

BOOK REVIEW

Cosmology and New Testament Theology

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This book, which contains a collection of twelve theological essays, written by young professors from USA, United Kingdom and German Universities is welcomed in the respect between theological and scientific authority preoccupied on Biblical cosmology. The editors also wrote the introduction and conclusions in which define the aims and furthers fields of research.

Edward Adams in *Graeco-Roman and Ancient Jewish Cosmology* does a useful survey into the most important philosophical and religious system, developed in Mediterranean culture, focusing on Epicurean, Stoic and Jewish cosmology. Because Cosmology was understood also in religious and philosophical field, Adams points the stages of conceptual development starting with experimental knowledge and ending with theoretical and religious assumptions.

The next eleven studies reflect major themes in Biblical cosmology, structured after New Testament authors or books.

Heaven, Earth, and a new Genesis: theological cosmology in Matthew is a semantic, literary and theological analysis made by J. Pennington. The scholar underline the centrality of Christ in Universe and the fulfilment of creation acts, showed in Genesis book, only by Jesus Christ. After semantic and theological analysis of concepts like Heaven, Earth, World and Hades, founded in Genesis and Matthew intertextuality, Pennington put in evidence the concept of new creation (*paliggenesia*, in Greek) showed in Mathew 19.28. He writes: "... the point of this broad thematic and linguistic overlap between Genesis and Matthew is to argue that in Jesus Christ we find the consummation of God's work that began with his creation" (p. 43).

In the structure of the book, the next study is *Tearing the Heavens and shaking the Heavens: Mark's cosmology in its apocalyptic context*, written by Michael F. Bird. This study must be read on two concentric levels, because apocalyptic cosmology showed in Mark 13 is less commented, comparative with the 'tearing' concept, largely expressed in commentary of Mark 1.10 and 15.38. I found a delight connection between Jesus' baptism and tearing of the veil.

Fragments of Bird's argumentation, quoted below, invite you to read his study: "In both passage the tearings are accompanied by reference to *pneuma* or Spirit". "Both tearings are followed immediately with an announcement of Jesus' divine sonship. The divine voice and the centurion's confession become moments of revelation, triggered by the tearings, which disclose Jesus' messianic identity and his unique filial relation to Israel's God" (p.53).

Steve Walton's study *The Heavens opened: Cosmological and theological transformation in Luke and Acts*, present a new element in New Testament cosmology: the Holy Spirit who manifests like a testimony of Jesus Christ, above believers which see the heavens opened on Earth. It's analyzed Luke's story about Jesus Ascension, when Lord 'exercises his sovereignty over the Universe'. Among six conclusions I notified next: "The ascension of Jesus, his piercing the barrier between Earth and Heaven, means that Heaven is open to Earth" (p. 68). In sub-chapter *Space invaders: Heaven coming to Earth* Walton pointed ideas that angels announce good news, Jesus is filled with the Holy Spirit and Jesus disciples hunt demonic spirits. Finally it's showed the ideological conflict between Stoic and Epicurean cosmology, on a side, and Judeo-Christian cosmology on other side, revealed in Acts 17 from Paul's Areopagus speech.

Because E.W. Klink III is interested by *Light of the World: Cosmology and the Johannine literature*, the cosmological elements are presented in dual antagonism: light and darkness, flesh and spirit, truth and falsehood, life and death. Starting of ancient biography pattern, Klink split his study into three parts: Narrative of Cosmic origins (John 1.1-18), Narratives of Cosmic career (John 1.19-17.26) and Narrative of Cosmic significance (John 18.1-21.25). The 'cosmic' term implied a journey of divine Word until "when I am lifted up from the Earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12.32). This 'assumption' means the beginning of another dimension of world, in which "the Paraclete will continue the mission of Jesus by teaching the word of Word (John 14.26), testifying about the Word (15.26) and by convicting the word (16.8)" (p. 87). From Johannine literature the scholar underlines the purpose of 1 John in this assertion: "It is in the letters of John that oddities of the Fourth Gospel are made understandable. The cosmic drama reflects upon his 'realized' eschatology. The same Johannine cosmic dualism, the 'word' and 'light/darkness' are used to describe the situation of the readers" (p.88).

In *Paul's cosmology: the witnesses of Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians*, Joel White extract a mixed conception about the physical universe that influences the Pauline cosmology: Hellenistic, Mesopotamian and Old Testament concepts. The reader founds three realms which are inhabited: the heavenly, the earthly and the subterranean (Philippians 2.11), different bodies (heavenly and earthly bodies – 1 Corinthians 15.40), the 'third heaven' (2 Corinthians 12.2-3). I suppose that the subtitles like 'God created the cosmos', 'God created the cosmos in order to bring glory to himself', 'The cosmos imparts information to human beings' and 'There is a divinely ordained hierarchy of relationships between God, humanity and the cosmos' deeper the

reader into a systematic and biblical research. The climax of demonstrations represents the concept of personification of the Cosmos in Romans 8.19-22 which, after human sin action, expect the restoration to its purpose, after the beginning made into Christ resurrection (1 Corinthians 15.45). In this case the cosmos begun 'new creation' (Galatians 6.15; 2 Corinthians 5.17b), and the restoration will be completed when Christ returns and 'God may be all in all' (1 Corinthians 15.28).

