

Does *περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου* imply “the sins of the whole world” in 1 John 2,2?

Since the 1916 edition of A. Plummer’s *Epistles of John*¹, critics have been increasingly sensitive to how the three *περὶ*-clauses in 1 John 2,2 make for difficult interpretation². The last of these has often been rendered “concerning the sin(s) of the whole world”³. The English “the sin(s)” is inserted here without Greek parallel. Critics identify the adverbial construction οὐ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ as indicating the sequence of 2c and 2d following the *περὶ*-clause in 2b⁴. However, this solution does not explain precisely to what *περὶ ὅλου*

¹ A. PLUMMER, *The Epistles of S. John with Notes, Introduction, and Appendices* (CBSC; Cambridge 1886 and 1896) 89, interprets ἀλλὰ καὶ *περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου* as “but also for the sins of the whole world ... ‘the sins of’ is not repeated in the Greek and is not needed in English”. This interpretation disappears in Plummer’s 1916 edition. There A. PLUMMER, *The Epistles of S. John with Notes, Introduction, and Appendices* (CGTSC; Cambridge 1916 and 2010) 36, quotes Martin Luther as an innovation, saying: “So Luther: ‘sondern auch für der ganzen Welt.’ The supposed ellipse [τῆς or τῶν following *περὶ*] is neither necessary nor very probable: rather, as R.V., but also for the whole world ... and if it be said that ἵλασμός *implies* τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν (which may be doubted), then let ‘propitiation’ imply ‘sins’ in the English. We are not justified in inserting the word”.

² A.T. ROBERTSON, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville, TN 1934) 441, notes: “The case of 1 Jo. 2,2 is simple where instead of *περὶ τῶν ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου* (to be parallel with οὐ *περὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων*) John has merely *περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου*, a somewhat different conception”. Robertson regards this ellipsis as “lack of parallelism” or “heterogeneous structure” (p. 1199).

³ For a brief explanation of *περὶ* in 1 John 2,2, see J.H. THAYER, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Coded with Strong’s Concordance Numbers (Peabody, MA 102012) 501. Grammarians indicate that *περὶ* with genitive case is often used in metaphorical senses. For example, C.F.D. MOULE, *An Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge 21977) 62, comments on the use of *περὶ*: “with the genitive it is much commoner; but is only so used in metaphorical senses. These can be broadly comprehended within the sense *concerning*”. See also J.H. MOULTON and N. TURNER, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*. Syntax (Edinburgh 1963) 269-270.

⁴ R.E. BROWN, *The Epistles of John* (AB 30; New York 1982) 222.

τοῦ κόσμου (in 2d) refers. The seemingly incidental nature of the ellipsis τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν in 2d could shift the theological interpretation by calling into question the syntactic parallel found in 2b // 2c // 2d⁵. This essay strives, in some small measure, toward the resolution of this syntactical conundrum by proposing a contextual reading of 2a // 2d. I pose a simple question: is it more probable to read 2d as syntactically following 2cb, or as theologically following 2a (given the use of the ἱλασμός-concept within 2,2; 4,10)⁶? Let us begin by naming the syntactic issues of v. 2abcd⁷.

I. Syntactic issues in interpreting περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου

Four important factors make the syntax of the clause in 2d problematic. First, the ellipsis of ἁμαρτίαι in 2d is unusual⁸. One might argue from silence that ἁμαρτίαι is implicitly understood in the construction of 2c because the expression τῶν ἡμετέρων agrees in case, number, and gender with τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν in 2b. Further, the possessive adjective ἡμετέρων in 2c adds to the parallel and agrees with the personal pronoun ἡμῶν (in 2b); the two agree in case, number, and gender. In this argument, the object “our sins” is implied. However, one cannot speak with the same degree of clarity regarding τοῦ κόσμου in 2d, which agrees in neither number nor gender (but only in the genitive) with ἡμετέρων in 2c. As a result, the absence of ἁμαρτίαι in 2d raises considerations regarding grammatical consistency and theological interpretation.

⁵ The first scholar who recognized an unusual ellipsis in τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν in 2d seems to be B.F. WESTCOTT, *The Epistles of St John*. The Greek Text with Notes (London 1883) 45. See discussion below.

⁶ A context-critical analysis, supported by the grammar and syntax of verse 2, suggests that περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου does not imply the “sin(s)” of the world *per se*. ROBERTSON, *Grammar*, 618, suggests the three περί-clauses in 2bcd should be viewed as ablative cases in parallelism with καὶ αὐτὸς ἱλασμός ἐστιν in 2a. However, Greek has no ablative case. See Graph 1 below for further illustration.

⁷ For convenience the text of 1 John 2,2 is offered here: (a) καὶ αὐτὸς ἱλασμός ἐστιν (b) περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, (c) οὐ περὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων δὲ μόνον (d) ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου.

⁸ T.C.G. THORNTON, “The Meaning of καὶ περὶ ἁμαρτίας in Romans 8,3”, *JTS* 22 (1971) 515-517, explains why difficulties exist in interpreting Paul’s use of this phrase in “and as a sacrifice for sin” or “and for sin”.

Second, to what exactly does περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου in 2d refer? Does it refer to the singular ἡ ἁμαρτία (“the collective or mutual sinfulness” of the whole world) or the plural αἱ ἁμαρτίαι (“the sins” of the world) as does τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν in 2b? Further, the adjective ὅλος can imply both the singular “completeness” and the plural “all things altogether”⁹. It is possible that ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου could be rendered collectively or individually. It is surprising that John does not use a helping article and write, for example, περὶ (τῆς or τῶν) ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου. An article (either τῆς or τῶν) after περί could have eliminated ambiguity by rendering the text “concerning the sin(s) of the whole world”? For this reason, Plummer questions the omission of such an article: “The supposed ellipse [either τῆς or τῶν] is neither necessary nor very probable”¹⁰. Elsewhere in 1 John we may see examples of explicit uses of the article in places where it is not necessary, as in the following: περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς (1,1); ἡ κοινωνία δὲ ἡ ἡμετέρα (1,3); ἡ ἐντολή ἡ παλαιά (2,7); and τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν (2,8)¹¹. The possibility also exists that John is not talking about the “sin(s)” of the world in 2d. He may instead be focusing on the means of forgiving sin (considering the ἰλασμός-expiation of 2a)¹². Moreover, considering John’s rather lengthy discussion about sin and its remission (1,6-10; 2,1-2; 2,3-6)¹³,

⁹ BDAG, s.v., ὅλος, offers three different definitions: (a) pertaining to being complete in extent (whole, entire, and complete); (b) pertaining to a degree of completeness (wholly and completely); and (c) everything that exists (all things).

¹⁰ Unless otherwise noted hereafter PLUMMER, *Epistles of John*, 36.

