

THE TERM *ΚΟΣΜΟΣ* IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN: EXPLORING ITS IMPLICATION FOR THE ADVENTIST CHURCH IN AFRICA ENGAGING IN POLITICS

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Abstract

The Greek term *κοσμος* rendered “world” in the English Bible embraces a wide range of nuances that carry diverse responses affecting human experiences. More specifically, in the New Testament (NT), *κοσμος* conveys a wide semantic range that allows for various conceptions and interpretations that undergirds the relationship between the church and the world. These nuances include *κοσμος* as the physical world (Acts 17:24), *κοσμος* as the people of world (John 3:16), and *κοσμος* as the organized system (John 15:18).

The Gospel of John offers the highest number of occurrences of the term *κοσμος* in the NT. The theology of *κοσμος* shapes the views on Christians’ engagement in politics. Gleaning from the biblical evidence, antecedents of Christian’s participation and engagement in politics by other Christian denominations. Should the Adventist Christians engage in politics? With this question in the background, this paper addresses the theological framework of *κοσμος* in the Gospel of John and its implications in the Adventist Church’s involvement in politics. In essence, this paper suggests that the conceptions of the term *κοσμος* in the gospel of John provide a solid framework for the political engagement of the Adventist Church in Africa and elsewhere.

1. Introduction

The Greek term *κοσμος* rendered “the world” in the English Bible comprises a wide range of nuances that bears various responses in human experiences. In the NT, the semantic range of the term include the physical world (Acts 17:24), the human world (John 3:16), and the

organized system (John 15:18). These conceptions and interpretations impinge the relationship between the church and social and political activities.

Apparently, the term *κοσμος* makes its highest number of occurrence in the Gospel of John. More importantly, its theological formulations have shaped the involvement of the Church in local “politics.” With its dual representation in the Gospel of John as an object of God’s love and wrath (John 3:16; 12:31), the church has viewed the world as either inherently evil or good. Based on the former perception, the world remains under the rule of the devil and, therefore, “conservative” Christians should withdraw or reject active involvement in its public issues (politics).

Certainly, the dichotomized perspective of the world into public and private life or secular and sacred life appears narrow and simplistic. Within this framework, the church tends toward an exclusive position that constricts its engagement in public issues and focuses on the private matters of salvation. Moreover, such a conception appears reactionary and limits the effectiveness of the church in the world. In the light the broad understanding of the Greek term *κοσμος*, however, the church (particularly Seventh-day Adventist) can espouse a balanced attitude towards public issues.

Based on the fact that some evangelical Christians have made a positive impact in the political arena, an improved biblical foundation promises an added impetus to the Christian engagement in public issues. Thus, the guiding question of this paper is, How does the understanding of the term *κοσμος* impinge the Adventist engagement in socio-political issues. This paper presupposes that a clear understanding and interpretation of the term *κοσμος* in the Gospel of John provides a sound biblical framework to the involvement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in politics.

2. A Historical Perspective of Adventist Church and Politics

The Adventists perspective on politics can be traced to the incomplete understanding of the term *κοσμος*. Jonathan M. Butler attests that the involvement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the public issues of the government of the United States of America (USA) evolved through three phases: 1) “apolitical apocalyptic,” 2) “political apocalyptic,” and 3)

“a political apocalyptic.”¹ In the earlier years of the Millerite Movement, the apolitical apocalyptic view informed the relationship of the Adventist Church and the governance of USA. In this conception, the Adventist Church withdrew from any political engagement and concentrated on the preparation for the imminent return of Christ. At this time, the Adventist Church understood any engagement with the government of USA as an involvement in the second beast of Revelation 13. In this sense, such members were considered to have apostatized and became Babylon.²

The second view, political apocalyptic, sustained the Adventist conviction that the American Republic fulfilled the Bible prophecies concerning the second beast in Revelation 13. Based John N. Andrews’ interpretation of the chapter, Adventists perceived the participation in political engagement as a promotion of the ideologies of the second beast. In this sense, the Adventist members remained “good citizens and obeyed the government as long as its dictates did not conflict with duty to God.”³

