Multicultural Life in New Testament Times

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In this article, I want to focus only one perspective of the topic, the life of Christians in the multicultural world of the Imperium Romanum during the first two centuries CE. How did Christians live in a mostly hostile society? How did they interpret their own situation as a challenge for their lives?

After starting with three short preliminary remarks (I.), I will give short surveys on (II.) the self-interpretation of the first community of believers in Jesus as the Messiah, living in Jerusalem and (III.) the life of Christian communities outside Israel. In part IV., I’ll try to describe the situation of Christians in the Hellenistic-Roman World, particularly the relations between Christians and the res publica, what we call “state”, that is: the existing political power, then the relations to their social contexts. Sources will be primarily the Pauline letters, the Acts of Luke, and the letter to Diognetus. I’ll close my contribution (V.) in a short conclusion.
I. Preliminary Remarks

\textit{a)} In some texts in the New Testament, differences between those who believe in Jesus Christ and those who do not, are marked very sharp. An example is the term \textit{kósma} ("the world") in the Gospel of John: In the first part of his fare-well speech in chapter 14:27, Jesus says to his disciples, "Peace I leave with you: my peace I give to you, I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."\textsuperscript{1) In his prayer in ch, 17, Jesus addresses God, saying, "I have given them [e.g, the disciples] your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world," Then, Jesus adds: "I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world" (John 17:14–16).\textsuperscript{2)}

In Rom, 12:1, Paul writes to the Christians in the capital of the empire: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." And after that, Paul in verse 2 continues: "Do not be conformed to this world (μὴ συγχρηματίζοντες τὸ αἰῶν τοῦ), but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect." We

\textsuperscript{1) The Biblical translations follow the New Revised \textit{Standard Version}.\textsuperscript{2) Jin-Su Im, \textit{Das Verständnis des košma im Johannesevangelium}, (Diss. Bethel, 1999), esp. 159-189.}