¹¹ See also the following examples: ἐγὼ δὲ ἔχω τὴν μαρτυρίαν μείζω τοῦ Ἰωάννου (John 5,36); ὑπὲρ τῶν ἰδίων ἁμαρτιῶν θυσίας ἀναφέρειν ἔπειτα τῶν τοῦ λαοῦ (Heb 7,27); and οὐ χωρὶς αἵματος, ὃ προσφέρει ὑπὲρ ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τῶν τοῦ λαοῦ ἀγνοημάτων (Heb 9,7). WESTCOTT, *Epistles of John*, 45, gives the following example from Philo (*de Monarch* ii.6): “ὁ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἀρχιερεὺς οὐ μόνον ὑπὲρ ἅπαντος ἀνθρώπων γένους ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑπὲρ τῶν τῆς φύσεως γῆς”. (I quote Westcott obliquely without having found the Philo text to which he refers). In all cases, therefore, the articles τοῦ (John 5,36) and τῶν (Heb 7,27; 9,7; and in Philo) are necessary for parallel expression.

¹² The possibility exists because, in 1 John 5,16-19, John discusses the sins of the world and of everyone living in the world. However, the absence of ἁμαρτία or ἁμαρτίαι in this context raises questions. See below.

¹³ 1 John often speaks of sin in both plural and singular forms. For example, in the case of πάσης ἁμαρτίας (1,7); ἁμαρτίαν (1,8); and τὰς ἁμαρτίας (1,9 [2x]), the author is explicit in using either a verb or a noun to speak of “sin”.

his lack of clarity is puzzling with regard to the “implied” sin-object in *περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου*. The absence of *τῆς* or *τῶν* makes the syntax of the prepositional phrase ambiguous¹⁴.

Third, in light of the Johannine view of human sins, the use of *περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου* does not seem congruent with other comments (1,5-10; 2,3-6). As it stands in the midst of the discussion on community sin, the purpose of *περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου* is unclear. The personal pronoun “we” occurs in every verse in 1,1-10 and 2,3-6¹⁵. R. Bultmann formulates his concern in the following way:

καὶ αὐτὸς ἰλασμός ἐστιν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν. Es ist der Gedanke, daß Jesus Christus durch seinen Tod (sein Blut) die Sünden gesühnt hat, ebenso wie es in der Interpolation 1,7b ausgesprochen war, und wie es 4,10 wiederkehren wird. Dieser Gedanke [in Vers 2] stimmt aber nicht zu V. 1, in dem die Hoffnung auf die Sündenvergebung dadurch begründet ist, daß Jesus Christus unser Fürsprecher (Anwalt) bei Gott ist¹⁶.

Bultmann questions the consistency of thought between 2,1-2 and 1,5-2,6. 1 John 1,7 speaks exclusively of “our sins”, and uses the expression *καθαρίζει ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ πάσης ἁμαρτίας*. The personal pronoun *ἡμᾶς* implies the Johannine community. In 2,1 he explicitly addresses the community members using *τεκνία μου*¹⁷. Later, in 4,10, John uses a similar expression (*ἰλασμὸν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν*) for “our sins”. However, he does not repeat *περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου* in 4,10. For this reason R.E. Brown observes: “If there is a grammatical irregularity in these two *peri* phrases of 2,2[cd], it is that the object of the first is ‘our sins’, while the object of the second is ‘the whole world’ – a seeming mixture of things and people”¹⁸.

¹⁴ ROBERTSON, *Grammar*, 441, 1199. See n. 2.

¹⁵ See J. PAINTER, *1, 2, and 3 John* (SP 18; Colledgeville, MN 2002) 44-51, 119-140; A. VON HARNACK, “Das ‘Wir’ in den johanneischen Schriften”, *SPAW.PH* (Berlin 1923) 96-113; and P. PERKINS, “Koinōnia in 1 John 1,3-7: The Social Context of Division in the Johannine Letters”, *CBQ* 45 (1983) 631-641.

¹⁶ R. BULTMANN, *Die Drei Johannesbriefe* (KEK 14; Göttingen 1967) 29.

¹⁷ BROWN, *Epistles of John*, 214, concludes that “in the Epistles *teknion* is used in the plural for the children of God or the church, while *teknion* and *paidion* are used as direct address for the readers who are clearly Christians of the author’s own community”.

¹⁸ BROWN, *Epistles of John*, 222.

Fourth, this irregularity has found its way into various translations. The words “the sins” are inserted in 2d. For example, the NIV (1984) translates “and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world”, while the NAS (1977) renders the passage as “and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world”. Similar insertions occur in German and French translations¹⁹. For instance, the EIN (1980) renders “aber nicht nur für unsere Sünden, sondern auch für die der ganzen Welt”, while even more radical are the LUO (1912) and LUT (1984) which translate “nicht allein aber für die unseren sondern auch für die der ganzen Welt”. The insertion of “the sin(s)” or “those” has not always met universal consent. The American Standard Version (1901) sought to remain close to the Greek text in rendering 2cd as “and not for ours only, but also for the whole world”²⁰, while two German versions, the ELO (1905) and ELB (1993), translate the same text as “nicht allein aber für die unseren, sondern auch für die ganze Welt”. Scholars have also criticized the addition of “the sin(s)” in 2d. B.F. Westcott argues that “[t]he supposition that περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου is an elliptical expression for περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου is not justified by usage, and weakens the force of the passage”²¹. Plummer advocates consistency in the interpretation of 2d by not inserting “the sin(s)”²².

These four syntactic considerations raise the following question: how far back, in the context of 1 John 2,1-2, should one interpret κόσμος as the object of περί? This question suggests two possibilities: (a) should we interpret περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου parallel to περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν in 2b (cf. 2c), or (b) should we treat περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου as an extension and effect of ἰλασμός in 2a? A presentation of περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου can be displayed in the following diagram:

¹⁹ Other English versions include the KJV (1611), DAR (1899), NAB, NAU (1995), NIB, RSV (1952), and NRSV (1989). French translations include the BJ (Bible de Jérusalem), LSG (1910), NEG (1979), and BFC (1997).

²⁰ Similar literal translations are provided by the DBY (1884/1890), BBE (1949/1964), and NKJ (1982). However, the WEB (1833) places the word “sins” in brackets (“and not for ours only, but also for {the sins of} the whole world”).

²¹ WESTCOTT, *Epistles of John*, 45. In contrast, L.H. MARSHALL, *The Epistles of John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI 1978) 119, n. 31, criticizes Westcott as “over-subtle” in translating “but for the whole world” without supplying the word “the sins”. I challenge this criticism. The insertion “the sins” or “those” in some modern translations of the Greek does not always do justice to what can appear to be the real intention of the author.

²² PLUMMER, *Epistles of John*, 36. See also n. 1.

