Chapter 3 – The Kingdom of God 2: Present and future

Introduction

This chapter, being the second half of the discussion of Van Ruler’s theology of the kingdom, deals with those aspects which relate to the theme of the temporality of the kingdom: it being both future and present. These are the aspects of salvation and reconciliation, fulfilment and future of the kingdom, the kingdom and the eschaton, time and continuity.

3.1 The kingdom and salvation

The incarnate Son of God has brought salvation through his ministry, his crucifixion and resurrection. This salvation has redeemed the world, the creation. The word that Van Ruler uses for salvation is ‘heil’, which covers the idea of individual salvation, but also includes the sense of wholeness and wellbeing. The nature of this salvation is historical, for it has come to us in the person and work of Jesus Christ. However, this historical salvation is also an expression of the love of God. God so loved the world that he has come with this salvation. The concept of salvation needs to be understood in a very wide, even cosmic context.  

Speaking about salvation Van Ruler says:

We ought not see the meaning of salvation too narrowly. Without doubt it is – first of all – a personal redemption of the individual from eternal perdition. But, secondly, it is also the eschatological kingdom as summing up (samenvatting) of the historical process. Therefore, thirdly, it is also the model after which our life, both individually and communally, is formed. This is called ‘christianisation’ (kerstening).

Van den Brom makes the point that in the theology of Van Ruler a distinction needs to be made between ‘heil’ as ‘salus’ and ‘beatitudo’. He defines ‘salus’ as: deliverance from the

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power and guilt of sin and defines ‘beatitudo’ as: the blessedness of creaturely and eschatological life. In a footnote Van den Brom says:

Van Ruler suggests that ‘beatitudo’ denotes the real destiny of humanity, but not in the traditional sense of the ‘visio Dei’, rather, in a ‘visio mundi’ shared with God, in which we see and know God’s world as his world, and in which we learn how to act in that world.³

This salvation in the form of ‘beatitudo’ is at work in the creation and in our personal ‘being’. There is also the deliverance or the liberation of ‘being’. “Salvation brings the created reality through the experience of sin and grace and makes it, so to speak, fire-proof.”⁴ By this Van Ruler means that the salvation received and present with us will prevent the creation from being destroyed again. There may be destruction, catastrophe and calamities, but the creation will come through and will survive. God ensures that the creation will be redeemed. He will not let go of his handiwork. Salvation is secure and we can no longer speak or think or be the creation, without the salvation God has brought in the form of ‘salus’ and ‘beatitudo’. There is a ‘general’ aspect to salvation, as well as a more particular aspect. Paul S. Fiddes alludes to the general aspect when he says:

‘Salvation’ is a concept of the widest scope, which is universally comprehensible. It assumes that the life of human beings and that of the wider natural world is distorted, self-destructive, or failing to reach its true potential. Against this background, ‘salvation’ denotes the healing or making whole of individuals and social groups, and the conserving of a natural environment which is ravaged and polluted by human greed.⁵

Fiddes also states that the goal of salvation is not only general, in the sense that it reaches the whole creation, but also works a transformation in the human person.

….the salvation of humankind is understood (also) as a progressive transformation into a more perfect image of God, a process which is rooted in certain decisive events in the past,


which continues in the present, and which will come to fulfilment in the future, in a new creation.⁶

This has everything to do with the realisation of salvation (heil) and the anticipation of the kingdom, not just in the future, but already now. This will be explored more fully later, in the discussion of the concept the ‘image of God’. Here it suffices to note that ‘salvation’ can be understood in various ways (having dimensions or layers) and applied to various aspects of God’s creation.

This salvation comes through the work of Christ. Van Ruler underlines this throughout his theology. Where he differs from most theologians, is not that, in his view, the eschaton will take place in the last days and that Christ will hand back the kingdom to the Father,⁷ but the implication he draws from this. The kingdom of Christ is a mode of the kingdom of God and with the completion and perfection of the kingdom, Christ’s work on earth will have been completed and there will be no further need to speak of the economic Trinity.

“The Son will hand back the kingship to the Father (1Cor.15:24), who conferred it on him for a time (Luke 22:29).”⁸ “The mediation of salvation in the Mediator is finished and has changed into a mediation through the Mediator.”⁹ Van Ruler maintains that Christ’s reign is an intermezzo. He often uses the word ‘intermezzo’, although sometimes he uses the word ‘emergency measure’ (‘noodmaatregel’).¹⁰ The second word gives the explanation of

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⁷ Dirk van Keulen draws the conclusion: “I know no one who has defended the views of Van Ruler (in relation to the Intermezzo), his view is rejected on different grounds.” Cf. Dirk Van Keulen, 'Inleiding' [Introduction], in Verzameld Werk, Deel 4B [Collected Work, Vol 4B], (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2011), 17ff.
⁸ Arnold A Van Ruler, De dood wordt overwonnen; 1 Corinthen 15 in morgenwijdingen [Death is Conquered; 1 Corinthians 15 presented in morning devotions], 2 ed. (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1972), 82, 64. Cf. also Arnold A Van Ruler, Religie en Politiek [Religion and Politics], (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1945), 139. Cf. also Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 107.
⁹ Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 92.
¹⁰ Van Ruler states that he bases his views on those of Calvin. Cf. Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 92. Van Ruler does not use the word ‘emergency measure’ or ‘intermezzo’ in his dissertation, but uses this in later works, e.g. in: Van Ruler, De dood wordt overwonnen, 80ff. Cf also Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 92. He says: “Then the Son – that is the Son in as far as he has appeared in the flesh – gives the kingdom to the Father: this means not that he puts aside his lordship, but that in a sense he transfers it from his humanity to his glorious divinity.” He adds: “If one does not see this, sooner or later an identification between kingdom and church will take place.” (My summary of footnote 34), 92.
the first. Van Keulen writes: “One could say that the term ‘emergency measure’ in Van Ruler’s theology is in fact applicable to all those things that God uses to reach his goal.”

The concept of the intermezzo is not used to undervalue the work of the Saviour, but rather to give expression to the completion of Christ’s task. The rule of Christ on earth comes to an end and is fully absorbed into the rule of the Father, who is then all in all. The idea of the intermezzo is applied by Van Ruler not only to Christ, but also to the work of the Holy Spirit. This will be dealt with more fully later, yet already here we can say that the indwelling, sanctifying work of the Spirit will have been completed in the eschaton and therefore no longer be needed. The Holy Spirit returns to that position in the triune life of God had before the outpouring in Jerusalem, says Van Ruler.

Van Ruler also applies the idea of the intermezzo to the church, Israel, the law, the Bible, the gospel and theocracy. In other words, the intermezzos are all means (media) between existence and revelation, between history and the eschaton. According to van Keulen, not one theologian has defended Van Ruler’s position on the ‘emergency measure’.

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11 Van Keulen, ’Inleiding, Deel 4B’ [Men kan zeggen dat de term ‘noodmaatregel’ in Van Rulers theologie in feite van toepassing is op al die dingen die God gebruikt als middel om zijn doel te bereiken.], 17.
12 A helpful discussion of Van Ruler’s use of the ‘intermezzo’ idea is given by Dirk van Keulen, who spent no less than 23 pages giving an extensive overview of this idea. He also reports the criticism of at least five theologians, who have reacted to Van Ruler’s use of this concept. Cf. Van Keulen, ’Inleiding, Deel 4B’ 17 – 40. : For another exposition of the idea of ‘intermezzo’ in the theology of Van Ruler see: Van Hoof, P.W.J. “Intermezzo. Kontinuiteit en diskontinuiteit in de theologie van A.A. van Ruler. Eschatologie en kultuur.”, Ton Bolland, Amsterdam 1974.
13 Cf. Chapter 5.2.
14 Arnold A Van Ruler, Visie en Vaart [Vision and Progress], (Amsterdam: Holland, 1947), 84.
15 Cf. Paul Roy Fries, Religion and the Hope for a Truly Human Existence. An inquiry into the Theology of F. D. E Schleiermacher and A. A. Van Ruler with Questions for America (Utrecht: Dissertation kept at the University Library at Utrecht 1979), 96. Fries says: “The most dramatic instance of the intermezzo, and the heart of the intermezzo concept, is that of the messianic intermezzo. Van Ruler holds that not only will the messiah abandon his messianic work, but that the incarnation itself will be surrendered.”
16 Cf. H C Van der Sar, ’Evenwicht of Beweging? Hoofdlijnen in de theologie van Van Ruler’ [Balance or Movement? Main lines in the theology of Van Ruler] (Master's degree thesis, Theological University, 1976), 43. Van der Sar speaks of the law, the sacrifice made by the messiah and the gift of the Holy Spirit as means (media) by which the dualities are kept together. However, I do not agree that their function is to keep ‘the dualities together’. Where Van der Sar speaks of dualities, the idea of an ellipse with two centres is to be preferred. Cf. also Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 267.
17 Van Keulen, ’Inleiding, Deel 4B’, 40.
3.2 The kingdom and reconciliation

Introduction

In his coming Christ Jesus established the kingdom of God. He not only ushered in the kingdom, but also established it. In other words there is a concreteness about it. It is the reality of the historical and eschatological action of God.\(^\text{18}\) Christ ushered in the kingdom by his ministry, his work, death and resurrection, through his suffering and the fulfilment of the Law. Van Ruler states that the kingdom of Christ is a modality, or form, of the kingdom of God. The *regnum Christi* is preliminary, hidden and fragmented. The kingdom of Christ, which the Father had given him, is provisional, says Van Ruler, because he will hand the kingdom back to the Father. There is also the fulfilment of the coming kingdom.\(^\text{19}\) In a sense there are two fulfilments, the fulfilment of the parousia and the fulfilment which exists already, since the kingdom has been established already. These two, the parousia and the already existing fulfilment are related, they both find their foundation in the work of reconciliation brought about through Christ. It is possible to say both: the kingdom has already come and is ‘not yet’ fully established; in a sense the kingdom still needs to come. However, both are true and both are grounded in the fulfilled work of Christ, the work of reconciliation.

Christ’s work of ministry and suffering is the basis of reconciliation. A discussion here of this topic is necessary in order to show that the basis for forgiveness, the basis for our relationship with God, is reconciliation. The kingdom is based on God’s relationship with the creation, the world and humanity. Without this relationship there can be no kingdom. God’s reign includes reconciliation, a reconciliation ‘fulfilled’ in Christ’s completed work, but one that still needs to be ‘revealed’(*onthulling*). Van Ruler states, “What we are

\(^{18}\) Van Ruler, *De Vervulling van de Wet*, 94

\(^{19}\) Van Ruler, *De Vervulling van de Wet*, 95.
waiting for is the revelation of salvation, that is really present, but covertly.”\textsuperscript{20} Therefore it is possible to say, there can be no ‘fulfilment’ of that kingdom ‘already’ without reconciliation. If there is no reconciliation there can be no anticipation of the kingdom of God.

