

## LOGOS CHRISTOLOGY AND THE JOHANNINE PROLOGUE: CONFESSIONAL IDENTIFICATION AND FUNCTION

The most important Christological task is to give reason for the confession “Jesus is God.”<sup>1</sup> In his philosophical defense of the classical Christological formulation for the deity of Jesus, Thomas Morris states:

*The fundamental Christological affirmation is an identity statement, a statement of faith identifying Jesus as a literally divine person. It is probably the most extraordinary identity claim ever propounded by large numbers of serious people concerned with the truth.*<sup>2</sup>

Whether or not one believes Jesus was God incarnate, it is difficult to deny that some New Testament writers identified him as such.<sup>3</sup> The most extended expression of this identification in the New Testament is the Gospel of John. In this gospel, 20:28 is generally viewed as the clearest statement of Jesus’ deity.<sup>4</sup> Although others argue 1:1 says “as succinctly and accurately as it can” what the New Testament teaches on this subject.<sup>5</sup> The third passage in John (1:18) has a textual difficulty usually resolved in favor of the confession.<sup>6</sup>

I believe 1:1 and 1:18 form an *inclusio* for the gospel’s prologue. The prologue identifies Jesus as deity and serves as an introduction, *for*

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<sup>1</sup>Pannenberg argues this confession must not be presupposed. Christology must start “from below,” from the work of Jesus in his earthly ministry. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus – God And Man*, trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1958), 34 – 35. Using these categories, John begins his Christology “from above” *for his readers* (1:1 – 18). The theological narrative (1:19 – 21:25) is “from below,” *for the narrative participants*.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic Of God Incarnate* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1986), 14.

<sup>3</sup>The following passages are generally accepted as support for the confession “Jesus is God,” Jn. 1:1, 18; 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:8; 2 Pet. 1:1. See, for example, A. W. Wainwright, “The Confession ‘Jesus Is God’ In The New Testament,” *Scottish Journal Of Theology* 10 (1957), 274 – 299, and Gerhard Kittel, ed. *Theological Dictionary Of The New Testament*, Vol. 3, Θ – K, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965, s.v. “θεός, θεότης,” by W. Stauffer, 104 – 106.

<sup>4</sup>Even the skeptic Vincent Taylor calls this passage: “The one clear ascription of Deity to Christ.” “Does The New Testament Call Jesus God?” *The Expository Times* 73 ((1961 – 1962), 118.

<sup>5</sup>J. A. T. Robinson, *Honest To God* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), 71. However, Robinson denies the New Testament affirms that Jesus was God, 70.

<sup>6</sup>I.e., the variant μονογενής θεός over μονογενής υἱός. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary On The Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), 198; B. A. Mastin, “A Neglected Feature Of The Christology Of The Fourth Gospel,” *New Testament Studies* 22 (1975): 37 – 41; and Wainwright, *Confession*, 292 – 293. However, some opt for the latter. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According To St. John* (London: SPCK, 1958), 141. See discussion under **CONFESSIONAL IDENTIFICATION** below.

*the reader*, to John's theological narrative (1:19 – 21:25). The narrative describes a series of events in the ministry of Jesus revealing his true identity. Yet taken alone, these events are insufficient; the observer (reader) must believe the *testimony* of these events, i.e., the revealed (written) "word."<sup>7</sup> The events, in and of themselves, are insufficient for several reasons:

1. Not all who experienced them believed. The dichotomy between belief and unbelief is a major motif in the gospel, and is anticipated by the prologue (1:6 – 13).
2. The nature of what was revealed has *metaphysical* implications reaching beyond all history and human event (1:1 – 3, 18). To some degree, this idea is reflected in references concerning Jesus' origin (3:13, 31; 6:33 – 38, 58 – 64; 7:32 – 36; 8:14, 21 – 23, 42; etc.).<sup>8</sup> Schillebeeckx understands John's Gospel as presenting four Jesus traditions (John the Baptist, Jesus' signs and works, Jesus' words or 'logia,' and Jesus' death and resurrection) set in the *katabasis–anabasis* model.<sup>9</sup> These traditions function as "testimony' to [Jesus'] heavenly origin and his deepest personal identity: his special unity with the Father."<sup>10</sup>
3. The nature of what was revealed had *salvific* implications universally spatial and temporal (1:9 – 13; 3:16 – 18; 5:25 – 29; 20:30 – 31). This leads to the question of faith geographically and temporally removed from the Christ event.
4. The nature of faith encompasses the *noumenal* realm (using Kantian categories), which can only be suggested in the phenomenal world (3:1 – 13).<sup>11</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to examine λόγος Christology in the Johannine prologue (1:1 – 18) with a view to how it functions for the narrative of the Gospel (1:19 – 21:25). First, however, I will consider

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<sup>7</sup>John's use of "word," particularly λόγος, will be considered in more detail below.

<sup>8</sup>Pilate's question, "Where are you from?" (19:9) is a fundamental Christological question concerning identity; origin determines nature (9:29 *cf.* 2:9; 4:11; 6:5). John's framing of Pilate's question reveals a deeper concern than Luke's (23:6), he looks beyond Jesus' humanity.

<sup>9</sup>On this model see Wayne A. Meeks, "The Man From Heaven In Johannine Sectarianism," *Journal Of Biblical Literature* 91 (1972): 44 – 72.

<sup>10</sup>Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience Of Jesus As Lord*, trans. John Bowden (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981), 352.

<sup>11</sup>This is the idea in Heb. 11:1—written to Christians removed from the Christ event, 2:3 – 4. A discussion about the nature of faith is beyond the scope of this paper, as is the philosophical framework of John's thought. However, John's fundamental confession—θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος . . . ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο—must be a matter of faith implying certain philosophical presuppositions, including the possibility of the noumenal and phenomenal realms intersecting. The question for John's community (and indeed our own) was existential, "What is the basis of Christian faith for those of us who have not seen Jesus or experienced his physical presence." Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 353.

some suggested influences on John's thought concerning λόγος, and then present some of the critical issues concerning the structure of the prologue.

