

God and the world in the epistles of Paul

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Paul is not interested in cosmological thinking in the proper sense of the word. This article starts by questioning the cosmological language of biblical writings. The authors of the books of the New Testament mostly use terms they found in the Septuagint – with a few remarkable exceptions. This article described how the specific term κόσμος has been used by the New Testament authors. There are two main usages of κόσμος: (1) as an anthropological term to describes mankind in its entirety; and (2) as an ecclesiological term to describes 'the others', that is the non-believers or the people outside the church. This is the reason why God is never called 'the king of the world'; he is only its judge.

God en die wêreld in die briewe van Paulus. Paulus was nie sodanig in kosmologiese denke geïnteresseerd nie. Hierdie artikel begin met 'n vraag na die kosmologiese taalgebruik van Bybelse geskrifte. Die skrywers van die Nuwe Testamentiese boeke het meestal die terme gebruik wat hulle in die Septuaginta gevind het – met 'n paar merkwaardige uitsonderings. Hierdie artikel verduidelik hoe die term κόσμος deur Nuwe Testamentiese skrywers gebruik is. Twee hoofgebruiken van κόσμος word genoem: (1) as 'n antropologiese term om die totale mensdom te beskryf; en (2) as 'n ekklesiologiese term om 'die ander', naamlik die nie-gelowiges of die buitekerklikes, te beskryf. Dit is die rede waarom God nooit 'die koning van die wêreld' genoem word nie; Hy is slegs die regter daarvan.

The terminological problem: Cosmology as theo-logy

The evidence in general

It is with a specific purpose that the title of this contribution speaks of 'God and the *world*', and not 'God and *cosmology*'. The reason is simply that in the epistles of Paul there is no cosmological thinking in the proper sense of the word. The first to use the expression *cosmology* was the German philosopher, Christian Wolff (1679–1754), in the title of his book *Cosmologia Generalis*, which was published in 1731 (cf. Wolff 2009). Since then, this term has been commonly used to denote the quest for the origin, the structure and the future of the universal system of which the world we live in is only a very, very small part. It follows naturally that these questions are addressed in the Bible. If we only look at the beginning and the end of the Bible, it becomes clear that its entire story is framed by a cosmological perspective. The Bible starts in Genesis 1 with the creation of 'heaven and earth' – including the sun, the moon and the stars (Gn 1:14–19) – and it ends with the vision of a new heaven and a new earth (Rv 21:1). Revelation continues to describe the 'New Jerusalem, descending from heaven' (Rv 21:2), which 'has no need of the sun or of the moon to illumine it' (Rv 21:23). In Jerusalem, the sequence of day and night will be suspended, at least in the shape in which it was created:

καὶ νῦν οὐκ ἔσται ἔτι καὶ οὐκ ἔχοντις χρείαν φωτὸς λύχνου καὶ φωτὸς ἥλιου, ὅτι κύριος ὁ θεὸς φωτίσει ἐπ' αὐτούς,
καὶ βασιλεύσουσιν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων [[A]nd night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever]. (Rv 22:5, ESV)

In the New Testament, it is not only the Book of Revelation in which this cosmological dimension comes into view, but also within Jesus' farewell discourse. We read in Mark 13 that before the future coming of the Son of Man 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken' (Mk 13:24–25, ESV). It is remarkable, and of course an established fact, that the cosmological texts of the New Testament do not use the Greek term κόσμος to denote the 'world' or the 'universe'. This draws a sharp distinction between the New Testament and the Greek philosophical tradition – beginning with the Ionian natural philosophers in the 6th century BCE – in which the term κόσμος had been used to denote 'the entirety of the Universe'.¹ In the New Testament, there are only

¹It is Pythagoras (6th century BCE) of whom it is said that 'he was the first to call the entirety of the universe κόσμος because of the order (διά τὴν τάξιν) within it' (*Fragmente der Vorsokratiker I*, p. 105, 24–25).

two stereotyped expressions in which the term κόσμος is used with this meaning: firstly, in the term τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου [the elements of the world] (Gl 4:3; Col 2:8.20) and secondly, in the expression ἀπὸ/πρὸ κτίσεως/καταβολῆς κόσμου [since the foundation of the world] (Mt 13:35, 25:34; Lk 11:50; Jn 17:24; Rm 1:20; Eph 1:4; Heb 4:3, 9:26; 1 Pt 1:20; Rv 13:8, 17:8). Both of these are technical terms which are taken from the Hellenistic world's natural-philosophical discourse. This is not only true for the term τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου, which is widely attested in hellenistic texts (cf. Wolter 1993:122–124), but also for the expression ἀπὸ κτίσεως/καταβολῆς κόσμου which has a clear parallel in a text of the Stoic philosopher, Chrysipp (3rd century BCE), who mentions that things are known to God ἀπὸ κτίσεως καὶ καταβολῆς κόσμου (cf. *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta II*, p. 289, 29–30).

