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# FROM COSMOLOGY TO ECOLOGY

POLITICAL POTENTIAL OF 1 COR 7.29-31 FOR OUR THREATENED WORLD

STUDENT:

TOM VAN GEMEREN

s1888862



university of  
 groningen

MENTORS:

PROF. DR. G.H. VAN KOOTEN

DR. DR. F.L ROIG LANZILLOTTA

## Contents

INTRODUCTION	ii.
<b>CHAPTER 1: PAULINE USE OF THE TEMPORARY WORLD-ORDER IN 1 COR 7.29-31: AS IF NOT USING IT UP</b>	<b>1</b>
The form of this cosmos: τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου	2
The temporality of the cosmos: παράγει τὸ σχῆμα	15
The use of the cosmos: οἱ χρώμενοι τὸν κόσμον	22
As if not using it up: ὡς μὴ καταχρώμενοι	24
Concluding reflections	31
<b>CHAPTER 2: PAUL: OUR CONTEMPORARY? HŌS MĒ AS ŽIŽEK’S MATERIAL CORRECTIVE TO BADIOU’S ABSTRACT UNIVERSALITY</b>	<b>36</b>
Paul in contemporary philosophy	37
As if not: Žižek's corrective to Badiou's universalism	51
<b>CHAPTER 3: PAUL: OUR ECOLOGIST? 1 COR 7.29-31 IN EXETER’S ECOTHEOLOGICAL READING OF SAINT PAUL</b>	<b>61</b>
<i>Exeter’s Greening Paul</i> in ecotheology	62
1 Cor 7.29-31: Paul’s limited use of the current world-order	71
Concluding reflections: hermeneutical limits to using Paul	79
SUMMARY	83
BIBLIOGRAPHY	84

## Introduction

Western political discussions concerning environmental challenges often lack reference to the religious ideologies and texts that formed its perspective on the ‘threatened’ world. Apart from skepticism towards the Bible in the political sphere, the study of the Bible can easily remain within the confines of either Christian communities or faculties of theology. This thesis tries to connect the modern political sphere to the theological study of the Bible, focusing on 1 Cor 7.29-31. This passage plays an important role in Continental Philosophy’s political turn to Paul and offers great, yet undiscovered, potential for an ecological reading. In order to connect Paul to modern-day politics, the thesis combines a historical contextualization of 1 Cor 7.29-31 with two contemporary philosophical accounts: political reactivation of Paul as a neomarxistic revolutionary and the ecological hermeneutic constructed at the University of Exeter, published in *Greening Paul: Rereading the Apostle in a Time of Ecological Crisis*.<sup>1</sup>

In the growing corpus of theological reflection on ecology the connection with Continental philosophy has not been made before. By combining historical methodology with political philosophy and theology this thesis analyses the political potential of Pauline literature for our modern day questions. Moving from history, through hermeneutics to practical relevance of the Bible for a contemporary political debate, the thesis proposes a translation of Pauline cosmology into modern-day ecology.

Regarding this project, I am greatly indebted to Geurt-Henk van Kooten.<sup>2</sup> Apart from giving constructive feedback as I progressed, Geurt-Henk repeatedly walked a second mile in order for me to keep on going.

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<sup>1</sup> David G. Horrel, Cheryl Hunt and Christopher Southgate, *Greening Paul: Reading the Apostle in a Time of Ecological Crisis* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Internationally known as: George Henry van Kooten.

## Chapter 1

### PAULINE USE OF THE TEMPORARY WORLD-ORDER IN 1 COR 7.29-31: AS IF NOT USING IT UP

let those who use the world live as though they were not using it up:  
for this world-order passes away.

οἱ χρώμενοι τὸν κόσμον ὡς μὴ καταχρώμενοι·  
παράγει γὰρ τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου.

1 Corinthians 7.31

The first letter to the Corinthian ἐκκλησία provides a great wealth of information about the socio-political, ethical and cosmological views of the apostle Paul. In the letter Paul replies to various discussions that were causing division in one of the earliest Christian communities, one of it being on the status of marriage (7.1-24, 32-35), another concerning virginity (7.25-28, 36-38).<sup>1</sup> Within Paul's treatment of these intertwined subjects, he presents an explanatory paragraph about the status of the world (κόσμος). In this section, Paul wants to show both the temporality of the current state of things and the ethical implications of such a condition. By doing so, Paul relates the status of the κόσμος to the preferred behaviour of the Corinthians. Simply put: the way the world *is* implies the way humans *ought to be*.

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<sup>1</sup> The different topics of debate are introduced by 'περὶ δὲ' in 7.1, 7.25, 8.1, 12.1 16.1, 16.12. William Fridell Orr and James Arthur Walther. *The Anchor Bible: I Corinthians* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976) 220.

In various complex and dense statements Paul suggests an ethical attitude that summarizes some of the instructions he gave before. Opening the paragraph with τοῦτο δέ φημι, Paul invites his audience to pay close attention to the words he is going to write. But instead of clear statements, Paul continues with confusing and seemingly contradictory sentences. In a paradoxical way, Paul instructs those with wives to live as if they had none, those who mourn or rejoice as if they weren't, those who buy as if they didn't possess anything at all and, finally, those who use the κόσμος as if they were not completely using it. These exhortations are framed by the time being wrapped up and thereby made short and by the form of the κόσμος passing away. A direct explanation for these instructions remains to be desired. This chapter aims at unravelling the mysteries of Paul's words, with a specific focus on the appropriate use of the κόσμος. To achieve this, various Pauline word combinations will be analysed both within the Pauline text corpus and within ancient Greek literature, namely: the form of the cosmos (σχῆμα-κόσμος), the passing away of the cosmos (παράγω-κόσμος/σχημα), the use of the cosmos (χράομαι-κόσμος) and fully using the cosmos (χράομαι-καταχράομαι and καταχράομαι-κόσμος). Thereafter follows an analysis of Paul's ὡς μὴ-rhetoric. The chapter closes with some concluding reflections, in which the translation of 'world-order' for σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου is proposed and the temporary ethic of 1 Cor 7.29-31 is discussed in reference to 1 Peter 3.5-13. As will be shown, Paul instructed the Corinthians to use their current world while being mindful of Christ being the actor in changing the temporary state of things.

### **THE FORM OF THIS COSMOS: τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου**

#### *Paul uses κόσμος*

According to Diogenes Laertius, Stoics could use κόσμος in three ways: for God/the whole of substance, for the arrangement of the stars or for a

combination of these two.<sup>2</sup> Κόσμος is a widely used word and concept in Greek Antiquity. The work of Edward Adams<sup>3</sup> provides a valuable resource for describing the scope of the term. For the Greeks, "κόσμος with the sense of 'world/universe came to encode a worldview which (...) was one of the fundamental ideals which shaped Greek culture."<sup>4</sup> Adams traces the development of the concept from a 'sense of order' by the early Greeks (e.g. Homer) to an elaborate worldview developed by later philosophers.<sup>5</sup> In the first century, the concept and corresponding ideology of κόσμος "served to legitimate the prevailing social order."<sup>6</sup> Adams distinguishes five features of Greek κόσμος ideology: (1) "κόσμος is characterized by order"<sup>7</sup>, (2) "marked by unity"<sup>8</sup>, (3) "an object of beauty"<sup>9</sup> and (4) "an object of praise"<sup>10</sup> Finally, (5) "human beings are related to the κόσμος as microcosm to macrocosm."<sup>11</sup> Adams concludes: "Up to the end of the first century CE, κόσμος (=world/universe) in principle encoded a positive evaluation of the world."<sup>12</sup>

Paul uses κόσμος<sup>13</sup> in a wide variety of ways, ranging from a visible, physical κόσμος (e.g. Rom 1.20) to an abstract, metaphorical one (Gal 6.14).<sup>14</sup> These two extremes are far from excluding one another. Paul rather

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<sup>2</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum* 7.137.10.

<sup>3</sup> Edward. Adams, *Constructing the World: A Study in Paul's Cosmological Language*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 42–81.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 67. See e.g. Cicero, *De natura deorum* 2.87.4-5 (the structure of the world in all its parts is such that it could not have been better whether in point of utility or beauty).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>13</sup> κόσμος appears 186 times in the NT. In Paul: 9x in Rom, 21x in 1Cor, 3x in 2Cor, 3x in Gal, 1x Phil. κόσμος is very prominent in Johannine literature: 78x in John, 23x in 1Joh and 1x in 2Joh.

<sup>14</sup> In his conclusion, Adams distinguishes between κόσμος as 'inhabited world' (physical environment of human beings), as the whole universe, as renewed creation (only in Rom 4.13) and as "this world in accordance with the spatio-temporal dualism of Jewish apocalypticism." (Adams, 241) He relates every occurrence of κόσμος to one of these categories. According to him, only the apocalyptic verses embrace both the human and the non-human world. He thereby fails to acknowledge the influence of the godly world on the other κόσμος-categories.

shows a fluid use of the word, in which the natural and supernatural κόσμος are interrelated. The visible creation in Paul's worldview is part of a broader cosmic scheme. In this scheme e.g. different spirits are influencing the course of what is visible to us. A similar dialectic between what Adams calls 'micro-cosmos' and 'macro-cosmos' can be found among the Stoics.<sup>15</sup> The inter-cosmic feature of κόσμος prevents us from categorizing Pauline verses into either the physical or the spiritual realm. Rather, every occurrence of κόσμος should be studied in light of Paul's interrelated worldview, containing a spiritual physicality and physical spirituality.<sup>16</sup>

Paul values the κόσμος ambiguously. Rom 1.20 displays the κόσμος as the world created by God. Through the κόσμος all people are able to clearly see the invisible qualities (τὰ ἀόρατα) of God, specified as his eternal power and divine nature (ἀίδιος δύναμις καὶ θεϊότης). Thereby Rom 1 qualifies the κόσμος positively as a revelatory device. In 1 Cor 2.12 on the other hand, Paul places the spirit of the κόσμος opposite to the spirit of God. Paul argues that only the spirit of God gives the opportunity to gain insight into God's wisdom (2.7). Adams also identifies the difference between κόσμος in Rom and 1 Cor: "κόσμος in Romans is not going to be as polemically or as negatively charged as it was in 1 Corinthians." In 1 Cor, Paul "rejects the ideal of integration into the social order of the κόσμος and replaces it with that of distinction of the κόσμος. (...) Paul challenges the world-view linked with cosmos."<sup>17</sup> In Romans, on the other hand, "Paul uses κόσμος and κτίσις (...) to construct a social world in (a measure of) solidarity with the wider society."<sup>18</sup> In order to establish this, "the world itself is the effect of God's redemption. The Christian community is not redeemed from this perishing

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<sup>15</sup> Adams, *Constructing the World*, 52–58. See also: George Henry van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology in Paul and the Pauline School: Colossians and Ephesians in the Context of Graeco-Roman Cosmology, with a New Synopsis of the Greek Texts*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003) 17. "According to Stoic physics, the world is the substance of God, and God the nature which sustains the world and makes things grow." Marcus Aurelius, *Meditationes* 11.1.2 ; Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* 8.7.330 (rational soul as microcosmos).

<sup>16</sup> The κόσμος also has a social and political dimension, as will be discussed later.

<sup>17</sup> Adams, *Constructing the World*, 147.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

world/age, but is a proleptic expression of the redemption of God's world."<sup>19</sup> Where κόσμος is the main negative theological term in 1 Cor, this linguistic role "has been taken over in Romans by the triad ἁμαρτία, θάνατος and σάραξ."<sup>20</sup>

Adam's work shows the creative ways Paul uses Greek language to articulate his theological and political views on the κόσμος. Through an elaborate analysis of κόσμος among Greek philosophers, Adam identifies a "significant departure from standard Greek usage"<sup>21</sup> in 1 Cor. If the letter predates Galatians (a debated issue), 1 Cor even contains "the earliest recorded example of apocalyptic employment of κόσμος in ancient literature."<sup>22</sup> In 1 Cor κόσμος stands in opposition to God; as the spirit of the world is opposite to the spirit of God (2.12). Similarly, the things of the κόσμος can hinder Paul's audience from doing the things of the Lord (7.32-33). At the end of times, the saints will judge the κόσμος (1 Cor 6.2), but not be judged alongside it (11.32). The saints shouldn't be escaping from the κόσμος (5.10), although they are subject to scorn from it (4.13). In Adam's frame, Paul uses κόσμος in 1 Cor 7.31 "to discourage over-involvement and enmeshment in the wider world."<sup>23</sup> Paul's negative evaluation of the κόσμος in 1 Cor is therefore a creative and innovative deviation from the Greek κόσμος ideology.

A word in "close proximity to κόσμος"<sup>24</sup> in Paul is κτίσις. This term occurs nine times in Paul, out of which three stand in the direct context of κόσμος.<sup>25</sup> Adams concludes his study of the use of κτίσις in Greek and Hellenistic-Jewish writings with: "κτίσις in non-biblical Greek usage had the standard sense "founding", "foundation", "settlement". In Greek literature, it

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>25</sup> Rom 1.20,25; 8.19,20,21,22,39; 2 Cor 5.17; Gal 6.15. With κόσμος: Rom 1.20; 2 Cor 5.17-19; Gal 6.14-15. Derived from: Ibid.



is employed in contexts relating to the establishment of cities. In Jewish usage, it was linked with God's creative/created work."<sup>26</sup> In Romans, "Paul uses κτίσις to emphasize the continuity between the present world and its future transformation."<sup>27</sup> The term is used "in a favourable manner by Paul,"<sup>28</sup> analogous to the positive use of κόσμος in Romans. In Galatians we see a cosmology similar to the one of 1 Cor.<sup>29</sup> In 6.14-15 the κόσμος and καινή κτίσις appear together. In combining these terms "Paul is invoking the apocalyptic spatio-temporal dualism of "this world" and "the world to come"/"the new creation".<sup>30</sup> In the Galatian cosmology, the στοιχεῖα fulfil an important role, to which we'll turn later on in this chapter.

One of the most important explicit texts on κόσμος in 1 Cor is 1.20-21,27-31. In this text God's wisdom is opposite to the wisdom of the world; what is counted as valuable in the world is opposite to God's evaluation. Instead of the wise (τοὺς σοφούς) and strong (τὰ ἰσχυρά), God choose the foolish (τὰ μωρά), weak (τὰ ἀσθενῆ), lowly (τὰ ἀγενῆ) and despised (τὰ ἐξουθενημένα) things of the world. The explicit opposition between God and κόσμος,<sup>31</sup> a Pauline deviation from common Greek ideology, ends in an antithesis between the flesh (1.29 - σὰρξ) and the Lord (1.31 - κύριος). God choose "the things that are not (τὰ μὴ ὄντα)—to nullify the things that are (τὰ ὄντα), so that not all flesh may boast before him (...) as it is written: Let the one who is boasting boast in the Lord."<sup>32</sup>

### *The κόσμος has a form*

In 1 Cor 7.31 Paul writes about a scheme of this cosmos (τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου). This combination of σχῆμα and κόσμος is unique in the NT.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>31</sup> In 1.25 the opposition regarding wisdom and strength is between God (θεός) and men (ἄνθρωπος).

<sup>32</sup> 1 Cor 1.28b-29,31.

Apart from 1 Cor 7, σχῆμα only appears in the Philippian hymn in 2.8.<sup>33</sup> In this text σχήματι εὑρεθείς ὡς ἄνθρωπος<sup>34</sup> designates the appearance of Christ: Christ was found in our world/lives in the σχῆμα similar to men. However, the Philippian hymn is not primarily on cosmology, but rather argues from an ethical and anthropological point of view. The hymn is introduced in 2.2 by several statements about the φρήν ('mind/intellect'), pointing to the ethical example of Christ in the following hymn. Σχῆμα appears in LXX only once, in Isaiah 3.17, in close proximity to several variants of κόσμος. The σχῆμα in Isa refers to the outward appearance of the leaders of Israel. Κόσμος is used three times to describe the ornaments and clothing these leaders wear (3.18,19,20). The Philippian hymn presents μορφή as a term parallel to σχῆμα: Christ was in the form of God (2.6 - ἐν μορφῇ Θεοῦ) and took the form of a slave (2.7 - μορφήν δούλου). Referring to the person of Christ, it is reasonable to interpret σχῆμα as a form/shape.<sup>35</sup> In the absence of further evidence in the Bible itself, appearances of the combination of σχῆμα and κόσμος in the wider Graeco-Roman world enrich our understanding of 1 Cor 7.31.

The wide majority of texts containing a combination of σχῆμα and κόσμος are not cosmological, meaning these texts do not refer to the world/universe. Instead, they show the importance of order in a wide variety of subjects. Dio Chrysostom e.g. uses σχῆμα-κόσμος to prescribe an orderly fashion for amusement.<sup>36</sup> He presents the two terms in equal fashion: amusement should be taken with decorum (μετὰ κόσμου) and according to the scheme of free men (σχήματος πρέποντος ἀνθρώποις ἐλευθέρους). Alongside cosmological application, Plutarch uses σχῆμα-κόσμος to describe buildings,<sup>37</sup> and the arrangement (κόσμος) and order

<sup>33</sup> In Rom 12.2 and 1 Pet 1.14 συσχηματίζω is used.

<sup>34</sup> Some translations place these words in 2.7.

<sup>35</sup> Apart from Phil 2, μορφή appears in the NT only in Mark 16.12, also indicating a form of Christ's appearance.

<sup>36</sup> Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 32.45.9. δεῖ δὲ μετὰ κόσμου καὶ σχήματος πρέποντος ἀνθρώποις ἐλευθέρους.

<sup>37</sup> Plutarch, *De Pythiae oraculis* 394d-409d. Also: Herodian, *Ab excessu divi Marci* 4.2.7.

(σχήμα) of a military camp.<sup>38</sup> Just as in LXX Isa 3.17 σχῆμα-κόσμος is also found in the context of clothing, art and decoration in Greek literature.<sup>39</sup> Adornments, e.g. clothes, can be called κόσμος. In the example of clothing a part of a costume is sometimes called σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου.<sup>40</sup> Finally, non-cosmological σχῆμα-κόσμος language appears in the context of grammar. Dionysius Halicarnassus uses the combination syntactically, referring to literary figures of a certain type/form (τοιούτων σχημάτων κόσμος).<sup>41</sup> For explaining 1 Cor 7.31 these texts provide little explanatory value, since Paul is obviously uses κόσμος as reference to the world/universe in 1 Cor 7.

The first category of Graeco-Roman texts using σχῆμα-κόσμος in the sense of world/universe gives physical descriptions of the κόσμος. An important philosopher on this subject is Posidonius, to whom both Cleomedes and Diogenes Laertius refer. Cleomedes' *Lecture on Astronomy* was written somewhere between 50 BCE and 250 CE.<sup>42</sup> In reference to Posidonius, Cleomedes distinguishes astronomy from physical theory. Whereas physical theory "deals with matter, causal relations, and teleological explanation, (...) astronomy is defined as an activity that uses geometry and mathematics to analyse the shape, size, motions, and interactions of the principal heavenly bodies (...) physical theory supplies the "first principles" (ἀρχαί) that astronomy has to adopt and follow."<sup>43</sup>

Cleomedes' book is primarily on the 'physics' of the κόσμος; on the motion, shape and size of different planets, like the earth, sun and moon. In his treatise both the earth and the κόσμος are considered to be spherical. After observing some of the movements of planets and phenomena on the earth, Cleomedes concludes: "The cause of the whole variation in the cases

<sup>38</sup> Plutarch, *Pyrrhus* Chapter 16.7.2.

<sup>39</sup> Euripides. *Bacchae* 832. Xenophon, *Ephesiaca* 1.2.5. Flavius Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* 6.11.244.

<sup>40</sup> Euripides. *Bacchae* 832.

<sup>41</sup> Dionysius Halicarnassus, *De Isocrate* 2.34.

<sup>42</sup> Alan C. Bowen and Robert B. Todd, *Cleomedes' Lectures on Astronomy: A Translation of The Heavens* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) 2–4.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

just described is the Earth's shape, which is spherical, as a fortiori is the whole cosmos itself (τῆς γῆς σχῆμα σφαιρικὸν ὑπάρχον καὶ αὐτὸς πολὺ πρότερον ὁ σύμπας κόσμος). In other words, none of the phenomena just described could occur with other kinds of shapes. We shall demonstrate next that both the whole cosmos, and its most significant parts, do have this shape."<sup>44</sup>

A spherical shape is considered to be an ideal type of forms. Cleomedes writes: "It is also entirely plausible that the most complete of bodies has the most complete of shapes. And the cosmos is the most complete of all bodies, while the sphere is the most complete of all shapes (καὶ ἔστι πάντων μὲν σωμάτων τελεώτατον ὁ κόσμος, πάντων δὲ σχημάτων ἢ σφαιρα). For the sphere can enclose every shape that has the same diameter as it, but no other shape can enclose a sphere that has a diameter equal to it. So it is absolutely necessary that the cosmos be a sphere."<sup>45</sup> In the spherical κόσμος, the earth is located at its exact centre.<sup>46</sup> This perfectly formed κόσμος conforms to the Greek κόσμος-ideology Adams described.

Diogenes Laertius (3c AD) writes on σχῆμα-κόσμος in his biography of Zeno. Diogenes describes the shared Stoic cosmology of Posidonius, as written in Posidonius' *Physical Discourse*, and as described by the disciples of Antipater of Tyre. "The world (κόσμον), they say, is one and finite, having a spherical shape (σχῆμ' ἔχοντα σφαιροειδές), such a shape being the most suitable for motion (τὴν κίνησιν ἀρμοδιώτατον)."<sup>47</sup> The notion of movement is related to the corporality of the κόσμος. Diogenes describes the dogma of the Stoics of the κόσμος being alive (ζῶος), rational (λογικὸς), animated (ἔμψυχος) and intelligent (νοερός).<sup>48</sup> The κόσμος stands in antithesis to the endless Void (τὸ κενὸν ἄπειρον), which is incorporeal (ἀσώματον).<sup>49</sup> The corporality of the κόσμος also means the κόσμος is united together

<sup>44</sup> Cleomedes, *Lectures on Astronomy*, 1.4.239.

<sup>45</sup> *idem*, 1.5.139-143.

<sup>46</sup> *idem*, 2.1.14.

