

The word χειρογραφον in Colossians 2:14

Colossians 2:11 describes a "circumcision of Christ" but the writer is not just interested in initiation symbolism such as the baptism ritual, but wishes to speak about some change/transformation which effectively puts off the "body of flesh" and which also relates somehow to "leaderships and authorities." The sentences which follow then, 2:12-15, will presumably directly expand upon this same Christian transformation which has been named and introduced.

But at the center of these following sentences is what seems to be-(or what is most obviously and easily taken to be)-a commercial metaphor, that is, the Greek word cheirographon (χειρογραφον) taken as meaning an IOU which is enforceable; a written (and likely signed) promise to pay back a loan; an ordinary mortgage perhaps. For various reasons most translators and commentators do not care for such a meaning, and thus strictly avoid a simple and straightforward commercial meaning for this word. Because this written paper or document (of whatever kind) is, it seems, at the center here of other meanings and phrases (being nailed to the cross for example) they would doubt that a commercial metaphor could possibly have such a central explanatory role.

Since there was no printing at the time and everything written was also literally hand-written, that is, cheirographon, a first suggestion as to why these two Greek nouns were put together to form one word might be to note a personal or individual meaning which is added; not just anything written, copied down, but content immediately connected with the writer, such as personal description, personal report and testimony. And this was the earliest meaning of this Greek word.

But there can also exist other personally-written-down things, such as a commercial/contractual promissory agreement. And this does become a meaning of the word in later Greek, and this seems to me as well to be the most available meaning for Colossians; a written agreement which obliges one to pay some sort of economic debt.

(Of course within what is take to be religious scripture there is a

strong propensity to look for religious-sacrificial or judicial-forensic guilt or liability; mere commercial debt doesn't seem adequate to serious theological statement.)

But, on the other side, this paragraph in Colossians is more about explaining renewal than about describing liability as such, and some sort of changed relation to powers, authorities, this also seems necessary to the transformation being described. To be freed of the economic-commercial bondage of a mortgage does also result in a different status vis-a-vi authorities, in this case, those persons who would enforce the commercial paper against oneself. Behind any commercial agreement put on paper there need to be powers of enforcement.

And as we are all more and more aware., the commercial realm is an immediate and comprehensive realm of existence. One can perhaps flee from or avoid recognition of criminal, moral, religious wrongdoing and guilt more readily, or at least more regularly, than one can avoid the immediate necessity, the exigency, of obtaining food and shelter. So I do not see why a strictly commercial meaning or metaphor could not have a central role within the other meanings and metaphors here.

A "mortgage certificate" is then cancelled, nullified, crossed out by God, as being something which was over against us, and he removed this from "out of the way." The language by which most of this is expressed in the Greek seems to me quite lacking in moral or even judicial overtones. Except for the phrase *τοις δογμασιν*, by (or in) regulations. How do these two words *not* bring in a forensic background of judge and courtroom, or else the legislative context of law and lawgiver?

But just because this is the term which is chosen rather than the more general term *nomos*, we ought to look in this direction. May this phrase mean regulation of human beings more sociologically considered, with the author's intention being in fact to avoid bringing the Divine origin or Divine authority of such regulations into explicit consideration? But is not everything in the Pentateuch, the ten words, sacrificial rituals, and other rules, equally of Divine origin and

authority?

To this an answer of No may be given. Because superseded by a higher and better principle now, the old "regulations" can be seen to be an aspect of Divine revelation which is less important now. But as authentic Divine revelation these would remain binding-unless these, nailed to the cross, are thus (somehow) left behind by our being brought additionally into another system of regulation which requires a heavenly Christ. "Why as if living (yet) in the world do you allow yourselves to be dogmatized to (i.e., given rules as to what to do)?" (Col 2:20)

This interpretative approach means that two similar but otherwise clashing metaphors must be kept distinct and coordinate. The primary metaphor is the personal but commercial loan or mortgage which each person has set up over against themselves (though this must not be taken too literally as if there were many such papers, nor as if each person specifically signed up for such a loan). Next, this debt is explained as somewhat vaguely placing all persons within the normal situation of social regulation which is also a moral realm as such. All are obliged (and found lacking as well) within this social-regulation context, a realm of human "regulations," whether Jew or non-Jew. But the more extensive commercial context with its enforcement forces remains the primary metaphorical context, and the socio-moral note added, the "regulations," just explains that this commercial liability is in point of fact, moral.

Then the Apostle explains how Jesus, putting off from himself then-existing "leaderships and authorities," by making such authorities to be openly exposed and public, somehow also turned these authorities into captives in a victory parade... by means of cross, and mortgage nailed to the cross. How does this explain Christian transformation..?

Jesus willingly lived according to human (social) regulations but now lives by, or is a source of, another system of rules. This fits at least. The mortgage paper nailed to the cross indicates a willingness to accept human regulation and limitation, and willingness also to be subject to the forces behind such ordinary human rules...