However, the New Testament's cosmological language depends on the Old Testament and is a Septuagintal manner of speaking. In Hebrew, there is no terminological equivalent to the Greek word κόσμος.

The entirety of the universe is mostly circumscribed by the conceptual pair 'heaven and earth'.² Sometimes 'the sea' is added to a tripartite complementarity as in Exodus 20:11: '[I]n six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them' (cf. Ps 96:11, 146:6; Am 9:6). Occasionally, the determined singular noun קָלַל, meaning 'all [things]', finds a use with the same reference as 'heaven and earth', for example in Jeremiah 10:16: '[H]e is the one who formed all things' (cf. Jr [28] 51, 19; Is 44:24; Ps 103:19). In the Septuagint, it is always translated by the plural (τὰ) πάντα.

Viewed from a reversed perspective, that is if we ask how those writings of the Septuagint that are translated from Hebrew use the noun κόσμος, we mostly find יְגָן [ornament] in the Hebrew pre-text.³ Sometimes κόσμος is also used to translate אָשָׁר [army or host] (Dt 4:19, 17:3; Is 24:21, 40:26; cf. Gn 2:1; Is 13:10) as part of the expressions מִנְפָתָח עֲקָבָה [host of heavens] and מִזְמָרָה אֶבֶן [host of heights] which is mostly translated by ὁ κόσμος τοῦ οὐρανοῦ in the Septuagint. This usage is based on the very basic Greek meaning of κόσμος as 'order'. It refers to the multitude of the stars as a well-ordered arrangement.

Evidence in the New Testament

In the writings of the New Testament, the cosmic universe is usually referred to in the language of the Septuagint. We find the conceptual pair 'heaven and earth' (οὐρανὸς καὶ γῆ)⁴ or its Septuagintal equivalent 'all things' (τὰ πάντα).^{5,6} or 'creation' (κτίσις; Col 1:15; Heb 9:11; 2 Pt 3:4; Rv 3:14).

2. For example, Genesis 1:1: 'In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth' (cf. Gn 2:1, 4; Gn 14:22; Ps 50:4; Is 44:24; Jr 32:17; Hg 2:6, 21).

3. See Exodus 33:5–6; 2 Samuel 1:24; Jeremiah 2:32, 4:30; Ezekiel 7:20, 16:11, 23:40 (cf. Is 3:18, 24; Pr 20:29, 29:17).

4. Compare Matthew 5:18, 6:10 par., 11:25, 24:35, 28:18; Mark 13:31parr.; Luke 10:21, 16:17, 21:33; Acts 4:24, 14:15; Ephesians 1:10; Colossians 1:16, 20; Hebrews 1:10; 2 Peter 3:7, 13; Revelation 5:13, 10:6, 14:7, 20:11, 21:1.

5. Romans 11:36; 1 Corinthians 8:6, 12:6, 15:27–28; Ephesians 1:10, 3:9; Philippians 3:21; Colossians 1:16–17, 20; Hebrews 1:3, 2:8, 10; Revelation 4:11.

6. Galatians 3:22 (συνέκλεισεν ἡ γραφὴ τὰ πάντα ὑπὸ ἀμαρτίαν, [Scripture imprisoned everything under sin]) must not be counted amongst these texts, because here τὰ πάντα has no cosmological reference at all. This article refers to the history of mankind after Adam's fall.

In Acts there is rather remarkable evidence. Twice the cosmic universe is referred to as 'heaven and earth' in relation to God – once in the prayer of the Jerusalem congregation: δέσποτα, σὺ ὁ ποιήσας τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς [Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them] (Ac 4:24, ESV), and another time in Paul's speech given in Lystra. Here, Paul summons the inhabitants of Lystra to ἀπὸ τούτων τῶν ματαίων ἐπιστρέψειν ἐπὶ θεὸν ζῶντα, ὃς ἐποίησεν τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς [turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them] (Ac 14:15, ESV).

In this passage Luke depicts the apostle as a monotheistically, hard-edged Jewish missionary who knows perfectly well what the theological fault of the Lystrian Gentiles is. To these two texts one could add Acts 7:50 where Stephen quotes what God had said through the words of the prophet (Is 66:1–2):

Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things [ταῦτα πάντα]? (Ac 7:50, ESV)

The only exception where Paul is not allowed to speak Septuagint Greek, but has to use the philosophical term κόσμος to denote what God had made, is in the situation where Luke describes him as addressing the Athenians on the Areopagus and he then calls God ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιήσας τὸν κόσμον καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ [the God who made the world and everything in it] (Ac 17:24, ESV).

It can be positively asserted that the switch from the Old Testament expression 'heaven and earth and sea' to the philosophical term κόσμος in this text is deliberate. Luke wants to demonstrate Paul's unabated theological adherence to Jewish monotheism and theology of creation as well as his philosophical proficiency and his linguistic ability to stand his ground in the debate with Athenian philosophers.

