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Eschatology as New Creation: A Reflection on Oliver O'Donovan's Perspective

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Abstract

This essay is a theological reflection on the reception of Oliver O'Donovan's two main contributions to theology and ethics namely *Resurrection and Moral Order* and *Desire of the Nations*, with special interest on his discussion in chapter three on eschatology and history. In this reflection I have explored his thoughts on eschatology and how it relates to creation and history in the modern contexts, and also how his thoughts on Christian and political liberalism converge in order to make a united argument on the creation of a new social order that is rooted in Christian biblical vision and morality. His creative moves have been acknowledged in how he approaches and argues his points on the subject. My own argument is that O'Donovan has opened a new vista of appropriating the idea of eschatology to the redemption of life and the transformation of creation. Furthermore, I have discovered his sustained realism on the influence and role of Christianity in giving birth and rise to the modern civilization and the need to sustain such influence within the idea of just judgment and freedom in dignity. His eschatological vision goes beyond the popular notion of eschatology as the end time, or time of the end; rather, from his ideas we see eschatology as the end of time.

Introduction

What is eschatology? How does eschatology relate to the phenomenon of creation and the moral order of life? And how do we speak about eschatology in this modern time in the face of the moral crises of our time? These are

questions that cannot be exhaustive in this short essay but in one way or another there would be responses to them. One of the major works of Prof. Oliver O'Donovan namely, *Resurrection and Moral Order* ([1986] 1994) is the main material that will be the guide in this reflection. The method of this study is basically a theological reflection on O'Donovan's perspective on the idea or doctrine of eschatology, and how that stimulates in us the need for new sense of moral reasoning in the modern world. I will not go into any depth in trying to know how *Resurrection and Moral Order* (hence RMO) has been extensively received by other thinkers, whether this be theologians, philosophers, or social critics around the world, but rather from my own African socioreligious context; with special emphasis on Christian thinking, I wish to reflect and respond to some of the patterns or challenging views that O'Donovan has brought to our horizon. This would point out the influence of Christianity in the construction of moral theology and the need to move beyond the horrors of life in the present world and life experiences. This mainly points us to the new vision of life as demonstrated by the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

Eschatology as New Creation

Oliver O'Donovan as one of the leading Christian philosophers and theologians of our time is not without his own surprises. One of the interesting surprises I noticed in his writing and approach of theme of eschatology is its placement in his writing and how he opened his discussion of it. He got to the idea of eschatology already in his third chapter. It is amazing for me not to see eschatology at the latter part or even as the last chapter of his work. I do not know how exactly this placement was informed but I would leave my comment until the end of this reflection. Secondly, I am also surprised that O'Donovan did not start his study on eschatology with the usual definition of what the term means, not even how it functions within his own writing. He links eschatology and history as two points of dialectical interest and reflection. Thirdly, O'Donovan's eschatological and historical reasoning is focused on the reception of Psalm 8 by the writer of the book of Hebrews in 2:5-9. These puzzling ways are not new to those who are used to reading O'Donovan, but they may even be serious distractions to novices in theological systems or even Christian reasoning. It is clear from here, to me at least, that O'Donovan does not write his works as systems; thus, he can be classified as a Christian theologian and dialectical philosopher of the 20th and 21st century who can

respond to issues of the time but not really one who has any serious interest in providing a systematic approach. His arguments follow his dialectical trajectory mainly as invitation to also think along and learn to reason from within the content of the revelation of God as given in the Christian tradition.

From O'Donovan's engagement, we see Psalm 8 being received by the writer of Heb. 2:5-9 who had a new vision of the order of life and the rule of the world in a different dimension of time. "The Order which the Psalmist believed that he beheld in the world around him the writer to the Hebrews declares to belong to 'the world to come' (O'Donovan 1994:52). This "world to come" is generally the eschaton. There is no indication of the actual time or the possible leading signs of this world to come in O'Donovan's discussions as seen in chapter three of his RMO. Nevertheless, his interest has been on the new order that this new world would surely be set upon; this coming world for me has been set in tension with the renewal of the old world in which we live, as can be seen in the arguments of Karl Barth (Barth 1958; Hodgson 1989; Gunton 2004) and even Jürgen Moltmann (1996). The renewal of all things is the actual doctrine of the reconciliation of the world and selves, even the lives that were wronged and hurt in many diverse ways (Volf 1996:2005). This new world order would be the new rule of God in the world that would be the healing of the nations and the lives of all the oppressed as argued by Miroslav Volf (2021:66-151). But O'Donovan does not go as far as to tell us what exactly could be expected in this new coming world other than the rules of the game shall surely change.

