



The Greek word *dia*

A little word with big Christological implications

Date: 24 May 2009

Author: Thomas Farrar

Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Case in New Testament Greek	2
3. The meaning of the preposition <i>dia</i>	2
4. Absolute uses of <i>dia</i> with reference to God	6
4.1. Rom. 11:36 - For from him and through him and to him are all things	6
4.2. Heb. 2:10 - For whom and by whom all things exist	6
5. Uses of <i>dia</i> with reference to Christ's role in creation	7
5.1. Heb. 1:2 - Through whom also he created the world	7
5.2. John 1:3, 10 - All things were made through him	10
5.3. 1 Cor. 8:6 - One Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things	11
5.4. Col. 1:16 - All things were created through him	12
6. Conclusion	15

All Scripture references are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

1. Introduction

It's not very often that a simple three-letter word leads a person to radically change his/her perception of the world. However, this has been the case for me with the Greek preposition *dia*. A discovery concerning this word set off a study that has forever altered my understanding of the most important topic there is – the person of Jesus Christ. In the article that follows I want to share this discovery and its vast doctrinal implications.

2. Case in New Testament Greek

In *koine* Greek, the original language of the New Testament, nouns (as well as adjectives, participles, pronouns and the article) occur in five distinct 'cases.' These cases serve many purposes: "Case is the inflectional variation in a noun that encompasses various syntactical functions or relationships to other words."¹ The five cases are nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, and vocative. The most common functions of these cases are as follows:

1. Nominative case denotes that a word is the subject of a verb.
2. Accusative case denotes that a word is the direct object of a verb.
3. Dative case denotes that a word is the indirect object of a verb.
4. Genitive case denotes possession. It is usually equivalent to the English preposition 'of' – for instance, if the word *theos* ("God") is in the genitive case it usually means "of God."
5. Vocative case (which is very rare) is used when directly addressing a person.

Another important function of case in Greek is to determine the meaning of prepositions. Prepositions are small but important words which modify verbs and show how they connect to various objects. In English, common prepositions include 'in,' 'to,' 'by,' 'for,' 'with,' and 'of'. In the Greek New Testament, there are 17 prepositions, listed as follows in order of frequency: *en, eis, ek, epi, pros, dia, apo, kata, meta, peri, hypo, para, hyper, syn, pro, anti,* and *ana*. For some of these, **the meaning depends on the case of the word that follows it**. For instance, the preposition *meta* will always be followed by a genitive or accusative. If the following word is genitive, *meta* means "with" or "among"; but if the following word is accusative, *meta* means "after" or "behind."

3. The meaning of the preposition *dia*

The meaning of the preposition *dia* also depends on the case of the word that follows it. *Dia*, like *meta*, will always be followed by a word in the genitive or accusative case. *Dia* + genitive (*dia+g* from now on) denotes one of the following:

- a. Agency: *by, through*
- b. Means: *through*
- c. Spatial: *through*

¹ Wallace, Daniel B. *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, p. 34.

d. Temporal: *through(out), during*²

By contrast, *dia* + accusative (*dia+a* from now on) denotes one of the following:

- a. Cause: *because of, on account of, for the sake of*
- b. Spatial (rare): *through*³

The *Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* defines *dia* thus:

“(1) **genitive**: through, used of place or medium, Matt. 7:13; Luke 6:1; 2 Cor. 11:33; through, of time, during, in the course of, Heb, 2:15; Acts 5:19; through, **of immediate agency, causation, instrumentality**, by means of, by, John 1:3; Acts 3:18; of means or manner, through, by, with, Luke 8:4; 2 Cor. 5:7; 8:8; of state or condition, in a state of, Rom. 4:11; (2) **accusative**: used of **causation which is not direct and immediate in the production of a result**, on account of, because of, for the sake of, with a view to, Mark 2:27; John 1:31; rarely, through, while subject to a state of untoward circumstances, Gal. 4:13”⁴

We are particularly interested in the meaning of *dia* when used with reference to persons. A survey of a few New Testament passages will serve to illustrate the difference between *dia* + genitive and *dia* + accusative when used of a person or persons.

