

THE “LOGOS” IN JOHN’S PROLOGUE

‘THE LOGOS’ MISAPPLIED

Before he died in 1928 the eminent Professor Loofs explained how the earliest concept to pervert the Christian doctrine about God and Jesus came about:

The Apologists [Justin Martyr, Tatian etc. of the second century] used the metaphysical misinterpretation of the concept of Son [as preexisting logos]...This was a *philosophical* new interpretation of John’s logos idea and imported into the church’s theology...They presented **Philo’s philosophical logos idea** [as a “second God”] as Christian teaching and read it back into Scripture. The Apologists laid the groundwork for the perversion of Christianity into a revealed [philosophical] teaching. Specifically their Christology influenced further development disastrously. They were the cause of the beginning of the Christological problems of the 4th century. They transferred the concept of Son of God onto the preexistent Christ. They took this for granted.

They thus shifted the starting point of Christological thinking away from the historical Jesus [the only real Jesus] back into preexistence. They shifted Jesus’ life into the shadows and elevated the Incarnation [of a preexisting Son]. They connected Christology to cosmology and were unable to connect it to salvation. Their Logos [Word] teaching is not a “higher” Christology than the ordinary one. It fell in fact far behind the genuine assessment of Jesus: it was no longer GOD who revealed Himself in Christ, but the Logos, the lesser God, a God who as God was subordinate to the supreme God.

Leitfaden zum Studien der Dogmengeschichte, part 1, pp. 90, 97, 1890, reprinted 1949, translated by Professor Anthony Buzzard.

THE PROLOGUE IN JOHN IS MAINLY POETIC

For many decades now it has been recognized by most scholars that the prologue of John’s Gospel was a hymn in praise of God, the Father. The New American Bible displays the poetry and prose layout which makes up the prologue. A slightly different poetic form of the prologue is set out by Raymond Brown as:

1 st Strophe	verses 1 and 2	3 rd Strophe	verses 10 to 12b
2 nd Strophe	verses 3 to 5	4 th Strophe	verses 14 and 16

Noteworthy, is the fact that the poem is arranged in what is called *staircase parallelism form* in which the last word of one phrase becomes the first word of the next finally rising to the climax in verse 14.

INTERNAL DETAILS OF THE PROLOGUE

Our understanding of the prologue is considerably helped when we examine its internal details. These give us clues as to how to understand its various parts. For instance, Catholic theologian *Raymond Brown comments that*:

the Greek word *zoe* (life) never means natural life in John’s writings *and that* The prologue is speaking of eternal life. *The Gospel According to John 1-12* (The Anchor Bible), p. 7

So John 1:4 in saying: “and the **life** was the light of men” means ‘the **eternal life** was the light of men.’ And in saying “those who were born of God,” verses 12 and 13 show that it is God’s declared purpose to make a New Creation which will be immortal. Also verse 18 shows that “No one has seen (got to know) God” and therefore God’s salvation plan or immortality plan is sent in the form of a man (verse 14) to explain, **reveal** or declare Him (verse 18). According to verse 17 such revealing was only partially accomplished by the Law, but “*grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.*”

LOGOS THEOLOGY

For the ancient Greek Stoic philosophers the Logos was **the rational principle of the universe** but not a person. However, for the neo-Platonic philosophers the Logos was a person - **an intermediary** between the remote supreme God and creation. Yet, what is termed *Logos theology* originated when Justin Martyr of the mid-2nd century AD and his disciples, who were trained in and promoted Greek philosophy, became Christians and interpreted **John 1:1** in neo-Platonic terms so that “the word” (Greek *logos*) was interpreted as a person. However, in recent decades a significant number of theologians have demonstrated that **the word** is, in fact, not a person — not Jesus Christ; but is to be **interpreted in biblical Hebrew terms** because the Gospel of John, although written in Greek, is a thoroughly Jewish book (Aramaic being the common language). These theologians also have demonstrated that John 1:1 speaks of only one person, namely the Father.

JOHN DID NOT GET HIS CONCEPT OF “THE LOGOS” FROM GREEK SOURCES

Based on the assumption that John wrote his book for Gentile Christians Trinitarians in past times have made several claims concerning where John got his concept of “the logos”:

1. From Greek Platonic philosophy
2. From Philo (in Egypt) who applied Greek philosophy to explain the Hebrew Scriptures.
3. That John originated the concept himself.

Firstly, it is now recognized that the people to whom the Gospel of John was written were not people who would know much about Greek philosophy. Rather they were Jewish non-Christians for whom the book was “written so that [they] may believe that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah)” (John 20:31). Secondly, although at first glance it may appear that Philo’s understanding of *the logos* was of a person separate from God, yet deeper investigation reveals that:

The Logos for Philo is ‘God’ not as a being independent of ‘the God’ but as ‘the God’ in his knowability – the Logos standing for that limited apprehension of the one God...

Christology in the Making, p. 241.