\textit{a. Reconciliation as acquittal of guilt}

Van Ruler sees reconciliation mainly as acquittal of guilt.\textsuperscript{21} The sinner has wrongly willed to sin, with the consequence that he or she is guilty. In other words, Van Ruler’s emphasis is not on the sinful nature of humankind, but on the will. Christ has set the sinner free, reconciled the believer to God and in this way the believer has received salvation. This salvation is a ‘taking away’ of guilt. There is a strong identity between this world and the coming one, says Van Ruler. Seen in the eschatological perspective, this salvation does not mean that another life is awaited, nor that this life will be continued, neither is there a repetition of this life, but rather that this life, lived now, will return in “eternity.”\textsuperscript{22} There is a complete identity between this world and the next.\textsuperscript{23} In other words, it is this world to which God applies his renewing work in Christ. It is therefore important to see the eschatological connection between reconciliation and the kingdom. For this reason God sent the Messiah, in order that we can receive the salvation of the world. In other words, Van Ruler makes two points here. First, he indicates that God remains faithful to his creation, to this world he made. Second, that salvation has come and that we are awaiting its revelation in the end of the age. “At the end of the age God will act in a completely new manner, so new that we cannot imagine what it will be like, but in a manner in which he remains true to himself and faithful to his world. It is this, our world, in which he completes

\textsuperscript{20} Van Ruler, \textit{De Vervulling van de Wet}, 55.
\textsuperscript{21} Van Ruler, \textit{De Vervulling van de Wet}, 56. This topic has been touched on in 2.3, but is expanded here.
\textsuperscript{22} Van Ruler, \textit{De Vervulling van de Wet}, 56. Van Ruler has quotation marks around the word \textit{eeuwigheid}, indicating that he uses the word in a special context and points to ‘the end of the age’ (Matthew 13:39).
\textsuperscript{23} Van Ruler, \textit{De Vervulling van de Wet}, 54
his new works, in a manner that we now ‘already’ experience the salvific power of these his works of the future.”

b. Reconciliation and justification

Van Ruler makes a distinction between reconciliation and justification. Reconciliation is something that happened at Golgotha and happens in heaven, while the justification is something that happens presently and is applied to the person. Van Ruler says that reconciliation belongs primarily in the doctrine of the work of Christ, while justification belongs in the doctrine of Pneumatology. And, for example, the imputation is something that is done by the Holy Spirit. Reconciliation has to do with the place Christ takes as our substitute, which belongs in the area of Christology, while in Pneumatology the ‘indwelling’ is dealt with. He therefore makes a distinction between the justificatio dei activa [the active divine justification] and the justificatio dei passiva [the passive divine justification]. In the first a sinner is declared righteous, while in the second a person accepts God’s verdict and agrees with God’s judgement and pronouncement. Van Ruler speaks here of reciprocity, but maintains that it is a theonomous reciprocity. He adds that this reconciliation, including justification, is never a purely personal and individual application of salvation which God gives in grace, but always a communal gift. After all, human beings are communal beings.

24 Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 54.
25 Heaven for Van Ruler is the realm where Christ dwells and safeguards our redemption and therefore is secure. In the eschaton our complete salvation will be revealed.
27 Van Ruler, ‘Hoofdlijnen van een pneumatologie’ 12. Cf. 79ff Van Keulen, ‘Inleiding, Deel 4B’ 79ff, where Van Keulen gives an overview of more than 11 pages of Van Ruler’s use and application of his concept ‘theonomous reciprocity’. Cf. also chapter 5.5.a further in this study, where this concept will be explained.
28 Van Ruler, ‘Hoofdlijnen van een pneumatologie’, 15. “De woonstede van God zijn de volkeren der aarde.” The nations of the world are the dwelling place of God in the world.
c. The difference between reconciliation and deliverance

Van Ruler does not want to make a qualitative difference between reconciliation (verzoening) and deliverance (verlossing), in the sense that here and now a part of salvation has commenced and later, in the fulfilment of deliverance, the complement is added and becomes complete salvation. On the contrary, the full salvation to which we look forward is real. When the guilt is reconciled, the world is saved and then there is not only the reality of salvation, but also the presence of that salvation. In other words, what the believer is waiting for is the revelation (onthulling) of salvation, which now is present but hidden. The difference that Van Ruler sees between reconciliation and deliverance, is a difference of modality. It depends on the manner in which salvation is present, i.e. hidden or open. It is important to see the eschatological issue at stake here. Van Ruler says salvation has come; salvation is present, it is hidden but nevertheless real. This means that this salvation is with us now. How? In the form of ‘anticipation’, which Van Ruler gives the name ‘fulfilment’. This connects with his statement that the kingdom coming from the future, in one sense is already with us, namely in the salvation that is present. And this salvation can only be present because of the work of reconciliation.

d. Fulfilment of the Law

What this reconciliation accomplishes is not an absolution from guilt, nor just the forgiveness of sins, but the ground of a new relationship. A new relationship made already actual by virtue of the work of Christ. Van Ruler wants to speak of reconciliation in a threefold manner, namely as ‘expiatio’, as ‘placatio’ and as ‘reconciliatio’. Reconciliation is first of all ‘satisfactio en expiatio’, it is God’s reconciliation.

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29 Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 55.
30 Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 55.
31 Cf. Chapter 6.3.
32 Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 101
reconciliation as placatio). Christ has fulfilled the Law and done everything that the Law demanded. What humankind was not able to do, Christ has done in his obedience to the Law. All these elements together make up reconciliation. One of the purposes of the coming of the Messiah and his work, says Van Ruler, is the fulfilment of the Law.

Through Christ’s work human guilt has been taken away, righteousness has been obtained. All that ought to have been done by humankind, has been done and fulfilled by Christ, the Law of God has completely been fulfilled and the righteousness of God accomplished. The satisfaction for the guilt of sin has been accomplished. Not for the satisfaction of God’s honour, but the Law of God. “The offer of reconciliation was necessary due to the Law of God, because it needed to depict salvation, the presence of the kingdom of God in our world (in de existentie).” Van Ruler stresses that the guilt has been taken away, it has been discharged (gedelgd). It has been taken away from life, humanity and existence, without a change to the nature of things, neither has anything been added to the nature of existence, humanity or life. Van Ruler speaks of ‘a blanket of sin’ covering the creation. Reconciliation means that ‘in principle’ everything has been done to remove that blanket, so much so that in a sense we can say that the blanket has already been removed. That removal will be revealed in the parousia.

Van Ruler draws attention to the fact that in Romans 8:3, 4 Paul says: “God has done what the Law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of

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33 Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 98. Van Ruler wants to place the emphasis on God, not the human person. The forgiveness is God's mystery, God’s action with the human person. He calls it therefore ‘revelation’ (openbaring). Reconciliation is revelation, but it is not possible to state this in reverse.
34 Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 98.
35 Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 490.
36 Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 330. Van Ruler devotes a large section of this volume to this particular aspect. It is not necessary to cover this in this study.
37 Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 490.
38 Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 490.
39 Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 491.
40 Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 213.
sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, …” By ‘flesh’ Van Ruler means,

the rebelliousness and guilt of human existence (de existentie) in the face of the law of God. But it also denotes weakness and sinfulness, mortality, transience, corporality and materiality. In this very existence the righteousness of the Law seeks to be established. It is directed toward this existence… It wants to order this human existence toward the Name and the kingdom, in a word toward the ‘image of God’. 41

Van Ruler relates this to the kingdom: “… the proclamation should not be narrowed to the matter of reconciliation in itself, rather, the proclamation must be about the kingdom of God, which is grounded in this offer of reconciliation.” 42 Van Ruler himself summarises this at the end of his dissertation.

In these two things – guilt and reconciliation – everything lies: the puzzle of history, the justification of God, the mediation of salvation and existence, the establishment of the kingdom in the ‘flesh’, the coinciding of the Law and the council of God, the realisation (of the kingdom of God). In this way God is God and we are human beings. In this way we are saved in this evil world-time for the future of God. This does not lead us to an active pessimism, but to a joyful persistence and work in the chaos of our historically constituted existence. The last word is love: Love in regard to everything the living God has said and done on earth and therefore love for the whole of reality. In this one word – love – the whole Law is fulfilled. 43

The purpose of the above excursus was to show the connection between reconciliation and the kingdom and therein also the connection between reconciliation and anticipation, for if anticipation is a pre-actualisation of the future kingdom and everything that it entails, then it must be grounded in reconciliation. Salvation is seen by Van Ruler as the proleptic reality of the kingdom of God. For in reconciliation we see that God has saved the world, has acquitted guilt and made salvation (heid) real in our present existence. Salvation is here and now and therefore it can be experienced, it can be lived, it can be anticipated, for salvation is part of the kingdom of God which is lived in anticipation of fulfilment.

3.3 The kingdom and fulfilment

Van Ruler’s magnum opus is his dissertation: ‘The Fulfilment of the Law’ (Vervulling van de Wet). It is the basis for the whole of his theology and especially for his theology of the

41 Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 490.
42 Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 491.
43 Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 535.
kingdom of God. It is here that he establishes his theology as an eschatological theology.

He approaches the teachings of the kingdom through the focus of fulfilment: prophecies and promises of God are fulfilled in the presence and future of the kingdom. The contours of this ‘fulfilment’ are the lines Van Ruler uses to outline the kingdom.\textsuperscript{44} “The fulfilment has to be seen as God’s deed on earth in the greater context of his historic-eschatological act, i.e. in the greater context of his kingdom”.\textsuperscript{45} It is in the kingdom that the ‘fulfilment’ is realised, it is a filling of the present reality with salvation.\textsuperscript{46} This ‘fulfilment’ is a work of the Trinity. It comes through the work of the Messiah who redeems all things in his work of salvation. It is the work of the Holy Spirit who with the power of salvation permeates all things, reduces the demonic powers and places them in the latitude of history as signs and seals of the kingdom of God.\textsuperscript{47} The gift of the Spirit is present in the kingdom of God, as Christ is present. We already “taste the powers of the coming world”, meaning that we already experience the new life of the coming world through the Spirit.\textsuperscript{48} The Spirit is our advocate with the Father and the Son and as such our comforter. In both aspects, as advocate and comforter, the Spirit does everything for the world, in order that humankind can experience the world as God wants us to experience it.\textsuperscript{49} ‘Fulfilment’ is the coming of the kingdom; it is sanctification and glorification of God’s world. ‘Fulfilment’ is the presence of the future, a form of the coming kingdom.

\textsuperscript{44} The translation of the Dutch word ‘Vervulling’ is difficult. The English word ‘fulfilment’ usually denotes (in the context of the kingdom) the consummation. Van Ruler’s term could be translated as ‘fulfilling’, seeing he uses it in the gerund form, but relates to more than the consummation. He gives it the sense of ‘anticipation’, because it pre-actualises the kingdom, which has ‘already’ been fulfilled and at the same time is ‘not yet’ fulfilled. Cf. also Chapter 6.3.b and especially note 99.

\textsuperscript{45} Van Ruler, \textit{De Vervulling van de Wet}, 26.

\textsuperscript{46} And as was shown above with: reconciliation.

\textsuperscript{47} Van Ruler, \textit{De Vervulling van de Wet}, 24.

\textsuperscript{48} Van Ruler, ‘Hoofdlijnen van een pneumatologie’, 24. This is an expression Van Ruler uses and may also refer to the sacrament of Holy Communion.

