Strangers and Pilgrims on Earth

Essays in Honour of Abraham van de Beek

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RADICAL ESCHATOLOGY: COMPARING BRAM VAN DE BEEK AND WOLFHART PANNEMBERG

Christiaan Mostert

To read the book God doet recht is to be drawn into a robust theological eschatology that states the content of Christian faith and hope in uncompromising but also nuanced terms.¹ His strongest claim is that God has already come, has already decisively intervened, in the incarnation and the cross, as he adumbrated in the short precursor of this major work, Hier beneden is het niet.² His eschatology is therefore a realised eschatology of a certain kind, though not of the kind proposed by C.H. Dodd in the middle third of the 20th century,³ in which the accent is completely on the realisation of God's kingdom in history and the presence of the eschaton, not its future coming. Although van de Beek's eschatology is characterised by an unusually strong accentuation of the present reality of the eschaton, there is in his work no muting of the hope for the future coming of the kingdom in its fullness. It would be misleading, therefore, to describe it as a realised eschatology without qualification. However, the sense that the eschaton is present and that Christians are therefore strangers and pilgrims on this earth is pervasive in God doet recht.

¹ It is a privilege to be a contributor to this collection of essays in honour of Bram van de Beek. I am grateful for his many kindnesses to me during a semester I spent in Leiden in 1999 and have appreciated the challenges of his theology in his publications and his lectures at IRIT conferences since that time.
² A. van de Beek, God doet recht: Eschatologie als christologie (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2008). It is difficult to translate this title despite its apparent simplicity. Normally one might translate it as God Acts Justly, but in the context of a theology, with its questions about the power of evil and the pervasiveness of suffering, which recur frequently in this book, one might prefer something like God Sets Things Right.
³ See Abraham van de Beek, Hier beneden is het niet: Christelijke toekomstverwachting (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Meinema, 2005), 26–27. "God heeft al ingegrepen. Hij is al gekomen."
Precisely because of this strong sense that God has already appeared and intervened decisively in the affairs of this world in the cross—after the crucifixion of Jesus "nothing more can happen"—a comparison of this eschatology with that of Pannenberg may be instructive. Of greatest interest is a comparison of their ways of articulating the tension between the kingdom's presence already here and now and its future coming in its fullness. Clearly it has come in the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, yet Christians of every time and place pray daily and weekly that the kingdom will come. How Christians understand and live in this tension has far-reaching implications for their beliefs, their hopes and their ethics.

Before embarking on this comparison, however, several more general points should be made. As one would expect of a Reformed theologian, this eschatology is strongly biblically grounded; the index of biblical references is impressively long and challenging passages are tackled head-on. More surprising is the author's wide knowledge of, and constant interaction with, patristic writers of both East and West. Reformed he may be, but his commitment to the 'catholic' substance of the faith is striking. Although a wide range of modern authors is consulted, the real inspiration, apart from that of the biblical writers, comes from the theologians of the first five centuries. His love of the patres is abundantly evident.

Classically, Christians have hoped that God will bring the whole creation, human history and the existence of every individual creature, to completion in the kingdom of God and in this way to take it up into God's eternal life. This typically formed the last chapter in the theological textbooks, for these were the last things in the divine economy. For personal life the topics were death and resurrection, the return of Jesus Christ, the judgment, heaven and hell. For the life of the cosmos there was the great question of its future, answered in very different terms from the scenarios proposed by cosmologists today. Recently eschatology has come to be understood more broadly than the content of these topics. In the mid-1960s Molmann described these as "a loosely attached appendix... that bore no relation to the doctrines of the cross and resurrection, the exaltation and sovereignty of Christ..." Instead, the whole of the Christian faith should be seen as eschatology, the key in which everything is set. "...the eschatological outlook is characteristic of all Christian proclamation, of every Christian existence and of the whole Church." Whether or not van de Beek is sympathetic to the way in which Molmann developed his own eschatological theology, his work is premised on exactly this broader understanding of the nature and scope of eschatology.