Because, it is now recognized that John wrote his Gospel with a **Jewish audience** in mind most Trinitarians have dropped the claim that Greek Platonic philosophy was John’s source. They also recognize that Philo’s understanding did not promote Greek Platonic philosophy with respect to the *logos*, but rather was drawn from the same Jewish background as John’s. So some Trinitarians have moved to the position that John originated the concept himself. However, under the article ‘Logos’ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* states that:

It would be inconceivable that the apostle [John] lighted upon the word [Logos] by chance or that he selected it without any previous knowledge of its history or value. It may be assumed that when he speaks of the ‘Word’ in relation to God and the world, he employs a mode of speech which was already familiar to those for whom he wrote...

“THE LOGOS” IN THE BIBLICAL LANGUAGES

The Hebrew word **dabar** was translated into the Aramaic of the Targums as **memra**
The Hebrew word **dabar** was translated into the Greek of the Septuagint as **logos**.

Therefore **dabar** (Hebrew) = **memra** (Aramaic) = **logos** (Greek)

THE PROGRESSION OF “THE DABAR/MEMRA/LOGOS” THROUGH THE HEBREW AND INTO THE GREEK SCRIPTURES

Dabar occurs 1,440 times in the Hebrew Scriptures and the phrase “the word of Jehovah” occurs 242 times in the Hebrew Scriptures. It has the following usages.

1. *THE CREATIVE “WORD”*

➤ “By **the word (dabar)** of Jehovah the heavens were made” (**Ps. 33:6**).

This is God’s decree which brought forth the Genesis creation.

2. *“THE WORD” IN THE FORM OF THE MOSAIC LAW*

➤ “Hear **the word** of Jehovah, YOU dictators of Sodom. Give ear to **the law** of our God, YOU people of Gomorrah” (**Isa. 1:10**).

By Hebrew parallelism “the word of God” = “the law of God” (the Torah) in this appeal to Israel.

3. *“THE WORD” IN THE FORM OF JUDGMENT*

➤ “There was **a word** that Jehovah sent against Jacob, and it **fell upon** Israel” (**Isa. 9:8**)

*Here we also see the idea of God’s word **personified**.*

4. *“THE WORD” AS GOD’S GOOD NEWS MESSAGE*

➤ “The green grass has dried up, the blossom has withered; but as for **the word** of our God, it will last to time indefinite” (**Isa. 40:8**).

This passage was quoted by Peter:

➤ “...for ‘All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but *the word of the Lord remains forever.*’ And this **word** is **the good news** that was preached to you” (**1 Pet. 1:24, 25**).

Finally, “*the word (logos) became flesh*” in the person of Jesus (John 1:14). This progression is seen in John 1:17, 18:

➤ “...because while *the law [Old Torah]* was given through Moses, grace and *truth [New Torah]* came through Jesus Christ.”

In all of the 1,440 occurrences of **dabar** in the Hebrew Scriptures there is **no instance where it refers to a person**.

THE ARAMAIC TARGUMS WERE THE BIBLE OF FIRST CENTURY PALESTINE

Because Aramaic had become the language of the common people in Palestine after the Babylonian Exile the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Aramaic in the form of *the Aramaic Targums*. These were the scrolls that were read in the synagogues so that the people could understand. By contrast the Septuagint was mainly the Bible of the Greek world outside of Palestine.

The *Encyclopedia Britannica 2003*, art. “Targum” informs us that:

The earliest Targums date from the time after the Babylonian Exile when **Aramaic had superseded Hebrew as the spoken language of the Jews in Palestine**. It is impossible to give more than a rough estimate as to the period in which Hebrew was displaced by Aramaic as a spoken language. It is certain, however, that Aramaic was firmly established in Palestine **by the 1st century AD**, although Hebrew still remained the learned and sacred language. Thus the Targums were designed to meet the needs of unlearned Jews [i.e. the great majority] to whom the Hebrew of the Old Testament was unintelligible, (emphasis ours).

ARAMAIC IN THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES

WORDS: Talitha qoum, ephatha, abba, raca, mammon, rabboni, maranatha, eli eli sabachthani, korbanas, sikera, hosanna.

PERSONAL NAMES: Bartholomew, Simon-bar-Jona, Barabbas, Bartimaeus, Barsabbas, Barnabas, Bar-Jesus, Boanerges, Cephas, Thomas, Tabitha.

PLACE NAMES: Gethsemane, Golgotha, Gabbatha.

THE ARAMAIC TARGUMS WERE JOHN’S PRIMARY SOURCE FOR THE CONCEPT OF “THE WORD”

The Targums were produced at a time when God was thought of in His transcendence so that people were afraid to attribute any human thoughts and actions to God or direct references to Him. So in the Aramaic Targums the word **memra** was used as a **periphrasis** or circumlocution (a substitute word) for God. Instances of periphrasis are: Matthew’s use of “heaven” instead of writing “God” or “Yahweh” and Jesus’ use of the word “Power” (Matt. 26:64) also as a periphrasis for “God” or “Yahweh.” In no instance of its use in the Aramaic Targums did it carry the thought of a person separate from God who is the Father.

EXAMPLES OF USAGE OF THE WORD “MEMRA”

➤ Genesis 3:8:

Hebrew Scriptures: “They heard the sound of Yahweh God walking in the garden...”

