

# The Cosmology of the Canonical Gospels

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## Introduction

The admiration and fear that the sky and the universe inspired in man is deeply rooted in his history and civilization. In ancient East, Minor Asia, Mesopotamia, and Egypt astral phenomena were seen as divine beings with an active role in the world. The Babylonians were perhaps among the first peoples that methodically observed the heavens and the celestial bodies and recorded their movements. Besides the scientific observations of the Babylonians which are combined with their religious beliefs are something remarkable<sup>1</sup>.

To this day the belief that celestial bodies and their movements affect human life is preserved. Such a perception was particularly spread at the time. It is also important to mention that the celestial dome was a source of predictions and a wrong or a different movement of the stars can mean disaster or success in a venture. These characteristics were associated with the theology of each culture in general, as well as with the theology of the New Testament, as we shall see later<sup>2</sup>.

The value of the sky was not undermined by Greek philosophy either; on the contrary, it was rather strengthened<sup>3</sup>. The stars remained the

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1. P. Kriwaczek, *Babylon: Mesopotamia and the Birth of Civilization*, Thomas Dunne Books, St. Martin's Griffin, New York 2012, pp. 15-37 and 66 ff.

2. For more on the theology of the New Testament see F. J. Matera, *New Testament Theology: Exploring Diversity and Unity*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky 2007, pp. xxvi-xxviii and 1 ff., and also Ch. Atmatzidis, *Η Θεολογία της Καινής Διαθήκης*, Ostrakon Publishing, Thessaloniki 2019.

3. It should be noted that the observation and recording of the sky and the stars had a direct impact on Greek mythology. K. Kerényi, *Mythologie der Griechen: Götter, Menschen*

model of the perfect order, while large celestial bodies, such as planets, emerged even more. The astronomical observations continued and brought to light great discoveries. Astrology, which had a continuous presence in some form, during the Hellenistic period was further developed, by taking elements from both the ancient astral beliefs, and from scientific observations<sup>4</sup>.

From the point of view of biblical literature, the Old Testament has several passages in which it seems to be influenced from astral mythical motifs<sup>5</sup>, such as those in *Isaiah* 14 and *Ezekiel* 28. The worship of the heavenly bodies was of course condemnable, as well as that it was something dangerous for the faith in Jahweh. But the cosmogony in *Genesis* 1, 14 shows the influences that were alive in the Jewish society and left room for the study of the heaven. Let us not forget, however, that the community of Qumran also used horoscopes and calendars on divination by thunder (*brontologia*)<sup>6</sup>. Jahweh was the supreme being, the Lord and creator of the universe, the one who called the name of every star. However, this is what the text of cosmogony at the beginning of the book of *Genesis*<sup>7</sup> wants to show.

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*und Heroen*, Klett – Cotta, Stuttgart 2013, pp. 29-31.

4. J. T. Pennington – S. M. McDonough (eds.), *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, T & T Clark, London 2008, pp. 1-2.

5. «... και ἀναπαύσονται ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ... ἄδης κάτωθεν ... ἐξέπεσεν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὁ ἑωσφόρος ὁ πρωτὶ ἀνατέλλων συνετριβή εἰς τὴν γῆν ... εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀναβήσομαι ἐπάνω τῶν ἄστρων τοῦ οὐρανοῦ θήσω τὸν θρόνον μου καθιῶ ἐν ὄρει ὑψηλῷ ἐπὶ τὰ ὄρη τὰ ὑψηλὰ τὰ πρὸς βορρᾶν ἀναβήσομαι ἐπάνω τῶν νεφελῶν ἔσομαι ὅμοιος τῷ ὑψίστῳ νῦν δὲ εἰς ἄδου καταβήση και εἰς τὰ θεμέλια τῆς γῆς» (*Is.* 14) and «... ἐν καρδίᾳ θαλάσσης ... ἐν τῇ τρυφῇ τοῦ παραδείσου τοῦ θεοῦ ἐγενήθη πᾶν λίθον χρηστὸν ἐνδέδεται σάρδιον και τοπάζιον και σμάραγδον και ἄνθρακα και σάπφειρον και ἴασπιν και ἀργύριον και χρυσίον και λιγύριον και ἀχάτην και ἀμέθυστον και χρυσόλιθον και βηρύλλιον και ὄνυχιον και χρυσίου ἐνέπλησας τοὺς θησαυροὺς σου και τὰς ἀποθήκας σου ἐν σοὶ ἀφ' ἧς ἡμέρας ἐκτίσθης σύ ... ἐν μέσῳ λίθων πυρίνων» (*Ez.* 28, 8; 13-14).

6. *Brontology* was the observation of lightnings and thunders in order to reveal the future and choose the right decisions that one should make in one's life.

7. J. W. Hilber, *Old Testament Cosmology and Divine Accommodation: A Relevance Theory Approach*, Cascade Books, Eugene Oregon 2020, p. 4.

Ancient cosmology is important and present even in the New Testament. The references of Paul to the firmament and the heavenly world<sup>8</sup>, the cosmic battle between good and evil, the descend and ascension to earth and heaven, as well as the outline of the world in the book of *Revelation*, indicate the presence of such influences, but also the interest in the universe. Although in this study we will focus only on the canonical gospels, it would be right to point out that the reception of the universe exists and in the other books of the New Testament as well. Because texts such as *2 Peter*<sup>9</sup>, outline a particular picture of the universe, as it was perceived by the people of that time.

### 1. Cosmology in the *Gospel of Mark*

The cosmology of Mark focuses on the battle between good and evil<sup>10</sup>. Godless and demonic forces are infesting people. These forces can fall under both the intellectual and the political spheres<sup>11</sup>. For Mark, the world is a dangerous place full of traps for people, but it is God who with Jesus and His coming kingdom will become the vehicle of the change, of transformation<sup>12</sup>. For Mark, the world is in the process of liberation from the bonds of the forces that want to annihilate it. This change occurs with the victory of Jesus over Satan, who is defeated by the passion, death and His resurrection<sup>13</sup>.

