. **Anthropological aspects and destiny shared with Christ**

I attempt to place Paul’s new-creation statements in the theological context in which these could be find out – **his death-life symbolism**. The dominant symbolism of these texts is dying and rising with Christ. Paul builds his case on his own transformative encounter with Christ, which forced him to abandon his **“former way of life in Judaism**” (Gal 1:13).

The word encountered most often in Paul’s discussion of life-crisis rituals is transformation. This is not surprising, phrases like ontological transformation, metamorphosis, becoming another, becoming “a new man”, and “new creation”, are but a small sampling of expressions used by anthropologists and comparative religionists to capture the essence and aim of these death-life dramas.

Paul expresses his personal commitment to Christ vividly by saying that he now feels himself as been crucified with Christ. It was in Galatians 2:19-20 that he gave expression to this feeling: “I have been crucified with Christ.” Even more, “... it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.” Paul gives word to his emphatic “I”: Paul is speaking rhetorically, emphatically, typically. He is making a point that would be true of anybody. Nevertheless, **whatever Paul is describing, it was clearly of a personal, transforming significance marked by an experience of the risen Christ.**

In the latest of his epistles Paul goes deeply into the recognition that it is only total fellowship in Christ, a shared destiny with him that matters and effects changes in human life. Romans 6:1-11 is located within the larger unit of 5:12-8:39. The movement from death to life arises organically from Paul’s discussion in 5:12-21, where the entirety of human history is schematized in precisely these terms.

In Romans 6:5 “**For if we have been united with him in death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his”** the subject of death is introduced clearly through the union with Christ in the likeness of his death. With the introduction of the term “our old self” the human body of sin undergoes deconstruction. With the plural personal pronoun “we”, Paul reminds the reader that he has the collective destiny of the members of the e)kklh/sia in mind. The conceptual-structural parallels between 6:6 and 6:4 suggest that “walking in newness of life” is the verbal antithesis to the nominal “our old self.” It suggests that walking in the newness of life requires a changed, renewed self. This idea has its synonym in Rom 7:6 where the role of the Spirit becomes visible according to which “we” are now serving in the condition that is renewed by the Spirit (in newness of spirit / en *kainotēti pneumatos*).

Paul in Romans 6 is arguing that the resurrection life, in some sense at least, is a crucial part of the believer’s experience of dying with Christ. However, Paul does not go on here with the words “...so that we might be raised with him in newness of life”, but with the words “so that we also might walk in newness of life”(6:4). Dying first with Christ is an inevitable step presupposing an agreement of the Christian in order to be elevated later in a new position of walking in the newness of life. **In Romans 6:5 the metaphor of likeness is central and binds human persons to Christ through baptism: “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” The baptized persons will share in Christ event and go through existential changes.** According to Peter Stuhlmacher, “Als Bekehrungs- und Erwachsenentaufe ... kam die Taufe urchristlich einem echten Existenzwandel gleich.” It means without technical wording that in baptism a sort of existentially decisive transformation has taken place.

1. **The concept of transformation and the significance of *eikōn***

There is a salvation-historical perspective that undergirds the section 2 Corinthians 2:14-7:4. In regard to 2Cor 5:5 it seems that the larger context suggests that Paul has in mind the re-creative work of God’s Spirit which effects transformation into the ei)kw/n (image) of Christ (2Cor 3:18).

But first, **Christ is the image of God (ei)kw\n tou= qeou=), and his glory is reflected in the face of [Jesus] Christ (e)n prosw/pw| )Ihsou= Xristou=;** (2Cor 4:4-6).

Second, Paul introduces a metaphoric theme of obtaining a new form, *i.e.* experiencing a sort of transformation.

While the word ei)kw/n makes its debut in 2 Corinthians in 3:18, we know that Corinthians had some familiarity with this important theme of Paul’s gospel from his previous ministry among them. In 1Cor 15:49 a hope is expressed that **just as we have borne the *image* of the man of dust, we will also bear the *image* of the man of heaven**. If there were any questions, Paul answers them in 2Cor 4:4 where Christ is specifically identified as the image of God. Transformation into the image of Christ occurs elsewhere in Paul in Romans 8:29 and the history of influence appears in Col 1:15.