<sup>47</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum*, 7.140.1.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.142.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.140.1.

(ἡνωσθαι), binding together the heavenly (οὐράνιος) and terrestrial (ἐπίγειος) realm.<sup>50</sup>

The final physical σχῆμα-κόσμος is found in Heraclitus 'the Grammarian' (1-2c AD), in his allegorical interpretation of Homer's *Illiad* named *Allegoriae - Quaestiones Homericae*.<sup>51</sup> Heraclitus also uses σχῆμα in close connection to σφαιροειδής (spherical): the σχῆμα of the κόσμος is considered to be spherical.<sup>52</sup> One of Heraclitus' σχῆμα-κόσμος combinations is part of his allegory on the story of Hephaestos creating a shield for Achilles. The spherical and round shape of Achilles' shield is described as a visible manifestation (ἐμφανής) of the κόσμος.<sup>53</sup> Later on, the shield is termed an image of the cosmic circle (εἰκόνα τῆς κοσμικῆς περιόδου).<sup>54</sup> Another point of comparison, and reason for the shield being a visible manifestation, is the substance of Achilles' shield and the κόσμος. According to Heraclitus, both have a mixture of the four elements (τὰ τέτταρα στοιχεῖα),<sup>55</sup> joined together by means of fire. In the process of forging the shield with "gold he (Homer) means the ethereal substance, by silver the air, which resembles it in colour; water and earth are represented by bronze and tin, because both of these are heavy. From these elements he (Hephaestos) first forges the shield."<sup>56</sup> The other Heraclitian σχῆμα-κόσμος is found in an allegory on the speech of Zeus to the Gods on the top of the Olympus as found in *Illiad II.8.3*. In the *Illiad*, Zeus discourages the gods to take part in the Trojan War. He threatens to throw those who interfere far away from the heavens into the Hades: "as far below Hades, as heaven above earth."<sup>57</sup> Heraclitus interprets this line allegorically as physical theorizing (φυσικῆς

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Heraclitus, *Heraclitus : Homeric Problems*, trans. David Konstan and D.A. Russell (Atlanta, 2005) xi-xxx. The following translations are also taken from this volume. I owe debt for finding Heraclitus to: George Henry van Kooten, "How Greek Was Paul's Eschatology?," *New Testament Studies* 61.2 (2015): 242, n.5.

<sup>52</sup> Heraclitus, *Allegoriae* 48.1, 43.14.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 43.14b.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 48.2.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 43.11.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 43.12-14a. See also: 2 Peter 3.10-13.

<sup>57</sup> Homer, *Illiad* II.8.16 (τόσσον ἐνερθ' Ἄϊδεω ὅσον οὐρανός ἐστ' ἀπὸ γαίης).

θεωρίας) from Homer.<sup>58</sup> In Heraclitus' frame, Homer implied the spherical σχῆμα of the κόσμος (σφαιρικὸν ἡμῖν τοῦ κόσμου σχῆμα) with this single line. In the circular κόσμος the earth (γῆ) stands at the centre. Other parts of the κόσμος are circling around this focal point. Heraclitus explicitly names the heaven (οὐρανός) and the fixed stars (ἀπλανές).<sup>59</sup> Heraclitus concludes that Homer's spherical shape of the κόσμος communicated a geometrical theory. This elaborate cosmology is all implied by the short quotation from the *Iliad*.

The texts described above are the only ones known to us containing a physical-cosmological pairing of σχῆμα and κόσμος. All three authors are either postdating Paul or approximately contemporary to him. This suggests Paul to be rather creative and innovative in combining the terms. All examples of physical σχῆμα-κόσμος show a close similarity between σχῆμα and σφαιροειδής. Another similarity is earth being similar in σχῆμα to the overarching κόσμος. The earth is placed at the centre of the κόσμος, with other cosmological parts surrounding it. Since Paul is primarily using σχῆμα-κόσμος in an overarching ethical argument, these physical descriptions have only indirect influence for interpreting Paul. Because the Greeks considered the micro-cosmos to be similar to the macro-cosmos, these macrocosmic observations remain relevant for the behavioural patterns as advised in 1 Cor 7.

There are two texts with σχῆμα-κόσμος that refer to Plato's *Timaeus* 55c-d. In this part of the *Timaeus*, Plato describes the formation of the κόσμος by the Craftsman. The Craftsman selects "four "kinds" (the so-called elements): fire, air, water and earth. The Craftsman begins by constructing four of the regular solids as the primary corpuscles of each of these four kinds: (...) the tetrahedron for fire, the octahedron for air, the icosahedron for water, and the cube for earth. The remaining regular solid, the dodecahedron, is "used for the universe as a whole," since it approaches

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<sup>58</sup> Heraclitus, *Allegoriae* 36.1.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.4-6.

most nearly the shape of a sphere."<sup>60</sup> Thereafter Plato names the possibility of five different worlds (κόσμους), an option he rejects in favour of seeing the world as essentially one.<sup>61</sup> Plutarch refers twice to this part of *Timaeus* in *De defectu oraculorum*. In the first a character named Cleombrotus describes a theory Plutarch ascribes to Petron of Himera. Petron proposed a cosmic scheme containing 183 worlds (κόσμους), arranged in the form of a triangle (κατὰ σχῆμα τριγωνοειδές).<sup>62</sup> Later on, Plutarch relates the possibility of different worlds even more closely to the geometrical shapes of Plato: "Why did Plato refer the number of his five worlds to the five geometric figures, saying that God used up the fifth construction on the universe in completing its embellishment?"<sup>63</sup> These texts show the possibility of multiple σχήματα in the κόσμος, or even multiple κόσμι. Philo's σχῆμα-κόσμος reflects another Platonic tradition, namely Plato's worldview of reality being only perceptible to us through shadows. Philo distinguishes the seen world knowable by our senses (τῆς τοῦ ὄρατοῦ φαντασίας) from the unseen world only perceivable by the mind (τὸν ἀειδῆ κόσμον).<sup>64</sup> This unseen κόσμος is distinct from the sight of any form (σχημάτων). The world of archetypal ideas is not shaped by forms, as is the seen world.<sup>65</sup> Paul's σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου might have pointed towards a part of the κόσμος. This argument is strengthened by Paul's use of τούτου (κόσμου), leaving the option open for other κόσμι. The relevance of this Platonic tradition for interpreting 1 Cor 7.29-31 is supported by the combination of κόσμος and καταχράομαι in both the second passage from Plutarch and the Platonic original, to which we'll turn later on.

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<sup>60</sup> Zeyl, Donald, "Plato's *Timaeus*", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/plato-timaeus/>.

<sup>61</sup> Plato, *Timaeus* 55D.

<sup>62</sup> Plutarch, *De defectu oraculorum* 422B. See: West, M.L., "The Eternal Triangle: The Curious Cosmology of Petron of Himera", in: West, M.L., *Hellenica: Selected Papers on Greek Literature and Thought. Volume III: Philosophy, Music and Metre, Literary Byways* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 134-143.

<sup>63</sup> Plutarch, *De defectu oraculorum* 430B.

<sup>64</sup> Philo, *De somniis* 1.188.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

Galatians 4 and 6: κόσμος and στοιχεῖα

In both Homeric and Platonic σχῆμα-κόσμος traditions the στοιχεῖα form an essential part of the κόσμος. Heraclitus' allegory assigns the quality of the four στοιχεῖα to the κόσμος,<sup>66</sup> although Homer himself never used the word στοιχεῖα at all. In the Platonic tradition both Plato and Plutarch use στοιχεῖα in close proximity to σχῆμα-κόσμος. Plato's κόσμος is constructed by the Craftsman with the στοιχεῖα.<sup>67</sup> Plutarch paraphrases the opinion that there is a κόσμος for every στοιχεῖον<sup>68</sup> and explains the movements in the κόσμος by referring to the στοιχεῖα.<sup>69</sup> According to Diogenes Laertius, στοιχεῖα is one of the five topics of Stoic physics.<sup>70</sup> In the words of Van Kooten: "The Stoics ... held that the world had been composed out of four elements: earth, water, air, and fire."<sup>71</sup> Because of the prominence of στοιχεῖα in σχῆμα-κόσμος language and Stoic cosmology, we'll look more closely to στοιχεῖα related to Paul's κόσμος.

Paul refers to the στοιχεῖα of the cosmos (στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου) in the letter to the Galatians (4.3,9).<sup>72</sup> By using this combination of words, Paul acknowledges the στοιχεῖα as part of the κόσμος. The main topic of Gal 4 is freedom and slavery in relationship to God. Formerly, the Galatians were slaves (4.3,5,7), but through the Son of God the opportunity is given to them to become free as children of God (4.7). Paul describes the former Galatians as unlearned children (4.1,3 - νήπιος) and slaves (4.7 - δοῦλος). As children

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<sup>66</sup> Heraclitus, *Allegoriae* 43.11.

<sup>67</sup> Plato, *Timaeus* 54D, 55A, 55B, 56B.

<sup>68</sup> Plutarch, *De defectu oraculorum* 422A.

<sup>69</sup> Plutarch, *De defectu oraculorum* 430C (στοιχεῖα is also mentioned in: *Ibid.*, 422E(2x), 426F, 427D, 428A,C,F).

<sup>70</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum* 7.132. Taken from: Kooten, *Cosmic Christology in Paul and the Pauline School*, 17. See also: Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum* 7.142.

<sup>71</sup> Kooten, *Cosmic Christology in Paul and the Pauline School*, 19.

<sup>72</sup> Dieter T Roth, "What ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ Are the στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου?," *HTS* 70.1 (2014) 1–8. Roth summarizes the different interpretations of στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου. I disagree with his sharp differentiation between στοιχεῖα as physical elements and elementary principles. In my view, these two fluidly went hand-in-hand. Other verses with στοιχεῖα in the NT: Col 2.8,20, Hebr 5.12, 2 Peter 3.10,12.



the Galatians were enslaved to the στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου (4.3).<sup>73</sup> Gal 4.8 shows a parallel to 4.3 that is quite similar to Paul's reasoning in Rom 1.22-25. In 4.8, those who haven't acquired knowledge of God are enslaved by 'those who by nature are not gods (τοῖς φύσει μὴ οὕσιν θεοῖς).' The new state of the Galatians does not allow for such slavery. In an apocalyptic timeframe characterized by the time being fulfilled (4.4), those who belong to God should not turn back to the στοιχεῖα, that are weak (ἀσθενής)<sup>74</sup> and destitute/poor (πτωχός) (4.9). Instead they should stand firm in their freedom (5.1), living their lives according to the Spirit (5.16) and in love (5.13).

Further on in Galatians, Paul describes that the κόσμος has been crucified to him, and he to the κόσμος (6.14: δι' οὗ ἐμοὶ κόσμος ἐσταύρωται κἀγὼ κόσμῳ). This has inaugurated the new creation (6.15: καινὴ κτίσις). Just as the στοιχεῖα, the κόσμος is something that belongs to the past. The previous slavery to the στοιχεῖα is overruled by the freedom of the children of God; the κόσμος is dead by means of crucifixion and has been replaced by the new creation. This argument is even made stronger in Col 2.20: if you have died with Christ to the στοιχεῖα of the κόσμος, why are you living in the κόσμος subjected to its rules? (Εἰ ἀπεθάνετε σὺν Χριστῷ ἀπὸ τῶν στοιχείων τοῦ κόσμου, τί ὡς ζῶντες ἐν κόσμῳ δογματίζεσθε).

In Gal 6.14 the crucifixion of Christ is applied to Paul<sup>75</sup> and the κόσμος. The particular topic that is discussed here is the value of circumcision. In reply to those who boasted for being circumcised, Paul only boasts in the cross of Christ (6.13-14). Implicitly Paul attributes circumcision to the bygone domain of the κόσμος. Being circumcised or not is irrelevant for Paul because the κόσμος has lost its relevance in the perspective of the new creation. Van Kooten concludes: "The new cosmic reality is now

<sup>73</sup> In Gal 4 the στοιχεῖα (4.3) and the Law (4.5) are both sources for slavery. How these relate to one another is described elaborately by: Martinus C de Boer, "The Meaning of the Phrase τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου in Galatians," *New Testament Studies* 53.2 (2007) 204–24.

<sup>74</sup> Contrast with 1 Cor 1.27 - God has chosen the weak to shame the wise.

<sup>75</sup> In 6.17 Paul states his body even bears the marks of the crucifixion (στίγματα) of Christ.

dominated by Christ. For that reason, the new religious order acknowledges this cosmic constellation of the στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου ('cosmic elements') by στοιχεῖν (6.16; cf. 5.25), being in line with the basic, elementary insight that, due to all the all-encompassing reality of the new creation, previous ethnic differences are no longer valid."<sup>76</sup>

Van Kooten also remarks the στοιχεῖα being worshiped widely in Antiquity: by "the Egyptians, the Phoenicians and, of course, the Greeks. (...) In the classical Greek and Graeco-Roman periods the cosmic elements (στοιχεῖα) were held by many to be divine."<sup>77</sup> With this in mind, Paul deviates from standard Greek στοιχεῖα ideology in Galatians. Paul's στοιχεῖα are not divine and immortal, neither are they operating on a human level, since they have the ability to dominate people in a status of slavery. Rather, these στοιχεῖα function somewhere in between. This relativity of στοιχεῖα is completely in line with Paul's view on the κόσμος in 1 Cor 7. Both Paul's στοιχεῖα in Gal 4 and κόσμος in 1 Cor 7 differ from the dominant Greek ideology of being divinely worshipped. For Paul both στοιχεῖα as a part of the κόσμος and the κόσμος in its totality is of relative value in the perspective of the transformation of all things through the work of Christ.

#### **THE TEMPORALITY OF THE COSMOS: παράγει τὸ σχῆμα**

Paul not only relativizes the κόσμος in importance, but also in regard to its time span. In Gal 6 the era of the κόσμος has been replaced by the new creation. In 1 Cor 7.31 Paul uses the verb παράγω to indicate the κόσμος' temporality. In most cases παράγω means 'passing by' or 'leading to' as an (human) act of movement, as e.g. seen in the Gospels (Mt 9.9,27;20.30; Mk 1.16;2.14;15.21; Jh 8.29;9.1). In some other texts the verb is used in an intransitive way: in these cases παράγω translates into 'passing away' in the

<sup>76</sup> Kooten, *Cosmic Christology in Paul and the Pauline School*, 78.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 65. De Boer has found evidence for the Jewish rejection of these practices in Wisdom 13.1-3. See: de Boer, "The Meaning of the Phrase τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου in Galatians," 218-221.

sense of 'coming to an end'.<sup>78</sup> In the NT παράγω is found intransitively in 1 John 2.8,17. Verse 2.8 describes the darkness (σκοτία) passing away and being replaced by the true light (τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν).<sup>79</sup> The writer thereafter provides an ethical instruction to love (ἀγαπάω) the brothers and sisters (ἀδελφοί), such an attitude being appropriate for living in the light. The contrasting way of living, 'in the darkness', is characterized by hate (μισέω). In 2.17 the world and its desires are coming to an end (ὁ κόσμος παράγεται καὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία αὐτοῦ). After a section with ethical exhortations (2.12-14) follows: "do not love (ἀγαπᾶτε) the κόσμος, nor the things in the κόσμος. If someone loves the κόσμος, the love of the Father is not in him."<sup>80</sup> In 2.16 the κόσμος is valued in a strong negative way, containing desires of the flesh (σαρκός) and of the eyes (ὀφθαλμῶν) and the empty display of life (ἀλαζονία τοῦ βίου). Similar to 1 Cor the κόσμος is set in antithesis to God in 1 John 2. In an eschatological setting<sup>81</sup> 1 John 2 demonstrates an early Christian view on the κόσμος being in temporal antithesis to the everlasting will of God.<sup>82</sup>

The combination between παράγω and κόσμος/σχημα is barely found within Graeco-Roman literature. Σχημα-παράγω is solely used in medical texts, for bringing into place (παράγω) dislocated physical parts (σχημα).<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> One of the words Paul uses for 'ending' is καταργέω (abolish, destroy, nullify), found in 1 Cor 1.28, 2.6, 6.13, 13.8,10, 15.24-26; 2 Cor 3.7-18; Rom 3.3,31, 4.14, 6.6 and Gal 3.17, 5.4,11. What will end are the rulers of the world, wisdom, food, prophecy, knowledge, 'the partial', the Law and death, but not the κόσμος itself.

<sup>79</sup> Compare to Ps 144.4b in LXX: Their days (of man) are like a passing shadow (αἱ ἡμέραι αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ σκιὰ παράγουσιν).

<sup>80</sup> 1 John 2.15.

<sup>81</sup> 1 John 2.18 speaks about the last hour (ἐσχάτη ὥρα).

<sup>82</sup> Παρέρχομαι is used both for passing by as human movement (Mk 6.48, Lk 18.37), for passing of a time/generation (Mk 13.30, 14.35) and for the passing of heaven and earth (Mk 13.31, Mt 24.35, Lk 16.17). In the Gospel of Mark and Matthew, the possibility of the passing of heaven and earth is followed directly by the impossibility of the passing of Christ's words (λόγοι μου). Paul uses παρέρχομαι in 2 Cor 5.17; the old creation passing away for the new: ὥστε εἶ τις ἐν Χριστῷ, καινὴ κτίσις· τὰ ἀρχαῖα παρῆλθεν, ἰδοὺ γέγονεν καινά. The parallel between 1 Cor 7.31 and 2 Cor 5.17 supports the role of παράγω as indication for the κόσμος' temporality.

<sup>83</sup> E.g. Hippocrates, *De Articulis* 30.39; *Vectarius* 38.2; Apollonius, *Hippocratis De Articulis Commentarius* 13.33,33.16; Galenus, *De Semine* 2.4.538.17; *In Hippocratis Librum De Articulis Et Galeni In Eum Commentarii* 4.18a.435.1.

Evidence for cosmological κόσμος-παράγω is very close to unavailable as well. Dionysius Halicarnassus uses the combination twice for the cessation of political organization.<sup>84</sup> Plutarch uses κόσμος-παράγω transitively in his biography of Phocion. In a discussion on the correct way of governing a city, Plutarch draws an analogy with the governance of the κόσμος by God. God does not regulate the κόσμος by means of compulsion, but brings (παράγων) the necessary things with persuasion and reason.<sup>85</sup> A final piece of evidence can be found in two exceptional manuscripts of Plutarch's *De Stoicorum repugnantis*, called *g* and *B*. Within the κόσμος, *g* and *B* state, all things are passing away (παραγομένων) according to the best of nature.<sup>86</sup> The majority of manuscripts use περαινομένων ('accomplish') instead of παραγομένων,<sup>87</sup> giving a slightly different edge to the sentence.<sup>88</sup> Instead of passing away and giving space to a new reality, περαίνω is a more definitive and 'closing' verb. The evidence of *De Stoicorum repugnantis* is further complicated by the fact Plutarch paraphrases the Stoic philosopher Chrysippus with these words, from whom no works have survived. All in all Graeco-Roman literature provides us next to no insight about the meaning of Paul's 'passing away' of the κόσμος.

In 1 Cor Paul gives some hints for understanding his temporal view on the κόσμος. Firstly, before his 'ὡς μή'-statements, Paul uses another expression for the relativity of the current era. In 7.29, the καιρός is wrapped up/drawn together (συνεσταλμένος ἐστίν). Καιρός refers to a specific time. For Paul it can either be the present time (Rom 3.26, 8.18, 11.5 - ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ), but often refers to a future as well (Rom 13.11, 1 Cor 4.5, Gal 6.9, 1

<sup>84</sup> Dionysius Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates Romanae* 4.41.2.3, 5.74.3.10.

<sup>85</sup> Plutarch, *Vitae Phocion* 2.9.3.

<sup>86</sup> Plutarch, *De Stoicorum repugnantis* 1051B.

<sup>87</sup> Jeffrey Henderson, "Plutarch, *Moralia*, Volume XIII: Part 2: Stoic Essays," *Loeb Classical Library*, 556n6, accessed 5<sup>th</sup> December 2016, <http://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL470/1976/volume.xml>.

<sup>88</sup> The combination κόσμος-περαίνω seems to be more common in Antiquity. TLG finds 39 texts up until Plutarch using both within a proximity of 15 words. Κόσμος-παράγω with these parameters results in 12 hits, including 3 from the New Testament. Κόσμος-περαίνω is used e.g. by Epicurus and fragments of Chrysippus and Diogenes.

Thes 5.1). Paul makes a peculiar combination between *καιρός* and the verb *συστέλλω*, a play of words not found in any earlier text known to us. This combination clearly indicates *καιρός* being the present time. This time was once like a long sheet, but has now become smaller by being folded together. 1 Cor 7.29 correlates with a temporal *κόσμος*. Both 7.29's wrapped up *καιρός* and 7.31's passing *κόσμος* point to the soon coming end of the way things are at present.

*1 Corinthians 15: κόσμος and φθορά*

Another perspective on meaning of the passing *κόσμος* is found in Paul's use of *φθορά* in 1 Cor 15.39-58. In a clear eschatological timeframe (*ἔσχατος* appears three times: 15.26,45,52) Paul explains the consequences of the resurrection of Christ, an important result being the vindication over death (15.26-28, 54-57) leading to Christ's kingship (15.20-25). In 1 Cor 15 resurrection, vindication and the kingdom of God (15.50) are interrelated themes. Within this narrative, *φθορά* indicates the temporality of the present: firstly in 15.42 and secondly in 15.50-54.