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8. J. D. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K. 1998, pp. 38-42.

9. For more on *2 Peter* see Ch. Atmatzidis, *Ἑρμηνευτικὸ Ὑπόμνημα στὴ Β΄ Πέτρου*, Ostrakon Publishing, Thessaloniki 2014.

10. For the issues of Mark's theology see D. A. deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Context, Methods and Ministry Formation*, IVP Academic, Downers Grove 2004, pp. 200-201; see also: Ch. Atmatzidis, *Ἡ Θεολογία τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης*, *op.cit.*, pp. 755-759 and W. R. Telford, *The Theology of the Gospel of Mark*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom 2002, p. 137 ff.

11. *Mark* 5, 1-14.

12. J. T. Pennington – S. M. McDonough, *op.cit.*, p. 45.

13. M. Patella, *Lord of the Cosmos: Mithras, Paul, and the Gospel of Mark*, T & T Clark, New York – London 2006, p. 59.

Thus, *in extremis* creation is saved and reunited with God, completing the cosmologic conflict between good and evil. That is why Mark calls his work “gospel” («εὐαγγέλιο»)<sup>14</sup>. It is precisely in this way that Mark presents his cosmology, which is that of redemption and salvation achieved through Jesus, an element that extends to humans, animals<sup>15</sup>, nature and the general perception of the world. Therefore, with these elements we can begin to better understand the theological structures that have been introduced into the narrative and shape the understanding of the world and existence.

The perception of the world by Mark refers to an apocalyptic eschatology. This means that the gospel carries certain eschatological characteristics, such as the separation between good and evil, messianism, decisiveness and hope in divine salvation. Apocalyptic eschatology was a social and religious phenomenon of the time, that flourished in communities such as that of Qumran. This may indicate that Mark’s gospel was written by a or for a community that had strong apocalyptic perceptions<sup>16</sup>.

However, how could the apocalyptic eschatology of Mark influence his cosmological perception? In simple words we could say that the presence of dualism<sup>17</sup> in the narrative where Jesus is depicted revealing his divine signs, his warnings of destruction, as well as the foretaste of divine glory, are elements that are beyond human knowledge and understanding. Jesus’ exorcisms, his teaching of the coming Kingdom, his battle with evil are characteristics that give a panoramic view of the universe, as Mark<sup>18</sup> understood it. It is about these moments that we

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14. *Mark* 1, 1. See R. H. Stein, *Mark*, Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2008, pp. 40-42 and Adela Y. Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, H. W. Attridge (ed.), Fortress Press, Minneapolis 2007, pp. 130-132.

15. For animal diversity in the New Testament see M. Gkoutzioudis, *Φύσις Θηρίων. Η χρήση της Ζωικής Ποικιλότητας στην Καινή Διαθήκη και στο Περιβάλλον της*, Methexis Publications, Thessaloniki 2013.

16. It should be mentioned that the gospel of Mark is not considered a revelation, since that kind of literature wants to reveal the mysteries of the divine through a plethora of rhetorical, narrative and theological means. For more see: Adela Y. Collins, *op.cit.*

17. For dualism, among others, see C. C. Simuț, *F. C. Baur’s Synthesis of Böhme and Hegel: Redefining Christian Theology as a Gnostic Philosophy of Religion*, Brill, Leiden – Boston 2014, pp. 125-140.

18. J. T. Pennington – S. M. McDonough, *op.cit.*, p. 47.

have in the narratives the encounter of heaven and earth, corruption and imperishability, good and evil.

In the gospel of Mark, the word *heaven* is the most common cosmological image. This is used seventeen times<sup>19</sup> and functions as a means of invoking God. Also, when Jesus performs a miracle, he turns towards heaven<sup>20</sup>, while often heaven is cosmologically presented as the place where heavenly beings, such as God and angels<sup>21</sup> dwell. But where heaven plays the most important role is at the baptism of Jesus: “And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove” («καὶ εὐθὺς ἀναβαίνων ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος εἶδεν σχιζομένους τοὺς οὐρανοὺς καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα ὡς περιστερὰν καταβαῖνον εἰς αὐτόν»)<sup>22</sup>.

This fact was very important to the community of Mark, as was the fact that John was the one who baptized Jesus<sup>23</sup>. This makes Jesus Messiah but also a servant of the Lord<sup>24</sup>. In this way the words in *Is.* 42, 1 and *Ps.* 2,7 find a correspondence. The apocalyptic theophany that is described in the narrative wants to highlight the theological positions of Mark, which have a cosmological connotation<sup>25</sup>. The motif in which the sky is torn in two, also exists in Jewish tradition during the period of the second temple<sup>26</sup>.

19. *Mark* 1, 10, 11; 4, 32; 6, 41; 7, 34; 8, 11; 10, 21; 11, 25, 30, 31; 12, 25; 13, 25, 27, 31, 32; 14, 62; 16, 19.

20. *Mark* 6, 41; 7, 34.

21. *Mark* 1, 10, 11; 4, 32; 10, 21; 11, 25; 12, 25; 13, 25, 27, 31, 32; 14, 62.

22. *Mark* 1, 10. See Mary Ann Beavis, *Mark*, Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2011, pp. 36-40.

23. For the baptism of Jesus see: M. Gkoutzioudis, *Ἑρμηνεία καὶ Πρόσληψη Εὐαγγελικῶν Κειμένων*, vol. Α', Ostrakon Publishing, Thessaloniki 2019, pp. 171-204.

24. Adela Y. Collins, *op.cit.*, pp. 53 ff. and W. L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge U.K. 1988, pp. 298-303.