2,1d	ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν δίκαιον)))
2,2a	αὐτὸς ἰλασμός ἐστιν	
2,2b	↑ ↑ ↑ <u>περὶ</u> τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν,	
2,2c	→ <u>περὶ</u> τῶν ἡμετέρων	
2,2d	→ <u>περὶ</u> ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου	οὐ δὲ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ

The emphasis of the first question (a) lies in the Johannine concept of sin (τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν) in 2b; the impetus of the second question (b) is placed on the salvific work of Jesus as ἰλασμός in bearing 2a with regard to the use of περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου in 2d²³.

II. Contemporary interpretations of περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου

The syntactic position of περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου has been commonly held as grammatically following the περὶ-clause in 2b. Often “the sins” is construed as belonging to or having to do with the “whole” world. Apart from Westcott and Plummer, no scholars have questioned the exact connotation implied in the object of the περὶ-clause in 2d²⁴. Perhaps influenced by their reading of the three περὶ-clauses in 2,2bcd, scholars interpret περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου as a sequence of περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν²⁵. Of particular importance in

²³ For discussion on the background and extra-biblical usages of κόσμος, see H. SASSE, “κοσμέω, κόσμος, κόσμιος, κοσμικός”, *ThWNT* 3 (Stuttgart 1938) 867-898, esp. 868-882. Also C. SPICQ, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA 32008) s.v. κοσμέω, 330-335.

²⁴ BROWN, *Epistles of John*, 222, is the only scholar after Westcott and Plummer who points out some irregularity in the περὶ-clause of 2d. In his overall interpretation of 1 John 2,1-2, however, Brown shares a common belief in seeing περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου as “the sins” of the world.

²⁵ U.C. VON WAHLDE, *The Gospel and Letters of John*. Commentary on the Three Johannine Letters (ECC 3; Grand Rapids, MI 2010) 45, inserts word(s) that are not in John’s text, saying: “the author exhorts his readers not to sin, but if they do Jesus is a Paraclete and an atonement for their sin and that of the entire world”. The list of scholars of similar view is long. Here are cited only a few. W. VOGLER, *Die Briefe des Johannes* (THNT 17; Leipzig 1993) 68-69; and PAINTER, *1, 2, and 3 John*, 158-159.

this regard is the inventory of N.H. Cassem²⁶, who studies the Johannine use of κόσμος. As the title of his article indicates, Cassem suggests implications in light of the limited Johannine use of κόσμος. “Although only occurring twice in Johannine literature, the phrase ὅλος ὁ κόσμος casts the world in [a] negative light. The references are to ‘the sins of the whole world’ (1 John 2,2) and to the gloomy declaration ‘the world is in the power of the evil one’ (1 John 5,19)”²⁷. Arguing in this regard, Cassem reads περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου as having everything to do with the “sins” of the world; thus he holds that the Johannine cosmic attitude is entirely negative. Cassem further notes that the author uses κόσμος in a hostile sense in the epistle²⁸.

Cassem inserts “the sins” into the Greek text without qualification. In this instance Cassem is no exception. His interpretation of 2d as “in negative light” and “more ambivalent or hostile” seems to be solely based on the insertion “the sins”. However the Greek of 2d does not warrant a reference to ἁμαρτία “sin(s)” in a singular or plural, individual or collective, sense. To make such a parallel regarding “the sin(s)” of the world the article τῆς or τῶν as a necessary grammatical component must follow περί and precede ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου²⁹.

A good example occurs in 1 John 3,12. The author compares the evil deeds of Cain and those righteous deeds of his brother Abel: ὅτι τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ πονηρὰ ἦν, τὰ δὲ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ αὐτοῦ δίκαια. Here the second τὰ is explicitly used to make a parallel expression with τὰ ἔργα in the sentence³⁰. In the absence of the article in 2d,

²⁶ N.H. CASSEM, “A Grammatical and Contextual Inventory of the Use of *kósmos* in the Johannine Corpus with Some Implications for a Johannine Cosmic Theology”, *NTS* 19 (1972-1973) 81-91. For different views on the summary of the Johannine use of κόσμος, see F.-M. BRAUN, “Le péché du monde selon saint Jean”, *RevThom* 65 (1965) 181-201; R.E. BROWN, *The Gospel according to John I-XII* (AB 29; New York 1966) 508-510.

²⁷ CASSEM, “Grammatical and Contextual Inventory”, 85.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 89. See also the summary in Table 4 on page 88 in Cassem’s article.

²⁹ ROBERTSON, *Grammar*, 441, 1199. See n. 2. Then 1 John 2,2d would have read: περὶ τῆς [οἱ τῶν] ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου. Here I presume that περί takes the genitive case as the phrase ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου implies. In Attic Greek περί can take genitive, dative, or accusative. But its use with the dative seems to have waned in NT Greek. Cf. M.J. HARRIS, *Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament. An Essential Reference Resource for Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI 2012) 179-180; and BDAG, 797-798, s.v., περί.

³⁰ Cf. also the following: γράφω ὑμῖν, πατέρες, ὅτι ἐγνώκατε τὸν ἀπ’

scholars have mistakenly interpreted *περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου* as implying the sins of the whole world³¹. Since Westcott and Plummer this interpretation has been questioned. C.G. Kruse raises doubts about the prepositional phrase in 2d, arguing that the author's meaning is unclear in the statement that Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice "for the sins of the whole world"³². However, Kruse still considers that 2d has to do with "the sins" of the world. More proper is the formulation by W. De Boor. If the death of Jesus Christ serves as the "sin-expiation" (*ἰλασμός*) concerning not only our wrongdoing but also that of the whole world, then it is not "the sins" of the world as such that God's sin-forgiveness through Jesus Christ brings to the fore³³. Rather, the focus is on God's salvific plan accomplished through the effective work of Jesus (*ἰλασμός*) that the world and those sinners living within it may receive forgiveness.

Recently scholars tend to argue that the Johannine view of universal expiation seems to dominate the Christian picture of Christ's salvific and effective work implied in *ἰλασμός*. To this end W. Thüsing notes that the image of Christ cannot be construed as the sin-expiation only for his own followers; rather the salvific work of Jesus is fundamentally universal. He is sent into the world to correct the darkness of falsehood, the falsehood of those opposed to God's love³⁴. The fundamental and theological claim about universalism in 1 John is grounded in the effective work of Christ as the means of expiation (*ἰλασμός*), both for the Johannine Christian(s) as well as the entire world. The central theme of *ἰλασμός* is not fixed on the sins, but on the expiation of sins. The focus on the effective work of Christ (*ἰλασμός*) is perhaps the reason why the author deliberately left out the article *τῶν* in 2d. For this reason G. Strecker argues that the sin-expiation is never restricted solely to the Johannine community, but

ἀρχῆς (1 John 2,13.14); *μὴ ἀγαπάτε τὸν κόσμον μηδὲ τὰ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ* (1 John 2,15); *ὅτι πᾶν τὸ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ* (1 John 2,16); *τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου* (1 John 4,3); *ὁ ἐν ὑμῖν ἢ ὁ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ* (1 John 4,4); *οἱ τρεῖς εἰς τὸ ἕν εἰσιν* (1 John 5,8); see also n. 12 for cited examples in John 5,36; Heb 7,27; 9,7.