It is especially interesting that many of the aforementioned texts can be form-critically classified as predication of God. In each of them, the statement about the 'heaven and earth' and 'all things' is part of a title, a restrictive participle or a relative clause with the function of defining God's 'being-God'.⁷ Theologically speaking, cosmology here has become a part of 'theo-logy' in the proper sense: these texts are not interested in developing an independent concept of cosmology, but cosmology is rather conceived as part of the doctrine about God.

The human world as κόσμος: Cosmology as anthropology

Where is the use of the term κόσμος in the New Testament taken from?

We now change our perspective and question where the usage of the term κόσμος, which is typical for Paul in

7. This is the case in Matthew 11:25; Luke 10:2; Acts 4:24, 14:15; Romans 11:36; 1 Corinthians 8:6, 12:6, 15:27–28; Ephesians 3:9; Hebrews 1:3, 10, 2:8, 10; Revelation 4:11, 5:13, 10:6, 14:7, 20:11.

particular and the New Testament in general, was taken from. Consequently, we once again direct our attention towards the Hellenistic world. A colloquial usage of this term is attested which is characterised by a distinct anthropocentric trait. Two meanings can be distinguished.

Firstly, κόσμος is used to denote the entirety of the world as inhabited by mankind. Here, κόσμος is more or less equivalent to οικουμένη, as Philo's description of Augustus' rule demonstrates. According to Philo (*Leg. Gai.* 309), it was Augustus τὴν εἰρήνην διαχέας πάντη διὰ γῆς καὶ θαλάττης ἅχρι τῶν τοῦ κόσμου περάτων [who diffused peace in every direction over earth and sea, to the very furthest extremities of the world].

Secondly, κόσμος can be used to denote the human race. According to this understanding, it is said that by birth human beings 'come into the world' (e.g. *Mark Aurel* 6:56:1; *Athenaeus, Deipn.* 1:21). There is a rather illuminating text in Philostrat's *Vita Apollonii* 8:7 that illustrates the distinction between these two concepts of the term κόσμος (see Box 1).

This understanding of the term κόσμος has also found entrance into Hellenistic Judaism. According to Wisdom 9:2–3, God has commissioned that 'the human being [...] rules the κόσμος in holiness and righteousness' (κατασκευάσας ἀνθρώπον ἵνα ... διέπῃ τὸν κόσμον ἐν ὄσιότητι καὶ δικαιοσύνῃ).

According to 2 Maccabees 3:12, the temple in Jerusalem is 'honoured throughout the κόσμος' (i.e. amongst every human being). The same meaning is attested by Wisdom 10:1, where Adam is called πατήρ κόσμου ['father of the world' in the sense of 'mankind' or 'every human being']. Wisdom 2:24 (through the devil's envy death entered the world) comes very close to Romans 5:12, and the same is true for Wisdom 14:14: (τὰ εἰδώλα) κενοδοξίᾳ γὰρ ἀνθρώπων εισῆλθεν εἰς τὸν κόσμον [through human vanity 'the idols' entered the world]⁸ with respect to Romans 1:19–23. In all these texts of which there are numerous examples, the Greek word κόσμος is just another expression for 'all human beings' or 'mankind'.

The New Testament usage

If we now switch to the New Testament, we can easily identify these two aspects of the colloquial use of the term κόσμος in its Hellenistic environment in the early Christian writings. A few examples may suffice.

That κόσμος could be used as a designation of the entire inhabited world, becomes clear if we compare Matthew 4:8 with Luke 4:5. In the story of Jesus' temptation, Luke tells his readers that the devil showed Jesus πάσας τὰς βασιλείας τῆς οικουμένης [all the kingdoms of the inhabited world]. Instead, Matthews reads πάσας τὰς βασιλείας τοῦ κόσμου [all the kingdoms of the κόσμος].

8. From Wisdom 14:14 it becomes sufficiently clear that it would be a severe fault if Romans 5:12 (δι' ἐνὸς ἀνθρώπου ἡ ἀμαρτίᾳ εἰς τὸν κόσμον εισῆλθεν) is interpreted as characterising sin coming from outside into the 'world'. Sin originates nowhere else but from the very midst of mankind.

BOX 1: Distinction between these two concepts of the term κόσμος.

κόσμος δὲ ὁ μὲν ἐπὶ θεῷ δημιουργῷ κείμενος τὰ ἐν οὐρανῷ νομέσθιον καὶ τὰ ἐν θαλάττῃ καὶ γῆ πάντα, ... ἔστι δὲ τις καὶ ἐπ' ἄνδρι ἀγαθῷ κόσμος οὐχ ὑπερβάλλων τὰ σφρίας μέτρα, ὃν ἄνδρός δεῖσθαι θεῷ εἰκασμένον· καὶ τί τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τοῦδε; αἱ γυγάι ἀπακοῦσαν μανικώτερον ἀποτοιπαντὸς σχῆματος, καὶ ἔωλοι μὲν αὐτὸς νόμοι, σωφροσύνη δὲ οὐδαμοῦ. ... ἀλλὰ δεῖ ἄνδρός, ὃς ἐπιμελήσεται τὸν περὶ αὐτὸς κόσμου, θεὸς ὑπὸ σφρίας ἦκων