1 Cor 15.39-50 is concentrically structured with a central *φθορά*-phrase in 15.42. The outer circle speaks on the role of the flesh (*σὰρξ*): there are different types of flesh (15.39) and the flesh is unable to inherit the Kingdom of God (15.50). Paul argues from the flesh, which he'll eventually characterize as being perishable/temporary, to different types of bodies (15.40 - *σῶμα*). In contrast to the flesh, some types of bodies are positively valued and not destined for *φθορά*. There are the bodies belonging to the heavenly realm (*σώματα ἐπουράνια*), like the sun, moon and stars (15.41), and the earthly bodies (*σώματα ἐπίγεια*). *Σῶμα* reappears in 15.44. This verse distinguishes soulish bodies (*σῶμα ψυχικόν*) from spiritual bodies (*σῶμα πνευματικόν*). The most inner circle speaks of glory (*δόξα*): in 15.40b-41 Paul explicitly attaches *δόξα* to the heavenly bodies, but rhetorically questions the relationship of *δόξα* to earthly bodies by not putting down the two words together. Literally translated Paul writes: 'and

(there are) heavenly bodies, and earthly bodies: but indeed the one is the glory of the heavenly (bodies), the other is of the earthly (bodies).<sup>89</sup> Verse 15.43, where δόξα reappears, strengthens the rhetoric of omitting δόξα in the sentence on the earthly (bodies). In discussing the earthly body, Paul says: 'it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory.'<sup>90</sup>

Paul shows the possibility of the earthly body to become glorious, when it is spiritually raised (15.44). 15.45-49 indicate that the earthly body is actually human, with Adam as the first human (ἄνθρωπος) being the image (εἰκόν) and the bringer of the soul-life.<sup>91</sup> Christ is considered to be the second man and the last Adam (ἔσχατος Ἀδάμ), who brought the spiritual life down from the heavenly realm.<sup>92</sup> These verses construct continuity between the traditional-cosmological bodies of planets and the human body. Paul implies the possibility for humans to attain ἀφθαρσία like the heavenly bodies as result of the resurrection. Therefore, what happens to the κόσμος can also translate into the bodies and lives of humans.

1 Cor 15.39-50 is concentrically structured in the following way:

Different types of σὰρξ (15.39)

Different types of σῶμα (15.40)

Δόξα of the heavenly σώματα (15.41)

Central verse (15.42)

Δόξα of the raised earthly σώματα (15.43)

Soulish and spiritual σῶμα (15.44)

*[Excursus on Adam and Christ as images: 15.45-49]*

Σὰρξ unable to inherit the Kingdom of God (15.50)

<sup>89</sup> 1 Cor 15.40: καὶ σώματα ἐπουράνια, καὶ σώματα ἐπίγεια· ἀλλὰ ἕτερα μὲν ἢ τῶν ἐπουρανίων δόξα, ἕτερα δὲ ἢ τῶν ἐπιγείων.

<sup>90</sup> σπείρεται ἐν ἀτιμίᾳ, ἐγείρεται ἐν δόξῃ.

<sup>91</sup> Another indication of the humanity of the earthly body is Paul's mentioning of blood (αἷμα) in 15.50.

<sup>92</sup> Christ is described as image from heaven (εἰκόνα τοῦ ἐπουρανίου). In the conclusion of the *Timeaus*, Plato describes the κόσμος as image of the imperceptible (εἰκὼν τοῦ νοητοῦ). Plato, *Timeaus* 92C.

Unsurprisingly, the central verse of this paragraph is about the resurrection of the dead (ἡ ἀνάστασις τῶν νεκρῶν).<sup>93</sup> Having described the heavenly bodies in 15.41, the implication is Paul will continue writing about the bodies belonging to the earth. In the following section Paul repeatedly uses the verbs σπείρεται (it is sown) and ἐγείρεται (it is woken/raised). The first sentence is: it (the earthly body) is sown in φθορά, it is raised ἀφθαρσία. In 15.50 Paul uses an antithesis between φθορά and ἀφθαρσία: just as σὰρξ and blood are unable to inherit the Kingdom of God, so too the φθορά is unable to inherit the ἀφθαρσία. The combination of these two verses suggests two things: (1) the φθορά and the σὰρξ are separate from the Kingdom of God and the ἀφθαρσία, but (2) it is possible for parts of the φθορά to be raised to the level of the ἀφθαρσία.

In Paul ἄφθαρτος is an attribute of God and his glory (Rom 1.23). Thereby, believers should strive to acquire this imperishability (Rom 2.7).<sup>94</sup> Just as in 1 Cor 15.50, ἄφθαρτος/ἀφθαρσία is elsewhere contrasted with φθαρτός/φθορά: in Rom 1.23 ἄφθαρτος of God is contrasted with φθαρτός of man and 1 Cor 9.25 contrasts an ἄφθαρτος prize for the persevering believer with a φθαρτός prize of an athlete. The NT displays two antitheses containing only φθορά. The slavery of φθορά stands in opposition to the freedom of the glory (δόξης) of the children of God (Rom 8.21). Φθορά here is part of the present suffering and groaning of creation, in contrast to the future (and eternal) glory. Secondly, in Gal 6.8, φθορά is harvested (θερίσει) as result of sowing (σπείρων) in the flesh, as opposed to eternal life (ζωὴν αἰώνιον) being the result of sowing in the spirit (πνεῦμα). In Col 2.20-23<sup>95</sup> φθορά appears together with the στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου. Although the Colossians had died with Christ to the στοιχεῖα of the κόσμος, they were still submitting themselves to its rules (δόγματα). All these rules are destined for

<sup>93</sup> Just as the opening of 1 Cor 7.29-31, this verse starts with τοῦτο δέ φημι. These are the only two times Paul uses this expression. See further: 10.15,19.

<sup>94</sup> Ἀφθαρσία is portrayed as a positive character trait in Eph 6.24 and Titus 2.7.

<sup>95</sup> Whether Colossians was written by Paul, one of his followers or another early Christian school does not disqualify the text as a valuable resource for understanding Paul's φθορά-language.

φθορά by means of abusing the rules (τῆ ἀποχρήσει - *dativus instrumenti*). Col 2 thereby indicates the temporality of the στοιχεῖα as part of the κόσμος. All these texts clearly show two separate word-fields: φθαρτός/φθορά having to do with σὰρξ, men, earth and temporality, and ἄφθαρτος/ἄφθαρσία being related to πνεῦμα, God, heaven and eternity.<sup>96</sup>

In 15.50-54 Paul further explains the process of φθορά becoming ἄφθαρσία. At the last trumpet (ἐσχάτη σάλπιγγι), the dead will be raised ἄφθαρτοι (15.52). In the following, the movement from τὸ φθαρτὸν (substantivized adjective) to ἄφθαρσία (substantive) is described as moving from the mortal (τὸ θνητὸν) to immortality (ἀθανασίαν). The verb used to indicate this movement is the aorist of ἐνδύω, 'to put on'/'to cloth'. Some φθορά things are covered with and renewed by ἄφθαρσία. When this process has been finished, death is finally destroyed ('consumed') by the victory of Christ (15.54,57) as the last enemy (15.26 - ἔσχατος ἐχθρὸς), along with sin (ἁμαρτία) and the law (νόμος) (15.56).

The similar cosmic temporality in 1 Cor 7.29-31 and 15.39-58 creates the opportunity to gain understanding of the passing κόσμος by looking at Paul's φθορά-language. In chapter 15 the current state of the κόσμος is gradually being replaced by a new kind of reality, in which Christ's kingship is coming alive. Adding aspects of φθορά to 1 Cor 7 means the passing of the κόσμος does not result into a power vacuum or a degradation of the κόσμος. Rather, with the fading of the temporal form of the κόσμος comes the emergence of ἄφθαρσία and the Kingdom of God. The starting event of this clothing of the present world is the resurrection of Christ. If 1 Cor 15 is taken into account, the passing κόσμος of 1 Cor 7 is a process initiated by God. In the shortening of time, Christ is enthroned as victor. In the interim period between Christ's resurrection and the ἐσχάτον Christ is active in subjecting creation to his reign. In the end, even death will be vindicated and raised into ἄφθαρσία. When this has happened, Christ will subject himself to God so

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<sup>96</sup> For the connotation of immortality, see: 1 Peter 1.18-25 (eschatological passage).



that God will be all in all (15.28 - ὁ Θεὸς πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν).<sup>97</sup> 1 Cor 15 informs us to read κόσμος in 1 Cor 7 not as an expiring reality, but as a state that will be covered by something else, namely the Kingdom of God.

### THE USE OF THE COSMOS: οἱ χρώμενοι τὸν κόσμον

The final ethical exhortation given before Paul writes about the σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου passing away concerns the use of the κόσμος in a particular way. What did Paul mean by using (χράομαι) the κόσμος in the perspective of the shortened time period he thought he was living? Interestingly Paul used the same verb earlier on in 1 Cor 7.21 in his complicated sentence on the preferable ethic of slaves: these slaves should rather use (μᾶλλον χρῆσαι) either their position as slaves or the opportunity to become free.<sup>98</sup> Paul in general does not deny the situatedness of his audience. He even instructs them to remain as they are (7.20,24). At the same time, Paul encourages his readers to do something specific with their circumstances.

In Greek literature χράομαι-κόσμος appears in political, cosmological, ethical and miscellaneous<sup>99</sup> texts. The most obvious political one is found in Dionysius Halicarnassus. Dionysius describes the stage in which the people of Rome had to decide which order of government (κόσμου πολιτείας) they were going to use (χρήσονται) for their newly found city.<sup>100</sup> In two other

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<sup>97</sup> Prepositional metaphysics are also found in 1 Cor 8.6. See also: van Kooten, "How Greek Was Paul's Eschatology?", 239–245. "Paul combines Stoic and Platonic views, inasmuch as he agrees with the Stoics that the cosmic process emerges from God and returns to him; he differs from them, however, in assuming that this process is not cyclical, but ends at the moment at which everything becomes identical with God, just as the soul of the Platonic philosophers escapes reincarnation and enters into the eternal vision of God. Unlike the Platonists, Paul maintains that somatic existence (apparently including that of the groaning creation) is subsumed – in a Stoic way – into God's existence. Unlike the Stoics, however, he believes that the identification of God with all in all is not cyclical, but the truly definitive, eternal and intimate embrace of God and creation." Ibid., 244–245.

<sup>98</sup> For the discussion on this verse, see e.g.: J. Byron, 'Paul and the Background of Slavery: The Status Quaestionis in New Testament Scholarship' *CBR* 3.1 (2004) 124–127.

<sup>99</sup> These include: using/doing a military discipline (κόσμος) (Thucydides, *Historiae* 2.11.9.6), wearing clothing/ornaments (Herodotus, *Historiae* 5.92.19; Dionysius Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates Romanae* 8.62.2.9; Strabo, *Geographica* 15.1.54.5; Flavius Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae* 3.103.3; Plutarch, *Septem sapientium convivium* 161.B.3 e.a.

<sup>100</sup> Dionysius Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates Romanae* 2.3.1.

texts *χράομαι* and a political *κόσμος* stand in close proximity. In these cases, however, *χράομαι* does not have the political *κόσμος* as object. Aristotle names the use of laws (*χρήσεις νόμων*) close to the order of government (*κόσμος πολιτείας*).<sup>101</sup> Philo describes the *κόσμος* as being (a) *μεγαλόπολις*, which could either be a name or a description for a city. This city, i.e. *κόσμος*, uses a single government (*μιᾶ χρεῖται πολιτεία*).<sup>102</sup> Instead of the *κόσμος* being used, Philo in this text describes the *κόσμος* being the actor in using *πολιτεία*. All these three political *χράομαι-κόσμος* are used in the context of the *πολιτεία*, the government.

In cosmological texts there is no *χράομαι-κόσμος* combination having humans as actor. This role is fulfilled either by the *κόσμος*, a part of the *κόσμος* or God. According to Cleomedes, the *κόσμος* uses (*κέχρηται/κεχρησθαι*) a spherical shape.<sup>103</sup> Philo also names the *κόσμος* as actor of *χράομαι*. After describing the development of a human being into perfection in different stages of change, Philo warns his readers not to consider the *κόσμος* to be perfect, since the *κόσμος* has not yet used/experienced (*χρήσασθαί*) such changes.<sup>104</sup> In Plutarch the earth and sea are in a natural way making use of the *κόσμος*, as the belly and bladder use an animal.<sup>105</sup> The parts are using the bigger whole to their advantage. Plutarch makes this statement while describing the *κόσμος* as a living being (*ζῷόν*).<sup>106</sup> Interestingly, also the stars and the sun have bodily functions in the living being, having the role of the eyes and the heart. Finally, Philo elsewhere describes the first cause (*τὸ αἴτιον*) using the *κόσμος*.<sup>107</sup> The *κόσμος* is termed to be the most fertile of plants in *De plantatione*, a work by

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<sup>101</sup> Aristotel, *De mundo* 399b.18.

<sup>102</sup> Philo, *De Josepho* 29.2.

<sup>103</sup> Cleomedes, *Lectures on Astronomy* 1.4.243, 1.5.138.

<sup>104</sup> Philo, *De aeternitate mundi* 72.1. In this section Philo also writes about creation being subject to *φθορά* and thereby not perfect as the gods are. "Surely this the all-perfect which embraces things visible wherein the several occupants included are gods, deserves to be held ever perfect (*τέλειον*) both in body and soul, immune from the plagues inseparable from all that is created (*γενητὸν*) and destructible (*φθαρτὸν*)." Ibid., 73.3-7.

<sup>105</sup> Plutarch, *De facie in orbe lunae* 928.B.11.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 928.A.5. The full description is: Ibid., 928.A-D.

<sup>107</sup> Philo, *De plantatione* 139.2.

Philo on agriculture. Philo summarizes the agricultural relevance of the patriarchal period of Israel as recorded in the books of Moses stating that all this was somehow ordained by the first cause. In none of these cosmological χράομαι-κόσμος texts are humans the ones using the κόσμος.

A final χράομαι-κόσμος is found in Philo's *De specialibus legibus*. Here Philo discusses different views on the reason for the unleavened bread at the Passover festival to be unleavened. In Philo's argument unleavenedness reflects an unperturbed state of creation. The eating of the unleavened bread at Passover is a reminder of how the children of the first human generations "used (χρήσασθαι) the gifts of the universe (ταῖς τοῦ κόσμου δωρεαῖς) in their unperturbed state before pleasure had got the mastery,"<sup>108</sup> these gifts being the unleavened bread. The very specific explanatory context of this χράομαι-κόσμος restricts its applicability for understanding Paul's ethical exhortation. In combining χράομαι with κόσμος in an ethical instruction, Paul is therefore again creatively combining words not found elsewhere in Antiquity. This combination reflects Paul's instruction not to leave the world or drastically change one's position inside of it, but to remain in the κόσμος with a changed attitude.

#### **AS IF NOT USING IT UP: ὡς μὴ καταχρόμενοι**

In 1 Cor 7.31 Paul connects χράομαι and καταχρόμαι by means of ὡς μὴ. This paragraph first analyses the combination χράομαι-καταχρόμαι, then καταχρόμαι- κόσμος and finally ὡς μὴ as connecting particle. In Greek literature the combination χράομαι-καταχρόμαι is with only one exception used synonymously.<sup>109</sup>The exception is found in Polybius, who describes how the Carthaginians during the Sicilian war had used up (κατεχρήσαντο) both their slaves and their prisoners of war. The prisoners were literally

<sup>108</sup> Philo, *De specialibus legibus* 2.160.3. τοὺς δὲ παλαιτάτους γηγενεῖς τε καὶ ἐκ γηγενῶν ἀναγκαῖον ἦν χρήσασθαι ταῖς τοῦ κόσμου δωρεαῖς ἀδιαστρόφοις, μήπω τῆς ἡδονῆς παρευημερούσης.

<sup>109</sup> Anonymus Iamblichi, *Fragmenta* 3.3-5; Plato, *Symposium* 187.c.8; Plato, *Euthydemus* 290.c.3; Plato *Respublica* 539.b.4.

consumed because the Carthaginians had used them as food (τροφῆ ταύτη χρώμενοι).<sup>110</sup> In Polybius καταχράομαι strengthens the depiction of the improper use of slaves and prisoners, which has undesirable consequences. In Paul himself we find χράομαι and καταχράομαι combined in his discussion on the rights he and co-preachers of the gospel have in 1 Cor 9.1-18.<sup>111</sup> Although these preachers in theory should earn a reward (μισθός) out of their work, they (9.12 - ἐχρησάμεθα) and Paul himself (9.15 - κέχηρημαι) did not use this right (ἐξουσία). Rather, Paul offered the gospel free of charge and thereby did not fully use (9.18 - καταχρήσασθαι) his right as preacher of the gospel. For Paul fully using (καταχράομαι) his right to salary would hinder his cause for preaching the gospel. Here, χράομαι describes a common way of using ('it is common to use the right to salary'), while καταχράομαι points to an unwanted way of using ('it hinders the gospel to fully use this right'). Καταχράομαι thus describes an undesirable over-using. Compared to the neutral verb χράομαι, καταχράομαι is negatively valued as bringing destruction or the ending of something.<sup>112</sup>

Καταχράομαι is used in close proximity to κόσμος in at least two Greek traditions. Firstly, we find the combination in Plutarch's explanation of the *Timaeus*. Plato wrote about the construction of the world. At a certain stage in this process, God used up (κατεχρήσατο) the fifth element (στοιχεῖα)<sup>113</sup> for the purpose of the Universe/All (ἐπὶ τὸ πᾶν). Plato does not elaborate on the meaning of this fifth element, apart from his reference to the possibility of five different worlds.<sup>114</sup> The absence of explanation of the fifth στοιχεῖα, in contrast to Plato's descriptions of the other four, implies the

<sup>110</sup> Polybius, *Historiae* 1.85.1.

<sup>111</sup> Καταχράομαι is not found in the NT besides 1 Cor 7.31 and 9.18.

<sup>112</sup> On proper and improper use, see: Rom 1.26 - God gave them over to passions of dishonour, even their females changed the natural use for the one contrary to nature (μετήλλαξαν τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν εἰς τὴν παρὰ φύσιν).

<sup>113</sup> In Plato the fifth element relates to the geometrical form called dodecahedron. Aristotle calls the fifth στοιχεῖα aether: Aristotle, *De Caelo* 270b.21-26.

<sup>114</sup> Plutarch provides an interesting quote: I think also that 'panta' (all) is derived from 'pente' (five) in accord with reason, inasmuch as the pentad is a composite of the first numbers. Plutarch, *De defectu oraculorum* 429D.

destructive feature of καταχράομαι. After something has been used up, it is no longer relevant. Plutarch explicitly refers to this Platonic passage in *De defectu oraculorum*.<sup>115</sup> He finds evidence for a multiplicity of worlds in the variations of movement in creation. Although the number five can be found in various parts of the world, e.g. number of fingers on a hand, Plutarch leaves the exact number of κόσμοι undecided.<sup>116</sup> Plutarch adds that the Platonic statement about God using up the fifth element would be referring to five κόσμοι and five σχήματα. Unfortunately, Plutarch only elaborates on the number five in relation to the κόσμος and nowhere explains the meaning of the verb καταχράομαι. This leaves us with the implicit meaning in Plato of καταχράομαι having to do with using something up in a way it ceased to have a relevant existence.

The other καταχράομαι-κόσμος<sup>117</sup> is found in Philo, when he discusses the Sabbath commandment in *De Decalogo*. Philo argues that humans should imitate God in working and resting. Just as God had worked for six days and contemplated on the seventh, so humans should turn to the study of wisdom and contemplation on the seventh day.<sup>118</sup> Philo describes God creating the world as follows: "God once for all made a final use (κατεχρήσατο) of six days for the completion of the world (πρὸς τὴν τοῦ κόσμου τελείωσιν) and had no further need of time-periods."<sup>119</sup> While God did not need times of contemplation, God still took time for it. Philo motivates his readers to contemplate, because they lack complete wisdom. In Philo, God's καταχράομαι of six days resulted in the completion of the κόσμος. Here κόσμος is the result of καταχράομαι and not its direct object as in 1 Cor 7.31. Καταχράομαι in Philo reflects the full use of something, using

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<sup>115</sup> Plutarch, *De defectu oraculorum* 430B.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 430F-431A.

<sup>117</sup> Besides these cosmological καταχράομαι-κόσμος, this combination can also be found in texts on decoration. In these texts there is gold or money fully used (καταχράομαι) to pay for an image (κόσμος). See e.g. Pausanias, *Graeciae descriptio* 3.10.8.7; Posidonius, *Fragmenta* 169.55.

<sup>118</sup> Philo, *De Decalogo* 197.98.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 197.99.

something to its potential. This positive application of the verb is not found in Paul, neither in 1 Cor 7.31 nor in 9.18. Rather, 1 Cor 7.31 stands in agreement with καταχράομαι as we find in the Platonic tradition mentioned above. Paul's readers are instructed not to use the κόσμος in a way it would deplete and destroy the world. In Paul, humans shouldn't be the ones forcing the passing away of the κόσμος. Rather, human should live in a κόσμος that is changing regardless of their actions.

#### Rhetoric of ὡς μὴ

Paul uses the ingenious construction ὡς μὴ to connect using the κόσμος with using it up. Simply put the Corinthians were to use the κόσμος *as if they were not* using it up. This cosmological ὡς μὴ is the final and climactic phrase of a larger ὡς μὴ-section.<sup>120</sup> In the frame of the shortened time (7.29b) and the ending of the σχῆμα of this κόσμος (7.31b), what remains for the Corinthians is to exist/be (ᾤσιν) in a particular fashion. Paul starts by applying an eschatological attitude to the topic he just discussed, namely, if the Corinthians were to marry or not. In the time that remains, 'let those who have wives (καὶ οἱ ἔχοντες γυναῖκας) exist *as if they didn't* have them (ὡς μὴ ἔχοντες)'. After that come two phrases referring to the Corinthian's emotional state: 'let those who mourn (καὶ οἱ κλαίοντες) exist *if they were not* mourning (ὡς μὴ κλαίοντες)' and 'those who rejoice (καὶ οἱ χαίροντες) *as if they were not* rejoicing (ὡς μὴ χαίροντες)'. So far ὡς μὴ negates exact similar phrases. The connected phrases start to differentiate after the first three pairs. Fourthly, 'let those who buy (καὶ οἱ ἀγοράζοντες) exist *as if they were not* possessing (ὡς μὴ κατέχοντες)'. And finally, as a climax, Paul connects the ethical ὡς μὴ-attitude to his view on the κόσμος: 'let those who use the κόσμος (καὶ οἱ χρώμενοι τὸν κόσμον) (do so) *as if they were not* using it up (ὡς μὴ καταχρώμενοι).'<sup>121</sup>

<sup>120</sup> 1 Cor 7.29c-31a.

<sup>121</sup> In this final phrase Paul uses passive particles instead of active ones.