³¹ See BROWN, *Epistles of John*, 224; D.L. AKIN, *1, 2, 3 John* (NAC 38; Nashville, TN 2001) 84.

³² C.G. KRUSE, *The Letters of John* (PNTC; Grand Rapids, MI 2000) 74.

³³ W. DE BOOR, *Die Briefe des Johannes* (WSB; Berlin 1978) 44.

³⁴ W. THÜSING, *Die Johannesbriefe* (GS 22; Leipzig 1970) 52.

has a universal outlook. The salvific work of Jesus is directed to the whole world, that is, περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου³⁵.

This being said, it is necessary to address the further question of whether περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου has anything to do with “the sins” of the world. Against this misconception we now turn to the context-based analysis of περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου.

III. Context-critical analysis of περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου

In the absence of τῆς or τῶν in 2d, a reinterpretation of the entire verse is necessary. When we examine carefully the structure of v. 2, the syntax of περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου is not so evident as it is for those who have taken for granted that the phrase has to do with “sin(s)”. In fact, a link with τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν (“our sins”) in 2b seems forced and unconvincing. It is necessary, rather, to look beyond the parallel construction οὐ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ in 2cd and connect 2d with the main clause in 2a (Graph 1). In so doing, we may discern five issues which demonstrate that περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου in 2d is linked syntactically and theologically with αὐτὸς ἰλασμός ἐστιν in 2a. We first examine whether ὁ κόσμος implies αἱ ἁμαρτίαι. We next look at the reading of κόσμος with prepositions. We then examine the use of περὶ in 1 John. We further analyze the meaning of ὅλος in 1 John. Lastly we link the reading περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου in 2d with ἰλασμός in 2a. In what follows we will consider these issues.

IV. Can ὁ κόσμος imply αἱ ἁμαρτίαι?

Since the compelling issue here is both the insertion and interpretation of “the sins” in some translations and commentaries, we must examine the question of whether John means or even implies the concept of “sins” in 2d. We are thus testing a specific usage of κόσμος to see if it implies or is directly related to ἁμαρτία in 1 John. We will only consider the occurrences of κόσμος in 1 John. Not considered is the usage of κόσμος in other Johannine writings or the rest of the NT (indeed, studies have been done in this regard)³⁶.

³⁵ G. STRECKER, *Die Johannesbriefe* (KEK 14; Göttingen 1989) 94.

³⁶ CASSEM, “Grammatical and Contextual Inventory”, 81-91; BRAUN, “Le

The objective of these statistics is to see whether in 1 John κόσμος ever occurs in parallel with, or as an implication of ἀμαρτία.

The following references are to be studied in parallel and in sequence. First, we list the occurrences of κόσμος: 2,2d.15a.15b.15c.16a.16c.17; 3,1.13.17; 4,1.3.4.5a.5b.5c.9.14.17; 5,4a.4b.5.19, with a total of 23 times³⁷. Second, we register the instances of ἀμαρτία: 1,7.8.9a.9c; 2,2.12; 3,4a.4b.5a.5b; 3,8.9; 4,10; 5,16a.16b.17a.17b, with a total of 17 times³⁸. Beside these, Strecker notes two places where the author uses κόσμος to express a synonymous idea with or relating to ἀμαρτία³⁹: περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου (2,2d) // οἶδαμεν ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐσμεν καὶ ὁ κόσμος ὅλος ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κέεται (5,19).

In the NT κόσμος occurs 105 times; 78 of these appear in the Fourth Gospel, and 24 times in the Johannine epistles (23x in 1 John and 1x in 2 John). According to Cassem's tabulation, "the frequency of use [in the Johannine literature], therefore, is two and one half times that of the entire remainder of the NT taken together. The word appears in the Fourth Gospel almost six times more frequently than it does in the Synoptics"⁴⁰. Our references above thus help point out several other factors. First, in none of the appearances of κόσμος in 1 John does the (immediate) context imply the

péché du monde selon saint Jean", 181-201; and BROWN, *Gospel according John*, I, 508-510.

³⁷ According to CASSEM, "Grammatical and Contextual Inventory", 82, references with underlined type indicate that "the form ὁ κόσμος appears absolutely, i.e., unmodified". I do question the analysis regarding 1 John 2,2, in which Cassem classifies it as being used absolutely. In the inventory offered by Cassem, the author seems to overlook the preposition περί which precedes τοῦ κόσμου. Cassem gives no clear criteria for why he considers certain cases with κόσμος as being used absolutely or non-absolutely. E. MALATESTA, *Interiority and Covenant. A Study of einai en and menein en in the First Letter of Saint John* (AnBib 69; Rome 1978) 27, holds that a construction involving a noun is used absolutely when the noun is not accompanied by a preposition and not-absolutely when it is preceded by a preposition. According to Malatesta, for instance, the noun ἀγγελία is used absolutely in ἔστιν αὕτη ἡ ἀγγελία in 1 John 1,5a. Thus, if my analysis of Cassem's criteria for absolute use of κόσμος is correct, the phrase περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου is not used absolutely, but is modified by the περί-clause.

³⁸ Underline type references indicate that ἀμαρτία is used in the absolute sense or as a nominative predicate.

³⁹ See STRECKER, *Johannesbriefe*, 94, for further explanation on this point.

⁴⁰ CASSEM, "Grammatical and Contextual Inventory", 81.

Johannine attitude toward or definition of sins or sinfulness. The only place is verse 2b where the *περὶ*-clause implies “our sins”. Yet this is not readily linked with *κόσμος*; and it is difficult to make a syntactic reference to “the sins” in *περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου* in 2d because of the absence of *τῶν*⁴¹. At best *περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου* should be rendered as “concerning the whole world”.

Secondly, when we examine the occurrences of *ἁμαρτία* in 1 John (reference above), the result is striking. Wherever *ἁμαρτία* occurs, absolutely or in reference to other verbs, it is never employed with an implication or reference to *κόσμος*. This seems to be in direct contrast to John 1,29 (cf. 16,8), in which John the Baptist proclaims that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. However, two important matters are to be kept in mind here. On the one hand, we are dealing with issues directly related to 2d⁴². On the other, in a recent study on John 1,29 (cf. 1,35-36), R. Bieringer offers important observations, namely: (1) “ὁ ἄμνος τοῦ θεοῦ [ist] eine Parallele von ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ”; and (2) “Der Ausdruck ὁ ἄμνος τοῦ θεοῦ bezieht sich nicht unmittelbar auf den Tod Jesu”⁴³.