II

The New Testament writers variously employ the verb 'to save' in the past (aorist or perfect), present (middle) and future (passive) tenses. People have been saved, are (or were) being saved, and will be saved. If salvation is not a matter of degree—a person is not at one time a little saved and at another more saved—there are presumably different senses in which people have been saved, are being saved and are yet to be saved, even if (as in Rom. 5:9) they have already been justified. Salvation is an eschatological reality—we will finally be saved from the wrath of God—but this does not prevent it from being already a reality in some way. In the strongest objective sense, we have been saved through grace, in the place and at the time of Jesus' death on the cross. There both the judgment and the salvation of the world took place, a theme strongly sounded in van de Beek's theology. As becomes apparent in the raising of the crucified one from the dead, God has intervened decisively on the cross to seek out (and save) the lost. This is the eschatological moment par excellence. There the king of the Jews exercises his paradoxical kingship; there the glory of God is strangely apparent; there the economy of salvation is accomplished. On this basis Van de Beek claims that eschatology is essentially christology. Although the ministry of Jesus has been full of the signs of

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5 "Nadien kan er niets meer gebeuren," Van de Beek, God doet recht, 148.
6 See Medard Kehl, Und was kommt nach dem Ende?, 2nd ed. (Kevelaeer: Topos Plus, 2008), 25.
9 In the foreword to God doet recht, 11, with particular reference to pneumatology and the cross, he illustrates the need to interpret everything in the economy of salvation through an eschatological lens. "Het kruis is zelf een eschatologisch gebeuren als inbreken van Gods laatste oordeel in de wereld."
10 See respectively Eph. 2:5, 2 Tim. 2:10; Tit. 3:5; Acts 13:27; 1 Cor. 15:24; 2 Cor. 3:11; Acts 16:31 and Rom. 5:9. In addition, Rom. 5:24 speaks of being saved "in hope".
11 Van de Beek, God doet recht, esp. 135-142.
12 Van de Beek, God doet recht, esp. 4.1, 115-29. One could add 'soteriology'.
the kingdom of God—he manifest in his person God's kingship—a the decisive eschatological intervention takes place on Golgotha. The cross, for Van de Beek, marks the inauguration of the eschatological age. This is a bold eschatological proposal.

The claim hinges on the plausibility of the eschatological age as unitary. Van de Beek sees no difficulty with this, citing an analogy the way we typically speak of the War. Like all human events, it had extension in time. Viewed as one event, it comprised a vast number of events. Comparably, we speak of the 'Christ-event', even though it too included a whole sequence of events which together constitute the identity of Jesus. Yet in a sense the whole period from Jesus' birth to his ascension is one event. Events in history, even if of long duration, may be considered as single events, e.g. the reign of a monarch. For Van de Beek the same must be said of the decisive acts of God, since they take place in history. In a key passage he contrasts seeing things as earthly events and seeing them in the perspective of the glorified life. In the latter the categories of time and space do not apply; only in the former do we distinguish, for example, the time of death and the time of resurrection. The same applies to other distinctions which, on the basis of our experience of time, we instinctively make when thinking about the eschaton. When considering things eschatologically, however, the content of what happens needs to be accentuated, not the duration of its happening. The concern is now with kairos, not chronos, though the one kairos of God's eschatological intervention can also be thought of in terms of a number of kairos.

This point is supported by another: eschatology is not to be reduced to the parousia. "The parousia is the final scene in God's appearance as king to put things right in the world, not an isolated return as a new eschatological event. It is about Jesus' appearance as the king who has gone to the utmost limits on the cross and now seals it with his triumphal procession." At issue in eschatology is Jesus Christ himself; the omega (and the alpha). Eschatology is ultimately about Jesus Christ, the eschatos, not about the eschaton or the eschata. If he is indeed the eschatos, then the whole of his history is the end-time. Long ago Baltmann made the then quite remarkable statement that 'Jesus—that is to say, his coming, his cross, and his resurrection or exaltation—has for Paul, and still more radically for John, the meaning of eschatological occurrence.' Some of the implications of this for the nature of Christian existence and for the earliest Christian community will be considered in due course.

There is much in the foregoing with which Pannenberg, one of the most strongly eschatological theologians in the modern history of theology, would be in agreement. In this book Van de Beek mostly refers to Pannenberg in a critical way. He includes him in a group of theologians who, though taking up the early Christian thinking about the kingdom of God, do not take seriously the apocalyptic thinking which provides the matrix for Jesus' (and the first Christians') understanding of the kingdom. Curiously, he later comments Pannenberg for his emphasis on the continuing importance of apocalyptic. Certainly his theology differs significantly from those whom van de Beek criticises in this regard. He regards the change from understanding Jesus' kingdom proclamation in eschatological rather than ethical terms, precipitated by Johannes Weiss in 1892, as of major importance. Few other theologians have viewed apocalyptic as positively as Pannenberg. For him Jesus' message of the imminent kingdom of God underlies every christology and every Christian understanding of human existence; both must be judged by it. It is the key to the whole of Christian theology. Pannenberg sees Jesus' announcement of the kingdom's imminent arrival—indeed its presence in Jesus' ministry—as the proleptic inbreaking of the eschatological reign of God. In his theology the