\textsuperscript{49} Van Ruler, ‘Hoofdlijnen van een pneumatologie’, 24.
a. *The four key terms*

As noted earlier, Van Ruler pays great attention to the different aspects of ‘fulfilling’ in his dissertation. There are four terms which play a key role in the understanding of the fulfilment of God’s work in the world. We will look at each one in turn.

The first one is *Vervulling* i.e. fulfilling or fulfilment. We are living in and towards the time of the fulfilment. The title of Van Ruler’s dissertation is: ‘The Fulfilling of the Law’ (*The Vervulling van de Wet*). On purpose, the word *vervulling* in the title is translated as ‘fulfilling’, not as a noun, but as the gerund form of the verb, inferring an ongoing action. Unfortunately we lose some of this dynamic context in the English language. This applies to all four key words. It also indicates more closely what Van Ruler means when he says that the ‘fulfilling’ (*vervulling*) is an ongoing work of God, coming towards us from the future with, and in anticipation, of the kingdom.\(^{50}\) It helps to understand the kingdom of God as the salvific conduct of God in the world. The world is given over to what God does with it. It is God’s dance with the world.\(^{51}\) Stronger even: the world *is* that which God does with it. “This also makes space for the ‘fulfilling’. It is an action of God and as such a moment in the conduct of God. It is a form, or modality, of the kingdom.”\(^{52}\) With ‘fulfilling’ Van Ruler also means that the kingdom of God is made effective (*van kracht maken*), is receiving validity, cosmic proportions and is spreading in the world.\(^{53}\) Here already it comes close to ‘realisation’.

Fulfilment, or the process of fulfilling, for Van Ruler takes many forms. His dissertation speaks of the fulfilment of the law, but this is done in many different forms. It is not

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\(^{50}\) P R Fries uses the word ‘fulfilment’ only. I will follow this example in the rest of this chapter.

\(^{51}\) Often Van Ruler uses the word: *reidans*, a particular form of dance like ‘line-dancing’, underlining that there are different steps and that there is a continual change of steps. The reference to dance (*reidans*) here, indicates the fluidity and changeability of the kingdom.

\(^{52}\) Van Ruler, *De Vervulling van de Wet*, 42.

\(^{53}\) Van Ruler, *De Vervulling van de Wet*, 465.
humanity that fulfils the law; nor does God do it in such a way that humanity can complete God’s work. God has fulfilled and does fulfil the law in Christ. And yet this fulfilment is placed in human hands, but not for the improvement of creation. Fulfilment is a trinitarian action of God, which shapes human existence. Fulfilment is eschatological, christological, as well as pneumatological, it is a trinitarian action. Fulfilment comes to us through the coming of the kingdom of God, which is provisionally and fragmentarily realised throughout history. Another meaning, important for this study, is that Van Ruler uses fulfilment as: to make valid, effective or operative or also to realise or actualise (van kracht maken).⁵⁴ God has made effective, has realised, ‘fulfilled’, his rule in the world, which is the kingdom, even if at present this is still hidden (verborgen). In the eschaton all will be revealed.

Fulfilment, as the work of the Holy Spirit, is the historical ordering of creation through which the kingdom of God is given form in history. The Holy Spirit, the ‘eschatological gift par excellence’⁵⁵, fills reality with the modality of the kingdom, the reign of Christ.⁵⁶ The role of the Holy Spirit is very important for Van Ruler in this form of fulfilment. In the fourth chapter of his dissertation, in four paragraphs, Van Ruler devotes 82 pages to the role of the Holy Spirit in the ‘fulfilling’ of the kingdom. This section shows the Holy Spirit as the indwelling power, the ‘gratia interna’.⁵⁷ It is noticeable that when Van Ruler speaks of the relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit, the Spirit has relative independence. This independence creates latitude or ‘space’ (speelruimte) in the actions of God for history and the future, and therefore also for fulfilment. This is because the Holy Spirit breaks into the present. This means that through the Holy Spirit the kingdom is realised or

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⁵⁴ Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 164.
⁵⁵ This expression comes from Fries, Hope for a Truly Human Existence, 100.
⁵⁶ Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 134.
⁵⁷ Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 200ff. On p. 125 Van Ruler says: “The idea of the ‘gratia interna’ implicitly means that the Spirit enters all forms of existence.”
actualised here on earth, but only fragmentarily. It remains a torso, incomplete and provisional. But in this the future reality is present. More will be said on this in chapter 5: The doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

The second word is ‘Verhulling’, i.e. covering or veiling or hiding. There is a play on words in the use of the two words ‘vervulling’ (fulfilling) and ‘verhulling’ (covering) as well as ‘onthulling’ (uncovering). The time of fulfilment is also the time of ‘covering’, it denotes the hiddenness of God, the veiled presence of the kingdom. The kingdom of God is coming towards us from the future, it is being established in our midst, but often we cannot see it. Often we cannot see in the world the actions of God by which he constitutes the kingdom. As much as there is a ‘fulfilling’ of the kingdom, there is also a ‘hiddenness’, or concealment of the kingdom and God. It is not something obvious.

Thirdly, there is the word ‘Verwachting’, i.e. expecting or expectation, a waiting for the parousia, the eschaton. It can also be translated as ‘anticipation’. We will deal with this aspect more fully later. The word ‘verwachting’ denotes living expectantly towards, but also from the future, like a woman expecting her baby.

Everything stands under the proviso (voorbehoud) of the last and new deeds of God … Hope determines Christian existence … We ought not to deny that we exist and that we know God and that we have our salvation in him. But one day there will be something more and different, and we will speak of it in a totally different manner.

Our living in expectation (verwachting), is different from that of the ancient Greeks. Van Ruler says that the cycle of nature has been broken and reality is focussed on the future; in place of the anamnesis has come the expectation … and we have become sensitive to the contingent, the problem of the new and unexpected.

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58 Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 130.
59 Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 52.
Then there is fourthly, the word ‘Voltooiing’, i.e. completing or completion, consummation, a making perfect. Van Ruler also uses: ‘Voleinding’, i.e. also completing or completion, a finishing of the task; or accomplishment. These two terms are used interchangeably. They are used for the completion of the kingdom, when all things will have been renewed; when God is all in all, and the kingdom of love is realised.

Each of these four words will return frequently throughout this study. Perhaps the most frequent will be ‘expectation’, for an eschatological theology of the kingdom speaks of hope, an expectation of a future that is being fulfilled, and will be fulfilled. This fulfilment comes in Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit. It is the fulfilment of God’s promises, therefore there is not only a kingdom, but a kingdom which opens the future and a future already ‘present’ amongst us in anticipation. The concept of fulfilment covers the whole of life and the universe. Van Ruler likes to illustrate this by way of the use of concentric circles.

The model below helps us see that all three spheres of church, world and kingdom are covered by the kingdom idea at the same time. It also shows that although the church is shown here as being at the centre, it nevertheless is not the centre of the kingdom. In the eschaton there will only be the kingdom, the world and humanity, with God being all in all.

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61 Van Ruler, De dood wordt overwonnen, 128. Van Ruler does not use the word ‘anticipation’ here, but certainly uses the idea as he refers to the ‘firstfruits’ and the harvest ripening on the fields of life.
The above diagram shows that the church, being God’s eschatological people, is a sign and a pre-figuration of the kingdom. The eschatological people anticipate the kingdom. The church points away from itself to the kingdom encompassing the universe. The world becomes the sphere of the kingdom. God has a hidden purpose with the world and the church is a sign of this. The reality of the fulfilment of the kingdom is not to be identified with the reality of the church. God’s eschatological purpose is not for the church, but for the whole creation.

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63 Van Ruler, *De Vervulling van de Wet*, 60.
The above diagram also shows that Van Ruler places the kingdom in relation to the world. His theology is not foremost a theology of the church, even though the church plays a role in the coming and the fulfilment of the kingdom. All aspects of society or the larger community, like the state, the culture and the church, have their place in relation to the kingdom of God, coming to us from the future. It is coming with vigour, power, even overwhelmingly\(^{64}\), from the future, but it is also hidden, partial (in torso) and imperfect. God uses all aspect of society as instruments in order to bring about the kingdom.

### 3.4 The various aspects of fulfilment.

Later in this study it will be shown that the way Van Ruler uses ‘fulfilment’ is a form of anticipation of the kingdom of God. For him the process of fulfilment is a pre-actualisation of the future kingdom. The ‘fulfilment’ understood as a process is of great importance; at one instance he even speaks of the ‘dispensation of fulfilment’.\(^{65}\) It is therefore necessary in this chapter to give a more comprehensive overview of what Van Ruler said about ‘fulfilment’. Many ‘things’ can be filled with the meaning of fulfilment. “When things are ‘fulfilled’ they are redeemed as signs and thereby receive their meaning outside themselves.”\(^{66}\) He himself enumerated ten different aspects of fulfilment. It will not be necessary to look at all of these, but a selection of these aspects will be mentioned in order to obtain a better insight into what he actually meant by the category of fulfilment.

#### a. The historical character of fulfilment.\(^{67}\)

Van Ruler points out the historical character of fulfilment. It is an ongoing eschatological action of God in history, coming from the future, the consummation, the end of all things.

\(^{64}\) Van Ruler often says that the kingdom comes towards us ‘overwhelmingly’ (overmachtig) and breaks into reality in an unstoppable manner (overstelpend), even though we cannot see it. Cf. Van Ruler, *De Vervulling van de Wet*, 24. a.o.

\(^{65}\) Van Ruler, *De Vervulling van de Wet*, 329.

\(^{66}\) Van Ruler, *De Vervulling van de Wet*, 114.

\(^{67}\) Van Ruler, *De Vervulling van de Wet*, 72.
God pushes into our present, says Van Ruler, breaks it open and in this manner places himself and his kingdom in our existence. It is important here to remember that Van Ruler uses the gerund form of the verb, fulfilling as a process all the time. So it points to the ongoing action of God, he is continually ‘fulfilling’ the kingdom of God. By ‘historical’, he means, that the fulfilment is necessary and indispensable, because all things are filled with the grace of salvation.

b. The hidden character of fulfilment.\textsuperscript{68}

The consummation or parousia can only be understood as the unveiling (\textit{onthulling}) or revelation of the fullness of salvation, which is already present, says Van Ruler. However, it is also necessary to recognise the hidden character of this fulfilment. The content of this fulfilment, which is salvation, can also be understood as the salvific presence of God, or as the kingdom of God that has entered our existence and is not obvious. “This hidden, historical act of God’s ‘fulfilment’ essentially belongs to the apostolic kerygma of the kingdom! The gospel of the kingdom for us, in the present (time) of grace, is always the proclamation of Christ!”\textsuperscript{69} The salvation in Christ is not obvious, but hidden, says Van Ruler. By this he does not mean that it ought not to be proclaimed or discussed. No, this hidden and historical deed of God belongs to the apostolic kerygma of the kingdom. It is hidden because it will only be revealed (\textit{onthulled}) in the fullness of time, says Van Ruler. He says, “The transcendence of the kingdom of God is the moment of its hiddenness.”\textsuperscript{70}

And therefore also of the ‘fulfilment’.