These observations are important for several reasons: (a) the context of John 1,29 does not speak of the death of Jesus; (b) the sentence, “the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (cf. John 1,29)”, is not necessarily identical with the statement that Jesus Christ the Paraclete (1 John 2,1d) is the expiation (*ἱλασμός*;

⁴¹ Cf. WESTCOTT, *Epistles of John*, 45; PLUMMER, *Epistles of John*, 36; and ROBERTSON, *Grammar*, 441, 1199. See n. 2. In addition, John elsewhere in his Epistle uses similar expressions with the article to make a clear parallel between two nouns (i.e., 3,12; cf. 2,13.14.15.16; 4,2.3.4; 5,8; John 5,36; Heb 7,27; 9,7).

⁴² While 1 John and the Fourth Gospel arguably belong to the same literary genre, there is every reason to allow for sharp differences and distinctions. See R.E. BROWN, “The Relationship to the Fourth Gospel Shared by the Author of 1 John and by His Opponents”, *Text and Interpretation*. Studies in the New Testament Presented to Matthew Black (Cambridge 1979) 57-68; U.C. VON WAHLDE, *The Johannine Commandments*. 1 John and the Struggle for the Johannine Tradition (New York 1990).

⁴³ R. BIERINGER, “Das Lamm Gottes, das die Sünde der Welt hinwegnimmt (Joh 1,29): Eine Kontextorientierte und redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung auf dem Hintergrund der Passatradition als Deutung des Todes Jesu im Johannesevangelium”, *The Death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (ed. G. VAN BELLE) (BETL 200; Leuven 2007) 199-232, esp. 230-232.

cf. 1 John 2,2a) concerning the whole world (1 John 2,2d); and (c) “the sins of the world” in John 1,29 cannot be equated with “concerning the whole world” in 1 John 2,2d. The Johannine Lamb of God, ὁ ἀΐρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου, is not in direct contrast to all the occurrences of ἁμαρτία in 1 John. In the Fourth Gospel, John does not employ “the Lamb of God” to imply the death of Jesus.

In 1 John the use of ἁμαρτία is strikingly different. 1 John 1,5–2,2 makes clear references to the death of Jesus (τὸ αἷμα Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ in 1,7) and to the expiation of sins (ἱλασμός in 2,2)⁴⁴. But the letter does not speak of Jesus’ death with regard to “the sins” of the world. It is therefore less plausible that John equates the concept of ἁμαρτία with his use of κόσμος.

Thirdly, according to the above reference, κόσμος is not used anywhere in 1 John in the “hostile sense” held by Cassem⁴⁵. Similarly, one may stress the relationship between the use of κόσμος and πονηρός, -ά, -όν in 1 John 5,19. Strecker observes that 1 John and the Gospel have the same concern for the tension between God’s love for the world through the Son and the negative inclination of the world. According to 1 John, the false teachers are from the world and the world listens to them (4,5); the true believers are from God, and they are separate from the false teachers (5,4; cf. 3 John 11). In this respect there are some in the world who are prone to evil and thus lie in the grip of falsehood (5,19)⁴⁶. If Strecker’s interpretation is correct, the Johannine use of πονηρᾶ here in 5,19 really means that “some” people, so long as they are in the world, are under the influence of falsehood and in danger of being controlled by their own evilness. In this sense, the world (κόσμος) can hardly be interpreted in a “hostile sense”. J. Painter argues that in general one can say that the Johannine use of κόσμος shows a diversity of attitudes to the world⁴⁷.

If Brown is right in saying that περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου means “a seeming mixture of things and people”⁴⁸, we still have to modify his overall argument regarding the universal provision. Because of

⁴⁴ See the discussion in J.T. DO, “Jesus’ Death as *Hilasmos* According to 1 John”, *The Death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (ed. G. VAN BELLE) (BETL 200; Leuven 2007) 537-565.

⁴⁵ CASSEM, “Grammatical and Contextual Inventory”, 85.

⁴⁶ STRECKER, *Johannesbriefe*, 94.

⁴⁷ PAINTER, *1, 2, and 3 John*, 159.

⁴⁸ BROWN, *Epistles of John*, 222.

the absence of τῆς οἰ τῶν, περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου is best rendered literally as “concerning the whole world”. Therefore, we can agree with Brown’s conclusion that 1 John 2,2 leans towards the sin-expiation concerning the world and speaks as such in its broadest extension⁴⁹. Here in 2d the object of περὶ is not “the sin” of the world. We should also take into consideration ὁ κόσμος ὅλος ἐν τῷ ποιηρῷ κεῖται in 5,19 and ὁ πατὴρ ἀπέσταλκεν τὸν υἱὸν σωτῆρα τοῦ κόσμου in 4,14 (cf. 4,9; John 3,16-17)⁵⁰. These texts give the impression that the object of περὶ in 2d points to a need for the sin-forgiving “concerning” the world, rather than “the sins” of the world⁵¹.

In short, it is syntactically possible to take περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου in 2d as a sequence of περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν in 2b or περὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων in 2c. Moreover, it is plausible to regard περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου as modifying the main clause αὐτὸς ἰλασμός ἐστιν in 2a (Graph 1). This suggestion invites us to take a closer look at the usage of κόσμος with prepositions in 1 John.

V. Readings of κόσμος with prepositions

The word κόσμος in 2d does not appear absolutely⁵². It is modified by περὶ⁵³ and ὅλος. Thus, it is necessary to examine how in 1 John κόσμος is used with prepositions. Our task is to observe the meaning or thought pattern where κόσμος occurs with prepositions.

According to the aforementioned uses of κόσμος in 1 John, we notice four prepositions modifying κόσμος, with varying connotations. First, ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ occurs in 2,15b (negative); 2,16a (negative); 4,3 (negative); 4,4 (negative); and 4,17 (neutral). Second, ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου is used in 2,16b (negative); 4,5a (neutral); and 4,5b (neutral). Third, εἰς τὸν κόσμον is employed in 4,1 (negative); and 4,9 (positive). Finally, περὶ [ὅλου] τοῦ κόσμου is found in 2,2 (positive).

⁴⁹ Ibid., 124.

⁵⁰ STRECKER, *Johannesbriefe*, 94, refers to John 1,29. Cf. BIERINGER, “Lamm Gottes”, 199-232.

⁵¹ In 1 John κόσμος appears for the first time in 2,2d. So without clear reference to what John says about the world, it is not easy to say simply that περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου refers to “the sins” of the world.

⁵² For examples and descriptions of how 1 John uses nouns absolutely see MALATESTA, *Interiority and Covenant*, 27-32.