During the political apocalyptic phase, the Adventist pioneers actively contended against slavery and the civil war in the American Republic. John Bates facilitated the establishment of an abolitionist society in his hometown.⁴ Ellen White wrote extensively against the slave trade and the war.⁵ The participation of the Adventist Church, however, was not an advocacy for change but rather a warning of the fulfilled prophecies of Revelation.⁶ At that time, Uriah Smith made a statement that formed the initial principle which eventually controlled the attitude of the Seventh-day Adventist church toward politics:

To the question why we do not with our votes and influence labor against the tendency of the times, we reply, that our views of prophecy lead us to the conclusion that things will not be bettered. The country, if we are correct in believing it to be symbolized by the two horned beast of Rev. xiii, will finally sustain such an abominable character that it will be landed in the lake of fire, Rev. xix 20. The two-horned beast will speak like a dragon. Rev xiii, 11. We do not therefore feel it incumbent upon us to labor, in this respect either to hasten or retard

¹Roger L. Dudley and Edwin I. Hernandez, *Citizens of the Two Worlds Religion and Politics Among American Seventh-Day Adventists* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1992), 59.

²Ibid., 61; John N. Andrew, “Thoughts on Revelation XIII and XIV,” *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 19, May, 1851, 81-86.

³Ibid., 62.

⁴Dudley and Hernandez, *Citizens of the Two Worlds*, 63

⁵Ellen White referred to “slavery as the sin of the darkest dye” and the war as considered the national days of prayer and fasting for victory as hypocritical; Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 1:359.

⁶Dudley and Hernandez, *Citizens of Two Worlds*, 61.

the fulfillment of prophecy. God's purpose will surely be accomplished.⁷

Furthermore, Ellen White made a foundational statement that has also been a definitive principle in the later days. She asserts,

It is a mistake for you to link your interest with any political party, to cast your vote with them or for them. Those who stand as educators, as ministers, and as laborers together with God in any line have no battles to fight in the political world. Their citizenship is in heaven. The Lord calls upon them to stand as separate and peculiar people. He would have no schisms in the body of believers.⁸

With such a mindset, the church viewed the government as a system of the devil. Consequently, church members were discouraged from participating in public issues save for matters that seemed to affect their allegiances to God. In this manner, the Seventh-day Adventist Church demonstrated dualistic perspective of the world as the good and the bad.

The third phase of the involvement of the Adventist Church in public issues concerns the political apocalyptic. This perspective emphasised the proclamation of the eschatological kingdom of God on earth. At this point, Adventists began to participate in the shaping of public policies, particularly in regards to religious liberty and temperance. Adventists began to occupy public offices. George Butler, then the president of the General Conference, affirmed that:

Encouraging Adventist towards the ballot box, petitions, temperance rallies and on occasion, public office, Mrs white typified the political prophetic that brought Seventh-day Adventism within the borders of the political process. The Adventist, as prophetic people, were to use their voice to sustain the Republic as long as possible. The irony of their position of course involved them in a particular vocational hazard. They wished to delay the end in order to preach that the end was soon.⁹

This statements reveals how the Seventh-day Adventist Church gradually began to engage in socio-political matters. Furthermore, it expanded its understanding of the relationship between the church and the government and, by extention, to the world. Seemingly, the pioneers realised their moral responsibility to the world. The Church encouraged its members to get involved in public matters in order to fullfill the divine mandate. Relating the importance of healthy lifestyle and the dignity of

⁷Uriah Smith, "Politics," *Review and Herald*, 11 September 1856, 152.

⁸Ellen G. White, *Fundamental of Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Southern, 1923), 475-486.

