

The LOGOS Christology of John 1:1

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by

Mark Carpenter

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PREFACE

The Roman Empire was Latin. Its culture was Greek. Its religious preference was pagan. Though Christianity was born underneath the veil of these three realities, its origin rested in none. The Christian faith was founded by a Hebrew; Jesus of Nazareth. Despite the surrounding world, Israel's culture, religious foundation and origin were Semitic.

When Jesus walked on this earth, his message was primarily to the Jews. However, upon his death, burial and resurrection, his followers were commissioned to take the message of salvation to all people of all nations.

Though Christianity began in a Hebrew world, the witnesses of the apostles were all written in Greek. From its earliest days, Christianity worked into and through every culture it touched. This is not to say it was syncretistic. In fact, the very opposite was true.

For example, the teachings of Christianity did not replace the Hebrew Law and Prophets, but fulfilled them. They did not incorporate the teachings of paganism, but replaced them. This was a new faith with a new teaching.

Central to the Christian faith was one's understanding of Jesus. Since the inception of Christianity, council after council has sought to offer an

orthodox understanding of Jesus' identity. This has often been attempted with the careful use of certain words. Was he *ὁμοουσιος*, or *ὁμοιουσιος*?

When God inspired John to produce a witness of Jesus, the apostle encountered the same dilemma. How was Jesus to be described? How would he be defined? What word would best render an accurate picture of Jesus?

John settled on the word *logos*. Why *logos*? What picture or image did this word conjure to the recipients of the fourth Gospel? Answering this question is foundational to one's understanding of Johannine Christology.

A popular Greek-English lexicon defines the *logos* of John 1:1 in this manner:

A way of thinking that was widespread in contemporary syncretism, as well as in Jewish wisdom literature and Philo, the most prominent feature of which is the concept of the *Logos*, the independent, personified 'Word' (of God). It is the distinctive teaching of the fourth gospel that this divine 'Word' took on human form in a historical person, that is, in Jesus.¹

This research has one main proposition which will be supported by four components. First, there will be a survey of the *Logos* doctrine among Hellenistic and Semitic cultures. Second, John 1:1 will be exegeted. Third, a synopsis of John 1:1 will be offered. Fourth, The implications of John's *Logos* Christology among the Greek and Jewish worlds will be discussed.

The reason for this structure is simple. John would

¹Walter Bauer. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 478.

not have selected such a philosophically charged word without a firm understanding of its history and impact. He must have selected this specific word with a particular reason in mind. These four components will therefore support the proposition that John selected the word *logos* for the intent purpose of confronting and challenging both the Hellenistic and Semitic worldviews of his day.

INTRODUCTION

Of the four Gospel accounts, John is the only one to open with a prologue. The opening verse of the prologue has a triadic structure. In this structure the word *logos* is written three times. When reading John's opening verses, obvious questions arise. What was John attempting to communicate? Why did he choose the word *logos* to describe the origin, position and essence of Jesus? What would this particular word have communicated to his readers? Was John embracing Greek philosophy, or was he re-defining their terms?

Individual words convey more than mere meaning. They can also communicate images, concepts, paradigms and even whole systems of thought. *Logos* is one word that presents itself in all of the preceding categories. Greek philosophers had been using *logos* for some five hundred years before John wrote his Gospel. Why John chose to use a word already much used among the philosophical world to describe Jesus has been an issue of interest to theologians for years. One must therefore examine John's reason for his usage of *logos*.

John uses some form of the words *logos* or *rhema* fifty-one times. This is more than the combined synoptics. What was he attempting to communicate? Regardless of whether the gospel of John post-dates or pre-dates the synoptics, his development of a *Logos Christology* merits very close examination. Of all the words to choose, why *logos*?

LOGOS AND ANCIENT THOUGHT PRIOR TO JOHN'S PROLOGUE

The Understanding of Logos In Ancient Greek Thought

Logos comes from the Greek word *Lego* which carries three principle meanings. They are to speak, reckon and think. Only gradually did logos come to the designation of "word."²

Heraclitus of Ephesus (born before 500 B.C.) provides the earliest known use of the word logos which may be used to shed light on John's prologue.³ In his understanding of creation and natural process, Heraclitus separated the logos (word, or wisdom) from the actual process.⁴ He saw reality as a "*world-energy...all-embracing divine fire... an everlasting word.*" However, it is not certain that he understood Logos as a divine intelligence.⁵ Still, his separation of Logos from the rest of creation established a philosophical platform from which others would build.

Circa 280 B.C., the Stoic school was founded by Zeno. The Stoics believed in a divine fire they identified with creative reason (*λογος σπερματος*). This fire "*embraced a*

²Thorlief Boman, Hebrew Thought Compared With Greek (Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 1960), 67.