17 personal uses of <i>dia</i> + genitive in the New Testament		
Reference	Greek phrase	Translation in context (relevant phrase bolded)
Matt. 1:22	<i>dia tou prophetou</i>	All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet
Matt. 18:7; Luke 17:1	<i>di ou</i>	Woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!
Matt. 26:24; Mark 14:21; Luke 22:22	<i>di ou</i>	Woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed
John 14:6	<i>di emou</i>	No one comes to the Father except through me .
Acts 2:22	<i>di autou</i>	Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst
Acts 4:16	<i>di auton</i>	What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem

² Ibid., pp. 368-369.

³ Wallace, Daniel B. Ibid., p. 369.

⁴ Mounce, William D. *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*, pp. 136-137.

Acts 12:9	<i>dia tou aggelou</i>	He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.
Rom. 1:4-5	<i>di ou</i>	Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith
Romans 15:18	<i>di emou</i>	For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience
1 Cor. 1:9	<i>di ou</i>	God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son
1 Cor. 3:5	<i>di on</i>	What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed
2 Cor. 12:17	<i>di autou</i>	Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you?
Col. 3:17	<i>di autou</i>	Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him
Philemon 1:7	<i>dia sou</i>	The hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you
Heb. 7:25	<i>di autou</i>	[Jesus] is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him , since he always lives to make intercession for them.
1 Pet. 2:14	<i>di autou</i>	Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution...to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil
1 John 4:9	<i>di autou</i>	God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him

17 personal uses of *dia* + accusative in the New Testament

Reference	Greek phrase	Translation in context (relevant phrase bolded)
Matt. 27:19	<i>di autou</i>	I have suffered much because of him today in a dream
Mark 2:4	<i>dia ton ochlon</i>	They could not get near him because of the crowd
Mark 2:27	<i>dia ton</i>	The Sabbath was made for man , not man for the

	<i>anthropon</i>	Sabbath
John 6:57	<i>dia ton patera; di eme</i>	As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father , so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me .
John 7:43	<i>di auton</i>	So there was a division among the people over him
John 11:14-15	<i>di hymas</i>	Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there
John 11:42	<i>di ton ochlon</i>	I said this on account of the people standing around
John 12:11	<i>di auton</i>	Because on account of him [Lazarus] many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus
John 12:30	<i>di eme; di hymas</i>	Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake , not mine ."
Rom. 2:24	<i>di hymas</i>	For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you ."
Rom. 4:23	<i>di auton</i>	But the words 'it was counted to him' were not written for his sake alone
Rom. 11:28	<i>di hymas</i>	As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake .
1 Cor. 4:6	<i>di hymas</i>	I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit , brothers
1 Cor. 8:11	<i>di on</i>	And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died.
1 Cor. 9:9-10	<i>di hemas</i>	Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not speak entirely for our sake ?
Phil. 1:24	<i>di hymas</i>	But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account .
Phil. 3:7	<i>dia ton christon</i>	But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ

It should be noted that the two meanings are not mutually exclusive. For instance, with reference to eternal life, believers are able to acquire it **through** Christ (1 John 4:9, *dia* + genitive), as he is the instrument through which it will be granted, and also **because of** Christ (John 6:57, *dia* + accusative), as it is for his sake that God is willing to grant eternal life to others.

However, the two meanings are clearly distinct. The most significant distinction for our purposes is simply this: when used of a person, *dia* + genitive implies the person's **actual involvement** in the action of the verb, whereas *dia* + accusative does not. Said another way, *dia* + genitive means that the person really **does something** (usually on behalf of someone else, an ultimate agent), whereas *dia* + accusative only requires that the person be a factor in, or a reason for, the ultimate agent's decision to carry out the action of the verb. In short, to perform *dia* + genitive causation a person **must actually exist**; whereas to perform *dia* + accusative causation they **need not actually exist** (they could, for instance, exist in the foreknowledge of the ultimate agent).