25. J. Marcus, *Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark*, Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville Kentucky 1992, pp. 56-58; see also Io. D. Karavidopoulos, *Τὸ κατὰ Μάρκον Εὐαγγέλιο*, P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki 2011, pp. 137-139 and 157-163 and C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom 2005, pp. 347-411.

26. *Is.* 64, 1; *Ez.* 1, 1; *Lev.* 2, 6; 5, 1 and 18, 6.

This characteristic is common in apocalyptic events and wants to show that the earthly and heavenly world are divided but the entrance of God in the earthly world breaks this distinction<sup>27</sup>. In the Old Testament the prophets invoke Jahweh to redeem the people of Isael from its oppressors. Deliverance will come with the direct intervention of Jahweh, who will crush the enemies of Israel and restore its people<sup>28</sup>.

It is in the same spirit that Mark moves at the baptism of Jesus. There he wants God to appear by tearing the invisible veil that separates heaven and earth. A similar pattern is encountered during the Crucifixion, where the curtain of the temple of Jerusalem separating the Holy of the Holies from the main temple is torn<sup>29</sup>. With these two scenes (the baptism and the crucifixion), that Mark describes to us, we can understand two important elements about his cosmology<sup>30</sup>: The first has to do with the fact that the divine intervention is the one that can directly affect the order of the universe and change the facts of each outcome. The second important element is that Mark saw the earthly world as mirror of the heavenly one. We can understand the parallelism that exists between the schism of the curtain of the temple and heaven. However, several scholars have argued for the theological implications of the tearing of the curtain, a scene that works also to support the messianism of Jesus, as well as the prediction of the destruction of the temple<sup>31</sup>.

So, the temple according to the Jews was the epicenter of the world and functioned as a meeting place of heaven and earth. The secular symbolism of the temple does not stop here, because the temple symbolized the universe the habitable earth, the ends of the universe and heaven. In other words, the temple was a microcosm of the universe<sup>32</sup>.

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27. V. Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark: the Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indexes*, Macmillan, St. Martin's P., London, Melbourne etc. – New York <sup>2</sup>1966, pp. 160.

28. For more see H. D. Preuss, *Θεολογία τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης*, transl. – ed. Io. Mourtzios, Kyriakidis Publications, Thessaloniki 2016.

29. *Mark* 15, 38.

30. Io. Karavidopoulos, *op.cit.*, pp. 9-11 and 499; see also R. H. Stein, *op.cit.*, pp. 56-59; Adela Y. Collins, *op.cit.*, p. 135 ff. and M. Gkoutzioudis, *op.cit.*, pp. 182-183.

31. For more see J. T. Pennington – S. M. McDonough, *op.cit.*, p. 53. Also among others see J. D. G. Dunn, *New Testament Theology: an Introduction*, Abingdon Press, Nashville 2009; see also Ch. Atmatzidis, *Ἡ Θεολογία τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης*, *op.cit.*

32. G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling*

In this way, in the first case heaven is torn to show that the union of heaven and earth can take place outside the temple, while in the second case, to declare the divine presence in Jesus, and to oppose the temple leadership, who organized His crucifixion<sup>33</sup>. An interesting element that we would like to mention is that the place where the Ark of the Covenant was kept, the Holy of Holies, after the Babylonian captivity and the reconstruction of the temple is now empty, because the Ark was lost during the destruction of the city and the temple<sup>34</sup>.

Continuing in the gospel of Mark, the researchers call chapter 13 “Little Revelation”<sup>35</sup>. Although the speech of Jesus does not bear strictly apocalyptic elements, it has several similarities with revelation since it contains images of secular content, as well as theological elements and motifs common to apocalyptic literature. Besides, there are many scholars who believe that Jesus’ discourse in this chapter on the destruction of Jerusalem does indeed imply the destruction of the city itself, rather than an imminent return of him<sup>36</sup>.

The particular passage puzzled the research a lot<sup>37</sup>. On the one hand the narrative can indeed refer to the end of space and time in secular quantities, while on the other hand, it can mean something else. The people of that time may have thought that the end of evil and the coming of the Messiah would have had as beginning the destruction of the temple, the center of Israel’s leadership, the microcosm on which Jerusalem was based. And this is because the influence of the God of Israel, reached as far as the administration of foreign empires, which

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*Place of God*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL 2004, pp. 29-80.

33. J. T. Pennington and S. M. McDonough, *op.cit.*, pp. 55.

34. K. Th. Zarras, *Ίστορία τῆς ἐποχῆς τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης*, Ennoia Publications, Athens 2005, pp. 50-51.

35. R. H. Stein, *op.cit.*, pp. 582-584.

36. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge U.K., The Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 2002, pp. 497-546 and R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament. His Application of Old Testament Passages to Himself and His Mission*, Inter-Varsity Press, Downers Grove, IL 1971, pp. 139-148.

37. Io. Karavidopoulos, *op.cit.*, pp. 398-417; see also W. L. Lane, *op.cit.*, p. 444 ff.; Mary Ann Beavis, *op.cit.*, pp. 188-204, W. R. Telford, *op.cit.*, pp. 205-213 and Adela Y. Collins, *op.cit.*, pp. 593-600.

describes a political religious cosmology, that was deeply rooted in the Jewish way of thinking, that later influenced the cosmological views of Christian communities<sup>38</sup>.

That is why we see the behavior of the Jews through their texts to be analogous. In order to be able to destroy the religion of the heathens, one must destroy the politics of the heathens, which depend one each other. Jahweh defeated the kings of Egypt and their gods but later the same happened to the Assyrians and the Babylonians. The survival of the Jewish community is a sign that Jahweh sustains them and takes care to fight all the forces that are opposed to him and – consequently– the Jews themselves becoming the helpers of this victory<sup>39</sup>.

In conclusion we can say that Mark's cosmology is both political and religious. There is a direct connection between God, curtain and the earthly political power. This element seems to be a particular feature of Mark's theology, that directly influences his cosmological view and is rendered in various ways within his gospel.