The writer to the Hebrews sees the "Man" depicted in Psalm 8 as Jesus "who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death" (Heb. 2:5ff; O'Donovan 1994:52). Yet, O'Donovan seems to read the text somewhat backwards, with Psalm 8 as a cosmological utterance. This for him does not mean a new world that would totally suppress the Psalmist's expectation; but rather, he showed something of its ontological fulfilment. O'Donovan (1994:52) argues from the side of the writer to the Hebrews saying, "He is not attempting to replace the psalmist's doctrine of creation with an eschatology which will better suit his own Christological interests". Thus, side by side, we see an open exegesis without any serious synthesis with a certain point of convergence, here as regards a theological view for the eschaton. O'Donovan does not see the vision of

eschatology as stripping humanity of its vital role in the creation order, not even in the Christ event. This points more to its revitalization and restoration than its replacement. O'Donovan (1994:52) further argues by saying that "... this eschatological triumph of mankind is not an innovative order that has nothing to do with the primal ordering of man as creature to his Creator".

O'Donovan builds his eschatological vision on the salvific work of Christ, of redemption, as the divine act of restoration. In his words (1994:53), "When we describe the saving work of Christ by the term 'redemption', we stress the fact that it presupposes the created order. 'Redemption' suggests the recovery of something given and lost". And the question here is, what is the redemptive nature of eschatology? What was that which was given at creation to humankind and was lost and now would be redeemed and restored at the eschaton? To answer these questions O'Donovan's thoughts lead us back to the moment of God's blessing of creation when God gave charge to humankind to take care or to "rule" (*masal*) the creation. The Old Testament scholar, Walter Kaiser Jr. (1978:76) argues critically on the divine mandate of Gen. 1:26-27 that it was never a given order for human beings to brutally use creation. God did not give license for mankind to destroy creation but rather to learn to tend it as something of their own sense of responsibility. In his 1984/1985 Gifford Lectures, published as *God in Creation*, Jürgen Moltmann (1985) also gives a new doctrine of creation as the habitat of God. The human being created in the image of God is created to be a viceroy to the rule of God in the world. The rule of God is that which tends and gives life in abundance to all that God has created. This is because all God's creation is the object of God's love (cf. O'Donovan). The redemptive act of God to humankind is the recovery of the humankind's rule of creation. This for me is the restoration of the harmony and vitality that has been grossly abused and neglected by the sinfulness of humanity, and the arrogance of modern science and technology which in many ways cares less about created nature.

O'Donovan gives us a new vision of God's redemption not only to humankind but to the entire cosmic order. God comes in God's love to bring back order to the chaos that sin has brought. The enmity of life that turns the human being in the modern world into more of a consumer than a steward shall be adjusted by the transforming act of God. Jürgen Moltmann (2012) presents us with a new modern anthropology and eschatology in his reflection on the dangers of

our time and the crisis of being human. In a similar sense Michael Welker's Gifford Lectures of 2019 also focus on the creation of human beings in the image of God; asking the question: in God's image? This poses the question on the second side of the created order not as first given, but as displayed by human beings in the modern world. Thus, Michael Welker follows the cultural and innovative trends of modern history to see how far he could trace back this pristine human being created in the image of God. I am afraid to say that the life of the modern human being is nothing but a big disappointment to him and surely even to God. But the time of redemption is coming as O'Donovan sums it up; this would not be the end of all things as if the last page of a book is being closed, but it shall be the time of cosmic redemption. "For redemption is what God has done for the whole, and not just for a part of that which he once made" (O'Donovan 1994:53).

Jürgen Moltmann in his *Theology of Hope* (1964) seems to dismiss any sense of ending when he sees even the end as a new beginning. This is a sign of serious hope – who knows even militant hope? But there would be an end of some things. Not everything will continue as they have begun: the problem of evil and its effect shall be done away with. O'Donovan refers to "[t]he end of futility" (Rom. 8:20; O'Donovan 1994:53). This would be possible, and it is surely one of the markers of the eschaton. This end would lead us to the beginning of a life in shalom. The end of evil and misery is the mystery of this coming eschaton. Miroslav Volf (2021:131-151) sees the necessity of the end of all evil and even the end of the memory of all evil as the experience of God's forgiving love and the joy of reconciliation of all things. To Volf (2021:276), every memory of evil if it should endure, it would undo heaven. But heaven he sees is the moment of the end of bad memory or the memories of sin and evil. And thus it is a new time that did not evolve from anywhere but broke open from the depth of the heart of God into our human experiences as the gift of God's newness.