³George Buttrick, The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (Nashville: Abbingon Press, 1962), 869.

⁴Milton C. Nahm, Selections From Early Greek Philosophy (New York: Appleton, Century, Crofts, 1964), 63.

⁵John M. Warbeke, The Searching Mind of Greece (New York: Appleton, Century, Crofts, 1930), 42.

multitude of embryonic forms, called creative reasoning bodies (λογοι σπερματικοι)."⁶ Like Hereclitus' philosophy, Stoicism separated Logos from creation. However, there was not one but many Logoi. This led to a form of theoretical pantheism. Nevertheless, by coupling divine fire with creative reasoning, the Logos of Stoicism appears to have received some level of divine intelligence with their divine fire. In his work titled *Jewish Philosophers*, Stephen Katz proposed:

The Logos, which for the stoics defined the Godhead, comes to be distinguished from God Himself, without being ontologically disconnected from Him.⁷

Still, because of the dualistic nature of Greek philosophy, any divine power had to be separate from creation. This divine power may have created nature, but was physically independent from nature. There could be no sharing of substance or essence. Therefore, there must have been an intermediary force. The fiery reasoning Logos was this intermediate force.

Though the Logos within Greek philosophy possessed creative power it would not have been feasible to ascribe any form of essential deity to their understanding of the creative Logos. It was merely a conduit through which divinity operated.

⁶W. F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957), 343.

⁷Stephen Katz, *Jewish Philosophers* (New York: Bloch Publishing Co, 1975), 17.

The Understanding of Logos In Ancient Hellenized Semitic Thought

Philo of Alexandria was a Jewish philosopher who was a contemporary of Jesus. He was thoroughly Hellenized. A Logos doctrine formed an important key to his system of thought. "*His is the most articulate attempt to trace Greek ideas to a Semitic context.*"⁸ In his book *Christianity According to St. John*, W. F. Howard stated:

Philo uses the term logos to express the conception of a mediator between the transcendent God and the universe, an immanent power active in creation and revelation, but though the logos is often personified, it is never truly personalized.⁹

Being influenced by Plato's *Timaeus*, Philo believed that creation was carried out in two successive stages:

the first day of creation represents God's conceiving in His Logos the noetic world of ideas that later serves as a model for the creation of the material world, represented by the other five days. In... man, the only creature capable of doing evil, God needs the cooperation of subservient powers.¹⁰

Philo identified these "*subservient powers*" as the creative Logos. Clearly, the Logos was less than the Father in both being and essence. Though the Logos was a creative power which had gone forth out of God, it was not without beginning.¹¹

⁸ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 3322.

⁹W. F. Howard, *The Religious Thought of St. John* (London: Duckworth, 1943), 38.

¹⁰Katz, *Jewish Philosophers*, 18.

¹¹Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus - God and Man* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1968), 123.

Philo's Logos doctrine can be characterized by five points:

1. The Logos has no distinct personality.
2. Logos is God's first-born son implying pre-existence.
3. The Logos idea is not linked with light and life as it is in John's Gospel.
4. There is no suggestion that the Logos could become incarnate.
5. The Logos definitely had a mediatorial function to bridge the gap between the transcendent God and the world.¹²

At times Philo identified the Logos with the mind of God. This was a type of "*cognate hypostases (which) are instrumental in establishing God's relation to the world.*" By interposing the Logos ("*world-creating power,*"¹³) between God and creation, Philo was able to avoid contact between a holy God and a defiled creation. This pacified his dualism.

The Understanding of Logos in Ancient Non-Hellenized Semitic Thought

According to Guthrie, there are four basic Hebrew sources one may pursue when attempting to ascertain a non-Hellenized, non-Christianized Jew's understanding of Logos. They are the Old Testament backgrounds, Wisdom literature, the Rabbinic idea of the Torah and Qumran literature.¹⁴ The last two points will be addressed in this section. The Old Testament and Wisdom literature will then be addressed in

¹²Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 322-232. These five points have been deduced by Guthrie from W. F. Howard's book *The Religious Thought of St. John*.

¹³Katz, *Jewish Philosophers*, 17.

¹⁴Guthrie, 324-326.

the following section.

