



THE  
New Heaven  
AND  
New Earth

*An Interdisciplinary Comparison between  
Jürgen Moltmann, Karl Rahner, and Gregory Beale*

Raymond R. Hausoul

*foreword by Gijsbert van den Brink*

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RAYMOND R. HAUSOUL

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But, as it is written,  
“What no eye has seen,  
nor ear heard,  
nor the heart of man imagined,  
what God has prepared  
for those who love him.”

—1 CORINTHIANS 2:9



# Contents

<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xi
<i>Foreword by Gijsbert van den Brink</i>	xiii
<i>Abstract and summary</i>	xv
1 Introduction and methodology	1
2 Rahner, Moltmann, and Beale on the dialogue between ST and BT	29
3 Karl Rahner's concept on the new heaven and new earth	52
4 Jürgen Moltmann's concept on the new heaven and new earth	96
5 Gregory Beale's perspective on the new heaven and new earth	136
6 Comparison and enrichment	185
7 Conclusion	290
<i>Bibliography</i>	307
<i>Subject Index</i>	337
<i>Author Index</i>	339
<i>Ancient Document Index</i>	343



## Preface

While I was writing my master's thesis on the message of the land of Canaan in 2013, my attention was drawn to the theme of the new creation. If the former Canaan was potentially the prototype of the coming new heaven and the new earth, it was exciting to discover how this theme of the renewal of the earth evolved in the Bible. Personal preliminary studies on this theme showed me, however, that it was mainly from the field of Biblical Theology (BT) that the theme of the new heaven and new earth was written. The theme itself was treated as a stepmother in Systematic Theology (ST). This brought me to the question of whether it was possible to compare some eschatological concepts from both fields to get a clearer view of the Christian doctrine about the new heaven and the new earth.

I realized several times during my research on the new heaven and the new earth that I stand like a dwarf on the shoulders of giants. In addition to the large number of publications that I worked through, I think of those who motivated me and believed in my capacities for this project. First of all, I would like to thank my promoter, from Systematic Theology, Prof. Dr. Jan Hoek, and my co-supervisor, from Biblical Theology, Prof. Dr. Mart-Jan Paul. In many conversations with them, I was able to taste on a modest scale the richness of an interdisciplinary comparison.

I would also like to thank the many loyal friends who supported the publication of this edition. God knows you and may he also fulfill the desires and needs of your hearts. A word of thanks goes to Jacques Rommel and Kevin Rigolle because both supported me linguistically. Finally, I am indefinitely indebted to my dear wife Belinda and my sons Adriël and Ilja, who often had to miss their father in sports games because I wanted to work on “the new heaven and new earth” again. This work is dedicated to them.

Ypres, Summer 2019  
Raymond R. Hausoul



## Abbreviations

BT	Biblical Theology
Gr.	Greek
Hebr.	Hebrew
LXX	Septuagint
NT	New Testament
NTBT	Beale, Gregory K. <i>A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New</i> . Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011.
OT	Old Testament
ST	Systematic Theology



## Foreword

This study by the young Belgian theologian Raymond Hausoul operates in a field that for a long time was somewhat in the background of Christian theological reflection, but which has rightly received more attention in recent decades, namely the so-called cosmic eschatology. The writer is concerned with the future of the earth and even of the universe. Or in biblical language: with the new heaven and the new earth. How can we address this notion in a theologically responsible way today? Is there only discontinuity with the here and now, or is there also continuity and perhaps even a restart of earthly life as we know it today? Partly in the light of contemporary ecological problems, this is an appropriate theme. In his detailed and comprehensive research, Raymond Hausoul searches for sustainable answers to the many questions that arise here, which leads to an essential and highly instructive study.

His studies go back to a successfully defended PhD dissertation at the *Evangelische Theologische Faculteit* in Leuven (Belgium). As a result, the author is taking his departure point in the representations of the new creation by two well-known European systematic theologians and a slightly lesser-known American biblical theologian, Karl Rahner, Jürgen Moltmann, and Gregory Beale, respectively. Mainly the choice for the last one is surprising, but it is perfectly justifiable. Gregory Beale is a biblical theologian of the Reformed tradition, who pays great attention to eschatological themes in his work and is therefore influential even outside his circle. The fact that, unlike Moltmann and Rahner, he rejects the historical-critical approach makes the comparative investigation both more complex and more exciting.

Thus, on the one hand, Raymond Hausoul has an intrinsic interest in cosmic eschatology—an interest that is also evident in his study of God's future for the animals (*Gods toekomst voor dieren—God's future for animals*, 2019) that has so far not been translated into English. On the other hand, he also has a more methodical aim. He has begun to relaunch the conversation between biblical scholars and systematic theologians, which is often hindered by far-reaching specialization, and explores where it can lead.

Raymond Hausoul also briefly includes in his reflections the debate on the relationship between Christian eschatology and contemporary scientific cosmology. This is of great significance for the viability and persuasiveness of systematic theological discourse. The Christian narrative is a story of hope and expectation amid secular

## FOREWORD

narratives about an imminent *Big Rip* or *Big Chill* of our solar system. However, in order not to leave it unreal and ethereal, this story needs to be critically-constructively linked to these existing science-fed narratives. Just as Reformed theology today will have to relate to influential biological theories such as the neo-Darwinian synthesis, it will also have to connect to leading cosmological theories that define the public debate. This book takes this aspiration seriously.

From the analyses of Karl Rahner, Jürgen Moltmann, and Gregory Beale as from their mutual comparison, this book argues that the new creation should be thought of as a glorification and perfection of the original creation. There is thus no annihilation and novel creation to be expected, because in the midst of break-up and discontinuity there will also be continuity. This conclusion is shared by many who have dealt with this subject. But the author concretizes it in a whole number of detailed observations that challenge systematic theology to process biblical material more adequately and, conversely, challenge biblical theology to become aware of its often hidden dogmatic assumptions. This raises some questions for Moltmann and Rahner because of the role that extra-biblical concepts play in their thinking (e.g., the *zimzum* idea in Moltmann and the way evolutionary theories are processed in Rahner). However, questions are also asked in the direction of Beale, primarily because of his non-reflected anthropocentrism.