By the κόσμος, which depends upon God the creator, we must understand things in heaven and all things in the sea and on earth [...] But there is also a κόσμος dependent on the good man, which does not transcend the limits of wisdom, which [...] stands in need of a man fashioned in the image of God. And what is the fashion of this κόσμος? There are undisciplined souls, which in their madness clutch at every fashion, and in their eyes laws are out-of-date and vain; and there is no good sense amongst them [...] Now you need a man to administer and care for the κόσμος, in these matters, a god sent down by wisdom.

Even more interesting is the recounting of Genesis 15:7 in Romans 4:13. According to Genesis 15:7, God promised Abraham to give him and his offspring 'the land' (τὴν γῆν ταύτην) as inheritance. In Romans 4:13 Paul refers to this promise, but he replaces γῆ [land] with κόσμος [world]: 'Not through the law did the promise come to Abraham or to his offspring that they should inherit the world but through the righteousness of faith.' Although there are numerous early Jewish texts that have broadened the biblical promise from Canaan to encompass the whole earth (e.g. *Sir* 44:21; *Jub* 17:3; 22:14; 32:19; *āthHen* 5:7; Philo's *Somn.* 1:175; *Vit. Mos.* 1:155),⁹ in Paul, the expansion from the 'land' to the 'world' is triggered by the universal perspective of Paul's soteriology. Paul not only let the promise refer to Abraham's physical descendants, but 'to all who believe without being circumcised'. Abraham received the promise to become *their* 'father', as Paul writes in Romans 4:11 (εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν πατέρα πάντων τὸν πιστευόντων δι' ἀκροβυστίας). Paul gives the promise an 'a-territorial' interpretation (Davies 1974:179). Its 'cosmic' dimension is part of Paul's inclusive soteriology – it is through faith in Jesus Christ that people become Abraham's offspring. Here, κόσμος reflects Paul's claim that the message of the Gospel transcends the borders of Judaism and brings good news to all human beings, wherever they may live. 'Everybody and everywhere' – this is the meaning of the Greek word κόσμος which corresponds rather closely to the Christian concept of faith. It is not limited to a distinct territory or to a distinct nation. Accordingly, the Gospel 'is proclaimed εἰς ὅλον τὸν κόσμον' (Mk 14:9), Jesus 'was believed in the κόσμος' (1 Tm 3:16), and the κόσμος is the 'field' in which the 'children of the kingdom' were sowed as 'good seed' (Mt 13:38). In this respect, New Testament cosmology could perhaps be considered an integral part of early Christian missiology.

What is even more typical for this aspect of the New Testament cosmological concepts is the personification of the κόσμος. Here it becomes evident that early Christian cosmology should be widely regarded as anthropology. Interestingly enough, it is almost exclusively Paul and John who ascribe human qualities and human abilities to the κόσμος. The κόσμος acts like a human being:

9. The two texts from Philo of Alexandria are of special interest, because the Pauline universalism is anticipated. In *Vit. Mos.* 1:155, Philo writes about Moses that God 'gave him the whole world as a possession suitable for his heir' (πάντα τὸν κόσμον ὡς κληρονόμῳ κτήσιν ἀρμόζουσαν). In *Somn.* 1:175 Philo mentions the promise given to Abraham according to Genesis 28:14: 'But the race of wisdom is likened to the sand of the sea', and he who is in possession of wisdom 'is the inheritor of all the parts of the world' (τῶν τοῦ κόσμου κληρονόμος μερῶν). It is the possession of 'wisdom' that universalises the inheritance of the 'land' to the inheritance of the 'world'; in Paul it is 'faith'.

- The κόσμος is able to ‘recognise’ or refuse to do so (Jn 1:10, 14:31, 17:23, 25; 1 Jn 3:1; 1 Cor 1:21).
- The κόσμος is able to ‘love’ or ‘to be loved’ (Jn 3:16, 15:19; Ja 4:4; 1 Jn 2:15).
- The κόσμος is said to ‘hate’ (Jn 7:7, 15:18, 17:14; 1 Jn 3:13), to ‘go after a person’, to ‘see’, and to ‘rejoice’ (Jn 12:19, 14:19, 16:20; 1 Jn 4:5, *et alii*).

The κόσμος’s relation to God can be described analogously:

- The κόσμος can be ‘judged’ and ‘condemned’ (Jn 9:39; Rm 3:6; 1 Cor 11:32, 6:2).
- He or she can be held ‘accountable to God’ (ὑπόδικος [...] τῷ θεῷ).
- The κόσμος can be ‘reconciled’ to God like a former enemy (2 Cor 5:19; cf. Rm 11:15).
- Finally, the κόσμος can even be ‘vanquished’ like a human enemy (Jn 16:33; 1 Jn 4:4, 5:4ff.).