⁵³ See the chapter on περὶ in MURRAY, *Prepositions and Theology*, 179-183.

Several points should be noted here. First, the occurrence of κόσμος with prepositions in 1 John (only 11 times) hardly provides any specific pattern of thought. A clear example is εἰς in 4,1 and 4,9: 4,1 has a negative connotation regarding false prophets, while the same preposition in 4,9 indicates the divine love by which God sent his only Son into the world. It is evident that a preposition does not carry a negative or positive connotation by itself⁵⁴.

Second, there is a tendency to combine the usage of ἐν with that of εἰς in the NT. Bieringer points out that in Koine Greek the distinction between ἐν and εἰς has already disappeared, and that εἰς has taken over more and more the meaning of ἐν. This is further reflected by the fact that in modern Greek ἐν has entirely disappeared⁵⁵. Bieringer's overall observation views εἰς as indicating a locative value⁵⁶. In 1 John, however, the uses of ἐν or εἰς modifying κόσμος seem to distinguish clearly between the locative value of ἐν and the directional aspect of εἰς⁵⁷. Moreover, the Johannine authors often tend to use εἰς as a technical term. In 1 John there are only two occasions where κόσμος is used with εἰς. There is a clear contrast in the expression εἰς τὸν κόσμον "into the world" in 4,1 and 4,9. The former denotes the false prophets who have come out (or "appeared") in the world, while the latter specifically means the incarnation of the Son of God who has come into the world⁵⁸.

In short, it seems difficult to find a specific pattern of thought for the use of κόσμος with any preposition. The meanings vary based on specific contexts, to which we now turn.

⁵⁴ Cf. MOULE, *Idiom-Book*, 62-63; and MOULTON – TURNER, *Syntax*, 269-270.

⁵⁵ BIERINGER, "Text-Critical Problems of John 16,13", 183. Cf. M. ZERWICK, *Biblical Greek* (SPIB 114; Rome 82005) §§ 99-111.

⁵⁶ F. BLASS and A. DEBRUNNER, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL 1961) §§ 205, 218, esp. §205, points out that "εἰς has absorbed the related preposition ἐν (in conjunction with the disappearance of the dative)".

⁵⁷ BLASS - DEBRUNNER, *Greek Grammar*, §205, state: "The Epistles and, still more surprisingly, Rev exhibit a correct differentiation between εἰς and ἐν in the local sense".

⁵⁸ VON WAHLDE, *Gospel and Letters of John*, III,148-149; III.157.

VI. Uses of περί in I John

Regarding περί, the phrase περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου in 2d hardly escapes the reader's attention. As Graph 1 suggests, two interpretations for the περί-clauses are possible. First, 2d is meant to follow successively 2b in the sense of the "sins" of the world as is implied in περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν⁵⁹. We have argued that this is not the most plausible interpretation because of the absence of τῆς or τῶν before ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου. Second, 2d is meant to modify αὐτὸς ἰλασμός ἐστιν in 2a. In this way, 2b, 2c, and 2d are construed as three distinct, though not separate, prepositional phrases modifying αὐτὸς ἰλασμός ἐστιν in 2a. Thus it seems clear that the meaning of περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου is clearly connected with the main clause in 2a, and not with 2b. What connects 2b, 2c, and 2d syntactically is αὐτὸς ἰλασμός ἐστιν.

As a preposition, περί can take the genitive, dative, or accusative⁶⁰. Indeed περί is one of the few prepositions in Greek (others are, e.g., μετά and ὑπέρ) that can be followed by all three grammatical cases. In the NT, F. Blass and A. Debrunner note that the dative was in the process of waning with all prepositions (μετά, περί, ὑπό, and ἀνά), except ἐν⁶¹. This is why in the NT περί occurs with only two cases, namely genitive or accusative⁶². BDAG gives two definitions of περί⁶³: (a) with genitive περί denotes the object or person to which (whom) an activity refers or relates, namely, "concerning;" and (b) with accusative it refers to a position, namely, "about". In

⁵⁹ HARRIS, *Prepositions and Theology*, 182, notes: "The singular περὶ ἁμαρτίας occurs nine times and the plural περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν five times in the NT. There is no material difference between the singular and plural since περὶ ἁμαρτίας may mean 'with respect to sins' (as a genetic singular)".

⁶⁰ Cf. LIDDELL and SCOTT, *Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford⁹1996) s.v., περί, 545-546. HARRIS, *Prepositions and Theology*, 179, ranks περί tenth in frequency among NT "proper" prepositions.

⁶¹ BLASS - DEBRUNNER, *Greek Grammar*, § 203.

⁶² F. W. MOULTON and A. S. GEDEN, *A Concordance to the Greek New Testament According to the Texts of Westcott, Hort, Tischendorf, and the English Revisers* (Edinburgh⁵1993) 791-794, show about 333 occurrences of περί in the NT for both genitive and accusative uses. The same statistics are shown in D. B. WALLACE, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics. An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament with Scripture, Subject, and Greek Word Indexes* (Grand Rapids, MI 1996) 357.

⁶³ BDAG, s.v., περί, 797-798.

1 John 2,2d, περί is followed by the genitive ⁶⁴, so we can agree with BDAG that περί ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου in 2d refers back to Jesus in αὐτὸς ἰλασμός ἐστιν in 2a.

It is interesting to note that περί, while occurring elsewhere in the NT with the genitive and accusative, appears only with the genitive in 1 John. Consult the following occurrences (10x total): 1,1; 2,2b.2c.2d.26.27; 4,10; 5,9.10.16.

In 1 John, when περί is used with an abstract noun (2,2bd; 4,10) or proper noun (5,9.10), it is accompanied by an article. 1 John 3,12 explicitly uses the article: τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ ποιηρὰ ἦν τὰ δὲ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ αὐτοῦ δίκαια. Indeed, the various uses of περί show that the author could have expressed the idea “the sins” of the world if he had so intended (cf. John 16,8-9). Then, verse 2d would have been περί ἁμαρτιῶν ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου or περί τῶν ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου ⁶⁵. In the absence of τῶν or ἁμαρτία, the phrase περί ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου places no stress on “the sins” of the world. The emphasis is rather on Jesus’ death as the expiation “concerning” the whole world. The reference to “sins” might have been presupposed in 2c, but it is not the focus of 2d. Here περί ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου in 2d will be better interpreted if it is linked with αὐτὸς ἰλασμός ἐστιν in 2a.

VII. The meaning of ὅλος in 1 John

In 1 John the adjective ὅλος, -η, -ον occurs only twice in 2,2 and 5,19. In both cases ὅλος modifies κόσμος. It is helpful to put the two occurrences in perspective:

- 2,2 αὐτὸς ἰλασμός ἐστιν περί τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν,
οὐ περί τῶν ἡμετέρων δὲ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ περί ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου
- 5,19 οἶδαμεν ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐσμεν καὶ ὁ κόσμος ὅλος ἐν τῷ ποιηρῷ
κεῖται

For Cassem both περί ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου in 2,2d and ὁ κόσμος ὅλος ἐν τῷ ποιηρῷ κεῖται in 5,19 imply the “sins” of the world ⁶⁶.

