

APPENDIX A

“God was the Logos” and Greek Syntax

It is certainly arguable that the clause “Jesus is the Christ” in the subordinate clause in John 20:31 [“...that you might believe *that Jesus is the Christ*”] is an assertion of identity. That is, the assertion being made is that Jesus is to be identified as the Christ. [Jesus = the Christ]. ‘Jesus’, in this clause, is anarthrous (without a preceding article) in the Greek. Now, the fact of the matter is that ‘Jesus’, in the Greek, is sometimes preceded by the article. For example, note the verse just before this one, John 20:30. There, when John writes, “Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples...,” the name ‘Jesus’ is preceded by the article in Greek. But ‘Jesus’ in 20:31 is anarthrous.

It is also arguable—though certainly not definite—that, in the clause “Jesus is the Christ” in John 20:31, ‘Jesus’ is the subject and ‘the Christ’ is the predicate complement. Since the function of the assertion is purely an identification of one with the other—that is, an identification of Jesus with the Christ—it is not particularly significant which is grammatically the subject and which is grammatically the predicate complement. We could describe the purpose of the assertion this way: to identify the Christ as Jesus, or to assert that Jesus is the one whom we must identify as the Christ. When the purpose of the assertion is to make such a close identification, it becomes a difficult matter to make a determinative decision with respect to which is playing the role of the grammatical subject and which is playing the role of the predicate nominative. [Is the assertion intending to say something about Jesus, that he is the Christ? Or, is the assertion intending to say something about the Christ, that Jesus is he? How does one decide this, when both come to substantially the same thing?] If it seems significant, then it is most reasonable to understand ‘Jesus’ to be the subject of this clause.

It is highly likely therefore that we have a clause in John 20:31 (“Jesus is the Christ”) which is of the following grammatical form in Greek: **anarthrous noun followed by a form of the verb ‘to be’ followed by an articular noun**. It is also the case that this particular clause is an assertion of identity. The anarthrous noun (as subject of the clause) is asserted to be identical to the articular noun (as predicate nominative).

Now consider a particular interpretation of the final clause of John 1:1—“and God was the Logos.” I will symbolically represent this interpretation of John 1:1 as $\langle \theta = \lambda \rangle$. Under this interpretation, the purpose of the assertion is to identify the Logos as God, or to assert that God is the one whom we must identify as the Logos. If it is significant at all, ‘God’ plays the role of grammatical subject under this interpretation, and ‘the Logos’ plays the role of predicate nominative.

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If we understand the final assertion of John 1:1 in accord with « $\theta=\lambda$ », then the grammatical form we discovered in John 20:31 is exactly what we have in this final clause of John 1:1. We have an anarthrous noun [‘God’] followed by a form of the verb ‘to be’ [was] followed by an articular noun [‘the Logos’]. Further, under « $\theta=\lambda$ », this clause is an assertion of identity—where the anarthrous noun (arguably the subject of the clause) [‘God’] is asserted to be identical to the articular noun (arguably the predicate nominative) [‘the Logos’]. At the very least, therefore, we have discovered in John 20:31 a grammatical precedent for interpreting John 1:1 in accord with « $\theta=\lambda$ »—namely, as “and God was the Logos.”

Why is this significant? Occasionally, bible scholars or grammarians will assert that the interpretation of the final clause of John 1:1 offered by « $\theta=\lambda$ » is “not grammatically possible,” or that it does not do justice to the patterns of Greek syntax. They will appeal to Colwell’s Rule or some other alleged discoveries about Greek grammar. I am skeptical of grammatical “truths” like these to begin with. Even if we were to grant the general validity of the relevant grammatical rules or laws that scholars and grammarians appeal to in their discussions of John 1:1, we still have this one hard fact to deal with: in John 20:31 we have a relatively clear precedent for an assertion with the same syntactical form as « $\theta=\lambda$ ». Even if the “rules” are generally valid, John 20:31 shows us that it is nonetheless the case that they do not render interpretation « $\theta=\lambda$ » IMPOSSIBLE, nor even unlikely. So, « $\theta=\lambda$ » cannot be ruled out on the grounds of any inviolable patterns of Greek usage.

John 20:31 is not the only instance of this syntax [anarthrous noun followed by a form of the verb ‘to be’ followed by an articular noun]. We also find it in 1 John 4:15 (“Whoever confesses that *Jesus is the Son of God*”), 1 John 5:1 (“Whoever believes that *Jesus is the Christ*”), and 1 John 5:5 (“but he who believes that *Jesus is the Son of God*”). One may object that all of the examples involve Jesus as the subject and that ‘Jesus’ is anarthrous simply because ‘Jesus’ is always anarthrous. If that were true, it could be argued that these are atypical instances of the grammatical form: articular noun followed by a form of the verb ‘to be’ followed by an articular noun. They are atypical because ‘Jesus’ is never articular. But, it is not the case that ‘Jesus’ is always anarthrous. ‘Jesus’ is, in fact, sometimes used with a preceding article. For example, I mentioned John 20:30 above. Furthermore, there are other instances of similar syntax where the subject of the sentence is God, not Jesus—and ‘God’ very often, in general usage, is preceded by an article.

Romans 8: 33 reads, “God is the one who justifies.” ‘God’ is anarthrous. The verb ‘to be’ is not present in the Greek text; it is understood. ‘The one who justifies’ is a participle rather than a noun, but it is preceded by the article.

Also, Philippians 2:13 reads, “God is the one working in you. . . .” ‘God’ is anarthrous. The verb ‘to be’ is present explicitly. ‘The one working in you’ is a participle rather than a noun; but it is preceded by an article.

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First Thessalonians 2:5 reads, “God is witness.” ‘God’ is anarthrous. The verb is not explicitly present; it is understood. ‘Witness’ is an anarthrous noun.

While none of the above three examples (which have God as the subject) is in exactly the same form as the last clause of John 1:1, they do provide a precedence for ‘God’ (in an anarthrous form) occurring as the subject of a sentence that contains the verb ‘to be’ (either explicitly or implicitly). (See also 2 Cor. 5:19–“God was in Christ.”) Since ‘God’ is typically preceded by the article, the article’s absence in these examples is not due to ‘God’ being typically anarthrous.

After all these considerations, we have to conclude that « $\theta=\lambda$ » as an interpretation of the last clause in John 1:1 is syntactically possible and entirely likely. At the very least, the patterns of Greek syntax do not preclude « $\theta=\lambda$ » as the intended meaning of that clause.