The image, then, functions as part of Paul’s theology of creation/consummation and, due to its protological-Christological orientation, is regularly associated with restoration of glory. Paul described this dynamic process in 2Cor 3:18: “**And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed** (metamorfou/meqa) **into the same image** (th\n au)th\n ei)ko/na) **from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit** (a)po\ kuri/ou pneu/matoj).” This verse concentrates central themes in a precise form. All people, men and women, participate in this transformation and glory.

The motif of transformation is used also in the explanation of resurrection in 1Cor 15:43, in 15:49, in 15:51f, in Phil 3:21 (o4j metasxhmati/sei to\ sw=ma ... su/mmorfon tw=| sw/mati th=j do/chj au)tou=), and at last in Romans 8:29-30: **“For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, ...”.** There the idea of the liberation of the whole creation from its bondage (Rom 8:19-23) sets the background for Paul’s hermeneutical mastery.

The relationship between 2 Corinthians 3:18, 4:4, and 4:6 is especially close, and many see the three texts as parallel. The antithetical symmetry of the blinded minds of the unbelievers (4:4) and the hearts of the believers who have received the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (4:6) is striking.

What is significant about 2Cor 4:6 is that Paul views conversion through the lens of Genesis and deems the initial creation to be a fitting analogy to God’s new Covenant work in the hearts of believers. After this intermediate statement, the questions centred to human beings will be in focus.

1. **Anthropological, cosmological, and communal aspects: Human existence *en Xristō***

*Kainē ktisis* is conditioned upon being *en Xristō*; Particularly noteworthy in the argument of 2 Corinthians 3-5 is **Paul’s portrayal of *en Xristō* as the sphere of transformation**. It is that the veil is removed from the heart. This idea is brought to a crescendo in 2Cor 5:21, where Paul declares that “in him” (*en autō*) believers become the *dikaiosynē theou*.

The question concerning the new creation is: do we have here a statement of Paul’s soterio-cosmology, or his anthropology? Cosmological understanding means that if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation ... a brand new world! Anthropological interpretation, however, goes that if anyone is in Christ, there is a newly-created being. It is closer to an anthropological understanding. Cosmos stands in 2Cor 5:19, but as to the context, the *cosmos* in 5:19 closely denotes the world of humanity! The world here probably denotes mankind, newly created men and women!

What then are the “old things” which have passed in 2 Corinthians 5:17? We need look no further than the context: boasting in appearances (5:12), living for self (5:14-15), and judging others *kata sarka* (5:16). **As the context makes clear, in 2 Corinthians 5:17 new creation (*kainē ktisis*) is an anthropological motif relating to the new situation of the individual “in Christ”. In the Galatian context Paul reveals his close relations with the Galatians in Gal 4:19. Paul describes himself as in the pain of childbirth “until Christ is formed in you”** (me/xrij ou[ morfwqh=| Xristo\j e)n u(mi=n). On the one hand, this “Christ in you” expression, seemingly contrary to the “in Christ” formula of 2Cor 5:17, can also be translated communally as “Christ among you”. On the other hand, the expression may have been coined with the active and transforming effect of Christ and the Spirit of Christ like it is expressed in 2Cor 3:18. In that case Gal 4:19 functions partially complementary to 2Cor 5:17.

**The miracle of transformation is most clearly expressed when its goal, likeness to Christ, is repeatedly emphasized**. **There is ample justification for connecting *kainē ktisis* with Paul’s Adam-Christ typology and relating it to the idea of transformation into the *eikōn* of Christ** (2Cor 3:18; 4:4-6). This confirms the earlier suggestion that the antithetical counterpart to the *palaios anthrōpos* of Romans 6:6 is the *kainē ktisis* of 2 Corinthians 5:17. **It seems that 2 Corinthians 5:17 speaks not essentially about the presence of the new age, but the presence of a renewed image in humans and thus a new humanity**. The primary purpose of Paul’s stark kainh\ kti/sij statement in 2 Corinthians 5:17 is to portray conversion as a complete and irrevocable break with one’s former life. That way the verse refers to the presence of the new creation in this world already now.

