Chapter 1 - Eschatology

This study explores that area of theology usually termed eschatology. And what is meant by eschatology? It is that aspect of theology that has as focus the future and what is expected in the future. Van Ruler would agree that the whole of theology ought to have the focus of the future.¹ He also states that this future rests in the future of God.² He mainly speaks about eschatology in the context of the kingdom coming from the future.

During the last two centuries eschatology has changed and developed. And although the following is not a complete historical review of eschatology, it serves to give a brief overview of the changes that have taken place. In the following the field of eschatology is divided into three sections, dealing respectively with consistent eschatology, the theme of promise and the theme of the future. These divisions are arbitrary and artificial, yet help with highlighting the three different emphases we find in later eschatology.

Eschatology can be viewed as simply a part of theology. In that case it deals with the ‘last things’, i.e. the return of Christ, the judgement, the parousia, eternal life and similar aspects. Most of the theologians of the Middle Ages and the Reformation period treated eschatology in that manner. Often it came at the end of their Systematic Theologies. Often it was treated as an epilogue. This did not help an emphasis on the concept of the kingdom of God. This is the more remarkable as Christianity, from its inception, was a faith focussed on the future, on what was promised to God’s people and the whole world.

Neither did eschatology receive due consideration in the systems of dogmatics. Ernst Troeltsch summarised it in these words: “nowadays the eschatological office is closed

² Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 49.
most of the time."³ Indeed, during the nineteenth century the office remained closed. Following the period of Enlightenment, theology was determined by an optimistic worldview and a faith in human potentiality. The nineteenth century liberal theologians stated that the kingdom of God, which Jesus preached, was an ethical ideal that would be progressively realized in human history. These liberal theologians pushed eschatology into the background, for the kingdom was something to be derived by human effort. These liberal ideas were reinforced by the teachings of the philosophy of Marx and Darwin, especially by their concepts of evolution. This period of optimism and liberalism came to a close after the two World Wars.

The change was pronounced. The centrality of eschatology for theology was rediscovered during the 20th century. So pronounced in fact was this rediscovery, that according to Schwöbel the 20th century “could correctly be called the century of eschatology.”⁴ Bauckham states: “…eschatology ceased to be merely one doctrinal topic among others to be treated after the others; it became something like a dimension of the whole subject matter of theology.”⁵ This study will follow those theologians who see eschatology not just as a section or part of theology, but a way of viewing the whole of theology. As will be shown, Van Ruler fits this category. Moltmann says: “From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology…The eschatological is not one element of Christianity, but it is the medium of Christian faith as such, the key in which everything is set, the glow that suffuses everything here in the dawn of an unexpected day.”⁶

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⁴ Walls, 'Introduction', 9.
1.1 Consistent Eschatology

The rediscovery of eschatology began with a greater emphasis on the meaning of the ‘kingdom of God’. The importance of this New Testament concept and its rich theological content, has been undervalued by the church for far too long. This changed with a publication by Johannes Weiss in 1892 titled: *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reich Gottes*, in which he stressed that the coming of the kingdom of God was really at the heart of Jesus’ message. Yet, it was nearly a century before it took hold. Mostert calls it a ‘shocking discovery’, not because it was demoralising, but simply because it disturbed a view that had been held for many decades and brought about a lasting and effective change. The reason that it took so long for this change to take hold is because the old views were so entrenched. Albert Schweitzer took up the theme of the ‘kingdom’ after Weiss. Schweitzer wanted to put an end to the quest for ‘the historical Jesus’ and instead put the emphasis on the apocalyptic, eschatological expectation of the kingdom of God. After the mission of the ‘Seventy’ (Luke 10) Jesus hastened the coming of the kingdom, according to Schweitzer. Nevertheless, the ‘end time’ failed to come. After Easter the disappointed disciples stripped away all eschatological expectation and transformed Christianity into an ecclesiastical and sacramental religion. The future based on the promises of God was replaced by the presence of eternity. The school that followed Schweitzer, that of the ‘consistent eschatology’, i. e. thoroughgoing eschatology, like

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9 Cf. Hans Küng, *The Church*, trans. R. Ockenden and R. Ockenden (London: Burns & Oates, 1967), 55. “For Schweitzer Jesus invokes a consistent eschatology which will be realized in the immediate future (the final and definitive kingdom of God at the end of time is not yet present, but is awaited in the immediate future, during Jesus’ lifetime, or subsequently as linked to his death).” Italics Küng’s.
Dodd,\textsuperscript{11} Martin Werner and Fritz Buri, abolished eschatology altogether. They did not see in eschatology a transformation of time itself, but transposed eschatology into time. However, true eschatology is not about future history; it was said - it is about the future of history.\textsuperscript{12} In other words the emphasis on the kingdom was lost again.