Aramaic Targum: “They heard the voice **of the word [memra] of the Lord God** walking in the garden...”

➤ Exodus 19:17:

Hebrew Scriptures: “And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God.”

Aramaic Targum: “And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet **the word of God.**”

➤ Exodus 31:13:

Hebrew Scriptures: “...is a sign between **me** and you throughout your generations.”

Aramaic Targum: “...is a sign between **my word** and you throughout your generations.”

So John and his readers were very familiar with the term **memra** and its Greek equivalent **logos**.

DABAR/MEMRA/LOGOS MEAN MORE THAN SIMPLY “WORD”

However, **memra** was not a simple substitute for “Yahweh” but denoted a special characteristic of “Yahweh” in reference to His speaking i.e. His activity of commanding in wisdom and power. Therefore, because **memra = logos** then **logos** also refers to **God’s activity of commanding**.

LEXICAL EVIDENCE FOR THE MEANING OF "LOGOS"

Utterance, command, decree, plan, expression of mind, revelation, creative thought, purpose, promise, message, wisdom, or reason.

For instance Bauer's Greek/English Lexicon variously states *logos* to refer to:

A **communication** whereby the mind finds expression – of utterance; **statement**; **question**; **proclamation**; **prophecy**; command; **instruction**; message; revelation; **the gospel**; and **declaration**.

"LOGOS" ENCOMPASSES THOUGHT, SPEECH AND ACTION

Therefore 'Word' is really a rather inadequate translation of *logos*. So the rather wieldy phrases '**God's creative thoughts expressed into activity,**' '**God's expressed/declared/decreed/commanded purpose or plan**' or similar phrases more adequately reflect the full meaning of *logos*. Somewhat more encapsulated phrases might be: God's **declared** or **decreed purpose** or His **self-revelation** or the expression of divine mind.

PERSONIFICATION RATHER THAN HYPOSTATIZATION

Because the poetic factor in John's prologue was not recognized in earlier times, it was taken literally. This has resulted in **hypostatization** of (*to ascribe essence to*) "the word" in verses 1-5 and so caused misunderstanding of John's intent. When a literary piece is poetic it is generally given to *metaphorical interpretation*, which in this case is the figurative language of **personification**. *Roger Haight a Jesuit scholar explains that:*

Hypostatization means making an idea or a concept into a real thing...the symbols Wisdom, Word, and Spirit, which are found in the Jewish Scriptures and refer to God, are not hypostatizations but personifications ... A major development occurred when a **personification** became transformed into hypostatization. *Jesus Symbol of God*, p. 257

The personification in John's prologue is appropriate because his sources were Hebrew and Aramaic literature where personification was freely used. For instance, the Hebrew term *dabar* translated 'word' is often personified in the Hebrew Scriptures *e.g.* "*With speed his word runs*" (Psalm 147:15). Interestingly the prologue shows striking parallels with Proverbs 8:22-30 where Lady Wisdom is personified, but never hypostatized. There is also a certain similarity to the introduction to the Letter to the Hebrews. So a personified impersonal *logos* was not a new idea to John or his readers. Additionally, *logos*, although grammatically of masculine gender in Greek, does **not mean that it is actually sexually masculine when translated into English**. This is just the same as when a French masculine or feminine noun is logically neuter when translated into English. From the above it is evident that God's *logos* has been personified and therefore does not refer to any literal person.

"LOGOS" WAS NEVER USED TO REFER TO A PERSON

Additionally, in the Septuagint *O.T.* the Greek word "*logos*" occurs **some 1,500 times** and is never used of a literal person. It also appears over **300 times** in *the Christian Scriptures*. Again it **is never used of a literal person** other than being wrongly capitalized as a person in John 1:1 (*but legitimately in Revelation 19:13*).

“LOGOS” IN JOHN 1:1 DOES NOT REFER TO JESUS

AN ILLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING

Because God is **the Father**, it makes no sense for Trinitarians to interpret the “logos” as Jesus. This would make John 1:1 become contradictory as in the following experiment: If we replace the terms “God” with “**Father**” and “word” with “**Jesus**” it reads as:

‘In the beginning was Jesus and Jesus was with the Father and **Jesus was the Father.**’

Yet it is not part of Trinitarian belief that Jesus is the Father.

THE LOGOS AND JESUS ARE ALWAYS DISTINCT

In fact John’s prologue maintains the *distinction between the logos and Jesus* throughout, and with Jesus not being directly mentioned until verse 17 but with indirect references to him in verses 9, 10, 11 and 14. Furthermore, the prologue of the Gospel shows **no conversations between God and “the word”** as with those conversations between Yahweh and Satan in Job 1 and 2 or the conversations that are recorded between God and Jesus in other parts of the Scriptures. This indicates the impersonality of “the word.”

A PERSON’S WORD HAS NO PERSONALITY OF ITS OWN

Certainly we all recognize that the word of a person has no personality beyond the personality of the person whose word it is. One parallel is that the spirit of a person is not a separate person from him/her.

James Dunn says concerning the prologue of John:

In the earlier stages of the poem we are still dealing with the Wisdom...not as a **personal being**, but as the wise utterance of God **personified**.