O'Donovan (1994:53) creatively sees history as a great movement of reality to its goal "through eschatology". Eschatology here does not close the door of everything but rather leaves it open for the coming of all reality into the goal for which it was created. This he (1994:54) further explains by the use of the word "transformation." In his own words, "The eschatological transformation of the world is neither the mere repetition of the created world nor its

negation". It is hard at this point to logically explain what O'Donovan thinks or how he wants his argument to proceed.

Firstly, he denies the idea of transformation as repetition; this goes contra to Barth, Rahner, Moltmann and even Pannenberg. Secondly, he also argues against seeing transformation as negation, which is also contra Nietzsche, and Tillich. It is impossible to force O'Donovan to stand with J. Derrida, or J. Caputo, in their stagnation of thoughts and their forceful expansion beyond reason or contortion beyond feeling. O'Donovan seems to say, "Things are not going to go on as they have been. There will be an interruption that would come from somewhere, sometime not to take away or merely to repeat, but to give something new." Now I think if this makes sense then O'Donovan awaits the miracle of renewal as the fulfilment of all things. The reason why it is a miracle is because it transcends that which was, and which is. It comes from somewhere beyond the now. But this somewhere is where the now is moving toward. And when it gets there, it shall all be well and fulfilled (Julian of Norwich).

O'Donovan (1994:54) further argues that, "Eschatological transformation rules out all the other conceivable eventualities which might have befallen creation, all those ends to which God did not destine it". This makes the eschaton also the new moment of purification. All that which intruded into the creation order that was not its actual reality shall be purged away. This in O'Donovan's view does not necessarily take us back to the Garden of Eden. But it releases us to live in the realized Kingdom of God. The kingdom of peace, joy, justice, and righteousness. O'Donovan sees the link between time and space in the question of the end time. This is actually not just to end time as we popularly say it but mostly the end of time. "Eschatological transformation resolves the unanswered question of creation, the question of what its temporal extension means" (O'Donovan 1994:54). What O'Donovan means by "temporal extension" includes the idea of seeing time as ultimately the time of God in which the life of God's gift and creation finds its fulfilment. This is the actual goal of eschatology that humanity and all creation are not bound in the prison of time but are all released to enjoy the fresh air of freedom. John Calvin saw the glory of God in the flourishing of the human being. This idea of flourishing life is the actual experience of true salvation and true blessing in God. According to the South African theologian Denise Ackerman (2014), to be

human is to be blessed and to be blessed is to flourish in the goodness of God. (cf. Marais 2014).

Natural Ends and History

Creation has its nature, and that which is only natural has an end. It is not the end in itself but an open means to an end. Nature here is quite different to the natural. Yes, there may be correlation, but the natural in this context would be seen as that which is transient. The order of the natural is that which characterizes the present world; this order cannot endure forever. It must be open to its own transformation. O'Donovan (1994:57) argues that "natural order and natural meanings are understood only as

moments in the historical process. They are to be dissolved and reconstituted by that process, and their value lies not in any integrity of their own but in being raw material for transformation".

In looking at that which is natural in the nature of God's creation, O'Donovan (1994:57) sees the begging question of history. In his view, "[w]e cannot object to the fact that history should be taken seriously". The idea of taking history seriously does not mean approving every bit of it or negating it all together. Taking history seriously, as I at least see in O'Donovan, is to live in history with open eyes. To live with hope and cheerfulness and not mere human optimism but the vital hope that all shall be well. To take history seriously means to understand the distance between the human self and the history of God. God is the God of all history. No part of history can ever be out of the Lordship of God (Abraham Kuyper). In this regard, the history of evil as seen in the modern world of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries can still be held in the hope of God's actual renewal and that evil that reigns in the heart of some human beings to that makes them be the agents of its negation shall be rescued from their tyranny, and the peace of God shall be the new order and the experience of life.