In the ‘Theology of Crisis’ of the early Karl Barth, the tension between the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’ of the kingdom, the tension between the present and the future disappears and becomes the tension between eternity and time. When Jesus proclaims that the kingdom of God is at hand, he is not looking into the future in the temporal sense; he is looking into the heaven of the present. According to Barth the kingdom does not come out of the future into the present. It comes from heaven to earth. God’s rule – and therefore the kingdom - is present already. The kingdom comes from eternity into time; not out of the future into the present.\textsuperscript{13} Barth also calls the eternal moment the \textit{nunc aeternum} – eternity is now. In the Christian sense Christ’s parousia takes place in the eternal moment, for the parousia is the presence of Christ.\textsuperscript{14}

Mostert, speaking about Barth, says that Barth’s eschatology collapsed into the doctrine of revelation, although Barth had claimed: “If Christianity be not altogether thorough going eschatology, there remains in it no relationship whatever with Christ.”\textsuperscript{15} Mostert says that Barth’s eschatology is far from being ‘a thorough going eschatology’, for Barth the eschatological reality is more like a boundary between the finite and the infinite. For

\textsuperscript{11} Küng, \textit{The Church}, 55. Cf. also Bauckham, ‘The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology’, 307: Dodd proposed “… that ‘realised eschatology’ was the real message of Jesus and the New Testament writers. He claimed that they turned the future hope of Jewish expectation into the realized experience of God in the present.”
\textsuperscript{13} Moltmann, \textit{The Coming of God}, 16.
\textsuperscript{14} Moltmann, \textit{The Coming of God}, 14.
the power and deity of God, having entered our world, has ‘set a boundary against
everything in our world’, and manifests itself at that boundary. Mostert says,

Barth speaks of a ‘Moment’, the eternal Moment, which is the ‘now’ of revelation, which
‘always is, and yet is not’. It is the parousia, but it is no temporal event. … The suspicion
is that eschatology, in the dialectical theology of Barth, is another form of eternity, the
transcendence, the timelessness of God, which meets us as a boundary to our existence.¹⁶

Later Barth became dissatisfied with his position on eschatology being overshadowed by
revelation. In regard to the later Barth, Mostert writes: “Much later, in his writing about
time – its relation to God, Jesus as the Lord of time, and the time of the church – (and) he
commented on this time of the church, (as) the time ‘between the first parousia of Christ
and the second’ ”. And “…the new is ‘infinitely superior as one which comes breaking in
triumphantly with the whole power of God.”¹⁷ It is clear that the emphasis has shifted to
an emphasis on the future, nevertheless, Barth’s emphasis remains on the Church and not
the Kingdom.

Another theologian who wrestled with the concept of the kingdom was Oscar Cullmann.
He dealt with the tension between the ‘already’ of the kingdom and the ‘not yet’. The
kingdom is at hand, he said, but it is neither wholly present, nor wholly absent. Jesus had
begun a ‘new division of time’. Cullmann explained that we are now living in the time
‘after Christ’, a transitional time. The ‘D’ day has come, the ‘V’ day is yet to come. Christ
is both fulfilled prophecy and the prophetic beginning of the End-time. Speaking about
the ‘Midpoint’, the concept remains linear in time.¹⁸ This view does not destroy
eschatological hope, but it weakens eschatology as a concept. Past and future are equally
important. It is historical deism, in that God becomes the watchmaker of the world and in
charge of the blueprint for the world by way of foreknowledge, according to Cullmann.

¹⁶ Mostert, God and the Future, 13, 14.
¹⁷ Mostert 11. Here Mostert quotes Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, trans. T.H.L. Parker and others, Vol.II/1
(Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 627.
¹⁸ Oscar Cullmann, Christ and Time: The primitive Christian Conception of Time and History [Christus und
One day the calendar will run out. It must be asked, where is God’s freedom in all of this? The last day does not bring Christ’s parousia, but Christ’s parousia brings the last day, when Christ comes to transform time. Christians live in the kingdom, but live between the ‘now already’ and the ‘not yet’. Even though Cullmann maintained an emphasis on the kingdom, the essence of eschatology here is on the present, diminishing the importance of the future.