The rhetorical use of ὡς μὴ for repeatedly negating (semi-) similar elements is unique to Paul and nowhere else found in Antiquity before Clement of Alexandria is the first to refer to and interpret 1 Cor 7.29-31.<sup>122</sup> In Antiquity ὡς μὴ was used to negate the following comparative clause, but this clause is nowhere as identical to the main verb as seen in Paul. Scholars have interpreted 1 Cor 7.29-31 in reference to the Stoic concept of the ἀδιάφορα (indifferent things).<sup>123</sup> Niko Huttunen mentions 1 Cor 7 in his work called *Paul and Epictetus on Law*. Instead of arguing from a Jewish point of view, Huttunen approaches the topic from a Stoic perspective. He traces similarities in celibacy-language between Paul and Epictetus.<sup>124</sup> Epictetus considers celibacy as the preferred option for cynics,<sup>125</sup> because it frees them from distraction and enables complete devotion to God.<sup>126</sup> Epictetus also exhorts his readers to make use of externals, including their social position. A similar argument is found in 1 Cor 7.17-24, where e.g. slaves are urged to use their position for the good cause.<sup>127</sup> In regard to the ὡς μὴ-section, Huttunen refers to Epictetus' Stoic teaching of external things as materials for moral purpose.<sup>128</sup> These things themselves are indifferent, being neither good nor evil.<sup>129</sup> Good or evil is the value judgment about these things made by individuals. The things themselves are indifferent, but not the use of them. External things are not our own, according to Epictetus, but given to us by God. Only our value judgments belong to ourselves.<sup>130</sup> Individuals therefor should not be ignorant, but content with the things they

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<sup>122</sup> Clement, *Paedagogus* 2.3.36.1.

<sup>123</sup> James L. Jaquette traces ἀδιάφορα in other Pauline texts (e.g. Phil 1.21-26, 1 Thess 5.10, Rom 8.38 and Rom 14.7-9): James L. Jaquette, "Life and Death, 'Adiaphora,' and Paul's Rhetorical Strategies," *Novum Testamentum* 38.1 (1996) 30-54. James L. Jaquette, "Paul, Epictetus, and Others on Indifference to Status," *CBQ* 56 (1994) 68-80. See also: Will Deming, "Paul and Indifferent Things," in *Paul in the Greco-Roman World: A Handbook*, by J. Paul Sampley, vol. 2 (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016) 48-67.

<sup>124</sup> Niko. Huttunen, *Paul and Epictetus on Law: A Comparison* (London: T&T Clark International, 2009), 75-83.

<sup>125</sup> Epictetus, *Enchiridion* 33.8.

<sup>126</sup> Epictetus, *Discourses* 3.22.69.

<sup>127</sup> Huttunen, *Paul and Epictetus on Law*, 29-30.

<sup>128</sup> Epictetus, *Disc.* 1.29.

<sup>129</sup> Huttunen, *Paul and Epictetus on Law*, 21.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

have gotten. Here is a possible analogy with 1 Cor 7.30, in which Paul exhorts his audience to live as if they have no possessions. In Epictetus' teaching it would be ignorant to regard things as being your possession, since God is the owner of all things. Huttunen provides an interesting perspective: the Stoic theory of external things, their possession, value judgments and indifference might be the theoretical background of Paul's reasoning.

Van Kooten also uses the Stoic ἀδιάφορα to approach 1 Cor 7's ὡς μή. Van Kooten, just as Huttunen, underlines ἀδιάφορα being neither good nor bad themselves, their value being dependent on the way they're used by individuals.<sup>131</sup> In 1 Cor 7 Paul writes about his preference for celibacy and the use of the opportunity of slaves to become free. These matters are similar to a certain type of ἀδιάφορα called preferential indifference, a contested concept among Stoic philosophers. "Although (these) *adiaphora* are in themselves neither good nor wrong, one can have a preference for a particular *adiaphora*."<sup>132</sup> Van Kooten concludes, " Paul's Pauline "as if not" (hōs mē, ὡς μή) phrase is ... an expression of the ambiguity of the *adiaphora*. Only good things should be followed, and only bad things should be avoided, but the indifferent things should be lived with an "as if not" (hōs mē, ὡς μή) attitude. Their preferential value depends on the way in which they are used."<sup>133</sup> The option of ἀδιάφορα being preferential adds another dimension to the possible Stoic interpretation of ὡς μή in 1 Cor 7.29-31.

Wolfgang Schrage nuances this Stoic possibility, describing the passage in relation to both the Stoic teachings of Epictetus and Jewish Apocalypticism as found in 4 Esdras.<sup>134</sup> According to Schrage, fundamental to Paul's thought is Christ's resurrection, which changed the world in

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<sup>131</sup> Van Kooten, "Paul's Stoic Onto-Theology and Ethics of Good, Evil and "Indifferents": A Response to Anti-Metaphysical and Nihilistic Readings of Paul in Modern Philosophy", in: *Saint Paul and Philosophy: The Consonance of Ancient and Modern Thought*, by Antonio Cimino, Gert Jan van der Heiden, and George Henry van Kooten (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017) 153-159.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>134</sup> Wolfgang Schrage, "Die Stellung Zur Welt Bei Paulus, Epiktet Und in Der Apokalyptik: Ein Beitrag Zu 1 Kor 7:29-31," *Zeitschrift Für Theologie Und Kirche* 61.2 (1964) 125-54.



eschatological fashion. The κόσμος is standing in opposition to the new creation as being the unredeemed part of the (physical) world.<sup>135</sup> The change Christ brought to human lives is part of a bigger change in the changing existential scheme of the world. In Paul we therefore find a continuation between creation and salvation. In this scheme, 1 Cor 7 argues for a middle ground between obsession of the world and escaping the world.<sup>136</sup> Paul is similar to Epictetus in his disengagement from external things. However, Epictetus proposes a complete separation from affection to the world, whereas Paul e.g. values compassion positively.<sup>137</sup> The apocalyptic tradition found in 4 Esdras is similar to 1 Cor 7 in adhering preparation and willingness for the coming end. Paul differs from this tradition in portraying creation not as completely evil and finite, but as being in a provisional state.<sup>138</sup> According to Schrage, an eschatological time frame provides Paul's readers with a motivation to relate to goods and values differently.<sup>139</sup> In comparison to Huttunen en Van Kooten, Schrage calls to attention the plurality of traditions that influenced Paul in writing 1 Cor, and keeps us from presenting a too simplified depiction of Paul's background.

The ambiguity of the Stoic ἀδιάφορα definitely shows similarities with Paul's ὡς μὴ-rhetoric. Just as in Stoic thinking, Paul regards e.g. marriage or buying things not as necessarily bad, their value being dependent on the way these things are used. Another similarity is the positioning of these topics in a wider frame. For Stoics ἀδιάφορα could be part of a virtuous lifestyle. For Paul, marriage could be part of living 'devoted to the Lord without distraction' (1 Cor 7.35, εὐπάρεδρον τῷ Κυρίῳ

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 126–128.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 128–130.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 130–138.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 139–152.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 153. "Es geht um die Haltung derer, die nichts von der Welt, sondern alles von Gott erwareten, die darum wissen, daß Gott nicht die gefallene Schöpfung repariert oder renoviert oder den status quo ante restituiert, sondern das Nichtseiende - und dahin zurück muß alles Weltliche - ins Dasein ruft und die Toteten erweckt (Röm 4,17)." Although Schrage's stress on Paul pointing to God as source of hope is valid, I disagree with his interpretation of Paul placing salvation completely outside of creation.

ἀπερισπάστως). Yet Schrage has brought difficulties with aligning Paul too closely to a Stoic ethic to the fore. Paul's apocalypticism and positive view on some parts of the world should also be taken into account, characteristics not found as explicitly in Stoicism. In the wording of 1 Cor 7.31: some use of the κόσμος is permitted, but using the κόσμος in a complete and destructive way is ill advised. Although there is some overlap between the Stoic ἀδιάφορα and Paul's ὡς μὴ-rhetoric, the two have their content and value on their own. Just as Paul's creation of different word-pairs, so too the adaptation of ὡς μὴ in a particular Pauline rhetoric should be seen as creatively aligning different traditions Paul was familiar with. In this perspective I agree with John Barclay's words:

"In his [Paul's, *TvG*] view, believers lived in the midst of the "apocalypse" itself, and their newly aligned allegiance to the risen, reigning, but embattled, Lord reset their priorities and encouraged a critical distance from all that was not directly aligned to Christ - a form of disinvestment that limited the quality and/or the quantity of engagements with worldly activities."<sup>140</sup>

## CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

### *Translating σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου as 'world-order'*

In 1 Cor 7.29-31 Paul presents a highly creative and provocative ethic informed by his cosmology. Paul's negative evaluation of the κόσμος in 1 Cor, e.g. shown in the opposition of its spirit to the spirit of God in 2.12, is evidence for an innovative and alternative ideology in comparison to Graeco-Roman literature. The σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου is another example of

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<sup>140</sup> John M. G. Barclay, "Apocalyptic Allegiance and Disinvestment in the World: A Reading of 1 Corinthians 7:25-35," in *Paul and the Apocalyptic Imagination*, by Ben C. Blackwell, John K. Goodrich, and Jason Maston (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016) 273.

Paul's creativity, easily overlooked as a self-evident combination of words. Within the small group of authors combining σχῆμα with a cosmological κόσμος, Paul is unique in using the σχῆμα-κόσμος construction within an ethical argument. The preferred stance of the Corinthian audience is somehow informed by the status of the κόσμος. Other σχῆμα-κόσμοι show the importance of order on a wide variety of subjects, like proper amusement, building patterns or military arrangements. They also portray σχῆμα and κόσμος as part of a bigger whole; the All (τὰ πάντα) encompassing both the κόσμος and the endless Void (τὸ κενὸν ἄπειρον). The most informative Graeco-Roman parallels for understanding Paul's use of words in 1 Cor 7.31 are interpretations of the *Timaeus* contemporary to Paul. Plutarch's *De defectu oraculorum* presents the possibility of a plurality of σχῆματα of the κόσμος, possibly even extrapolatable into multiple κόσμοι. Philo's interpretation distinguishes the unseen κόσμος from visible σχῆματα and thereby refers to Plato's epistemology of forms and ideas. Graeco-Roman literature thereby shows the relativity of the σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου, undermining common ideology portraying κόσμος as eternal and divine.

Paul's use of στοιχεῖα in Galatians shows a similar counter-narrative. For Paul, the στοιχεῖα, being a constitutive part of the Stoic κόσμος-ideology, do not operate on the usual divine and immortal level. Neither are they earthly forces, as seen by their ability to subordinate humans to their reign. Rather, Paul's στοιχεῖα function somewhere between heaven and earth. In Galatians, the relativity of the κόσμος is accompanied by the bygone age of the στοιχεῖα. The relative temporality of the way things are is made explicit with Paul's φθορά-language in 1 Cor 15. Christ's resurrection inaugurated a new age and is the focal point of this chapter's argument. Through resurrection some fading parts of this world can be made imperishable. Some earthly bodies can therefore share in the eternal reign of God (βασιλεία Θεοῦ). All these observations about the shared relativity and temporality of the σχῆμα and στοιχεῖα of the κόσμος and the κόσμος as a whole question the scope of Paul's κόσμος in 1 Cor. For Paul, κόσμος is

clearly distinct from both the physical earth/nature (γῆς) and the eternal reign of God. Κόσμος refers to the *way things are* at the moment, on a scope broader than nature but smaller than eternity. Therefore I suggest translating σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου in 1 Cor 7.31 as 'world-order'. Paul informs the Corinthians that the world as they know it and see it is a temporal reality. This alternative to the Greek perspective is one of the foundations for Paul's ethic. Not the current structure of society (κόσμος) should determine the Corinthian behaviour, but the resurrection of Christ that is slowly replacing this cosmic reality.

*Ethics of temporality: οἱ χρώμενοι τὸν κόσμον ὡς μὴ καταχρώμενοι*

While discussing the proper use of marriage and virginity in the light of Christ's resurrection, Paul enlarges his ethical perspective to the general use of the κόσμος. The Corinthians were to use the κόσμος, *as if not* using it up completely to depletion. Again Paul's word constructions display innovation and creativity in conjoining elements from different traditions for his particular rhetoric. Within the Antique literary corpus, Paul is unique in combining (κατα)χράομαι to κόσμος in an ethical argument. Besides using the κόσμος, the Corinthians were instructed to use their social position (7.21). In the ethics of 1 Cor 7, Paul gives two exhortations: remain where you are (7.20,24) and use your position in a specific way, appropriate to God's "call to fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>141</sup> The difference between χράομαι and καταχράομαι can be derived from Polybius and 1 Cor 9. These texts designate καταχράομαι as inappropriately and negatively over-using something, resulting in a cessation of relevance. In 1 Cor 7 Paul extrapolates his relational ethic to cosmic proportion. The Corinthians are instructed to stay present in the κόσμος, but not cause the κόσμος to cease being relevant. This extrapolation of ethics to the κόσμος invites the

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<sup>141</sup> 1 Cor 1.9 (ὁ Θεὸς, δι' οὗ ἐκλήθητε εἰς κοινωνίαν τοῦ Υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν). The link between 'using your social position' and 'being called' is taken from 1 Cor 7.21.

audience to engage in a cosmologically informed way of looking at their behaviour and brings cosmological sections of 1 Corinthians into play for interpreting Paul's ethic.

The transformation from φθορά to ἀφθαρσία as result of Christ's vindication over death reminds the Corinthians about their role in the κόσμος. In the on-going passing of the 'world-order' Christ is the main actor. In this process, the Corinthians are to remain, while Christ is subjecting creation to his reign and covering the 'world-order' with (a) new creation. In light of the κόσμος' temporality, the Corinthians ought to take a middle ground between escaping the world and having too big of an ambition in their own ability of saving the world from its φθορά. On the other hand they shouldn't be afraid of a power vacuum, since God will be the one replacing the old order by gradually becoming all in all (15.28).

Paul ingeniously uses ὡς μὴ to strengthen his rhetoric and implicitly engages simultaneously in the Stoic debate concerning the preferential ἀδιάφορα and notions from Jewish apocalypticism about the end of the world. Contextualising 1 Cor 7's passing of the κόσμος in the broader Graeco-Roman world is comparable to Edward Adams' interpretation of another eschatological text from the New Testament.. In *The Stars Will Fall From Heaven*<sup>142</sup> Adams traces cosmic catastrophes in Mk 13.24-27, Hebr 12.25-29, Rev 6.12-27 and 2 Peter 3.5-13. Commenting on the later, a passage elaborating on the destruction of the στοιχεῖα, Adams states: "the writer's outlook differs in fundamental ways from Stoicism ... His creational monotheism and linear eschatology stand in sharp contrast to Stoic

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<sup>142</sup> Edward. Adams, *The Stars Will Fall From Heaven: Cosmic Catastrophe in the New Testament and Its World* (London, New York: T&T Clark International, 2007). In this book Adams complements his analysis of κόσμος in the Graeco-Roman world by focussing specifically on the theme of the end of the world. "Whether the cosmos lasts for ever or is destined to come to a catastrophic end was one of the main cosmological questions considered by Greek and Roman natural philosophers." (Ibid., 101.) Plato, Aristotle and their successors "advocated the indestructibility of the cosmos." (Ibid., 109.) Later on, "the Stoics believed that cosmic history was cyclic: the ordered world is generated in a space or a void, continues for a period, ends in an *ekpurōsis* or conflagration, and is recreated anew out of the fire, the sequence repeating itself endlessly." Ibid., 114.

pantheism and cyclic eschatology."<sup>143</sup> "Verses 5-7 ... form a concentrated defence of the destructibility of the cosmos, which appears to reflect an awareness of the polemics involved in the philosophical debate on the fate of the cosmos, and which exploits Stoic cosmological theory in particular."<sup>144</sup> But, "in line with Stoic thought, the writer seems to imagine that the eschatological fire is not only an instrument of destruction but also a means of (re)generation."<sup>145</sup>

Apart from the remarkable applicability of these comments on 2 Peter 3.5-13 to 1 Cor 7.29-31, the comparison of these two New Testament texts invites to further research and new questions, unfortunately transcending the scope of this chapter. For example: how does Paul's cosmologically informed ethic in 1 Corinthians relate to 2 Peter? And does the passing of the world-order point to the same destruction found in 2 Peter? Or is this passing less intrusive? And how do both texts interact with Paul's philosophically complex Graeco-Roman environment?<sup>146</sup> Going into these questions could even more clearly specify Paul's position within the Graeco-Roman world and his use of the κόσμος. Such research has the potential to clarify in what ways the Corinthians ought to have lived in their κόσμος, which was changing regardless of their actions.

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>146</sup> Bruce Winter e.g. proposes sophists as Paul's main adversaries. Bruce W. Winter, *Paul and the Sophists: Alexandrian and Corinthian Responses to a Julio-Claudian Movement*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002).

## Chapter 2

### PAUL: OUR CONTEMPORARY? HŌS MĒ AS ŽIŽEK'S MATERIAL CORRECTIVE TO BADIOU'S ABSTRACT UNIVERSALITY

Throughout the ages Paul's letters have been studied extensively for religious purposes. Interestingly, the end of the 20th century saw an emergence of the Apostle among explicitly atheistic philosophers. Although these philosophers do not read the Pauline corpus as part of God's eternal message to the world, they do find in Paul a meaningful resource for their politically orientated philosophies. This chapter aims to analyse the philosophical potential for introducing Paul into 21st century debates, preliminary to using Paul for our ecological questions. Special attention is given to Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek. Both these philosophers introduce Paul into their politically engaged criticism of Western capitalism. And both rely heavily on the works of Nietzsche, Freud, Marx and Lacan. In *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*,<sup>1</sup> Badiou explicitly names Paul our contemporary. Paul serves as an exemplary figure of Badiou's evental philosophy. According to Badiou, the Apostle communicated a universal thought that casted off differences and produced a "Sameness and Equality".<sup>2</sup> Žižek responded elaborately to Badiou in both *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*<sup>3</sup> and *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political*

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<sup>1</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>3</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Massachusetts: Mit Press Ltd, 2003).

*Ontology*.<sup>4</sup> Žižek's psychoanalytic interpretation of the Apostle demonstrates the particularity of Paul's universalism. Instead of erasing differences for the benefit of an all-encompassing oneness, Žižek's Paul introduces a difference, "a radical division which cuts through the entire particular content."<sup>5</sup> Paul's fundamental difference creates the possibility for freedom, love and struggle. Žižek's notion of *struggling universality* corrects Badiou's Paul by calling to attention the provisional and particular nature of Paul's, or Badiou's, universalism.

Žižek's philosophy will be approached through his comments on Paul's ὡς μὴ-rhetoric in 1 Cor 7.29-31. Ὡς μὴ is also present in the Pauline accounts of Agamben and Taubes, but absent from Badiou's work. The two ὡς μὴ-references in *The Puppet and the Dwarf* display Paul's rhetoric not as an act of suspension (of differences) and disentanglement, but as self-negation, struggle and engagement. Žižek's corrections to Alain Badiou demonstrate that although 21st century readers can introduce Paul to a wide range of questions, they ought to be mindful of the particular struggle of the Apostle himself. Paul's particularity is thereby not only an historical conclusion, but a philosophical consideration as well.

### PAUL IN CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY

The end of the 20th century witnessed a rising interest in the Apostle by Continental philosophers,<sup>6</sup> starting with the publication of Heidegger's interpretation of Paul's letters in 1995.<sup>7</sup> In these lectures Heidegger interprets Paul along the lines of his critique of classical philosophy, which he describes as being too conceptual, theoretical and predictable. Instead, Heidegger promotes a phenomenological approach to philosophy

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<sup>4</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*. (London: Verso, 1999). The third chapter is entirely devoted to Badiou. It is called: *The Politics of Truth, or, Alain Badiou as a Reader of St Paul*, 127-170.

<sup>5</sup> Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 109.

<sup>6</sup> Gert-Jan van der Heiden, "Attitudes to Life: Saint Paul and Contemporary Philosophy," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 77.3 (2016) 81-84.

<sup>7</sup> M. Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1995). Heidegger presented his reading of the Pauline letters in a course called *Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion*, originally given in 1920-1921.



that is grounded in and engaged with the human situation, a situation that is factual, fragile and unpredictable. Philosophy has to be atheistic in principal. For Heidegger "the ultimate is not found in a highest being but in the facticity of life, and this should be approached as the ultimate."<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, Heidegger's Paul is not concerned with the content of the message, but with the actualisation of his message through proclamation. Paul does not write like a classical philosopher absorbed by content, but as a preacher engaged with his factual world in a meaningful way. Paul's ὡς μή of 1 Cor 7.29-31 serves for Heidegger as an example of the need to continuously actualise life. With ὡς μή, Paul roots the Christian life into actual life circumstances. At the same time ὡς μή shows the inability to grasp life in a definitive way, recognizing the fragility of life. Heidegger finds the unpredictability of current life explicitly expressed in Paul's concept of καιρός. Christ's intervention in time ('like a thief in the night') is sudden and undeducible from the situation itself, proving our understanding of our situation as provisional and broken. Ben Vedder describes the role of ὡς μή in Heidegger: "The "as if not" expresses that humans live not as completely open to the unpredictable future but still have to use concepts that are framed already on forehand. This means that human self-understanding remains always a vulnerable and broken understanding."<sup>9</sup>

At about the same time as the publication of Heidegger's lectures, several Pauline readings were published by Continental philosophers. In 1993 the lectures Jacob Taubes gave just before his death in 1987 were published as *Die politische Theologie des Paulus*.<sup>10</sup> In 1997, Alain Badiou's *Saint Paul: La fondation de l'universalisme*<sup>11</sup> appeared and in 2000 Giorgio

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<sup>8</sup> Ben Vedder, "Heidegger's Hermeneutics of Paul," in *Saint Paul and Philosophy: The Consonance of Ancient and Modern Thought*, by Antonio Cimino, Gert Jan van der Heiden, and George Henry van Kooten (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017) 67–68.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>10</sup> Jacob Taubes, *Die politische Theologie des Paulus: Vorträge, gehalten an der Forschungsstätte der evangelischen Studiengemeinschaft in Heidelberg, 23.-27. Februar 1987* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1993).

<sup>11</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint-Paul: la fondation de l'universalisme*, (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1997).