With that important grammatical lesson in hand, let us turn to some particularly important uses of *dia* in the New Testament and see what conclusions we can draw.

4. Absolute uses of *dia* with reference to God

4.1. Rom. 11:36 – “For from him and through him and to him are all things”

“33 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! 34 "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" 35 "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" 36 For **from him** (*ex autou*) and **through him** (*di autou*) and **to him** (*eis auton*) are **all things**. To him be glory forever. Amen.” (Romans 11:33-36)

Paul states that God is the cause of everything, which is why no one can counsel Him in any matter, or give Him a gift that He does not already own. The three types of causes can be described as efficient causation (*ek*), instrumental causation (*dia* + genitive or *en*), and final causation (*dia* + accusative or *eis*). Similar statements about God are made in other writings of the period, both non-Jewish and Jewish⁵. Bauckham describes Rom. 11:36 as “a Jewish description...of God's unique relationship to all other reality.” It is therefore not limited to spiritual things, or to the new creation. It is absolute – ‘all things’ here means all things.

4.2. Heb. 2:10 – “For whom and by whom all things exist”

“9 But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. 10 For it was fitting that he, **for whom** (*di on*) and **by whom** (*di ou*) **all things exist**, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.” (Hebrews 2:9-10)

This verse paints God as the *reason* (final cause) for which the universe came into existence, as well as the *agent* (instrumental cause) who brought the universe into existence. Significantly, it does so by using both the genitive and accusative cases with the preposition *dia*, demonstrating the difference between the two. While the context is speaking of salvation, and the “world to come” (v. 5), there is again no reason to take this statement about God as anything less than absolute. The understood verb here is present tense. Everything that currently exists, came into being through God and for God. That includes things natural and spiritual, visible and invisible, in heaven and on earth, etc. Everything.

⁵ For a list of references see Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, p. 214.

5. Uses of *dia* with reference to Christ's role in creation

There are a number of passages in the New Testament which use the preposition *dia* + genitive to name Christ as the agent or instrumental cause of God's creative work. Examining these passages in light of what we have learned about the preposition *dia* will reveal that the traditional Christadelphian understanding of them simply does not hold up. These texts are Heb. 1:2; John 1:3, 10; 1 Cor. 8:6; and Col. 1:16. All of these texts teach Christ's involvement in God's creative work. Christadelphians have a number of ways of explaining these passages in keeping with their disbelief in the personal pre-existence of Christ. These methods of interpretation are outlined as follows:

- 1. Final causation, not instrumental causation:** Christ's involvement in creation was that the creation was brought about *with him in mind*. This explanation utterly fails on grammatical grounds because all of these texts have *dia* + genitive, which denotes instrumental causation. If the writers had wanted to express final causation they would have used *dia* + accusative.
- 2. Scope limited to new creation:** The creative work described in these passages does not refer to the entire creative work of God but only to the *new creation* which began with Christ's resurrection and is mostly yet future. This explanation fails on contextual grounds: the passages use the past tense, and speak in the same absolute terms we saw in Rom. 11:36 and Heb. 2:10. While some of them do speak of the new creation, they are not limited to it.
- 3. Not talking about Christ:** In the case of John 1:3, 10, it is claimed that 'the Word' is not Christ personally, but God's purpose which was embodied in Christ. However, as will be seen there is good reason for understanding the Word here to be a title of the pre-existent, personal Christ. And of course, this explanation has no bearing on Heb. 1:2, 1 Cor. 8:6 and Col. 1:16, all of which are clearly referring to Christ personally.

Once these alternatives are removed, all that remains is the plain interpretation which the vast majority of Bible scholars through the ages have followed: that Christ was personally involved as God's agent in the Genesis creation. A closer look at each of these passages will reveal that this is by far the most sound explanation.