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14 Van de Beek, God doet recht, 114–15.
15 Van de Beek, God doet recht, 156. By 'the War' most Europeans still mean the World War of 1939–45.
16 Van de Beek, God doet recht, 157.
17 Van de Beek, God doet recht, 158.
18 Van de Beek, God doet recht, 159.
19 Van de Beek, God doet recht, 165.
concepts of 'prolepsis' and 'anticipation' assume a decisive importance as ways of both distinguishing and connecting what took place in the history of Jesus, including his resurrection, and what is yet to take place in the consummation of all things. Instead of Van de Beek's distinction between an event that extends in time and the events that comprise it, Pannenberg distinguishes between an event's proleptic presence and its final appearance in its fulness. Such differentiation is especially important for understanding the kingdom of God and the eschatological age, both of which the New Testament describes as present and future.

Van de Beek notes Pannenberg's use of the concept of prolepsis, the appearance of something ahead of its time, but makes no comment at this point about the choice of this concept as such. (Later he remarks on the strength of the concept of prolepsis.) Yet he remains suspicious of Pannenberg's use of it, interpreting it as part of Pannenberg's reduction of the Christian claim from a strong ontic one to a claim about the possibility of anticipating the final meaning of history within historical events. He is critical of a number of theologians, including Pannenberg, for emphasizing present history (in which salvation is present in some way) rather more than the completion of history and the final judgment. He is suspicious of any suggestion of a theology of history, probably because of the danger of falling in to a hegelian hole. Pannenberg is indeed strongly influenced by Hegel, but in his eschatology his theology differs most sharply from the theological philosophy of Hegel.

Whether Van de Beek's uneasiness about Pannenberg's eschatology can be justified depends on the fruitfulness of the concept of prolepsis (or anticipation) in Christian eschatology. These terms have a long history in philosophy and theology, notably in epistemology, where they have the sense of pre-conception; Clement of Alexandria makes use of the idea of prolepsis in Books 2 and 5 of the *Stromateis.* However, Pannenberg uses these terms mostly in their ontic rather than their noetic sense, to denote a real state of affairs, not merely an element in the process of cognition. Thus we can say that in the ministry of Jesus the kingdom of God was actually present, though it is essentially a future reality. A child prodigy (in any area of human endeavour) may truly be said to anticipate (in the ontic sense) the brilliant musician or linguist that she turns out to be in the future. In the phrase, 'dead man walking' (the title of a famous 1995 movie), the man walking is not yet dead but the reality of his death is very much present. Something essentially future is already present in an anticipatory manner, ahead of its time. Thus the idea of prolepsis or anticipation is the correlate of a future-oriented, eschatological theology.

By means of it present and future can be conceived as being in a relation of identity-in-difference. It establishes both the connection and the difference between the resurrection of Jesus and the general resurrection of the end-time. It also makes intelligible the claim of the church that in the particularity of the Christ-event the eschatologically final salvation and revelation of God have appeared. As well, it begins to make intelligible the sense of the empirically disputable Christian claim that in the lives of flawed and fallible people the eschatological life of the new creation is already present.

Van de Beek does face this problem head-on. Jesus Christ, he believes, is God's definitive answer to the injustice of the world, suffered by human-kind's victims. In him the glory of God has appeared. The coming of Jesus is the coming of the kingdom of God. His death is an atoning death and in his resurrection from the dead God vindicated him and his claims. But the glory of God has to be seen as the glory of the cross. The power and glory of the cross are manifest in weakness. Yet the power of God is the power of God's compassion, in which God loves his own to the end.

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Van de Beek, *God doet rechtk*, 21–22; cf., 152.

Van de Beek, *God doet rechtk*, 153. He is certainly wrong to say that the uniqueness of the resurrection in Pannenberg's theology is only relative. For a discussion of Pannenberg's view of Jesus' resurrection, including its proleptic character, see Mostert, *God and the Future*, 43–52.