Agamben's *Il tempo che resta: Un commento alla Lettera ai Romani*.<sup>12</sup> As these books were translated into English between 2003 and 2005,<sup>13</sup> and Žižek's *The Puppet and the Dwarf* was published in 2003, Paul's philosophic potential generated a range of other publications.<sup>14</sup>

The perspectives on Paul by Continental philosophers share some common characteristics: all of them interpret Paul from a non-spiritual perspective, ranging from a 'soft' phenomenological approach (Taubes) to rigid materialism (Žižek).<sup>15</sup> Another shared feature is the retrieval of Paul as a great but often forgotten influence to Western thought. The present relevance of Paul is demonstrated by showing the influence of the Apostle on modern philosophy, frequently citing Marx, Freud, Nietzsche and Walter Benjamin; added by either Carl Schmitt (Taubes, Agamben) or Lacan (Badiou, Žižek). Most importantly, and probably the main reason for philosophy's 'turn to Paul', is that this group of philosophers finds in Paul a valuable resource to engage with 21st century political questions by means of ontology. As Delahaye concludes: "So, why Paul? Because the philosophers' Paul is a radically subversive thinker and because of his new ontology, he also gives philosophers the means to rethink contemporary politics."<sup>16</sup> Delahaye divides the contemporary turn to Paul into two ontological groups.<sup>17</sup> The first group

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<sup>12</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Il tempo che resta: un commento alla Lettera ai Romani* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> Jacob Taubes and Aleida Assmann, *The Political Theology of Paul* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); Badiou, *Saint Paul* (2003); Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); Martin Heidegger, Matthias Fritsch, and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> Among others: John D. Caputo and Linda Alcoff, *St. Paul Among the Philosophers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Douglas Harink, *Paul, Philosophy, and the Theopolitical Vision: Critical Engagements with Agamben, Badiou, Žižek, and Others* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010); Cimino, van der Heiden, and van Kooten, *Saint Paul and Philosophy: The Consonance of Ancient and Modern Thought*; *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 77.3 (2016).

<sup>15</sup> Agamben (not interested in "true propositions on God and the world" but in the "the performative power of [Paul's] language" (*Time That Remains*, 136-137.) and Badiou (explicit atheism) occupy a middle ground.

<sup>16</sup> Ezra Delahaye, "The Philosophers' Paul: A Radically Subversive Thinker," in *Saint Paul and Philosophy: The Consonance of Ancient and Modern Thought*, by Antonio Cimino, Gert Jan van der Heiden, and George Henry van Kooten (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017) 92-93.

<sup>17</sup> Delahaye's third group of texts, containing Nietzsche's *Antichrist* and Deleuze's *Nietzsche and Paul*, does not belong to the contemporary turn, because these books

(Badiou, Žižek) emphasizes Paul's anthropology, has Gal 3.28 as central text and "draws on the psycho-analytic tradition to think a universal humanity through Paul."<sup>18</sup> The second group (Agamben, Taubes, Heidegger) starts with ontological considerations to rethink anthropology, has 1 Cor 7.29-31 as central text and temporality as a central theme. I would suggest the same division, albeit for different reasons.<sup>19</sup> Apart from the extent of 'atheism', use of sources and central onto-anthropological theme, the form/genre of Badiou-Žižek also differs from Taubes-Agamben. The second pair contains two innovative commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans, focussing on the relevance of messianism for our world. Badiou and Žižek write thematic philosophical tractates that criticize dominant Western capitalism and search for a neomarxistic alternative. This chapter will analyse the role of 1 Cor 7's  $\omega\varsigma\ \mu\acute{\eta}$  in these two neomarxistic reactivations of Paul. But first, we'll turn to the method through which Badiou and Žižek reactivate their Paul.

*Badiou's evental philosophy - Paul as 'Our Contemporary'*

Instead of understanding Paul in reference to his first century contemporaries, Alain Badiou boldly labels the Apostle "Our Contemporary."<sup>20</sup> Badiou introduces Paul into his philosophical project that explores a new connection between the subject and truth. In his analysis of our Western world, Badiou identifies a double hostility towards truth procedures, both by means of the abstract and false universality of capital (capitalism) and the reduction of differences to identity politics (multiculturalism). Badiou considers both these procedures to be *without truth*. Political actions to protect markets show the inability of capital to serve as universal denominator.<sup>21</sup> In the end, "the capitalist logic of the general equivalent and the identitarian and

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portray "Paul as thinker of the institutionalized church" (Delahaye, 82.) and miss the subversive Paul that is characteristic to the contemporary turn.

<sup>18</sup> Delahaye, 83.

<sup>19</sup> Delahaye's identification of a central text in Agamben and Taubes (both are interpreting Romans) and Žižek (refers to G.K. Chesterton more frequent than Paul, Gal 3.28 is only mentioned once) I consider to be rather problematic.

<sup>20</sup> Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 4–15.

<sup>21</sup> Badiou refers to Front National's desire to create a France for the French.

cultural logic of communities or minorities form an articulated whole."<sup>22</sup> Although capitalism intends to establish a global market, this market fails to be universal because the market does not address and count all subjects equally. Referring to multiculturalism, Badiou writes: "In the progressive reduction of the question of truth (and hence, of thought) to a linguistic form, judgment (...) ends up in a cultural and historical relativism that today constitutes at once a topic of public opinion, a 'political' motivation, and a framework for research in the human sciences."<sup>23</sup> Through these different contextualizations, the question of truth is removed from the table. As a consequence, humans (or: subjects) ceased to be truly alive. In Badiou's words: "Cornered between monetary abstraction and petty national, religious, or racial identities, we are no longer alive."<sup>24</sup>

Badiou aims to revitalize truth procedures by constructing an evental philosophy.<sup>25</sup> An event interrupts the normal state of affairs in an unpredictable way. Whereas the State is constructed by discriminating abstractions of the uncountable Being, therefor being particular, an event is a universal singularity addressing all people equally.<sup>26</sup> In an essay on the universal Badiou describes the connection between universality and singularity: "Every universal presents itself not as a regularization of the particular or of differences, but as a singularity that is subtracted from identitarian predicates; although obviously it proceeds via those predicates. The subtraction of particularities must be opposed by their supposition. But if a singularity can lay claim to the universal by

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 6. Badiou places 'political' between brackets to indicate its irony. For Badiou true politics are not relativistic but interested in the truth.

<sup>24</sup> Alain Badiou, "St. Paul, Founder of the Universal Subject," in *St. Paul Among the Philosophers*, by Linda Alcoff and John D. Caputo (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009) 37.

<sup>25</sup> Alain Badiou and Oliver Feltham, *Being and Event* (London: Continuum, 2007); Alain Badiou and Alberto Toscano, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event 2* (London: Continuum, 2008).

<sup>26</sup> "I will call *particular* whatever can be discerned in knowledge by means of descriptive predicates. But I will call *singular* that which, although identifiable as a procedure at work in a situation, is nevertheless subtracted from every predicative description." Alain Badiou, "Eight Thesis on the Universal," November 2004, <http://www.lacan.com/badeight.htm>.

subtraction, it is because the play of identitarian predicates, or the logic of those forms of knowledge that describe particularity, precludes any possibility of foreseeing or conceiving it."<sup>27</sup> A truth becomes operative by people being true to an event through declaration. By declaring the statement that originated in the event, it is materialized into reality. Hallward provides an insightful description: for Badiou "truths are materially produced in specific situations, and each begins from an event or discovery that eludes the prevailing logic that structures and governs those situations. (...) A truth persists solely through the militant proclamation of those people who maintain a fidelity to the uncertain event whose occurrence and consequences they affirm— those people, in other words, who become subjects in the name of that event."<sup>28</sup> Badiou's conception of truth is entirely subjective, distant from any form of objective definition, (privileged) knowledge or ascription of meaning to a situation. For Badiou, truth cannot take "the form of the object or of objective legality. (...) It can be experienced only through the production (or reproduction) of a trajectory of thought, and this trajectory constitutes (or reconstitutes) a subjective disposition."<sup>29</sup>

Within the framework of his evental philosophy, Badiou reactivates Paul in an atheistic, subjective account that neither aims to be historical nor exegetical. For Badiou, "Paul demonstrates in detail how a universal thought, proceeding on the basis of the worldly proliferation of alterities, produces a Sameness and an Equality. The production of equality and the casting off, in thought, of differences are the material signs of the universal."<sup>30</sup> The universal thought Paul declares ('Christ is resurrected') is his faithful response to the Resurrection. Although Badiou repeatedly assures his readers of the fictitious dimension of this event, its content being mythological, Paul's declaration starts a genuine truth procedure, making him a subject of this event.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Hallward, *Badiou a Subject to Truth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003) xxv.

<sup>29</sup> Badiou, "Eight Thesis on the Universal."

<sup>30</sup> Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 109.

Paul's innovation, awarding him Badiou's classification of a founder of Universalism,<sup>31</sup> consists in the separation of truth from the concept of law. For Badiou the Law is the figure of every type of particularity, exemplified by Paul's use of the Jewish-Greek discourse. The Jewish Law separated the Jewish people from others, creating a division into humanity through exception. Those who adhere to the Law ('the circumcised'), in other words: those who master the Law, are separated from the majority that does not. This Jewish discourse is complemented by a Greek discourse. Mastery in the Greek discourse is acquired through knowledge of the cosmos, possessed by 'the wise'. The Greek and Jewish discourses are mutually contingent and therefore not universal, the Jew being the exception to the totality, the natural the reference for the miracle. Another problem of these discourses is that they are not equally nor freely addressed to all, but require mastery and obedience to either the rules of the Law or the cosmos. In this situation Paul proposes a "universal logic of salvation ... which is a-cosmic and illegal."<sup>32</sup> This logic is acquired through the introduction of an Event, the resurrection of Christ, which is graciously and equally addresses to all. Accordingly, everyone has the opportunity to respond faithfully to the event, become a living subject and participate in this universality.

Badiou finds in Paul a conceptual organization suitable for assessing our situation and philosophical task.<sup>33</sup> Since truth for Badiou is identical to the universal,<sup>34</sup> Paul's foundation of universalism also provides a foundation for truth procedures. Truth procedures, resulting in subjects that are alive, start with the local emergence of a universal singularity. Disjoined from its fabulous content, Paul's declaration to the event of the resurrection "follows the requirements of truth as universal singularity:"<sup>35</sup> (1) the Christian subject exists only after declaring the

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<sup>31</sup> "Paul is a founder, in that he is one of the very first theoreticians of the universal." Ibid., 108.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>34</sup> "There is singularity only insofar as there is universality. Failing that, there is, outside of truth, only particularity." Ibid., 97.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 14.

event, (2) truth is entirely subjective as a declaration of the conviction regarding the event (the evental statement), (3) truth is a process requiring fidelity to the event (not illumination) and (4) truth is "indifferent to the state of the situation."<sup>36</sup> In his faithfulness to the event, and his indifference to the secular abstractions of his time, Saint Paul is an example of living 'in truth', being nonconformist to his particular State.

Žižek's response to Badiou

In *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, Slavoj Žižek reads Paul through the lens of the psychoanalysis of Lacan. This method results into an "inherent decentering of the interpreted text, which brings to light its 'unthought', its disavowed presuppositions and consequences."<sup>37</sup> Žižek portrays "Paul as a radical Jew, an author of Jewish political theology. (...) [Žižek sees, *TvG*] Paul as a Leninist: ... the great institutionalizer ... standing in between two revolutions."<sup>38</sup> According to Žižek, Paul's situation is similar to Lenin's: the Pauline *already, not yet* can be compared to Lenin's situation between the Revolution of February and October 1917. Žižek's Paul is thoroughly radical in "the way he undermined the Jewish tradition from within."<sup>39</sup> As a materialist philosopher, Žižek criticizes Western capitalism's *suspended believe* with its lost interest in the Real, exemplified in e.g. caffeine-free coffee and beer without alcohol, and indifference towards differences. Instead, Žižek aims for an engaged and sometimes violent political attitude that establishes differences. This stance searches for truth and actively asks people: 'what do you believe?' In Christianity, especially Saint Paul's, Žižek sees an example of this revolutionary attitude.

In Žižek's reading, Christianity philosophically introduced a Difference into the realm of Being, into the 'way things are', contrary to Buddhism stressing the Oneness of all things. Whereas Buddhism has a

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>37</sup> Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, vii-viii.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 9. This is analogous to Badiou, who finds in Paul a new militant figure in succession to Lenin and the Bolsheviks. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 2.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 10.

logic surrounding the number One, against which a multitude is possible, Christianity is "the only logical theology of the two."<sup>40</sup> Žižek writes: "Buddhist (or Hindi, for that matter) all-encompassing Compassion has to be opposed to Christian intolerant, violent Love. The Buddhist stance is ultimately one of Indifference, of quenching all passions that strive to establish differences; while Christian love is a violent passion to introduce a Difference, a gap in the order of being, to privilege and elevate some object at the expense of others."<sup>41</sup> The Christian gap is narratively exemplified firstly by the Fall as separation of man from God, which Žižek interprets as "the emergence of freedom"<sup>42</sup> and "*a Salvation which we misrecognize as a Fall*"<sup>43</sup>, and secondly by the separation between Christ and Father-God on the Cross.<sup>44</sup> In Žižek's philosophy the introduction of a Difference in the realm of Being results into a gap. The distance that thereby originates between the Absolute and the Particular, between the Real and the Law, leads to freedom. This revolutionary type of freedom "is not a blissfully neutral state of harmony and balance, but the very violent act which disturbs this balance."<sup>45</sup>

Recognition of pervasive ontological Difference creates the opportunity for a concrete universality. Concrete universality differs from abstract universality, containing actualized and concrete determinations instead of abstract, negative and impossible demands (about what *ought to be*).<sup>46</sup> Žižek describes the process of constructing such a universality: "in a first move, universality has to be asserted in its negativity, as exclusive of all particular content - that is to say, not as an all-

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 32-33.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 87. Without Adam's disobedience there would be no possibility for love.

<sup>44</sup> Shown by Christ's words on the cross: My God, why hast thou forsaken me? According to Žižek this moment shows the impotence of God the Father. In Žižek's Christianity as the religion of atheism, God "as the 'big Other' that decides on the 'objective meaning' of our deeds" has been replaced by the Holy Spirit as community. Ibid., 171.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 31. Later on, Žižek comments on our 'age of anxiety': "Christianity is the only frame for pagan freedom, this means that, precisely, this frame - the frame of prohibitions - is the only frame within which we can enjoy pagan pleasures: the feeling of guilt is a fake enabling us to give ourselves over to pleasures - when this frame falls away, anxiety arises." Ibid., 57.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 82. Žižek here uses Hegel's opposition between concrete and abstract universality.



encompassing container, but as the destructive force which undermines every particular content within its organic whole; on the contrary, the true Hegelian "concrete universality" is the very movement of negativity which splits universality 'from within', reducing it to one of the particular elements, one of its own species. It is only at this moment, when universality, as it were, loses the distance of an abstract container, and *enters its own frame*, that it become truly concrete."<sup>47</sup> Through this process the concrete universality emphasises the Real/particular *what is* on expenses of the abstract/universal *what ought to be*, the material thereby gaining priority over the ideal.

Žižek's Paul communicates a concrete universality, undermining Jewish tradition *from within*. Žižek describes some characteristics of Paul's universality when he integrates Agamben's concept of the Remainder into his argument.<sup>48</sup> For Agamben, Paul's messianism introduced a Remainder to the division of the Law into Jewish and non-Jewish people, showing that these categories do not suffice in the new messianic time. Žižek attributes this thought by stating that those who are excluded from the present state (the Remainder), "represent the Whole in contrast to all others who stand only for their particular interests."<sup>49</sup> Paul transformed this concrete situation into a concrete universality. Paul is therefore not an abstract philosopher, observing his situation from a distance, but an engaged fighter.<sup>50</sup> Paul's engagement leads him into a struggle. For Žižek, the concept of struggle is related to Nietzsche and his attempts to articulate the Real while at the same time acknowledging the inadequacy of any formulation for such an endeavour.<sup>51</sup> Analogously, Paul used words from the Jewish symbolic universe to articulate his new position. This leads him to suggest a Law of Love, in which illegal and imperfect love gains priority over legalistic

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>48</sup> In the same paragraph, Žižek defends Badiou against Agamben: Paul did not continue the tradition of Jewish messianism, but brought this logic to its end to create space for a new universality.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 78.

formulations, suspending the prevailing social norms. In Žižek's words: "What we find in Paul is a commitment, an engaged position of struggle, an uncanny 'interpellation' beyond ideological interpellation, an interpellation which suspends the performative force of the "normal" ideological interpellation that compels us to accept our determinate place within the sociosymbolic edifice."<sup>52</sup> Žižek's Paul formulates a concrete, engaged and struggling universality, explicitly not being abstract, mute and neutral.

In *The Ticklish Subject*, Žižek devotes an entire chapter to Badiou's reading of Paul. Žižek finds a strong resemblance between Badiou and the Althusser, both in regard to the Althusserian opposition of science and ideology (knowledge and Event) and his notion of ideological interpellation: people are driven by a Cause (Event), which through interpellation (naming) leads to ideology (Truth). Žižek criticizes both these features by describing the difference between Badiou and the psychoanalysis of Lacan. According to Badiou, the subject is constituted only in succession of the Event. For Lacan, however, the relationship between Event and subject is not linear, but circular. "The subject serves the Event in his fidelity, but the Event itself is visible as such only to an already engaged subject."<sup>53</sup> The Lacanian subject is located in the act that decides to elevate the Truth-Event from the multitude of Being.<sup>54</sup> For Žižek, Badiou's recognition of the fabulous nature of the Resurrection proves the pre-existence of the subject, Paul's event being merely a semblance of the Truth-Event, which is not operative for us today anymore. Following up on an Event through naming and declaration, requires the subject to make *a formal act of decision*. Fidelity is therefore not a necessity, but "true fidelity to the Event is 'dogmatic' in the sense of unconditional Faith."<sup>55</sup>

The opposition of knowledge and Event in Badiou's philosophy is correlated to two other oppositions: Law-Love and death-Resurrection.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>53</sup> Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 145.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 144.

For Badiou all these oppositions are radically disconnected, without any (dialectical) relationship between their two parts.<sup>56</sup> For Lacan, and psychoanalysis in general, a destructive death drive is a necessary stage for the development of new 'life'. First the old order has to be broken down to create space for a new truth. Moreover, in Lacanian psychoanalysis the death drive is preferred over the construction of something new: "Lacan insists on the primacy of the (negative) *act* over the (positive) establishment of a 'new harmony' via the intervention of some new Master/Signifier; while for Badiou, the different facets of negativity (ethical catastrophes) are reduced to so many versions of 'betrayal' of (or infidelity to, or denial of) the positive truth."<sup>57</sup> In Badiou's eventual philosophy the Event cannot be named or identified from the perspective of what counts as knowledge. The same incommensurability leads Lacan to conclude that truth remains in the structure of a fiction.<sup>58</sup> In these differences between Badiou and Lacan, Žižek repeatedly sides with the latter, both because of his recognition of subjectivity in the establishment of every truth, and to prevent the construction of a totalitarian ideology that requires no explanation nor tolerates its own demise ('death'). Although being fictitious, truth is definitely relevant for Žižek, but in a specific way: "the site of truth is not the way *things really are in themselves*, beyond their perspectival distortions, but the very gap, passage, that separates one perspective from another. (...) There is a truth; everything is not relative - but this truth is the truth of the perspectival distortion as such."<sup>59</sup>

### *Badiou and Žižek: Hermeneutical considerations*

In both Žižek and Badiou we find ontological reflections on the Apostle Paul as part of a larger philosophical project to formulate a New Leftist

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<sup>56</sup> G.J. van der Heiden argues that there might be a hidden dialectics of exception present in Badiou's Paul. See: Gert-Jan van der Heiden, "The Dialectics of Paul: On Exception, Grace, and Use in Badiou and Agamben," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 77.3 (2016) 171–90.

<sup>57</sup> Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 159.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>59</sup> Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 79.

political attitude. Žižek replies to Badiou's resurrection of truth as a universal singularity by describing the difference between abstract/mute and concrete/engaged universalities, and by pointing to the subjective character of the entire truth procedure: from the recognition of events until the actualization of its consequences. In reaction to Badiou's idealistic breaking out of particularities into Universalism, Žižek identifies the concrete and particular nature of every universality. Instead of radically separating the Particular from the Universal, Žižek proposes a dialectical relationship between the two by identifying the Universal with the particular Remainder of the state of things.<sup>60</sup> Žižek distances the Particular-Universal pair from the Absolute, resulting into subjective and fictitious truths that are nonetheless relevant and valuable. In his evaluation Žižek generally agrees with Badiou's philosophical project. At the same time Žižek corrects Badiou, indicating the limits for a Pauline universality. For Žižek, Paul's universality shows the particular struggle of an inspiring revolutionary.

Besides this philosophical particularity, several biblical scholars pointed to the historical particularity of Paul in response to the philosophical turn to Paul.<sup>61</sup> Writing on the anachronism of the philosophers, Paula Frederiksen goes so far to separate historical from systematic inquiries, advising the second to refrain from historical claims (*this is what Paul means*) and resort to hermeneutical claims (*I interpret Paul in this way*). According to her, in their efforts to display a more coherent apostle "any application of any systematic or systematizing interpretive theory will distort the lived messiness that the primary evidence attest to."<sup>62</sup> For Frederiksen, Badiou "has presented us not with a study of Paul and his concerns, but with an oblique self-portrait, and an

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<sup>60</sup> Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 224.

<sup>61</sup> J. Barclay, "Paul and the Philosophers: Alain Badiou and the Event," *New Blackfriars* 91.1032 (2010) 171–84; Pamela E Klassen and John W Marshall, "Saint as Cipher: Paul, Badiou, and the Politics of Ritual Repudiation," *History of Religions* 51.4 (2012) 344–63.