Christology in the Making, p. 242.

On this issue C.J. Wright states that: “When John presents the eternal Word he was not thinking of a Being.”

And Dr. Colin Brown of Fuller Seminary comments that: “To read John 1:1 as if it means ‘In the beginning was **the Son**’ is patently wrong.”

Furthermore, *Roger Haight* says:

One thing is certain, the Prologue of John does not represent direct descriptive knowledge of a divine **entity or being** called Word, who descended and became a human being. To read **a metaphor** as literal speech is misinterpretation...

Jesus Symbol of God, p. 210.

1 JOHN 1:1-3 AS COMMENTARY ON THE PROLOGUE

A great help to our understanding is found in the prologue of John’s first letter which is a partial commentary on the prologue of his Gospel. From 1 John 1:1-3 we learn that, ‘the word’ is God’s **promise of eternal life** or immortality plan. So this impersonal promise, declared purpose or revelation is:

- “...**what** was from the beginning, **what** we have heard, **what** we have seen...concerning the word of life...and the life was manifested.”

Emeritus professor of Divinity James Dunn comments that:

The subject of which 1 John 1:1-3 speaks is not Christ...but ‘that which concerns the word of life (the relative pronouns are neuter not masculine); and what ‘was manifested’ is not Christ or the word, but life, ‘the eternal life which was with the Father’. In other words, it is clearly the content of the message which is in view, not the person as such.

THE VIEW OF EARLY CHURCH FATHERS

- *Origen’s* commentary on John says: “logos - only in the sense of **the utterance** of the Father which came to expression in a Son when Jesus was conceived.”
- *Tertullian* (155-230 A.D.) translated *logos* as **speech** and states: “It is the simple use of our people to say [of John 1] that the **word of revelation** was with God.” This view survived in Spain and southern Gaul until at least the 7th century.

SO WHAT IS THE ‘LOGOS’ IN JOHN’S PROLOGUE?

The ‘logos’ is ‘**the expression of God’s mind,**’ – **to complete the creation in the commissioning of Jesus to bring the Kingdom and its accompanying immortality.** So it is “**the good news.**” Therefore, Jesus is not “the logos” per se, but is the subject matter or content of it so that in time “the expressing of divine mind was embodied in a human being.” Again James Dunn comments that:

The Logos is God in his self-manifestation in creation, in inspiration and in salvation...
The Logos was the one God in his self-revelation.

Did the First Christians Worship Jesus, p. 83, 4.

THE SETTING OF “IN THE BEGINNING”

John 1 begins with the words “*En arche en ho logos*” – “in the beginning was the word.” The way the phrase “in the beginning” is used in the New Testament always refers to a point of time. Bauer’s Gk-Eng Lexicon defines *arche* as “a point of time at the beginning of a duration.” Examples are:

- “Moses permitted you to divorce...But it was not like that **from the beginning.**”
(Matt. 19:8 HCSB).
- “...just as those who **from the beginning** were eyewitnesses” (Luke 1:2 ESV).
- “What was **from the beginning**, what we have heard...concerning the Word of Life--”
(1John 1:1 NASU).
- “For this is the message which you have heard **from the beginning**, that we should love one another” (1John 3:11 NASU).
- “For Jesus knew **from the beginning** who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him” (John 6:64 NASU).

All of these instances indicate a point of time when something starts. With that in mind one must then determine from the context when the particular point of time was in the above cases. The above examples are: when Adam and Eve were brought together, when Jesus began his ministry, and when he chose his disciples. So for John 1:1 the point of time spoken of must

be determined according to the overall context of the usage of the term “the word” in the Scriptures. These show that “the word” already existed prior to God’s arranging of the creation when He “said, ‘Let there be...’” and whatever feature then came into existence i.e. “the beginning.” Therefore, the earlier information shows that ‘the word of revelation’ or ‘the expression of God’s mind’ already existed before the Genesis creation.

WHAT DOES “WAS WITH (Gk *pros*) GOD AND THE LOGOS WAS GOD” MEAN?

According to Bauer’s lexicon the preposition **pros** with the accusative (as in John 1:1, 2) is a marker of movement or orientation toward someone/something: It variously can mean:

- a. toward, towards, to,
- b. near, at, during,
- c. aiming at, striving toward,
- d. against, for,
- e. **to indicate a connection by marking a point of reference**, with reference to/regard to (about, because of, with respect to, which concerns, which belongs to, what makes for, in accordance with, in order to, for the purpose of),
- f. in adverbial expressions (“tends toward” Jas. 5:4)
- g. by, at, near.

To all of these meanings Thayer’s lexicon adds the definition “pertaining to.” And various translations render *pros* with the accusative as: Concerning, as respects, pertaining to, of, even to. Furthermore, the Greek word generally rendered as ‘with’ is **para** and not **pros**. So one wonders why almost all translations of John 1:1, 2 render it as: “the Word was with God” when, in fact, the word with is barely one of the lexical definitions. Such a practice would seem to be because of tradition. In contrast, for about 70 times, the LXX renders *pros ton theon* as “to God.” Also there are 18 further occurrences of *pros ton theon* in the Christian Scriptures, the great majority of which are translated as: “to God,” “toward God,” “related to God” or “pertaining to God.”