Adherents to the rabbinical idea of the Torah believed it was an intermediary between God and the world. This Torah transcended beyond written word. It was pre-existent. It lay on God's bosom. It was God's first born. Also, the words of the Torah are life for the world.¹⁵

The Qumran literature does not explicitly contribute to a Semitic understanding of Logos. However, by showing many facets of Semitic thought previously considered to be exclusively Hellenistic, the Qumran literature questions the level of Hellenistic influence in Semitic thought.¹⁶

W. F. Albright determined that outside of Philo the Semitic world provided "no clear evidence that the 'Word' of God was a substitute for the Divine Name."¹⁷ Whether dualistic or monotheistic, Israel's God was beyond the physical.

The Jewish community has always perceived itself to be the chosen people of God. The core of Jewish thought and identity rests in their covenant with Yahweh God. It was no different in the days prior to John's Gospel. Thus, if Israel ever developed any Logos philosophy it would be inextricably linked to the Old Testament.

¹⁵Guthrie, 325.

¹⁶Ibid., 326. A primary challenge to Hellenistic influence is the dualism which underlies much of Qumran literature.

¹⁷Albright, *From the Stone Age*, 372.

Logos in the Old Testament

The word logos is naturally found quite frequently in the Old Testament. C. K. Barret recognizes two groups of passages which use logos. First, there are those passages which infer or declare the word of God is creative (Gen 1:3, 6, 9). In the second group, the word of the Lord is the prophetic message (Jer 1:4, Amos 3:1).¹⁸ Any understanding of the Logos as a creative force would come from sections within the first group.

In several passages the Logos of God is vested with creative power. In Genesis chapter one and Psalm 33:6, not only is the Logos "*invested with divine authority,*" but also with creative and sustaining power.¹⁹ According to Thorlief Bowman, In the Old Testament, "*the word of God is never a force of nature... but is always the function of a conscious and moral personality.*"²⁰

Logos is also related to the wisdom motif of the Old Testament. In Proverbs 8 wisdom is actually personified. It is there seen as a pre-existent creator. This passage is perhaps the closest Old Testament parallel to John 1:1 to be found.²¹

Though implicit, wisdom is surely identified with

¹⁸C. K. Barrett, The Gospel According to St. John (London: SPCK, 1955), 127.

¹⁹Guthrie, 324.

²⁰Boman, *Hebrew Thought*, 60.

²¹Guthrie, 324.

the word of God in Jewish wisdom literature. Wisdom is divine (Wisdom 7:25-26). She is active in creation (Wisdom 9:9). She came into this world and was rejected (Wisdom 9:10).²²

Perhaps W. F. Albright was right when he said the Semitic world provides "*no clear evidence that the 'Word' of God was a substitute for the Divine Name.*"²³ However, it can be convincingly argued that the Old Testament does.

JOHN'S PROLOGUE

Forethought or Afterthought?

One significant element of the Logos debate resides in the composition of John's gospel. When was the prologue written? If, as many propose, the prologue was written after the body of the gospel was complete, then it may be argued that the Logos of John 1:1 developed not from outside influences, but from within the corpus of John's gospel. However, if the prologue was the first part of the gospel written, then the rest of the letter does not define, but refines John's Logos Christology. Hence the source of the Logos Christology resides outside the letter.

Even if the prologue was written after the main body of John's Gospel its implications would be the same. Had John drawn his Logos Christology from the body of his letter

²²Robert Kysar, The Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1975), 108-109.

²³Albright, 372.

the word *logos* would have impacted the letter's recipients no differently. The recipients of the letter would not have read the body of the letter before the prologue. Thus, the prologue would still have set the stage for further Christological development. Therefore, with regards to the recipients, the chronological sequence of the compilation of John's Gospel would have been irrelevant. Its implications would be the same.

Poetic or Polemic?

Is the Prologue poetry or polemic? Both sides may be argued. The rhythmic nature of the prologue is quite obvious. "*The poetic quality of the prologue is observable, even in translation.*"²⁴ Virtually every commentary on the book of John will allude to (if not offer an elaborate analogy of) the hymnic structure of John's prologue. Several commentaries will even arrange the prologue into a series of stanzas.

With a certain degree of creativity Dr. Ed Miller has been able to produce what he calls the, "*original hymnic material.*"²⁵ This was done by using only the first five verses of the prologue and then omitting verse 1c-2. These verses were dismissed as "*probable interpolations.*"²⁶ Ben

²⁴George R. Beasley, John, In Word Biblical Commentary 36. (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987), 3.

²⁵Ed Miller, "The Logic of the Logos Hymn," New Testament Studies 29 no. 4 (October 83): 552.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 552.

Witherington III has produced a hymn that covers the entire prologue. His hymn contains four strophes and omits verses 6-9 and 12b-13.²⁷

It is interesting, however, that few commentaries discuss the declarative tenor of the prologue. It may be too strong to suggest that it is an apologetic. However, it was destined to incite its readers. The prologue was indeed polemical in that it juxtapositioned John's understanding of Logos with that of both the Hellenistic and Semitic conception.