## 2. The Cosmology in the *Gospel of Matthew*

At the time of the early Christian communities, the concept of a symbolic universe was quite widespread, especially in communities that were more isolated from the main body of the rest<sup>40</sup>. This came from the combination of theoretical traditions that were introduced into the belief systems guided by a symbolic totalitarianism<sup>41</sup>. More simply, the symbolic universe consists of belief systems, of values and symbols, that describe the way in which the communities that use them perceive the world<sup>42</sup>.

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38. J. T. Pennington and S. M. McDonough, *op.cit.*, p. 57.

39. On Jahweh as warrior among others see H. D. Preuss, *op.cit.*, pp. 252-254.

40. On theology and the perception of the evangelical message in the community of Matthew and the rest of the Evangelists see G. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, Donald Hagner (ed.), William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1993, pp. 54-67, 80-81, 91-93 and 104-106.

41. P. L. Berger – T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, Irvington Publishers, New York 1980, p. 113.

42. U. Luz, *Matthew in History*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1989, p. 23.

The cosmologic expressions and the vocabulary that are used in Matthew's gospel are combined with theological terms and express special content<sup>43</sup>. The main element of the cosmology of Matthew is the terms *heaven* and *earth*, which are of great importance to the community and the writer. Without doubt, Matthew wants to imitate the book of *Genesis*, in an attempt to present a new *Genesis*<sup>44</sup> of his own. That is why, the terms that we have mentioned are found in the book of *Genesis*. These terms are not foreign to the Jews and that is why we observe their use constantly in the Old Testament<sup>45</sup>.

The word *heaven* is used in Matthew 30% more than in the rest of the Evangelists<sup>46</sup>. The term is used to describe the heavenly, spiritual world, and in its literary sense. The word *earth* also occurs several times in the gospel, with a similar meaning and analogies. These two words appear together 43 times, as a pair of words. This pair is used and is especially important in the scenes where Jesus and the disciples are described<sup>47</sup>.

The use of these words, in both the singular and plural, indicates an important element of the theology of Matthew which is related to his cosmology. Matthew wants to show the difference, the contrast and sometimes the confrontation that exists between *heaven* and *earth*<sup>48</sup>. The one term represents God, while the other represents humans, presenting thus the difference that exists between heaven and earth, between the universe and Hades. There is no doubt that, when Matthew records the events and narrates the narratives, refers directly or indirectly to the Old

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43. D. L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2008, p. 1.

44. J. T. Pennington – S. M. McDonough, *op.cit.*, p. 43.

45. For the Jewish background of the gospel, see among others C. S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K. 1999, p. 112.

46. C. H. Talbert, *Matthew*, Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2010, p. 297.

47. *Matthew* 4, 14-16 and 12, 17-21. See B. Witherington, *Matthew*, Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Georgia 2006, pp. 94-96.

48. L. Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge U.K. & Appolos, Leicester England 1992, pp. 2-3.

Testament. That reveals his attempt to create this new *Genesis*, which begins with the coming of Jesus to earth and ends in the empty tomb and resurrection<sup>49</sup>.

Of course, the connection between Matthew and *Genesis* does not stop here and continues more intensely. Lexically, we can see that the first words of the gospel are: «*Βίβλος γενέσεως*»<sup>50</sup>. Something similar can be said and about the way the gospel ends, with the assignment of the mission to the disciples from the resurrected Jesus<sup>51</sup>. At this point Matthew can again link his account to *Genesis*, where the disciples are sent to the nations to carry the message and are blessed by Jesus in the same way that Jahweh blesses Abraham<sup>52</sup>.

However, the role that the book of *Genesis* plays in Matthew seems to be important. All this typology, such as the similarities with *Genesis*, the pair of words *heaven* and *earth*, the genealogy of Jesus at the beginning of the gospel, and the influences from the Jewish tradition, show to us the interest of Matthew in placing the listener in a broader context of understanding Jesus<sup>53</sup>. As Hieke explains, Jesus for Matthew symbolizes the beginning of a new eschatological creation<sup>54</sup>. For that reason, however, all parallels with the book of *Genesis* are focused on the person of Jesus or on events directly related to him.

The content of the new creation is therefore eschatological and the end will be just like the beginning, completing the eschatological hopes of people for a new creation<sup>55</sup>. Therefore, we can observe that Matthew

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49. W. D. Davies – D. C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, T & T Clark, London – New York 2004, p. 166 ff.

50. *Matthew* 1, 1. For the introduction of Matthew and the forefathers of Jesus see M. Gkoutzioudis, *op.cit.*, pp. 25-76 and D. H. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Books Publisher, Dallas, Texas 1993,

51. *Matthew* 28, 16-20; M. Simonetti, *Matthew 14-28*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois 2002, pp. 367-369 and U. Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis 2005, p. 614 ff., also D. H. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Books Publisher, Dallas, Texas 1995, pp. 883-889.

52. *Gen.* 12, 2-3; J. T. Pennington and S. M. McDonough, *op.cit.*, p. 38.

53. For the understanding and the reception of the evangelical message see U. Luz, *Matthew in History*, *op.cit.*, pp. 39 ff., and 82-85.

54. J. M. Auwers – H. J. de Jonge (eds.), *The Biblical Canons*, University Press, Leuven, Belgium 2003, pp. 646-647 and 644.

55. L. Morris, *op.cit.*, p. 8; see also D. L. Turner, *op.cit.* and C. H. Talbert, *op.cit.*, p. 291.

consciously incorporated into his work elements of the book of *Genesis*, thus showing that the redemptive work of God is found in the person of Jesus Christ Who is the bearer of this new creation. Jesus is the foundation on which this new world will be based, as Peter mentions<sup>56</sup> in his confession.