Paul’s epistle to the Romans

Let us now focus on two texts in Paul’s epistle to the Romans: Romans 3:19–20 and 5:12–14.

οἴδαμεν δὲ ὅτι ὅσα ὁ νόμος λέγει τοῖς ἐν τῷ νόμῳ λαλεῖ, ἵνα πᾶν στόμα φραγῇ καὶ ὑπόδικος γένηται πᾶς ὁ κόσμος τῷ θεῷ· διότι ἔξ εργῶν νόμου οὐ δικαιωθήσεται πᾶσα σάρξ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ [Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight.] (Rm 3:19–20; [author’s own translation])

In Romans 3:19–20, the κόσμος is depicted as a human being standing before his or her judge, unable to answer the accusations made against him or her. Correspondingly, the expression πᾶς ὁ κόσμος can be replaced by πᾶν στόμα (Rom 3:19) and πᾶσα σάρξ (v. 20). All three are not synonyms, but they are semantically isotopic since they refer to one and the same subject matter – mankind in its entirety:

Διὰ τοῦτο ὥσπερ δι' ἐνὸς ἀνθρώπου ἡ ἀμαρτία εἰς τὸν κόσμον εἰσῆλθεν καὶ διὰ τῆς ἀμαρτίας ὁ θάνατος, καὶ οὕτως εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους ὁ θάνατος διῆλθεν, ἐφ' ὃ πάντες ἡμαρτον· ἀχρι γύρω νόμου ἀμαρτία ἦν ἐν κόσμῳ, ἀμαρτία δὲ οὐκ ἐλλογεῖται μὴ ὄντος νόμου, ¹⁴ἀλλὰ ἐβασιλεύειν ό θάνατος ἀπό Αδάμ μέχρι Μωϋσέως καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς μὴ ἀμαρτήσαντας ἐπὶ τῷ ὄμοιώματι τῆς παραβάσεως Αδὰμ ὃς ἐστιν τύπος τοῦ μέλλοντος. [Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned – for sin was in the world before the law, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.] (Rm 5:12–14, [author’s own translation])

In Romans 5:12–14, εἰς τὸν κόσμον is equivalent to εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους or simply to πάντες. When the text reads ‘sin came into the world’, it denotes the very beginning of the history of sin and its proliferation amongst Adam’s offspring.¹⁰ When Paul writes in Romans 5:13 that ‘sin was in the world before the law’, nothing else is implied except that human beings, who lived in the period between Adam and Moses, were sinning.

10. For a proper interpretation of the expression εἰς τὸν κόσμον εἰσέρχεσθαι in Romans 5:12, see footnote 8.

These two texts apparently refer to each other insofar as Paul uses it to characterise the nature of mankind. It frames the history of mankind as a history of sinfulness where Romans 5:12 denote the protological beginning with Adam’s fall and Romans 3:19 denote the eschatological end with the last judgment. From this, we may draw the conclusion that, for Paul, human beings are not involuntarily bound *into* a κόσμος that has to be distinguished from them, but rather that they *are* the κόσμος which is constituted by their sinning. In these texts, cosmology is conceived as anthropology.

If we go a step further and ask how this concept is embedded in the broader context of Paul’s theology as it is developed in Romans, the answer is at hand. What Paul is saying about mankind forming one uniform κόσμος determined by sin, is the complementary counterpart of the inclusive character of his soteriology. As God justifies every human being, whether a Jew or a Gentile, only through faith; all human beings, whether a Jew or a Gentile, are under the dominion of sin. In Romans there are two statements where the first words are almost identical (not in the hand-out): ‘There is no distinction’ (οὐ γάρ ἐστιν διαστολὴ). In Romans 3:23 it is followed by the words: ‘[A]ll have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’, whereas in Romans 10:11–12, Paul starts with the quotation of Isaiah 28:16: ‘[N]o one who believes in him will be put to shame.’ He then continues: ‘For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same one is Lord of all, rich to all who call upon him.’ From this it becomes clear that Paul’s anthropological cosmology is an integral part of his doctrine of justification. Within this theological framework, Paul’s cosmology functions as an antithesis to the Jewish theology of election as it was advocated by himself prior to his conversion.

However, there is yet another theologically important aspect of Paul’s concept of κόσμος.

‘We’ and the κόσμος: Cosmology as ecclesiology

This article intends to display the interrelatedness between cosmology and ecclesiology in Paul’s theology in two different factual connections. Both have two aspects in common: Firstly, the Church, or rather, the ‘we’ or ‘you’ of the Christian community, on one side and the κόσμος on the other – these are dualistically opposed to each other; and secondly, in the same context, the term κόσμος has an anthropological meaning.

If we connect these two aspects, we are able to describe a rather detailed semantic profile of Paul’s ecclesiological understanding of this term – he uses κόσμος as an umbrella term to embrace all human beings who do not believe in Jesus Christ. In contrast to the usage in Romans 3:19 and 5:12–14, the term κόσμος refers to mankind in its entirety – excluding the Christians.