5.1. Heb. 1:2 – “Through whom also he created the world”

“1 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, **through whom** (*di ou*) also he created the world. 3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.” (Heb. 1:1-3)

Christadelphians use a multi-pronged approach to attempt to address the difficulties presented by this text. The first is to claim final causation, not instrumental causation. This interpretation may owe to a straightforward mistranslation of the verse in the Emphatic Diaglott, a one-man translation of the New Testament by Benjamin Wilson, an associate of

John Thomas who forms part of the pedigree of Jehovah's Witnesses. The Diaglott translates the relevant clause as "**On account of whom** he framed the ages." This translation would be possible only if *dia* were followed by an accusative; here, it is followed by a genitive, and thus denotes instrumentality or personal agency. This is an elementary mistake that any first year student of Greek would be able to identify, and it thus raises serious questions about the reliability of the Diaglott.

Perhaps following this error, the popular Christadelphian book *Wrested Scripture* says on Heb. 1:2 that "The worlds (ages) were made or constituted through Christ since it is in him that they have their **meaning and ultimate realization**."⁶ Similarly, Christadelphian author W.H. Boulton writes that "[The ages to come] will therefore be constituted **on the basis of** his work, and he is therefore the 'maker of the ages.'"⁷ Both of these explanations are consistent with *dia* + accusative, but both are inconsistent with *dia* + genitive and can therefore be ruled out.

Secondly, both of the above Christadelphian works propose that Heb. 1:2 be understood with reference to the future. Abel in *Wrested Scripture* writes:

"The reference to "he made the worlds" is referring to the new creation, not the old creation. This is made clear in Hebrews 2:5 - "It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking." The writer to the Hebrews is referring to THE WORLD TO COME. Jesus is the creator of this new world to come. The redeemed are described as a new creation, and Christ our creator. Christ will create "new heavens and a new earth", wherein dwells righteousness."⁸

The reference to Heb. 2:5 does not mean that every single clause in the book up to that point refers solely to the world to come. Notably, in Heb. 1:10-12 the old creation is contrasted with the new, and Christ is named as Creator of the *old*.⁹ Both Boulton and Abel are forced to use the future tense to explain the meaning of the passage, even though the Greek uses the aorist tense, denoting a *completed action*.

Another important issue at hand in Heb. 1:2 is the meaning of the Greek word *aionas*. Most translations render the word as 'world' or 'universe,' whereas Christadelphians generally render it as 'ages.' What gives? *Aionas* is the plural of *aion*, which according to the most comprehensive lexicon of ancient Greek, has four basic meanings:

1. A long period of time, without reference to beginning or end
 - a. Of time gone by, the past, earliest times
 - b. Of time to come which, if it has no end, is also known as eternity
2. A segment of time as a particular unit of history, age

⁶ Abel, Ron. *Wrested Scripture*. Online edition, accessed at <http://www.wrestedscriptures.com/bo8trinity/hebrewsiv2.html>

⁷ Boulton, W.H. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 14.

⁸ Abel, Ron. *Ibid*.

⁹ The writer's quotation from Psalms 102:25-27 in Heb. 1:10-12 may be understood as an expansion on what is meant in Heb. 1:2. Heb. 1:10-12 explicitly names Christ as the Creator of the heavens and earth that will "perish" and "be changed," which cannot possibly be the new creation! These heavens and earth were created "in the beginning" – only the strongest of theological biases could fail to see this as a reference to Genesis 1:1! Boulton is forced to offer imaginative interpretations of Heb. 1:10-12 which are contrived and implausible.

- a. The present age (nearing its end)
- b. The age to come, the Messianic period
3. The world as a spatial concept
4. The Aeon as a person¹⁰

So semantically speaking, *aion* is usually temporal, but it can also be spatial, referring to the world. There are two reasons why most translators see *aionas* as taking on its less common spatial meaning here in Heb. 1:2. The first reason is that the word is used in a similar context in Heb. 11:3 and the meaning is definitely spatial there: “By faith we understand that the **universe** (*aionas*) was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.” Here, the writer defines the *aiwnas* as “what is seen” – the visible world. The second reason is the verb used in Heb. 1:2, *poieo*. This verb, according to *BDAG*, is “used in reference to a broad range of activity involving such matters as **bringing something into being, bringing something to pass**, or simply interacting in some way with a variety of entities.”¹¹