A final important term associated with the cosmology of Matthew is *παλιγγενεσία* (regeneration/rebirth/revival)<sup>57</sup>. This word appears only twice in the New Testament with the second being in *Tit.* 3, 5. Its content focuses on the renewal of the world by God. In the context of the schema that the end is the beginning, there is also in the meaning of this word. However, the difference with other perceptions of Middle East cultures is that this process does not take place repeatedly, but is a renewal and restoration of the primordial order<sup>58</sup>.

With the *παλιγγενεσία* we have the renewal of the universe and not its recreation. But it is a mistake to study this concept in isolation from the main body of cosmology presented by Matthew in the gospel he wrote. Thus, Matthew shows that this renewal will come in the time, when the new Genesis<sup>59</sup> will take place. The Christ-centered reception of theology that is at the center of the cosmology of Matthew is the one which accompanies the whole gospel. The end times and the renewal of the universe will come from Jesus, as well as the judgement<sup>60</sup>.

Matthew unites the real and the symbolic universe, with Jesus himself as a point of reference. The author tries to reduce the gap between man and God, in order to integrate the former in a new eschatological creation. He achieves this using *Genesis* as the foundation of his story and on this he develops the narrative of the gospel according to him, having the first book of the Pentateuch at the same time as background.

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56. For more on the confession of Peter see A. Aslanidis, *Ἀπόστολος Πέτρος: Ἡ Ἀναζήτησή του στὰ Κανονικά Εὐαγγέλια*, Ostrakon Publishing, Thessaloniki 2020, pp. 105-128.

57. *Matthew* 19, 28; D. H. Hagner, *op.cit.*, pp. 564-565 and U. Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis 2001, p. 517.

58. D. C. Sim, "The Meaning of *παλιγγενεσία* in Matthew 19:28", *Journal of the Study of the New Testament* 15, 50 (1993), pp. 3-12.

59. D. C. Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996.

60. J. T. Pennington – S. M. McDonough, *op.cit.*, pp. 42-43.

Thus, the renewal and the creation of the new creation comes from the person of Jesus, who is considered to be the beginning of these events.

### 3. The Cosmology in the *Gospel of Luke*

In the narratives of Luke *heaven* and *earth* are transformed through Jesus by the Holy Spirit<sup>61</sup>. This process even changes the way one perceives and receives God himself. In both the gospel of *Luke* and in the *Acts of the Apostles* there are two basic characteristics that are directly related to the more general cosmology of Luke<sup>62</sup>: The first characteristic is that the evangelist, after the gospel offers a second work, the *Acts*, which function as the continuation of the events describing the expansion of the Church and the continuity of its mission<sup>63</sup>. The second characteristic is that Luke recounts the ascension of Jesus not just once but twice<sup>64</sup>.

Jesus, unlike angelic beings, ascends to heaven as a man and sits at the right hand of God. In this way he can continue to guide the apostles and the community in His own presence, as well as in the presence of the Holy Spirit<sup>65</sup>. In order to be able to break the barrier between heaven and earth, Jesus changed in his teaching the way people perceived reality at that time and in the future in general<sup>66</sup>.

It is these elements that structure the main core of the cosmology of Luke. The cosmology of Luke bears characteristics which from a lexical

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61. U. Schnelle, *Theology of the New Testament*, transl. M. E. Boring, Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2009, pp. 465-470.

62. J. B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, Mm Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge U.K. 1997, pp. 21-23.

63. D. L. Bock, *A Theology of Luke's Gospel and Acts*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2011, pp. 387-388.

64. *Luke 24* and *Acts 1*. D. L. Bock, *Luke*, vol. II: 9:51-24:53, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1996, p. 470 ff.; see also R. T. France, *Luke*, Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2013, pp. 380-399 and R. H. Stein, *Luke*, Broadman & Holman Publishers, Nashville, Tennessee 2001, pp. 602-624.

65. A. A. Just, *Luke*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL 2005 and D. L. Bock, *A Theology of Luke's Gospel and Acts*, *op.cit.*, p. 212 ff., and also M. D. Goulder, *Luke: A New Paradigm*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield 1989.

66. J. T. Pennington – S. M. McDonough, *op.cit.*, p. 60 and R. H. Stein, *op.cit.*, pp. 46-47 and 48-49.

point of view seem to conflict with central norms of the time related to the temple in Jerusalem, idolatry and Caesar himself. Besides the use of the word *Lord* and its purpose are quite well known<sup>67</sup>. However, in this work we focus on the basis of Luke's cosmology, which is Jesus' ascension and the transformation of the universe through Him<sup>68</sup>.

Luke characteristically implies the word *κτίζω* (create), although he does not use it to refer to the creation of the world by God. For Luke, God is the Lord and creator of the universe. Besides, he states characteristically in the *Acts*: «ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιήσας τὸν κόσμον καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ, οὗτος οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς ὑπάρχων» (“The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth”)<sup>69</sup>. However, Luke's interest in the universe and the world is not focused on its creation. He does not want his cosmology to expand to a “New Genesis”, as Matthew did. What he is interested in is to present the transformative work of Jesus' presence, that results in the change of man's attitude. Because man, through the influence of Jesus, radically changes the way he perceives the world, God and the universe in general. He achieves this through the ascension and mission of the Paraclete<sup>70</sup>.

The double reference of Luke to the ascension of Jesus, at the end of his gospel and at the beginning of the *Acts*, shows how important this event was to him. The ascension presents the entry of Jesus into the heavenly world the 42nd day. For Luke the ascension exalts Jesus as Lord and as Christ. Luke also defines that after his ascension: «Καὶ αὐτοὶ προσκυνήσαντες αὐτόν»<sup>71</sup>. This element reveals a worship of Jesus, something that the Jews manifested only towards Jahweh<sup>72</sup>.

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67. For more on the Christological titles of Jesus see Ch. Atmatzidis, *Θεολογία τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης*, *op.cit.*, pp. 310-328.