For C H Dodd ‘the day of the Lord’ is the fulfilment of history. Here the message of Jesus is: ‘the kingdom has arrived!’, it has been realised. The prophecies of the Old Testament have been fulfilled in Jesus and realised in our present day. “The eschaton has entered history; the hidden rule of God has been revealed; the Age to come has come.” His ‘realised eschatology’ is very similar to that of the Early Barth in that eternal life is now realised in experience. He who believes has life eternal. The kingdom of God has moved out of the sphere of expectation into the sphere of experience. Here the kingdom of God is already amongst us.

A change came with Paul Althaus, who shifted the emphasis from kingdom to promise. Althaus, following Schleiermacher to some extent, used the concept of promise and based this on the hope derived from the reality of Jesus Christ. This reality, namely the salvation we have in Christ, is final and at the same time provisional, because its finality is hidden. For this he used the eschatological distinction of the ‘now already’ and the ‘not yet’. Althaus maintained that this reality, this presence of salvation in Christ is the basis for hope and therefore is the ground for promise. The fact that the revelation and salvation in

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21 Dodd, The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments, 95.
Christ is largely hidden holds the promise of a future disclosure.\textsuperscript{22} Althaus modified his ‘eternity theology’ or ‘axiological eschatology’\textsuperscript{23} a number of times. In the midst of time we experience the timeless validity of absolute value. Teleologically we perceive it as the goal for our desires and will. Althaus’ concept of time moved from ‘time = eternity’ towards a ‘future-present’ dynamic. He turned to a double form of eschatology with an emphasis on both the presence and the future of the kingdom, both the believing and the hoping aspects of the kingdom, both the possessing and awaiting of the kingdom.\textsuperscript{24}

For Rudolf Bultmann “The dominant concept of Jesus’ message is the \textit{Reign of God}. Jesus proclaims its immediately impending irruption, now already making itself felt.”\textsuperscript{25} Jesus is the end of history, not temporally but existentially. Existential faith frees from the past, but does it really open the future? Existential eschatology, for Bultmann, is not about the end of the world, rather the future comes to meet human beings in the kerygma and faces them with the final decision. “In every moment (of the present) slumbers the possibility of being the eschatological moment.”\textsuperscript{26} “Now is the time of decision, and Jesus’ call is the call to decision.”\textsuperscript{27} In the kerygma’s call to decision, the Last thing, as the Absolute, has become present, this presence is eschatologically qualified. Bultmann’s eschatology is presentative in the eternal sense, not the temporal one. So there is no way in which it can be complemented by a futurist eschatology. Moltmann critics: “History is swallowed up by eschatology.”\textsuperscript{28} Here the development is away from the concept of

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Axio} Greek for ‘worth’, i.e. dealing with values. Axiological is pertaining to the belief of values.
\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Moltmann, The Coming of God}, 16ff.
\textsuperscript{26} Rudolph Bultmann, \textit{History and Eschatology} University Press, Edinburgh, 1955), 155.
\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Moltmann, The Coming of God}, 20.
kingdom to one of time and future. We will return to this later. For Bultmann the kingdom as the Reign of God is present rather than future.

1.2 The theme of promise

The above shows us that over time the locus of eschatology changed and was expanded. This is clear also from a remark from Moltmann: “For the theology of our time, eschatology has become more important than in previous periods. What was an abstract ‘doctrine of the last things’, has become a concrete eschatology, the ‘locus de novissimis’; what was an appendix of dogmatics, they did not know what to do with, became a theology of hope.”