⁹George I. Butler, "Politics and Temperance," *Review and Herald*, 11 April 1882, 234.

all human kind, Adventists used priority to reach out to the world. It is certain, however, that even up to this moment the church maintained the dualistic perception of the world as good and evil.

The overriding emphasis of the Adventist political perspective shows that the pioneers hesitated to engage in political matters. The shift towards restricted political participation emerged in the late 20th century. Therefore, it is plausible to argue that a limited understanding of the term *κοσμος* might have also attributed to the Adventist perspective on politics. The three phases of the Adventist understanding regarding the relationship between the church and the world show some limitation to the full conception of the term *κοσμος*.

3. The Adventist Church and the Protestant Heritage on Politics

Based on the Protestant heritage, from Luther through the Anabaptists, the dualistic perspective of *κοσμος* as good and evil shaped the understanding of the relationships between the church and the world.¹⁰ Therefore, the trends of the church following the reformation promoted the church's separation from politics. Drawing from the theological understanding of Tertulian, Richard H. Niebuhr intimates that Christians were to withdraw from any engagement in politics and focus on its heavenly citizenship.¹¹ The church proclaimed an apocalyptic message that saw the world as corrupt and evil, thus fulfilling the biblical prophecy.

Meanwhile, the Adventist Church focused much of its effort to fulfill the Great Commission with little or no inclination towards secular political engagement. At this juncture, the Adventist Church maintained the held view of the separation between the church and the state. In this manner, it prolonged the reformation heritage that emphasized a moral approach to politics. Moreover, the Adventist Church resisted alliances between the church and state in opposition to the Roman Catholic Church.

¹⁰According to Ronald J. Sider, Luther and the Anabaptists called for the separation of the church and the state. Based on Luther, Sider observes that Luther insisted that the "secular government is a Kingdom of sin, because its theme is nothing but sin and checking sin." For the Anabaptists, Sider notes that they insisted that the Christians could not serve in the army or the government. Ronald J. Sider, *Just Politics: A Guide for Christian Engagement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2012), 16-17.

¹¹H. R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1951)

At the reformation, the Roman Catholic Church advanced the Constantinian union of the church and state. Augustinian and Thomist political reflections revealed a positive outlook on the role of the state.¹² Later, the Lutherans, Calvinists, and Anabaptists held a diametrically opposite approach to the relationships between state and church. The Calvinists preferred a radical severance of the church from the state.¹³ These perspectives and tendencies formented the Protestants' moral approaches to politics. The propositions shaped the larger section of the Protestants' dialogues concerning politics. In addition, these theological foundations built the understanding of the late 20th century evangelical political engagements. Given these overly unbalanced theological views and approaches to the relationship between the state and the church, it is necessary to make another investigation of the biblical data to offer an improved perspective for a balanced relationship between the Adventist Church in Africa and the political engagements. In order to clarify the wide range of semantic values of the term *κοσμος*, it is important to understand the its meaning within the biblical and contemporary era of the Bible. The analysis includes relevance and applicability and standard senses and conventions associated with the term *κοσμος* in the Greco-Roman and Jewish background.

4. Background of the Term Κοσμος

The origin, development, and use of the term *κοσμος* is examined within the social world of the Greek and Jewish backgrounds. These foundational elements represent the basis for intepretation of the usage of *κοσμος* in the Gospel of John.

4.1. Κόσμος in Greek Philosophy

The Greek orientation of the term *κοσμος* provides limited information concerning the etymology of the word.¹⁴ Stanley B. Marrow offers a well condensed summary of the wide conception of the term *κοσμος* in the Hellenistic world. He includes 1. Iliad usages of the word to denote

¹²Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York, NY: Modern Library, 1950); Stephen J. Pope, "Natural Law in Catholic Social Teaching," in *Himes* ed., *Modern Catholic Social Teaching*, 43-45.

¹³Helmut, Thielicke, *Theological ethics: Politics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 17; Harro Hopfl, ed., *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge university Press, 1991), 11.