### THE LOGOS TRADITIONS

The opening of John's Gospel is startling. The reader, familiar with the Greek translation of the Old Testament, is projected back to the opening words of Genesis, ἐν ἀρχῇ.<sup>12</sup> There, as in John's first few lines, is a response to the perennial question, "Why is there something rather than nothing?"<sup>13</sup> John's inclusion of the *logos* tradition has been the subject of much speculation. For the early church it raised two critical issues: the relationship between the Son and the Father in the Godhead, and the relationship between the divine and human natures in the person Jesus. In more recent critical scholarship the focus has been on the contemporary traditions which may have influenced John's formulation of the *logos* doctrine in particular, and the prologue in general. Although much of the focus is speculative and contingent upon the tentative dating of materials, it is difficult to deny that any writer or speaker is influenced by the literary milieu of his or her generation.<sup>14</sup> John writes as if his readers are already familiar with his terms (especially *logos*), either as part of a common tradition or as part of his own teaching to which they previously had been exposed. Either way, the question remains concerning the origin of the *logos* concept.

Before examining the possible influences on the *logos* concept in particular, brief mention is due the proposed influences on the prologue in general. Some scholars view part of the prologue as an earlier *logos* hymn (or poem) from the Johannine circle.<sup>15</sup> Others have found the origin of the hymn in sectarian Judaism, praising Sophia and Torah. This hymn was later adapted by a Hellenistic Christian community influenced by Paul's identification of Christ with Sophia and his antithesis between law and grace.<sup>16</sup> Still others deny John used a poetic source, and simply

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<sup>12</sup>"It would be foolish to deny categorically that . . . the Fourth Evangelist had Genesis 1:1 in mind." T. Evan Pollard, "Cosmology And The Prologue Of The Fourth Gospel," *Vigiliae Christianae* 12 (1958): 148.

<sup>13</sup>This (i.e., cosmology) should not however be viewed as the purpose of the prologue. *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>14</sup>The danger in focusing on the so-called sources of the canonical prologue in order to reconstruct the primitive form—*Urprolog*, see C. K. Barrett, *New Testament Essays* (London: SPCK, 1972), 28 – 29—is twofold: 1) at best, the result is a hypothetical reconstruction upon which exegesis can only be tentative, and 2) exegesis of the canonical form may suffer from neglect.

<sup>15</sup>Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According To John (i – xii)*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday And Company, Inc., 1966), 19 – 21.

<sup>16</sup>John Painter, "Christology And The History Of The Johannine Community In The Prologue Of The Fourth Gospel," *New Testament Studies* 30 (1984): 460 – 474.

wrote his prologue as a prosaic hymn introducing the Gospel.<sup>17</sup> Peder Borgen views the prologue as an exposition of Gen. 1:1ff in the Targumic tradition.<sup>18</sup> Although there is a consensus among source critics that the tradition concerning John the Baptist (vv. 6 – 8 [9], 15) is a later interpolation to the logos hymn, there is no consensus as to the form (poetic or prosaic) or extent of the so-called primitive source.<sup>19</sup> I believe Schillebeeckx (who accepts a pre-Johannine origin for the logos hymn) is right to question whether the reconstructions of such a hymn are helpful or can enlighten beyond what an exegesis of the canonical prologue can offer.<sup>20</sup>

The influence of Exodus 33 – 34 on John 1:14 – 18 is often neglected.<sup>21</sup> Mowvley examines the echoes from this Old Testament passage in the last five verses of the prologue.<sup>22</sup> For example, the catchwords ἐσκήνωσεν (1:14) and μαρτυρεῖ (1:15) may allude to the “Tabernacle of Testimony” in Ex. 34:7 (LXX, σκηνὴ μαρτυρίου). In 1:14 the disciples “beheld his glory” and in 1:18 the statement “no man has seen God” recall Moses’ encounter with God’s glory (Ex. 33:17 – 23).

Much attention has been given to the possible contemporary influences on John’s logos doctrine. Scholars have exhaustively examined potential sources from both Greek and Jewish contexts.<sup>23</sup> Although early Greek sources (e.g., Heraclitus and Anaxagoras, fifth century B.C.) that espoused a logos doctrine would have no direct effect on John, their influence on later philosophical developments would have been felt. For example, in *Stoicism*, logos was equated with God and reason (the cosmic power ordering and constituting the world). In some

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<sup>17</sup>Barrett, *Essays*, 36 – 39.

<sup>18</sup>“Observations On The Targumic Character Of The Prologue Of John,” *New Testament Studies* 16 (1969 – 1970): 288 – 295, and “Logos Was The True Light,” *Novum Testamentum* 14 (1972): 115 – 130.

<sup>19</sup>This point is illustrated by R. Brown who lists nine scholars, including himself, with disparate opinions, *John (i – xii)*, 21 – 22. J. S. King adds five more, “The Prologue Of The Fourth Gospel: Some Unsolved Problems,” *The Expository Times* 86 (1975): 372 – 375.

<sup>20</sup>Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 354. He suggests comparison of the prologue must begin, not with hypothetical reconstructions of pre-Christian traditions, but with another witness from the Johannine community (viz., 1 John), 354 – 357.

<sup>21</sup>For example, both Barrett, *St. John*, 139, and R. Brown, *John (i – xii)*, 32, 36, make only passing references.

<sup>22</sup>Henry Mowvley, “John 1:14 – 18 In the Light Of Exodus 33:7 – 34:35,” *The Expository Times* 95 (1983 – 1984): 135 – 137. See also Anthony Hanson, “John 1.14 – 18 And Exodus XXXIV,” *New Testament Studies* 23 (1976 – 1977): 90 – 101.

<sup>23</sup>The literature on this is vast. For good concise summaries see Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology Of The New Testament*, rev. ed., trans. Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A. M. Hall (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1959), 251 – 258; T. W. Manson, *On Jesus And Paul* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1963), 138 – 149; Jack T. Sanders, *The New Testament Christological Hymns: Their Historical Religious Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 29 – 57; and Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1981), 321 – 326.

*mystery religions*, logos took on a special religious significance in connection with deities of revelation. Certain gods (Orsisir, Hermes) personified logos, and therefore could be called υἱὸς θεοῦ. In *Hermeticism* (Hermes as personified logos) the logos (as a concept) did hypostatize (was given real identity) as a god. Yet there was no idea of incarnation.<sup>24</sup> The late date of the Hermetic literature (second/third centuries A.D.), although rooted in earlier material, militates against John's awareness of it.

Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 B.C. – 50 A.D.) most fully developed the logos concept in Hellenistic Jewish literature. In the view of some, the resemblance and parallels between his works and the Gospel of John strongly suggest Johannine dependence.<sup>25</sup> The more moderate view recognizes the parallels, but argues they only demonstrate that Philo and John

*were part of the larger tradition of Hellenistic Jewish biblical interpretation and speculation. Both were making use of similar structures of thought and were expressing those structures through the use of similar vocabulary, even though the results were very different.*<sup>26</sup>

Both writers viewed the logos as an intermediate metaphysical reality through which God created the universe, the basis of "light" in contrast to darkness, and the means by which humans became God's children.<sup>27</sup> However, in Philo, the logos remained an impersonal metaphysical reality with no suggestion of an incarnation.<sup>28</sup>

Brief attention must also be given to Bultmann's so-called gnostic redeemer myth, which most all scholarship has abandoned.<sup>29</sup> However, Bultmann's appeal to the *Odes Of Solomon* as evidence of pre-Christian gnosticism deserves some notice. Charlesworth has dated the *Odes* at 100 A.D.,<sup>30</sup> and has seriously challenged its gnostic origin.<sup>31</sup> The

<sup>24</sup>Gerhard Kittel, ed. *Theological Dictionary Of The New Testament*, Vol. 4, A – N, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), s.v. "λέγω, λόγος, ῥῆμα. . . ." by H. Kleinknecht and G. Kittel, 80 – 88.

<sup>25</sup>A. W. Argyle, "Philo And The Fourth Gospel," *The Expository Times* 63 (1951 – 1952): 385 – 386.

<sup>26</sup>Thomas H. Tobin, "The Prologue Of John And Hellenistic Jewish Speculation," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52 (1990): 268. See also R. Wilson, "Philo And The Fourth Gospel," *The Expository Times* 65 (1953 – 1954): 47 – 49.

<sup>27</sup>Tobin, "The Prologue Of John," 257 – 265.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 265 – 267. See also Guthrie, *Theology*, 322 – 323.

<sup>29</sup>R. Brown, *John* (i – xii), LIV – LVI. But also see Sanders, *Christological Hymns*, 33 – 39.

<sup>30</sup>James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 2 (Garden City: Doubleday And Company, Inc., 1985), 727.

<sup>31</sup>James H. Charlesworth and R. A. Culpepper, "The Odes Of Solomon And The Gospel Of John," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 35 (1973): 299. But also see Werner Georg Kummel, *Introduction To The New Testament*, rev. ed., trans. H. C. Kee (Nashville:

parallels between the *Odes* and John's Gospel are striking. Charlesworth and Culpepper examine the verbal and conceptual relationships between the two and conclude the *Odes* are closer "to John than any other non-canonical writing prior to Justin Martyr."<sup>32</sup> As with Philo, there is no incarnation of the logos, but there is hypostatizing, as in Hermeticism. Also as with Philo, there is no necessary dependence in either direction. The best explanation of the parallels is that they merely reflect the same religious milieu.

Many scholars regard *Jewish sources* (though not necessarily to the exclusion of Greek sources) as the strongest influence on John. There are at least five lines of Hebrew ideas followed: *debhar*, *memra*, *torah*, *sophia*, and *Qumran*.

*Debhar Yahweh*. As stated above, Jn. 1:1 projects the reader back to Gen. 1:1. It is there that the Word of God brought the universe into existence. "God said," and it was done (Ps 33:6, 9). A Rabbinic paraphrase for the divine name is "He who spoke, and the world came into being."<sup>33</sup> Thus, God's Word *creates*. It also *sustains* (Ps. 147:15 – 18; 148:8; Dt. 8:3) and *judges* in history (Is. 55:11; Hos. 6:5; Wisd. 18:15). The Wisdom passage comes close to personifying the Word. Finally, the Word is the means of *revelation* (Ezek. 33:7; Ps 119:105). The logos of John's prologue also creates (1:3, 10), sustains (1:4a), judges (1:5, 11 – 12), and reveals (1:4b – 5a, 9, 14, 17 – 18).<sup>34</sup>

*Memra deYahweh*. This is the expression for "Word Of Yahweh" found in the Targums (Aramaic paraphrases of the Old Testament) used in Palestinian synagogues. Rather than speak of God acting directly in the world, the Targums substituted *Memra* as a personal hypostatized intermediary between God and the world. It was not the equivalent of *debhar Yahweh*, nor was it a name for an hypostatized attribute of God. It was used as a way of avoiding the divine name. Thus, it "is purely a phenomenon of translation, not a figment of speculation."<sup>35</sup> McNamara, however, argued that the background for John's logos doctrine might be found in the *Memra* idea in the Palestinian Targum on Ex. 12:42 – 15:8, rather than Gen. 1:1ff.<sup>36</sup> I believe this thesis is strained, and I have found no support for it.

*Torah*. According to Rabbinic Judaism, Torah was created before the world, is God's first-born through whom he created the world, laying in the bosom of God, is called God's daughter, and provides life to the

Abingdon Press, 1975), 223.

<sup>32</sup>"The Odes Of Solomon," 310.

<sup>33</sup>Manson, *Jesus And Paul*, 146.

<sup>34</sup>Borgen, "Logos Was The True Light," 115 – 130. Sanders, following Durr, similarly traces the hypostatization of *debhar* finding culmination in Heb. 4:12, *Christological Hymns*, 45 – 48.

<sup>35</sup>Manson, *Jesus And Paul*, 147 – 148. See also R. Brown, *John (i – xii)*, 523 – 524.