⁶⁴ The genitive use of περί is the most common in the NT. Cf. MOULE, *Idiom-Book*, 62-63; and MOULTON – TURNER, *Syntax*, 269-270.

⁶⁵ HARRIS, *Prepositions and Theology*, 182-183.

⁶⁶ CASSEM, “Grammatical and Contextual Inventory”, 85. Similarly,

This interpretation is inadequate unless 2d is interpreted against 2a, because ἁμαρτία (“sins”) is never used with κόσμος in 1 John (cf. aforementioned references). Scholars have taken a literal reading and constructive approach to 1 John 5,19. For instance Bultmann reads 1 John 5,19 as follows: “die Welt liegt im Machtbereich des Satan, ob also ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ wie in 5,18 maskulin gemeint ist, oder ob es neutral verstanden ist, so daß der Sinn wäre: die Welt liegt im argen”⁶⁷. Painter reads 5,19 as: “and the whole world lies in [the power of] the Evil One”⁶⁸. Bultmann and Painter seem to echo Brown’s point that περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου means “a seeming mixture of things and people”⁶⁹. Here περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου can be rendered as the entire created world of God.

Since ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου in 2,2d and ὁ κόσμος ὅλος in 5,19 occur only twice in 1 John⁷⁰, John seems to make a connection regarding his understanding of κόσμος. It is not “the sins” implied in ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου. Rather ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου in 2d should be understood as based on the use of ἰλασμός in 2a. Put differently, Jesus as the ἰλασμός is the sin-expiation concerning the whole world (Graph 1). In this sense, the sentence οὔδαμεν ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐσμεν in 5,19a seems to make clear the following: those who are from God are those who believe and belong to God, namely, the (Johannine) Christians who are not under the power of evil. In addition, the conjunction καί between 5,19a and 5,19b, taken as “but” or in the sense of opposing, can rightly be understood as marking a difference between those living in the world: those who believe in God, and

J.R.W. STOTT, *The Epistles of John. An Introduction and Commentary* (London 1960) 194, explicitly draws a parallel between 2,2d and 5,19 in the following terms: “We need to remember, however, that although the whole world lies in the power of the evil one, it is for the sins of the whole world”.

⁶⁷ BULTMANN, *Drei Johannesbriefe*, 92. Cf. also R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Die Johannesbriefe* (HThKNT 13; Freiburg²1963) 288-289.

⁶⁸ PAINTER, *1, 2, and 3 John*, 320.

⁶⁹ BROWN, *Epistles of John*, 222, 622-623.

⁷⁰ WESTCOTT, *Epistles of John*, 194-195, and BROOKE, *Johannine Epistles*, 150-151, have attempted to solve the seeming contradiction in the two phrases ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου in 2,2d and ὁ κόσμος ὅλος in 5,15. They propose “the whole world” for 2,2d and “the world as a whole” for 5,19. As BROWN, *Epistles of John*, 623, points out, the grammatical base is too fragile to try to solve such a “seeming” contradiction. In addition, the attributive positions of these two phrases make no grammatical difference.

those who do not. In this respect, Strecker offers a helpful observation. There exists a separation between God and the world whose alternative power is the devil. In this tension, the faithful are rooted in God whereas the world is left to the power of evil. It is important for the believer to know this separation between God and the evil power of the world. However, it would be misleading to conceive this expression as an arrogant self-awareness only for the Christian community. The salvific work of the Christ is not exclusively for the church (ἐκκλησία), but is ordered universally toward the whole world (περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου; cf. 2,2; 4,14) ⁷¹.

In this way, the expression περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου in 2d may be taken syntactically as a parallel to περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν in 2b and to περὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων in 2c. But the main connection for 2d is 2a, allowing ἰλασμός to be the syntactic link with the triple περί in 2b // 2c // 2d. This proposed syntax implies a stronger theological interpretation of 2d in view of the entire verse 2abcd. This demands a closer look at the meaning of ἰλασμός in 2a.

VIII. Reading περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου in 2d with ἰλασμός in 2a (cf. 4,10)

Graph 1 indicates that the noun ἰλασμός in 2a stands at the crux of our understanding of the triple περί-clauses. This very word ἰλασμός occurs only in 1 John 2,2; 4,10 and is used by no other NT author ⁷². Hence, the meaning of ἰλασμός in this context is vital. In 2,2 the author uses ἰλασμός to speak of Jesus' death as a means to remove sins (περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν in 2b). In 4,10 he employs ἰλασμός to explain how God loves humanity by sending his Son into the world concerning our sins (ἰλασμὸν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν).

There has been continuing debate over the meaning of the ἰλάσκομαι word-group, both in the LXX as well as the NT. Two theological positions are often held: (a) the propitiatory sense of the word, and (b) the predominantly expiatory connotation.

⁷¹ STRECKER, *Johannesbriefe*, 306.

⁷² The ἰλάσκομαι word-group appears eight times in the NT (Matt 16,22; Luke 18,13; Rom 3,25; 1 John 2,2; 4,10; Heb 2,17; 8,12; 9,5). Only four, however, arguably imply either expiation (of human sins) or propitiation (of God's wrath), namely, 1 John 2,2; 4,10, Rom 3,25, and Heb 2,17.

A number of scholars led by L. Morris are of the opinion that the ἱλάσκομαι word-group is often used to mean propitiation⁷³. They believe that the LXX constantly uses this word-group coupled with a sense of human sinfulness, and that the inevitable consequence of sin is the wrath of God. To be reconciled with God is to regain his favor. A propitious act or human effort through propitiation has to take place. The entire enterprise of regaining reconciliation with God lies in the appeasement of God's wrath. For instance, D. Büchner argues that the meaning of the ἱλάσκομαι word-group for the cultic portions of the Pentateuch should be "appease" or "propitiate". However, it is in no way certain that in the LXX secular and religious uses are to be distinguished, or that a dual meaning of "appease" as well as "cleansing" occurs⁷⁴.