¹⁴Gerhard Kittel, "Κοσμος," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 2: 601.

“order,” whether physical or moral; 2. Herodotus’ perception to include “organization and constitution;” 3. Pindar’s understanding of the term *κοσμος* in the sense of “honor and glory;” Pythagoras, Parmenidas, and Plato’s use the term *κοσμος* to denote “order of the world” and “universe;” and the later Greek usages of *κοσμος* to denote “inhabited world” (*οίκουμένη*).¹⁵ The Hellenistic world provided a wide range of usage and understanding that allowed for the diverse application of the term. Thus, the NT corpus, particularly the Gospel of John, established its meaning and importance from these backgrounds.

In addition, the term included the reference to the structure either of artifacts like the “horse of wood” (*ἵππου κοσμον . . . δουπατεου*). Relating to human beings, the term indicates “order.” According to Homer, it includes the sense of the sitting arrangement in the ship that would bring Odysseus to Ithaca or the order of the soldiers in battle.¹⁶ This perception lends its meaning to “public social order” and denotes the union of the citizens and the state.¹⁷

Within the Greek philosophy, order expressed beauty; thus, the derivation of the term “cosmetics” from the term *κοσμος*. In this perspective, the term *κοσμος* assumed the meaning of orderly adornment.¹⁸ In reference to the world, universe, and the orderly heavens, however, the term *κοσμος* encapsulated the order of heavens, of our world, of the universe, and its harmony and unity. Consequently, the understanding of the term *κοσμος* in the Greek background offers a sense of unity between the universe with all its elements including “man as the microcosm.” Adams quotes Mansfield and asserts that the “Greek thought concerning *κοσμος* is optimistic with the pessimistic views being, as a rule against the current.”¹⁹

¹⁵Stephen B. Marrow, “Κοσμος in John,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 64 (2002): 90.

¹⁶Homer, *Odyssey* 13:76: “Then they sat down on the benches, each in order (*κοσμεω*)” Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. A. T. Murray, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 2.9.

¹⁷Plato, *Laws* keeping and conserving of public system of the state (*τόν κοινόν της πολεως κοσμον*), Plato, *Laws*, trans. R.G. Bury, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 3:89.

¹⁸Marrow, “κοσμος,” 91.

¹⁹Edwards Adams, *Constructing the World: A Study in Paul’s Cosmological Language* (Edinburgh, UK: T. & T. Clark, 2000), 68.

4.2. Κοσμος in the Old Testament Usage

The term Κοσμος has identical correspondence in the OT.²⁰ The equivalent of the term is heaven and earth.²¹ The LXX (Septuagint) renders the Hebrew term “host” for the term κοσμος (πάς ὁ κόσμος αὐτῶ), “the heavens and the earth were finished and all the host of them” (Gen 2:1; cf. Deut. 4:19; 17:3). Elsewhere, the term κοσμος is rendered in “ornaments” in the LXX, “So, now put off your ornament from you” (Exod 33:5, 6), “their beautiful ornament they used for vainglory” (Ezek 7:20), “decked with ornaments” (Ezek 23:40), and “the glory of the young men is their strength” (Prov 20:26).

The LXX edition in some Wisdom literature (Apocrypha) follows a philosophical meaning of the term κοσμος. The presence of wisdom in creation, “thou make the world” (Wisdom 9:9), “the whole world” (11:22; 17:19), “the structure of the world” (7:17), “how through the devils, evil, and death entered the world” (2:24), and “the salvation of the world” (σωτηρία κόσμου) (6:24).

