CONSTRUCTING THE WORLD: AN EXEGETICAL AND SOCIO-RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF PAUL'S USES OF 'WORLD' AND 'CREATION'[1]

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The recent application of sociological perspectives to the study of the New Testament has generated interest in the construction and maintenance of social worlds in early Christianity. The theoretical model which provides the paradigm for this line of inquiry is derived from the work of T. Luckmann and P.O. Berger in the sociology of knowledge. This study attempts to elucidate and refine our understanding of the phenomenon of world-construction in Pauline Christianity by exploring the roles of the words 'world' (κόσμος) and 'creation (κτίσις), which are Paul's main terms in this process.

The investigation falls under the rubric of New Testament 'wordy-study'. Yet it differs in concern from the more conventional forms of such study in that its main aim is to uncover the intended *social functions* of Paul's various uses of κόσμος and κτίσις in the different communities addressed.

Chapter 1 reviews the main trends in the interpretation of these terms, drawing particular attention to the influential treatment by R. Bultmann, and sets out the method adopted in this dissertation. Previous approaches to this terminology in Paul, especially κόσμος, have been overly concerned with formulating unifying theological definitions of the words, smoothing out important if subtle differences in the Pauline usage in the process. The question of how far social and rhetorical factors might have affected the diversity of usage has largely gone unasked. This neglected issue becomes the

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primary focus of interest. The broad theoretical base
undergirding the study, that of 'critical linguistics', is then set
out. This perspective is shown to provide a more precise and
nuanced understanding of the role of language in the construal
of reality than the account given by Berger and Luckmann.
After highlighting the potential pitfalls of New Testament
'word-study' and explaining how the investigation attempts to
avoid them, the importance of contextual analysis of specific
word-uses is stressed. A sharper profile is then drawn for this
particular style of approach to Paul's cosmological terminology
which, broadly stated, is to interpret Paul's various statements
on κόσμος and κτίσις in terms of the social situations within
which they are employed, in the context of the interactive
process whereby social worlds are formed and configured.

The historical and semantic background of κόσμος and
κτίσις is perused in Chapter 2. The aim of this survey is to
provide a basis upon which to judge the impact of Paul's
particular uses of the terms on his audiences. Consideration is
mostly given to κόσμος, in the light of its profuseness and
importance in Greek literature. After outlining the various
senses with which κόσμος appears in Greek usage, the use of
the term in Greek and Hellenistic philosophy is explored in
some depth, since it is within the philosophical literature that
κόσμος with the sense 'world' or 'universe' most frequently
occurs. Attention is drawn to the world-view which κόσμος
tended to evoke when applied to the world/universe in a
philosophical setting, and to the social implications which this
designation tended to generate, especially among the Stoics.

The study then proceeds to analyse Paul's usage of
κόσμος and κτίσις on an epistle-by-epistle basis, concentrating
on the *Hauptbriefe*, where instances of these words are mainly to
be found, and treating these letters in order of the terms'
frequency of occurrence. Each epistolary usage is interpreted
against the background of the community situation which is
being addressed and in relation to the socio-rhetorical strategy
deployed by Paul to achieve his particular aims and goals in
writing.

Chapter 3 deals with 1 Corinthians, where we find the
highest concentration of instances of κόσμος in Paul's letters.

Paul here talks of κόσμος in what, to a fairly cultured Greek audienc, would have been a highly striking and probably quite novel way. Reconstruction of the social setting of the church at Corinth, appropriating insights from sociology as well as the findings of a number of recent social-historical studies on Christianity in Corinth, reveals a community significantly lacking in well-defined boundaries with the surrounding society and culture. Paul's negative and defamiliarising use of κόσμος in this epistle forms part of a socio-rhetorical strategy aimed at correcting this situation. Paul's statements on κόσμος help to construct a social world for his Corinthian readers in which the community of faith is more clearly marked off from the larger Graeco-Roman society, with its beliefs, norms and values.

    The terminology in Romans is examined in Chapter 4. There are striking differences in the way κόσμος is employed in this epistle in comparison to 1 Corinthians. In general, Romans exhibits a much more positive use of κόσμος alongside κτίσις than is found in 1 Corinthians. Again an attempt is made to relate the distinctive pattern of linguistic usage in Romans to the particularities of the social setting of the epistle's addressees. The social situation in Rome is seen to require a more delicate and nuanced analysis than in Corinth, given the relative sparsity of unambiguous information in Romans regarding the believing community, its needs and problems. A case is tentatively developed for a community situation of mounting conflict with outsiders and of increasing vulnerability to repressive actions by the political authorities. Paul's cosmological language is cautiously interpreted within such a context.

    Chapter 5 considers Galatians and 2 Corinthians. The movement by Paul's Gentile converts in Galatia towards social identification with the Jewish community, under pressure from the 'agitators', is elucidated by group identity and differentiation theory. We endorse the view that this socio-cultural move toward Judaism was at least partly motivated by a desire on the part of the Gentile Galatian believers to attain to a more secure social status and positive social identity. Paul's talk of κόσμος and καινὴ κτίσις in Galatians is a key component

of a very clear epistolary, socio-rhetorical strategy directed at preventing assimilation with the synagogues. The language serves to stress the separate existence of the Gentile churches from the Jewish community in the social world of Paul's Galatian readers. Paul argues that Christians belong to a new creation which transcends the ethnic distinctions of the old world-age (Gal. 6:14-15) and which establishes completely new social patterns. An analysis of 2 Corinthians leads to the conclusion that there is no clear and consistent pattern to Paul's usage of κόσμος in the letter, but a case is made for a sharp socio-rhetorical edge to the declaration in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that Christ has inaugurated a καινὴ κτίσις for those who are in him.

The various findings of the thesis are summarised in Chapter 6, and some general conclusions are drawn on κόσμος and κτίσις in Paul. Finally, a brief consideration is offered on how the method and results of this investigation might impinge on wider areas of New Testament study. It is suggested that this analysis: i) opens up a new approach to New Testament 'word-study', informed by the relatively new sub-disciplines of sociolinguistics and critical linguistics; ii) raises questions concerning the suitability and general helpfulness of the sociological model of the sect as utilised by some New Testament scholars to interpret and explain the Pauline data; and iii) both sharpens and broadens our appreciation of the dynamics of 'world-construction' in Pauline Christianity.