“God no longer is seen as the ‘God above us’, or ‘in the depth of being’, but as the God ahead of us, journeying with or pulling us forward into history as the ‘God of hope’.” In this context he also states that eschatology brought about a new focus, one of promise and looking forward. “From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present. The eschatological is not one element of Christianity, but it is the medium of Christian faith as such, …”

Together with the expansion of eschatology also comes a greater awareness that the theme of God’s rule comes to us throughout the whole of the Old Testament and New Testament. There is a shift from a local to a more universal interpretation of the kingdom. With the emphasis on kingdom also comes an emphasis on promise. Sauter says it this way:

Promise is the leading category of eschatology. God is promising God’s action, and God is acting in a promising way. It is characteristic of God always to reserve further action

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29 Jürgen Moltmann, 'Theocratie en Eschatologie (This essay was originally a chapter from the book The Crucified God (Der gekreuzigte Gott))' [Theocracy and Eschatology], in Woord en Werkelijkheid, over theocratie [Word and reality, about theocracy] A collection of essays in thankful memory of Prof. Dr. A. A. van Ruler ed. B. Plaisier, (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1973), 79.
30 Moltmann, 'Theocratie en Eschatologie', 79.
31 Moltmann, Theology of Hope, 16.
for himself in the future, and yet to cast forward a hint of that future action into the present as a promise.32

Moltmann develops and applies this idea of ‘promise’ to eschatology and places it in the wider context of mission and theology. Moltmann grounded the eschatological content in the promises of God. Hope arises from the promises of God, namely the promise of redemption and a completed creation. These promises are not limited by what the world can offer, but come from the power, the promises and potentialities of God. As Moltmann says:

As the God of the promises and the historical guidance towards fulfilment, that is, as the God of the coming kingdom, he has shaped the experience of the historicity of world and man that is open towards his future. The place where God’s existence and communion are believed and hoped for is the place “in front of us” and “ahead of us”. This is not a spatial, but a temporal definition of place. God is not “beyond us” or “in us”, but ahead of us in the horizon of the future opened to us in his promises.33

It is difficult to separate the themes of future and promise, yet as the above quotation shows, with Moltmann the emphasis remains on promise.34

Richard Bauckham, like Moltmann, also states that the basis for hope is found in the Old Testament promises of God, which have been fulfilled and ratified in Jesus Christ. His ministry, death and resurrection need to be seen against the background of the Old Testament promises, even though they go beyond them. For the resurrection of Jesus is an


33 Jürgen Moltmann, The Future of Hope; Theology as Eschatology (NY: Herder and Herder, 1970), 10. Richard Bauckham an admirer of Moltmann says: “It was Moltmann’s first major work, Theology of Hope (first published in German in 1964), that most of all enabled theologians to think once more of eschatology as speaking of the real future of the world and thereby also to envisage its relevance to the present not just in terms of the destiny of the individual but also in terms of the church’s engagement with the world on its way to the kingdom of God.” He also adds: “Moltmann, … is the one who carried his eschatological thinking, not only through a series of major dogmatic works on all areas of theology, but finally also to a climax in his The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology (first published in German in 1995), surely the most important work on eschatology to appear since the 1960s.” Richard Bauckham, ‘Conclusion: Emerging issues in eschatology in the twenty-first century’ in The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology, ed. Jerry L. Walls, (Oxford: University Press, 2008), 671, 672.

34 Cf. also Section II of Moltmann, Theology of Hope, 95 – 106.
event belonging to the eschatological future. “It is promise in the form of concrete anticipation. What has happened to Jesus is what will happen to the whole creation.” Moltmann worked consistently with this theme in his Theology of Hope. The promise of an open future brings hope for the future and therefore is eschatological in nature.

Meeks points out that Moltmann’s theology is based on the conceptions of Barth and Bloch. And the measure of Moltmann’s freshness and surprise is due to the coupling of these two great teachers. Bloch advanced ‘Marxist’ humanism. Although an atheist, Bloch became interested in the Bible and its God. He developed a theory of revolutionary transformation, for which he needed a quasi-transcendent reality. In 1961 Bloch was dismissed from his University chair in Leipzig by his fellow Marxists, who accused his philosophy of hope of being a religion. For Bloch, hope had become the key to the meaning of human existence and to the transformation of the present. “The mode of anticipation is concretely correlated to the process of matter…and social analysis”, says Meeks. Bloch worked towards a theory of revolutionary and material transformation, which he found “… in the spirit of exodus and rebellion, new creation and kingdom in the religious sons of Moses and Jesus.” Moltmann differs in that he emphasises a dialectic of reconciliation and so goes beyond these two teachers, Bloch and Barth.