The relation between creation and history is quite open and delicate. This delicate negotiation leaves the doors open for the harmony of both. O'Donovan (1994:57) observed that, "That which most distinguishes the concept of creation is that it is complete" "Creation is the given totality of

order which forms the presupposition of historical existence". History is the ongoing process of creation and not its actual end. There is no end of creation until the end of this time of creation, this time of being human, this time of brokenness. This would be found ultimately in the time of perfection beyond the meaninglessness of this transience created order (cf. Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be*). There is a tension between the traditional view of creation as being complete and the modern view of the incompleteness of creation. The modern perspective believes in the incompleteness of creation, for example, O'Donovan (1994:59) referred to a hymn in his discussion from his modern Anglican tradition which in part reads, "Creation's Lord, we give you thanks/ That this your world is incomplete". This takes my mind back to Hannah Arendt's analysis of the modern man in her book *The Human Condition* (1998).

The modern human being is *homo faber* and *homo laborans*. This means that humankind are struggling beings, the human being is a creative agent who always wants to manufacture things and also contribute to the order of things in the world. This is why some would even opt to live without any sense of submission to the reality of God. The modern human being wants to always contribute to the making of things. This makes him or her to glory in the incompleteness of creation. But creation as given in terms of the natural order of things has been completed. Now what remains is the continual manifestation of the effect of that order. But creation as "the making of things" for the comfort and enjoyment of the human being in the world cannot be said to be actually completed, for the modern human being is yet to complete his or her creation work.

According to O'Donovan's perspective, he argues for the biblical traditional view when he said that God completes his creation and what remains for us is to enter his rest (cf. Gen. 2:2; Heb. 4:10) "Historical fulfilment means our entry into a completeness which is already present in the universe" (O'Donovan 1994:59). This "rest" is the experience of the eternal fulfilment of our life in the presence and perfection of God. At this stage the completion of creation is not only realized or accepted but it would be fully experienced. Thus, "If we can, and must, speak of the completeness of God's work in creation, we can, and must, speak equally of the incompleteness of his work in the providential government and redemption of history" (O'Donovan 1994:59). "To defend the

finitude of history as the object of God's creative decree, the early Fathers spoke of creation as absolute origin, *ex nihilo*" (O'Donovan 1994:60).

Creation as Covenant

Another important point that O'Donovan (1994:60) made in his discussion of creation between the natural and historical is the idea of seeing creation as covenant. But sadly, he never elaborated on this idea so we cannot say much about it. But it is still agreeable that creation is God's initiated life which is covenantal; this means it moves according to God's given rules of creation and these rules are the principles upon which the covenantal activity of God and God's creation is found. The actual sense of creation as given and as history is made cogent here when creation is seen in the context of time.

"Creation as a completed design is presupposed by any movement in time" (O'Donovan 1994:60). The eschaton shall be creation without time. This is the end of time. Sometime in April, 2022 in one of his emails to me, O'Donovan challenged me to reflect on the idea in Rev. 10:6 which says, "Time shall be no more." For me I see the idea of time (*chronos*) as the idea of history. Thus history shall be no more. When creation reaches its goal there would not be time to regulate human activities. Creation would be left in its given beauty and no more movement in time. We shall only and always be joyful in the presence of God. Thus the idea of the completion of creation can only be discussed in its theory, in its design, but not yet in its experiential sense. The end of time, what eschatology is, eventually shall be the fulfilment of history and the coming of God (cf. Moltmann 1996). This would be the time of true justice and righteousness and shalom.

Creation is seen as that which awaits the transformative action of God in order to redeem it from the futility there is and to restore it to its actual sense. "The transformation is in keeping with the creation, but in no way dictated by it" (O'Donovan 1994:62). The understanding of creation as God's open reality leaves it open to the coming of the transformation of God. No matter what creation becomes, God's power is always available to make it whole. This comes not from creation itself, not by means of human science and technology, but it comes from the creative love and mercy of God. God in creation as Moltmann argues directs our attention to the God who actively

loves his creation and seeks to always make it his home. The eschaton shall be the moment (without time) in which the creation of God becomes the actual home of God and the God of creation becomes the home of his creation. This would usher us into the Sabbath rest (Moltmann) or “the rest” (O’Donovan) that God has already destined to give his creation. This is the moment of fulfilment and delight in all wholeness. If we keep this argument open it might be readily dismissed by O’Donovan as reading too much into history or away from it. It may appear as a kind of dogmatic view of that which is meant to be the natural order of history. This dogmatization has been confronted by O’Donovan in the name of modern historicism. In O’Donovan’s own words (1994:63) he said, “Our complaint against historicism is that it has made every act of providence by definition an act of salvation.” “All happenings have taken on a Messianic character”. I would now turn briefly to O’Donovan and listen to his perspective on the way forward from what he suspects is nothing but modern historicism.