Leading the opposite group is C.H. Dodd who, in his study of the translations of the word in the LXX, argues for the English rendering of expiation rather than propitiation⁷⁵. Sin is the cause of the subsequent conciliation that must take place, that is, to un-sin, to cleanse from defilement, or to expiate. Dodd argues that the stock

⁷³ L. MORRIS, "The Use of ἱλάσκεσθαι etc. in Biblical Greek", *ExpT* 62 (1951) 227-233; IDEM, "The Wrath of God", *ExpT* 63 (1951-52) 142-145; IDEM, "The Biblical Use of the Term 'Blood'", *JTS* 53 (1952) 216-227; IDEM, "The Meaning of ἱλαστήριον in Romans 3,25", *NTS* 2 (1955-56) 33-43; IDEM, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI 1983), 144-213; R.R. NICOLE, "C.H. Dodd and the Doctrine of Propitiation", *WTJ* 17 (1955) 352-360; D. HILL, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings. Studies in the Semantics of Soteriological Terms* (SNTSMS 5; Cambridge 1967) 23-48; T.C.G. THORNTON, "Propitiation or Expiation? ἱλαστήριον and ἱλασμός in Romans and 1 John", *ExpT* 80 (1968-69) 53-55; and D. BÜCHNER, "ἔξιλάσασθαι: Appeasing God in the Septuagint Pentateuch", *JBL* 129 (2010) 237-260.

⁷⁴ BÜCHNER, "ἔξιλάσασθαι", 254.

⁷⁵ C.H. DODD, "ἱλάσκεσθαι, Its Cognates, Derivatives, and Synonyms in the Septuagint", *JTS* 32 (1931) 352-360; T.W. MANSON, "ἱλαστήριον", *JTS* 46 (1945) 1-10; L. MORALDI, "Sensus vocis hilasterion in Rom 3,25", *VD* 26 (1948) 257-276; S. LYONNET, "The Terminology of 'Expiation'", *Sin, Redemption, and Sacrifice. A Biblical and Patristic Study* (eds. S. LYONNET - L. SABOURIN) (AnBib 48; Rome 1970) 124-126, 137-146, 147-166; K. GRAYSTON, "ἱλάσκεσθαι and Related Words in the LXX", *NTS* 27 (1981) 640-656; N.H. YOUNG, "C.H. Dodd, 'Hilaskesthai' and His Critics", *EvQ* 48 (1976) 67-78; IDEM, "'Hilaskesthai' and Related Words in the New Testament", *EvQ* 55 (1983) 169-176; DO, "Jesus' Death as *Hilasmós*", 537-553; and IDEM, "The LXX Background of *Hilasterion* in Rom 3,25," *The Letter to the Romans* (ed. U. SCHNELLE) (BETL 226; Leuven 2009) 641-657.

rendering of ἱλάσκομαι and its cognates does not regard the cultic meaning as a means of appeasing the displeasure of the Deity, but as a means of delivering human beings from sin. In such cases, the rendering of the ἱλάσκομαι word-group carries an expectation that God himself will perform the deliverance. Therefore, the common rendering “propitiation” is not proper in any biblical context ⁷⁶.

While Büchner argues strongly for “propitiation”, he allows a certain semantic shift that has its origin in the LXX and moves into later Jewish and Christian theology. Even though certain LXX words and phrases have a purely symbolic function, subsequent communities may well have altered and introduced them with a content that remains alien to standard Greek usage ⁷⁷.

In the NT, the propitiatory sense of ἱλάσκομαι seems to have disappeared, giving way to a stronger theological emphasis on expiation. For example, H.W. Attridge argues that the NT usage of the ἱλάσκομαι word-group whenever referring to Jesus’ sacrificial death is always directed at removing sin and its effects, not at propitiating God or appeasing his wrath ⁷⁸. More particular is the noun ἱλασμός in 2,2 and 4,10. I have elsewhere pointed out an important parallel between the phrases ἱλασμός ... περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν (2,2 and 4,10) and τὸ αἷμα Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ καθαρίζει ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ πάσης ἁμαρτίας (1,7). Of particular importance are the expressions following the noun ἱλασμός and the verb καθαρίζω, both of which point directly to the forgiveness or purification of sins ⁷⁹. In 2,2 and 4,10 we are obviously dealing with the reality of sins, and not with appeasing God’s wrath. Added to this argument is the fact that nowhere in 1 John is the term θυμός/ὀργή used to refer to God’s wrath which must be appeased.

Much work has, of course, been done on ἱλασμός. For our purposes we will accept, with Attridge and others, that this word may best be viewed in light of the NT understanding of Jesus’ death as a means of expiating sins ⁸⁰. In the context of 1 John 2,2 (4,10; cf 5,19) it is not God’s wrath that is propitiated. Rather, the author’s use of ἱλασμός

⁷⁶ DODD, “ἱλάσκεσθαι”, 353, 359-360.

⁷⁷ BÜCHNER, “ἐξιλάσασθαι”, 256.

⁷⁸ H.W. ATTRIDGE, *The Epistle to the Hebrews. A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN 1989) 96, n. 2.

⁷⁹ DO, “Jesus’ Death as *Hilasmos*”, 546-547.

⁸⁰ ATTRIDGE, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 96, n. 2; and DO, “Jesus’ Death as *Hilasmos*”, 553.

here in 2,2a and 4,10 refers to Jesus' death as sin-expiation for the members of the Johannine community (2bc) and the world (2d).

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The incidental ellipsis of τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν in 2d should be viewed with caution by interpreters and translators of 1 John 2,2. No exegete should readily take for granted that περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου in 2d implies "sin(s)" *per se*. As Graph 1 suggests, the better way to understand the implied sins is to look back to 2a with the employment of ἱλασμός.

The ellipsis of ἁμαρτιῶν or τῶν in this context is too uncertain to justify the insertion of "the sins" into the clause. The author asserts in 2a that Jesus is not only the expiation (ἱλασμός) concerning the sins of the (Johannine) Christians (2bc), but also the expiation (ἱλασμός) concerning the whole world (2d). This Johannine conviction is reinforced at the end of the epistle. Because the whole world lies in the grip of evil (5,19), John believes that αὐτός [Jesus] ἱλασμός ἐστίν . . . περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου (2ad). In 1 John 2,1-2 the author seems to presuppose the reality of sin (2,1) among the members of the Johannine community (2,2bc). The expression περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου represents the Johannine conviction of the sin-expiation (ἱλασμός) concerning (περί) the whole world. But the "sin(s)" can be understood in connection with ἱλασμός, and not in περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου. Our understanding of 2d will do justice to the author *only if* we look beyond its immediate syntax (2bc) and link 2d with 2a. The main clause αὐτός ἱλασμός ἐστίν serves as a key to the interpretation of the entire verse.

Sacred Heart School of Theology
7335 S Lovers Lane Road
Franklin, WI 53132, U.S.A.

Toan Do

SUMMARY

In 1 John 2,2 the phrases (2b) περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, (2c) οὐ περὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων δὲ μόνον, (2d) ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου, demand careful interpretation. The construction οὐ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ explains the sequence of 2b and 2c, following the *peri*-clause in 2a. However, this does not explain theologically to what περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου in 2d refers. This essay seeks, in some measure, to remedy this syntactical conundrum by proposing a contextual reading of 2a as parallel with 2d.



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