<sup>36</sup>Martin McNamara, "Logos Of The Fourth Gospel And Memra Of The Palestinian Targum (Ex 12:42)," *The Expository Times* 79 (1968): 115 – 117.

world.<sup>37</sup> Cullmann notes that the Torah idea is only secondarily derived through the Wisdom idea (see below) in Judaism.<sup>38</sup> However, in the prologue John sets logos against the law (1:17).<sup>39</sup> In spite of these considerations, a recent apologetic article unconvincingly equates logos with Torah.<sup>40</sup>

*Sophia.* Few question the influence of wisdom literature upon all Jewish thought. Both *debhar* and *Torah* are connected to the wisdom tradition.<sup>41</sup> Many scholars have stressed the connection of logos and Wisdom.<sup>42</sup> John's logos has features in common with Jewish Wisdom (especially Prov. 8; Sir. 1; 24; Wisd. 7 – 9):<sup>43</sup>

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| Pre-existence    | Prov. 8:22 – 26; Sir. 1:4; 24:9                                   |
| Creativity       | Prov. 8:27 – 31; Wisd. 8:1, 4 – 6                                 |
| Revelation       | Sir. 24:32 – 33; Wisd. 7:25 – 29; 8:4, 8; 9:17 – 18               |
| Dwelt w/God      | Prov. 8:30; Sir. 1:10; 24:4                                       |
| Dwelt w/humanity | Prov. 8:31; Sir. 1:15; 24:7 – 12 (“tabernacled,” 24:8); Wisd. 8:9 |
| Provides life    | Prov. 8:35  |
| Overcomes evil   | Wisd. 7:30  |

However, certain significant differences militate a strong direct connection. For example, Wisdom is created (Prov. 8:22, LXX; Sir. 1:9; 24:9), and there is no thought of incarnation, hypostatization, or personalization.<sup>44</sup>

*Qumran.* Shortly following the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, scholars detected parallels in terminology and thought forms between

<sup>37</sup>Guthrie, *Theology*, 325.

<sup>38</sup>*Christology*, 257. Similarly, this could be said concerning Torah's relationship to *debhar Yahweh*, R. Brown, *John (i– xii)*, 523.

<sup>39</sup>John Aston, “The Transformation Of Wisdom: A Study Of The Prologue Of John's Gospel,” *New Testament Studies* 32 (1986): 161. R. Brown, suggests *logos* was formulated to offset Jewish speculation about the law, *John (i – xii)*, 523.

<sup>40</sup>Jacobus Schoneveld, “Torah In The Flesh: A New Reading Of The Prologue Of The Gospel Of John As A Contribution To A Christology Without Anti-Judaism,” *Immanuel* (24/25 (1990): 77 – 94.

<sup>41</sup>George Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 36 (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987), 8 – 9.

<sup>42</sup>For example, R. Brown, *John (i – xii)*, 521 – 523; Ashton, “Transformation Of Wisdom,” 161 – 186; Painter, “Christology And The History Of The Johannine Community,” 460 – 474; and Piet Schoonenberg, “A Sapiential Reading Of John's Prologue: Some Reflections On Views Of Reginald Fuller And James Dunn,” *Theology Digest* 33(1986): 403 – 421.

<sup>43</sup>Manson, *Paul And Jesus*, 141 – 144.

<sup>44</sup>T. E. Pollard, *Johannine Christology And The Early Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 11. However, Wisdom is *personified* (Sir. 24:3), as is the logos (Wis. 18:15).

some of them and Johannine material.<sup>45</sup> The most striking parallel is between *The Community Rule* 11:11 and John 1:3:

*All things come to pass by His knowledge;  
He establishes all things by His design  
and without Him nothing is done.*<sup>46</sup>

The parallel is interesting, though hardly enough to demonstrate Johannine dependence. Even if familiarity could be demonstrated, John's logos Christology goes far beyond the Qumran "knowledge" (γνώσις) idea in this passage.

It is difficult to deny that John's logos doctrine was influenced by his cultural context. However, the point to which he developed it—ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο—was unprecedented. The extent of John's understanding of Greek philosophical thought cannot be known. Likewise, it is pure guesswork (although sometimes reasonable) to determine John's familiarity with contemporary literature (e.g., Philo or *Odes Of Solomon*). Beyond this, it strains the credulity of the average observer to imagine a first century Jewish fisherman (or his audience) thinking in categories of "hypostatization of debhar or sophia." Yet, why would John choose such a loaded term (λόγος) to express such an astounding doctrine, and then use the same term in a relatively pedestrian way throughout the remainder of his book?<sup>47</sup> The meaning of logos in the Johannine prologue is ultimately a matter of contextual exegesis.<sup>48</sup>

## THE STRUCTURE OF THE PROLOGUE

To some degree, one's view of the prologue's structure depends upon his or her view of the source(s) behind it. If earlier hymnic material is supplemented by the so-called Baptist tradition, the structure depends upon the extent of the hymnic material. However, as mentioned above,

<sup>45</sup>Pollard, "Cosmology And The Prologue," 151 – 152, and *Johannine Christology*, 10.

<sup>46</sup>Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls In English*, 3rd ed. (New York: Penguin Books USA Inc., 1987), 79.

<sup>47</sup>I do not suggest the term is used equally throughout the remainder of the book (i.e., 1:19ff). It is used of the word of a Samaritan woman (4:39), the word of Jesus' accusers (19:7 – 8, 12 – 13), a general saying (21:23), the apostle's preaching (17:20), quotes from scripture (4:37; 12:38; 15:25), and most significantly, the word of God (5:38; 8:55; 10:35; 14:24; 17:6, 14, 17) and the words of Jesus (2:22; 4:41, 50; 5:24; 7:40; 8:31, 37, 43, 51 – 52; 12:48; 14:23 – 24; 15:3, 20; 18:9, 32). Only in 1 John 1:1 and Rev. 19:13 does λόγος approach the significance it has in John 1:1, 14.

<sup>48</sup>My own view is that the *debhar Yahweh*—particularly from the Hebrew canon—was a primary influence on John, and the wisdom (sophia) tradition, as it derived from *debhar Yahweh* was secondarily influential.

there is no consensus among scholars as to the extent of the hymn.<sup>49</sup> Another variable is whether the early hymn was poetic or prosaic.<sup>50</sup>

Even if the prologue is analyzed in its canonical form without regard to sources, there are textual difficulties that might effect the structure.<sup>51</sup> Also, the differing methods of approaching the text might result in diverse implications for the narrative structure.<sup>52</sup>

The approaches which deal directly with the canonical form of the text in its historical context are best able to do justice to the intent of the author. The material can reasonably be viewed as a logos hymn or poem (vv. 1 – 5, 9 – 14, 16 – 18),<sup>53</sup> with parenthetical explanations (vv. 6 – 8, 15),<sup>54</sup> or simply as a single literary unit (see below).<sup>55</sup>

The traditional approach to the structure of the prologue divides it according to *content*. Barrett typically observes that it naturally falls into the following divisions:<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>See footnote 19.

