

Making the World Andrew Perry

In this article, the exegetical question is: how can Jesus be said to be the one *through* whom the world was made (John 1:10).

In the prologue of John, v. 10 is a transitional verse in which the text moves from a consideration of ‘the Light’ as a type of Christ (vv. 7-9) to a consideration of Jesus as the Passover lamb.

“He was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world knew him not.” John 1:10 (KJV revised)

This transition is indicated by the pronouns. In English versions, John writes that the world did not know “him”, and the world that did not know “him” was the very same world into which “he” came and it is *this* world that was made through “him” (John 1:10). In Greek, some pronominal forms may be either masculine or neuter. Here in v. 10, any ambiguity in one pronoun is settled by the unambiguous masculine form of the other pronouns. However, “the Light” is a neuter noun, and the pronouns of v. 10 are best taken as implicitly referring to Jesus, even though he is the anti-typical Light.

The first detail to examine in v. 10 is “through him” (δι’ αὐτοῦ/, RSV). This expression is used of an agency: someone does something through someone else. Thus, God sent his son into the world so that the world might be saved *through* him (John 3:16); or again, God did signs and wonders *through* Christ (Acts 2:22). The same expression is used in John 1:3—the new creation comes about by God acting *through* Christ; or again, in John 1:7, men believe in Christ *through* John the Baptist. Accordingly, John 1:10 is not affirming that Jesus is the maker of the world, but that the world was made *through* “him”. This is clearer in the RSV than the KJV which has ‘made by him’.

The question is: who made the world through Jesus? While ‘God’ is an obvious answer, the text so far has presented John the Baptist and the Light. This relationship echoes the relationship of Moses and the Angel of the Lord: Moses was “the man” sent from God who bore witness to the Light of the Burning Bush. This echo supplies the clue for interpreting how the world was made through Jesus.

Many types of Jesus are presented in the story of the exodus. Jesus is prefigured by the Angel of the Lord, by Moses, and by the Passover Lamb, to name only three types. In the account of the exodus, the Angel of the Lord is said to “make” Israel (Exod 32:10, Num 14:12). The “world” into which Jesus entered was the people of God—Israel, and this was a people made by the Angel of the Lord in bringing them up from Egypt. While Yahweh is the agency behind the Angel of the Lord, we should focus on the Angel of the Lord and ask the question: how did the Angel of the Lord make the world through Jesus?

The Angel of the Lord prevented the destroying angel from annihilating the firstborn of Israel, by not allowing the destroyer to enter houses where the blood of the Passover Lamb was on the lintels. (Exod 12:23). This blood showed that there had already been death in the house, and as a result there was no need for the destroying angel to enter the house. In a sense therefore it was *this blood* that saved Israel, and it was because of this sacrifice that Israel could be re-born through the waters of the Red Sea. John’s statement that ‘the world was made *through him*’ is a

reference to *this* particular Passover sacrifice as “Jesus” and the means through which the “world” was made.

A sacrifice stands at the Exodus beginning, as is generally the case with other OT beginnings. This sacrifice is of supreme importance, and easily overshadowed by the various typical sacrifices of the Law. Its importance is secured by the Book of Revelation and the description there of the beginnings of the millennium. In that book Christ is chiefly portrayed as ‘the Lamb’ at every point. Such an emphasis in the Apocalypse is matched by John’s use of Exodus typology.

Just as a Passover sacrifice stood at the beginning of the Mosaic “world”, a renewed Passover sacrifice is the starting point for the New Creation of those who would be part of the “all things”. It is stressed by John: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29-36, 3:17).

That “made through him” is a reference to a sacrifice is shown two other texts:

- 1) In John 3:17, the world is “saved” through him.
- 2) In Rom 5:9, believers are justified by his blood and thereby “saved” through him (cf. Col 1:20).

This way of drawing types is characteristic of John’s writings. John places Jesus into the middle of some other typical situations, for instance, the offering of Isaac, the giving of the manna, and Moses’ ascents up Mt. Sinai. The same thing can be seen in Paul’s writings in connection with a type based on the reconciliation of Jacob and Esau. By placing him into the middle of such situations, it can appear as if Jesus had some manner of existence before his birth of the Virgin Mary, but a proper appreciation of typology prevents this reading. The basic mistake that Trinitarians make with the Gospel of John, when they argue for the pre-existence of Christ is to misconstrue the typical language.¹

That John is using language typologically is indicated by his description of Jesus or the Word as the ‘true Light’, for ‘true’ here denotes, not the opposite of false, but rather the measure of the standard. It is like saying of a right angle that it is true if it conforms to the *definition* of a right angle. In typology it amounts to saying that Christ is the archetype for the typical Light. Other examples of this use of ‘true’ which involve typology include ‘true riches’ (Luke 16:11), ‘true bread’ (John 6:32), ‘true vine’ (John 15:1), ‘true tabernacle’ (Heb 8:2), ‘figures of the true’ (Heb 9:24) and ‘true witness’ (Rev 3:14).² With John having introduced the ‘true’ Light, he reminds his readers that it was through Jesus that the Angel of the Lord also made the world.³

This deployment of typology is similar to Paul’s use of ‘the rock’ (1 Cor 10:1-5). The people journeyed through the wilderness with a rock, and Paul comments that this rock was Christ. So they journeyed with Christ through the desert. But the rock that was struck was a literal rock, and the water was provided by the Angel of the Lord who led them through the wilderness. He

¹ In doing this they copy the Jews, who also did not understand who Jesus was: *the world knew him not*.

² Here the true witness is contrasted with the typical witness in the heavens of the rainbow (Ps 89:37) — all covenants require a witness.

³ The anti-type can also function as a way of speaking about the type, because you seek to identify the significance of the type in terms of the anti-type — this would be a typical metonymy.

sustained them by day with manna (also Christ) and water. So Christ went with them and sustained them, if only they had eyes to see the doctrine being taught in their midst. Christ was there *in type*, as Paul says, the Exodus was a type, and the things that happened to the Israelites were types.⁴

⁴ The Alexandrian Jew, Philo, interpreted the 'rock' as an allegory of Wisdom.

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