Philo of Alexandria introduced Hebraic nuances to the term κοσμος OT. According to Sasse, “no thinker of antiquity used the word more than he did.”²² Philo drew upon the Platonic-Stoic background to build his philosophical framework of the Bible. For example, in Genesis he indicates that the “universe, incorporeal as known through the senses.”²³ Adam attests that Philo employed the term κοσμος within the Greek philosophical understanding of the sense of the world/universe in order with beauty and perfection.²⁴ Josephus uses the term κοσμος with the sense of ordering (e.g., government systems,²⁵ market places,²⁶ political constitution,²⁷ inhabited world, etc.).²⁸

Notwithstanding the diverse presupposition among the Greek and Hellenistic philosophers of the term κοσμος, the underlying assumption

²⁰Sasse, “κοσμεω,” 874.

²¹Genesis 20:11; 31:17; Deut. 4:26; Deut. 30:19; 31:28; 2 Kings 19:15; 2 Chron. 2:12; Ezra 5:11; Ps 69: 34; Ps. 115:15; Ps. 121:2; Ps. 124:8; Ps. 134:3; Ps. 146:6; Isa. 37:16; Jer. 23:24; 33:25.

²²Sasse, “κοσμεω,” 877.

²³F. H. Colson, G. H. Whitaker, et al, trans., *Philo*, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929-53) 4:190-193, 318-19; De Opificio Mundi 16, “So when He willed to create this visible world, He first fully formed the intelligible world in order that He might have the use of a pattern wholly God-like and incorporeal to produce the material world” Philo I: 14-15.

²⁴Adam, *Construction the World*, 59.

²⁵Josephus Flavius, *Antiquity of the Jews*, 3:84, trans. Thackeray, Loeb Classical Library, 3:84.

²⁶Flavius, *Antiquity of Jews*, 3:289.

²⁷Ibid., 5:132.

²⁸Ibid., 9:245; 10:205.

of the descriptions included the sense of ordered structure, united various elements, beauty, related human beings, and objects of praise.

4.3. Κοσμος in the New Testament Usage

In the NT, the term *κοσμος* retains both the positive and negative nuances. The positive connotations build on the LXX while the negative notions draw upon the earliest Judaism sources.²⁹ The positive nuances are included in Matt 25:7, “the wise virgins trimmed (*έκοσμησαν*) their lamps;” Rev 21:2, “Jerusalem is seen as a bride adorned for her husband;” 1 Pet 3:5, “wives to adorn (*κοσμειν*) themselves;” Acts 17:24, “God made the whole world and everything (*τον κοσμον και παντα*) in it;” Rom 5:12 “into this world came sin, and death came through sin;” and 2 Cor 5:19, Paul states that Jesus has come to “reconcile the world to himself.”

In contrast, the negative connotations of the term *κοσμος* are notable in several biblical texts in the NT. The Apostle Paul states that the “world did not know God through wisdom... and God made foolish the wisdom of the World” (1 Cor 1:21). The Apostle James explicitly declares, “Friendship with the world is enmity with God” (Jas 4:4). Peter considers the world as “defiled” (2 Pet 2:20).

With the positive and negative renderings of the term *κοσμος* in the NT writings, scholarship has subscribed either to the positive or the negative view. Seemingly, in the texts highlighted above regarding the negative connotation of the term *κοσμος*, it is used in the sense of the contrast between the spiritual and the natural. Therefore, it seems that the positive connotations bear the wider semantic meaning of the term. It is necessary, however, that contextual elements are considered in determining the nuances of the term of *κοσμος*.

5. The Gospel of John

The gospel of John contains references to the term *κοσμος* that bear both positive and negative meanings. Burrow, however, introduces a third neutral category.³⁰ For instance, he identified these following verses to consist of the neutral nuances of the term *κοσμος*: “He was in the world and the world was made through him” (John 1:10a and b), “show yourself to the world” (John 7:4), “the world has gone after Jesus” (John 12:19), one does not stumble because he sees “the light of this world” (11:9), “his hour

²⁹Jacob Neuser and William Scott Green, eds., *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period 450 B.C.E. to 600 B.C.E.* (New York, NY: Macmillian, 1996), 2:677, s .v. “World.”