68. R. H. Stein, *op.cit.*, pp. 622-625.

69. *Acts* 17, 24; D. L. Bock, *op.cit.*, pp. 389-395.

70. See D. Farrow, *Ascension Theology*, T & T Clark, London – New York 2011 and D. Farrow, *Ascension and Ecclesia: on the Significance of the Doctrine of the Ascension for Ecclesiology and Christian Cosmology*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1999, pp. 15-40, and also J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke IX-XXIV: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Doubleday, New York 1985.

71. *Luke* 24, 52.

72. L. W. Hurtado, *Destroyer of the Gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World*, Baylor University Press, Waco, Texas 2017, pp. 345, also J. Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*,

Then, in Acts 1, 11 the men dressed in white identify the event as ascension saying: «ἄνδρες Γαλιλαῖοι, τί ἐστήκατε [ἐμ]βλέποντες εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν; οὗτος ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὁ ἀναλημφθεὶς ἀφ' ὑμῶν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν οὕτως ἐλεύσεται ὃν τρόπον ἐθεάσασθε αὐτὸν πορευόμενον εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν» (“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven”). The moment of Jesus’ return after His ascension, will be the moment of judgement, when all the creation will be renewed and made new. The symbolism of the Second Coming within the ascension may have prompted Luke to describe Jesus’ rapture in the clouds<sup>73</sup>.

The coming of the Paraclete marks the fact that the heavenly world now communicates directly with the earthly world. The curtain separating the two worlds was opened with the ascension of Jesus to heaven. The result of God’s glory is the coming of the Spirit, which is poured out upon the believers of God. This tearing of the curtain that separates heaven from earth is achieved with the ascension of Jesus. In a sense, heaven is now the one that invades earth, thus deconstructing the previous efforts of people to do the opposite<sup>74</sup>.

As it was mentioned, Luke’s cosmology is based on the ascension of Jesus, Who is glorified in heaven. Luke prepares this fact from the beginning of his gospel, from the birth of Jesus. God sends angels to announce His birth, while the Spirit is the one who at various times inspires the word of those present<sup>75</sup>. Jesus is strengthened by God through the Spirit, but we already know from John the Baptist that he who comes will baptize with the Spirit<sup>76</sup>.

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Word Books Publisher, Dallas, Texas 1993 and J. B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke, op.cit.*, pp. 859-863.

73. M. Turner, *Power from on High: The Spirit in Israel’s Restoration and Witness in Luke - Acts*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield 1996, p. 278 and F. Bovon, *Luke the Theologian*, Baylor University Press, Waco, Texas 2005, p. 123 ff.

74. H. D. Buckwalter, *The Character and Purpose of Luke’s Christology*, Cambridge University Press, New York – Cambridge 2005, pp. 182-184.

75. Luke 1, 41-45, 67-79; 2, 25-32. F. Bovon, *op.cit.*, pp. 225 ff., also D. L. Bock, *Luke*, vol. I: 1:1-9:50, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1994, pp. 29-42.

76. Luke 3, 16. M. Gkoutzioudis, *op.cit.*, pp. 171-208.

During the crucifixion and burial of Jesus, we again see beings who do not belong to the sphere of the earthly world, as well as similar phenomena being carried out. The darkness on the cross wants to show the temporary victory and prevalence of evil<sup>77</sup>. In the midst of darkness, the curtain of the temple is torn in two, an element that we have already analyzed, in this case however, of the narrative in the gospel according to *Luke* may want to show that the Holy of Holies is no longer the place where God dwells<sup>78</sup>.

Finally, in the empty tomb, the women meet two men, who are angels and announce the resurrection of Jesus in the same way that the angels announced His birth<sup>79</sup>. The Gospel of *Luke* prepares its readers in order to complete the picture of events in the *Acts*, with a detailed description of Jesus' Ascension<sup>80</sup>. It describes phenomena that reveal the entrance of the heavenly world to the earthly. The angels function within the narrative surrounding the beginning and end of the earthly activity of Jesus, declaring that they will continue to support the Church in its work. The Spirit that strengthened and supported Jesus in his action, will also strengthen the faithful in their mission<sup>81</sup>.

The presence of Jesus next to God presents a theological change from the way people perceive God. God is perceived through Jesus and the Holy Spirit, to the nations and to the Jews: «ἀλλὰ λήμψεσθε δύναμιν ἐπελθόντος τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος ἐφ' ὑμᾶς καὶ ἔσεσθέ μου μάρτυρες ἐν τε Ἱερουσαλήμ καὶ [ἐν] πάσῃ τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ καὶ Σαμαρείᾳ καὶ ἕως ἑσχάτου τῆς γῆς» (“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth”)<sup>82</sup>. In this very

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77. J. B. Green, *op.cit.*, pp. 745-800 and A. A. Just, *op.cit.*, p. 368.

78. R. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave*, vol. I: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels, Doubleday, New York 1994, pp. 1042 and I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek text*, The Paternoster Press – Mm. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1978.

79. D. L. Bock, *A Theology of Luke's Gospel and Acts*, *op.cit.*, pp. 150-159 and L. T. Johnson, *op.cit.*, p. 49 ff.

80. R. H. Stein, *op.cit.*, pp. 624-625.

81. J. T. Pennington – S. M. McDonough, *op.cit.*, p. 67.

82. *Acts* 1, 8. See F. Bovon, *op.cit.*, pp. 352-354, and especially for the authors' positions

way Luke completes and consolidates the presentation of his cosmology. He wants to show that the change that Jesus brings to the world is not limited to creation itself, but also extends to the human mentality<sup>83</sup>. Theology and the conception of the divine and the world are rebuilt from the beginning and renewed within the context of divine grace, which is made possible through Jesus and the Spirit. The believers and the Church are not abandoned, but heaven is now invading in the earthly world to renovate and save man.