Thus, in a general sense the verb appears to fit with either interpretation of *aionas*. However, when we look at the specific meanings listed in the semantic range of *poieo*, we find that there is much weaker support for a temporal application:

1. **to produce something material**, make, manufacture, produce
 - a. of human activity
 - b. of divine activity, specifically of God’s creative activity**
2. to undertake or do something that **brings about an event**, state, or condition, do, cause, bring about, accomplish, **prepare**, etc.
 - a. do deeds
 - b. do, perform miracles
 - c. bring about conditions – make peace, cause a disturbance**
 - d. used with a noun as a periphrasis for a simple verb of doing
 - e. what is done is indicated by the neuter of an adjective or pronoun
 - f. of means or banquets
 - g. of the natural processes of growth; in plant life
 - h. with focus on causality
 - i. the result of the action is indicated by the accusative and infinitive – make (to), cause (someone) to, bring it about that
 - ii. With a double accusative, of the object and predicate, make someone or something into something
3. To carry out an obligation of a moral or social nature, do, keep carry out, practice, commit
4. To do something to or with others
5. Do, make, with variations in specialized expressions
6. To be active in some way, work, be active
7. To make/do something for oneself or of oneself

¹⁰ Danker, F.W., ed. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 2000., p. 32. Note that this lexicon is popularly referred to as *BDAG*.

¹¹ *BDAG*, p. 839.

Of the above, the only meanings that could fit Heb. 1:2 are 1b (God's creative activity in producing something material, i.e. the world) and 2c (bringing about an event, i.e. the ages). The second meaning is awkward and not well attested – the one who translates “the ages” has the burden of proof of showing that the verb *poieo* is ever used in ancient Greek literature with respect to preparing or bringing about the ages. Thus, it is not the result of the translators' bias that the rendering ‘world’ or ‘universe’ is preferred – it is based on sound scholarship.

Of course, even if we allow the rendering, “through whom also he brought about (or prepared) the ages,” the problems for Christadelphian theology do not go away. Given the plural ages and the aorist tense of the verb, the writer is not merely talking about the future, or even the recent past, but must be discussing the entire span of time. Therefore, *dia* + genitive requires that the Son was God's agent in preparing or bringing about all the ages of the past, which still implies personal pre-existence.

In summary, the most sound interpretation of Heb. 1:2 is, not surprisingly, the one found in virtually all English translations of the Bible – that Christ was God's agent in creating the world.

5.2. John 1:3, 10 – “All things were made through him”

“1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made **through him** (*dia* + genitive), and without him was not any thing made that was made... 10 He was in the world, and the world was made **through him** (*dia* + genitive), yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” (John 1:1-3, 10-12)

In John 1:1-3, we have an unmistakable reference to the Genesis creation. “In the beginning” clearly alludes to Gen. 1:1, so the writer is saying in v. 3 that all things have come into existence through the instrumentality or agency of the Word. The writer could not be more emphatic on the absoluteness of the all things, as the latter part of v. 3 literally reads in Greek, “and without him was **not even one thing** made that was made.” And again, *dia* + genitive rules out the “final causation” interpretation. So the only challenging question that confronts us is, who or what is the Word here?

The standard Christadelphian interpretation of this passage identifies the Word as God's plan or purpose, and argues that Christ does not formally enter the discussion until v. 14, where he is “the Word made flesh” – that is, the Word manifested in flesh. However, this view is fraught with difficulties:

1. In John 1:14, Christ is “the Word,” not “the Word made flesh.” The Word is the subject of several verbs in the verse: *the Word* became flesh; *the Word* pitched his tent among us; we beheld *the Word's* glory; *the Word* was the only Son of the Father. Christ is called “the Word of God” in Rev. 19:13, also written by John. He was not merely flesh through whom the Word was manifested; he was the Word who manifested himself in flesh.