Once recognizing the divine Logos, John exalts it far beyond the sphere of both Semitic and Hellenistic thought. However, John did not stop there. After its exaltation, he then incarnates the deified Logos. Certainly, to the Greek world, it would have been highly reprehensible to ensconce any god in a body of flesh!

With regards to Jewish thought, John's deification of Logos would have challenged Israel's faith at its very foundation. John's exaltation of Logos (Jesus) would have only exacerbated an Israel who had (as they thought) already condemned and destroyed this blaspheming troublemaker.

When considering the above analysis, it is not necessary to argue whether the prologue was either poetic or polemic. It is quite possible that it was deliberately written to be both.

²⁷Ben Witherington III, John's Wisdom; A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 47-48.

EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF JOHN 1:1

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God."

The prologue establishes both the humanity and deity of Jesus. The establishment of Jesus' identity then serves as a platform for the rest of John's Gospel. His position is that Jesus is fully God and fully man. In verse one is the proclamation of the deity of Christ while in verse fourteen is a statement regarding Jesus' humanity. Though the prologue deserves to be studied as a unit, for brevity's sake, this research will deal only with the first verse.

John 1:1 may be broken into three phrases:

- a. *"In the beginning was the Word";*
- b. *"and the Word was with God";*
- c. *"and the Word was God."*

Each of the three clauses has the same subject and an identical verb.²⁸ Each clause defines a different aspect of Jesus' nature. One could say John 1:1 represents the Gospel writer's ontological perception of Jesus.

The first two phrases of John 1:1 will be dealt with only briefly. It is the third phrase that insights the most reaction and therefore deserves the closest examination.

When this phrase is properly exegeted and understood the translator can only sit back and wonder what kind of reaction it must have brought to its recipients.

²⁸Murray J. Harris, Jesus as God: The New Testament use of Theos in Reference to Jesus (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 70.

εν αρχη ην ο λογος

One may compare John 1:1a to Genesis 1:1 of the Septuagint. The Greek term "*εν αρχη ην*" is found in both passages. This phrase illustrates the eternality of the subject which it modifies. Just as God in Genesis 1:1 is without time or beginning, so is the Logos without time or beginning. It is likely that John made a deliberate comparison between John 1:1 and Genesis 1:1. Here, there is no indication that the Logos was either created or had a beginning. There is therefore no reason to imply a temporal origin to "*ο λογος*."²⁹

If John wanted to suggest that the Logos was a created being he would have used the term "*εγειρω*" which means to become and not "*ην*." By using the verb *ην*, "*John implies the eternal preexistence of the Word*."³⁰

This argument is further strengthened when one compares the verb usage in v.1 and v.14. Whereas John 1:1 implicitly states that Jesus is God (using the verb *ην*), in v.14 he explicitly declares that the Logos became flesh (using the verb *εγειρω*). God is who Jesus is, human is what he became. The verb forms which John used had to have been deliberately chosen. According to John 1:1a, the Logos (Jesus) is equal to God the Father, at least, in origin.

²⁹John Spence, The Gospel of St. John In The Pulpit Commentary (London and New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 19??), 5.

³⁰Harris, *Jesus as God*, 54.

και ο λογος ην προς τον θεον

While the first clause of this triadic verse explains the eternal pre-existence of the Word,³¹ the second clause offers insight into the relationship between the Father and the Son. This clause associates Logos "with God." It contains the preposition "προς" which actually means towards and not with. Harris offers four possible renderings of this passage:

1. Following the term Logos, ην προς could mean "spoke to." The Word spoke to God.
2. Προς could indicate "having regard to God," "[looking] toward God," or "devoted to God,"
3. This view takes προς as equivalent to παρα, denoting position ("with"). The preposition does not imply any movement or action on the part of the Logos in his relation to the Father.
4. According to the fourth alternative, the sense is "the Word was in active communion with God." This seems to be the import of John's statement, for when προς describes a relationship between persons it must connote personal intercourse rather than simply spatial juxtaposition or personal accompaniment.³²

This phrase does not carry the meaning side by side, but it connotes face to face. This suggests that the Father and the Son shared an intimate fellowship as equals.

As it was important for John to establish Logos' eternality, so too was it important for John to define the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. Why? Because being co-eternal does not imply co-equal.

³¹Guthrie, 327.

³²Harris, 55-57.

Theologies such as Modalism and Subordinationism can embrace a Jesus who is only co-eternal with God the Father.