#### 4. The Cosmology in the *Gospel of John*

The cosmological language of John both, in the gospel and in the rest literature of John is special<sup>84</sup>. The gospel is governed by strong elements of dualism, as well as the entire literature of John. These elements define and characterize the special language of John, as also the very essence of his cosmology<sup>85</sup>. Without any doubt the cosmology of John bears a uniqueness, especially when compared to the synoptic Evangelists<sup>86</sup>.

The word *κόσμος* (world) in the *Gospel of John* is found about 78 times and has the meaning of the natural world as understood by the ancient Greeks; that is, of the natural order that exists within the universe, contrary to the concept of the world as the Jews understood it, meaning heaven and earth<sup>87</sup>. John seems to understand the Greek perception of the world «καὶ νῦν δόξασόν με σύ, πάτερ, παρὰ σεαυτῶ τῇ δόξῃ ἣ εἶχον πρὸ τοῦ τὸν κόσμον εἶναι παρὰ σοί» (“and now, Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee

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on the issue see *op.cit.*, pp. 366-387.

83. M. D. Goulder, *op.cit.*, and D. P. Moessner, *Luke the Historian of Israel's Legacy, Theologian of Israel's 'Christ'*, Walter de Gruyter GmbH, Berlin – Boston 2016, p. 339.

84. H. N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John: A Theological Commentary*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan – Cambridge 1997, pp. 1-16.

85. F. Hahn, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 32011, p. 586 ff.

86. L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1989, p. 49 ff.

87. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1978, p. 508.

before the world was made”)<sup>88</sup>. One more example of this understanding is the way the Gospel ends: «ἅτινα ἐὰν γράφηται καθ’ ἕν, οὐδ’ αὐτὸν οἶμαι τὸν κόσμον χωρῆσαι τὰ γραφόμενα βιβλία» (“were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written”)<sup>89</sup>. Therefore, we can understand that the concept of the world was not limited exclusively to the borders of the material world, but reached even the heavenly world, combining the understanding of existence on both the Jewish and Greek level<sup>90</sup>.

At this point, however the most certain rendering of the concept of the world begins to be limited because dualism begins to appear and directly affect the text<sup>91</sup>. John’s dualism differs considerably from that of the synoptic. In the synoptic gospels we see that there is dualism in the present century as well as in the century to come. However, in John dualism exists between the world above and the world below<sup>92</sup>.

Of course, dualism is not only about union, but also about the emergence of two opposing positions: *light* and *darkness*, *flesh* and *spirit*, as also *truth* and *falsehood*<sup>93</sup>. *Light* and *darkness* as natural symbols have a poetic connotation even in the texts of Qumran. There are to symbolize good and evil, while at the same time referring to diarchic perceptions<sup>94</sup>. John describes the coming of Jesus as light that tears through the darkness. This secular language presents the power and the way in which Jesus will appear, something that characterizes the whole of John’s literature. Also, the ontological dualism between light and darkness shapes the

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88. *John* 17, 5. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Books Publisher, Waco, Texas 1987, pp. 297-298.

89. *John* 21, 25. C. S. Keener, *The Gospel of John. A Commentary*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2003, pp. 1240-1242.

90. A. J. Köstenberger, *Encountering John*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2004, pp. 24-26.

91. G. Lakoff – M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London 1980.

92. R. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (i-xii)*, Doubleday, Garden City, New York 1966, pp. 347.

93. L. Morris, *op.cit.*, pp. 102 (note 85) and 211-212.

94. R. Brown, *op.cit.*, p. 515 and J. F. McHugh, *John 1-4*, Gr. N. Stanton (ed.), T & T Clark, London – New York 2009.

way in which listeners assume their own personal role, in the world and towards God<sup>95</sup>.

Then we have *flesh* and *spirit*, a distinction that was quite pronounced in the Platonic philosophy. In this philosophy the flesh, that is human body, is the bearer of sin and miasma. For John, however, this is not the case because, although he uses similar terminologies, he does not charge them with the same content. The flesh for John is not a bearer of sin, but gives birth to the flesh. Only spirit is the one which gives birth to spirit<sup>96</sup>: «τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν τὸ ζῶοποιοῦν, ἡ σὰρξ οὐκ ὠφελεῖ οὐδέν» (“it is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail”)<sup>97</sup>.

In the analogous sphere with light and darkness lies *truth* and *falsehood*, concepts that also exist in the literature of John. Truth has to do with God and Jesus Himself is the truth<sup>98</sup>, as in the case of *John* 16, 13<sup>99</sup>. On the other side is falsehood, where all the godless forces that oppose God and the cosmic order reside.

Of course, life and death could not be excluded from the dual symbolism of John. The main interest of John is not just Jesus, but the life he brings with Him, because he is life Himself<sup>100</sup>. Life is absolutely connected with the person of Jesus, whereas death is with the removal from him. These two concepts exist as cosmic forces within the universe of existence and influence it to a large extent<sup>101</sup>. The Son is the creator of life<sup>102</sup> and we can realize several elements from the introductory hymn of the gospel, because on this hymn is based all the theology and cosmology of the *Gospel of John*<sup>103</sup>. The concepts that are mentioned at the beginning of the gospel unfold within the narrative and reveal the secular truths they

95. C. R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis 2003, p. 172.

96. J. T. J. T. Pennington – S. M. McDonough, *op.cit.*, pp. 77-78.

97. *John* 6, 63.

98. *John* 17, 3; 14, 6. See H. N. Ridderbos, *op.cit.*, p. 549 and Jo-Ann A. Brant, *John*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2011, p. 224.

99. L. Morris, *op.cit.*, pp. 699-701.

100. *John* 1, 4. J. F. McHugh, *op.cit.*, pp. 14-17.

101. R. Brown, *op.cit.*, p. 506.

102. *John* 1, 3.