Although Raymond Hausoul doesn't even mention it that way in this publication, I find it interesting that he also—and maybe even especially?—is bridging the gap between an orthodox reformed approach (represented here by Beale) and the more *mainstream* Christian theology we find in Moltmann and Rahner. Raymond Hausoul shows that both theological traditions have something to say to each other, and in doing so, overcomes caricatures that are quite common. Moreover, in his final chapter, he zooms out and compares his conclusions to treatments of the new heaven and the new earth in ten recent dogmatic studies from various parts of the (Western) world. This tour shows that there is still some work to be done in the field of cosmic eschatology. In this way, Raymond Hausoul's study stimulates and challenges us to take up this work, following up on his fascinating explorations in this book.

GIJSBERT VAN DEN BRINK  
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## Abstract and summary

In theology, there is a growing appreciation for the interdisciplinary conversation. This dissertation examines how the systematic-theological representations of the new heaven and earth of Rahner and Moltmann can be critically compared with the biblical-theological perspective of Beale on this matter in a methodically responsible way. It will explore in an exemplary way what an interdisciplinary comparison between experts in Systematic Theology (ST) and Biblical Theology (BT) can yield in the theological discourse of the new heaven and the new earth. It reveals that Beale's BT makes unconscious hermeneutical choices in its research and that Rahner's and Moltmann's ST common uses biblical "proof texts," without adequately taking the biblical context into account. Furthermore, it becomes constantly visible how both disciplines complement, challenge, and encourage each other on micro- and macro-level. Chapter 7 closes the inquiry of this dissertation with a structured conclusion about the methodical observations in the interdisciplinary comparison and the resulting value of this research.

### 1 INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Today there is a growing interest in the interdisciplinary dialogue between academic disciplines. In theology, this desire relates to the dialogue between Systematic Theology (ST) and Biblical Theology (BT). However, within academic publications, an exemplary development of how the methodological gap between ST and BT can be bridged remains. Systematic theologians and biblical theologians write individual chapters in common publications, with no attempt to bridge this gap and carry a visible dialogue with each other in these. An inquiry into a possible comparison between experts in ST and BT that is methodologically responsible can be a significant contribution to addressing this gap.

This dissertation provides a new contribution to this by examining how, through a critical interdisciplinary comparison, the systematic-theological representations of Rahner and Moltmann on the new heaven and new earth can interact with the biblical-theological perspectives of Beale. It will so serve as an exemplary exploration of what a comparison between both theological disciplines can bring to the theological topic of the new heaven and new earth. In addition, this dissertation proposes a substantial

contribution to the academic inventory of the cosmic eschatology of Rahner, Moltmann, and Beale in regard to the new heaven and earth. From the research question, the dissertation is structured as follows:

Chapter 1 contextualizes the research question of the dissertation, offers an overview of recent publications on the subject and includes a justification of methodology and assumptions. Chapter 2 investigates how Rahner, Moltmann, and Beale estimate an interdisciplinary conversation between ST and BT. The individuality of these academic disciplines and the enrichments and dangers of a dialogue between the ST and BT are discussed. Chapters 3 to 5 contain a hermeneutical-theological analysis of Rahner's, Moltmann's, and Beale's reflections on the new heaven and the new earth. In addition to their differences in approach and execution, the core elements of the three theologians in their own approach to the subject are investigated. Chapter 6 examines how a critical interdisciplinary comparison between Rahner's, Moltmann's, and Beale's eschatology can be methodically conducted in a responsible way. From the chosen methodology therein, a first critical comparison is held on hermeneutical choices which the interlocutors make. After this, a second comparison is undertaken which focuses on the substantive choices Rahner, Moltmann, and Beale make in their talk about the new heaven and earth. This visualizes to which extent an interaction between ST and BT can be of value in the theological debate about the new heaven and earth. In chapter 7, the dissertation will be closed with a conclusion about the methodical observations in the interdisciplinary comparison and the resulting added value.

## **2 RAHNER, MOLTMANN, AND BEALE ON DIALOGUE BETWEEN ST AND BT**

Chapter 2 presents the attitudes of Rahner, Moltmann, and Beale facing an interdisciplinary conversation with the other field presented. This chapter shows their individual attitudes towards this and mentions the enrichments and dangers they a priori observe in a dialogue between ST and BT. The chapter demonstrates that all three theologians are in favor of such a dialogue when it is developed on an equal level. Their own enrichments, which they see in the dialogue between ST and BT, can be summarized as follows: the dialogue between ST and BT offers (1) inspiration by new insights; (2) awareness of one's own presuppositions; (3) enhancements from the overall theological picture; (4) relevance of the Bible and the Christian faith. Although Rahner, Moltmann, and Beale place different accents in their objectives of ST and BT, they agree both that ST deals with subjects from the Christian creed and social questions thereabout, while the BT describes the biblical storyline. It will also be demonstrated that for all of them, the Bible is a basic source in the reflection about faith in the dialogue between BT and ST. On the question of the authority of the Bible, they think differently.

### 3 KARL RAHNER'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH

Chapter 3 offers a new contribution to the study of Rahner's eschatology by analyzing and profoundly systematizing Rahner's thoughts on cosmic eschatology. The investigation into this shows how Rahner stresses in his hermeneutical principles that the future is only realized by God's absolute intervention. From this, responsible discourse on eschatology is only possible if it departs from the salvation which has already been achieved by Christ. For Rahner, the glorified and resurrected Christ constitutes the objective beginning of the new creation.

In his reflections on the new creation and on the interpretation of the biblical data about this, Rahner remains reluctant. At the same time, he emphasizes that the format and the content of the biblical imagery should not be separated. In his reflection on matter, Rahner presents the tangible and intangible as an inseparable unity. The history of the cosmos is therefore inextricably linked with the history of mankind. In Rahner's elaborations of this, Christ's resurrection stands in the midst and is very important when it comes to the reflection of the future resurrection. Christ's resurrected body is a unique and radical transformation of his crucified body. From this paradigm, Rahner speaks about the ultimate future resurrection of the body that humanity will receive. But he also insists that this does not mean that the resurrected body consists of the same identical atomic matter as the crucified body. With regard to time, Rahner sees eternity as the fruit of the personal history of human beings. Eternity as an infinite continuation of time or as an absence of time is rejected by him. Finally, Rahner stresses in his theocentric perspective on the new creation that in the *visio beatifica* the knowing of God remains an ongoing process in which the Creator and his creation will pervade each other in the same way as God's spirit permeates the Christian today.