The aim of this symbolism is to create a distinctive community, and the relationship between the two is best illustrated by comparing 1 Corinthians 5:7-8 with 2 Corinthians 5:14-17. These two passages are conceptually parallel, though 1 Corinthians 5:7-8 has the community in view. I represent the position that new creation applies to the community as well as to the individual. In keeping with initiatory symbolism generally, its social relevance is grounded in its personal significance and this dual focus cannot be obscured if Paul is to be understood correctly.

Paul uses individual anthropological expressions on the one hand and collective, even cosmic aspects on the other. An increased awareness of corporate themes in Paul’s letters has given rise to the view that kainh\ kti/sij in Galatians 6:15 express a “Gemeindewirklichkeit”, and that Paul’s new-creation motif speaks of a new community. This assumption finds its expression also in the baptismal transformative communal effect in Gal 3:27f. Paul wrote: **“As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus”.** Men and women are clothed themselves with Christ and appear as Christ. **Though this famous verse does not say anything about functional ministry, Lutherans may find support for the idea of priesthood of all believers.** The sense of corporateness is perceivable and Paul has here the body of Christ in view.

In Galatians 6:15 Paul summarizes his conviction that new creation abolishes some rules posed to Israel at the time of the old order. It is probable that Paul’s dismissal of “circumcision” and “uncircumcision” as irrelevant relates to his insistence on the priority of internal versus external considerations. The primary support for an anthropological reading of kainh\ kti/sij in Galatians 6:15 is its coherence within the argument of Galatians itself. Paul introduces his closing comments with reference to “those who wish to make a good appearance outwardly” (v. 5:12), and this clearly picks up the “appearance versus reality” motif of chapter 2, with its emphasis on the priority of internal over external considerations.

Paul’s rejection of his Torah-oriented way of life was the result of his transforming encounter with Jesus Christ (Gal 1:15-16; 2:19-20), and it is difficult not to see these crucial themes (formerly/now, external vs. internal) crystallized in the words “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, but *new creation!”*

1. **Spirit and the new creation**

**Contrasted with the outward state of (both) circumcision or uncircumcision, new creation should be related to the inner dynamic of the Christian life, which is precisely where Paul locates the work of the Spirit** (Rom 2:28-29; 5:5; 8:9-11,23; 1Cor 6:19; 2Cor 1:22; 3:3; Gal 4:6). In Romans 2:28-29, which read like a commentary on Galatians 6:15, Paul again rejects the outer state circumcision, allowing validity only to the inner state of circumcision of the heart by the Spirit.

This imagery and line of thought has its theological ancestry in the prophecies of Jeremiah, and suggests that Paul’s new-creation/ language should be related to that inner renewal promised by later prophets. Paul brings pneumatic transformation into foreground in Galatians 3-5. Since the Galatians have received the Spirit (Gal 3:3, 14; 4:6), have been “made alive” by the Spirit (3:21-22 with 3:14 and 5:25), have been “begotten” by the Spirit (4:29), “live” by the Spirit (5:25), “walk” by the Spirit (5:16, 18, 25), and have become “children” and “heirs” through the Spirit in their hearts (4:6-7) one may conclude that the work of the Spirit is to transform Christians into the divine likeness, which is Christ.

Paul argues that the law and circumcision are no longer relevant. This entire chain of reasoning is perfectly summarized under the heading “the motif of transformation”, new creation. Paul seems to develop an idea of a God as a sovereign master over history and His own rules and commandments to Israel. God can change the rules after He had decreed that the fullness of time had come (Gal 4:4) and those who were under the law are redeemed.