\textsuperscript{68} Van Ruler, \textit{De Vervulling van de Wet}, 73.
\textsuperscript{69} Van Ruler, \textit{De Vervulling van de Wet}, 73.
\textsuperscript{70} Van den Brom, ‘Theoloog van de werkelijkheid’, 39.
c. The sign character of fulfilment.\textsuperscript{71}

God who comes to us from the future, has chosen and consecrated certain people and things to be signs of the coming kingdom. The Bible speaks of the ‘signs of the end of time’, but the concept sign takes on a special meaning after the ascension of Jesus, says Van Ruler.\textsuperscript{72} It designates a ‘deed of God in Christ’, in that time is broken up in signs of the times, in the plural.\textsuperscript{73} “In the concept sign we find an application of the category of fulfilment of great importance, … .”\textsuperscript{74} The signs are an important category, for they point beyond themselves to the fulfilment that is awaited from the future, but is present in the signs. The hiddenness of fulfilment can apparently only be expressed in sacramental language, says Van Ruler. He does not explain this further, but no doubt is referring to the Reformed understanding of sacrament, which is a sign and seal of the covenant of God. ‘Fulfilment’ can be expressed in the language of the sacraments, namely that they are signs and seals of the kingdom of God, for the “whole reality has been made into signs of the kingdom of God.”\textsuperscript{75}

\textit{d. The pluralistic character of fulfilment.}\textsuperscript{76}

There is not just one sign in the world, but many. “The whole reality has been made into signs of the kingdom of God.”\textsuperscript{77} Van Ruler often states that there is a plurality of signs, there are many signs and many things have been redeemed as signs. Neither does a sign appear on its own, but always in company of others. In a dance one step is never sufficient; it has substance and meaning only as it moves to the next step. In that way it is a sign of the kingdom taken up in and dependent on the plurality of signs. In this plurality lies also a
certain fullness.\textsuperscript{78} This is a new aspect of the word ‘fulfilment’, namely that it thereby includes all the signs.

e. \textit{The ecclesiastical-sacramental, the political and cultural nature of fulfilment.}

Van Ruler also points to the “ecclesiastical-sacramental and to the political-cultural character of ‘fulfilment’.”\textsuperscript{79} The process of fulfilment concerns the church in all its dimensions and perspectives, but it also reaches out beyond the church to the world in all its aspects and realities. The church as the bearer of the gospel of the kingdom has been set in the world. The kerygma is its organising centre around which stand the sacraments and offices, the communion of saints, faith, hope and love, to mention some. In the church, being Christ’s body, dwells “the fullness of him who fills all in all.” (Eph.1:23). But the church does not exist for itself. It exists for others, it is apostolic in nature. The church has been placed in the world in order to reach out to all nations in a kerygmatic manner. The living God is active in the work of fulfilment, “… so that through the church the wisdom of God in rich variety might be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places (Eph.3:10).”\textsuperscript{80} They, the rulers and authorities, are called to be servants of God (Rom.13:4). The work of God’s ‘fulfilment’ needs to be proclaimed in the church and in the world, in all aspects of culture, arts and politics.

\textit{f. The cosmic character of ‘fulfilment’}.\textsuperscript{81}

In the New Testament the words ‘fulfilment’ and ‘fullness’ have a cosmic implication, in particular when ‘fulfilment’ is approached from a Christological context. This became

\textsuperscript{78} Van Ruler, \textit{De Vervulling van de Wet}, 74.
\textsuperscript{79} Van Ruler, \textit{De Vervulling van de Wet}, 75.
\textsuperscript{80} Van Ruler, \textit{De Vervulling van de Wet}, 75.
\textsuperscript{81} Van Ruler, \textit{De Vervulling van de Wet}, 76.
apparent when the future of the kingdom and the future of God were considered. Van Ruler says that, seen from an eschatological perspective, the whole of natural life will return in the Christian faith.\(^{82}\) This seems to indicate that the action of fulfilment goes so far, that the salvific work of the Messiah flows with force through the whole of life. It is not possible to speak about the fullness of salvation without including the physical and cosmic aspects. In this way, Van Ruler says, that nothing falls outside the scope of the fullness of salvation, nor outside the ‘fulfilment’ of the salvific work of the Messiah.\(^{83}\)

g. *The normal character of fulfilment.*\(^{84}\)

By the ‘normal character of fulfilment’ Van Ruler means that the action of God’s fulfilment, by which the fullness of salvation is given to us, is nothing extraordinary. This clarifies it as the fullness of salvation. Van Ruler clarifies this by pointing to the sacrament of Holy Communion, which uses ‘ordinary’ bread and ‘ordinary’ wine. By this he does not deny that something special happens in the sacrament, but that by way of the proclamation, the kerygma, i.e. the institution and promises of Christ, by way of the action of fulfilment that ordinary bread and that ordinary wine become the forms by which the believer participates in (and also anticipates) eternal life. That is the salvific action of fulfilment. In other words, the ‘ordinary’ things are seen in the light of eternity. These ‘ordinary things’ are the full kerygmatic and apostolic truth of the fulfilment of the gospel of the kingdom. This aspect of ‘ordinariness’ or ‘normality’ is to be seen in the whole of life. Van Ruler clarifies this further, when he adds, that if one should want to analyse this ‘fulfilment’ empirically, one would find nothing but only what is proclaimed and believed. In this faith one can act and live in fulfilment and therefore – as will be shown later - also in anticipation.

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82 Van Ruler, *De Vervulling van de Wet*, 77.
83 Van Ruler, *De Vervulling van de Wet*, 77.
84 Van Ruler, *De Vervulling van de Wet*, 77.
h. The plerophoric and realistic character of fulfilment.\textsuperscript{85}

“Despite its plurality and contradictory nature, despite its hidden and ordinary character, despite its significant and cosmic aspects, the fulfilment is, due to the power of the transcendent God, nothing more or less than the real and truthful presence, existence and actions of God, coming towards us in our physical being (\textit{vleesch}).\textsuperscript{86} God makes himself present among us in all his holiness. “When this is acknowledged, one will not be able – out of pure delight and joy – to stop praising God, despite the fact that this joy is not to be compared with the future of God, at which everything is directed. In this we already received the fullness of salvation.”\textsuperscript{87}

In summary, Van Ruler gives a deeper insight into what he means by ‘fulfilment’. He enumerates the various aspects of ‘fulfilment’. Their nature is historical, all comprising, cosmic, ongoing and real. It is a way of stating the presence and immanence of God, but also the fullness of salvation. It is hidden and yet with us, it is the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’ of the kingdom, it is the future lived in anticipation.

3.5 The future aspect of the kingdom

The restoration of creation is brought about by God working from the future. This trinitarian activity comes through the kingdom of God, arriving from the end. The goal of this kingdom, or the rule of God, is the restored creation. In the end, i.e. in the eschaton, God will bring about a renewed creation; a restored creation. This restored creation, although not identical with the proton, will nevertheless be recognisable as the creation. The purpose for the creation is the ultimate eschatological purpose, namely the renewed creation as the

\textsuperscript{85} Van Ruler, \textit{De Vervulling van de Wet}, 78.
\textsuperscript{86} Van Ruler, \textit{De Vervulling van de Wet}, 78.
\textsuperscript{87} Van Ruler, \textit{De Vervulling van de Wet}, 79.
kingdom of God. There remains an identity between this present world and the coming one.

Van Ruler states that “The kingdom of God comes from the future and it comes towards us from the future, breaking into our existence powerfully and overwhelmingly (overstelpende).” Thinking dogmatically about the kingdom, it is necessary to begin with the end, says Van Ruler, and walk backwards to the cross and creation. “We find ourselves here in God’s actions, which can only be understood from the end”. Mentioning Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer, he says that we have to think again about the meaning of the kingdom in the kerygma and the modern dogmatic development as God’s historic-eschatological dealings with the world. This is the task that Van Ruler took upon himself in his dissertation and stated that the kingdom is present and future. The kingdom is not identical with the creation, nor to be found in heaven, nor in culture or the church. The kingdom is present like a cloud that throws its shadow on the earth. There is no process, no evolution, but it is present, not because the time is right, but because it pleases God and it overwhels the world from out of the future, because God is busy with the world.

According to Van Ruler, the kingdom of God has the characteristics of being overwhelming and hidden. It means that it is impossible for us to stop or block the kingdom. This, however, does not mean that we can always see or recognise it. The kingdom of God is hidden and transcendent. Yet it is among us, present and immanent.

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89 Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 24.
90 Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 26 cf. also 80.
91 Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 46; see footnote 61.
93 Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 46. Van Ruler says: ‘due to the actions of God’.
94 Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 39
This presence is eschatological: it is a presence that comes from the future, for the kingdom comes from the future. It comes towards us, in a backwards movement,

That is why in the dogmatic way of thinking, we commence at the end and from there look back; or rather we walk back, it is a movement, indeed a backwards movement, toward the cross, - and further back – to the beginning of creation and the fall into sin. We move in the action of God, which can be understood only from the end.\(^{95}\)

Van Ruler not only says that the kingdom comes from the future, but: “…the kingdom of God … comes to us powerfully and overwhelmingly, breaking into our existence; and in this way it also establishes itself in all reality and in all abundance as the kingdom of Christ.” \(^{96}\) And again: “The most characteristic aspect of eschatology is that the kingdom of God comes from the future, it comes towards us and breaks into our existence powerfully and overwhelmingly,…”\(^{97}\)

The above clarifies that Van Ruler maintains the tension that exists in the kingdom coming from the future. For on the one hand we can say that the kingdom is ‘already’ amongst us (Matt. 11:28; 13:24; 13:44) and at the same time it can also be said that it still needs to come from the future (Matt. 25:1; 26:29; Mark 9:1; 11:10; 14:25). On the one hand, the fulfilment of the kingdom is already with us in Christ and through the Spirit and yet the total fulfilment is yet to come from the future. Van Ruler says: “That the kingdom is present, is in my view, not a question. We have to recognise the presence of the kingdom. That is certain. The question is, however, how we acknowledge this presence?”\(^{98}\)

This clarifies that the aspect of the future plays a major role in the concept of the kingdom for Van Ruler: “…the kingdom of God is the ultimate and salvific conduct of God with

\(^{95}\) Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 26.
\(^{96}\) Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 24.
\(^{97}\) Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 24.
\(^{98}\) Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 45.
this world or, to put it differently, what God does, from the future with the world, for its redemption.”

Van den Brom gives a different interpretation from Van Ruler’s eschatological understanding of the kingdom of God ‘coming from the end’. According to Van den Brom, Van Ruler did not really intend to theologise from the future, as a backwards movement coming ‘from the end’, the eschaton. He understands Van Ruler to say that God’s actions are stretched towards the end and move towards that goal. Van Ruler’s wording ‘acting from the end’ is a metaphor for the nature of God’s governance (gubernatio), says Van den Brom. This means that the history of things needs to be interpreted ‘from their stated goal’. It means that “God’s actions are to be understood as a thinking along with God from the end of things.” In this way “things receive their ultimate meaning.” “God has given a certain goal to the created things”. In this way the eschaton becomes, for all things, the goal or destination to which God leads them in his government.