EXAMPLE OF ‘PROS TON THEON’ WITH THE ACCUSATIVE

➤ Hebrews 5:2:

NWT: “appointed in behalf of men over the things **pertaining to God...**”

NASB: “appointed on behalf of men in things **pertaining to God...**”

NRSV: “is put in charge of things **pertaining to God** on their behalf...”

NKJV: “appointed for men in things **pertaining to God...**”

ESV: “appointed to act on behalf of men **in relation to God...**”

NIV: “appointed to represent them in matters **related to God...**”

Amplified: “appointed to act on behalf of men in things **relating to God...**”

So there is no grammatical or contextual reason why some of these and other definitions could not be used for John 1:1, 2, e.g.

1. “the word was **in regard to** God and God was the word. This was in the beginning **pertaining to** God” or
2. “the word was **with reference to** God and God was the word. This was in the beginning **because of** God.” or
3. “the word was **with respect to** God and God was the word. This was in the beginning **with regard to** God.”

NOTE: The phrase rendered: “and the word was God” is expressed in the Greek text as: “kai theos en ho logos” (“and God was the word”). So The Unvarnished New Testament renders John 1:1 as: “the Word was toward God and God was the Word.”

WORD = DECREED PURPOSE

So from the above we can rightly substitute ‘the word’ for ‘**the expression of divine mind**’ or any of the other meanings of *logos* and giving the following possible renderings:

1. “**the expression of divine mind** was **in regard to** God and what God was **the expression of divine mind** was. This was in the beginning **pertaining to** God” or
2. **the expression of divine mind** was **with reference to** God and what God was **the expression of divine mind** was. This was in the beginning **with respect to** God” or
3. “**the expression of divine mind** was **about** God and what God was **the expression of divine mind** was. This was in the beginning **with regard to** God.”

THE TRANSLATION ISSUE OF “AND THE LOGOS WAS A GOD”

Please see Study 23, EXAMINING THE NEW WORLD TRANSLATION in Volume 4. Much is made of the fact that the second word *theos* is anarthrous. This only matters if one uses the standard structure of the phrase i.e. “the logos was God (or a god).” However, the Greek text contains the phrase: “*kai theos en ho logos*” and is translated as “**and God was the logos**.” So the issue over the anarthrous noun becomes irrelevant.

WHAT THE PHRASE “AND GOD WAS THE LOGOS” PROVES

The whole sentence being:

“In the beginning was the logos and the logos was with **the God and God** was the logos.”

This linking of the second occurrence of the word “God” with “the God” by the word “and” shows that the passage is speaking of **one and the same person - God**. There is no second person – either a so-called ‘God the Son’ or ‘a god’ in the form of an archangel.

THE IMPERSONAL “WORD” IN TRANSLATIONS OF JOHN 1:1-4

PRIOR TO THE KJV

Even prior to the 1611 KJV, eight major translations and one lesser translation used either **a small ‘w’** for word or the pronoun “**it**” with reference to *the word* or both. These are: Tyndale (1534), Coverdale (1535), Matthew’s Bible (1537), The Great Bible (1539), Taverner’s NT (1540), Whittingham (1557), The Geneva Bible (1560), Bishop’s Bible (1568), and the Thomson NT (1607). **The first time the rendering ‘him’** was used came in 1582 with the Douai/Rheims version by Roman Catholic priest Gregory Martin. And the note on John 1:3: “all things were made by IT.” in the Campbell New Testament by Campbell, Macknight, and Doddridge, 1826 says:

Every English version before that of King James [some 13 versions], preferred IT to HE because of the laws of concord: WORD being in English NEUTER, the pronoun referring to it should be in the same gender. The Vulgate also uses HOC, the neuter gender, to agree with VERBUM, neuter. Luther, in like manner, prefers the neuter

pronoun. In Italian, PAROLA (the word) is feminine, and so is the pronoun agreeing with it. So in the French versions. Dr. Campbell justifies IT in a long note on this passage, and shows that the authors of the common version departed from their own rule in the fourth verse of the same chapter, where the term LIGHT is as clearly applied to the same person as the term WORD, and yet, in the fifth verse, they translate the pronoun agreeing with it, by the same pronoun IT, — ‘and the darkness comprehendeth IT not.’ ... The best reason, as it appears to us, for this preference, is that the antecedent to the word IT can only be the term WORD; but the antecedent to the term HIM may be more naturally concluded to be GOD, the nearest noun — which would materially change the sense of the passage.

TRANSLATIONS SINCE 1611 A.D.

There are numerous translations since 1611 that reflect the fact that a second person is not being spoken about in John 1:1-3 e.g. LeClerc (1701), Wakefield (1791), Campbell (1826), B. Wilson’s Diaglott (1864), Concordant (1926), William Temple (1939), the 1985 translation by the Jewish historian Hugh J Schonfield, The Unvarnished New Testament (1991), and the 1993 translation by Robert W. Funk. The Elberfelder and Luther Bibles have *Das Wort* (*Das* being neuter and a capital letter being standard for all nouns in German) and the French Second version has *La parole* (feminine) and in Russian it is *slovo...en bylo* (neuter).