After quoting John 1:1b in a sermon, Martin Luther proclaimed *"Where else should it (the Word) have been?"* Wherever God is the Word must be with him. This verse distinguishes the persons *"so that the Word (Jesus) is a different person than God."* (The Father)³³ Jesus' position with the Father is therefore both equal and distinct.

και θεος ην ο λογος

With the first two sections of John 1:1 Jesus is declared to be equal in origin and equal in position to the Father. These two clauses alone would not have been sufficient to launch an appropriate Christology.

Had John stopped here many down through the centuries may have been able to convincingly argue that his Christology had its foundations in Greek philosophy. A Greek pagan would have had little problem accepting a Logos (creative power) that was eternal. It had to be. Without a creative power there would be no creation. They probably would have even accepted the Logos as being on the same level as whatever god, or gods, they worshiped.

Other's could have argued that John's inspiration came from Jewish Rabbinic tradition. By using a syllogism, some Jews have argued that the Logos of John's prologue is

³³ Martin Luther, Sermons on Gospel Texts for Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany vol. 1 of Sermons of Martin Luther (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 181.

actually the Torah. The syllogism is presented as thus:

- A. Torah = Wisdom
- B. Wisdom = Logos
- C. Logos = Torah
- D. Logos is Torah³⁴

The Torah is the foundation of Jewish society. It came from heaven. God's finger had carved a portion of it out before Moses. With a little more difficulty, a Jew may have even accepted God's Torah as being equal positionally to Yahweh. Position indicates neither substance nor essence.

However, John 1:1 does not stop with Logos' origin and position. The final clause (*and the Word was God*) is what distinguishes John's understanding of Logos apart from any other philosophy or religion of his day. Naturally, the clause that characterizes John's Christology is the one that has received the most scrutiny.

When John 1:1c is exegeted from the Greek text the anarthrous *theos* quickly becomes the focal point of the passage. Three times within this verse the word *logos* is written in the nominative case. The Word *theos* is written twice; first in the accusative case and again in the nominative. It is the phrase "*και θεος ην ο λογος*" which creates the controversy.

There are two primary questions which arise from this phrase. The first deals with the cases of *theos* and *logos*. They are both written in the nominative case and are

³⁴Schoneveld Jacobus, "Torah in the Flesh," Immanuel 21-25 (1990): 77-94.

thus substantival. What is the implication of this particular construct? The second question surrounds anarthrous logos and the anarthrous theos. How does one properly translate this phrase?

Both questions are related. It is the usage and position of the article in this clause that determines which substantival is nominative and which is the predicate nominative. Once the predicate and the predicate nominative have been ascertained, one is then able to produce a proper translation.

The Anarthrous Theos

One cannot assume that a Greek nominative automatically operates as the subject within a given passage. John 1:1c can serve as a classic example against such a notion. As a general rule, when there are two nominatives within a Greek clause that are explaining the same subject, the nominative with the article is usually the subject and the nominative without the article is usually the predicate.

Apart from the ambiguous theos in John 1:18, there is no instance when an anarthrous theos forms the subject of a sentence.³⁵ The missing article in John 1:1c has misled some into translating the text "*and the Word was a God.*" This is grammatically indefensible. Since logos is used as a subject two other times in the verse it is unlikely that

³⁵Harris, 53.

John would have shifted the emphasis to theos.³⁶ John intended that his readers understood the Word to be God Himself.

The gospel of John uses a predicate noun at least 137 times. In eighteen instances the main verb precedes an arthrous predicate. In sixty-six cases the verb precedes an anarthrous predicate. In fifty-three passages an anarthrous predicate precedes the verb.³⁷ This last category is where John 1:1 resides. Because predicates are used so extensively in John, the concern must not only be their definitions but also their implications.

There are two basic principles one may follow when translating an anarthrous predicate noun. First, a predicate noun in the Greek is anarthrous when *"it indicates the category or class of which the subject is a particular example."*³⁸ For instance, in Mark 7:26, *"the woman was Greek"* speaks of a particular woman who was Greek though other women would fit the same category. The second principle suggests that a predicate noun is anarthrous *"when it is interchangeable with the subject in a given context."*³⁹ A good illustration for this is the phrase *"the*

³⁶Guthrie, 327.

³⁷Philip B. Harner, "Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns: Mark 15:39 and John 1:1," Journal of Biblical Literature 92, (March 1973): 82.

³⁸Harner, *Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns*, 75.

³⁹Ibid., 75.

man is John." John renames the man.

The particular construct of John 1:1c will mitigate that *theos* does not serve as a nominative, but as a predicate nominative. *Theos* does not serve as the subject, it renames the subject. Conforming to the second principle (mentioned above) *Theos* is Logos-Logos is *Theos*.