<sup>50</sup>Barrett, *Essays*, 36 – 39.

<sup>51</sup>For example, if the reading μονογενῆς υἱός (v. 18) is correct, it weakens the possible chiasm. A key factor in the A (1:1 – 2) and A' (1:18) elements is the deity of the logos which is lost with this reading.

<sup>52</sup>For example, if Culpepper's chiastic analysis is accepted, ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν τε/κνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι is the central affirmation of the prologue, and this effects one's approach to the narrative. R. Alan Culpepper, "The Pivot Of John's Gospel," *New Testament Studies* 27 (1980): 1 – 31. Even if his conclusions fail to convince, his observations about language, conceptual, and content parallels—criteria for chiasm—in the prologue affirm it as the product of one hand.

Another approach views the structure of the prologue as "three concentric circles" (1 – 5, 6 – 13, 14 – 18) around the revelation of the historical Christ. Herman Ridderbos, "The Structure And Scope Of The Prologue To The Gospel Of John," *Novum Testamentum* 8 (1966): 180 – 201. The former approach focuses on the *result* of the confession of incarnation (the subjective element of faith), the latter on the *substance* of the confession (the objective element of faith). This does not suggest the two ideas are in conflict, only that exegesis following either too rigidly might result in the neglect of other ideas. However, I do believe it is difficult to deny the centrality of the *substantive* element in the confession (1:1, 14). See Beasley-Murray, *John*, 4.

<sup>53</sup>Cecil Cryer, "The Prologue To The Fourth Gospel," *The Expository Times* 32 (1921): 440 – 443.

<sup>54</sup>J. A. T. Robinson views these verses as interruptions in the prologue. Of verse 15 he says it "is the most rude interruption...it explains nothing in the context: it merely interrupts." "The Relation Of The Prologue To The Gospel Of St. John," *New Testament Studies* 9 (1962 – 1963): 122, 125. However, Morna Hooker aptly demonstrates their function in the prologue and connection with the remainder of the gospel. "John The Baptist And The Johannine Prologue," *New Testament Studies* 16 (1969 – 1970): 354 – 358.

<sup>55</sup>In a rather elaborate effort to demonstrate the function of both the "penultimate" and final stages of the prologue, Charles Homer Gibling understands the former (i.e., prior to the addition of the Baptist traditions) as "a meditative, appreciative reflection on the eschatological theophany effected through the Word," and the latter as "a literary, thematic introduction to John's narrative." "Two Complimentary Literary Structures In John 1:1 – 18," *Journal Of Biblical Literature* 104 (1985): 87 – 103.

<sup>56</sup>Barrett, *St. John*, 125.

1. Cosmological (1 – 5)
2. The witness of John (6 – 8)
3. The coming of the Light (9 – 13)
4. The economy of Salvation (14 – 18)

David Deeks<sup>57</sup> takes Barrett's four divisions as the key to understanding the four divisions of the gospel as a whole. Each prologue division corresponds to the themes in each gospel division. Therefore, the "Cosmological" theme of 1:1 – 5 is the general theme of the first section of John's gospel, i.e., the prologue itself (1:1 – 18). The "witness of John" (1:6 – 8) corresponds to the "witness" theme in 1:19 – 4:54, the "coming of the Light" (1:9 – 13) corresponds to the public ministry of Jesus (5:1 – 12:50), and the "economy of Salvation" (1:14 – 18) corresponds to the final words and deeds of Jesus leading to, and including, his passion (13:1 – 20:31). Chapter 21 is an epilogue. Although Deeks analysis will not convince everyone, it does suggest a basic unity to the prologue and the gospel as a whole.

A more complex literary approach (than Deeks) is followed by Jeff Staley.<sup>58</sup> Staley suggests that the first strophe in the prologue (1:1 – 2) has a symmetrical structure which anticipates the symmetrical concentric ("ring-like") pattern of the whole prologue. The narrative episodes follow the paradigm set by the prologue and neatly divide into five sections (1:19 – 3:36; 4:1 – 6:71; 7:1 – 10:42; 11:1 – 21:25). Each section gets progressively larger (around a "journey" motif), resolving a "minor discordant story" with which the section opened. The development of these minor story plots is the author's way of ordering the "metaphorical-theological structure" of his book.

Klappert divides the prologue according to an incarnational time scheme:<sup>59</sup>

1. The pre-existent being of the Word (1 – 4)
2. The coming of the Word to the world of men and his incomprehensible rejection (5 – 13)
3. The event of the incarnation of the Word and its redeeming significance (14 – 18)

Although Klappert makes no mention of the fact, the present indicative ( $\phi\alpha\acute{\iota}\nu\epsilon\iota$ ) in v. 5 seems to support a break at v. 4: the light that was ( $\eta\acute{\iota}\nu$ ) in

<sup>57</sup>"The Structure Of The Fourth Gospel," *New Testament Studies* 15 (1968 – 1969): 107 – 129.

<sup>58</sup>"The Structure Of John's Prologue: Its Implication For The Gospel's Narrative Structure," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48 (1986): 241 – 264.