Another Paul's cosmology view is found in Robert L. Foster's study *Reoriented to the cosmos: Cosmology & Theology in Ephesians through Philemon*. Starting at Ephesians 1.3-4, he found the finality "in mystery revealed at the fullness of time, when God will 'gather up all things in him [Christ], things in Heaven and things on Earth'" (Ephesians 1.10) (p.110). Also Psalm 68.19 quoted in 4.8 the Heaven and Earth images, pointing that Heaven means Christ sovereignty with myriad of spiritual forces, and earthly structure can be understood like 'Church' with same structure, but formed by humankind. Paul instructs us in Colossians epistle that Christ triumphed over the rulers and authorities in the cross (Colossians 2.15). "The world consists of the visible, things one can touch, taste, or handle, material things that will perish in time. Then they know what the invisible God is like because they have heard the gospel about Christ, who is the image of the invisible God in whom the fullness of God dwelled" (p.116). Resuming the Thessalonians cosmology, Foster concludes: "Paul envisions the coming day of Jesus Christ as happening on a particular timetable, must occur before Jesus returns. The appearance of the 'lawless one' cannot thwart the purposes of God and in fact, Christ will destroy this being when he comes. The Cosmos in 2 Thessalonians concerns mostly the temporal world, as a time of affliction. When the current time of Cosmos comes to an end, Christ will appear in a way evident to all and God will execute judgment against those who afflict the Thessalonians, along with other unbelievers" (p. 118-19). In Pastoral Epistles reference about Cosmos are in 1 Timothy 3.16 where Christ come into the world, taking on the flesh, he also apparently left the world, 'seen by the angels' in his ascension into glory. In 1 Timothy we found two realms: this world and heaven. On earthly realms we have people on flesh and wealth; on heaven live God, Jesus and the angels abide. Between these realms we found some permeability, God sustaining his creation.

Jon Laansma in *The Cosmology of Hebrews* made a genuine exposition about Jewish cosmology and cultic space of Temple, reflex of heavenly image. "In the world of Israel space might be religiously charged on the model of concentric spheres of decreasing holiness as one moves outward from a centre." "The Most Holy Place was a point of intersection between Heaven and Earth and the centre of Israel as sacred space" (p. 131-32). The 'Hebrews' cosmology points up the glory of God. An end (death) is the occasion for a new beginning (resurrection), all the more to the glory of God.

God and 'The worlds': Cosmology and Theology in the Letter of James essay's of Darrian Lockett underline dual antithetical between God and World in believers life. Seeing the poor man perspective, world measurement of values is merely opposed to God's. It is a 'unrighteous world' (James 3.6) expressed in tongue which spread fire, in adulteresses manifestations (4.4) and murder (4.1-10). Poor man search better the real wisdom 'from above' (3.14), expecting the coming of Lord. James cosmology is integrated, also, "into a theological understanding of the Universe where individuals must stand free from the world view of 'the world' in order to be wholly devoted to God" (p. 156).

John Dennis in his *Cosmology in the Petrine literature and Jude* essay describe the terminology of creation and destruction of Cosmos and final renewal of Heaven and Earth, using biblical and intertestamental allusions. The connections between place and time is theological understand, starting with 1 Peter 1.20 and ending at 2 Peter 3.12-13. At middle is 1 Peter 3.18-22 dynamic movements (descending and preaching of Christ to 'the spirits in prison' with His resurrection and ascension 'to the right of power'). Sins and rebellions against God's order prepare the renewal of Creation, different that first – made from water like conversion of fire's element in Stoic cosmology – or flood destruction in Genesis 6-8, at 'coming Day of the Lord' (2 Peter 3.10). Using from his Hellenistic readers the Stoic cosmology, in these encyclical writers "the core of [his] ideas are Jewish-Christian" (p. 177).

The seal of Cosmology and New Testament Theology book is made by Sean McDonough, who writes *Revelation: The climax of Cosmology*. In Revelation we found references about Heaven and Earth, alongside sea and Hades. Heaven has two dimensions: a veil separating the Earth from the throne room of God (who can roll back like a scroll on the day of God's wrath) and also the place of God's throne. Here, the message of God – like the stone transparent of jasper – permeated the world of humanity in accordance with the prophetic promise (Habakkuk 2.14). Earth has negative associations: it can be a place of refuge for the saints, but also localizes Babylon, the great city of sins. The sea, the third cosmological element play an important role as a symbol of primordial chaos, which fusion with Abyss after LXX conception (reflect in Deuteronomy 8.7; Psalm 103.6). Abyss is the prison-house of evil spirits, but is not the same place with Hades – like region under Earth, place of the death. The fifth elements of cosmology in Revelation is the lake of fire "forever outside the renewed Cosmos", who "are in a place that is No-Place" (p.184).

The dynamic of essay it's an overlap to theological interpretations, until the fulfilment of God cosmology in the New Jerusalem, like place of God's throne, which is suffused with God's presence.

The conclusion aims establish the limits of research, the *telos* suitable being a theological reading of cosmic references in New Testament in lens of cultural meaning of Mediterranean space.

In the cosmology research, this book represents a useful guide for lecturers of New Testament. Each scholar who subscribes to this collection of essays presents a piece of a great puzzle concerning Theology like mediator between Science and Judeo-Christian thought. It's a fruitful beginning, who – perhaps – confirmed the necessity of dialogue between scientific argues and Creationism theology of Bible.

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