According to Meeks, Otto Weber had an even greater influence on Moltmann. After all, Moltmann wrote both his dissertation and his Habilitations-schrift under the direction of Weber. This explains why we see a great emphasis on the Calvinist understanding of

37 At that time in Communist East Germany.
38 Meeks, Origins of the theology of hope, 18.
40 Meeks, Origins of the theology of hope, 17.
41 I understand this to be his second dissertation.
the Lordship of Christ and ‘perseverance’ in Moltmann’s theology. The two principal themes are Reformed in nature and are: (1) the certainty that God will remain faithful and keep his promise of the new being; this will lead to (2) hope in God’s fulfilment of all things and that He will preserve his people. Hope so kindled spans the horizon and opens our closed existence. Calvin had called hope the ‘inseparable companion of faith’. The theology of hope is in large part a contemporary exegesis of Calvin’s view of the faith-hope dialectic. It became the basis for Moltmann’s eschatology with an emphasis on hope. “Thus the kingdom of God is present here as promise and hope for the future horizon of all things, which are then seen in their historic character because they do not yet contain truth in themselves.”

It has been pointed out by Van Ruler and many others that Moltmann’s theology of hope resulted in a political message. It could not just remain a theological or theoretical approach. “Hope should lead to (hopeful) action for the transformation of socio-economic conditions that are contrary to the will of the God who takes up especially the cause of the poor and the marginalised.”

Promise also leads to mission, for Christian eschatology speaks of ‘Christ and his future’. Its language is the language of promise. That language understands history as the reality instituted by promise. In the light of the present promise and hope, the as yet unrealised future of the promise stands in contradiction to given reality. The promise is latent and hidden. The _promissio_ of the universal future leads of necessity to the universal _missio_ of

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the Church to all nations. The Christian consciousness of history is a consciousness of mission … and the historic character of existence.47

The purpose of this extended reference on Moltmann is threefold. First, it shows that Moltmann emphasises that the concept of the kingdom of God stresses that the people of God live in hope. His eschatology is an eschatology of hope. Secondly, Moltmann’s eschatology leads to a politicised eschatology in that the eschaton will bring about a kingdom of equality and universal justice. Thirdly, we see that there is a relation between the eschatology of Moltmann and that of Van Ruler. Meeks makes the point that Moltmann was familiar with Van Ruler’s theology. Moltmann himself acknowledges this. It was said that no new systematic theology was possible beyond that of Barth, but Moltmann says: “It was Arnold A. van Ruler, the theologian of the Dutch Apostolate, who set me free of this error in 1957. Through him I became acquainted with eschatology (a field lying fallow), with the missionary initiative of Christianity and, not least, with the joys of theological imagination.”48 Moltmann again gives great credit to Van Ruler, when in 2008, in a paper delivered at the 100th anniversary of Van Ruler’s birth date, held in Utrecht, the Netherlands, he stated that Van Ruler had set him free from ‘Barthian orthodoxy’. He learnt from Van Ruler that after Barth another and new way of theologising was possible.49

47 Moltmann, Theology of Hope, 225.
1.3 The theme of the future

The understanding of eschatology moved from ‘a doctrine of the last things’, to a greater understanding of the importance of the Kingdom of God in the Old and New Testament, to eschatology as a theology of hope. We now need to see how the concept of the kingdom of God led to a greater emphasis on the future in eschatology.

Early signs of this are already seen in the plenary gathering of the fourth World Council of Churches in Uppsala in 1968 which in its publication: Uppsala spricht (speaks), called Jesus “the Anticipator of the future of God, his righteousness and the freedom of man.”\(^{50}\) Moltmann comments on this and said: “This anticipation of the future, which became apparent in the whole of his (Jesus’) appearance, his Person, in his functions and in the history of his crucifixion and resurrection, has led to see in him the unconditional and universal fulfilment (van krachtmaking) of the prophecies and to call him the ‘prolepsis’ of the consummation (voltooing), in the middle of history….”\(^{51}\) Here we have the first indications of a more pronounced emphasis on the future and the role of the kingdom coming from the future. We see this theme of future becoming stronger also in Hans Küng, who said:

Since the reign of God has been preached, has begun, and is already effective – through and in Jesus – in the present, the hope for a consummated and revealed reign of God is not an empty and unfounded hope directed to the future alone; but a hope, rooted in already fulfilled realities, for the future consummating of this present reality through the eschatological saving act of God, which is the same and yet new.\(^{52}\)

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\(^{51}\) Moltmann, 'Theocratie en Eschatologie', 79. Cf. also Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 256, where it is translated: “He has been named the unique anticipation of the end in the midst of history, or God’s lieutenant in a godless world, as the provisional representative of the still absent God.” Italics his.