### 4 JÜRGEN MOLTMANN'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH

Chapter 4 analyzes Moltmann's eschatology on the new heaven and earth. This chapter is unique in its comprehensiveness. In Moltmann's theology, eschatology stands in a central middle and cosmic eschatology is leading in this. The various hermeneutical principles that determine Moltmann's eschatology are analyzed and systematized in this chapter. It explains how Moltmann's eschatology is christologically determined. The crucifixion and resurrection of Christ are, according to Moltmann, related to the discontinuity and continuity between this creation and the new creation. The resurrection of Christ thereby anticipates what will take place between the present and the eschatological horizon. The doctrines of salvation and of creation are closely

connected with this horizon. Out of this, history can be distinguished in three phases: *creatio originalis*, *creatio continua*, and *creatio nova*.

With regard to time and space, Moltmann says that God has confined himself to form a *nihilum*, in which he created the world. This *nihilum* makes creation imperfect and points to the future redemption. Despite recognizing positively that earthly historical time (*chronos*) causes the *creatio originalis* to move to the *creatio nova*, he emphasizes the negativity of *chronos* because it is connected with the *nihilum*. Therefore, in the new creation, eonic cycle time will exist, which never perishes and glorifies all times throughout history. Also, on space (*topos*), Moltmann thinks both positively and negatively. On the one hand, space offers creation protection, but on the other hand, it makes a distance between creation and Creator. In the new heaven and earth, that distance disappears and God pervades all living space (*perichoresis*).

In his view on matter, Moltmann sees in Christ's Incarnation and resurrection a testimony to the redemption and renewal of the material. The matter of God's whole creation will be renewed and completed in the eschatological moment. The creation will be then changed into an eternal dwelling place for the triune God and will participate eternally in the trinitarian life. Moltmann recognizes various anticipations during this *creatio continuum* on the coming new creation. These are images and metaphors which give us an idea of the new heaven and earth. They bring two facets forward: the absence of the current negativity and the presence or reminder of the current positivity.

## 5 GREGORY BEALE'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH

Chapter 5 analyzes Beale's perspective on the new heaven and earth. Because this has not yet been comprehensively done, this chapter constitutes a first scientific contribution to Beale's eschatology of the new creation. First, it examines the hermeneutical principles in Beale's BT. His methodical form and his focus on the biblical storyline from protology to eschatology are discussed. After this, it looks at the substantive themes that empower Beale's BT. Central to this, Beale has the idea that (1) the story of creation reveals God's plan for this creation, (2) Eden is the prototype of God's new creation, and (3) the history of salvation is continuously accompanied by references to this beginning. Beale also emphasizes that Christ's resurrection constitutes the beginning of God's new creation in Christ. From this, Beale concludes that the Christian has already been spiritually resurrected in the life of the new creation. The physical resurrection thereby remains outstanding. This will happen at Christ's second coming. For that moment, the Spirit is preparing Christians as first fruits. A glimpse of that blessed future can be seen in the creation story of Genesis when it testifies of God walking on earth and of the peace that humanity in the new creation is allowed to receive.

## 6 CRITICAL COMPARISON

Chapter 6 provides a critical interdisciplinary comparison between Rahner's, Moltmann's, and Beale's theological speaking on the new heaven and the new earth. This answers the research question of this dissertation. In the beginning, it reminds the reader of the openness for dialogue between ST and BT, which the three theologians recognize. From there, it establishes a comprehensive methodology for the interdisciplinary comparison that this chapter presents. In a hermeneutical and substantive critical comparison, it will examine to what extent the BT or ST of the respective theologians can have any significance for the other in talking about the new heaven and the new earth. This hermeneutical interaction reveals how Beale's BT unconsciously takes some important decisions from ST when it comes to the realization of the future. It also shows that Rahner's distinction between "eschatology" and "apocalypse," and his exegesis of Mark 13 is inaccurate. In addition, all three theologians complement each other well in their perspective on protology and eschatology. They positively challenge each other to reflect critically on the origins of evil, and on the permanent impact evil has on God's original creation. Further, both systematic theologians stimulate in their theological perspectives Beale's BT to an examination of the biblical images which are connected with the topic of cosmic eschatology, and they also request from his BT a theological investigation of the resurrection stories of Jesus Christ.

After the hermeneutical comparison, the substantive comparison reveals how the spiritual renewal, which Beale's BT stresses, and the physical renewal, which Rahner and Moltmann both emphasize in their ST, can be brought together. This ensures that a strict separation between the tangible and intangible aspects of the resurrection is avoided. It also shows the balance which is necessary between the continuity and discontinuity of this creation and new creation. Also, Moltmann's and Beale's contributions about space are brought in juxtaposition so that they complement and challenge each other. This interdisciplinary comparison can potentially result in a further investigation of the contrasts and similarities in the biblical imagery about the new heaven and earth. Also, they may be further examined in BT to illustrate how God's plan for this creation is related to his own being. Finally, the substantive comparison brings the question of the meaning and implication of certain biblical words for time forward. This interdisciplinary investigation, therefore, shows that both the ST and BT should be aware that their reflection on time and eternity is often more affected by an extra-biblical philosophy than by the Bible itself.

## 7 CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this dissertation brings the methodical observations in the interdisciplinary comparison to our attention. Of significance is the awareness of (1) the significance of the theological approach which the conversation partner applies, (2)

the own hermeneutical grid, (3) the uniqueness and equality of both disciplines, and (4) on their own contributions to theology. The interdisciplinary comparison is from this perspective, valuable. It makes both disciplines aware of their presuppositions and shows how both are related to the complete field of theology. ST and BT are in fact, an integral part of the same whole. Although both operate in a different way within theology, they search for the same reliable, authentic Christian theology.