103. A. J. Köstenberger, *op.cit.*, pp. 36-40.

mention, describing their deeper meanings. The secular drama of the gospel presents us with two stories, that of historical reality and that of the Church<sup>104</sup>. Although the gospel refers to these two stories and expands on them, it is not limited to the geographical and existential boundaries it mentions but tends to extend to a timeless ontological and secular reality<sup>105</sup>. All the earthly action of Jesus is a secular journey towards the completion of God's plan. The symbolism of existence and of the world in general is presented in the narrative of the earthly action of Jesus<sup>106</sup>.

The completion of the earthly action of Jesus marks the beginning of the action of the apostles, of God's children. God is the source of the mission and His love for people is revealed by the mission of his Son<sup>107</sup>. The work of the Son is not to fulfill His will, but the will of Him who sent him and to reveal His word. The reference to the sender and the messenger and the relationship that exists between the Father and the Son will appear later in the gospel between the Son and His disciples<sup>108</sup>.

The Word comes into the world and this is a cosmological event by itself. The exit from this world wants Jesus to return to His former state. This is the essence of the Ascension, as described to us in the gospel, in order to complete the secular circle of Jesus' action<sup>109</sup>. In this sense, the mission of the Word was completed, but not the secular drama, because its significance continues and is expressed in three different ways: First, the mission of the Son continues through the disciples: «εἰρήνη ὑμῖν καθὼς ἀπέσταλκέν με ὁ πατήρ, καὶ γὼ πέμπω ὑμᾶς» ("peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you")<sup>110</sup>. Secondly the

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104. B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Marshall, Morgan & Scott Publ. Ltd., London 1986, pp. 56, 59 and 60.

105. Adele Reinhartz, *The Word in the World: The Cosmological Tale in the Fourth Gospel*, Scholars Press, Atlanta, Georgia 1992, pp. 4-5 ff.

106. For the earthly activity of Jesus in the gospel of John see A. J. Köstenberger, *op.cit.*, p. 51 ff., and also G. R. Beasley-Murray, *op.cit.*, p. 18 ff.

107. Teresa Okure, *The Johannine Approach to Mission: A Contextual Study of John 4:1-42*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 1998, p. 23.

108. B. Lindars, *op.cit.*, pp. 619, 621-623 espec. 637-638.

109. C. S. Keener, *op.cit.*, pp. 1240-1242.

110. *John* 20, 21. H. N. Ridderbos, *op.cit.*, pp. 642-643.

coming of the Paraclete will continue the work of the Son and will help the believers by guiding them and reminding them of the Word<sup>111</sup>: «ὁ δὲ παράκλητος, τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, ὃ πέμψει ὁ πατήρ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου, ἐκεῖνος ὑμᾶς διδάξει πάντα καὶ ὑπομνήσει ὑμᾶς πάντα ἃ εἶπον ὑμῖν [ἐγώ]» (“but the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you”)<sup>112</sup>. Finally, the Word will return to take with Him the children of God. In a sense as the Son achieved the secular victory completing His mission, the secular drama continues for anyone who received the Word and become God’s child. The participation in the drama continues for the readers of John<sup>113</sup>.

The question of the cosmology in John is not the end but the beginning. The synoptics lead the reader to the cross, something that John also does. But although the synoptics begin their story in the historical time of Judea, John begins from the beginning of existence in a timeless becoming at the center of the universe. For John, only a secular perception of Jesus (or better a secular perception of the Christian faith itself) can express what it really means to be a Christian<sup>114</sup>. Instead of approaching the literature of John in a purely theological or sociological pattern, we saw the secular dram which served the presentation of Jesus and faith as it was presented by John. John narrates a secular drama about the light of the world, as the Word of life. The truth has ramifications and paths that lead to the completion of the secular journey<sup>115</sup>.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, we have seen that the universe is full of mysteries and hidden truths. The evangelists have tried with their theological approaches to present these truths. According to the evangelists the

111. A. Reinhartz, *op.cit.*, p. 24; also for the meaning of the Logos see L. Morris, *op.cit.*, pp. 115-125 and C. K. Barrett, *op.cit.*, pp. 333-352 and 378-386.

112. John 14, 26. Jo-Ann A. Brant, *op.cit.*, p. 216.

113. B. Lindars, *op.cit.*, pp. 42, 442 and 496.

114. R. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, Paulist Press, New York, Mahwah 1979, pp. 43-47, 63-65 and 135-137.

115. J. T. J. T. Pennington – S. M. McDonough, *op.cit.*, pp. 87-88 and 89.

world has a direct relation with Jesus and His presence in it, both in historical reality and in eternal existence. The universe is influenced by the events that take place during the earthly action of Jesus. The entry of Jesus marks the beginning of change, transformation, renewal, while His exit completes the first stage of this change.

The ascension of Jesus is of particular importance in the gospels of *Luke* and *John*. It wants to show in practice the beginning of the renewal of the world together with the beginning of the apostles' mission. The influence of the Spirit also plays a role in the secular renewal, since the Spirit helps and guides the believers of God. Despite the obvious influences from ancient Greek philosophy, as well as from Judaic tradition, evangelists elaborate the content of the relevant concepts, in such a way as to give them a new, unique meaning.

Also, the analogies that exist in the political-religious world directly affect the sphere of the universe in general. This feature is of particular interest and is present in Mark. However, the universe, despite the diversity it carries, is directly influenced by God. The historical time is also a part of existence and is controlled by God in order to complete His plan.

Finally, the union between the spiritual and the existential universe is achieved in the light of Jesus. God tears heaven and approaches man, bringing a new Genesis, a total renewal of the existence that changes the way man approaches God. The secular order emerges in the work of the divine dispensation and the new role of man, who wants to approach God, is revealed and strengthened. The secular drama continues for every believer who wants to follow the will of God and will be completed in the coming judgement.