Is Van den Brom’s interpretation correct? More than once Van Ruler stresses God’s salvific action in the world today. God comes, or is motivated from out of the future. God is acting in the world today ‘from the future’. This means that God’s actions do not come only from the past, or from what has happened in the past, but come directly from God acting from out of the future. He is the God of the future and from this future calls the kingdom into being. “The category of the future belongs to a description of the being of God.” It finds its foundation in the concept of God and is the centre of the kingdom.

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99 Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 48.
100 Van den Brom, ‘Theoloog van de werkelijkheid’ 287.
103 Van den Brom, ‘Theoloog van de werkelijkheid’ 286.
104 Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 49.
We discover the being of God in the works of God. Van Ruler makes it abundantly clear that the kingdom coming from the future is not a metaphor for God’s governance. The eschaton is the drawing point (trekpunt) of history.

The above brings into focus the meaning of ‘the presence of the future’. For Van Ruler this means that the structure of biblical thinking begins at the end and works in a backward movement from the ultimate purposes, from the future of God, i.e. from God coming towards us. This movement works all the way to the beginning, to the proton. And this presence of God as future is with us in the Spirit of God. The indwelling of the Spirit has to be understood as God’s ultimate presence, as the ‘dwelling of God with humanity’. The Spirit is the eschatological gift of the kingdom. The Holy Spirit is the anticipated Power (vorwirkende Dynamis), the anticipation of the ‘first dawn’ (Erstanbruch). This underlines the importance of the ‘future’ in Van Ruler’s thinking. We will return to this later, as well as to the place of the Spirit in his eschatology.

The kingdom of God then, is the rule of God established in this world. Van Ruler says: “The kingdom of God in the biblical sense is to be understood as: the ultimate and salvific actions of God with this world”. The kingdom is the rule of God established in Christ

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105 Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology Vol.3*, trans. Geoffrey W Bromiley (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998), 527. “The future of God’s kingdom for whose coming Christians pray in the words of Jesus (Matt.6:10) is the epitome of Christian hope. All else that is related to it, including the resurrection of the dead and the last judgement, is a consequence of God’s own coming to consummate his rule over creation.”


108 Van Ruler, *De Vervulling van de Wet*, 40. Italics his.
and therefore present, but also future. The rule of God, largely hidden at present, will be completed, revealed and fulfilled, in the future. The creation is good but the kingdom of God is larger and richer than anything else (Matt.6:31-33). There is much that we do not know about the kingdom; nobody knows why the kingdom has been given to us (Lk.12:32), nor when the kingdom will come in its fullness (Acts 1:6, 7). Neither is it known what the kingdom actually is, for what we will be has not been revealed to us as yet (1 Cor.2:9; 1 John 3:2). Therefore, the hiddenness of the kingdom means we will never have the last word on the kingdom of God.

The kingdom is not another kind of space, some static-ontological sphere beside or above this temporal spatial world, but is the conduct of God working, in action with our reality. Yet, the kingdom is also more than our present reality. It is God at work in this reality. It is an eschatological reality, for it is not complete as yet, but its completion is from the future, it is coming. This relation between the world and reality is graphically illustrated by Van Ruler: “...the world can simply be portrayed as the sheet (of water) on which the oil spill of the kingdom keeps spreading itself.” The kingdom will reach all the borders of existence.

The kingdom permeates itself throughout the present reality, but does not become absorbed by this present reality. It is God at work, it is God entering our world and history. It is God making history. It is God busy with our world. Van Ruler says: “By the kingdom of God in biblical perspective we mean the final, ultimate and salvific conduct of God with this world.” Yet, not only God is at work, the kingdom also engages us in an eschatological perspective. “The kingdom of God is the vision, the dream from which we

109 Van Ruler, 'Het koninkrijk en geschiedenis', 33.
110 Van Ruler, Religie en politiek, 39.
111 This was dealt with in section 2,5; cf. also 3.6.
112 Van Ruler, Religie en politiek, 40.
live and the model, the pattern after which we try to act.”\textsuperscript{113} The kingdom has both an eschatological and a soteriological function.

The kingdom of God is the salvific conduct of God, by which this world is redeemed from its perdition. The fulfilment, as the fulfilling or redemption of all things by the salvific power of the work of the Messiah, participates clearly in the soteriological character of the kingdom of God.\textsuperscript{114}

The final goal of the kingdom is this visible, tangible creation and humanity. This also defines the essence of the kingdom. The nature or essence of the kingdom is not moral, ethical or just an ideal. The kingdom can be material or spiritual, external or internal. It is the reign of God.

Van Ruler also defines the kingdom as the salvific and ultimate (uiteindelijk) dealings of God with this world. This kingdom is present, but not as part of the creation; it is not out of creation, even though it is immanent, pervading the creation. It is present, but not because the time is ripe. It is present, and not just in a small measure.\textsuperscript{115} Neither is it developing automatically or ethically or steadily towards a new heaven and a new earth. The kingdom is defined as the actions of God. These actions are a penetration, a thrusting of the kingdom from out of the end into this world.\textsuperscript{116} This can be conceived of as becoming stronger or more intensive. Yet, there is not a progressive development. Sometimes the kingdom is present internally, at other times externally. Yet, it is present only because it is coming. “It has not arrived, nor can we think of it, or imagine it as arrived, but neither is it only future. It is coming.”\textsuperscript{117} There is no process, but the world is flooded from out of the future by the actions of God. This transcendence is at the same time the immanence, it is the superior force of the kingdom. It means that God is dwelling in this world and with his

\textsuperscript{113} Van Ruler, 'Grenzen van de eschatologisering', 116.
\textsuperscript{114} Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 44.
\textsuperscript{115} At this point Van Ruler points to Joh. Weiss who compared the presence of the kingdom with a cloud which throws its shadow on the world. Cf. Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 46. Note 61.
\textsuperscript{116} Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 46.
\textsuperscript{117} Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 46. Note 62.
people. It is present and future. It is the presence of the future amongst us. The presence of the kingdom is a miracle, it includes all the aspects mentioned above and therefore in one word is ‘fulfilment’, says Van Ruler.

3.6 The kingdom and the eschaton

The kingdom has a history (chapter 2.5). Is it therefore possible to say that history ends in the eschaton? History is structured teleologically and therefore has a goal and an end. The unfolding reality receives its nature and essence from this telos. It is the eschatological goal that inspires people to live with expectation. The divine process creates life, redeems and recreates it and the whole created reality moves towards the goal of the perfected kingdom of God. That is the telos, the eschaton. The eschaton is the sum total and resumé of the historical process. “If there is no history, even God could not call an eschaton into being. At most he could come to a *nova creatio*.”

At a ministers’ conference in 1968 Van Ruler gave a lecture on the topic “Biblical eschatological expectations and an earthly perspective.” In this paper he stressed that the biblical expectation for the future (eschatology) is not centred exclusively on God, but that the earthly perspective is also very important. The question is raised, whether the present creation will be discarded and replaced by a new one? No, says Van Ruler, the creation, according to her content, is the eschaton. There is a correlative relationship between the eschaton and history. The eschaton is more than the boundary of history, even more than the goal. It is the consummation and the fulfilment that brings unity to history. It is a re-creation. The new earth is not a new creation, it is the world renewed, in that it will

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118 Van Ruler, *De Vervulling van de Wet*, 43.
119 Van Ruler, *De Vervulling van de Wet*, 47.
120 Van Ruler, ‘Bijbelse toekomstverwachting’ 220 ff.
121 Van Ruler, ‘Bijbelse toekomstverwachting’ 225.
122 Van Ruler, ‘Bijbelse toekomstverwachting’ 226.
123 Van Ruler, ‘Bijbelse toekomstverwachting’ 231.
constitute the new social order, where there will be justice, righteousness and peace. This
is realised through judgement, destruction, deliverance and glorification.\textsuperscript{124} Van Ruler
states that the Christian faith believes in the destruction of the world, but also that the
world emerges from this destruction, the whole creation will return as a new creation.

History is like a pregnant woman. It is in the pains of labour. It brings forth the
eschaton…. Even in the destruction of the world the world continues, even through the
destruction. Even at the last minute we do not escape into another world. Biblical
expectation of the future is the true earthly perspective and the so-called worldly
perspective is completely taken up in this.\textsuperscript{125}

The kingdom will reach its destination in the fullness of the re-creation. Van Ruler states
that the world will be saved. It will not be a new world, but this world which will return in
a renewed and perfected mode. “The eschaton is by definition nothing other than the
deliverance and glorification of all material, temporal and communal reality.”\textsuperscript{126}

\textbf{a. The reciprocity between the eschaton and history}

The kingdom of God is the action of God within history. Van Ruler says, “The Lord [God]
rules the field of reality and makes existence historical.”\textsuperscript{127} Also “The kingdom of God is
nothing other than the penetration (binnendringen) of God into history.”\textsuperscript{128} History
contains God’s salvific actions. It is God’s action from the end, an eschatological action.
The kernel of the kingdom is the future of God.\textsuperscript{129} The eschaton and history are in a
reciprocal correlation. The eschaton is in a correlative manner necessary for history. But
the converse also needs to be said. If the eschaton falls away then history disappears,
because history is the content of the eschaton. In maintaining this correlation of history and
the eschaton, life and the world make sense and have purpose. How did this correlation
arise? God revealed himself to Israel and later in Christ to others. He did this in a historical

\textsuperscript{124} Van Ruler, ‘Bijbelse toekomstverwachting’, 231.
\textsuperscript{125} Van Ruler, ‘Bijbelse toekomstverwachting’, 240.
\textsuperscript{127} Van Ruler, ‘Het koninkrijk en geschiedenis’, 33. “\textit{Hij treedt als Heer op in het veld der werkelijkheid en
maakt de existentie historisch.”}
\textsuperscript{128} Van Ruler, ‘Het koninkrijk en geschiedenis’, 35.
\textsuperscript{129} Van Ruler, \textit{De Vervulling van de Wet}, 49.
manner, for Jesus Christ was a historical person and salvation takes place in history.

Therefore there is a future and in that future history will be redeemed. Neither does the eschaton demolish, negate or annihilate the historical. History is meaningful, not only because God is involved in history, also humanity is meaningfully involved in history. Humanity is held accountable for what has taken place in history. In the eschaton all the tears cried in history will be wiped away. History will journey with humanity into the eschaton, so it can be said: society (culturally and as a community) is the heart of history and the eschaton.

Van Ruler says that the completion of the kingdom is not an ending of the creation. Then what is the eschaton? A repetition of what was? Or is it a continuation of created and redeemed existence? Or is it a return to the original creation? Van Ruler says that the creation, together with the plus of history and the fire-proofing, will return in the eschaton. The eschaton is not a creation ex nihilo, says Van Ruler. This may require the same power of God, yet the last deed of God is totally different from the first. It will be a re-creation! It will also be a completion. Van Ruler makes a distinction between fulfilment and completion. The fulfilment of the kingdom of God is an ongoing process, the completion is realised in its perfection when all will be revealed. Then the

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130 Cf. also Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, Vol.3, 580ff. “The two aspects of the term ‘eschaton’, end and completion or fulfilment, are not alternatives. They go together in the sense that we cannot think of an end that is not a completion or a completion that is not an end.”