Van de Beek, *God doet rechtk*, 22.

Van de Beek, *God doet rechtk*, 22.


Van de Beek, *God doet rechtk*, ch. 5, esp. 155.


Van de Beek, *God doet rechtk*, 113.

Van de Beek, *God doet rechtk*, 118.


Van de Beek, *God doet rechtk*, 135.

On the one hand, the world lives in the time of fulfilment. On the other, the time after Good Friday and Easter has gone on as before; the world is not qualitatively different from what it was, certainly not more peaceful; we still await the day of the Lord. How are we to think of the time between Christ's coming and his parousia? Van de Beek's basic point is that, whatever the world may look like, God has intervened in its history once for all on the cross. The cross marks the point of division between the old age and the new (eschatological) age. There the world has its judgment and its salvation and there the eschatological age began. We must speak of the total presence of God's kingdom in Jesus and the total presence of God's kingdom in the parousia; neither must be allowed to relativise the other. They are one event. Any further differentiation is secondary.

Here we see both the strength of Van de Beek's proposal and a problem. God's salvific act in Jesus Christ is indeed to be understood as a single divine economy. The eschatological age has arrived with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus; to be in Christ is to be a new creation, everything old having passed away. The new order has indeed begun. But the church still lives between Pentecost and Parousia. It looks back to the one and forward to the other, backward to the first fruits of the resurrection and forward to the full harvest. We enjoy the Spirit's power and gift as a first instalment even as we look with hope to the final instalment. We live in remembrance and in hope, and the difference between these, though part of a single divine economy, is not to be diminished. As van de Beek constantly reiterates, the cry, "how long, O Lord?", is still heard. We still pray for the kingdom's coming and for God's will to be done on earth. This present in-between time is difficult for all Christians, and unbearably painful for many. Without dissolving the unity and identity of the salvation that is already made real and that which is yet to be made real, a meaningful distinction between them has to be made if we are to make sense of the eschatological tension. Far from denying the profoundly eschatological character of the time since Easter and Pentecost, Pannenberg's use of the concept of prolepsis makes it intelligible and enriches it.

Van de Beek, God doet recht, 148.
Van de Beek, God doet recht, 150.
"Niet... twee gebeurtenissen maar... één gebeurtenis." Van de Beek, God doet recht, 155.
Van de Beek, God doet recht, 159.
2 Cor. 5:17.

On the third half, as we have seen, is its strong emphasis on the present time, the time after the cross, as the eschatological age and thus on the Christian life as eschatological existence. The eschatological theology set out in this work is at once an ecclesiology, a theology of the sacraments, a theological anthropology and, at least in nuce, a missiology. All of these are read through an eschatological lens. As noted earlier, there is nothing narrow about this eschatology.

Although God doet recht cannot be neatly divided into two halves, much of the second half is concerned with the church, baptism, Christian life in the world and the eucharist. Van de Beek begins with a discussion of baptism, but we shall begin here with the nature of the Christian community, with ecclesial existence, which is eschatological existence. Christians do not belong to a new community within the world, says Van de Beek, but to the eschatological reality, which is not of this world. They no longer belong to the old world but to the new. He sees this difference in very stark terms, reminiscent of a kierkegaardian either/or. We are either in the old or the new age. For Christians, according to Van de Beek, "our old existence is completely past... the old is gone and will never return." He qualifies this by recognising that this theological truth does involve us in a profound struggle, for we live in the crisis precipitated by the breaking in of the new while the old still retains a strong hold on us. The apostle Paul speaks eloquently of this struggle, which self-aware Christians cannot fail to recognise in themselves. The strength of van de Beek's formulation is its clear description of the reality of the new and its unwillingness to settle for a dialectic of new and old in which there is no resolution. Its limitation is that, even though it recognises the struggle against sin in our lived experience, the either/or is not really modified by the both/and of the old and the new. Theologically, this could be achieved by the use of the concept.

Van de Beek, God doet recht, chs 6, 7 & 10. Ch. 8 deals with one of the traditional eschatological subjects, the judgment, and ch 9 combines the certainty of death and of an end to the process of history with the question of theodicy: how long before we see justice? Is there a sign that God is alive and just?
Van de Beek, God doet recht, 222.
Van de Beek, God doet recht, 224.
Cl. For example Rom 6:17-7 and Rom 7:34-35.
of prolepsis or anticipation, as Pannenberg employs it, or making room in one’s view of time for an overlap of the old age and the new.  