³⁰Burrow, “*κοσμος*,” 98.

had not come to depart out of this world" (13:1; 16:28), "a child is born into the world" (16:21), Jesus speaks "in the world" (17:13; 18:20), "the glory he had before the world was made" (17:5, 24), "his kingdom is not from this world... my kingdom is not from here (έντεϋθεν) (18:36), and "the world could not contain the books"(21:25).³¹ The usages of the term κοσμος in these verses do not easily fit to either the positive or the negative connotations but offer a neutral hue.³²

Given this observation, it is plausible to perceive the world as innately evil. It seems the negative aspect emerges from the corrupt and evil human activities. Edward Adams observes that Plato perceives the κοσμος as the "quintessence of beauty."³³ He intimates that according to Plato, κοσμος designates "ordered unity in which heaven and earth, gods and human beings are bound together."³⁴ Plato's underlying assumption, however, consists of some misconstrued ideas. For instance, Adams elaborates that Plato assumes, "the deity fashioned the world as a living creature with soul and body, and that it is indestructable because of its perfect construction."³⁵ Notwithstanding, Plato's philosophical framework of the world resonates with the biblical understanding that God created the world perfect (cf. Gen 1:31).

The idea of a world created perfect is reflected in the NT corpus. As mentioned above, the world is the object of both God's love and wrath. N. H. Cassem's insightful exposition supports the notion of a world that God created perfect. Cassem understands the use of the term in the Gospel of John in two ways. He sees that chaps. 1-12 as portraying κοσμος as the object of God's love, while the chaps. 13-21 depicts κοσμος as the object of negative aspersions.³⁶ As an object of God's love, it follows that "for God so loved the world that he gave His only Son" (John 3:16), God sent His son into the world not to condemn it, but save it (John 3:17; 12:47). Jesus is the "savior of the world" (4:42), He is "the lamb who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29), He is "life to the world" (6:33, 51), and He is the "life of the world" (8:12; 9:5; 12:46; 11:9).

³¹Ibid.

³²Bill Salier "What's in a World? A Prologue of John's Gospel," *The Reformed Theological Review* 56, no. 3 (1997): 106.

³³Adams, *Constructing the World*, 66.

³⁴Ibid., 47

³⁵Ibid., 48

³⁶N. H. Cassem, "Grammatical and Contextual Inventory of the Use of κοσμος in the Johannine Corpus with Some Implication for a Johannine Cosmic Theology," *New Testament Studies* (1972): 81-91.

Negatively, the world is depicted as an object of God's wrath. The world lies under the wrath of God. For instance, it cannot receive the Holy Spirit (14:17), "for Judgment I came into the world" (9:39), and "the world was made through Him" but chose to "know Him not" (1:10). Jesus attests, "Now is judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out" (12:33).

Although the various references of the Gospel of John portray the world positively, Bill Salier contends that the "fourth Gospel's view on *κοσμος* is negative."³⁷ Notably, such observations seem inaccurate, given the apparent overwhelming scriptural data in the Gospel that provide the positive nuance. In addition, it is important to note that the negative connotations of the term *κοσμος* occur in contexts that include the response to Jesus or the truth that He reveals.

Apparently, the negative connotations of the term *κοσμος* emerge within the relationship between the world and the revelation of God. In this way, the sense of the term *κοσμος* points every principle, system, or power that stands against the revelation of God in the Gospel of John. Arguably, it is the poor relationship between the world and revelation of God that set it on a negative position. Adams observes that Democritus, Plato, and Stoics identified human beings with the *κοσμος* as in "microcosm to macrocosm dimensions."³⁸ Would this then be the relationship between humans, individually and corporately, to the world? Does what happens to humans affect the world?

The connection between human beings and the *κοσμος* permeates the Gospel of John. The evil works of human beings set the world against God. For example John states, "And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, people loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to light, lest his deed should be exposed"³⁹ (3:19-20). Furthermore, John records concerning the paraclete, "He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment, concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the father, and you will see me no more; concerning judgment, because ruler of the world is judged"(John 16:8-11). Without doubt, the Gospel of John advances the thought of correlation between human and the *κοσμος*.