2. In John 1:3, *dia* + genitive is used to describe the Word's instrumentality in creation. This echoes what was said about the Word in such passages as Psalm 33:6, Psalm 104:24 and Jer. 28:15, but John makes a significant grammatical change in using *dia* here. Psalm 32:6(33:6) LXX uses the naked dative of means (i.e. a dative noun with no preposition) to express the instrumentality of the logos, while Psalm 103:24(104:24) LXX and Jer. 28:15(51:15) LXX uses the preposition *en* to express the instrumentality of sophia (wisdom). The Old Testament never uses *dia* in the way John does here, because *dia* carries a stronger connotation of **agency rather than means**. As Wallace notes, the difference between means and agency is that "means is impersonal, agency is personal."¹² He further notes that intermediate agency is usually expressed by *dia* + the genitive, whereas the naked dative and the preposition *en* seldom or never express agency – they are used of impersonal means. So why would John, who was certainly familiar with these Septuagint passages, make this subtle grammatical change from the naked dative and *en* to *dia* + genitive? The most likely reason is that he wanted to express that the Word was a *personal agent*.
3. Christ is clearly discussed personally prior to v. 14, as can be seen by comparing the Prologue to the rest of the Gospel. In v. 10, it is *Christ* who was in the world (cf. John 9:5), and was not known by the world (cf. John 9:29). It was *Christ* who came to his own people, and was not received by them (cf. John 3:11; 4:44; 18:35). It is *Christ* who gives the right to become children of God to those who believe in his name (cf. John 2:23; 12:36; 17:2). Therefore, it is Christ who John here identifies as he "through whom the world was made" – the agent of the Genesis creation! The world that was made through Christ was the world he was in, the world that did not know him. This therefore cannot be explained away as a reference to the spiritual creation or the world to come. "The world" in v. 10 is the world in its broadest sense – the cosmos and all of its inhabitants.
4. The other passages which name Christ as the agent of creation – Heb. 1:2, 1 Cor. 8:6 and Col. 1:16 – very likely have Word or Wisdom Christology behind them, but they don't even mention the Logos or Sophia – the emphasis is entirely on the person of Christ. This strengthens the assertion that Logos in John 1 functions as a personal title of Christ.

5.3. 1 Cor. 8:6 – "One Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things"

"For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth--as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"-- 6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, **from whom** (*ex ou*) are all things and **for whom** (*eis auton*) we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, **through whom** (*di ou*) are all things and **through whom** (*di autou*) we exist." (1 Cor. 8:5-6)

This passage is quite similar to Rom. 11:36 in using a series of prepositions to proclaim God's exclusive and unique transcendence over all things, but there is one striking difference: in Rom. 11:36 God is the source, agent and goal of all things, here God is the source and goal but *Christ* is the agent. As in Rom. 11:36 there is no basis for seeing the scope of this verse as

¹² Wallace, Daniel B. *Ibid.*, p. 373.

anything less than absolute. The topic under discussion here is not the new creation or the world to come; it is the nature of deity. Whereas the pagans attributed sources and agencies to various gods in a pantheon – there was the god of love, the god of the sea, the god of wine, etc., Paul affirms monotheism, and includes Christ within it!

Richard Bauckham has an excellent, detailed discussion of this passage in his essay Paul's Christology of Divine Identity, which can be accessed online at

http://www.forananswer.org/Top_JW/Richard_Bauckham.pdf. He explains how Paul here modifies the Shema (“The Lord our God is one Lord” – Deut. 6:4), the classic expression of Israel’s monotheistic faith, in a way that upholds God’s unique identity but *includes Jesus Christ within it*, identifying the Father as ‘God’ and the Son as ‘Lord’:

“Paul apportions the words of the Shema between Jesus and God in order to include Jesus in the unique identity of the one God YHWH confessed in the Shema. Similarly, he apportions between Jesus and God the threefold description of God’s unique identifying relationship as Creator to all things, in order to include Jesus in the unique identity of the one Creator.”¹³