If we may not speak of continuity between the old and the new, we may—indeed we must—speak of living concurrently in both the old and the new age. This is a different approach to the problem of the eschatological tension from Van de Beek’s. N.T. Wright answers the question, “what time is it?”, this way: ‘The ‘age to come’ has been inaugurated, but the ‘present age’ still continues. We live between resurrection and resurrection, that of Jesus and that of ourselves; between the victory over death at Easter and the final victory when Jesus ‘appears’ again. This now/not yet tension runs right through Paul’s vision of the Christian life…” The power of sin may have been broken on the cross, but temptation, suffering and death are not yet conquered in our daily experience. The new age is proleptically present, truly present, but not present in its eschatological fulness. We know all too well the pull of the old age. In Cullmann’s terms, the decisive victory was won on D-day, but V-day has not yet arrived.  

Van de Beek’s view of the church is of a new fellowship or communion (gemeenschap) in Christ, baptised (ingespoord) in him. This is no ordinary human society; it is “the eschatological fellowship of the kingdom of God,” the fellowship of the Spirit, the body of Christ. Later this community is also described as “the presence of the kingdom on earth.” As such, it is involved in the ‘happening’ (gebeuren) of the parousia. Both these statements make very strong claims for the church, which surely stand in need of some qualification. The latter claim is not further explained. Van de Beek is confident that the parousia does not simply happen to the church; the church is an active participant. This claim surprises because it is usual to claim of the kingdom that it is God’s kingdom, not in any sense the creation of the church. Correspondingly, one supposes that the parousia is the coming of Christ to the world at the end of the age and that the church ‘participates’ in this receptively rather than actively. At the core of this lies Van de Beek’s ambiguous use of the term ‘parousia’. It is usual to equate the parousia with the day of Christ’s coming in glory, the end of all events; Van de Beek certainly accepts this. However, in keeping with his strong sense of the ‘already’ of God’s coming, Van de Beek mostly uses the term with reference to the cross. God has intervened definitively in the person of Jesus Christ; his coming had the form of the cross. Far from the parousia’s delay, it has arrived in the death of Jesus; there the kingdom of God is revealed. Van de Beek uses parousia virtually as a synonym of kairos. Only in this unusual context does it make sense to say that the church is a participant in the parousia. The question it leaves for the reader is whether the tension between the parousia that has already arrived and the one that is yet to come is adequately accounted for by saying that events have extension in time.  

As to the other claim, that the church is “the presence of the kingdom of God on earth,” this too seems somewhat over-stated, especially by not being in any way qualified. The church is indeed an eschatological fellowship, but the relation of the church and the kingdom of God requires more nuanced statement. Confusion of the church and the kingdom, not unknown in the history of theology, is problematic. The relation between them is neither one of identity nor one of dissociation. Küng sees the church as “an anticipatory sign of the definitive reign of God: a sign of the reality of the reign of God already present in Jesus Christ, a sign of the coming completion of the reign of God.” The qualifying adjective ‘anticipatory’ avoids an over-identification of the church and the kingdom of God, safeguarding both the connection and the distinction between the two.  

Pannenberg provides further clarification of the relation between the church and the kingdom of God. The church is an eschatological community and as such “an anticipatory sign of God’s coming rule and its salvation for all humanity.” Although the sign and what it signifies are not to be confused, what is signified is in a certain sense already present in the sign. In distinguishing itself from the kingdom of God in its futurity,
thus acknowledging that finality belongs to the kingdom rather than the church, the church is yet able to be a sign of the kingdom, and through the sign the kingdom's salvific future is already present. The church must be very careful in making claims for the particular form of its life in any given time or place; it can easily fail to be a sign of the universal scope of God's reign and an instrument of the reconciliation of people with each other and with God. However, the reign of God is at work in the life of the church, as it was in the ministry of Jesus. In particular, it comes of effect in the church's proclamation, its liturgical (especially its sacramental) life, and in its many kinds of service in the face of human need.