\(^{52}\) Küng, *The Church*, 69.
We see this change of emphasis on the future also in Moltmann. In his book of 1995 – 30 years after the *Theology of Hope* – he writes: “The God of hope is himself the coming God (Isa.35.4;40.5).”\(^{53}\) Not that Moltmann now formulates a different eschatology, rather the emphasis has changed. This also illustrates just how difficult it is in the field of eschatology to make a demarcation between hope and future. Moltmann says this himself when he refers to his earlier work.

The eschatology put forward here accords with the *Theology of Hope* in that it starts from a concept of the future which neither allows history ‘which continues to run its course’ to swallow up every eschatology, nor permits the eternity that is always present to put an end to every history. The eschaton is neither the future of time nor timeless eternity. It is God’s coming and his arrival.\(^{54}\)

What does Moltmann understand by the future coming of God? He wants to understand the future in the sense of advent, namely the arrival of a person. Here he refers to the German word *Zukunft* (future), which expresses the expectation or arrival of a person, as in the future coming of Christ. “The future as God’s power in time must then be understood as the source of time … With the coming of God’s glory, future time ends and eternal time begins.”\(^{55}\) Yet, this understanding of time does not make it a ‘futuristic’ eschatology, because:

> Futurist eschatology is a contradiction in terms, because the future (in the static sense of *Futur*) cannot be an eschatological category. And eschatology of the eternal present is a contradiction in terms, because it abolishes time. Only the idea of the coming God, and the advent concept of time which is in accord with him, open up categories for eschatology.\(^{56}\)

Moltmann bases the concept ‘future’ on the resurrection of Christ, “… because the resurrection of Christ is an eschatological event. … [and] eschatology looks from the future to the past.”\(^{57}\) For Moltmann the arrival of a person, namely Christ in his

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\(^{57}\) Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 190. Cf. also Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 220.221, where he says: “The future which remained open in Jesus’ message of the kingdom is confirmed by his resurrection.
incarnation, but also in his resurrection becomes the foundation of the ‘future’. This future does not abolish time, rather it becomes the source of time. Historical time is determined by the future. 58

If Moltmann defines the future as the coming of God, Pannenberg defines it as belonging to the nature of God. God is the God of the future, he comes towards us from the future.

For Pannenberg it is not sufficient to base the future of the kingdom of God on promises. “It is not enough merely to appeal to the fact of promises that we can claim are the promises of God.” 59 It is possible to accept this claim only if there are also other grounds “which support our conviction concerning the reality of God.” 60 This reality of God is linked to the future of the kingdom in this world. In turn, “the future of the kingdom in the world presupposes the existence of the world as his creation.” In the eschaton, “God will be shown to be its Creator.” 61 And Pannenberg concludes: “thus he (God) is the author of the existence and being of all things in and with the fact that he is their final future.” God’s “… reality is indissolubly linked to the future of his kingdom in this world.” 62 For Pannenberg, “the future of God’s kingdom in the world presupposes the existence of the world as his creation.” 63 This creation finds its consummation in the future of God’s kingdom.

This is not the place to give a full overview of Pannenberg’s eschatology, but the preceding discussion makes clear that the expectation of the fulfilment of the kingdom

appearances, assured in anticipation as the dawn of his parousia, and can now be called his future.” His italics.

58 We will return to a discussion of time later.
60 Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, Vol. 3, 540.
has shifted from hope to promise and from promise to the eschatological future. This emphasis on the future is also evident in the eschatology of Van Ruler.

1.4 The eschatology of Van Ruler

The three main elements in eschatology described in the foregoing, namely ‘consistent eschatology’, the themes of promise and the future, are seen in Van Ruler’s eschatology, yet the theme of the future is most prominent. However, before we look at how this theme was present in his theology, it is important to note that he was aware of what was happening on the eschatological front in his time. He gives an indication of this in an article in *Vox Theologica* of November 1970. He asks:

How do things stand with the eschatological trend in present day theology? Does it imply only that we have to work together for a (revolutionary) better world? Is it directed towards a complete emptiness or a total newness, in which the whole created reality disappears, but which in the meantime functions as an impulse for taking hold of this reality in order to joyfully break it down? Or is the eschatologisation of theology a third attempt, after the existentialism of Bultmann and the ‘revelation-positivism’ of Barth, to create a bomb-free shelter for the attacks of modern scientific thinking?