What can we say about the pessimistic assessment of the world? According to Adams, the negative view of the term *κοσμος* emerged in

³⁷Salier, "What is the World," 107.

³⁸Adams, *Constructing the World*, 66.

³⁹Bo. Reicke, "Positive and Negative Aspect of the World in the NT," *Westminster Theological Journal* 49 (1987): 354.

the second and third centuries within Greek philosophy.⁴⁰ He explains that the negative perspectives of the world emerged within the Christian thought along threats of “Gnosticism, Neo-Pythoreanism, and Neo-Platonism.”⁴¹ The main emphasis of the negative aspects of the world, however, appeared from the post-exilic tradition that drew upon Persian and Hellenistic conceptions about the universe. These concepts expanded within the full narrative of the OT (Gen 2:4b–3:24) and the proclamations of the prophets (Isa 40:9-31).⁴²

This negative aspect of *κοσμος* profligated during the intertestamental literature period and shaped the NT’s conception of *κοσμος*. In addition, the negative attitude towards the world also grew out of the post-exilic apocalypticism that enlarged within the Qumran beliefs that perceived the world in dualist dimensions of light and truth and darkness and lie.⁴³ The Qumran community understood themselves as the children of light, while the rest of the world dwelt in darkness.⁴⁴ Subsequently, these negative perspective grew also in the reading of the Gospel of John (John 1:5, 10).

6. Κοσμος and Politics

The term *κοσμος* consists of one overarching aspect that relates to the social order. Adams cites Kahn to affirm that *κοσμος* was applied to “world-order by conscious analogy with the good order of society.”⁴⁵ Similarly, Adams observes that Plato conceived *κοσμος* as a well-ordered city-state, and thus, the social system acted as the microcosm of the *κοσμος*. Therefore, human engagement in social norms and conventions and sanctions and punishments reflected an effective way of establishing the *κοσμος*.⁴⁶

Adams argues that from Presocrates onwards, the understanding of the *κοσμος* corresponded to the civic order.⁴⁷ Thus, in the light that the social order reflected the structure of the *κοσμος*, men and women engaged in establishing order to fulfill a divine mandate. The analogy of the *κοσμος* with the social ordering justifies and endorses the existence of social and political order. The underlying motivation of politics is the

⁴⁰Adams, *Constructing the World*, 69.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Reicke, “Positive and Negative Aspects,” 352.

⁴³1Qs 3:17-26; 1 Qm 1:1; 1QS 3:21; 1Qm 1:1-2

⁴⁴Ibid., 355.

⁴⁵Adams, *Constructing the World*, 69.

⁴⁶Ibid., 70.

⁴⁷Ibid., 69.

promotion of order in the socio-political issues. At this point, a correlation exists between the meaning of the world and politics. Both concepts illustrate the sense of social order.⁴⁸

Generally, politics includes all the “social activities focused on shaping the state.”⁴⁹ In this case, the state comprise the social organs that control and direct the authorised social ordering. Andrew Goddard affirms that the modern designs of the social ordering—executive, legislation, and the jurisdiction—evolved out of the Roman political institutions to form the fabric of modern political power.⁵⁰

This function of the political organ of the state is to ensure the coordination of all operation. The political process directs the interest of the state affairs and its distinct from the society. Its orientation includes a centralized decision-making institution within a society that assumes the responsibility for all the affairs of men and God. Thus, the governing institutions act on behalf of the divine mandate (Rom 13:1-6).