Definite, Indefinite, or Qualitative?

Not only does the anarthrous *theos* indicate its being a predicate nominative, but it also reveals its emphasis. The exegete has one of three options when trying to interpret the anarthrous *theos* in John 1:1. This word can be definite, indefinite, or qualitative.

Virtually every theologian who has invested much time studying the arthrous *logos* and the anarthrous *theos* signals *logos* as the subject and *theos* as the predicate.⁴⁰ Calwell studied definite predicate nouns before and after the verb, with and without the article. He noted: "*if a definite noun preceded a copulative verb, it was normally anarthrous; if it followed it was articular.*"⁴¹ If this rule is applied to John 1:1, the word *theos* can be taken as either definite or qualitative, but not indefinite. According to Calwell, "*87 percent of definite predicated nouns that come before the verb in the Greek New Testament*

⁴⁰Ed L. Miller, "The Logos Was God," The Evangelical Quarterly 53, (April-June 1981): 71.

⁴¹D. A. Carson, Exegetical Fallacies (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1984), 86.

are anarthrous."⁴²

As stated earlier, the context makes it difficult to substantiate an argument for the indefinite. This is why most scholars will narrow the argument to the definite, or the qualitative.

According to Harris, the single most important reason for the anarthrous theos is that it is qualitative and it *"emphasizes nature rather than personal identity."*⁴³

To suggest that both theos and logos are definite would be to translate the passage *"and the God was the word."* Not only is this translation problematic regarding the unity of the Trinity, but it does not flow with the rest of the verse. The whole thrust of John 1:1 is to elevate Jesus as God. First he is equal to God in origin, then he is equal in position, finally he is equal in essence.

When comparing the verb usage of John 1:1 with the rest of the prologue, Harris concluded that the anarthrous theos had to be qualitative. Harner arrived at the same conclusion. He stated succinctly:

In John 1:1, I think that the qualitative force of the predicate is so prominent that the noun cannot be regarded as definite.⁴⁴

According to Kenneth Wuest, the anarthrous theos in John 1:1 refers to divine essence. The emphasis is upon quality or character. Thus, John teaches us that Jesus is

⁴²Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 86.

⁴³Harris, 67.

⁴⁴Harner, 87.

Deity with the same essence as God the Father. "*Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter, the teacher, is Very God.*" The Word was (as to his essence or nature) God.⁴⁵

SYNOPSIS OF JOHN 1:1

Since John introduces the term *logos* without an explanation, he probably expects his readers will understand it.⁴⁶ According to Barrett, the prologue is a prose introduction specially written to introduce the gospel of John. It not only introduces, but also harmonizes with the rest of the gospel.⁴⁷

Though *Logos* is not used after the prologue, it is still consistent and foundational to Johanine Christology. It is consistent in that the primary theme of the Gospel is the deity of Christ. It is foundational because the validity of John's Gospel rests upon the deity of Christ. If Jesus is not God then John 1:1 is at best an exaggeration or hyperbole. At worst, it is blasphemy and heresy.

The third clause of John 1:1 which argues the equality of essence between the *Logos* and God has probably created more controversy than any other passage within the book of John. This, however, is the phrase that

⁴⁵Kenneth Wuest, Word Studies in the Greek New Testament Vol 3, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 52.

⁴⁶J. N. Sanders and B. A. Mastin, A Commentary on the Gospel According to John (London: Adan & Charles Black, 1968), 67.

⁴⁷Barrett, 126.

distinguishes John's understanding of Logos from the Greek, Jewish, Gnostic and Hermetic philosophies. Not only is the pre-incarnate state of the Logos affirmed, but *"it is pointedly asserted that He was God in the sense that the Father is God."*⁴⁸ One cannot be honest with the Greek text and arrive at any other conclusion. Gordon Clark in his Johannine Logos wrote:

The Deity of Christ is, as has been stated, the main message of the Gospel of John. To mistranslate the first verse is to misconstrue the whole book.⁴⁹

Considering Clark's statement, one may ask if it is possible to construct a Biblically sound Christology with nothing more than John 1:1. According to this verse Jesus shares co-eternality with God the Father. He shares equality in position with God the Father. He then shares equality in essence with God the Father.

Perhaps better than any other passage, John 1:1 articulates the deity of Christ. However, apart from the rest of the prologue, the fulness of Christ is lost. The deity of Christ is affirmed, but his humanity is not addressed. Just as history can tell us from where John's Logos is coming, so, Biblical context will tell us to where his Logos is going. In John 1:1 we see the sovereign transcendent God, but not the humble incarnate man. Without

⁴⁸A. T. Robertson, The Divinity of Christ in the Gospel of John (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1916), 40.