Philippians 2:14–15

Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish

in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world (ἐν οἷς φαίνεσθε ὡς φωστῆρες ἐν κόσμῳ).

If we want to understand this text properly, we have to draw our attention to the fact that the ‘you’ of verse 15, the second plural, is an ecclesial ‘you’. It is also the case with the ‘you’ of Matthew 5:14: ὑμεῖς ἔστε τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου [you are the light of the world]. Both texts do not denote the Christian individual as it has often been interpreted, but it refers to the same ‘you’ whom Paul calls ‘God’s temple’ (1 Cor 3:16–17; 2 Cor 6:16) or ‘body of Christ’ (1 Cor 12:27) or ‘children of God’ (Gl 3:26).¹¹

Philippians 2:15 is an intertextual allusion to Deuteronomy 32:5 (LXX), although Paul turns the meaning of the Old Testament text to the contrary. He changes a word of condemnation against Israel into a paraenetic word directed at the Christian community. It is the task of the Christian community to display God’s salvation to the κόσμος, that is amongst the non-Christian majority of their social environment. Matthew 5:14 is not far removed from this admonition. John 1:5¹² and 12:35¹³ use the same imagery and have to be understood ecclesiologically too.

As both John 1:5 and 12:35 use the soteriological symbolism of light and darkness, Philippians 2:15 implicitly does so too, because stars only shine during the night and in the darkness. Furthermore, in the background of Philippians 2:15, two Old Testament texts are discernable: Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6. In these two texts, God assigned the task to his servant Israel to become a light to the Gentiles. Accordingly, the Christian community’s relation to the κόσμος corresponds with Israel’s relation to the Gentiles.

1 Corinthians 1:18–29 and Galatians 6:14–15

The texts in Boxes 2 and 3 have three elements in common:

1. It makes the *cross of Christ* a subject of discussion. In 1 Corinthians 1:18–29, it is referred to by the expressions λόγος τοῦ σταυροῦ (v. 18) and Χριστὸς ἐσταυρωμένος (v. 23). In Galatians 6:14, Paul characterises it as the content of his boasting.
2. The cross marks the distinction between the Christian believer and the κόσμος.
3. The pair ‘Jews and Gentiles’ (respectively ‘Jews and Greeks’ and ‘circumcision and foreskin’) occur (1 Cor 1:22, 23, 24; Gl 6:15).

Although Ernst Käsemann has invested much energy to show that Paul fought on two different fronts with both epistles – in 1 Corinthians against the enthusiasts and in

¹¹It should not be overlooked that Paul never says ‘*the church* is the temple of God’ or ‘*the church* is the body of Christ’, but always ‘you are the temple of God’ and ‘you are the body of Christ’. It is always the people who are determined ecclesiologically – never the institution.

¹²John 1:5: τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ ὥν κατέλαβεν [the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it].

¹³John 12:35: περιπατεῖτε ὡς τὸ φῶς ἔχετε, ἵνα μὴ σκοτία ὑμᾶς καταλάβῃ [walk whilst you have the light, lest darkness overtake you].

BOX 2: 1 Corinthians 1:18–29.

¹⁸ Ο λόγος γὰρ ὁ τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῖς μὲν ἀτολλαμένοις μορίᾳ ἐστίν, τοῖς δὲ σφιζομένοις ἡμῖν δύναμις θεοῦν ἐστίν.	¹⁸ For the word of the cross is a folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.
¹⁹ γέγραπται γάρ· ἀπόλῶ τὴν σοφίαν τῶν σοφῶν καὶ τὴν σύνεστιν τῶν συνετῶν ἀθετήσα.	¹⁹ For it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart’.
²⁰ ποὺ σοφός; ποὺ γραμματεύς; ποὺ συγγραφῆς τοῦ αἰώνος τούτου; οὐδὲ ἐμώρανεν ὁ θεός τὴν σοφίαν τοῦ κόσμου;	²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?
²¹ ἔπειδη γάρ ἐν τῇ σοφίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἔγνω ὁ κόσμος διὰ τῆς σοφίας τὸν θεόν, ενδόκησεν ὁ θεός διὰ τῆς μορίας τοῦ κηρύγματος σῶσαι τοὺς πιστεύοντας·	²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of the message to save those who believe.
²² ἔπειδη καὶ Ἰουδαῖοι σημεῖα αἰτοῦσιν καὶ Ἕλληνες σοφίαν ἤτοι σοφίαν τοῦ θεοῦ,	²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom,
²³ ἵμεις δὲ κηρύσσουμεν Χριστὸν ἐσταυρωμένον, Ἰουδαῖοι μὲν σκανδάλον, εθνεῖστε δὲ μορίαν,	²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,
²⁴ ἀντὸς δὲ τοῖς κλητοῖς, Ἰουδαῖοι τε καὶ Ἕλλησιν, Χριστὸν θεοῦ δύναμιν καὶ θεοῦ σοφίαν·	²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God .
²⁵ ὅτι τὸ μαρόν τοῦ θεοῦ σοφώτερον τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐστίν καὶ τὸ ἀσθενές τοῦ θεοῦ ισχυρότερον τὸν ἄνθρωπον.	²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than human beings , and the weakness of God is stronger than human beings .
²⁶ Βλέπετε γάρ τὴν κλῆσιν ὑμῶν, ἀδελφοί, ὅτι οὐ πολλοὶ σοφοὶ κατὰ σάρκα, οὐ πολλοὶ δυνατοί, οὐ πολλοὶ εὐγένεις·	²⁶ For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to the flesh , not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.
²⁷ ἄλλα τὰ μορά τοῦ κόσμου ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεός, ίνα κατασχύνῃ τοὺς σοφούς, καὶ τὰ ἀσθενή τοῦ κόσμου ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεός, ίνα κατασχύνῃ τὰ ισχυρά,	²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;
²⁸ καὶ τὰ ἀγενή τοῦ κόσμου καὶ τὰ ἔξουθνημένα ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεός, τὰ μὴ ὄντα, ίνα τὰ ὄντα καταργήσῃ,	²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world , even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are,
²⁹ ὅπως μὴ καυχήσται πᾶσα σὰρξ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ·	²⁹ so that no flesh might boast in the presence of God .