Van Ruler distances himself from a number of trends here. He wants neither to follow the eschatology of the liberation theology, popular in his day, nor the existentialist theology of Bultmann nor the dialectical theology of the early Barth, in their understanding of eschatology.

As stated above, after the 19th century there was a change in the approach towards eschatology. In the 20th century, there was a strong tendency to focus theology through the lens of eschatology. Richard Bauckham says: “In the first place it was the study of the New Testament that promoted eschatology to this key significance for theology.”

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Ruler was aware of this and calls this focussing “an ongoing eschatologisation of theology and the Christian faith”. He does not support this. Not that Van Ruler does not accept the necessity of eschatology; he does indeed. “The heart of the gospel makes eschatology absolutely necessary, indeed an eschatology in which nothing of history is lost.” He maintains that eschatology is important and that all aspects of theology need to be viewed in an eschatological light. But he is against the total eschatologisation of theology. He maintains that there are boundaries (grenzen) to this. These limits are the creation, history, humanity and salvation. All these boundaries limit speaking of theology as simply eschatology. For him eschatology is not the only lens through which theological claims can be read.

Further, Van Ruler states that eschatology is not only christological in nature, meaning that eschatology does not commence with the incarnation. Nor is eschatology only pneumatological in nature, which means that it did not begin with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. His whole theology is an eschatological theology, but also a trinitarian theology. Yet, the above-mentioned boundaries do not prevent Van Ruler from speaking of eschatology as a ‘realised eschatology’. By this he means that what is to take place eschatologically, for example at the end of the age is, in a sense, present with us already. It is even possible to say ‘eternity is present with us’. He asks rhetorically: “Is not the now also in some sense the nunc aeternum?” This, in short, is the question at the core of this whole dissertation.

70 Van Ruler, ‘Grenzen van de eschatologisering’, 108. Van Ruler says, “It is impossible to put everything on the one card of the eschaton.” [Wij kunnen onmogelijk alles op de ene kaart van het eschaton te zetten.]
72 Van Ruler, ‘Grenzen van de eschatologisering’, 103.
These limits, or boundaries, of eschatology are really determined by the definition of eschatology. Eschatology, for Van Ruler, deals with the future hope (Eph. 2:12) and the future kingdom. Eschatology, for Van Ruler, focusses on the rule of God and therefore on the future, as the future rule of God. That rule, or the kingdom, exists in the tension of the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’. The rule of God has already been established, but it is also still to come. It is present in a hidden form, says Van Ruler, it is coming and will be established completely in the eschaton. He says: “There is not only the past and the present. There is also the future! As water is for fish, so the future is for faith: this is its element. Indeed, this is faith’s product. Faith is having a future and creating future.”

To view matters eschatologically also means to see them from the end (vanuit het einde). In Van Ruler’s view, all of our speaking about God needs to be done from the end. We need to view all aspects of life from the future. He has made this important point already in his dissertation: “… characteristic about the end of days is, that the kingdom of God comes towards us from (vanuit) the future and breaks into our existence (existentie) most powerfully and overwhelmingly”.

In summary it must be said that Van Ruler stresses the eschatological aspects in his theology by concentrating on the coming of the kingdom from the future. The kingdom of God is an eschatological kingdom. This kingdom will include a renewal of the creation. God will not do away with his hands’ work. As will be shown, there is a strong emphasis that in all God’s eschatological work, humanity is wholly involved. In fact, our whole being, and all our actions are anticipations of the kingdom. Creation, including the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, is part of this anticipation. “As the eschaton is the

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73 Van Ruler, ‘Grenzen van de eschatologisering’, 104.
74 Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 24. At the end of his dissertation he repeats the same thought. Cf. Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 466.
consummation of the historical process, so the historical process is the anticipation of the eschaton."\(^{75}\) What Van Ruler means by statements of this kind will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

\(^{75}\) Van Ruler, 'Grenzen van de eschatologisering' 115.