This chapter speaks also of the significance of the interdisciplinary comparison on the theme of the new heaven and earth. In addition to the aforementioned hermeneutical awareness, it will be shown that this interdisciplinary investigation between experts on ST and BT about the new creation does not have to focus primarily on providing concise “proof texts,” but should be seen in a mutual exchange of wider theological themes, which recommends new sub and main themes. From this perspective, the dialogue between the ST of Rahner and Moltmann on the new heaven and earth, and the BT of Beale on the same topic, has an added value for both disciplines. In the midst of this dissertation stands thereby the essential question of continuity and discontinuity between this creation and the new creation. We conclude from the separate analyses of Rahner, Moltmann, and Beale, as from the interdisciplinary comparison between them that the new creation is not a *restitutio in integrum* or a *renovatio mundi* (discontinuity). Rather, the new heaven and the new earth represent a change, glorification, and completion of the original first heaven and earth which God created. There is both a fundamental continuity and a radical discontinuity between the current life in Christ today and the future life in God in the new creation. So the future involves both a radical break with a subsequent *novum* and a process-based transformation and renovation, which transcends our thinking. However, the eschatological perspective on the ultimate arrival of the triune God to this creation urges us to take God’s creation seriously. From the results of this research, there are still major challenges in the dialogue between ST and BT on the topic of the new heaven and earth. But at the same time, the Christian testimony may continue to witness that God, for his creation, offers not a hopeless end, but rather an endless hope.

# 1

## Introduction and methodology

### 1.1 PURPOSE OF THE INVESTIGATION

This dissertation investigates how two systematic-theological designs on eschatology and a biblical-theological design can be of significance for theological discussion about the new heaven and the new earth. The concrete research question is:

How can comparison between Karl Rahner's and Jürgen Moltmann's systematic theological designs on eschatology and Gregory Beale's biblical-theological design be of significance in a theological dialogue concerning the new heaven and the new earth?

In literature, the importance of such an interdisciplinary dialogue between representatives from the discipline of ST and that of the BT has already been mentioned several times (cf. §1.2.4).<sup>1</sup> To ascertain its relevance, it is important to compare the designs of different professional experts from theological disciplines. This dissertation does not offer an independent systematic-theological or biblical-theological design concerning the new heaven and new earth. To begin with, this seems too pretentious and, moreover, it would ignore the core of the research question, which is to get a closer look at the way interaction between well-known designs on the part of ST and BT take shape, as well as which potentials of an interdisciplinary dialogue are as yet unused.

In this thesis, Rahner, Moltmann, and Beale are chosen, and their different theological designs are compared. Through this comparison, systematic-theological and biblical-thematic reflections on the new creation can be linked. In this way, a careful comparison reveals how an interdisciplinary comparison can increase the

1. Vanhoozer, "Theology of the New Testament," 28; Wilkinson, *Eschatology*, 24–26, 54–57; Mühl-ling, *Grundinformation*, 305–14; Turner and Green, "New Testament," 1–22; Goldingay, "Biblical Narrative," 123–42; O'Collins and Kendall, *Bible for Theology*, 2; Mildenerger, *Prolegomena*.

understanding of three separate designs from different denominational, cultural, and disciplinary areas, and at the same time shows how each design is limited and how a comparison can lead to enrichment on the subject of the new heaven and the new earth.

## 1.2 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BT AND ST

In the past, a strict separation between BT and ST has often been made.<sup>2</sup> The Dutch theologian Kees van der Kooi writes:

They are households next to each other, while at most in the kitchen, the house-mates look over a shoulder with surprise at what the other brews. . . . Most practitioners of dogmatism are already happy when they have some overview of their own field. . . . A simple appeal to exegetical results and biblical theology, as it seemed to be for former generations, seems to be definitely over.<sup>3</sup>

As a result, the fields of BT and ST have little in common with each other. But we also discover in our society that there is an appreciation for the interdisciplinary discussion.<sup>4</sup> This also has its influence on the dialogue between BT and ST. As a result of the demand for a responsible interdisciplinary dialogue, the desire to bridge the gap between ST and BT has therefore grown over the past decades. Kevin Vanhoozer already stated in 2014:

There are encouraging signs that the two disciplines, after generations of wandering in the wilderness in isolation from one another, are each approaching the Promised Land of interdisciplinary partnership.<sup>5</sup>

This will lead both disciplines to a cycle of mutual influence and enrichment. The same thought can be found with Markus Mühling when he pleads for more interaction between BT and ST in his reflection on the new creation.<sup>6</sup> This motivates the

2. See detailed: Den Hertog and van der Kooi, *Tussen leer en lezen*; Van der Kooi, "Van binnenuit," 30–49. See for further definition and introduction in these professional fields: Klink and Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology*; Barr, *Concept*, 1–17; Van den Brink and van der Kooi, *Dogmatiek*, 28–32; Guarino, *Foundations*; Kamphuis, "Systematische theologie," 59–71; Fischer, *Protestantische Theologie*; Gunton, "Historical and Systematic Theology," 3–20.

3. Van der Kooi, "Van binnenuit," 32: "Het zijn huishoudingen naast elkaar, terwijl de huisgenoten hoogstens in de keuken over een schouder met bevreemding toekijken wat de ander brouwt . . . [D]e meeste beoefenaren van de dogmatiek zijn al blij wanneer ze enigszins het eigen veld overzien. . . . Een eenvoudig beroep op exegetische resultaten en bijbelse theologie, zoals dat voor vroegere generaties leek te zijn weggelegd, lijkt definitief voorbij." See also, Van den Brink and van der Kooi, *Dogmatiek*, 491–92.

4. Repko et al., *Introduction*, 3–22, 63–85; Schmidt, "Box," 39–49; Moran, *Interdisciplinarity*, 3–12, 188–92.

5. Vanhoozer, "Theology of the New Testament," 28. Cf. Green, "Scripture and Theology," 23–43; Goldingay, "Biblical Narrative," 123–42; Nineham, *Use and Abuse*, 214–32.

6. Mühling, *Grundinformation*, 305–14. See also, Wilkinson, *Eschatology*, 24–26, 54–57.

research to compare two systematic-theological theologians and a biblical theologian and to find out what the added value of this comparison may be.

The interdisciplinary discussion involves two different disciplines that enter into dialogue with each other. This societal tendency is a reaction to a reduced approach of the individual sciences. On the one hand, a reduction can cause one's own professional research to deepen and, on the other hand, can cause the research to overlook contextual elements and underestimate the complexity of the subject.<sup>7</sup>

In this dissertation, an interdisciplinary comparison is chosen between two theologians from the ST field and one theologian from that of the BT. Such a comparison between ST and BT is not new (see §1.5). Therefore, the synopsis below provides an overview of the relationship between ST and BT in Western theology.