BOX 3: Galatians 6:14–15.

⁴ Ἐμοὶ δὲ μὴ γένοιτο καυχᾶσθαι εἰ μὴ ἐν τῷ σταυρῷ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, διὸ οὐδὲ μοι κόσμος ἐστάρωσται κάγκω κόσμῳ.	¹⁴ But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world .
¹⁵ οὕτε γὰρ περιτομή τί ἐστιν οὕτε ἀκροβυστία ἀλλὰ κανή κτίσις.	¹⁵ For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation .

Galatians against the nomists (cf. Käsemann 1964:265) – it can be shown, however, that both texts deal with the same conflict and the same concept of κόσμος.

The situations to which Paul reacted in both texts

1 Corinthians has a background that can be described in terms of social history. Within the Christian community in Corinth, there were considerable differences in social standing between individual house churches. This led to a complete division of the church into several warring factions (cf. 1 Cor 1:10–12, 3:3–4), including one that boasted about its level of ‘wisdom’ (σοφία) and ‘knowledge’ (γνῶσις; 1 Cor 8:1, 7).¹⁴ This party obviously did not only feel superior to the other community members, but was also scornful of Paul (cf. 1 Cor 3:3, 18, 4:6ff.). In 1 Corinthians 4:19, Paul calls them ‘arrogant’ (πεφυσιωμένοι). Thus in this case, the unity within the Corinthian church as a whole was at risk, because

¹⁴Also refer to 1 Corinthians 1:17, 19, 20, 2:1, 4–6, 13, 3:19, 12:8; Pickett (1997); Konradt (2003).

one group imported the prevalent social structures into the church and created the factions described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:10ff.

In Galatians, Paul is engaged with Jewish Christians who emphasise the distinction between Jews and non-Jews, and conclude baptised Gentiles who believe in Jesus Christ can only belong to God's chosen people and Abraham's offspring by becoming Jews and being circumcised.

Dealing with the situations in a similar way

In 1 Corinthians 1–4, Paul's line of argument is twofold. On the one hand, he deals with the position of the 'knowledge and wisdom' faction and on the other hand, he criticises the actual formation of factions as such. In 1 Corinthians 1:18–29, he uses semantic oppositions he sets against each other. He begins with two fundamental oppositions: God-world and wisdom-foolishness.

On both sides diametrically opposite concepts of wisdom and foolishness exist. What God regards as 'wisdom', is estimated by the world as 'foolishness', and vice versa: in God's judgment, the 'wisdom of the world' is nothing but 'foolishness'.

Within the context of these oppositions, Paul then introduces his 'message of the cross' (1 Cor 1:18), and he does this in such a way that even the representatives of the Corinthian wisdom and knowledge party must agree with him – no Christian can deny that God has brought salvation through death on a cross. It is precisely this claim that salvation comes from such a despicable event like a death on a cross that, according to the standards of the 'world', must necessarily be 'foolishness'. Two dualistically opposed cognitive positions meet each other here. Those who believe that God has brought salvation through death on a cross are compelled to thoroughly revise their previous perception of reality in which such assurance has no place whatsoever. Thus, what is considered 'wisdom' outside the context of faith, no longer applies. To those who cannot grasp that Jesus' death on the cross is the saving event, Paul's message necessarily must remain foolishness.

This is substantiated in the second dualistic passage of 1 Corinthians (author has to confirm 1 Corinthians) which is as follows (see Box 4).

Although the terms on each side that comprise the passages have different meanings, their reference remains the same: they represent the distinction between the κόσμος and the church.