<sup>62</sup> Paula Frederiksen, "Historical Integrity, Interpretive Freedom: The Philosopher's Paul and the Problem of Anachronism," in *St. Paul Among the Philosophers*, by Linda Alcoff and John D. Caputo (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009) 72.

investigation of concerns and ideas that are irreducibly Badiou's."<sup>63</sup> Although Frederiksen's strong opposition between systematic and historical inquiries affirms the influence of larger philosophical projects on the Continental Paul, it fails to acknowledge both the role of hermeneutics in 'historical' interpretations and the influence of 'the true' Paul on the philosopher's portraits. Besides, both Badiou and Žižek explicitly distance themselves from exegetical and historical methods. Nonetheless, Van Kooten claims the philosopher's intuitions of the Apostle are generally accurate, being aware of the philosophical potential in Paul and his "reservation with regard to the present world."<sup>64</sup> Van Kooten sees the possibility of a fruitful dialogue between historical and contemporary contextualizations of Paul. Through such a dialogue "a few misapprehensions can be corrected"<sup>65</sup> in the philosopher's Paul. At the same time, the contextualization of Paul within the ancient philosophical world would assist contemporary philosophers in their search for "an alternative to the State without subverting it."<sup>66</sup>

The question remains to what extent Continental Philosophy misapprehend Paul, and what effect historical corrections would have on their project. Dale Martin shares Van Kooten's optimism about the accuracy of the philosopher's Paul, for Martin shown in Badiou's and Žižek's analysis of the presence of truth in combination with the impossibility of its formulation: *truth without content*. However, contemporary philosophy misapprehends Paul in three ways, failing to do justice to Paul's eschatological reservation (we cannot know now what we will know), his teleology of promise/hope instead of fulfilment/certainty, and his faithfulness to Israel that does not allow for a new Christianity but aims to graft new people without completely erasing their previous identity. These corrections lead Martin to a less revolutionary stance that exchanges universalism in favour of a

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<sup>63</sup> Fredriksen, 72.

<sup>64</sup> Van Kooten, "Paul's Stoic Onto-Theology and Ethics", 160. Van Kooten comments on Badiou, Agamben and Taubes.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 162.

subjective ethical stance that seeks to live in the context of our constraints.<sup>67</sup> Both Van Kooten's and Martin's corrections lead to a limitation of the Pauline truth procedure of Badiou and Žižek. Whereas Badiou and Žižek are drawn to Paul for his revolutionary potential to radically change the state of things, Van Kooten's non-subversive correction and Martin's constrained apostle restrict the usefulness of Paul for a revolutionary political project.

### **AS IF NOT: Žižek's corrective to Badiou's universalism**

Paul's  $\omega\varsigma\ \mu\eta$ -rhetoric as found in 1 Cor 7.29-31 has been given particular attention in the philosophical turn to Paul. Surprisingly, Badiou never commented on this passage, probably related to his reluctance towards dialectical philosophy and his reliance on oppositions for his eventual philosophy. By omitting  $\omega\varsigma\ \mu\eta$ , a dialectical phrase *par excellence* for other philosophers, Badiou's Paul fails to address the relevance of Law and State after the event of the resurrection. In Badiou's philosophy it remains unclear what happens after the establishment of a universal truth. The stress on fidelity towards the illegal Event could easily lead into a totalitarian ideology that is closed to new events or insights.

The evolving insight into  $\omega\varsigma\ \mu\eta$  by Continental Philosophy goes through Taubes and Agamben to Žižek, and provides a correction to Badiou's idealised philosophy, showing the particularity of every truth. Agamben and Taubes interpret  $\omega\varsigma\ \mu\eta$  from the perspective of messianism, indicating a reservation to the present time and the possibility of transformation. Van Kooten's correction to their alleged nihilistic interpretation of  $\omega\varsigma\ \mu\eta$  will be critically evaluated. The differences between Agamben's and Taubes' messianism nuance Van Kooten's correction, confirming its validity for Taubes but limiting its applicability to Agamben. In contrast to Taubes, Agamben combines the relativity of the current state of things with a prospect of a hopeful future that is full of potentiality. For Agamben  $\omega\varsigma\ \mu\eta$  shows the dialectic

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<sup>67</sup> Dale Martin, "The Promise of Teleology, the Constraints of Epistemology, and Universal Vision in Paul," in *St. Paul Among the Philosophers*, by Linda Alcoff and John D. Caputo (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

between the nullification of the vocations of the current state and their reactivation in the new situation. Žižek's ὡς μὴ evolves around Agamben's reading, further specifying its dialectic in reference to Lacanian psychoanalysis. Reading the two ὡς μὴ-references in *The Puppet and the Dwarf* as part of Žižek's complex argument, provides us with an evolved dialectical correction to Badiou's abstract universalism. Unravelling the complex dialectical relationship between Law and Love brings forth the provisional and particular nature of every assertion to truth.

*Messianic ὡς μὴ in Taubes and Agamben*

Both Taubes and Agamben interpret Paul's ὡς μὴ as a characteristic expression of his politics of messianism. One of the features of this messianism, to which both philosophers refer, is the Apostle's eschatological understanding of time. *The Time That Remains*, the title of Agamben's book on Paul, explicitly refers to this temporality of the present. In contrast to Taubes, Agamben also identifies the future of the messianic (*eschaton, parousia*), associating it optimistically with potentiality.<sup>68</sup> While Taubes displays a pervasive pessimistic and deconstructive attitude, Agamben's reservation towards the present time is combined with openness and hope for the undefined future.<sup>69</sup> The two philosophers share a reservation towards the present and find this expressed by Paul's ὡς μὴ. For Taubes, ὡς μὴ signifies Paul's political nihilism as result of the coming of the Messiah. Although Taubes' Paul discourages open revolt, the messianic politics of nihilism politically challenge both the domination of the Roman Empire (*nomos*) and the

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<sup>68</sup> Ezra Delahaye, "About Chronos and Kairos. On Agamben's Interpretation of Pauline Temporality through Heidegger," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 77.3 (2016) 85–101.

<sup>69</sup> Both the past and the future are used typologically by Agamben. Agamben's apostle is interested solely in the present, contrary to the prophet's interest in the future. The messianic temporality is situated in between the past resurrection and the future *parousia*.

restrictive Jewish self-definition (*ethnos*).<sup>70</sup> This silent form of revolution, enacted by an ethics of love, eventually subversively works "toward the destruction of the Roman Empire."<sup>71</sup> Whereas ὡς μὴ has an exemplary role for Taubes' negative political theology of nihilism, for Agamben it is a central tenet of Paul's messianic stance. Agamben describes ὡς μὴ as possibly Paul's "most rigorous definition of messianic life,"<sup>72</sup> involving a nullification and an undermining of the previous state of things (factual condition) in the form of a revocation. The messianic event caused every possible situation, be it a juridical status or worldly condition, to be transformed and changed towards the messianic life. All previous conditions are considered to be nothing (nullified) in the perspective of the resurrection, making it possible for everyone to be addressed and to live out the messianic (re)vocation.

Van Kooten commented on the interpretations of ὡς μὴ by Taubes and Agamben. After praising their sensitivity to the philosophical potential of Paul, Van Kooten corrects their 'nihilistic' portrayals by relating 1 Cor 7.29-31 to the Stoic concept of preferential ἀδιάφορα. Through this correspondence with Paul's philosophical context, Van Kooten concludes that Paul, in his reservation towards the present world, was not nihilistic "but reflects an awareness of the temporality of the world and the importance of an ethics that challenges one's attitude towards the ἀδιάφορα."<sup>73</sup> In aligning Agamben too closely to Taubes, Van Kooten is unaware of the semblance of his Paul with Agamben's reading of ὡς μὴ. Agamben's understanding of messianism is different from Taubes', involving the acknowledgment of the temporality of this world.<sup>74</sup> In addition to a reservation concerning the present, Agamben also shows optimism towards the potential of the world and explains this explicitly in relation to ὡς μὴ. After identifying the nullification of previous

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<sup>70</sup> Wolf-Daniel Hartwich, Aleida Assmann, and Jan Assman, "Afterword," in *The Political Theology of Paul*, by Jacob Taubes and Aleida Assmann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004) 117.

<sup>71</sup> Taubes and Assmann, *The Political Theology of Paul*, 72.

<sup>72</sup> Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 23.

<sup>73</sup> Kooten, "Paul's Stoic Onto-Theology and Ethics", 160.

<sup>74</sup> Delahaye, "About Chronos and Kairos."



situations, Agamben describes the enactment of the messianic κλησις through χρησις: "To live messianically means "to use" *klēsis*; conversely, messianic *klēsis* is something to use, not to possess."<sup>75</sup> Commenting on 1 Cor 7.30-31 Agamben further elaborates on the messianic difference between possessing and using:

"Paul contrasts messianic *usus* with *dominium*; thus, to remain in the calling in the form of the *as not* means to not ever make the calling an object of ownership, only of use. The *hōs mē* therefore does not only have a negative content; rather, for Paul, this is the only possible use of worldly situations. The messianic vocation is not a right, nor does it furnish an identity; rather, it is a generic potentiality [*potenza*] that can be used without ever being owned. To be messianic, to live in the Messiah, signifies the expropriation of each and every juridical-factual property under the form of the *as not*. This expropriation does not, however, found a new identity; the "new creature" is none other than the use and messianic vocation of the old."<sup>76</sup>

Agamben's nullification is therefore not a form of nihilism, but a method to make space for a new potential that is free of ownership. Van der Heiden aptly describes this process: "the old or given identities and vocations are not only fought against but by their deactivation they are also given back to the *subject for free use*."<sup>77</sup> The messianic in Agamben shows an indifference towards previous vocations, making no distinction to whatever factual situation was present. The stress on the use of these vocations in the new messianic situation brings Agamben's Paul close to

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<sup>75</sup> Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 26. Agamben uses 1 Cor 7.21 as example: use your *klēsis* as slave.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>77</sup> Heiden, "The Dialectics of Paul: On Exception, Grace, and Use in Badiou and Agamben," 181. See also: Gert Jan van der Heiden, "On What Remains: Paul's Proclamation of Contingency," in *Saint Paul and Philosophy: The Consonance of Ancient and Modern Thought* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017) 115–30. In Agamben's words: "The messianic event (...) is present *en tō nun kairō*, as the revocation of every worldly condition, released from itself to allow for its use." Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 43.

the Stoic concept of preferential ἀδιάφορα, or at least way closer in comparison to Taubes' messianic nihilism.

*Psychoanalytic ὡς μὴ in Žižek:*

In *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, ὡς μὴ appears two times as exemplary expression of Paul's attitude towards the Law. To understand Žižek's use of the phrase, these references need to be contextualised into Žižek's broader argument and in the tradition of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Recurring themes like the non-existence of a Big Other, the dialectical (and 'phallic') functioning of the Law and transgression, and the necessity of difference to make love possible are all part of Žižek's complex argument. Lacanian insights bring Žižek to further evolve Agamben's dialectic between Law and Love, radically associating the two with one another. The full realisation of the Law through Love results into Žižek's specific ὡς μὴ-attitude: that of suspension towards the psychic functioning of the Law, resulting in a continuously self-negating Law of Love.

Žižek's first reference to ὡς μὴ is part of his critique of orthodoxy as a method to structure our world. According to Žižek, orthodoxy it is a perverse strategy to counteract the nonexistence of a Big Other. Its perversity lies in the necessity of transgression for survival, both found in dogmatic Christianity (not Paul) and totalitarian ideologies. Both systems introduce an artificial Law to sustain a limited and contingent system of freedom and transgression. In Christianity, for example, the perversion philosophically lies in the requirement of the Fall for Salvation, likewise the 'heroic' betrayal of Judas is necessary for Jesus' sacrifice. Žižek interpretation of Paul's *as if* mode proposes a different scheme, in which the exception runs straight through the rule itself. Instead of seeing transgression and freedom as opposites, in Žižek's philosophy these terms are considered to be two symbolic sides of the same coin, displayed by Paul's paradoxical ὡς μὴ-rhetoric.

In his critique to orthodoxy, Žižek evolves G.K Chesterton's *Doctrine of Conditional Joy* by means of a Kantian correction. For

Chesterton the experience of joy requires a condition; only the existence of prohibition enables the subject to enjoy freedom and to live. In relationship to Christianity Chesterton claims that "Christianity is the only frame for pagan freedom," explained by Žižek as: "the frame of prohibitions—is the only frame within which we can enjoy pagan pleasures: the feeling of guilt is a fake enabling us to give ourselves over to pleasures."<sup>78</sup> This fakeness, being the result of the nonexistence of a Big Other, causes Žižek to further develop Chesterton's doctrine into a Doctrine of *Unconditional Joy*. After the Kantian revolution, Žižek claims, it is no longer possible to rely "on the pre-established Obstacle against which we can assert our freedom," because "our freedom is asserted as autonomous, every limitation/constraint is thoroughly self-positing."<sup>79</sup> Therefore, Žižek formulates a concept of freedom that does not require an objective framework. In 1 Cor 7.29-30<sup>80</sup> Žižek finds a formula for an unconditional, infinite and unmediated form of joy, described as "the Pauline suspension of our full commitment to earthly social obligations:"<sup>81</sup>

"In the "Doctrine of Conditional Joy," the Exception (be home by midnight, etc.) allows us fully to rejoice, while the Pauline *as if* mode deprives us of the ability fully to rejoice by displacing the external limit into an internal one: the limit is no longer the one between rejoicing in life and its exception (renunciation), it runs in the midst of rejoicing, that is, we have to rejoice *as if we are not rejoicing*."<sup>82</sup>

Žižek's first ὡς μὴ reference is part of his critique towards seemingly objective laws. Instead of seeing prohibition as transgression of the Law, the Law itself should be considered as the ultimate transgression,

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<sup>78</sup> Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 57.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>80</sup> Žižek doesn't include 1 Cor 7.31 into Paul's *as if* mode, nor the aspect of temporality.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 52.

because it "intervenes in the 'homogeneous' stability of our pleasure-oriented life as the shattering force of absolute destabilizing 'heterogeneity'."<sup>83</sup> Žižek's stress on joy, pleasure and enjoyment relates to the centrality of *jouissance* within Lacanian psychoanalysis; the enjoyment of the Real and not the semblance (in this case: the Law). For Lacan "the Real is not external to the Symbolic: the Real is the Symbolic itself in the modality of non-All, lacking an external Limit/Exception."<sup>84</sup> Žižek's finds this interrelation between the Real and its semblance in a materialistic-Lacanian reading of Christianity. In this reading the gap that separates God from man is not to be overcome, but recognized as a characteristic of failure internal to God himself.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, there is a gap between the Truth and perspectives on the Truth, between the Real and its semblance.<sup>86</sup> Salvation, Truth and *jouissance* all lie in the recognition of the distance between the Real and its semblance. This distance results into an ethic of suspension towards the obligations of the semblance/Law.

Žižek's second reference to  $\omega\varsigma \mu\eta$  further specifies Paul's ethic of suspension by evaluating Agamben's reading of  $\omega\varsigma \mu\eta$  as instruction "to continue to participate in the world of social obligations through an attitude of suspension."<sup>87</sup> In his evaluation of Agamben, Žižek comes back to his previously used distinction between Buddhist disentanglement and Christian struggle. Both philosophers agree that the distance Paul takes from social obligations is not a matter of indifference, nor an act of disengaged observing, "but that of a thoroughly engaged fighter who ignores distinctions that are not relevant to the struggle."<sup>88</sup> However, Žižek parts with Agamben in regard to the meaning of the suspension of the Law, and the relationship between Law and love. For Agamben, the Law is suspended in a 'state of exception' through sublation (Hegel's *Aufhebung*); the Law itself is retained through suspension to create space

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 112.

for the new and higher dimension of love. Žižek separates "the standard Bakhtinian carnivalesque 'state of exception', when everyday moral norms and hierarchies are suspended and one is encouraged to indulge in transgressions,"<sup>89</sup> from "the Jewish-Pauline 'state of emergency', the suspension of the 'normal' immersion in life."<sup>90</sup> Žižek's Paul stays within the law of his world, but is in a different, suspended way emerged into this law. In his interpretation of ὥς μὴ as suspension, Žižek relies on psychoanalytic insights into the functioning of a law and the importance of Pauline state obedience as found in the letter to the Romans.

"What the Pauline emergency suspends is not so much the explicit Law regulating our daily life, but, precisely, its obscene unwritten underside: when, in his series of *as if* prescriptions, Paul basically says: "obey the laws as if you are not obeying them," this means precisely that *we should suspend the obscene libidinal investment in the Law, the investment on account of which the Law generates/solicits its own transgression.*"<sup>91</sup>

Apart from the suspension of the unwritten side of the Law in a state of emergency, Žižek criticizes Agamben in regard to the relationship between Law and love. According to Žižek, Pauline love is not a supplementing dimension beyond the Law, but the full realization of the Law. Instead of the dialectic between the Law and transgression that involves a tension between the All and the exception (according to Lacan this is a masculine and phallic logic), love follows the feminine logic of paradoxes of the non-All. In this logic imperfection with its vulnerability serves as a requirement for love.<sup>92</sup> Christianity ideologically values imperfection by revealing the impotence of God, exposing this Jewish secret by communicating Christ's explicit separation from God the Father

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 114-117. Žižek refers to 1 Cor. 13 to argue for this imperfect character of love: 'If I have all knowledge and all faith, but do not love, I am nothing.'

on the cross. By his ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ God himself announced the death of the Big Other. Through the suspension of Otherness the Holy Spirit emerges, “which is not Other, but the community (or, rather, collective) of believers.”<sup>93</sup> Eventually, the neighbour becomes the other love is aimed at. For Žižek, Law and Love are dialectically interrelated. Love is not performed outside of the Law, but inside of it. In Žižek’s reading of Christianity, it is the psychic attitude towards the Law that changes. The recognition of the imperfection of the Law gives the subject the freedom to love.

Žižek’s ὡς μὴ can only be understood as part of his larger philosophical project to reintroduce truth and ideology into society without an objective basis. His entire book can be read as an evolution to both Badiou’s and Agamben’s accounts on Paul. Through ὡς μὴ, Žižek comes back to his insistence on the perspectival distortion of every truth, resulting into a distance towards every law. By placing imperfection into the core of his (death of God-) theology, Žižek reminds Badiou that the outcome of every truth procedure can only be provisional. There is a need for constant revolution, since the state of things is never entirely true. This revolution is first of all one situated into the psyche of the subject itself. It is not the Law itself that needs to be suspended, but the obscene and totalitarian clinging to the Law. Instead, the subject should aim to appreciate the imperfections of the Law and be motivated to love his neighbour inside of this situation. Although Badiou’s and Žižek’s books on Paul are part of similar political projects, their philosophical and methodological differences allow for a Žižekian correction to Badiou’s universalism. The difference between Badiou’s antithetical approach with strong opposition-pairs and Žižek’s dialectical philosophy is pivotal for their Pauline accounts. Whereas Law and Love are radically disconnected in Badiou, Žižek describes the interrelatedness of the two, resulting into a Law of Love. Instead of destroying the opposite side of Love, Žižek incorporates the supposed opposition into the new situation

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 138.

as the other side of the same coin.<sup>94</sup> Keeping an eye on Žižek while reading Badiou prevents us from falling into the trap of endorsing a totalitarian universalism that becomes an all-determining law in itself, enabling us to avoid perverse dogmatism of any sort.

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<sup>94</sup> Badiou's opposition to the Law is connected to opposing the figure of 'the Jew'. Badiou has repeatedly been accused of antisemitism for his use of 'the Jew'. The implications of the philosophical 'turn to Paul' for the topic of antisemitism exceed the scope of this chapter. Žižek's dialectical approach allows him to appreciate the role of 'the Jew' in Pauline Christianity. For example, Žižek relates the specific Christian mode of 'unplugging' from the social domain to the introduction of divine justice by the Jewish Law as a dimension that functions heterogeneous to the social law. *Ibid.*, 118-119.

## Chapter 3

### PAUL: OUR ECOLOGIST? 1 COR 7.29-31 IN EXETER'S ECOTHEOLOGICAL READING OF SAINT PAUL

The ecological challenges our world is facing provide a remarkable case for the often contested role of religion within politics. Alongside the rise of environmental politics through e.g. the establishment of green parties and several UN Earth Summits since 1972,<sup>1</sup> the growing awareness into the ecological status of our world resulted into the growth of ecotheology.<sup>2</sup> In 2015, Pope Francis widely communicated the importance of the topic to the Catholic world through his second encyclical.<sup>3</sup> In *Laudato Si* the Pope includes an “uncompromising call for political renewal rooted in a Christian theological account of creaturely relations.”<sup>4</sup> Through an integral ecology he urges to acknowledge the connectedness of all (created) things, thereby combining issues of nature with social/human justice. Although the Pope primarily addressed the Catholic community, he explicitly encourages to “enter into dialogue with all people about our common home.”<sup>5</sup> In his address, the Pope shows the great potential of ecological challenges for a dialogue between religion and politics.

David G. Horrell and his colleagues at the University of Exeter contributed to the study of ecotheology by analysing the often implicit hermeneutics in the field, and constructing an explicit methodology

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<sup>1</sup> The Paris Climate Agreement resulted from these summits. The Paris Agreement developed from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), a treaty signed during the second Rio Earth Summit in 1992.

<sup>2</sup> There is a vast amount of literature on ecotheology. An extensive indexed bibliography can be found in: Ernst M. Conradie, *Christianity and Ecological Theology: resources for further research* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2006) 195-366. See also this journal: *Ecotheology: Journal of Religion, Nature & the Environment* (1997-2006), changed into: *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature & Culture* (2007-2017).

<sup>3</sup> Francis, “Laudato Si”, *The Holy See*, 24 May 2015, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html).

<sup>4</sup> Anna Rowlands, “Laudato si: Rethinking Politics”, *Political Theology* 16.5 (2015) 420.

<sup>5</sup> Francis, “Laudato Si”.



containing a hermeneutical lens. Strongly building on ecotheology's favorite texts, Rom 8.19-23 and Col 1.15-20, Exeter's project leaves the appropriate *use of this world* as found in 1 Cor 7 out of consideration. This chapter aims to include 1 Cor 7.29-31 into Horrell's ecological Paul, further shaping Exeter's hermeneutical lens as means to address our ecological questions. This shaping involves both a critical engagement with the hermeneutical lens as interpretative strategy and with the content of this lens in light of 1 Cor 7. Paul's suggested *use of this world* will generally prove to be compatible with Exeter's Paul. Nonetheless, it nuances the human position in the change of the world and adds the ethical possibility for sustainable use of natural resources.