Modern English paraphrases are:

- “In the beginning was the purpose, **the purpose in the mind of God**, the purpose which was God’s own being” G. B. Caird, *New Testament Theology*.
- “In the beginning there was **the divine word and wisdom**. The divine word and wisdom were there with God. **It** was there with God from the beginning. Everything came to be by means of it.” *Robert Funk*.
- “In the beginning was the Plan, God’s Plan, divine!! Everything took shape through it, nothing without it!! It brought life and light for all, shining in the dark, never overcome!! It entered the world it had planned, yet the world refused to know!! God’s own people refused!! But all who accepted, who trusted, could become God’s children, not born in a woman’s blood, not conceived by any man, but born of God!! ... And the Plan became flesh...” *David L. Edwards* (Trinitarian).

WHAT DOES “THE WORD BECAME FLESH” MEAN?

J.A.T. Robinson explains John 1:14:

What I believe John is saying is that the Word, which was God in his self-revelation and expression, was embodied totally in and as a human being, became a person, was personalized not just personified. But that the Logos came into existence or expression as a person does **not mean that it was a person before**. In terms of the later distinction, it was not that the Logos was hypostatic (a person or hypostasis) and then assumed an impersonal human nature, but that the Logos was anhypostatic until the Word of God finally came to self-expression not merely in nature and in a people but in an individual historic person, and thus *became* hypostatic.

The Priority of John, pp. 380-381.

So rather than being a sentient person “the word” in John 1:1 was the complete index of God’s mind in action. So when John 1:1 speaks of “**the word**” it was not at that time “the Son” until John 1:14 when “the word **became** flesh.”

BUT JESUS IS “THE WORD OF GOD” IN REVELATION 19:13

- “...and he is arrayed with an outer garment sprinkled with blood, and **the name he is called** is The Word of God” (NWT).

Does this mean that we must view the pre-existing logos/word in John 1:1 as a person — as Jesus? No! For all the reasons given above concerning the prologue of John as speaking of God’s impersonal word this Revelation passage cannot be used to promote a pre-existing person in John 1:1. Furthermore, we need to consider the timing of the granting of this name.

A NAME GIVEN IN THE FUTURE

“*The name he is called is The Word of God*” was a name given him at a time after his birth, death and resurrection and occurs only in this one **future scenario** of Revelation 19:11-16. Therefore, it cannot concern a time before these events. As most commentators agree the entire passage of verses 11-16 is a symbolic description of the return of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the fact that he has a sharp sword is a metaphor for God’s word (Heb. 4:12) i.e. the message of the good news (Rev. 1:2, 9; 6:9; 20:4) and this is what is meant here in 19:13. This ‘word’ is also defined in 1 John 1:1 as the message preached by Jesus during his ministry. This is why he could say:

- “...and the word that YOU are hearing is not mine, but belongs to the Father who sent me”
(**John 14:24**).

He could only be called “the Word of God” because as Messiah **at the end of his life** he had fulfilled all for his first advent that was prophesied about him in the Hebrew Scriptures. This was completed with his death and resurrection. Also in the passage of 19:11-16 he is also called “*Faithful and True*,” but such was not his title until he “*became faithful as far as death*” (Phil 2:8). He is also called “*the King of Kings and Lord of Lords*,” but such was not his title until his resurrection after which “*God has highly exalted him...so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...*” (Phil 2:9, 10 ESV). The Revelation 19:11-16 passage entirely pictures the returning Jesus as a warrior dispensing death and destruction in line with many prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures for his second advent. So none of this concerns Jesus’ early life or a supposed pre-existent life and “*The name he is called is The Word of God*” is entirely about Jesus’ future return and does not concern God’s impersonal word spoken of in John 1:1.

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTS ON JOHN’S PROLOGUE

Occasionally Bible writers wrote applying a double meaning to certain phrases - *a double-entendre*, which is a figure of speech called *amphibologia*, and is explained in the primary work *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* by E.W. Bullinger. This was evidently the technique used by John in the beginning of his prologue, where he uses the Genesis creation of order’ as a basis for a treatise on the Good news of the New Creation.

*THE EXPRESSION OF DIVINE MIND CREATES EVERYTHING***FIRST POETIC STROPHE** - (verses 1-2)

Verses 1-2:

- “In the beginning was **the expression of divine mind** (Gk *logos*) and the expression of divine mind was **with reference to** God and what God was, the expression of divine mind was. **This** was with God in the beginning.”

SECOND POETIC STROPHE - (verses 3–5)

Verse 3:

- “**Everything** [of the Genesis and New creations] **came to be through it** [the expression of divine mind], **and without it nothing came to be that has come to be.**”

Although John is referring to the original creation in quoting the Genesis 1:1 phrase “in the beginning,” he is also using it as a way of introducing fundamentals of **the New Creation** which becomes entirely the subject from verse 4 forward (also see vs. 13). However, it can be seen from how other NT writers and John himself used the word “beginning,” according to context, that John’s prologue is also not primarily a treatise on the Genesis creation:

- “[The] *beginning* of **the good news** about Jesus Christ” (Mark 1:1).
- “...just as those who from [the] *beginning* became **eyewitnesses** and attendants of the message delivered these to us” (Luke 1:2).
- “For from [the] *beginning* Jesus knew who were the **ones not believing** and who was the one that would **betray** him” (John 6:64).