### 1.2.1 General developments

What in Western theology today has been divided into ST and BT belonged together until the seventeenth century.<sup>8</sup> Judaism and Christianity traditionally used the Bible in the reflection on religious subjects. Despite the differences in hermeneutical association with the Bible, there was a dialogue between biblical exegesis and Christian faith. While theology held on to this dialogue globally, German universities in the Enlightenment opted for a separation between the two.<sup>9</sup> In the context of this separation, Jürgen Moltmann and Karl Rahner developed their theology. Furthermore, the growing gap between biblical sciences and systematic theology also influenced American theology in the middle of the twentieth century, within the context in which Gregory Beale found himself. A more detailed description of the manner in which the separation between BT and ST took place is of importance for a better understanding of the positions of the three theologians to whom our investigation is addressed. That is why we give brief attention to this development in the next section.

### 1.2.2 The time after the Enlightenment

During the Enlightenment, a shift occurred within German academic theology in the use of the Bible within ST. Through the strong emphasis on the intellect, an increasing tension arose between faith and reason.<sup>10</sup> Systematic theology, which set the tone at theological faculties, often wanted to interpret the Bible from certain philosophical frameworks. In contrast to this rationalistic approach, others insisted on the traditional method of relating Christian faith to biblical texts as authentication (*dicta*

7. See for theology, Fredericks, "Religious Studies," 161–74.

8. See detailed, Zwiep, *Tussen tekst en lezer*, 2:2–268; Hauser and Watson, *History of Interpretation (Medieval-Reformation)*; Bray, "Church Fathers," 23–40.

9. Stylianopoulos, "Biblical," 555–57.

10. Kraus, *Biblische Theologie*; Merk, *Biblische Theologie*.

*probantia*). So, the Bible was used to demonstrate the super-temporal truths of one's own systematic-theological positions.<sup>11</sup>

This maintenance of the Bible in ST caused a rivalry between those above rationalistic and traditional approaches. Systematic theologians wanted to free dogmatics from the ties of confessionalism, and biblical scholars wanted to get rid of every dogmatic harness. The Bible could not be a paper papal for ST and ST should not be a dictatorship for the interpretation of the Bible. Around the year 1745, the need for privatization of the professional disciplines with their methodical distinction became apparent in German theology.<sup>12</sup> A striking point in this development was the inaugural speech of Johann Gabler (1753–1826) *Oratio de justo discrimine theologiae biblicae et dogmaticae regundisque recte utriusque finibus*, held on 30 March 1787 at the University of Altdorf. Gabler proposed to separate biblical exegesis and Christian faith from each other. This was the birth-hour of biblical theology (BT). Incidentally, Gabler was not the first to introduce a division between biblical exegesis and Christian faith. His contribution was mainly that he made a methodical distinction between the two, which officially created the field of BT and the separated field of ST.<sup>13</sup>

Gabler considered BT as a historical-descriptive discipline that reconstructed what the biblical writers meant to say at the time and ST as a didactic-normative discipline that addressed the question of the relevance of faith. Gabler's vision turned out to be ground-breaking, with the result that from then on ST in Western Europe was mainly concerned with the Christian faith tradition, in consultation with contemporary philosophy. In distinction, BT dealt with the biblical testimony. In Gabler's performance, she adopted the contours of the historiography of religion and wanted to describe historically-objectively what faith meant at the time.<sup>14</sup>

### 1.2.3 Developments up to the twenty-first century

In the two centuries that followed, rational Enlightenment thinking would not only characterize the theology of German universities.<sup>15</sup> This way of thinking also influenced Anglo-Saxon countries. For example, Walter Brueggemann mentions the later biblical-theological works of the Germans Walther Eichrodt and Gerhard von Rad.<sup>16</sup>

11. See for example, Hülsemann, *Vindiciae Sanctae*; Schmidt, *Collegium Biblicum*.

12. Den Hertog and van der Kooi, "Problemen op tafel," 11; Kraus, *Biblische Theologie*, 17; Merk, *Biblische Theologie*, 20.

13. Gabler, *Kleine theologische Schriften*, II:179–198. He followed strongly, Zachariae, *Biblischer Theologie*. See detailed, Niebuhr and Böttrich, *Gabler*; Sandys-Wunsch and Eldredge, "Gabler," 133–158 (esp. 150).

14. Gabler, "Oration," 495–96.

15. For a historical overview see, Steinberg, "Korte geschiedenis," 21–49; Rosner, "Biblical Theology," 3–11.

16. Brueggemann, *Theology*, xv; Von Rad, *Theologie*; Eichrodt, *Theologie 1: Gott und Volk*.

As was to be expected, the sharp separation between ST and BT gradually caused an increasing distance between these two disciplines. A fruitful exchange was often lacking. In the twentieth century, the artificial separation that Johann Gabler made between a prescriptive ST and a descriptive historically-objective BT was for many the core problem of this lack of exchange.<sup>17</sup> The objective neutrality that the BT received as a label turned out to be a myth. Also, within the field of BT scholars read the texts from their own context, as recipients and not as senders. There is no purely objective exegesis that can be considered completely neutral and value-free. Objective neutrality in BT, which works purely historically-descriptive, turns out to be impossible. The explanation of what a text meant is colored by the presuppositions of the scholar in the present.<sup>18</sup>

This is reflected in the pluralism of concepts that exist within BT. James Barr and Gerhard Hasel map out the most important concepts within BT and provide a critical reflection on their methodical-hermeneutical choices.<sup>19</sup> These concepts can be divided into three main paradigms: (1) a systematic approach, (2) a historical approach, and (3) a canonical literary approach.<sup>20</sup> The systematic approach usually works with a theological center and often places questions from ST in the foreground of BT.<sup>21</sup> The historical approach often concentrates on the question of how the Israelite religion and the biblical texts originated from a historical-critical analysis.<sup>22</sup> The literary-canonical approach raises the question of how literary stylistic tools can be used to communicate the testimony of OT and NT and attaches importance to the Bible as a canonical collection of equivalent books.<sup>23</sup> The biblical theologian will, in describing the testimony of the OT and NT, choose one of these paradigms and also make his choices in the field of selection, delimitation, accentuation, and ranking.<sup>24</sup> A further distinction between these different concepts within BT is the development of both a historical-critical and a historical-canonical analysis of the BT. While the historical-critical approach focuses primarily on the historical development of religions and the evolutionary development of their teachings, the historical-canonical approach rather accepts the testimony of the Bible as authentic. In both cases, it concerns choices in methodology.<sup>25</sup>

17. Steinberg, "Korte geschiedenis," 24; Barr, *Concept*, 6, 15; Brueggemann, *Theology*, 13-15; Hasel, "Relationship," 113-14; Gaffin, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," 283.

18. Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*; Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine*, 202-3; Bultmann, "Voraussetzungslose Exegese," 149; Gaffin, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," 283; Warfield, "The Idea of Systematic Theology," 65-68, 73-74.

19. Barr, *Concept*; Hasel, *Theology*.

20. Steinberg, "Korte geschiedenis," 29-48; *Die Ketuvim*, 20-57; Rendtorff, *Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 1-4.

21. For example, Vriezen, *Hoofdlijnen*; Eichrodt, *Theologie 1: Gott und Volk; Theologie 2: Gott und Welt; Theologie 3: Gott und Mensch*; Köhler, *Theologie*.

22. For example, Gerstenberger, *Theologies*; Von Rad, *Theologie*. For a historical perspective based on a more historical-canonical approach, see Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*; Kaiser, *Theology*.

23. For example, Koorevaar and Paul, *Theologie*; Rendtorff, *Canonical Hebrew Bible*.

24. Steinberg, "Korte geschiedenis," 29.

25. Brueggemann, *Theology*, 13.

The same will be the case with different systematic-theological designs. Because ST has a less fixed method than BT, there is a greater variety of methods available.<sup>26</sup> Traditionally, ST divides itself into the following main paradigms: (1) kerygmatic-confessional approaches, (2) philosophical-hermeneutical approaches, and (3) more current-free approaches.<sup>27</sup> The kerygmatic-confessional approach offers an analytical-systematic deepening of the articles of faith and wants to articulate, clarify, and proclaim the Christian creed. The philosophical-hermeneutical approach responds to the contemporary thinking climate and its specific questions to Christian doctrine. It often gives an apologetic answer.<sup>28</sup> In this approach, there is also the weak or deconstructivist theology that distances itself from all metaphysics and emphasizes the human interpretation, in which the “being” is explained, and the radical theology that states that “being” precedes our understanding, and therefore is more than just interpretation, even if it is only interpreted accessible.<sup>29</sup> The more current-free approaches came to the forefront from the nineteenth century through the increasing specialization within ST and the practice of ST as an end in itself with its issues.<sup>30</sup>

For a study that wants to compare designs from the two disciplines of ST and BT, it is important to take into account the above variations. A comparison of a systematic-theological design with a BT historical-thematic design will be different from a comparison of a systematic-theological design with a BT literary-canonical design. In a confrontation with the differences, the theologian’s own determination also comes into sharp focus. Here, hermeneutical questions come to the forefront. In this dissertation, we must take these presuppositions into account. Also, it will become apparent in this writing that Rahner is mainly in the philosophical-hermeneutical approach, that Moltmann does not want to limit himself to one concept of ST, and Beale uses his BT mainly from a systematic-historical paradigm.

#### 1.2.4 Importance of a dialogue

It was gradually confirmed that both ST and BT are not completely neutral. Human theories are always influenced by their presuppositions. Ludwig Wittgenstein and Hans-Georg Gadamer separately demonstrated, from their philosophy, that no one can be fully objectively disconnected from their own context, i.e., their tradition, culture,

26. Tillich, *Systematic Theology 1*, 34; Van den Brink and van der Kooi, *Dogmatiek*, 30. See for a historical overview of the developments within ST, Webster, “Introduction,” 3–6; McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 143–44; Van Genderen and Velema, *Dogmatiek*, 29–33; Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie 1*, 27–28; Weber, *Grundlagen*, 1:87–181; Wentsel, *De openbaring (ST2)*, 2:407–624.

27. Webster, “Introduction,” 9–10; Muis, “Dogmatiek,” 84–86; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 21–23.

28. Tillich, *Systematic Theology 1*, 30–31, 35–38.

29. Schaafsma et al., “Vervreemding,” 13–16, 19–22.

30. Van den Brink and van der Kooi, *Dogmatiek*, 26; Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 656; Berkhof, *Christelijk Geloof*, 88. See for an overview, Ford and Muers, *Modern Theologians*; Moltmann, *Erfahrungen*, 171–259.

class, sex, history, etc.<sup>31</sup> Every reading of a text is framed in a confessional and contextual way. We read the Bible from our own experiences, expectations, and assumptions. Even in translating the Bible, one's theology plays a role in the choices we make.<sup>32</sup> Several researchers approach a text in different ways: historical-critical, historical-canonical, literary, symbolic, depth-psychological, societal-critical, feminist, etc.

This realization does not mean that humankind is surrendered to absolute arbitrariness and that universal statements can no longer be made. Rather, the contextual definition of the research makes it clear that every theological statement has its own "grammar" and is subjectively determined.<sup>33</sup> The theologian cannot be fully objectified and, as a reader, remains involved in the interpretation process with his subjective input. From this, theologians like Stephen Fowl and Christopher Spinks conclude that the Bible has no definite meaning, but that it unfolds continuously in the translation.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, Arie Zwiep calls for vigilance against postmodern relativism that leaves the question of truth unanswerable and leaves no room for revelation.<sup>35</sup> The abandonment of any claim to truth would go beyond what is customary in modern scientific theory. Krzysztof Burdzy and Peter Novick thus point out that, even in modern theology, the realization that the practice of science is paradigm dependent is no reason to say that modern science is at the mercy of absolute arbitrariness.<sup>36</sup>

If there are different contextual approaches next to each other, this does not mean that the Bible text has been deprived of its original meaning. It is enriching when people from different cultures and situations read the same biblical story. While individual theological reflection often works as a mirror, dialogue offers the advantage of openness to other elements in the object under investigation. In the words of Ludwig Wittgenstein, "One learns the game (life and meaning) by watching how others play."<sup>37</sup>

Recently, for example, all kinds of Bible comments have appeared that were written from African, Asian, feminist, apologetic, or one of many other backgrounds.<sup>38</sup> This joint intercultural reading of the Bible can be a catalyst for new, cross-border forms of dialogue and identity building. For this reason, the ST may not withdraw into its discipline. It has to take up the challenge to be practiced in close relation with reading the Bible and also with the discipline of the biblical sciences which deals with

31. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 293–326; Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*. Cf. Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, 293–326, 357–438.