### **EXETER'S GREENING PAUL IN ECOTHEOLOGY**

Preliminary to bringing Horrell's hermeneutical lens into the focus of 1 Cor 7, this paragraph assesses Exeter's green reading of Paul as part of ecotheology and as method for interpretation. Although theological reflection on the natural environment is as old as the Bible itself, the publication of Lynn White Jr's *The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis* will be taken as starting point for modern ecotheology,<sup>6</sup> because of the challenge White posed to biblical scholarship and the prevalence of his article in ecotheological literature.<sup>7</sup> Together with his colleagues in Exeter, Horrell categorized theology's responses to White into ecological readings of re(dis)covery and resistance, and critically combines these readings into an explicit creative and imaginative hermeneutic.

#### *Ecotheology as response to Lynn White Jr.*

The medieval historian Lynn White Jr. provoked biblical scholars and theologians to rethink the role of nature within the Bible and Christianity.

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<sup>6</sup> Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis", *Science* 155 (1967) 1203-1207.

<sup>7</sup> Publications about earlier forms of ecotheology are e.g.: Panu Pihkala, *Joseph Sittler and Early Ecotheology* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2017); Ernst M. Conradie, *Creation and Salvation: Dialogue on Abraham Kuyper's Legacy for Contemporary Ecotheology* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2011). A sociological description of the emergence of ecotheology can be found in: Anne Marie Dalton & Henry C. Simmons, *Ecotheology and the Practice of Hope* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010).

According to White, (Western) Christianity's axioms about the world are the historical root of our ecological crisis. Christianity's destructive understanding of creation involves a separation of humanity from other aspects of the world and an ethic of transcendent ecological mastery. White wrote: "Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions (except, perhaps, Zoroastrianism), not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends. (...) By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects."<sup>8</sup> In the 13th century of the Latin West natural theology changed from contemplating nature as a revelation of God to understanding the way the world functionally operates. This tradition resulted not only into technological progress, but also in a neglect of the wellbeing of nature-that-is-not-human. This development made Christianity "the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen."<sup>9</sup> In the same 13th century Francis of Assisi showed a different attitude, which White proposes as possible solution to our crisis. Instead of with domination, Francis of Assisi approached nature with a spirit of humility. "Francis tried to depose man from his monarchy over creation and set up a democracy of all God's creatures."<sup>10</sup> Because our dealings with nature are strongly dependent on our religious "ideas of the man-nature relationship, more science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one."<sup>11</sup>

White's challenge to theologically reconceptualise nature/ecology was accepted by a large number of scholars.<sup>12</sup> David Horrell hermeneutically

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<sup>8</sup> White, "Historical Roots", 1205.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 1206.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Elspeth Whitney, "Lynn White Jr.'s 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis' After 50 Years", *History Compass* 13/8 (2015) 396–410; Whitney Bauman, "Ecology and Contemporary Christian Theology", *Religion Compass* 5.8 (2011) 376–388. Bauman shows how different American histories (civil rights movement, Native American theology and Ecofeminist literature) contain different understandings of the world and therefore lead to different ecotheologies.

categorized these responses into readings of re(dis)covery and resistance,<sup>13</sup> exemplified by respectively Richard Bauckham<sup>14</sup> and the Earth Bible project.<sup>15</sup> According to Horrell, “many of these [responses, *TvG*] have essentially been defensive, arguing, against White and others, that the biblical texts do not mandate any divinely given right for humans to exploit the earth for their benefit.”<sup>16</sup> The readings of re(dis)covery argue that it's not the biblical text, but its interpretation that communicates an environmentally unfriendly message. According to this apologetic approach “the problems and distortions arise through the acts of later interpreters, who obscure and distort the positive meaning of the original.”<sup>17</sup> In re(dis)covery-readings stewardship is a recurring theme, e.g. used as ecologically positive interpretation of Gen 1.26-28. Individual texts are put into the perspective of the whole Bible, correcting Genesis' supposed domination by referring to the story of Job (against human hubris) and the community of creation in the Psalms (both humanity and other creatures praising God). Focussing on various texts from the New Testament, Bauckham proposes to read Gen 1 from the perspective of a (christological) eco-narrative that is found throughout the Bible.<sup>18</sup>

Horrell's classification of readings of resistance consists both of readings that resist the ecological concern from the perspective of the Bible, and readings that resist (parts of) the Bible from the perspective of ecology.

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<sup>13</sup> David G. Horrell, Cherryl Hunt and Christopher Southgate, “Appeals to the Bible in Ecotheology and Environmental Ethics: A Typology of Hermeneutical stances”, *Studies in Christian Ethics* 21.2 (2008) 219–238. Horrell borrows this framework from Francis Watson, “Strategies of Recovery and Resistance: Hermeneutical Reflections on Genesis 1–3 and its Pauline Reception”, *JSNT* 45 (1992) 79–103.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010); Richard Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures: Green Exegesis and Theology* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011); Richard Bauckham, *God and the Crisis of Freedom: Biblical and Contemporary perspectives* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> Norman C. Habel (ed.), *The Earth Bible. Vol. 1: Readings from the Perspective of the Earth* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2000). The Earth Bible contains five volumes published between 2000 and 2002. For more info, see:

[http://www.flinders.edu.au/ehl/theology/ctsc/projects/earthbible/earthbible\\_home.cfm](http://www.flinders.edu.au/ehl/theology/ctsc/projects/earthbible/earthbible_home.cfm)

<sup>16</sup> David G. Horrell, “Ecological challenges to biblical studies”, *Theology* 112.867 (2009) 164.

<sup>17</sup> Horrell, “Bible in Ecology”, 221.

<sup>18</sup> David G. Horrell, “Ecological Hermeneutics: Reflections on Methods and Prospects for the Future”, *Colloquium* 46.2 (2014) 142–145. Another example of a re(discovery) reading can be found in the Green Bible, which Horrell critically reviewed in: David G. Horrell, “*The Green Bible: A Timely Idea Deeply Flawed*”, *The Expository Times* 121.4 (2010) 180–186.

The first type contains arguments from (often evangelical) Christians pointing towards the objectionable nature of ecological action in light of the soon coming end of times, or qualifying the ecological narrative as part of New Age-ideology threatening the Christian worldview.<sup>19</sup> Other readings offer resistance to the Bible in favour of an ecological agenda, and thereby a view on the authority of biblical texts different from both recovery-readings and bible-centric readings of resistance. Similar to feminist hermeneutics, these readings assume some texts are in themselves anthropocentric and violent towards nature. According to Norman Habel, “the Bible is an “inconvenient,” ambivalent, and sometimes damaging text that “has been used to justify our domination, devaluation and destruction of the planet.””<sup>20</sup> As a result the Earth Bible project identifies biblical texts as being either ‘green’ or ‘grey’, depending on the congruence of the text with six “ecojustice principles, developed in conversation with scientists and ecologists, and deliberately formulated in non-theological language, so as to facilitate dialogue across disciplines and traditions.”<sup>21</sup> Habel proposes a green reading of grey texts through a three-step hermeneutical process: through *suspicion* towards biblical texts and their history of interpretation (both might have been harmful towards nature) the reader *identifies* with the perspective of the Earth, resulting into the *retrieval* of the voice of the Earth.<sup>22</sup>

#### Exeter's ecological hermeneutic

The Exeter Project, called ‘Uses of the Bible in Environmental Ethics’,<sup>23</sup> developed an ecological reading of the Bible in between and in critical reflection of readings of re(dis)covery and resistance. Problematic in readings of re(dis)covery, and ‘evangelical’ readings of resistance,<sup>24</sup> is the

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<sup>19</sup> Horrel, *Greening Paul*, 25-30. A frequently cited text is 2 Peter 3.10-13.

<sup>20</sup> Horrell, “Ecological Hermeneutics”, 151. Horrell refers here to: Norman Habel, *An Inconvenient Text: Is a Green Reading of the Bible Possible?* (Adelaide: ATP, 2009) xvii.

<sup>21</sup> Horrell, “Ecological Hermeneutics”, 150.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 149-158.

<sup>23</sup> For an overview of the project, see:

<http://humanities.exeter.ac.uk/theology/research/projects/uses/>.

<sup>24</sup> Although the criticism towards evangelical “anti-ecological” readings has the same type, their readings are opposite in content. For readings of re(dis)covery the real message of the Bible is ecological, for ‘evangelical’ readings the real message is not-ecological. The following quotes are related to Horrell’s critique on readings of re(dis)covery.

elevation of the author's interpretation into the status of the 'real' meaning of the text in contrast to 'wrong' (older) readings. Horrell describes this as an "inadequate acknowledgement of the extent to which both older (non-ecological) interpretations, and contemporary ecological ones, are equally products of their cultural contexts and thus equally acts of constructive and creative interpretation."<sup>25</sup> Re(dis)covery readings thereby fail to take into account the openness of texts towards "a range of different, plausible readings."<sup>26</sup> A second, related critique is that re(dis)covery readings do not address difficult or contradicting texts appropriately, e.g. those with a strong eschatology, but silence these through harmonization into a (constructed) meta-narrative. As example Horrell names the introduction of the concept of stewardship (*oikonomia*), a concept foreign to the Old Testament, into humanity's role in Genesis 1-3.<sup>27</sup> The problem with the Earth Bible project is the dominance of ecojustice principles in interpretation; if a biblical text agrees with these principles, it is accepted, if it does not, it has to be corrected. The resulting classification of texts being either 'green' or 'grey' does not account for the ambivalence within texts themselves and the various ways in which they can be interpreted. The eco-principles are presented as universal concepts outside of any religious tradition, while the anthropomorphic retrieval of the voice of the Earth is definitely part of a specific and non-neutral discourse.<sup>28</sup> And finally, the choice to interpret from non-theological, general principles "fails to speak faithfully in the language of the Christian tradition."<sup>29</sup> According to Horrell, the strong commitment to *a priori* ecological principles in the Earth Bible project has the result "that the Bible is pretty much dispensable."<sup>30</sup>

The Exeter project aims to combine the strong points of the two types of ecological readings, while avoiding their pitfalls. In between re(dis)covery

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<sup>25</sup> Horrell, "Ecological Hermeneutics", 146.

<sup>26</sup> Horrell, "Bible in Ecology", 232.

<sup>27</sup> Horrell, *Greening Paul*, 33-36.

<sup>28</sup> Horrell, "Ecological Hermeneutics", 154-155. Horrell refers to Stanley Hauerwas: "supposedly neutral terminology" that "masquerades as neutral (...) imposes its own story about human identity and relationship to the earth." (Ibid.)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>30</sup> Horrell, *Greening Paul*, 38.

and resistance, Exeter aims to revise<sup>31</sup> and reformulate the Christian tradition in light of our current situation. It refrains from determining 'what the Bible really says', accepting the ambivalence both within the Bible as a whole and within individual biblical texts. This ambivalence provides the possibility for a range of different plausible readings and affirms the relevance of the interpreter's contribution to the proposed reading.<sup>32</sup> In *Greening Paul*, Horrell et al. attempt to formulate "an explicitly constructive, creative, and hermeneutically informed reading of Paul, a reading shaped by the particular context we inhabit and informed by the contemporary science so crucial to understanding issues of ecology."<sup>33</sup> Just as the ethical concerns and priorities of the post-holocaust perspective gave rise to Dunn's New Perspective on Paul, Horrell claims the recent concern for the environment "demands a(nother) new perspective on Paul."<sup>34</sup> The Exeter approach unites a strong commitment to ecological values and biblical authority, preventing to either read ecology into the Bible (as re(dis)covery-readings do) or the Bible into an ecological narrative (like resistance readings). It involves "a conceptualisation of the process of engagement with the Bible in which ecological principles can both emerge from, and also act as a critical lens for, our reading."<sup>35</sup> For this purpose Exeter uses a two-fold methodology. It combines the use of a hermeneutical lens with a narrative analysis to reformulate an ecological version of (Pauline) theology.<sup>36</sup>

Horrell et al. derive their hermeneutical lens from Ernst Conradie's *doctrinal or heuristic key*. Conradie criticized the Earth Bible project by describing its principles as doctrinal keys, externally emerging motifs that "unlock the meaning of the contemporary context and the biblical texts and

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<sup>31</sup> Horrell borrows this term from: Paul Santmire, *Nature Reborn: The Ecological and Cosmic Promise of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000) 7-8.

<sup>32</sup> Horrell calls this an unavoidable 'distortion': "biblical interpretation is inevitably a constructive process." Horrell, *Greening Paul*, 46.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>34</sup> David G. Horrell, A New Perspective on Paul? Rereading Paul in a Time of Ecological Crisis, *JSNT* 33.1 (2010) 25.

<sup>35</sup> Horrell, "Ecological Hermeneutics", 156.

<sup>36</sup> In this chapter, the focus lies on the writings of Paul. Although Paul functions at the center of the Exeter project, it extrapolated an ecological ethic to the entire Bible in two books: David G. Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment: Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology* (London, Oakville: Equinox, 2010). David G. Horrell, Cheryl Hunt, Christopher Southgate and Francesca Stavropoulou (eds.), *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical, and Theological Perspectives* (London, New York: T&T Clark, 2010).

simultaneously enable the interpreter to establish a link between text and contemporary context.”<sup>37</sup> Because of the necessary distortion of both text and context through the creative act of interpreting, any key should be approached with critical suspicion.<sup>38</sup> To further stress the constructedness of motifs that stand between the text and its reader, the Exeter project evolved Conradie’s key into a hermeneutical lens. Creative and imaginative construction is especially necessary within ecotheology, because direct or explicit ecoethical responsibilities are not found in any biblical text.<sup>39</sup> Some features of the Bible pose challenges to ecological action. Horrell names the Bible’s theocentrism, anthropocentrism and eschatology. These three features can easily discourage an ecological ethic, strengthening the need for a constructed reading. A hermeneutical lens not only shapes and focusses our view on the biblical text and the way we are viewed, but can also be shaped itself. The possibility for the lens to change over time allows for critical and constructive use of (Christian) tradition. According to Horrell, “a kind of acknowledged circularity is necessarily intrinsic to a fruitful hermeneutic: *hermeneutical lenses are at one and the same time products of the tradition and the means for its critical rereading and reconfiguration.* Equally crucial, however, is the impact of the contemporary context in generating the particular priorities which shape the articulation of hermeneutical lenses.”<sup>40</sup> Apart from constructedness and engagement with tradition, the hermeneutical lens differs from Conradie’s key in originating ideally “from engagement with the biblical text itself,”<sup>41</sup> rather than from doctrine.

Exeter’s hermeneutical lens is based on what Horrell calls ecotheology’s favorite texts: Rom 8.19-23 and Col 1.15-20. Being mindful of our ecological priority, these texts affirm the goodness and intrinsic worth of all creation.<sup>42</sup> When κτίσις is regarded to also include non-human creation,

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<sup>37</sup> Ernst M. Conradie, “The Road Towards an Ecological Biblical and Theological Hermeneutics”, *Scriptura* 93 (2006) 306.

<sup>38</sup> Horrell, *Greening Paul*, 40-43.

<sup>39</sup> Cheryl Hunt, David G. Horrell and Christopher Southgate, “An Environmental Mantra? Ecological Interest in Romans 8:19-23 and a Modest Proposal for its Narrative Interpretation”, *Journal of Theological Studies* 59.2 (2008) 576. Horrell, *Greening Paul*, 123.

<sup>40</sup> Horrell, *Greening Paul*, 43.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

Rom 8.19-23 highlights the connectedness between humanity and the rest of creation, both being caught up in the same hopeful eschatological prospect that moves from groaning to liberation. From an ecological perspective, Col 1.15-20 gives the possibility for cosmic reconciliation to serve as a central ecotheological motif. In this process, τὰ πάντα given an ecological scope, all creation “is encompassed by Christ, incorporated in him, and, therefore, caught up in the reconciliation accomplished by his death.”<sup>43</sup> Ecologically challenging in both texts is their theocentrism: God/Christ is portrayed as the necessary actor in the redemption of creation. In this theocentrism there is no appeal to humans for acting in favor of creation’s redemption. Secondly, redemption in both Rom 8.19-23 and Col 1.15-20 is anthropocentric. Although non-human creation might be included in God’s redemption, the primary target in both texts is (the believing part of) humanity. A third challenge comes from the eschatological outlook of both texts. These challenges make Horrell stress the need for an imaginative and creative ecotheology, since “there is ... no easy means to “read off” any *particular* contemporary ethical responsibilities or policies from Romans 8.19-23, Colossians 1.15-20, or indeed any other biblical text.”<sup>44</sup>

In Horrell’s creative response the centrality of God and humanity in the cosmic redemption leads to an ethical responsibility for humans towards the whole of creation. Humanity is not the defining entity in redemption, but God. Neither is humanity redemption’s sole goal, this being the whole of creation.<sup>45</sup> Horrell translates the ethical implications of humanity’s central role in the redemption of creation into an ethic of other-regard, ethical kenosis and corporate solidarity, exemplified by respectful treatment of animals and moral concern for threatened animal species or human communities. In Horrell’s scheme, a Pauline eschatological outlook motivates Christians to already live out the new creation. Through what Horrell terms an “imaginative step”<sup>46</sup> ecotheology can stretch ethics concerning the

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 123-124. Horrell claims Paul’s soteriology contains an instrumental anthropocentrism, different from anthropomonism (only humans are part of redemption) and teleological anthropocentrism (humans having ultimate value in creation).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 169.



ἐκκλησία (ecclesiastic) to the human community (universal) and the whole of creation (ecologic).

As part of the theological (re)turn to narrative structures, Horrell's hermeneutical lens is complemented by a narrative analysis. This exegetical method "considers the implied narrative substructure(s) of key Pauline texts,"<sup>47</sup> classifies the texts into narrative categories and compares the texts' narratives with one another and with other narratives present in Paul's world. For the purpose of Pauline ecotheology the focus lies on Paul's narrative(s) about the κόσμος, and the way in which this story might have challenged other cosmologies. In Rom 8.19-23 and Col 1.15-20 Horrell finds a similar (partly implicit) story of beginning, problem and resolution concerning the whole of creation. Both affirm God as creator and imply a problem that demands a solution. However, the texts use "different images of creation's renewal or restoration: freedom and glory on the one hand, reconciliation and peace on the other," providing "different possibilities and different questions for shaping an ecological ethics."<sup>48</sup> The two cosmological narratives challenge dominant Graeco-Roman narratives in different ways: the story of struggle in Rom 8 rejects the optimistic "narrative of fruitfulness of creation under Caesar,"<sup>49</sup> Colossians' establishment of peace through Christological cosmic reconciliation counters both the Roman *Pax Romana* and Stoic cyclic narratives of the κόσμος.<sup>50</sup> Exeter's Pauline hermeneutic is summarized as follows: "Our hermeneutical lens is one that sets the focus on the whole of creation as central character in a narrative of beginning, problem, and glorious resolution in and through Christ, a narrative into which the Christian believers are caught up and in which they have a central place."<sup>51</sup>

Within ecotheology 1 Cor 7.29-31 undeservedly plays a marginal role at best. Instead, the discipline focuses "on a few favourite texts such as Genesis 1-2, the theme of the covenant (e.g. Genesis 6-9), the Sabbatical laws (e.g. Lev 25), Job 37-39, some of the Psalms (8,19,24,98,104), some prophetic

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. See also: Ibid., 83-85.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 112-115.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 131.

texts such as Isaiah 9-11,40f,65, Ezek 36, Joel, Amos, some of the sayings of Jesus (e.g. in Matt 6:28-30, 10:29-31), Romans 8:18-23, Colossians 1 and Revelation 21-22.”<sup>52</sup> In *Greening Paul*, 1 Cor 7.29-31’s ὡς μὴ-rhetoric is mentioned as expression of Paul’s pragmatic eschatological ethic. According to Horrell, who strongly reads the text in the perspective of Rom 8, 1 Cor 7.29-31 contains a “series of clauses calling for some kind of “detachment” from the world – comparable to similar phraseology in Stoic-Cynic writings – [that, *TvG*] can be read not as implying a lack of care *for* the world but rather as precisely an indication of the Christian’s freedom ... Paul challenges his readers to live as those who are free from the acquisitive desires and appetites of the world in its present form, shaped as they are by the new creation that is already taking shape yet is still to come.”<sup>53</sup> The following paragraph explores the ecological potential of 1 Cor 7.29-31 more fully, further sharpening Exeter’s hermeneutical lens by specifying Paul’s eschatological worldview and ethics.

### **1 COR 7.29-31 – PAUL’S LIMITED USE OF THE CURRENT WORLD-ORDER**

The strength of the first letter to the Corinthians lies in its translation of theology into concrete situations. Throughout the letter the question recurs how the inauguration of the new creation translates to the everyday life of the Corinthian ἐκκλησία. 1 Cor 7 explicitly deals with social roles and responsibilities in light of the ἔσχατον. The chapter translates an eschatologically informed worldview into behavioural prescriptions of people living in their world. In 7.29-31 Paul acknowledges the situatedness of the Corinthians and advises them to orientate their behaviour in the perspective of the transformation of the world. His plea ends in the climactic instruction to *use this world as if you are not using it up*. Through a historically informed reading, this sentence will prove to be fruitful as addition to Exeter’s ecotheological reading of Paul. As part of the larger Pauline corpus, 1 Cor 7.29-31 adds two similar eco-Pauline counter-narratives to Exeter’s list: counter-κόσμος and counter-στοιχεῖα. Read

<sup>52</sup> Ernst M. Conradie, “Towards an Ecological Biblical Hermeneutics: A Review Essay on the Earth Bible Project”, *Scriptura* 85 (2004) 126.

<sup>53</sup> Horrell, *Greening Paul*, 200-201.

together with 1 Cor 15.39-58, chapter 7 gives more clarity about the extent of Paul's eschatology and, thereby, his framework for eschatological ethics. Finally, Paul's advice to use this world in a limited way points to a human responsibility for the world and has the ecotheological potential to argue for using natural resources in a limited and sustainable way in order to prevent ecological disaster.