IV

With this we come to the discussion of baptism and the eucharist, both of which Van de Beek rightly discusses in robust eschatological terms. Because of its connection with the forgiveness of sins, baptism must be seen in an eschatological light; it places people in the eschatological reality. Although this aspect of baptism is scarcely apparent in the theology and liturgy of baptism in many churches, it is of central importance. The well-known World Council of Churches statement on Baptism makes the eschatological meaning of baptism clear, but places it last in the fivefold meaning of baptism. For van de Beek the eschatological meaning of baptism is primary. To be baptised is to die, to die with Christ, to participate in his death. It is to enter the judgment of God. But it is also to participate in his resurrection, to rise to new life, a life of forgiveness, regeneration and redemption. This participation in Christ through baptism can only be grasped if we see it in the eschatological perspective of the one coming of God, for through baptism we are brought into the new eschatological creation. It is an eschatological event because in baptism we are bought to the end of one existence and the beginning of another. Thus "the water of baptism is ordinary water, but baptism is holy." It is a way in which the kingdom of God makes itself present in the world. Regrettably, the baptism as practiced in many churches today typically conveys little if anything of this; it is a travesty of what it should be. Van de Beek is right to lament the loss of the eschatological perspective as a major cause of this.

Contrary to what we might expect, in Pannenberg's discussion of baptism we do not find the same strong eschatological language as in Van de Beek. This is not to say that the eschatological perspective is absent. As the sacrament of Christian identity, it is the sacrament of a new belonging, a belonging to God or Christ, not to ourselves. To be assured that we belong to Christ and have received the seal of the Spirit is to be assured of "eschatological deliverance" in the coming judgment. Baptism is by no means simply a rite of initiation or entry into the church; not something from which we move on. "Baptism is there all our lives." It is to be appropriated again and again so that our new identity as Christians can absorb our empirical humanity and transform it. Thus we live into our baptism as much as we live from it. Baptism sets us in relation to the death and resurrection of Jesus and actualises it; this is the gift of God. It calls for our response of faith, the reception and appropriation of what is given. Baptism is an anticipatory sacrament inasmuch as it anticipates our death and rising to new life, bringing it into our present. It converts us to Christ, giving us our baptismal identity, which we are invited and enabled to make our own existentially throughout the ensuing years. Theologically, the objectivity of baptism, expressing the objectivity of Jesus' death and resurrection, precedes the subjectivity of faith, even though it may be the case for many Christians—those not baptised in infancy—that their faith chronologically precedes their baptism.

In the sacrament of baptism, and no less in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, we are given a share in the mystery of salvation effected by Jesus on the cross and in his resurrection, a salvation which will be complete only when the kingdom of God comes in its full power and glory but which is already made real proleptically in the community of the church. In this sense, whether it is implicit or explicit, both sacraments are eschatological.

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59 Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, Vol. 3, p. 37. See also The Nature and Mission of the Church, Faith and Order Paper 198 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005), §35, On the basis of Col. 1:13-14, Pannenberg writes that through the church's life and work "Christians are already translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son by the Spirit of the Father... so that by him they are already redeemed from sin." (37)
60 Van de Beek, God doet recht, 168.
62 Van de Beek, God doet recht, 188.
63 Van de Beek, God doet recht, 193.
events. They look to the forgiveness of sins, the fulness of salvation, the resurrection of the body and the coming of the kingdom. As the sacramental sign is enacted, including the particular words that accompany it in each case, the mystery of salvation that is signified is present to the gathered community. The terms in which Pannenberg expresses this theology of the sacraments may differ from that of Van de Beek, but its eschatological core is essentially the same. The major exception again is that whereas Van de Beek emphasises the oneness of God’s eschatological act, focussed on the cross, Pannenberg stresses the proleptic presence here and now of God’s essentially future salvation.

It is beyond the scope of this essay to consider in detail the eucharistic theology of Van de Beek and Pannenberg. Broadly speaking, there is an even greater area of overlap in their theology of the eucharist than is the case in their baptismal theology. Each of them writes in clear and strong terms of the eucharist as an eschatological sacrament. The first heading in the final chapter of God doet recht is “Eucharist as eschatological celebration” and the point is made repeatedly. This sacrament is rich in eschatological associations; Van de Beek and Pannenberg cover much of the same ground here. Pannenberg adds that the table fellowship Jesus shared with many during his ministry was already “a sign of the presence of God’s kingdom that he proclaimed and a sign of the acceptance of the other participants into the future community of salvation ... table fellowship was a real symbol of fellowship with God himself and of participation in the future of his kingdom.” This is an important part of the background to the sacrament. The earliest Christians met on the first day of the week, not the Sabbath; but this is also the eighth day, the eschatological day of days. The Supper was a fellowship with Christ, to whom they belonged; it signified that they were part of the eschatological life which he had inaugurated.