32. De Vries, "Vertalingen kiezen," 43.

33. Zwiep, "Onderweg," 38; Westermann, "Zur Frage," 14–15.

34. Fowl, *Theological Interpretation*; Spinks, *Bible and the Crisis*, 66.

35. Zwiep, "Onderweg," 50.

36. Cf. Burdzy, *Search for Certainty*; Novick, *Noble Dream*.

37. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 23.53.

38. Adeyemo et al., *Africa Bible Commentary*; Ngewa, *Africa Bible Commentary Series*; Nicholls, *Asia Bible Commentary*; Sakenfeld, *Reading the Bible as Women*; Kroeger and Evans, *IVP Women's Bible Commentary*; Cabal, *Apologetics*. For several perspectives together, see Patte, *Global Bible Commentary*.

the study of the Bible.<sup>39</sup> We are not considering here an explanation with the exegeses of individual Bible texts that ST likes to use as “proof texts,” as was often the case in the past. The Bible was then nothing more than a collection of isolated texts that could be used at random in the ST. In this way, little justice was done to the own genres and purport of these biblical texts.<sup>40</sup> When we talk about a close relationship between ST and the discipline of the biblical sciences, we think mainly of an interdisciplinary relationship between ST and a responsible theological interpretation of the Bible, as it largely takes place in BT. Although BT has been viewed critically, because of its methodical variation, it can lead to valuable insights into ST. After all, in theological reflection, BT gives the ST an awareness of what the relevant biblical texts, which serve to substantiate certain doctrinal positions, mean in their context. This diversity of biblical texts and different theological perspectives is not something that we need to eliminate or neutralize. Rather, it shows the richness of biblical perspectives on the path God is following with this creation.

Therefore, ST and BT should be engaged in an interdisciplinary discussion in which there are continuous interaction and mutual influence between equivalent subjects. In this way, they can be held accountable by each other for the theologies they have formed. It is from this background that this dissertation investigates how the design of a biblical theologian and the designs of two systematic theologians can enrich each other in an interdisciplinary comparison of the new heaven and the new earth.

### 1.3 THE SUBJECT OF A NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH

The expectation of a new heaven and earth already manifests itself in the OT: “For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind” (Isa 65:17, cf. 66:22).<sup>41</sup> The NT echoes this hope and speaks twice about a new heaven and a new earth, “We wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home” (2 Pet 3:13), “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more” (Rev 21:1).

In church history, the Creed of Nicea-Constantinople is the oldest confession, mentioning the hope for the new creation. At the end of it, we find, “and life in the coming empire” (καὶ ζωὴν τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος). Apart from this concise formulation, there is little or no reference to the new heaven and earth in the confessions of the early church, while other eschatological subjects are mentioned. Although the

39. Reynolds et al., *Reconsidering*; Bockmuehl and Torrance, *Scripture's*; Den Hertog and van der Kooi, *Tussen leer en lezen*; Green and Turner, *Between*.

40. Van den Brink and van der Kooi, *Dogmatiek*, 33, 35, 486.

41. All Bible references are from New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

subject of the new heaven and the new earth is discussed several times in the Bible, it is less at the center of theological attention.<sup>42</sup>

In Christian theology, in recent decades, the question arose to (re)discover the Christian hope for the new creation in its integrity and individuality. Tom Wright, Richard Bauckham, and others contributed from the discipline of New Testament studies,<sup>43</sup> Alister E. McGrath, Colleen McDannell, Bernhard Lang and others from the perspective of historical theology,<sup>44</sup> Walter Brueggemann, Hendrik J. Koorevaar, Mart-Jan Paul made contributions to this from their reflections on the place of the earth and the land in the department of Old Testament,<sup>45</sup> and Gregory Beale, Thomas Schreiner, and Richard Middleton did so from a biblical-theological field of expertise.<sup>46</sup>

This interest in the new creation is less present in the field of ST. This interest in the new creation is less present in the field of ST. If you look at some of the dogmatism on this subject, you will discover that the starting points for the theme of the new heaven and earth remain concise and rather form an appendix.<sup>47</sup> It is admittedly true that many people place Ernst Troeltsch's words from 1916:

A modern theologian says, "the eschatological office is mostly closed nowadays."<sup>48</sup>

As opposed to those of Hans Urs von Balthasar:

If the word of Troeltsch could apply to 19th-century liberalism, "The eschatological office is usually closed," on the contrary, it has been working overtime since the turn of the century.<sup>49</sup>

42. McDannell and Lang, *Heaven*, 47–358; McGrath, *Christian Theology*.

43. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*; Wright, *New Heavens, New Earth*; Bauckham and Hart, *Hope against Hope*.

44. McGrath, *Heaven*; McDannell and Lang, *Heaven*.

45. Koorevaar and Paul, *Land*; Brueggemann, *Land*. See also my own contributions about this topic, Hausoul, "Land Ahead!"; "Land"; *Boodschap*.

46. Middleton, *New Heaven*; Schreiner, *King*; Beale, *New Testament*.

47. Concise are, Culver, *Systematic Theology*, 1155–56; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1158–64; Van den Brink and van der Kooi, *Dogmatiek*, 639–40, 673–78; Wohlmuth, *Mysterium*, 224–33; Schwarz, *Eschatology*. More expanded are, Van de Beek, *God doet recht*, 83–95; Hoek, *Hoop*, 262–74; Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie* 3, 625–53; Moltmann, *Kommen*, 287–350.