Historicist Ethics?

O’Donovan speaks of a historicist’s ethics when I expected that he should construct something beyond it. By this I do not mean that he returns to it in order to promote it, but only to criticize it. My expectation here is to see how he pushes the boundaries beyond this dogmatic enticement. O’Donovan (1994:64) began with the assessment of the formation of history from a classical creationist perspective, saying, “Classical Christian thought proceeded from a universal order of meaning and value, an order given in creation and fulfilled in the kingdom of God, and order, therefore, which forms a framework for all action and history, to which action is summoned to conform in its making of history”.

To briefly highlight some of his view here, O’Donovan (1994:64) argues that “Historicism comes in many forms, some inclining to be definite and some to be agnostic about the ends which human cultures serve”. He (1994:65) further points out that, “In man’s dealing with nature historicism invariably promotes a strong tendency to intervene and manipulate”. This is what I see more in Moltmann’s critique of modern science and technology in which the autonomy of human reasoning has made humankind the masters of nature and the destroyers and consumers of its beauty (cf. Moltmann 1985). If this is correct

then historicism must be the extension of modernity's triumph of humanity over nature and not going by the classical view of life and history as ordered by God.

O'Donovan further examined the possible failure of human beings in the capture of nature by means of historicism. "If historicism fails in its treatment of nature for lack of a concept of creation, its social thought fails equally for lack of a strong eschatology" (O'Donovan 1994:66). What remains vague from the above quote from O'Donovan is his idea of "treatment of nature" and the "lack of a concept of creation." Does the treatment of nature mean the right dealing or right care of and for nature? Does "a concept of creation" here refers to the biblical testimony of the revelation of God as the creator of all creation? Where does O'Donovan leave his idea of "creation"? In the field of biblical exegesis or at the door step of secular or social philosophy? These are questions yet to be clearly answered.

O'Donovan sees the idea of human creative action in the quest for something new beyond that which is in the present. The human being who needs to live towards the goal of history must learn to protest against the stagnation and abuse of history now. "Protest, rather than administrative evolution, must be the engine that propels history forwards on its way, the tool with which we fashion the raw material of past and present experience into the artefact of our own future," O'Donovan (1994:69) argues.

Restoration, Politics and Christian Liberalism

Tranter (2018) examines the contribution of O'Donovan with regards to the nature of the world in the future. The argument is mainly to stress the assurance of the coming of the new world and the renewal of the old. Thus, what has been created and given would not be totally lost and what has been distorted would be renewed and restored. O'Donovan has made a strong argument on the nature of Christian ethic in the light of Christian liberalism and the political interest of that possibility (cf. O'Donovan 1996). O'Donovan has creatively worked at restoring the truth of life through the Christian imagination and the processing of the Christian vision of life in the past and also in the future. This has been done as his own way of restoring the almost lost argument from the Christian perspective in the wider Western tradition of

politics, philosophy, and life. He has found the space in which the “truth” of the Christian tradition would always become meaningful and sound into the right direction of life (Tranter 2018:136). This is the work of “restoration” in which not only what has been given or created his restored but even the moral order that has been terribly distorted by human inadequacy would be made anew (Tranter 2018:136). The doctrine of restoration in Christian theology is a very good news not only with regards to politics and ethics in the present world but also as part of the central vision of eschatology.

The restoring action of God is organized and guided by God’s passion (Tranter 2018:141). Moltmann (1993:21-60) argues on God’s nature is an expression of God’s love. God does not deny or abandon God’s self. But God in mercy can adjust God’s action for the sake of the expression of his forgiving love. The passion of God is that which holds all things together as that which God has truly cherished and wishes to keep together in love. O’Donovan (1996:178) is referred to by Tranter as seeing the condition of the Church in the wider context of the world. The Church is truly a suffering community in the midst of the powers of darkness. The good news through all this is the fact that the Lord Christ has already conquered all the power of evil which assail the church (Tranter 2018:141). The Church lives not by itself in the struggle with darkness but rather it lives from the victory that Christ has already won on her behalf in the world. This has remade history in the history of Jesus Christ.