BOX 4: Substantiated in the second dualistic passage of 1 Corinthians.

οἱ σωζόμενοι (v. 18) 'we' (v. 18)	(v. 18) οἱ ἀπολλύμενοι
οἱ πιστεύοντες (v. 21)	
οἱ κλητοί, Jews and Gentiles (v. 24)	(v. 23) Jews, to whom the message of the cross is 'skandalon'. (v. 23) Gentiles, to whom the message of the cross is 'foolishness'.

If we now relate these two comparisons, it is clear what belongs together and what does not. On the one side is 'God', 'wisdom' and the ensuing passage, and on the other side is the 'world', 'foolishness' and the ensuing passage. Thus, the counterparts God and κόσμος are projected onto the counterparts Christians and non-Christians. It is by the message of the cross where they coincide. It is of great significance, though not surprising, that the polarity of Jews and Gentiles appears in both comparisons.

Within the context of Paul's debate with the factions in Corinth, it means that those who favour wisdom and knowledge can only do so as believers if they understand the cross as the saving event. From the side of the κόσμος and its values respectively, 'wisdom' is utterly excluded. This makes it impossible for some Christians to claim superiority over others by allowing paradigms which are only valid outside the Christian community and which Paul can only label as τοῦ κόσμου ('of the world'; cf. 1 Cor 1:20), to dominate. No one can understand the cross as saving event without having crossed the border from 'foolishness' to 'wisdom', from the κόσμος to 'God', and from unbelief to faith in Jesus Christ.

In Galatians 6:14–15, Paul argues against the position of his opponents by setting two sets of ideas in contrast to each other. On the one side, he has κόσμος as well as the distinction between Jews and Gentiles, and on the other side he has 'boasting in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ' and the 'new creation' which had substituted the distinction between Jews and Gentiles. It is the mentioning of the κανὴ κτίσις that brings God into play. This is so, because creations always need a creator, and the creator of the 'new creation' is certainly the same as he who created the old.

Paul's argument gains its specific profile from the way he relates the two sets of ideas to each other and thus attempts to create a paradigm shift. He identifies the distinction between Jews and Gentiles as an element of the κόσμος separated from God. The cross forms an irreversible breach with the κόσμος. It is therefore not only the boundary between Jews and Gentiles, but also the impossibility of being able to boast about a cross that are identified as specific characteristics of the κόσμος reality. 'Boasting in the cross' is only possible under the conditions of a new creation which God alone can bring into being. The opposite is also true: God has opened up a way of salvation through a despicable cross, and thereby has made a 'boasting in the cross' possible. This can only be correctly understood as the establishment of a new creation. It is impossible for the κόσμος to boast in the cross. Therefore, Paul can say that the κόσμος has been crucified to him and he to the κόσμος.

The same use of the term κόσμος in both situations

Although the positions of the opponents Paul is arguing against in Galatians and 1 Corinthians are quite different. He makes the same use of the term κόσμος. In both situations, struggles against Christian opponents who allowed distinctions between Christians, taken from outside the

Christian belief and community, to become predominant over the common Christian identity. In Galatia it is the distinction between Jews and Gentiles, and in Corinth it is the distinction between different social statuses and levels of education. Paul stymies these distinctions by giving them a common denominator: they are not only taken from, but also belong to the κόσμος. This is what these distinctions have in common, and this is what separates them fundamentally from God and the Christian identity according to Paul. Paul tears down boundaries by erecting one new and fundamental boundary: the boundary between those who believe in Jesus Christ and the κόσμος.

Conclusion

Cosmology in the proper sense is not an issue Paul is interested in. For him the κόσμος has a human face and speaks with a human voice. If we consider this matter, it might perhaps be the reason for two further issues. The New Testament scriptures repeatedly mention an 'age to come' (αιών μέλλων; Mt 12:32; Mk 10:30par.; Lk 20:35; Heb 6:5) or announce 'a new heaven and a new earth' (2 Pt 3:13; Rv 21:1, 21:5), but it never expects something like a 'new world' (in Greek perhaps a 'κόσμος καινός'). The only event expected with regard to the κόσμος is its 'passing away' (1 Jn 2:17; cf. 1 Cor 7:31; Heb 9:26). God is called 'Lord of heaven and earth' (οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς [...] κύριος; Ac 17:24; cf. Mt 11:25; Lk 10:21), but never 'father' or 'lord' of the κόσμος. This corresponds to Revelation 11:15, where it is said that heavenly voices proclaim '[t]he kingdom of the world has become belonging to our Lord and his Messiah, and he will reign forever and

ever' (ἐγένετο ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ κόσμου τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν καὶ τοῦ χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ, καὶ βασιλεύσει εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων). God's reign over the κόσμος will be enforced through a universal judgment that will do away with those who presently rule over the inhabited world. The same holds true for Paul: God is not the king of the world, but – according to Romans 3:6 – its judge.

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