Whether or not the distinction between inner person and inner activity fully persuades, one essential point remains: **Paul’s new creation expresses a reality *intra nos* not a reality *extra nos*,** and functions as an alternative formulation of his central Spirit affirmation - the Spirit creates life. However, it is incorrect to emphasize the individual aspect of new creation alone. In 2Cor 5:18, Paul’ approach to new creation and reconciliation is based on the new eschatological reality of the believer as a new creature in Christ. Through Christ God reconciled the world. “Paul did not only have the reconciliation of human beings in mind but, in light of the fall of the human being (Gen 3), speaks of a new creation in Christ as something that includes the universe as a whole”. Paul confirms this view in Romans 8:18-23.

Paul’s new creation motif belongs to that family of passages whose foundational metaphor is the movement from death to life, and 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 6:15 should not be treated in isolation from this crucial soteriological matrix. New creation in both letters functions as an aspect of Paul’s pneumatology. For Paul, the Spirit is a personal being who guides, teaches, etc. If one describes kainh\ kti/sij in Galatians and 2 Corinthians not so much in terms of an ontological transformation, but in terms of a pneumatological transformation, it is nevertheless appropriate to characterize new creation as an existential change or transformation.

There is an eschatological aspect of new creation that first becomes visible in connections to the Old Testament. The association of the Age to come with an outpouring of God’s Spirit is a familiar theme in Israel’s prophetic traditions (Joel 3:1-2). The eschatological Spirit was not only associated with the Age to come generally, but also with an individual particularly, who would be the bearer of the Spirit in a unique way (Isa 11:1-16; 42:1-9).

**Reflecting the familiar Pauline tension between the already and the not yet, the problem is solved where the problem began, in the human heart, while the created order waits in eager expectation of the full consummation of God’s redemptive plan (Rom 8.18-25).**

**Summary**

Paul’s experience with Scripture is that of a devout Jew and to understand Paul we have to argue within the Jewish paradigm of hermeneutics. Paul seems to presuppose that his readers know Scripture too and while building his exposition of the new creation on Biblical creation narratives he felt no need to explain it in detail. His Christ-typology works like a reverse application of the Adam-typology of Gen 1-3.

The Old Testament based tradition alone does not explain the ideas developed by Paul, his epistles contain a clear autobiographical element. He builds his case on his encounter with Christ that forced him to abandon his “former way of life in Judaism”. It appeared to have been a transformative encounter of pivotal significance. Paul recognised that it is only total fellowship in Christ, a shared destiny with him that matters and effects changes in human life. Paul expresses his personal commitment to Christ vividly by saying that he now feels himself as having been crucified with Christ.

On this basis it is understandable why terms like transformation, metamorphosis, becoming another, becoming “a new man”, and “new creation,” are but a small sampling of expressions Paul used in his hermeneutical exposition of the new creation. In his first thesis, Luther underlined the importance of daily repentance and demonstrated a good use of Paul’s doctrine of the new creation.

**The metaphor of likeness becomes a central characteristic of the direction of the transformation.** Through baptism human persons will certainly be united with Christ in a death like his, and after that in a resurrection like his*.* It follows from this metaphor that the transformation is in fact the re-creative work of God’s Spirit, which effects transformation into the image of Christ. **Being in Christ is the sphere where transformation into new creation takes place.**

The new creation applies to the community as well as to the individual. Participation in Christ is corporate and the renewed image of Christ in individual human beings means the appearance of the new humanity who lives by the Spirit and walks by the Spirit.

According to 1Cor 8:6, all things are through Christ and thus the new creation is not only the transformation of humans into the image of Christ. **Paul finalises his hermeneutical construction in Rom 8:29-30 with the hope for a change for the whole creation.** Since the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God, these children of God are expected to act as stewards and deacons, gardeners and gamekeepers of creation.

From the eschatological point of view, new creation is not easy to explain. On one hand, on an individual and ecclesial basis, the outer nature of humans is wasting away. At the same time the inner nature—new creation—is being renewed day by day. Repent – Luther might say! Repentance is an attitude open for change to what is good, and the new creation is also an ongoing process within the present Age.

Paul looked at the new creation through Christ as the lens. Christ is the agent of the new creation and thus the source of Paul’s views on the new creation. New creation refers to the new inner dynamic of the Spirit who has given impetus to the process of restoring the *imago dei* marred by Adam’s sin. This process is not individual alone but also a corporeal event.