From O’Donovan, Tranter (2018:141) points out how the resurrection of Christ has opened the new pattern for humanity. The history of humanity has never been truly realized until the coming of Jesus Christ. Christ has been the only demonstration of who God truly is and who a human being truly is and should always be. The resurrection of Christ brought in the new moral order of life in which the creative power of God prevails over the chaos of life and history. The power of God as seen is that which gives life in the darkness of death and frees all that God so loves into the newness of the given life. The emptiness of the tomb after the resurrection is both a testimony and the creative demonstration of the presence of life in the midst of death. This gives hope and new vision to the contexts of history in which death seem to prevail. Many African countries like Nigeria, Sudan, Somalia, etc. suffer the presence of evil as that which marginalizes, steals, and kills. But in Christ we are all invited to open our eyes into the new future that Christ has opened in his body.

Without reducing our ethical vision to an imagined or ideological Jesuology, we are rather invited in Christ to see the new realistic sense of life in which the life and death are met in the cross of Christ (Tranter 2018:142). This new realization has been found as key to the politics of Christian mission (cf. Kerr 2009). The politics of Christian mission here does not mean a new sense of Christian militancy. But rather a true sense of reality as it has been given and as it has been opened to being in Christ. This is the new proclamation of life beyond death. The cross event of Jesus Christ announces the newness that death is not the last word. Death is the most dreadful experiences of life because many who fear death do not see it as an adventure but rather as an end in itself. But in Christ we see that death is the defeat of that which negates life and makes it miserable. The death of Christ is the victory of life over death thus the new ethics of the Christian is the new proclamation of life in all its fullness. Christian political presence and action is not meant to be a sense of intrusion upon the right of others as in colonial ideology but rather it is the opening of the gates of unfreedom and life negation to true freedom and life affirmation. The political moves of the Christian are the new mobilization that awakens the weary to see the new vision that Christ is and which he presents through his life. This means living a life in all its worth. This is the politics of the Christian. It is politics because of the dynamism of choice and action that makes it constructive and effective. It is politics because it helps to mobilize the other persons to see that which they might not have seen before and also key into the new vision and the new life.

O'Donovan and Yoder have imagined the correlation of theology and politics in a post Christian Protestantism (Doerksen 2009). The understanding of the Christian life in the post Christian context to me does not spell out a new sense of atheism or secularism but rather it points us to an inclusive vision of the Christian life that is marked by what O'Donovan calls Christian liberalism (cf. Chaplin 2002) In his reflection on O'Donovan's idea of Christian liberalism, Chaplin (2002:269) observed that it was not a triumphalist ideology of the influence of Christianity in Western culture and life, but rather it is a new form of reading of history (Western and beyond) from a Christological perspective. This helps us to see the reception of Christ in the modern world. The reality of human dignity, rights and rational judgment have not been neglected but rather they have been given a new force in the reality of Jesus Christ and his actions in the world of time and space. It is not meant to be a totalitarian

ideology but rather it is an open generosity of God in the person of Jesus Christ. The establishment of the Kingdom of God in its eschatological reality remains an open vision for the new world of order and life. There would be new society and government in which the righteousness of God and justice would dwell. The idea of judgment is also found in its perfection in the fullness of God's time in the Christ event. This is not about a fantasy game of dispensationalism (Chaplin 2002:290) but rather it would be the actual fulfillment of all time and life in that which God makes new in Christ. The thrust of Chaplin's reading of O'Donovan in order to present the world which a call for political responsibility remains a good contribution even to my African contexts. The bastardization of life will surely be reversed and all cases of human injustices made right in the fullness time. Eschatology thus is not the call to the end of all things, but rather for the renewal and fulfillment of all life.

The *Desire of the Nations* by O'Donovan has been well- received and critically examined by scholars like Chaplin and many more. The challenge to read it with the new interest of discovery remains interestingly stimulating. For through it, O'Donovan has given voice to the depth of Christian faith (O'Donovan 1994; 1996; 2004; 1989; McIlroy 2010). His thoughts have radically opened new vistas of thinking about politics, Christianity, civilization, and the world of time. O'Donovan's thoughts remain critical of modern secular thinking but still remain useful to the construction of democracy and the hope of the life in the new creation of God. This eschatological vision gives democracy a proper pattern that could fit into any Christian context and with the hope that it further shapes the Christian thinking into that which remains the common good for the enjoyment of all.