⁴⁹Gordon H. Clark, The Johannine Logos (USA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1972), 18.

the rest of the prologue, John 1:1 is incomplete.

Logos Christology: A Unique Perspective

The very usage of the word *logos* implies that John was targeting both a Jewish and Gentile audience. To a Jew, *Logos* meant God's self-expression. To a Greek it implied an impersonal rational reality. The readers would have tended to bring their own philosophical presuppositions to the table when reading John's prologue.⁵⁰

However, John's usage of *Logos* was not inspired by philosophy. His prologue is explicitly religious. John's focus on the "word" does not stress creation (the typical Hellenistic understanding of *Logos*) but redemption.

The prologue sets the foundation for a Johannine *Logos* Christology which is unique from both biblical and extra-biblical sources.

Words like life, light, darkness, witness, believe, world, knowledge, flesh, grace, truth, glory have a specific meaning and importance in the Gospel as a whole. The meaning found in the word "logos" unfolds in the Gospel as a whole.⁵¹

Logos Christology: A Unique Foundation

The evolution of a *Logos* doctrine from a Hellenistic and or Semitic philosophical background does have its critics. In a journal written to the Evangelical Quarterly, Dr. Ed Miller voraciously discounted such a notion. He categorically rejected all theories which "root it (*Logos*)

⁵⁰Barrett, 429.

⁵¹Ibid., 429.

in some pre-Johannine tradition such as Greek philosophy, Gnostic thought, or Old Testament concepts."⁵²

In a more recent article, Dr. Miller built his case further. The foundation of his argument was that the prologue was written after the main body of the gospel was finished. Thus, the Logos in the prologue is a verification of a Christology that John had already developed without any outside influences.

Let us look, then... in an entirely different direction for the origin of the Johannine Logos, however, paradoxical it may sound initially: the Fourth Gospel itself. That logos and related words and ideas function already in the Fourth Gospel proper in a way that may be relevant for an understanding of the Logos of the Prologue.⁵³

Dr. Miller may be overstating his refutation. Though John would not have bought in to prior Logos philosophies, it is certain that many of his readers did. John would had to have known this. This paper does not argue that John's Logos Christology evolved from other sources. It does, however, propose that John deliberately used the word logos with full understanding of its background.

The view opposite to Miller's would be the History of Religions school. Proponents of this view would argue that John's use of logos further validates the claim that Christianity was developed through a composite of other world religions. Today the number of pro-History of

⁵²Miller, *The Logos Was God*, 67

⁵³Miller, *The Logic of the Logos Hymn*, 560.

Religions scholars is in decline. The reason for this is that the past generation of scholarship has systematically and effectively challenged the presuppositions of the History of Religions school.

Though Logos has had an extensive history, John's usage does not facilitate any form of syncretism. The opposite is true. John's usage establishes Christianity as unique and set apart from all other world religions. The only aspect of Johannine Logos Christology that was borrowed from previous philosophical sources was the word itself.

More conservative theologians argue that the origins of John's use of logos are found only in Jewish sources.⁵⁴ If Jesus (as He claimed) came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets then Jewish sources would have to be the obvious place one would look for John's Logos origins. Nevertheless, to say that John's Logos had foundations in the Old Testament is not to say that John's Logos can be defined by the Jew's understanding of Logos in the Old Testament.

Once again, John's foundation was built not on a philosophy, but a word-The Word. The genius of John's use of Logos is that it's pervasive use (by other systems of belief) forced these other philosophies and theologies to compare and contrast their beliefs with the prologue of the fourth Gospel. John's foundation for Logos rested solely in his understanding of Who Jesus was.

⁵⁴Guthrie, 326.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF A LOGOS CHRISTOLOGY

Implications to the Greek World

Had John wished, he could have used a number of Jewish words to open his prologue. The Hebrew words "Memra" and "Dabar" would have been legitimate choices. The Greek words "ρημα" or *ἄρρητος*⁵⁵ could also have been used. Instead, he deliberately chose *logos*, a word rich in Hellenistic philosophy.⁵⁶

John's deification of Logos would have aroused much concern. However, his incarnation of Logos would have induced not concern, but disgust. John's new use of Logos challenged the philosophical and religious worldview of the entire Hellenistic culture.

After reading John's prologue a proponent of Hellenistic philosophy would immediately realize that his whole dualistic world was being called into question. This was most certainly one of John's objectives. Since the

⁵⁵Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament vol 1. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 400. This lexicon defines *ἄρρητος* as "pertaining to what cannot or must not be spoken." If the sole audience of John was Jewish, one could argue that *ἄρρητος* would have been a better choice over *λογος*. The Jews worshiped a God whose name was so holy it could not be mentioned. If Logos was God then it stands to reason that his name should also not be spoken.

