

ΚΟΣΜΟΣ From Homer to St. John

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It is practically impossible to trace κόσμος to its primary root with any degree of certainty. Therefore we shall forego any recitation of the different opinions expressed by various etymologists, interesting as they may be. Indeed, our time limit places "Do not enter" signs at several attractive scholastic bypaths.

Although there is marked disagreement as to the essential root form there is general agreement as to the essential root meaning, or meanings, of κόσμος. It is derived from an unknown Indo-Germanic root meaning "to arrange, to adjudge as orderly," "to make attractive, ornamental." In fact, so closely allied are the ideas of "order" and "ornament" that scholars are divided as to which came first. Among those who have put "order" as the original signification are Liddell and Scott, Stephano, Thayer, Valpy and Boisacq. But precedence is ascribed to "ornamentation" by Curtius, Cremer, French, Humbolt and others.

It is quite possible that the two meanings originated, as they were developed, simultaneously. Perhaps they were so closely akin as to be identical to the philosophical, beauty-loving Greek mind. As to Keats: Truth is beauty, beauty truth; so to the ancient Greek: Order is beauty, beauty order. Both meanings are found in Homer and his classical successors, as we shall see.

"ORDER"

We shall first consider the ancient usage of κόσμος in the sense of "order," partly because I consider this the basic meaning. Orderly arrangement produces beauty.

Homer uses the expression κατὰ κόσμος (*Iliad*, 10.472, al.) to mean "in order, duly" and οὐ κατὰ κόσμον (*Odyssey* 8.179; *Iliad* 2.214), "shamefully." In the *Odyssey* (13.77), we find κόσμῳ καθί-

ζειν, "to sit in order," while Herodotus (2.52) writes κόσμῳ θεῖναι τὰ πάντα, "to set all things in order." In one of Pindar's *Pythian Odes* (3.82) we find the phrase κόσμῳ φέρειν, "to bear becomingly." Demosthenes uses κόσμος in the sense of "good order, discipline" (18.216).

The verb κοσμέω was used in this sense. In the *Iliad* we read of an army πέντοχα κοσμηθέντες (12.87), "marshaled in five bodies," and in the *Odyssey* of hunters "arranged (κοσμηθέντες) in three groups" (9.157). The verb is used also in the sense of preserving order and of good behavior.

Archbishop Trench observes that the adjective κόσμιος "is a very favorite word with Plato, and is by him and others constantly applied to the citizen who is quiet in the land, who duly fulfills in his place and order the duties which are incumbent on him" (*Synonyms* XCII).

In the Tebtunis Papyri there are two petitions (45.20; 72:12) of 113 B. C. in each of which the author complains of some marauders who attacked his house and knocked down the door, ουδενὶ κόσμῳ κρησάμενοι.

The adjective κόσμιον, found frequently in the classics, occurs but once in the Septuagint. In Ecclesiastes 12:9 the preacher declares that he "set forth in order parables." ἐξιχνιάσεται κόσμιον παραβαλῶν. Outside the references to the "host" of creation, I find but one LXX example of the substantive κόσμος to mean "order." Ecclesiasticus 26:18 compliments "a good wife in the ordering of a man's house," ἐν κόσμῳ οἰκίας αὐτοῦ.

With tenacity κόσμος has held on to its earliest meanings through the centuries, even while the language was adopted and adapted by other races and new meanings were thrust on this old word.

“ORNAMENT”

As we have noticed, κόσμος was used in the most ancient records of the Greek language to mean “ornament” also. Quite naturally, the earliest and principal usage in this sense is with reference to women. But it is found also as applied to adornments for men, horses and even dogs.

Juvenal (6.476) tells us that there was among the Romans a class of male slaves called κοσμηταί, whose duty it was to dress and adorn the ladies. The Greek heroines were not only ornamented but ornamental. Theocritus describes the golden Helen, “as a tall cypress has shot up, an ornament (κόσμος) to a fertile field” (*Idylls* 18.31). In an Elephantine papyrus (1.4) of the fourth century B. C., which, according to Deissmann (*Light from the Ancient East*, p. 37), is the oldest example of Greek papyrus yet discovered, we find κόσμος used of a bride’s trousseau.

The LXX, particularly in the Apocryphal books, abounds in illustrations of κόσμος and its derivatives carrying the idea of ornament. Here it is used metaphorically, as in the classics, to mean “praise, beauty, glory.”

We gain a vivid impression of the versatility of this phase of this very versatile word when we compare κόσμος κυρίου, “worship of the Lord,” in Ecclesiasticus 50:19, with the smears array of “cosmetics” on milady’s modern dressing table.

“UNIVERSE”

It is generally agreed that “it was Pythagoras who first used the word to designate the order in the universe, and *the universe itself*” (Humboldt, *Cosmos*, I, p. 511).

The word κόσμος is found often in the writings of Plato, who uses the word in an ideal sense. “Philosophers tell us. . . . that communion and friendship and orderliness and temperance and justice bind together heaven and earth and gods and men, and that this universe is therefore called *Cosmos*, or order, not disorder or *misrule*” (*Gorgias* 508 a).