<sup>59</sup>Colin Brown, ed. *The New International Dictionary Of New Testament Theology, Vol. 3, Pri – Z* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Corporation, 1978), s.v. "Word, Tongue, Utterance," by B. Klappert, 1115.

the beginning “continues to shine” (i.e., as the prologue is written). The writer brings the reader from the creation (1 – 4) to the present (5). He reaches back to the ministry of the Baptist’s witness to the light (6 – 8)—the light that continues to enlighten (φωτίζει, 9). This is the light rejected by the world and his own people (10 – 11), but received by some (12 – 13). Verses 14 – 18 are a reference to the same period as verses 10 – 13. Following the verb tenses three temporal states of the logos can be detected:<sup>60</sup>

1. pre-existent            1 – 4, 10b, 15c
2. incarnational        5b (this passage may envision pre-existence), 6  
– 9a, 9c – 10a, 10c – 15b, 16 – 17, 18b
3. exalted                5a, 9b, 18a

The above scholars treat the prologue as a single literary unit. I believe Barrett is correct to argue against removing certain passages from the prologue as later additions to an early logos hymn:

*The whole passage shows, on careful exegesis, a marked internal unity, and also a distinct unity of theme and subject-matter with the remainder of the gospel; and by the variety of attempts which have been made to restore the original form of the Prologue. . . . [It] was specially written (it must be supposed) to introduce the gospel.<sup>61</sup>*

Thus, internal unity, the prologue’s relationship to the remainder of the gospel (see below under **THE FUNCTION OF THE PROLOGUE**), and the failure of source criticism to reconstruct the earlier form all point to the prologue as a single literary unit used by John to introduce his narrative.

### **CONFESSIONAL IDENTIFICATION: “JESUS IS GOD”**

My primary purpose in this section is to examine the confessional identification—“Jesus is God”—within the context of John’s prologue.<sup>62</sup> Formal confessional statements from as early as the fourth century have made this identification. The Council of Nicea (325) identified Jesus as μονογενῆ τουτέστιν ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ πατρὸς, θεὸν ἐκ θεοῦ, φῶς ἐκ φωτός, θεὸν ἀληθινὸν ἐκ θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ...<sup>63</sup> More recently, the World Council of

<sup>60</sup>This schema is clearly outlined in Paul’s Christological hymn in Phil. 2:5 – 11.

<sup>61</sup>Barrett, *St. John*, 126.

<sup>62</sup>The key verses are 1 (identifying the logos as God), 14 (identifying the logos as Jesus, with 15 implying the pre-existence of Jesus), and 18 (identifying Jesus as God).

<sup>63</sup>Philip Schaff, ed. *The Creeds Of Christendom*, Vol. II, *The Greek And Latin Creeds*, rev. David S. Schaff (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1931), 60.

Churches identified “Jesus Christ as God and Savior.”<sup>64</sup> John’s prologue has served as the basic source for the formulation of this confession.<sup>65</sup> A survey of thirty-four English translations revealed that twenty-eight translated Jn. 1:1c with “the Word was God,” or some equivalent. Five rendered it “the Word was divine,” or some equivalent.<sup>66</sup> Only one, the *New World Translation*, rendered it “the Word was a god.”<sup>67</sup>

What does John’s prologue state relative to logos Christology?<sup>68</sup> Does John actually call Jesus “God?” Some scholars deny he does.<sup>69</sup> Vincent Taylor tries unsuccessfully to eviscerate the almost universally accepted passage identifying Jesus as God, Jn. 20:28, by claiming it is merely a “devotional” (emotional?) response of Thomas to the “Risen and Exalted” Jesus in “the atmosphere of worship.”<sup>70</sup> What Taylor claims proves nothing unless he is implying such a response in this context need not be grounded in reality. However, this cannot be demonstrated. Taylor dismisses Jn. 1:1c on the grounds that “the Word was *with* God” (1:1b) and θεός is in an anarthrous construction (1:1c) (see discussion below). Citing Moffatt’s translation (!), he falsely claims that the phrase in 1:1c “is *generally* [emphasis mine, see preceding paragraph] translated ‘and the Word was divine.’”<sup>71</sup> Although he accepts the textual support for the reading “only-begotten God” in 1:18, he questions it on the basis of the following phrase (“who is in the bosom of the Father”). He implies (as in 1:1b) Jesus cannot be both God and in God’s bosom at the same time. However, John uses πατήρ, not θεός, which removes some of the difficulty—God *as the Son* is in the bosom of God *as the Father*). John is speaking *relationally*, not *ontologically*. Contrary to Taylor’s assertions, most scholars accept that these three passages (1:1, 18; 20:28) identify Jesus as God.<sup>72</sup>

καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος (1:1c). As indicated in footnote 67, this phrase has been understood three ways: the λόγος was 1) God, 2) divine, and 3) a god. Leaving aside a consideration of the theological and philosophical

<sup>64</sup>Wainwright, “The Confession,” 274.

<sup>65</sup>For example, the Council of Nicea used the terms, μονογενῆ, φῶς, δι’ οὗ τὰ πάντα εἰγε/νετο, σαρκωθέντα (“he was [made] flesh”). Schaff, *The Creeds*, 60.

<sup>66</sup>Moffatt, Goodspeed, Barclay, Today’s English Version, and the New English Bible.

<sup>67</sup>This survey reflects the three basic ways the phrase has been understood: 1) the logos was *God* [definite], 2) the logos was *divine* [qualitative], and 3) the logos was a *god* [indefinite]. This order also reflects the amount of support each has received from critical scholarship, descending considerably to very little for the indefinite view.

<sup>68</sup>It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the *linguistic* difficulties with the statement “the Word (Jesus) was (is) God,” as well as the *ontological* implications for monotheism and anthropology.

<sup>69</sup>I suggest this denial is rooted more in philosophical presuppositions than exegesis.

<sup>70</sup>“Does The New Testament Call Jesus God?” 117 – 118.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>72</sup>Mastin, “A Neglected Feature,” 33 – 34.

presuppositions that lie behind these interpretations, is there syntactical support for one of them?