*Pauline counter-κόσμος-ideology*

In *Greening Paul*, Horrell identifies several Pauline counter-narratives towards the Graeco-Roman world that are relevant for ecotheology. Paul's ὡς μὴ-ethic in 1 Cor 7.29-31 is framed by an eschatological cosmology that agrees with this perspective and forms an addition to Horrell's list. Here Paul implicitly addresses the dominant Graeco-Roman κόσμος-ideology, providing a different view on the κόσμος in light of the resurrection. Following the resurrection of Christ, Paul considered time to be wrapped up and the form of the κόσμος to be passing away. This spatio-temporal frame forms the background of Paul's ὡς μὴ instructions. Particular in 1 Cor 7's eschatology is the indication of the form of this κόσμος passing away (παράγει τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου), implying both the finite outlook of the current κόσμος and the possibility of a different κόσμος-scheme. Chapter one of this thesis showed the relativity in both time and scope of Paul's conception of κόσμος standing in tension with Graeco-Roman κόσμος-ideology. As elaborately described by Edward Adams, the concept of κόσμος had developed in Late Antiquity into not only referring to social order, its original meaning, but also to an elaborate worldview.<sup>54</sup> The microcosmos of the city was conceptually transferred to the organisation of the macrocosmic universe. Graeco-Roman κόσμος-ideology emphasizes order and unity, and evaluated the world as positive and desirable. Larry Siedentop argues similarly, albeit more critical towards the Graeco-Roman world. According to him, Greek philosophers projected the aristocratic, hierarchical structure of society on the natural

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<sup>54</sup> Adams, *Constructing the World*, 42-81.

universe, legitimating social inequality as something natural.<sup>55</sup> Aristotle e.g. attributed different types of intelligence to each of the spheres of planets and stars orbiting the earth, reflecting the different levels of rationality present in society.<sup>56</sup> Instead of this idealised, natural κόσμος, throughout 1 Corinthians Paul negatively displays the κόσμος as temporary order standing in opposition to the purposes of God.

Reservation towards the κόσμος and the opposition between the κόσμος and God are found both in 1 Corinthians and Galatians. Whereas Paul's letter to the Romans generally values the κόσμος positively, e.g. as divine revelatory device, 1 Cor and Gal oppose the realm of the κόσμος to the divine purpose. Paul therefore uses κόσμος ambiguously, creatively adapting the term to strengthen his contextual argument. In Romans this argument involves a "world in (a measure of) solidarity with the wider society,"<sup>57</sup> while 1 Cor "rejects the ideal of integration into the social order."<sup>58</sup> In Galatians Paul's counter-κόσμος is combined with a counter-στοιχεῖα narrative. Similar to the κόσμος, the στοιχεῖα enjoyed a divine appreciation in Antiquity.<sup>59</sup> The στοιχεῖα were considered to be the building blocks of the κόσμος, a view represented in Paul by the phrase στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου (Gal 4.3,9). In Galatians the στοιχεῖα belong to a bygone, pre-resurrection age. Before Christ, the στοιχεῖα had dominated the people through a type of slavery. After the resurrection, however, the Galatians gained freedom because the κόσμος has died with Christ (6.14). As replacement of the κόσμος, the resurrection inaugurated a new creation (6.15). Paul's counter-στοιχεῖα narrative, indicating the relativity of the στοιχεῖα for the post-resurrection era, has many similarities with 1 Cor's counter-κόσμος. Galatians further clarifies that although the κόσμος and its στοιχεῖα transcend humanity, they are nonetheless temporal and relative in the perspective of Christ's resurrection.

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<sup>55</sup> Larry Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 2014) 33-47.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-43. According to Siedentop, the central position of the earth in Antique cosmologies is a reflection of the superiority the Greeks granted themselves and their rationality.

<sup>57</sup> Adams, *Constructing the World*, 220.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>59</sup> Kooten, *Cosmic Christology in Paul and the Pauline School*, 78.

The translation of κόσμος is pivotal for Pauline ecotheology. Translating κόσμος as nature, and considering Paul's cosmology to (only) be about nature, would e.g. bring ecological potential to Rom 1. At the same time, Galatians' and 1 Corinthians' counter-κόσμος language would become problematic. Siedentop highlights the strong Greek connection between κόσμος as societal organisation and κόσμος as nature, which is different from our modern culture's separation between nature and culture.<sup>60</sup> In addition Siedentop identifies Greek oppression of the individual through the hierarchical 'natural law' of the κόσμος. In Siedentop's account, Christianity's innovation lies in the disconnection of the divine with the κόσμος, giving space to the individual. Instead, Paul created "an inner link between the divine will and human agency."<sup>61</sup> This cancellation of the 'natural' κόσμος in favour of an anthropocentric soteriology could severely limit the ecotheological potential of not only 1 Cor 7.29-31, but of Pauline cosmology in general. Using Exeter's imaginative approach provides a possibility to constructively use Paul's criticism to κόσμος-ideology for an ecotheology. If the background of Paul's criticism was the aristocratic projection of social inequality on the κόσμος, a reversely argued cosmology can still be ecotheologically fruitful. In such a cosmology instructions for societal organization are derived from understanding nature, instead of the other way around. Understanding society as part of nature, bearing in mind the Pauline relativity of the current way this world is understood and articulated, gives the possibility for an integral ecology in which our understanding of nature could lead to political action to restructure society. In this creative sense κόσμος translated as (temporal) 'world-order' opens space for ecologically informed action.<sup>62</sup>

#### *Eschatology as temporality*

Horrell briefly refers to 1 Cor 7.29-31 as expression of Paul's eschatological ethics. The hopeful Pauline eschatology, read by Horrell through an

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<sup>60</sup> Siedentop, 41-42.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>62</sup> A related, and ecologically challenging, issue is the interpretation of Paul's opposition between heaven (οὐρανός) and earth (γῆ), e.g. in 1 Cor 15.39-58, where the divine is related to the heaven and not the earth.

ecothological lens, stimulates to take action in line with the future. According to him “in respect of the nonhuman creation an eschatological approach can hope to side with the purposes of God (...) also in working – to the best of our extremely limited ability – to help creation transcend the “futility” to which God subjected it in hope, hope for the glorious liberty of humans, and ultimately, of the whole creation.”<sup>63</sup> When 1 Cor 7.29-31 is closely read together with 1 Cor 15.39-58’s futility, Exeter’s interpretation is largely reaffirmed. Such a reading also clarifies Paul’s eschatology in relation to the current κόσμος, identifying ecotheological potential in aspects of the current world.

By itself, 1 Cor 7.29-31 gives some clarity about the κόσμος’ temporality: the current time is shortened (7.29) and its κόσμος is passing away (7.31). As argued in chapter one, 1 Cor 7’s eschatology can further be explained by looking at the rest of the letter, specifically at the role of φθορά in the passing κόσμος (15.39-58). Within a narrative of sinfulness (past) to resurrection (present) and the kingdom of God (future), φθορά indicates the temporality of some parts of the present, namely those that are not (yet) part of the godly future-to-come. Paul considers all flesh to be temporal/perishable (φθορά), while bodies can, through the resurrection, become glorious and imperishable (ἀφθαρσία). Other appearances of φθορά in the NT sketch a scheme of two word-fields: φθορά together with σὰρξ, men, earth(ly) and temporality, and ἀφθαρσία with πνεῦμα, God, heaven(ly) and eternity. In light of φθορά-ἀφθαρσία, Paul’s eschatology includes a change in which not everything passes. In line with the form of this κόσμος, 1 Cor 15’s temporality does not include all things. It is therefore not the κόσμος in its totality, but its form and some of its parts that are perishing. Informed by chapter 15, the change of the κόσμος is not all-destructive, but a transformation of the way-things-are. Paul’s understanding of the world in relation to its hopeful future includes an affirmation of the potential parts of the current situation. Creatively translated to Exeter’s ecotheology this implies that some parts of our world do not fit with its necessary

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<sup>63</sup> Horrell, *Greening Paul*, 202.

transformation and will perish, whereas others can become ecologically fruitful through transformation.

The hopeful expectation and the central role of God in Exeter's portrayal of Pauline eschatology are reaffirmed by 1 Cor 15's cosmological φθορά-ἀφθαρσία scheme. Through the resurrection the current state of the κόσμος is transformed into a new reality, in which Christ's kingship is coming alive. According to Paul, the passing of the κόσμος does not lead to a chaotic form of government, in which there is no order to structure life, nor to degradation of the quality of the world, but its transformation has a prosperous outlook in victory over death. As in other biblical texts, this transformation is enacted by God/Christ, with the Corinthian community given just the opportunity to participate. All three challenges Horrell identified for a Pauline ecotheology are coming together in 1 Cor 15.39-58: (1) it is eschatological, (2) theocentric and (3) anthropocentric. As response to the challenge of anthropocentrism, *Greening Paul* interprets 1 Cor 15.27-28's τὰ πάντα in the frame of the cosmic reconciliation found in Col 3.11, thereby creatively transforming the resurrection of the dead into resurrection of the κόσμος and its nature.<sup>64</sup> As a result, the believers can not only participate in the resurrection themselves (anthropocentric), but also include nature in its redemption (ecologic). Exeter's ecotheological reading thereby modifies Paul in two respects. Firstly, the scope of the resurrection is enlarged to include creation outside of humanity. Secondly, whereas 1 Cor 15 repeatedly notes God being the enactor of the resurrection (15.27,38,57), Horrell also gives humanity the agency to implement resurrection. In light of 1 Cor 15, it is problematic for a Pauline eco-ethic to aspire cosmic changing activity by humanity. 1 Cor 7.29-31's urge to responsibly use the world in a sustainable way requires less creativity.

#### *Proper use of the world*

Although God/Christ is the main actor in the cosmic transformation of 1 Cor, Paul instructs his audience not to wait or escape, but to live 'in the current world' with a specific eschatological attitude. Interpreting ὡς μὴ, several

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 161-162.

Continental philosophers convincingly argued that Paul's eschatology results into a reservation towards the obligations and denominators of the dominant discourse, encouraging a distance towards the κόσμος.<sup>65</sup> For Žižek this distance is not a matter of indifference, but a condition for an attitude of struggling love. Paul's ὡς μὴ-rhetoric climactically builds to a cosmologically informed ethic: the Corinthians way to deal with marriage, emotions and possessions is determined by the notion of the κόσμος' temporality. In general, the Corinthians are advised to use this κόσμος in a limited way, as if they are not using it up. Creatively adapted to our environmental concern, this ethic involves the challenge to prevent abuse of the world and encourages sustainable use of the world's resources.

Paul's use of χράομαι to prescribe the relationship of the Corinthians to the κόσμος invites us to read his eschatological ethic in combination with his description of slaves in 1 Cor 7.17-24. In this passage Paul combines two instructions: just like others, slaves ought to stay in their pre-Christian calling (7.17,20,24), and use their situation to their ability (7.21). It is therefore not the occupation or position in society that the Corinthians were to change, but their attitude in their world. The slave is a specific example of Paul's ethic, but also a general role for all believers. For Paul the Christian freedom is combined with a calling to be a slave of Christ (7.22). With the acknowledgement of this general Christian slavery and the understanding of κόσμος as 'world-order', it makes sense to extrapolate Paul's combination of remaining in and making use of the world to 1 Cor 7's κόσμος.

Modern insights into the effects on the world of (over)using natural resources, in regard to the natural environment but also concerning economic inequality and political conflict, provide a complex and relevant context for determining appropriate use of the world. Analogous with Horrell, an environmental-political application of Paul into this topic should be accompanied by the recognition that, although in line with Paul's cosmological reconciliation, such an endeavour goes "well beyond what Paul

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<sup>65</sup> Van Kooten, "Paul's Stoic Onto-Theology and Ethics", 159-162. Van Kooten comments on Badiou, Agamben and Taubes.



and his contemporaries might have envisaged.”<sup>66</sup> Also, Pauline ecotheological interpretation of appropriate use of the κόσμος is ambiguous, since it implies the dominant role of humanity towards the (natural) world that caused White Jr. to accuse Christianity of being the root of our ecological crisis. However, since 1 Cor’s anthropocentrism explicitly aims for constructive action within the world rather than exploitation for ego- or anthropocentric means, its ethics preserve their ecological potential.

Especially relevant for an ecotheological appropriation of Paul’s use of the κόσμος is the limit he articulates for such activity: *as if not using it up*. This ‘as if not’ should not be read as an act of hypocritical pretending, but as advice for preferred behaviour.<sup>67</sup> Paul acknowledges that the Corinthians use their world, just as they buy things and marry, but urges them to do so in a specific way. In light of the κόσμος’ temporality, the Corinthians should refrain from using the κόσμος in a destructive way. This reading is informed by parallels to χράομαι-καταχράομαι found in 1 Cor 9.15-18 and Plutarch.<sup>68</sup> These texts indicate Paul advises against undesirably over-using the κόσμος and against using the κόσμος in a way that would lead to its destruction. Instead of enforcing or stimulating the end of the current world, Paul instructs to use its possibilities for the sake of freedom (1 Cor 7.21,32). In 1 Cor the transformation of the world into the new creation is initiated and implemented by Christ, humanity’s involvement being restricted to the responsible use of the κόσμος’ opportunities. However, humanity possesses the agency to destructively overuse the κόσμος. Translated to ecotheology, 1 Cor’s anthropocentrism gives humanity a central role in preventing ecological disaster, rather than enacting the saving transformation. In the letter the importance of cosmology, as being the way the current world is ordered, is limited in the perspective of Christology, being the resurrection transforming the whole of creation. 1 Cor underlines the inability of humanity to change the world on a cosmic level, encouraging sustainable use of the already changing κόσμος through a changed attitude.

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<sup>66</sup> Horrell, *Greening Paul*, 125.

<sup>67</sup> Van Kooten, “Paul’s Stoic Onto-Theology and Ethics”, 153-159.

<sup>68</sup> Plutarch, *De defectu oraculorum* 430B.

Reading 1 Cor 7.29-31 in the perspective of Paul's Christological counter-cosmology and Graeco-Roman literature grants Exeter's eco-Paul a supportive, yet critical conversation partner. It affirms the provocative style Paul used to shake up his reader's culturally determined worldviews through counter-narratives, and adds counter-κόσμος and counter-στοιχεῖα to Exeter's list. It also acknowledges the challenges Paul brings for the construction of an ecotheology, namely that of anthropocentrism, theocentrism and eschatology. Conceptually analysing the Greek κόσμος adds a fourth challenge, resulting from the connectedness between nature and culture in Antiquity. This cosmological challenge problematizes using Graeco-Roman cosmology for modern day ecology, since the former stresses societal order, projected on the physical universe, whereas the second takes nature as starting point for ethical reflection. *Greening Paul* does not recognize this challenge by approaching cosmology from a Judeo-Christian, rather than Graeco-Roman, perspective.<sup>69</sup> Recognizing Paul's critique towards the Graeco-Roman κόσμος and his argument to nuance the importance of the κόσμος for the sake of an all-encompassing reality (the resurrection) provides a promising starting point for imagining a Pauline ecology. Bringing 1 Cor 7.29-31 to the ecological conversation also credits parts of the world with ecological potential, through the need for only a partial passing of the κόσμος. And finally, Paul's instruction to use the possibilities of the already passing world in a sustainable way limits human aspirations to cosmically change the world, but encourages them not to use their power for its destruction.

#### **CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS: HERMEUTICAL LIMITS TO USING PAUL**

Exeter's often repeated need for imagination and creativity to construct a Pauline ecotheology provokes questioning the hermeneutical limits of the Apostle. If Paul's worldview is eschatological, anthropocentric, theocentric and cosmologic, is the amount of translation needed for an ecological Paul still justified? Jacob Taubes, for example, argues Paul's interest in nature is

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<sup>69</sup> "Every cosmology can be understood in chronological terms as a narrative of the unfolding of the creation from the distant past, through the present, and into the future." Horrell, *Greening Paul*, 54.

purely and only eschatological, explicitly not ecological: "You notice that Paul has very peculiar worries about nature. Of course they're not ecological worries. He's never seen a tree in his life. He travelled through the world just like Kafka- never described a tree, or mentioned one."<sup>70</sup> However, the same critique can be used against Taubes' argument to show the relevance of political messianism to modern-day people, especially Jews. Analogously put: "Paul has very peculiar worries about Jews and politics. Of course they're not our modern day worries." The question to the hermeneutical limits of Paul serves as an incentive to summarize this thesis. Both Exeter's eco-Paul and the political Paul of Continental Philosophy introduce Paul to our modern-day situation, and both distance themselves from objectivism and the 'historical' Paul. The boldness of philosophy's Paul shows the potential for a strong political appropriation of the Apostle, that can enlarge the limited audience and impact of Exeter's ecological Paul. *Greening Paul* on the other hand provides the political turn to Paul with a concrete opportunity for political action.

Continental Philosophy explicitly reactivates Paul subjectively, distant from standard theological interpretation. For Badiou truth as fidelity to an event, in Paul 'the resurrection', is entirely subjective. Žižek adds the recognition of a pre-evental subjectivity: the identification of an event as such is already dogmatic and subjective. Therefore, subjectivity is foundational for the entire truth operation. Historians like Frederiksen oppose these subjective systemizing "self-portraits" to the messy historical objectivity. However, as chapter 2 argued, it does more justice to both the Apostle and the interpreter to enter into a fruitful dialogue to discuss the philosophical and political potential of Paul. In such a dialogue, the philosopher's understanding of Paul's philosophical intuitions is acknowledged and some misapprehensions are historically corrected.<sup>71</sup> The other way around, Continental Philosophy stimulates historical research by recognizing the relevance and importance of Paul today.

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<sup>70</sup> Taubes, *Political Theology of Paul*, 73.

<sup>71</sup> Van Kooten, "Paul's Stoic Onto-Theology and Ethics", 159-162. Dale Martin, "The Promise of Teleology, the Constraints of Epistemology, and Universal Vision in Paul."

After informing about their subjective, non-exegetical methodology, both Žižek and Badiou boldly introduce Paul to our political situation as a radical contemporary, without further nuancing the validity of such a presentation. This political boldness can inspire Exeter's eco-Paul to be more audacious and politically daring. The philosopher's Paul shows that recognizing imagination and subjectivity in interpretation does not necessarily lead to careful proposals, but can result into a political manifest as well. The advantage of Exeter's ecological approach to Paul is the possibility for concrete political action. While Continental Philosophy struggles to articulate an ontological alternative to capitalism, and limits its political potential by the use of abstract philosophical terminology, the topic of ecology provides ample opportunity for translation into concrete policy. Such an endeavour corresponds to Heidegger's pursuit to engage philosophy with the concrete (factual) human condition through phenomenology, different from the abstract and conceptual observations Continental Philosophy tends to fall back to, at least in reference to Paul.

Whereas Horrell repeatedly stresses the constructedness of Exeter's ecological Paul, the combination of historically contextualising Paul in his politico-philosophical environment and the rediscovery of the politico-philosophical Paul by Continental Philosophy point towards the political and philosophical potential of the Apostle himself. In both Antique and modern situations Paul has proven to be a valuable source to rethink the present (political) κόσμος, providing counter-narratives to the surrounding world. Therefore, the hermeneutical prudence of Exeter's eco-Paul is unnecessarily over-cautious, failing to credit the original Paul for his own politico-philosophical value. Rather than reconstructing the Apostle, such an insight motivates to reactivate the value of Paul for our own world.

The audience Exeter's eco-Paul aims at limits itself to theologians and Christians. Different from the Earth Bible project, *Greening Paul* decides to use Christian theological language for constructing an ecological Paul, in order to be faithful and meaningful to the Christian tradition and its community. Rather than an ecology, Horrell et al. articulate an ecotheology as basis for eco-ethics. This Christian scope reappears in the conclusion of

*Greening Paul*: “we hope to have shown how Paul can help to inform and to shape the theological and ethical framework within which Christians can develop their contributions to such [ecological, *TvG*] questions.”<sup>72</sup> By this ‘traditional’ approach, Exeter’s eco-Paul unnecessarily reduces Paul’s eco-political potential. The philosophical interpretations of Paul show the possible relevance of the Apostle for an explicit non-Christian audience. Their accounts enable Paul’s letters to not only motivate Christian minds for ecological action, but directly urge for political embodiment on the basis of ecological understanding of our world. As such, the philosopher’s Paul can engage in a fruitful dialogue with Exeter’s Paul. Philosophers like Badiou and Žižek stimulate Horrell to move past a limited Christian and theological eco-Paul, advancing to a general audience with a political call. *Greening Paul* on the other hand puts a topic on the table that contains the possibility for an abstract philosophical program to be translated into concrete politics.

Comparison of Exeter’s project with the reactivation of Paul by Continental Philosophy provokes the option for an audacious politico-ecological Paul. With a similar portion of hermeneutical imagination, such a project would not only creatively make Paul into an ecologist, but a daring politician as well. Including 1 Cor 7.29-31 in such a project would limit humanity’s aspirations of changing the world, but at the same time empower people to use the world’s resources in a sustainable way, preventing to hasten the coming of the passing of this world-order. The challenge in this remains to use Paul, as if not using him up.

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<sup>72</sup> Horrell, *Greening Paul*, 220.

## Summary

### **FROM COSMOLOGY TO ECOLOGY: POLITICAL POTENTIAL OF 1 COR 7.29-31 FOR OUR THREATENED WORLD**

The eschatological ethic of 1 Cor 7.29-31, in which Paul deals with his threatened and changing world, has the potential to be politically reactivated in our ecological discourse. Paul's creative use and critique of his politico-philosophical environment, combined with the rediscovery of the Apostle by Continental Philosophy, shows the relevance of his thought for rethinking the world. In Paul's Graeco-Roman context κόσμος included an all-encompassing worldview. Originally an indication for order, the term came to designate society and the universe. Through this development the societal hierarchy was projected on the macrocosmos and legitimized as natural. Paul's critique to the dominant Graeco-Roman κόσμος-ideology, nuancing the κόσμος in the perspective of Christ's resurrection, can inspire an ecologically informed ethic in which the natural status of the universe prescribes our behaviour. In the destabilized world, Paul instructs to use the possibilities of the current world-order while remaining in it. Although the structure of the world is temporal, humans should prevent to destroy the world themselves by using the world in a limited way. Translated into an ecological program, the Apostle prevents the ambition of saving the world and inspires to use the world's resources in a responsible and sustainable way. Continental Philosophy shows the ability of Paul to speak outside of church and university. Keeping the subjective reactivation of Badiou and Žižek in mind, Paul can not only be a Christian ecologist, but an audacious politician as well. In this way, Paul's cosmology has the potential to be translated into a modern-day ecology.

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