Clearly this is a reference back to the beginning of the time Jesus was able to assess Judas’s motives long after he had chosen him.

- “...because you have **been with me** from *the beginning*” (John 15:27. NWT is not literal here, but brings out the meaning).

They clearly were not with Jesus from the beginning of the universe.

- “But when I started to speak, the **holy spirit fell upon** them just as it did also upon us in [the] *beginning*” (Acts 11:15).

This is a reference back to the similar event at Pentecost and so refers to the beginning of the Christian Congregation.

- “As for YOU, let **that which YOU have heard** from [the] *beginning* remain in YOU. If that which YOU have heard from [the] *beginning* remains in YOU, YOU will also abide in union with the Son and in union with the Father” (1 John 2:24).

So although John is referencing the Genesis creation it is only as a basis to tell the same story as the other Gospel and letter writers i.e. the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ from the 1st century. In fact, John states that the purpose of his Gospel is that: “that YOU may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God,” (John 20:31). Commenting on John 1:1 Professor F.F. Bruce stated that:

It is not by accident that the Gospel begins with the same phrase as the Book of Genesis. In Genesis 1:1, ‘In the beginning’ introduces the story of the old creation; here it introduces the story of **the new creation**.

The Gospels and Epistles of John, p. 28.

NOTE: This use of *logos* is the same as the descriptions of God’s word as His agent in the Genesis creation (**Gen. 1: 3; Ps. 33:6; Isa. 55:11; 2 Peter 3:5**). It is also similar to the descriptions of spirit, power, and wisdom as His agents of creation (**Job 33:4; Jer. 10:12**), none of which are persons.

THE TREATISE IS NOW ENTIRELY ABOUT THE NEW CREATION

Verses 4-5

- “**In it was life** [immortality of the coming age] **and the life was the light of men.**

The light [God's revealed truth] **shines in the darkness** (of lies from Satan in Eden), **and the darkness did not overpower it** [Gen. 3:15 and onward].”

Commenting on John 1:4, 5, F.F. Bruce stated that:

In the first creation, ‘darkness was upon the face of the deep’ (Gen 1:2) until God called light into being, so **the new creation** (in which the Word of God is agent as effectively as in the earlier one) involves the banishing of spiritual darkness by the light which shines in the Word. *The Gospels and Epistles of John*, p. 33.

So through the expression of His mind God brings about His revealed truth [**The light**] that leads to immortal life in the age to come:

➤ “And this is the message which we have heard from him...that **God is light** and there is **no darkness** at all in union with him” (1 John 1:5).

So **the light** at this point (verse 5) of the prologue is clearly impersonal, the pronoun **it** having been used. This indicates that “*the logos*” is also impersonal at this stage of the prologue. Next “the light” is shown to become embodied in Jesus; and later in the prologue “*the logos*” is also shown to become embodied in Jesus.

THE REVEALING OF JESUS WHO WOULD EMBODY THE TRUE LIGHT

FIRST PROSE SECTION—(verses 6-9)

Verses 6 and 7:

- “**There came a man sent from God whose name was John...in order to bear witness about the light** [to be embodied in Jesus]...”

Verse 8: “**He was not the light but he came to testify about the light.**”

Verse 9: “**That, was the true light which is enlightening every man coming into the world**” (see the structure in the Greek and the NKJV).

According to the *Word Biblical Commentary* the phrase “*every man coming into the world*” was “a common phrase among Jews.” Less likely is the common rendering of:

“That was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.”

NOTE: The NWT wrongly adds “*was about to.*” (See KIT interlinear).

Because John sets verses 6-9 as prose at this point he has altered the sense of the remaining poetry which was about **the expression of divine mind**. He thereby gives the first hint that the climax will be about **the expression of divine mind** becoming en fleshed, and which then gives out the true light. These statements about the true light begin leading toward the eventual embodiment of “*the logos*” and the light in Jesus (vs. 14) – a human. (Matt. 4:16; John 3:19, 8:12).

THE EXPRESSION OF DIVINE MIND BECOMES EMBODIED IN JESUS

THIRD POETIC STROPHE - (verses 10-12b)

Verse 10:

- “**He** [Jesus] **was in the world** (of humanity — Gk *kosmos*), **and the world** [in his time] **came to be through him but the world did not acknowledge him.**”

David J. Ellis comments on the phrase “the world *came to be* through him” in verse 10:

This applies to that part of creation (cf. v.v3) which is capable of making a sensible response. The world (Gk *kosmos*) is the world of people, especially those who, in this gospel, are confronted with the truth of Christ.

New International Bible Commentary, p. 1233.