He further notes that Jewish language about creation did not allow for intermediate agents who were other than God. Isaiah 44:24 declares that YHWH is he who “made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself.” There was not room for someone else in the work of creation, so the only way Paul could include Christ in this work is by including Christ in the identity of YHWH Himself – which he did by modifying the Shema. As stated earlier, the Old Testament’s language about God’s Word and Wisdom are clearly in the background here. Bauckham states:

“[Paul’s] purpose was to include Jesus in the Jewish characterization of the unique identity of God, which entailed including him as participant in God’s creative activity. He came to the [Old Testament creation] texts with this theological-christological purpose. What he certainly found in the Jewish description of creation was a distinction within the divine *relationship* to creation. He found a distinction between, on the one hand, God as the agent of creation, and, on the other hand, God’s own Wisdom devising the creation or God’s own Word accomplishing the work of creation. It was this distinction that facilitated his apportionment of the language of creation between God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ without introducing an associate other than God into the uniquely divine work of creation.”¹⁴

Thus, 1 Cor. 8:6, which ironically is advanced in the Christadelphian Statement of Faith as evidence of the Father’s exclusive deity, is actually a remarkable statement of Christ’s full deity and pre-existence.

5.4. Col. 1:16 – “All things were created through him”

“13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. 15 He is

¹³ Bauckham, Richard. *Jesus and the God of Israel*, p. 217.

¹⁴ Bauckham, Richard, *Ibid.*, pp. 217-218.

the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For **by him** (*en autw*) all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things were created **through him** (*di autou*) and **for him** (*eis auton*). 17 And he is before all things, and **in him** (*en autw*) all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.” (Col. 1:13-20)

Here, as in Heb. 1:2 and 1 Cor. 8:6, there is no question that the subject at hand is the Son; and *dia* occurs with the genitive, implying agency or instrumental causation rather than reason or final causation. The only real question is, what creation is being spoken about? Admittedly the question is more challenging here than in the other references. In John 1:3, 10 and 1 Cor. 8:6 it is an open-and-shut case that the “all things” or “world” are absolute, encompassing the Genesis creation and all subsequent creative work. In Heb. 1:2, the word *aiwnas* complicates things, but the reference is still definitely to *past* creation of space or time. Here in Col. 1, however, the reference to Christ’s creative work is in the midst of a discussion of his kingdom, his redemptive work, and his resurrection. Are we not therefore justified in taking “all things” in a limited sense – namely, all things in the new creation? The answer, as we shall see, is no.

Let us first look at v. 15, where Christ is called “the firstborn of all creation.” Arians and Trinitarians have long debated whether ‘firstborn’ here refers to chronological precedence or superiority of status¹⁵, but this debate does not concern us as both sides affirm the pre-existence of Christ. The Greek word translated ‘creation’ here is *ktisis*, which is used 11 times by Paul in his epistles. BDAG defines the semantic range of the word as follows:

1. An act of creation, *creation*
2. The result of a creative act, *that which is created*
 - a. Of individual things or beings created, *creature*
 - b. The sum total of everything created, *creation, world*
3. A system of established authority that is the result of some founding action, *governance system, authority system*

In Pauline usage, the word is used seven times in Romans, always with reference to the natural creation or creatures (Rom. 1:20, 25; 8:19, 20, 21, 22, 39). In 2 Cor. 5:17 and Gal. 6:15 it is used to refer to a believer in Christ as a “new creature,” which is a spiritual rather than natural application. However, the qualifying word ‘new’ unmistakably decides the issue. The other two Pauline uses are in Col. 1:15, and Col. 1:23, where Paul declares that the gospel has been proclaimed “in all creation under heaven.” This is obviously hyperbole, but the reference to ‘all creation’ is nonetheless natural in its application, referring primarily to the known world, i.e. the Roman Empire. Thus, in Pauline usage of the word *ktisis*, when the new creation is meant, the word ‘new’ is always explicitly added; otherwise the old, natural creation is the referent, including once in the immediate context of Col. 1:15. Consistency

¹⁵ Arians, and their descendents Jehovah’s Witnesses, take this verse to mean that Christ was the first creature made by God; Trinitarians take it to mean that Christ is preeminent over all creation, in light of Old Testament uses of the word in passages like Ps. 89:27 and Jer. 31:9.

therefore implies that we should understand “all creation” in Col. 1:15 to refer to the natural creation.