In an important article over seventy years ago, E. W. Colwell formulated a rule concerning the use of the article and predicate nouns.<sup>73</sup> The result of the study demonstrated:

*A predicate nominative which precedes the verb cannot be translated as an indefinite or a “qualitative” noun solely because of the absence of the article; if the context suggests that the predicate is definite, it should be translated as a definite noun in spite of the absence of the article. In the case of a predicate noun which follows the verb the reverse is true; the absence of the article in this position is a much more reliable indication that the noun is indefinite.*<sup>74</sup>

Although Colwell’s figures which result in this rule are impressive, there remains at least one caveat. As with most grammatical “rules,” the rule is not absolute, it is always conditioned by context. Thus, applying this rule to Jn. 1:1c, the most that can be said is that the context makes no demand on the anarthrous predicate θεός to be indefinite (“a god”) or qualitative (“divine”). Therefore, it can be definite (following the general rule).<sup>75</sup> Based on 20:28, this would be consistent with John’s context.<sup>76</sup> In addition, because ὁ λόγος is clearly the subject in 1:1a – b (an articular nominative following the verb in 1:1a, cf. the demonstrative οὗτος preceding the verb in 1:2), it follows that ὁ λόγος is the subject in 1:1c. Also, the definitiveness of τὸν θεόν in 1:b calls for definitiveness in 1:1c.<sup>77</sup>

J. Gwyn Griffiths adds some observations to this discussion with particular reference to Jn. 1:1.<sup>78</sup> In Classical and Hellenistic Greek

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<sup>73</sup>Commonly called “Colwell’s Rule,” it states, “A definite predicate nominative has the article when it follows the verb; it does not have the article when it precedes the verb.” E. W. Colwell, “A Definite Rule For The Use Of The Article In The Greek New Testament,” *Journal Of Biblical Literature* 52 (1933): 13.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, 20 – 21.

<sup>75</sup>However, it must be understood that the rule does not state that anarthrous predicate nominatives preceding the verb *are definite*, only that they need not be indefinite or qualitative *if the context* suggests they are definite.

<sup>76</sup>It should be noted that Colwell was not arguing this case in particular. He merely introduced it as an example. Colwell’s rule has not been shown to be invalid, it has received support and reinforcement in the following decades. See for example, Bruce Metzger, “On The Translation Of John i.1,” *The Expository Times* 63 (1951 – 1952): 125 – 126; Robert H. Countess, “The Translation Of ΘΕΟΣ In The New World Translation,” *Bulletin Of The Evangelical Association* 10 (1967): 156 – 160.

<sup>77</sup>With the exception of the New World Translation, I know of no one who renders θεός indefinitely—although the adjectival or qualitative renderings might approach the idea.

<sup>78</sup>“A Note On The Anarthrous Predicate In Hellenistic Greek,” *The Expository Times* 52 (1950 – 1951): 314 – 316.

predicate nouns are *generally* anarthrous.<sup>79</sup> There is no suggestion they are adjectival in function.<sup>80</sup> John's use of θεός is articular sixty times and anarthrous fifteen times. They are used with identical meaning in both constructions (e.g., ἐκ θεοῦ in 1:13 and ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ in 8:47). When θεός is the subject it is always articular (e.g., 3:2, 16 – 17, 33 – 34; 6:27; 8:42; 9:29, 31; 13:31 – 32). Thus, unless 1:1c is the one exception in John, θεός cannot be the subject.<sup>81</sup> Wainwright argues that John wanted to stress θεός and therefore placed it at the beginning of the phrase. Therefore, according to Colwell's Rule, John omitted the article to make it clear that θεός was the predicate and not the subject.<sup>82</sup> John 8:54 is the only other passage in John where θεός is a predicate with a form of εἶναι; it is anarthrous and precedes the verb.

There has been movement away from Colwell's Rule, which some argue leaves 1:1c in conflict with 1:1b.<sup>83</sup> If θεός in 1:1c is definite, as it is in 1:1b, the result is effectively the same as if John had written ὁ λόγος ἦν ὁ θεός. This equates the two nominatives and makes them interchangeable. If this is the case, ὁ λόγος cannot be said to be πρὸς τὸ θεόν. Harner argues that Colwell failed to recognize that the primary function of anarthrous predicate nouns preceding the verb is not a question of whether the noun is indefinite or definite, but a matter of the character or nature of the subject. Thus, anarthrous predicate nouns preceding the verb have a *qualitative* significance.<sup>84</sup> Using 1:14 as an example—ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο—he argues that the Word “took on the nature of flesh,” it did not become “the” flesh.<sup>85</sup> I see two immediate problems with this example. First, the Word took on actual flesh, not just the nature of flesh. In that sense it is definite and not simply qualitative. Second, the implication from Harner's argument that the Word did not take on “the” flesh, as if flesh existed as a single ontological unity, does not follow. No one would suggest that because σὰρξ is a definite

<sup>79</sup>Discussing classical Greek, Smyth shows exceptions but agrees with the general rule: “A predicate noun has no article, and is thus distinguished from the subject.” Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, rev. Gordon M Messing (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 292.

<sup>80</sup>Griffiths, “The Anarthrous Predicate,” 315, “Nouns which shed their articles do not thereby become adjectives.” Had John wanted to convey only quality he could have used the adjective θεῖος (Acts 17:29; 2 Pet. 1:3 – 4).

<sup>81</sup>To the best of my knowledge, no one renders the passage “and God was the Word.”

<sup>82</sup>“The Confession,” 289.

<sup>83</sup>Philip B. Harner, “Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns: Mark 15:39 And John 1:1,” *Journal Of Biblical Literature* 92 (1973): 75 – 87.

<sup>84</sup>The evidence supports this point, however the argument against Colwell is *semantic*, not *grammatical*. Colwell's error, if any, was including θεός in Jn 1.1c as a *contextually* determined definitive. Colwell's study was initiated semantically, not grammatically. In other words, he began with what he considered *contextually determined* definitive nouns, which were anarthrous predicates preceding the verb, rather than beginning with the *structural* category of *all* anarthrous predicate nominatives preceding the verb.

<sup>85</sup>*ibid.*, 83.

predicate noun in the verse that it must equate to *all that there is of* flesh. Likewise, no one would argue that the Word was *all that there is of* θεός. This may be the very reason John constructed the phrase as he did (see below).

Harner tried to find a middle ground between equating the Word and the God, and the idea that the Word was only divine; although his view is only semantically removed from the latter. He suggests the translation “the Word had the same nature as God.”<sup>86</sup> Using his analogy from verse 1:14, “the Word had the same nature of flesh,” cannot mean anything less than “the Word was actually flesh.” If not, what does it mean? Therefore, 1:1c must mean “the Word was actually God.” However, this need not mean that the Word was actually *all that there was of* God, any more than it would have to mean the Word was actually *all that there was of* flesh.