So the phrase: “the world *came to be* through him,” concerns the world of humanity (Gk. *kosmos*), rather than the physical planet, according to the context. Because Jesus “was in the world” it was evidently **the world of his own time** and place that “*came to be* through him.” So by his life of sacrifice Jesus gave that world the opportunity to be reconciled to God and become part of the new creation. However, most of that “*world did not acknowledge him*” i.e. it rejected him in about AD 30-33. This simply cannot be a jumping back to verse 1 and so interpreted to mean that Jesus was the agent of the creation of the universe because only Jehovah with no help whatsoever did that (Isa. 44:24).

HOW THE WORLD “CAME TO BE THROUGH HIM”

Verses 11, 12a and b NAB:

- **“He [Jesus] came to what was his own [Israel], but his own people did not accept him. But to those [enlightened men], who did accept him he gave power to become children of God...”**

THE SECOND PROSE SECTION – (verses 12c-13)

Verses 12 c and 13:

- **“...to those who believe in his name, [having God’s authority] who were (or “was”) born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man’s decision but of God”** [i.e. “born from above”] (NAB).

This is the completing of creation when those who accepted Jesus became the first of the **children of God - the new creation** from a new birth and therefore they “*came to be through him.*”

FORTH (LAST) POETIC STROPHE - (verses 14 and 16)

Verse 14:

- **“And the expression of divine mind became human and tabernacled [as the new mode of God’s presence and the bearer of the New Torah] among us, and we saw his [Jesus as ‘the expression of divine mind’], glory, glory as of a unique one from a father (a metaphor), full of grace and truth**

Verse 16:

- **... From his fullness we have all received, grace [verse 17 shows this to be truth through Jesus leading to the New Covenant] in place of grace [the Old Torah which fades after it is fulfilled].”** The NIV has “one blessing after another” and the NJB has “one gift replacing another.”

So Jesus is *the logos* or *expression of divine mind* made into flesh. He was never that *expression of divine mind* before his being flesh. In *Christology in the Making* James Dunn notes that:

it is only with verse 14 that we can speak of the **personal Logos**. Prior to verse 14 we are in the same realm as pre-Christian talk of Wisdom and Logos...dealing with personifications rather than persons, personified actions of God rather than an individual divine being as such. p. 243.

Also Kuschel notes that:

Only from v.10 on may one speak of the Logos ensarkos. But it is v.14 which first makes unmistakably clear in 'Christian' terms that 'the word became flesh' and thus identifies the Logos asarkos with **a specific person**... *Born Before all Time?*, p.381.

Just as John, in verse 10, had shown that God's *light* was now embodied in a human, he completes his thoughts concerning God's *expression of mind* by showing that it, too, was now embodied in a human.

THE THIRD PROSE SECTION - (verse 15)

Verse 15:

- "John testified to him and cried out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, "the one who is coming after me ranks ahead of me because he existed before me."

THE FINAL PROSE SECTION - (verses 17-18)

Verses 17, 18:

- **"...because while *the law* [Old Torah] was given through Moses, gracious favour and *truth* [New Torah] came through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time. The unique Son, who is closest to the Father's heart, he has explained Him.**

CONCLUSION

In his prologue John is demonstrating how God, through Jesus, completes his creation as **the New Creation**. However, perhaps the most helpful points are the understanding that the term *word* is inadequate to express the meaning of *logos*. Additionally, the larger part of the prologue is poetry which indicates a strong likelihood of a metaphorical interpretation of personification as in its parallel passage of Proverbs 8.

Furthermore, Kuschel states that:

The prologue intrinsically has a dynamic movement and determines its own focal point. It begins universally and ends in a concrete way. *Born Before all Time?* p. 382.

This really makes it impossible to jump back to any earlier stage of the prologue. Such forward movement in the poem strongly indicates that Jesus is what the word became only from verse 14 and making it impossible for there to have been a pre-existent person in John 1:1 who then became Jesus.

APPENDIX

WATCHTOWER CONTRADICTION OF ITS OWN TEACHING

From The New Schaff Herzog Encyclopaedia the *Trinity* brochure published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (WBTS) gives a quotation on page 11 that is used by them to condemn Platonism. The Encyclopaedia states:

The doctrines of the Logos and the trinity received their shape from Greek Fathers, who...were much influenced...by the Platonic philosophy...That errors and corruptions crept into the Church from this source cannot be denied.

Yet the Logos doctrine is exactly what the WBTS of the Jehovah's Witnesses teaches when it teaches that a pre-existent Jesus was the logos in John 1:1.

By Raymond C. Faircloth

SUGGESTED READING

Christology in the Making - James Dunn (Professor of Divinity at Durham University).

Did the First Christians Worship Jesus? - James Dunn

Born Before all Time - Karl Joseph Kuschel (Catholic theologian at the University of Tübingen).

The Human Face of God - John A. T. Robinson (leading Protestant theologian in the UK).

The Priority of John - John A. T. Robinson

The Christian Experience of God as Trinity - James P. Mackey (Professor of Divinity).

The Birth of the Messiah - Raymond E. Brown (leading Catholic theologian in the USA).

Jesus Symbol of God - Roger Haight (Jesuit Professor of Systematic Theology).

Christological Anthropology in Phil.,II, 6-1 - Jerome Murphy O'Connor.

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