131 Van Ruler speaks about a ‘plus’ which adds to the proton in the eschaton. This ‘plus’ is fire-proof (vuurvast). The image of a fire-proof dish, which can stand great heat, is used in order to express that the creation will come through the destruction of the end of days and become part of the ‘re-creation’. The content of this ‘plus’ is also that humankind no longer can sin. The ‘posse non peccare’ (possibility to sin) changes into the ‘non posse peccare’ (not able to sin). Cf. Van Ruler, ‘Bijbelse toekomstverwachting’, 229. Cf. also Arnold A Van Ruler, ‘De Verhouding van het kosmologische en het eschatologische element in de Christologie’ [The relation between the cosmological and eschatological element in the Christology], in Verzameld Werk, Deel 4A [Collected Works, Vol.4A], ed. Dirk van Keulenl, (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2011), 171. See pages 97/8.

132 More about this will be said in the following section 3.6.c.

133 It has been shown in a previous section in this chapter that Van Ruler uses ‘fulfilment’ in a particular manner and we will see later that he gives it the meaning of ‘anticipation’. It is important to remember that Van Ruler uses ‘fulfilment’ in the gerund form, namely as a process of fulfilling (vervulling).
‘scaffolding’ of the work of Christ and the Spirit will fall away and the original creation will return redeemed and perfected.

With regard to fulfilment and completion we need to repeat that Van Ruler sees the relation between eschaton and history as a reciprocal and necessary one. The eschaton is not only the drawing point (trekpunt) of history, it is also its boundary or limit. It is more than goal or purpose, it is also the summary, the recapitulation, the consummation and the completion (Dutch: ‘voleinding’; Gk. ‘synteleia’), which makes history a unity. In this way history becomes complete history. This drawing point, namely the eschaton, also sets history into motion. Van Ruler finds this relation between history and the eschaton so important, that he can say that without it the eschaton would not be possible. “If there would be no history, even God could not call the eschaton into being. At most he could turn to a new creation (nova creatio).” The eschaton is the pleroma, the fullness of all realised possibilities.

b. The eschaton as revelation (onthulling)

Theologians would typically say that the eschaton is the completion of the kingdom, the completion of God’s work and history. Yet Van Ruler says that the eschaton is not only completion, but also revelation (onthulling). In the eschaton it will be revealed what God has wrought in history; then it will be revealed what has been fulfilled all along. The ‘fulfilment’ will no longer be hidden (verborgen), but made public, unveiled, revealed, for all to see and to hear. In the eschaton the revelation of the kingdom will be completed. Then the reign of grace and compassion (regnum gratiea) will become the reign of God’s

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134 Van Ruler points to Col. 3:3 namely that “your life is hidden with Christ in God”. Cf. Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 104. Van Ruler also speaks of the ‘ascension’ as ‘hiding’ and the ‘resurrection’ as ‘bringing into the light’. He points to Col.3 and 1Peter 1.
majesty and glory (regnum gloriea). At this point the kingdom of Christ will be completed and finished, and will it become the kingdom of God.\textsuperscript{135}

Van Wilgenburg makes the observation that the above also means that revelation did not come to an end. For Van Ruler the objective revelation was not closed at the time of Jesus’ resurrection. For Van Ruler the ascension is a ‘covering’ of the resurrection life and thereby the emphasis shifts to the ‘coming again’ of Christ. This means that objective revelation could not have been closed, but waits for the completion of the kingdom of God, when all will be revealed. Van Wilgenburg says:

\begin{quote}
It is therefore of the greatest importance to keep in mind the provisional and preliminary character of the whole ‘messianic-pneumatological presence of God in the flesh’. Only then is the work of the Spirit not placed in opposition to the work of Christ, and only then is the dynamic pluriformity and significatory character of revelation maintained in its totality.\textsuperscript{136}
\end{quote}

Does this mean that we know everything about the eschaton, that we can fully describe this eschatological event? Van Ruler says that it is only possible to speak of the eschaton with the help of images and pictures. They reveal only certain aspects of the eschaton. He also says that we need to realise the symbolic character of the eschatological dogmas, which leaves them open to some extent. Van Ruler does not hesitate to speak of boundaries in regard to eschatology and the eschaton.\textsuperscript{137} What is known is that there will be a revealing and a completion in the eschaton. It will be completed in the Messiah and through the Spirit. This completion is both an unveiling and disclosure, for it will mean the revelation of the ‘gloria Dei’. Therefore the eschaton will not be the finishing or ending of all things, love and eternal life will continue. And there will be a resurrection of the body.\textsuperscript{138}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{135} Van Ruler, \textit{De Vervulling van de Wet}, 107.
\item \textsuperscript{136} Aart W Van Wilgenburg, 'God en de geschiedenis: een christologisch dilemma' [God and history, a christological dilemma] (A dissertation, University, 2008), 291.
\item \textsuperscript{137} Van Ruler, 'Grenzen van de eschatologisering', 111.
\item \textsuperscript{138} Van Ruler, 'Grenzen van de eschatologisering', 112, 113.
\end{itemize}
c. Re-creation or new creation

For Van Ruler the relation of this present reality to the eschaton is of central importance. Put differently, this world is not discarded or done away with. There will be no annihilation of the proton. The eschaton does not mean that God is creating a new world, there is no ‘nova creatio’ in the eschaton, but a ‘re-creatio’. Over against J Moltmann, Van Ruler maintains that the eschaton is not a creation ex nihilo. He writes, “There is a radical newness in the eschatological conduct of God, but this newness is radically united with his radical faithfulness to all he has ever said and done”. It is clear that Van Ruler is opposed to the views of J Moltmann.

Moltmann draws attention to the fact that already the Old Testament prophets spoke of ‘new things to come’ (Isa 43:18f.;). “Hosea promises a new settlement of the land, Isaiah the new David, Jeremiah the new covenant, Deutero-Isaiah a new Exodus, and Ezekiel a new temple. In Isa. 43:18 the breach between the old and the new becomes so deep that hope takes over from remembrance altogether.” Moltmann goes on to write,

“Just as the raised Christ does not develop out of the crucified and dead Christ, the novum ultimum [the ultimate new thing] does not issue from the history of the old….The new thing is the surprising thing, the thing that could never have been expected. It evokes unbounded astonishment, and transforms the people whom it touches.”

Yet, this is not the end of the matter. Moltmann further says:

What is eschatologically new itself creates its own continuity, since it does not annihilate the old but gathers it up and creates it anew. It is not that another creation takes the place of this one: ‘this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality’ (1Cor.15.53).….The creatio nova is therefore the new creation of this one, the creation which is perishing from its sin and injustice.

There seems to be some ambiguity in Moltmann’s description. It appears that he gives due weight to the expression from Isaiah 40:31 ‘Behold I make all things new’, in such a way that the emphasis falls on the term: nova creatio. Van Ruler, on the other hand, places the

140 Moltmann, The Coming of God, 27.
141 Moltmann, The Coming of God, 28. The cursive is Moltmann’s.
142 Moltmann, The Coming of God, 29.
emphasis on the term ‘re-creation’. This is very important for Van Ruler, because the proton may not be done away with in a ‘nova creatio’. Van Ruler allows no ambiguity here. The creation is preserved, restored and re-established in greater glory. Van Ruler is positive that the original creation is good in essence and therefore God will restore it rather than cast it away. This is not a denial that the creation has become corrupted, and that the present is stained by sin and pain, but Van Ruler says that God will bring this creation in its total existence through the darkness and pain, even through the catastrophes and chaos to the ultimate perfection of the ‘new heaven and the new earth’ where God will be all in all. The perfected kingdom coming from the future could be called a new creation, but not as a replacement of the present creation, not as a second ex nihilo.\textsuperscript{143}

This creation also includes the physical human existence. The Saviour does not only deliver the soul, but also the body, the person’s whole existence. The human temporal existence will, in a salvific manner, return in the eschaton, in line with the confession of the resurrection of the body, according to Van Ruler.\textsuperscript{144} Nevertheless, this does not mean that the proton will be returned in the eschaton as if nothing has happened. There will be a ‘plus’ value added to the creation in the eschaton. If the eschaton were to be purely a return of the proton, history would have had no content and no meaning.\textsuperscript{145} The eschaton is also the fullness of humanity’s actions. The expression of love, love for God, humanity and creation, is taken up in the eschaton. What was expressed in the anticipation of the eschaton, but also the service of humankind, the response to calling and life in sanctification, all adds to the ‘plus’ of the eschaton. The eschaton is future, yet returns us to the present, in that humanity serves God and his reign now. The whole of reality, but

\textsuperscript{143} Russell, ‘Cosmology and Eschatology’, 564.
\textsuperscript{144} Arnold A Van Ruler, ‘Alle dingen nieuw?’ [All things new? ], in Blij zijn als kinderen [Happy like children], (Kampen: Kok, 1972), 147.
\textsuperscript{145} Arnold A Van Ruler, Waarom zou ik naar de kerk gaan? [Why would I go to church?]. (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1967), 117.
also human existence is, in a sense, the anticipation of the future. In the ‘fulfilment’ the future is already present.

d. The essence of the eschaton

Asked what he means by the eschaton, Van Ruler states that we cannot fully explain or imagine it. It remains unimaginable, it remains God’s surprise, a mystery of which we can only speak in symbols. At the same time, it can be said that the eschaton is disclosure, it is also fulfilment in the sense of completion. The eschaton will mean death, but also the resurrection from the dead. There will be crises, judgement in the eschaton, but also consummation and synthesis. Van Ruler stresses that the eschaton is soteriological in nature and also ontological. It is the work of the trinitarian God. However, Van Ruler does not want to spiritualise the eschaton, in fact he leaves all options open. We can conceive of the eschaton, bodily, materially, spiritually and in time; yet it is possible only to approximate its real mystery.\(^{146}\)

In the eschaton the creation will become the re-creation, even though it may have to go through calamities and destruction. Van Ruler is adamant that even if the creation has to go through a cleansing, through a purification, or even through a ‘reduction to nothing’, a ‘nihilism’, the creation will be returned. Certainly, the consummation or fulfilment is not an ending.\(^{147}\) The creation will go through all of these possibilities, yet will also come through as God’s creation, close to the original creation; yet improved, with the added ‘plus’ of God’s and human historical deeds, with salvation and perfection.\(^{148}\)

\(^{146}\) Van Ruler, *Waarom zou ik naar de kerk gaan?*, 112.

\(^{147}\) Van Ruler, ‘Grenzen van de eschatologisering’, 112. Van Ruler seems to indicate that in the eschaton there is a continuation of redeemed existence. He asks: “Could it be that in eternity the temporal reality returns (in the form of salvation?)?”

None of this may be used to flee from this present created reality. "The eschaton throws us back completely and exclusively into the present. There is our place and our task. If we do not remain there, and in an active sense, no eschaton is possible. In other words, the eschaton is not an escape from time, but an accentuation of time."  

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We are living in eschatological times, we are called to expect, to anticipate and "to fully experience the created reality as the glory of God, holy in its smallest details, but also in its coarsest exteriors." The way we discuss the eschaton determines the way we live and ‘are’ in the world. 