The verb *ktizo* (‘create’) used twice in Col. 1:16 derives from the same root as *ktisis*, and must therefore be understood in the same sense. The creation of which Christ is the firstborn, and within which his Good News is preached, is also the creation of which he was the instrumental cause. The verb is *aorist* in tense, denoting a completed action.

The “all things” are expanded upon as “in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities.” Some have understood this to be limiting the scope of the ‘all things.’ However, this is clearly not the case. If you take away things in heaven and things on earth, you aren’t left with many things. Similarly, if you take away all visible things and all invisible things, you aren’t left with much. These clarifying markers, along with “thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities” are not added to narrow the scope of the ‘all things,’ but rather to *emphasize* the inclusion of the spiritual realm. As one commentator explains:

“Paul underscores that Christ made everything: visible, invisible, heavenly, earthly. Then he specifically points out that Christ made all the various spiritual authorities, no matter how exalted and no matter how good or evil any given power may be. It is in Christ and his creative rule that the Colossians are to find their security, not in finding ways to appease, control, or manipulate these spiritual powers themselves.”¹⁶

Paul’s specific mention of the authorities is thus driven by the exhortative purpose of his epistle, that the Colossians are not to put their trust in superstitions or “worship of angels” (Col. 2:18) but are to devote all their allegiance to Christ: “In Colossians the attribution of creation to the pre-existent One serves to counter the Colossians ascription of creation to the angelic powers.”¹⁷

In Col. 1:17, Christ is further said to be “before all things,” which could be taken in terms of time or rank – perhaps Paul is intentionally ambiguous because the one implies the other (cf. John 1:15). It is then said that “in him all things hold together.” The scope of ‘all things’ cannot have changed from the previous verse, so Christ is here stated to be the Ruler and Sustainer of the entire cosmos (cf. also Heb. 1:3 on this).

Col. 1:18 is very important to the interpretation of the previous verses, because it specifically introduces the church as well as the new creation begun by his resurrection, beginning with the word “And,” suggesting a new thought. The church and the resurrection are *added* to what was said before. Paul says it was fitting that he should be the head of the church, just as he is the Sustainer of the universe. It is fitting that he should be the firstborn of the new creation, just as he is the firstborn of the old creation. Why is it fitting? “That in *everything* he might be preeminent.”

¹⁶ Davids, Peter H. Colossians. In *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 16., p. 258.

¹⁷ Fuller, Reginald H. Pre-Existence Christology: Can We Dispense with It? Word and World, 1982.

In summary, then, in Col. 1 Paul attributes to Christ the role of instrumental cause of God's entire creation (as he does in 1 Cor. 8:6), and goes on to specify that this encompasses things old and things new; things spiritual and things natural; things invisible and things visible; things heavenly and things earthly. "Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:11).

6. Conclusion

When read in context, and with grammatical correctness concerning the preposition *dia*, these four New Testament passages are seen to teach the pre-existence, by including him in God's creative work, past, present and future. This of course implies Christ's deity, as creation is a definitively divine act.

Having long-standing theological assumptions or beliefs challenged can be a traumatic experience, like a spiritual earthquake. I can attest to this personally, and it is the main reason I have only written this now although I have been aware of most of the arguments presented herein for years. In the end, I have to submit to what the Scriptures actually teach rather than what I would like them to teach, or what makes the best sense to me.

The good news is, God does not require us to understand the person of Christ on a complicated academic level before he will save us. Rather, He simply asks that we put our trust in the slain and risen Jesus Christ as our Lord. It is my hope that this article has enriched the reader's understanding of who this Lord really is – for "in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3).