The term *κοσμος* (world) provides a secure foundation concerning the complimentary relationship between the social institutions and political institutions. It follows that the individual involved in politics fulfill a divinely ascribed role. In this manner, the strength and fabric of the *κοσμος* are established. Apparently, in recent times “population growth, mass communication, and belief in popular sovereignty” has exposed the limitation of centralised political institutions. This has instigated the participation of private individuals in politics. This conception expands the political horizon beyond the traditional understanding. The autonomous orientation of politics is replaced with an ideal non-autonomous view. In citing Ellul, Goddard observes that the totalitarian and centralised structure of modern political scenario is the source of the destructive nature of politics.⁵¹

It is important to see that politics includes a broad and narrow sense. The latter aspect of politics relates to the traditional conception of a centralized political institution that directs all human activities. On a broader sense, politics embraces the array of societal, religious,

48There are different conceptions of politics: Politics viewed as an art of governance (state-centric). Politics as public affairs include the interaction between the free and equal citizens. Politics as consensus and compromises involves the mode of decision-making. Politics as the production, distribution, and the use of resources relates to the context of social existence. Studies have defined politics based on the various disciplines of study. Sociological studies emphasize the human components while the political scientists put emphasis on the governance aspect.

49Sider, *Just Politics*, 28.

50Andrew Goddard, *Living the World, Resisting the World: The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2002), 262.

51Ibid., 269.

economical, and political sources that shape human activities in a particular area. Thus, the integration and involvement of all the different organs of human activities perpetuates the natural purpose of human existence. In this case, all citizens of the nation, particularly Christians, (including Adventists) should identify their respective roles in the maintenance and preservation of the state. Adams concurs with Cicero's view that "each person is like an actor on the cosmic stage, with the responsibility of performing a role and playing that part well."⁵² Within the social structure, the individual and collective entities promote the *κοσμος* design.

The basic assumption of this study has been that the linguistic background to John's employment of *κοσμος* offers a biblical foundation for the involvement of Seventh-day Adventists in political activities. Thus, an accurate view of *κοσμος* provides the Christian with a balanced attitude towards politics.⁵³ From the reformation, a spiritualized conception of the world has resulted in the Christian's reluctance to engage in politics. Simply, Christians have perceived politics as worldly and evil. Consequently, Christians, including Adventists, have withdrawn and rejected political engagements. The proper biblical understanding of the term *κοσμος*, however, seem to clarify the misconceptions and supports the engagement of Christians, including Seventh-day Adventists, in politics and provides significant implications for many matters of government policy.

7. Summary and Conclusions

This study attempted to show that an accurate understanding of the term *κοσμος* provides Seventh-day Adventists a balanced attitude towards involvement in politics. It is observed that an inadequate or inaccurate understanding of political issues results into a disengagement from political matters. Thus, the study explored the linguistic understanding of the term *κοσμος* within the Seventh-day Adventist and Protestant heritage and the OT and NT. The term *κοσμος* offers a variety of lexical senses in its Greek usages—social, moral, aesthetic, and cosmological. The study showed that the term *κοσμος* comprise both negative and positive

⁵²Adams, *Constructing the World*, 73.

⁵³Wayne Grudem offers six modern perspectives on the relation between Christians and Politics. These are five wrong views: "1. Government should compel religion; 2. Government should exclude religion; 3. All government is evil and demonic; 4. Do evangelism, not politics; 5. Do politics no evangelism; 6. Significant Christian influence on government, this is his proposal;" Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource For Understanding Modern Political Issues in the Light of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Michigan, 2010), 18.

definitions in the Gospel of John. The majority of the negative definitions of the term *κοσμος* are seen as later developments. The literary reservoir of later Judaism included facts of human experience after the fall. The fundamental definition of the term, however, also consist of positive connotations that relate to order, orderliness, harmony, beauty, and integration. Consequently, the understanding of the term *κοσμος* legitimizes social structures, including the church. These social institutions promote the welfare of individuals and collective entities in many geographical areas. Hence, the understanding of *κοσμος* in the Gospel of John underpins the significance of the political engagement of the Adventist Church in Africa and elsewhere.