Jesus Christ as The Eschatos

I wish to also highlight the person of Jesus Christ as central to the ethical thought of O'Donovan in RMO. Who is Jesus Christ in the modern world? How does the being of Jesus Christ affect our ethical understanding and relation to the created world and the world to come? O'Donovan in his analysis of the thoughts of the writer to the Hebrews sees the relation of Jesus Christ as the Son of man who helps to open the door of freedom for his brethren. O'Donovan (1994:52) said, "The triumph of the Son of man prepares the way for the future triumph of his 'brethren', mankind as a whole". The writer to the

Hebrews presents a new Christology which attends to the sufferings and pains and the goals of the incarnation or rather the appearance of Jesus Christ. This is seen in the temporal sense of the lowering of Jesus. We have earlier seen how the writer to the Hebrews transposed the thought of Psalm 8 with reference to Jesus Christ. In O'Donovan's (1994:53) view, "This enables him to see Christ's incarnation and glorification as the sign that mankind's subordination to angels is provisional and temporary". The idea of mankind's "subordination to angels" in this context is a new intrusion into both texts. There is nowhere either in Psalm 8 or Hebrews 2 where human beings are subordinates to angels. If this is done then it would be a good reason to actually accept and promote the subservience of human beings to angels and also encourage the worship of angels, even the so-called guardian angels. But the two texts referred to humankind and then Jesus, as being made "a little lower than the angels" this means the quality of the life of glory and power had to be set aside for the sake of fulfilling the mission of salvation of mankind (that is on the side of Jesus Christ). This Messianic vision opens us to the solidarity of God with human beings even in the lowly estate of our being. This is what we see being celebrated in Hebrews 2-4, that Jesus Christ has accepted our sense of being and by that has given us his own sense of glory as from the Father.

O'Donovan (1994:53) points us to the "age of sin and suffering" which to the Rabbinic tradition is the period of "[t]he temporary subjection of mankind to angels". Now we can see where O'Donovan met the idea of human beings' "subordination to angels." It must be a Rabbinic tradition which to me creates an ambiguity on the history of human relation to God through the Lordship of Jesus Christ as the only mediator between God and Man (1 Tim. 2:5). Even in the coming of Jesus Christ as the Savior the writer to the Hebrews said, "it was not angels that he came to help" but he came to help or save us, who are his brothers and sisters before God. The role of angels as seen in the letter to the Hebrews is that of being the servants of light to us who are going to inherit the salvation of Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:14). Thus, this moves us beyond the Rabbinic tradition of subordination to angels to a new paradigm of freedom in Jesus Christ.

O'Donovan (1994:53) further emphasized his arguments as we have seen before that, "The 'future age' would see the renewal of the created order as

God intended it to be". The revelation of God in Jesus Christ, which Karl Barth sees as the humanity of God, opens us the way to see the ontological vision of the incarnation (cf. Barth 1956; Barth 2015). This is the revelation of the glory of God in him and this is the glory that we too shall share in him (Rom 8:17-18). O'Donovan (1994:53) explains that "Although we do not see the glory of mankind, we do see the glory of Jesus in his passion and exaltation. That is the guarantee: the pioneer of salvation has been made perfect through suffering, and he calls the rest of humanity his 'brethren 'and his 'children'" (Heb. 2:11-13). The light of Christian eschatology is seen first at the dawn of the resurrection morning. To Moltmann and then to O'Donovan the resurrection of Christ is the key to the eschatological moment. "The resurrection of Christ, upon which Christian ethics is founded, vindicates the created order in this double sense: it redeems it and it transforms it" (O'Donovan 1994:55).

Conclusion

In conclusion, we need to ask this question of O'Donovan, where does Christian ethics look? In his discussion we see that, it "looks both backwards and forwards, to the origin and to the end of the created order. It respects the natural structures of life in the world, while looking forward to their transformation" (O'Donovan 1994:56). The eschaton is the new moment of fulfillment of all things and not the end of all things. O'Donovan creatively links the idea of creation to eschatological creation. This frees the world from the limitation of time, and the corruption of sin and all kinds of evil. This purifies the world from outside itself and makes it a new habitat for humankind and God and all creation. This is the new moment (*Augenblick*) in which everything reaches its goal as deigned by God. The eschaton, as I see it from O'Donovan's RMO is the coming of the day of God's justice that "supersedes all other justice" (O'Donovan 1994:70).

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