Again the question needs to be asked: what will happen in the eschaton? Does the proton return in the eschaton as it was before the influence of sin and history? If history and time are taken up in the eschaton, what has been the meaning of history? Has history been marking time (pas op de plaats), and therefore God’s acts and those of humanity had no real meaning or content? Van Ruler does not believe so; he states that not only grace has added a plus to the proton, but also sin answered by grace. And something also happened to wickedness and evil, says Van Ruler. Guilt has been reconciled, evil wiped clean or covered. In fact, guilt, sin and evil will be borne (gedragen) by God in the Person of Jesus Christ. It will be carried to the last judgement. In other words, guilt is not just discarded. It is covered until the parousia. It is in this correlation with grace that sin shares in the meaning of history. Humanity participates in this plus, according to Van Ruler, through the covenant of works.

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149 Van Ruler, ‘Grenzen van de eschatologisering’, 117.
150 Van Ruler, Waarom zou ik naar de kerk gaan?, 117.
151 Van Ruler, ‘Alle dingen nieuw?’, 149.
152 Van Ruler, ‘Bijbelse toekomstverwachting’, 229. However, Van Ruler does not state what happens to guilt in the parousia. He does make a distinction between guilt and the guilty person. He asks, “Is not guilt the wrong intention of the deeds?”
Does this mean that the eschaton takes place in time? Van Ruler is careful not to deny this, but reminds us that all we can do is ‘play’ with images when we discuss the beginning and the end of the world. Is the meaning of history realised within the space of history, or is that not possible? Answering his own question, he states: would it not be tragicomic if the meaning of history would be realised outside of history? That would be very disappointing! If communism believes that the eschaton can be realised within time, should we as Christians not believe the same? The second problem that Van Ruler considers is if we say that the eschaton is not realised in time. In that case, the conclusion would need to be drawn that as creatures we are lifted above our creatureliness. That would be an elevation and although some theologians would not object, Van Ruler does shy away from this. He is not comfortable with a dualism of history and the eschaton, or time and eternity. They are related and all these aspects, history, eschaton, time and eternity, emphasise the importance and value of time. It leads to this statement:

… each day has something, is a prefiguration, of the ‘last day’ (jongste dag). It is not enough to long for the parousia – that may bring something romantic and idealistic to our Christian eschatological expectation and threatens to turn it in its opposite. The last day throws us radically back into the present: there it is already prefigured.

The above shows that Van Ruler does not place the eschaton outside of time, as we know it; he also believes that we are participants in the eschaton. The quotation also shows that ‘prefiguration’ is an important expression for Van Ruler. This concept will be considered in more detail in 6.2c, but already it can be said that Van Ruler is speaking here in a proleptic manner about the kingdom of God. In other words, in our everyday life, the kingdom of God is anticipated. In our everyday living (and being) the kingdom of God is present in a proleptic manner, in a prefiguration.

154 At the time of Van Ruler’s writings Communism was a popular ideology and seen by many as a threat. 155 Arnold A Van Ruler, ‘Eschatologische Notities’ [Eschatological Notes], in Theologisch Werk, Deel I [Theological Works, Vol I], (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1969), 226. Van Ruler states that Reformed theologians would not follow the idea of elevation which could lead to deification. Cf. also Van Ruler, ‘Bijbelse toekomstverwachting’, 225. Here Van Ruler also warns against a false dualism, namely that of ‘the biblical future expectation and the earthly perspective.’ 156 Van Ruler, ‘Eschatologische notities’, 226.
All sanctification is a form of glorification. In heaven and in the kingdom of glory we do not receive something that is qualitatively and essentially different from what we already have, namely sanctification, hallowing, which includes a sanctification of the earth. At most, it takes on a different mode, namely not as veiled and therefore not as broken by the implications of sin.\(^{157}\)

In the above, Van Ruler shows that in the eschaton human persons are not only participants, but that this life, we live presently, will be honoured and glorified. At most it may take on a different mode, but essentially it will be the same. The eschaton “… is modally something else, namely it is not so hidden (verhuld) and therefore not so broken due to the implications of sin.”\(^{158}\)

This also determines the meaning and content of time. The content of time is the history we make; just as God’s actions are the essence of history. The content of time is the meaning given by the lives we live. Human beings are ‘forms of filled time’; that means that all that human beings are and do, i.e. the lives they live, are important and meaningful.\(^{159}\) Persons fill time with meaning. This meaning is also created because they live in anticipation of the kingdom of God and so live from the future.\(^{160}\)

### 3.7 Time and eternity

To speak about ‘the presence of the future’ in the theology of Van Ruler it is necessary also to look at his concept of time. Time for Van Ruler means a ‘continuity of reality’ into eternity. Here he makes a determined contrast with Platonism, by saying, Christians believe “… that time returns in eternity, in the form of salvation, and this is (for us) the only glory of eternity.”\(^{161}\) Van Ruler expands this when he says that in the eschaton “God

\(^{157}\) Van Ruler, ‘Eschatologische notities’, 226-27. Cf. also Van Ruler, ‘Bijbelse toekomstverwachting’, 229. Where Van Ruler asks: “Is it (i.e. all reality) not anticipation of the eschaton, like the whole created existence?”

\(^{158}\) Van Ruler, ‘Eschatologische notities’, 226.

\(^{159}\) Van Ruler, ‘Eschatologische notities’, 223.

\(^{160}\) What it means ‘to live from the future’ will be discussed in chapter 6; under 6.1.g and 6.3.g.

\(^{161}\) Van Ruler, ‘Eschatologische notities’, 223.
is only interested in the temporal things. He asks of me in the judgement: fellow, (vadertje) what did you do with my world?”

Here also Van Ruler works with the model of ellipses rather than dualities, although other theologians often referred to them as dualities. Aalders has remarked that to understand the theology of Van Ruler we need to understand his orbital thinking where two related topics are held in balance in the trajectory of an ellipse. The two points never meet, never become identical, but remain in a constant relation to each other.

Already in one of his early writings Van Ruler explained his concept of time. It would not be proper to speak of an antithesis between time and eternity. It is Platonism that makes an antithesis between time and eternity. Eternity is not an escape from time, but an accent on time. “It is an essential accent, for without eternity all meaning ebbs from time.” There is no such thing as abstract time. Often Van Ruler uses the term ‘filled time’. People are ‘forms’ of filled time. History is filled time (gevulde tijd), filled with salvation. It underlines the importance and accountability of time, but stresses that eternity is not more important than present time. Another expression Van Ruler uses is ‘time has

162 Van Ruler, ‘Eschatologische notities’. 223.
163 Van der Sar prefers to speak of dualities, although he does point out that balance is important to Van Ruler. Cf. Van der Sar, [Balance or Movement? Main lines in the theology of Van Ruler], 43.
164 P F Th Aalders, ‘Beweeglijke tweepoligheid: van Gunning naar Van Ruler’ [Two-pole moveability: from Gunning to Van Ruler], in Heel de kerk [The whole church], ed. Jaap Vlasblom and Jaap van der Windt, (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1995), 222ff. Aalders describes how this construction is to be preferred over the circular construction and illustrates how both of these constructions have been and are used by different theologians.
165 Cf. Fries, Hope for a Truly Human Existence, 90, where it is stated that Van Ruler already wrote this in 1940.
166 Van Ruler, ‘Eschatologische notities’. 223.
169 Van Ruler, ‘God en de chaos’ 160. Van Keulen remarks that Van Ruler may have borrowed the term ‘filled time’ (gevulde tijd) from K. Barth KD,III/2,648; id., KD,IV/2,476. Cf. also E. Martien Brinkman, ‘De Gereformeerden en Van Ruler’ [The Refomed and Van Ruler], in Verder met van Ruler - Men moet telkens
been fulfilled’, has been filled, time has become full, it has received content and meaning. The 'fullness of time' has come. Philosophically speaking, eternity has come into time.\textsuperscript{170}

Theologically speaking: the Word has become flesh. Or different again, God has time for us, God is with us. Neither is there abstract eternity. Eternity is not something empty. It is filled with time; the human Jesus is God, our flesh is in heaven and believers are children of God. In the incarnation time has been accepted (\textit{aangenomen}) and in the ascension time has been elevated (\textit{opgenomen}) into eternity and in the parousia all will be revealed (\textit{geopenbaard}). Then will also be revealed what Christ has done for humanity in a veiled (\textit{verborgen}) manner, hidden in the mystery (\textit{verborgenheid}) of cross and heaven. In the present humanity lives in the ‘in between’ times of ascension and parousia (\textit{wederkomst}).\textsuperscript{171}

There is much more that could be said about Van Ruler’s concept of time; it is clear that his concept of time is determined eschatologically. He argues from the future, in that eternity God will reveal what he has done historically, in time. There is continuity, in that time returns in eternity and there is also discontinuity, in that eternity is a different mode from our present experience.

The above paragraphs give an insight into Van Ruler’s thinking about time. It is necessary to place this concept in the polarity of revelation and existence. As noted in the previous chapter, Van Ruler maintains that there is only one existence, one reality, the reality of creation, including the creature ‘in the flesh’. Van Ruler maintains this position throughout


\textsuperscript{171} Van Ruler, \textit{Religie en politiek} Van Ruler, \textit{Religie en politiek} , 16,17.
his writings and rejects any suggestion towards a two-world dualism, such as heaven and earth, eternity and time.

Van Ruler does not discuss time philosophically or historically. Neither does he only refer to temporal time. His view of time is theologically shaped and enriched. For him time is ‘filled time’, filled with God’s actions in this present world, filled with God’s deeds of salvation. Time therefore is also revelation and history, for God’s actions take place in time and history. He makes several distinctions in the concept of time. Already in his early writings and especially in his dissertation: “De Vervulling van de Wet” Van Ruler makes three important distinctions.

First, there is eschatological time: time is filled with eschatological salvation (heil). This happens through the acts of the trinitarian God. All moments, facets, and aspects of reality (existence) are loaded ‘in the fulfilment’ with messianic salvation. Time is filled with the benefits of Christ. That is the way the kingdom of God comes, it comes filled with the salvation of Christ applied to us through the Spirit. It comes to us from the future. As a rule, in the discussion of eschatology, time is seen as a movement from the past toward into the future. Van Ruler’s eschatology works, in part, in reverse, from the future towards the present into the past, from the parousia to the proton. This dominates his theology, especially his theology of the kingdom. It also influences his notion of time and transcendence. Van Ruler’s definition of the kingdom of God is to be understood as “God’s ultimate (uiteindelijke) and salvific (heilijke) actions with this world.”

\[\]Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 236, 237. Cf. also 40.

\[\]Cf. Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, Vol.3, 603ff. Pannenberg also discusses the term K Barth uses, namely ‘duration’, which Pannenberg says, has not been explained sufficiently by Barth. Pannenberg says: “To God all things that were are always present, and as what has been they are present in the totality of their existence.” Pannenberg also uses the term ‘duration’ but in a different sense as Barth. The duration of creatures is to be understood as participation in the eternity of God, 606.

\[\]Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 40.
means that God comes to us from and in his power and might, as well as his mystery. He comes to us in Christ and through the Spirit. He comes to us in his soteriological transcendence, which does not cancel out his immanence. Fries summarises Van Ruler this way:

Time is filled with eschatological salvation through the Trinitarian acts of God, and thereby fulfilment occurs. The kingdom of God enters into the forms of human existence. But this in no way compromises its transcendence. The transcendence of the kingdom is found in its overwhelming, hidden and soteriological character. Van Ruler can describe the kingdom of God as “the ultimate..., salvatory... acts of God with the world.” The heart of the kingdom, then, is God’s future. That future arches back into the present, filling time with salvation.175

In Christ and through the Spirit, the kingdom pushes itself from the future into existence. Salvation and its application fill eschatological time.