“WORLD”

The Greeks applied κόσμος to the limit-

less immensity of space, to particular spheres or ordered groups within τό πᾶν and then to individual stars and planets. So it is not surprising that the word came down to earth—from depicting the ordered universe to signifying this particular portion which sometimes seems so disorderly.

The word began to be applied to the earth about the time of the Ptolemies. We find examples in the Hibe Papyri (16.36) and other fragments. Sophocles, in his *Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods* (pp. 683ff), gives an impressive list of the derivatives and compounds of κόσμος current in the early Christian period and carrying definite reference to this world.

NEW TESTAMENT USAGE

When we examine the Synoptic Gospels it is surprising that Matthew alone uses κόσμος with any frequency, Mark and Luke employing it only once each. The Synoptists do not use the substantive in the primary sense of “order” but the verb is used in Matthew 25:7 of the virgins who “ἔκόσμησαν their lamps.”

Κόσμος in the Pythagorean sense of “universe,” never very common in the Κοινή, is correspondingly rare in the New Testament. But it “too regards the κόσμος as the ordered entirety of divine creation” (Cremer). Perhaps the most familiar example of this sense is in Acts 17:24. Paul, addressing the Athenians on the Areopagus, would introduce them to “God, who made τόν κόσμον καί πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ (the universe and everything in it).”

An interesting example of the word in the sense of “earth” is found in Matthew 5:13-14, where Jesus tells his apostles that they are the salt τῆς γῆς and the light τοῦ κόσμου.

The New Testament has given to the word κόσμος a new emphasis. It presents man as the object of God’s love and plans, and so attaches importance to this physical world only as his abode. So the inspired writers readily took up the use of κόσμος to indicate *mankind*, itself.

This distinctly personal emphasis, so common in the New Testament, cannot be more lucidly illustrated than in II Corin-

thians 5:19, where Paul declares that "God was in Christ κόσμον καταλλάσσων ἑαυτῷ." So definitely does this κόσμος consist of people that the Apostle continues: "not reckoning unto *them* (αὐτοῖς) their trespasses."

It is this Cosmos which "God so loved," as we are told so unforgettably in John 3:16. When we compare this statement, "God so loved τόν κόσμον," with the command, "Love not τόν κόσμον," we encounter a delightful apparent contradiction and are impressed with the fact that "this term has a peculiar elasticity of application," as Robert Law puts it.

This elasticity is well illustrated in John 1:10: ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἦν καὶ ὁ κόσμος δι' αὐτοῦ, ἐγένετο καὶ ὁ κόσμος αὐτὸν οὐκ ἔγνω. Here we have, I am convinced, three occurrences of the word in three different meanings: "He was in the world (on this earth) and the world (the entire universe) became through him and the world (the world of men) did not recognize him."

Here is suggested that *new meaning* which the New Testament writers, notably the Apostle John, gave to the word. They were the first to attach to it a distinctly *evil* significance, as far as I can learn. Humanity had already been thought of as generally wicked, but this word had not been used of it in that sense. Ropes lament that "the history of the ethical sense of the word has not been worked out" (Commentary on James 1:27). The writing of that history will reach its climax in John's Gospel and Epistles. Incidentally, John never uses κόσμος in its early sense of "order" or "ornamentation."

Other New Testament writers also clearly employed this ethical usage. James (1:27) declared that the religious man

keeps himself "unspotted from τοῦ κόσμου." Paul saw nothing essentially evil in the physical world, but there is a κόσμος from which he broke away most definitely, ἔμοι κόσμος ἑσταύρωται καὶ γὰρ κόσμῳ (Gal. 6:14). Meyer defines this κόσμος as "the organic totality of all relations aloof from Christianity, looked upon, indeed, as a living power which exercises authority and sway over the unconverted" (*Com. on N. T.*).

John's employment of κόσμος in the evil sense is so definite that George B. Stevens (*The Johannine Theology*) declares, "The whole Johannine doctrine of the world may be summed up in the emphatic assertion, 'The whole world lies in the evil one' (I John 5:19)."

Their Lord often warned the early Christians against that evil world and its *worldliness*. We are prone to overlook the fact that most of the examples of this evil sense of κόσμος in John's writings are quotations of the words of Jesus himself. His voice rose in sharp warning whenever he mentioned οὗτος ὁ κόσμος.

Because Jesus overcame "the world, the flesh and the devil" he promised such victory to his followers. In closing his famous address to them in the upper room, he said, "In the world you have affliction, but he of good cheer, I have overcome the world (ἐγὼ νενίκηκα τόν κόσμον)" (John 16:33). In his First Epistle John declares that he writes to the young men ὅτι νενικήκατε τόν πονηρόν.

The evil one lives in the world and the whole world lies in him. This is a dark picture. But Christ lives in his disciples and they live in him. To them victory is assured, ὅτι μείζων ἐστὶν ὁ ἐν ὑμῖν ἢ ὁ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ (I John 4:4f).