Van de Beek emphasises that this life placed them sharply at odds with the practices and politics of the world. The eucharist was the central liturgical act of a contrast-society. Pannenberg makes less of this but gives equal prominence to the eschatological character of the eucharist.

As the fellowship that celebrates the Lord’s Supper the church is the sign and instrument of humanity’s eschatological ordination for fellowship in God’s kingdom ... Hence it is primarily in its liturgical life that the church is what it is essentially, namely, the ‘eschatological community,’ a provisional representation of humanity’s eschatological fellowship in the future of the divine reign.

Van de Beek mourns the marginalisation of the eucharist in the life of Reformed Churches in particular. He laments even more the serious loss of the eschatological sense in the church today, expressed not only in our baptismal and eucharistic theology and liturgy but also in the absence of any sense that as Christians we are strangers in the world. Yet through baptism we have a new identity, for which the eucharist nourishes us and to which it recalls us as often as we celebrate it; he rightly asserts that this should be weekly, such is our need of it. For gathered around word and table, we celebrate our salvation, both its ‘now’ and its ‘future’ reality. Here, as we receive the body of Christ in bread and wine, we are reconstituted as the ecclesial body of Christ in the world. Here we are recalled to the church’s mission, which is none other than the mission of God. Here we give thanks to God, eucharistia, for the divine economy in which God has created humankind for communion with Godself and given us even now, through Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit, a clear foretaste of the glory that is to come.

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Van de Beek’s God doet recht is a powerful statement of the church’s eschatological faith, understood not simply as a set of beliefs about the ultimate future of the cosmos and of God’s human creatures. It is a work that describes the essential character of the Christian faith, as belief, as doctrine and as praxis. As noted at the outset, it is very richly informed by the biblical writers and illuminated by the insights of the patristic theologians. It is a rich scholarly work, but the voice that is heard most is that of the preacher. The author is passionately committed to proclaiming the liberating truth of the gospel and exhorting his readers to discover this truth. He understands this gospel in radical terms, so the voice we hear is also prophetic. The radical newness of what has been given to the world.

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82 Van de Beek, God doet recht, 322.
84 Van de Beek, God doet recht, 345.
85 Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, 292.
86 Van de Beek, God doet recht, 388 and Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, Vol. 3, 102.
in the incarnation and sealed in the cross and the resurrection makes the author particularly attentive to the eschatological character of the gospel. It is about a new world radically discontinuous with the old, about an identity given to those who receive this gospel which is powerfully transformative of who they were. In short, it is about the God who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. \textsuperscript{73} God has done this and will do this; Van de Beek places the accent firmly on the decisive eschatological action of God in the past, on the cross.

This radical, strongly realised eschatology has been put in conversation, as it were, with another major writer on eschatology of the last century. The voice heard from this quarter is not that of the preacher or the prophet but of the apologist, the philosopher. His interest is, of course, in the same gospel of the God who is intent on bringing the cosmos into reconciliation with itself and with God as its source and goal. In a culture increasingly less interested in what the church has to say about the world and our life in it, he explores the truth-claims implicit in this gospel, arguing for their credibility and firmly persuaded that the truth of the gospel can illuminate both the practical and theoretical problems we struggle with in today's world. If Van de Beek resembles Luther, with his uncompromising statements, Pannenberg writes more in the style of the consensus-seeking Calvin.\textsuperscript{74} Pannenberg, no less persuaded of the eschatological nature of the gospel, has wrestled with the implications of futurity for ontology, anthropology and epistemology, as well as systematic theology. Differences of style and divergent interests notwithstanding, there is much on which their respective eschatologies could find agreement. Beneath the surface, however, the matter is less straightforward. Some of the differences between them have been noted in this essay: Pannenberg's description of the eschatological tension is theoretically more nuanced; Van de Beek's view of the tension is more in terms of a struggle between our eschatological existence in Christ and our ongoing location in the world. Pannenberg's instinct is to accentuate the future unity of a reconciled humanity in the kingdom of God, while Van de Beek's is to accentuate the division between those who know Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord and those who do not. From both there is much to learn about the ways of God and God's reconciling and liberating action in the world.

\textsuperscript{73} Rom. 4:27.
\textsuperscript{74} The analogy is taken from the comparison of the two great Reformers; Van de Beek, \textit{God doet recht}, 370.