⁵⁶The word Logos was rich in more than just Hellenistic thought. Jewish, Gnostic and Hermetic sources had also developed significant philosophies surrounding this word. No doubt, each of these different schools of thought would have taken issue with John's portrayal of Logos.

Gospel was written in Greek he obviously expected a Hellenistic audience to read it. One commentator wrote:

John represents a stage in the invasion of Hellenistic paganism by Judaism and later by Christianity, and not an invasion of the Biblical religion by the pagan world.⁵⁷

Implications to the Jewish World

The implications of John's Logos Christology was probably more impacting in the Jewish world than in the Greek. There are several reasons for this. First, if John's Logos was God then they had crucified their God. Second, they would have to re-think their understanding of monotheism. Third, their hopes of a physical deliverance from earthly kingdoms was dashed. Fourth, it would call into question their understanding of their covenant with God. Their very identity would be under attack.

To the Christian, Jesus is the fulfillment of the Jewish faith. To the Jew, Jesus is the ultimate blasphemer. He claimed to have authority to forgive sins. He assumed to have authority over the Law. He claimed to be one with the Father. He claimed to be sent by the Father. He called Yahweh God (the God whose name could not be uttered) Abba Father. He embraced the dregs of society. He rebuked the religious leaders of society. He refused to condemn or oppose the Roman occupation of Israel.

Added to all this, John declares him to be the Logos of God. This Logos, according to John, is God. The

⁵⁷Beasley, *Word Biblical Commentary*, liv.

personification and incarnation of the divine Logos meant Israel's God was no longer far off in the distance. He was here. He walked with them and talked with them. They could look face to face with God (whom Moses could not behold) and yet not die! To embrace the Logos of John would be to repudiate their fundamental understanding of who God was.

Christological Significance

By using and redefining an already highly charged word, John was drawing a proverbial line in the sand and challenging two worldviews. One could not read John's prologue and ignore its implications. Neither the Greek nor Jewish world could embrace John's Logos without renouncing their own worldviews.

Before conceding to John's Logos Christology, the Greek would have to abandon his understanding of Logos as merely a rational principle, or divine power. The Jew would have to resign the belief that Logos was only God's self expression. They would both have to rethink their understanding of God's personal presence in this world.

John's Logos was decidedly different from anything these two worlds had encountered. According to John, the Logos was not a rational principle, or God's self expression. He was God himself. He was also God in the flesh! When one exegetes the prologue of John it becomes clear that the Logos of John is foreign to the divine Logos as his world understood. John's Logos can only be understood as fully God and fully man.

CONCLUSION

In Acts 17:22-34 Paul was preaching on Mars' Hill of Athens, Greece. While there he noticed an altar with the inscription "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD." Upon seeing this he declared, "*Whom you therefore ignorantly worship, him I will declare to you.*" Paul used that empty altar and presented the real Jesus.

In like manner, when John introduced Jesus as the divine Logos, he took a word with a rich history and redefined it. In essence, John was saying, "*For centuries you Greeks and fellow Jews have been proclaiming a belief in a divine Logos. Today I am here to tell you who this Logos is. He is Jesus, He is very God and he has come to us in the flesh!*"

For both the Jewish and Greek worlds, the concept of Logos had significant philosophical meaning. To these two cultures, Logos evolved into a divine force. Though there was no personification, there was a general understanding that this divine Logos superceded all natural creation. In fact, it was often considered as the force behind natural creation.

Therefore, when John opened his Gospel with "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God...*" he would have been met with much consensus in both the Greek and Jewish intellectual worlds. However, his next statement - "*and the Word was God,*" coupled with, "*and the Word became flesh*" - must have dropped like a theological bomb shell.

Did John develop his Logos Christology from previous philosophies? Did he develop it in spite of knowledge of any previous concept? The truth probably lies between these two questions.

In using logos, John knowingly borrowed a word with a deep philosophic past. However, John borrowed a word and not a philosophy. He took a word rich in meaning and redefined it. John's Logos was not an extension of any prior philosophic divine creative fire. It was not some type of cognate hypostases. It was not the Torah as Israel understood. It was not a fusion of divergent religious expressions. He was a revelation of God extending through all eternity, transcending through all heaven, descending to meet man in his most desperate need, revealing Himself who is none other than Jesus Christ, *"Begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God."*⁵⁸

⁵⁸Philip Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom Vol. 1. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 27.

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