48. Troeltsch, *Glaubenslehre*, 36: "Ein moderne Theologe sagt: 'das eschatologische Bureau sei heutzutage zumeist geschlossen.'" Troeltsch gives the following reason for this statement, "Immer unerträglicher wird für das sittliche Gefühl der Lohn- und Strafgedanke. Das Jenseits kann nichts anderes sein als das allmähliche Hervortreten der Folgen, die das höhere Leben zeitigt, und ein immer tieferes Hineinwachsen ins göttliche Geisterreich"—"The idea of pay and punishment is becoming increasingly unbearable for the moral feeling. The afterlife can be nothing else than the gradual emergence of the consequences of the higher life and an ever deeper growing into the divine spiritual realm."

49. Von Balthasar, "Eschatologie," 403: "Wenn für den Liberalismus des 19. Jahrhunderts das Wort von Troeltsch gelten konnte: 'Das eschatologische Bureau ist meist geschlossen,' so macht dieses im Gegenteil seit der Jahrhundertwende Überstunden."

Nevertheless, the eschatological office that deals with cosmic eschatology is still closed to a large extent. In any case, overtime is not yet an issue. Matthias Remenyi writes:

As a rule, the hope of a new heaven and earth is rather a stepchild of the eschatological discussion.<sup>50</sup>

Gottfried Bachl makes the same judgment, “The cosmic dimension has always been overshadowed by anthropocentric interest.”<sup>51</sup> And Jürgen Moltmann writes, “in our theological tradition eschatology has always been limited to an *individual eschatology*.”<sup>52</sup> Karl Rahner asks the question about the twentieth century:

If this epoch does not come to an end and a new one is slowly coming up, which will have a more direct relationship to the cosmic and human-historical e[schatology] of Christianity from the implications of its own overall human dynamics for the future.<sup>53</sup>

Therefore, interdisciplinary research with contributions from systematic-theological and biblical-theological perspectives offers the possibility to make a personal contribution to the study of the new creation.

The choice to use the term “new creation” for the new heaven and the new earth in this dissertation is in line with a broad theological tradition that refers to the various Judaeo-Christian representations on this theme. Also, “new creation” refers to the late-Jewish and early Christian use of terminology to the renewal of humanity.<sup>54</sup> Christian eschatology uses the term “new creation” for both fields of meaning. Second Corinthians 5:17 emphasizes that “if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation” (εἴ τις ἐν Χριστῷ, καινὴ κτίσις; cf. Gal 6:15). From a semantic point of view, this terminology around “new creation” also occurs in the case of cosmic renewal or “new heavens and a new earth” (οὐρανὸν καινὸν καὶ γῆν καινὴν; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1).<sup>55</sup>

Therefore, traditionally eschatology distinguishes between the individual or personal renewal of humanity to “new creation” and the collective or cosmic renewal of this creation to “new creation.” These are not two independent events. The completion of humans as individuals takes place within the great process of the completion

50. Remenyi, *Um der Hoffnung*, 419: “In der Regel ist es vielmehr so, dass die Hoffnung auf einen neuen Himmel und eine neue Erde eher ein Stiefkind der eschatologischen Diskussion darstellt.”

51. Bachl, *Eschatologie*, I:18: “Die kosmische Dimension liegt seit eh und je im Schatten des anthropozentrischen Interesses.”

52. Moltmann, “Liebe,” 837: “in unserer theologische Tradition war die Eschatologie immer auf eine *Individualeschatologie* beschränkt worden.”

53. Rahner, “Eschatologie (SM),” 1185: “ob diese Epoche nicht zu Ende geht und langsam eine neue heraufkommt, die von den Implikationen ihrer eigenen gesamt menschlichen Zukunftsdynamik ein unmittelbarer Verhältnis zu der kosmischen und menscheitsgeschichtlichen E[schatologie] des Christentums haben wird.”

54. Jackson, *New Creation*; Hubbard, *New Creation*.

55. Van den Brink and van der Kooi, *Dogmatiek*, 648; Jackson, *New Creation*, 7–10; Mell, *Neue Schöpfung*, 1–4.

of creation as a collective. Notwithstanding this dual use of “new creation” for both anthropological and cosmological modification, the term in this dissertation refers to the collective cosmic renewal of current creation and thus to the promised “new heaven and earth.”

#### 1.4 CLARIFICATION OF CHOSEN THEOLOGIANS

It is not feasible to treat a large number of theologians in-depth in a dissertation. Because this dissertation is written by the discipline of ST, a comparison was chosen between two systematics and one biblical theologian, who all focus extensively on the theme of the new heaven and the new earth in several publications.

To minimize the influence of the interdisciplinary discussion on the subject, it was decided not to choose representatives from the same tradition. The criterion for the selection is that the theologians have dealt with the theme in detail. This led us to choose the Protestant Jürgen Moltmann (b. 1926), the Roman Catholic Karl Rahner (1904–1984), and the Reformed Gregory Beale (b. 1949). Although the choice of these three theologians is partially subjective, it is also objectively justifiable. The following considerations will demonstrate this.

##### 1.4.1 Jürgen Moltmann

Regarding the choice of the theme of the new heaven and the new earth, I chose to bring together theologians from recent history, who are more or less influential in the recent discussions about the new heaven and the new earth. A choice for theologians from the distant past could have been made as well, as long as they had sufficient attention for the theme of the new heaven and the new earth.

As we have already noted, only a few systematic theologians from the last century were profoundly into cosmic eschatology (§1.3). Despite the golden age of eschatology at the beginning of the twentieth century, the results of the concise research on the new heaven and the new earth were mainly described regarding discontinuity. For this reason, many people followed in the footsteps of Rudolf Bultmann in opting for a consistent, coexisting eschatology in the here and now.<sup>56</sup> Theological reflections on the new heaven and earth did not go much further than the statement that the new life would manifest itself in a new form of reality that could only be speculated on in the present.<sup>57</sup>

This changed in the second half of the twentieth century. In particular, this was achieved through the *Theology of Hope*, with which the name Jürgen Moltmann was associated. His *Theologie der Hoffnung* (1964) caused a renaissance in eschatological

56. Bultmann, *Geschichte*, 181; “Eschatologie,” 134–52.

57. Schwöbel, *Gott in Beziehung*, 437; McDannell and Lang, *Heaven*, 307–52; Müller-Goldkuhle, *Eschatologie*.