Second, time is the present time. In the last days, which is the present, the Holy Spirit has been poured out. Van Ruler stresses that this ‘time’, this period, has an eschatological character, taking place in the last days.176 It comes to us ‘from the end’, from the future. Yet this must not be interpreted as the end-time in the strictest sense of the word. It needs to be understood as ‘in-between’ time. It is the period between the ascension and the parousia. It is the dispensation of the messianic and pneumatological salvation, bringing together the hidden kingdom and earthly existence.177 Van Ruler says:

In the Spirit the kingdom of God is powerfully present. He has been poured out in the last days. But the Son is no less revealed in the last days. And no less is the kingdom of God present....One cannot make any contradiction between the messianic and pneumatological (presence).178

This makes clear that there is a dual motion in Van Ruler’s concept of time, one from the proton to the parousia and another from the parousia to the proton. Fries puts it this way:

“The arrow (of time) points in both directions from eschaton to time (filled time) and from

176 Van Ruler, *De Vervulling van de Wet*, 134.
177 Van Ruler, *De Vervulling van de Wet*, 137.
178 Van Ruler, *De Vervulling van de Wet*, 140.
time to eternity (time taken up into eternity).” On this point Janssen remarks that although some read Van Ruler in different ways (e.g. Van Hoof) “… all perceive that the eschaton works both towards the past and the present from the future and from with the past and the present toward the future.”

Third, time as fulfilled time. Central to this is Van Ruler’s immensely complex discussion of the fulfilment of the law. It is not possible to explore this thoroughly within the confines of this study. According to Van Ruler the fulfilment of the law [see previous section 3.3] comes in a myriad ways, but basically means that God in Christ and through the Spirit has fulfilled the law for us and has filled time with the fullness of salvation. That is why he uses the term ‘fulfilled time’. The fulfilled law mediates between revelation and existence; existence has been filled with salvation. The fulfilment of the law means that time is fulfilled. The fullness of time, is human existence fulfilled. Fulfilment is the paradigm of the kingdom in the flesh. Fulfilment is the trinitarian act of God through which salvation (heil) shapes all the forms (gestalten) of human existence. The fulfilment of the law implies the fulfilment of time.

As stated earlier, Van Ruler often uses the term ‘filled time’, which is a further aspect of ‘fulfilled time’ in these ‘the last days’. It has the meaning of time filled with salvation. Fries states:

In this notion of ‘filled time’ we find not only one side of Van Ruler’s time doctrine, but also one of the cables on which his entire theology is suspended. In the last days – between ascension and parousia – time is filled with eschatological salvation (i.e., salvation out of the end), and thus life is formed in a new way and given a new content. Van Ruler rejects all docetism through his doctrine of fulfilled time -- salvation has truly entered history and the scriptures give us no reason to look for another world, a higher

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179 Fries, Hope for a Truly Human Existence, 89.
181 Van Ruler, De Vervulling van de Wet, 7.
reality, but rather for the transformation and sanctification of this world through the salvation already present within it.\textsuperscript{182}

It is necessary to complement the above insights with statements from Van Ruler’s later work. Time has been redeemed (\textit{verlost}); the whole of temporal reality (existence) has been delivered. Not only does deliverance, or salvation, take place in time; but time itself has been redeemed. Furthermore, humanity plays a part in this redeemed time. Van Ruler says:

\begin{quote}
History is the totality of the acts of God. Humanity is called to interweave its action with the acts of God and bring to completion the work of God on earth. All this is concentrated in the one great deed of God, namely the sending of his Son and the work completed in Christ. Herein the kingdom of God (the eschaton par excellence) is built (\textit{opgericht}). Time is now fulfilled, that is: time has become full, life has meaning, history has received its eschaton, the individual person is redeemed, but not out of time; time itself is redeemed: temporal reality in its entirety is redeemed.\textsuperscript{183}
\end{quote}

At the same time, the eschaton (present but hidden) is so richly present that temporal forms are incapable of containing it.\textsuperscript{184} The superabundance of eschatological salvation is hidden in the flesh until final disclosure, but is present with us. The kingdom of God is among us. The parousia will be the unveiling of the salvation hidden in the forms of time. The future is present among us. Fries calls this a ‘preview’, he states:

\begin{quote}
During the period of the last days, there is indeed a “preview” or partial unveiling which occurs through the configuration of revelation, i.e. Israel with the law and the prophets; the church with the apostles, sacraments, offices, and the corpus Christiani.\textsuperscript{185}
\end{quote}

The idea of ‘preview’ is inadequate for describing Van Ruler’s view. He speaks much more strongly of the presence of the kingdom, using terms like ‘prefiguration’ and ‘anticipation’. This will be dealt with fully in chapter 6, but already it necessary to quote

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{182} Fries, \textit{Hope for a Truly Human Existence}, 89. Here Fries comes close to the notion of anticipation: the anticipation in the present of the fullness of future salvation.
\textsuperscript{183} Van Ruler, ‘Eschatologische notities’, 217.
\textsuperscript{184} Cf. Van Ruler, \textit{De Vervulling van de Wet}, 38ff. Van Ruler speaks of the ‘overwhelming power’ (\textit{overmacht}) with which God works in the world and defines it as God’s transcendence. It is also hidden (\textit{verborgen}). This power is Christological and Pneumatological (163), this power or character of the kingdom is also salvific (40). It overwhelms in such a way, that it cannot be ‘contained’, this is systematised or exhausted. This salvific power permeates throughout all things and often surprises us.
\textsuperscript{185} Fries, \textit{Hope for a Truly Human Existence}, 89. Where Fries uses a text from Van Ruler’s \textit{Theologie van het Apostolaat} [The Theology of Mission], no page number given.
\end{footnotesize}
him here: “Everything present (heden) is anticipation, a reaching forward towards (vooruitgrijpen) the future.”

The final point in this section on time needs to be that there is both a continuity and a discontinuity in Van Ruler’s concept of time. The concept of ‘filled time’ carries the assurance that time - this world, with all its variety, specificity and sinfulness - is redeemed. Time is not only filled, (with eternity) but it is also taken up into eternity. In this way time continues in eternity, or stated differently, eternity enters time. In this way there is a continuity of time. Van Ruler says:

In Plato eternity comes back into time, in the form of the idea. In the gospel, time returns to eternity, in the form of salvation (heil)….What I live on earth here and now is this life, this earthly, bodily, material, temporal, mortal life, but this life redeemed, saved, delivered. …And this life I receive back, redeemed, crowned, glorified, in eternity.

Fries points out that Van Ruler’s ‘eternalisation’ of time goes back to his pre-war writings. In a comment on Kuyper’s “Idea of a Christian Culture” Van Ruler states:

Must one not, over against the thesis of Kuyper, assert not that eternity is in time, but precisely the reverse, that time is taken up in eternity….And must one not, over against the thesis of Kuyper, assert that it is not that time shall be taken up, but that time is taken up in eternity?…Time is, as it were, brought to rest (stil gezet) in eternity. Temporal existence turns back in eternal life. This is the eschatological remembrance. It is precisely the Christian antithesis of the Platonic anamnesis.

Kuyper asserted (over against Schilder) that eternity is not in time, but Van Ruler asserts that the reverse is true: time is taken up in eternity. He therefore shows that there is a continuity between time and eternity. Time does not come to an end, but is taken up in the kingdom of God, in eternity. Does the eschaton give meaning to time, or is time taken up in the eschaton? The kingdom of God fills time and is filled time. This filled time is taken up in eternity. When all time is taken up in the completed kingdom and therefore in eternity, temporal existence returns, in a sense, in eternal life. This ‘in a sense’ indicates

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186 Van Ruler, Waarom zou ik naar de kerk gaan?, 161.
187 Van Ruler, Religie en politiek, 36.
188 Fries, Hope for a Truly Human Existence, 90. Fries states that Van Ruler wrote this already in 1940.
189 Fries, Hope for a Truly Human Existence, 89, 90. Cursive his.
discontinuity, for eternity is a mode of existence different from the present. Eternal life is different from the present life, for eternal life will be a transformed life in glory, face to face with God.

In this way Van Ruler develops his concept of the continuity of time; continuity between the proton and the eschaton, between the creation and its recreation. Some of this we have already seen above in the discussion of the eschaton, but it is necessary to expand this. This world will come through catastrophes and death; there will be recreation and at the same time, a continuity with the original creation. Speaking about biblical imagery Van Ruler says there will be an 'acceleration of the current' (stroomversnelling).\textsuperscript{190} He also uses the image of a boat (or canoe) going through a rapid. The eschaton will be like a rapid; things will happen in rapid succession, the world will go through catastrophes. Van Ruler believes that, although these occurrences may be frightening, the creation will come through these events. God will not forsake his creation. “God will do unheard of new things, but in all the newness of his deeds He will be faithful to all the old things, which were his. The new earth is not a different earth, but this earth renewed.”\textsuperscript{191} There will be renewal, a recreation and the original creation, the proton, will come through developed, glorified and transformed as the new heaven and the new earth. There will be a synthesis of the proton and the eschaton.\textsuperscript{192}

The creation and all creatures will come through these catastrophes as the original created humanity and world, but with a ‘plus’. The change that will happen will make the creation ‘fire-proof’. This means, according to Van Ruler, that there will no longer be the

\textsuperscript{190} Van Ruler, ‘Eschatologische notities’, 225.
\textsuperscript{191} Van Ruler, ‘Eschatologische notities’, 225.
\textsuperscript{192} Aalders, ‘Beweeglijke tweepoligheid’, 170, 171.
possibility of sin. Humanity will now be ‘non posse peccare’, i.e. unable to sin.\textsuperscript{193} The kingdom of God will have fully arrived. Creation will have reached its purpose and humanity will have become the true humanity. It will mean that history has its goal, that the fulfilment of the law will be complete. Time will be halted, stopped (\textit{stil gezet}) in eternity. Eternity will have entered time.

This brings to conclusion the overview of the most important aspects of Van Ruler’s theology of the kingdom. It has been shown that there is a tension in this theology between the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’. The kingdom of God is not only a future reality, but is also already present with us. This is the basis for the claim that Van Ruler has incorporated in his theology a strong sense of the \textit{presence} of the future. The next chapters will seek to substantiate this.

\textsuperscript{193} Van Ruler, ‘Bijbelse toekomstverwachting’, 229. The \textit{posse non peccare} changes into the \textit{non posse peccare}. 