Harner appeals to R. Brown for support, but it appears that Brown is arguing as I am. Brown states:

*For a modern Christian reader whose trinitarian background has accustomed him to thinking of “God” as a larger concept than “God the Father,” the translation “The Word was God” is quite correct.*<sup>87</sup>

Later Brown writes that John’s omission of the article prohibits a personal identification of Jesus with the Father (I presume Brown means ontologically<sup>88</sup>), and for the Gentile readers, it prevents identifying Jesus as a second god.<sup>89</sup>

E. L. Miller adds some thoughts along this line.<sup>90</sup> Against Harner he argues that it is unlikely that John interjects a concept of θεός that differs from that of the other references to θεός in 1:1 – 2. In 1:3 the logos is identified as Creator, “Why soften in v.1 what v.3 will insist on?”<sup>91</sup> More importantly, he picks up on the point I alluded to above. It may be John’s express purpose in the anarthrous construction to prevent the reader from equating the Word with the whole Godhead. In a predicate nominative construction with only articular nouns, the predicate can be understood as “identical with the subject.”<sup>92</sup> Such may be the case in 1:4b, ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς. Here it can be said that “the life was the light,” and “the light was the life.” But it cannot be said in 1:1c that “God was

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<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 87.

<sup>87</sup>John (i – xii), 5.

<sup>88</sup>That John is referring to “God the Father” is supported by 1:18 (which seems to form an *inclusio* for the prologue) and 1 John 1:1 – 3.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>90</sup>“The Logos Was God,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 53 (1981): 71 – 77.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 71.

<sup>92</sup>Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, 292.

the Word.”<sup>93</sup> The God–head was not exhausted in the logos. To infer from the statement “the Word was God” that they were identical and interchangeable is to make the simple logical error that if “A is B” then “B is A.”<sup>94</sup> This error can be seen by applying the logic to 1:14: “the Word was flesh,” then “flesh was the Word.”

There is no point in dealing with the radical minority opinion that Jn. 1:1c should be translated “the Word was *a god*.” This has been adequately dealt with elsewhere.<sup>95</sup> It is enough to say that the crass idea of polytheism, which this translation cannot avoid, would have been repugnant to the thoroughly monotheistic Johannine community.

καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο (1:14a). In 1:1c John does not say καὶ ὁ λόγος θεὸς ἐγένετο (aorist indicative), but rather the Word simply ἦν (imperfect indicative) God. John’s use of verb tenses in the prologue is masterful,<sup>96</sup> although caution should be used in determining meaning by them. The imperfect of εἰμί (1:1) implies simple continuous existence. There is no sense of beginning or conclusion in relation to the temporal marker ἐν ἀρχῇ. The aorist of γίνομαι (1:14) addresses only the reality that the Word, at some time, “became” flesh. Thus, the Word in its essence (deity, 1:1) exists outside of a temporal sequence, the Word in the flesh is related to a temporal sequence.

The testimony of John the Baptist (1:15) is included to remind the reader that the logos in the flesh, who tabernacled among the witnesses, is the same logos who dwells outside of time. The Baptist said the logos who came after him had rank over him ὅτι πρῶτος μου ἦν (“because he was before me,” *cf.* 1:30).<sup>97</sup> The imperfect of εἰμί pulls the reader back to 1:1.<sup>98</sup> The Baptist spoke of the Word’s pre–existence. Jesus himself makes a similar claim in the narrative (8:58) for which the Jews attempt to kill him (8:59 *cf.* 10:31 – 33).

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<sup>93</sup>The *New English Bible* implies this by translating “what God was, the Word was.”

<sup>94</sup>Miller, “Logos,” 73.

<sup>95</sup>See Countess, “The Translation Of ΘΕΟΣ,” 153 – 160; B. Metzger, “The Jehovah’s Witnesses And Jesus Christ: A Biblical A Theological Appraisal,” *Theology Today* 10 (1953): 65 – 85; and Victor Perry, “Jehovah’s Witnesses And The Deity Of Christ,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 35 (1963): 15 – 22.

<sup>96</sup>Notice for example in 1:3 the shift from the aorists of γίνομαι, referring to the act of creation, to the perfect referring to the state of creation. This simple grammatical move involves the Word in both the initial act and continual sustenance of creation. This observation is valid whether ὁ γέγονεν is taken with 1:3 or 1:4. On this last point see John Mehlmann, “A Note On John 1.3,” *The Expository Times* 67 (1955 – 1956): 340 – 341; Bruce Vawter, “What Came To Be In Him Was Life,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 25 (1963): 401 – 406; and Fredric W. Schlatter, “The Problem Of JN 1:3b – 4a,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 34 (1972): 54 – 58.

<sup>97</sup>John the Baptist was about six months *older* than Jesus (Lk. 1:5 – 2:7).

<sup>98</sup>Against those who deny the temporal significance of these words, see R. Brown, *John* (i – xii), 56.

The meaning of ἐγένετο has caused some discussion. It is generally translated “became,”<sup>99</sup> and sometimes “was made.”<sup>100</sup> Barrett argues “it cannot mean ‘became’ since the Word continues to be the subject of further statements.”<sup>101</sup> That is, the Word “tabernacled,” was “beheld,” was “witnessed” by John, etc. In other words, “the Word continued to be the Word,” it did not “become” something else. Barrett suggests it should be used in the sense of 1:6, “the Word came on the (human) scene—as flesh, man.”<sup>102</sup>

R. Brown seems to suggest almost the opposite. The Word *became* (did not enter into or abide in) flesh in the sense that would be unthinkable to Hellenistic logos speculation. The Greek mind would have no tolerance for a logos inextricably bound to humanity.<sup>103</sup>

The problem is ontological. How does immutable deity *become* (change into) something else (Mal. 3:6)? For this reason Louw and Nida offer a caveat with their definition—by becoming human Christ did not give up his divine nature.<sup>104</sup> However, the matter is not resolved that easily for some.

More recently J. C. O’Neill argues against the translation “became” on the basis of ontology.<sup>105</sup> It cannot be said that the Word changed into man the way the water was changed to wine (Jn. 2:9). O’Neill examined how Justin and Athanasius used the term (γίνομαι) in this context and discovered it meant “to be born.” Any translation that suggests the Word turned into flesh, changed its nature, only came on the scene as flesh (Barrett), or only “appeared” as flesh (Docetism) must be rejected. The passage should be translated “the Word was born (or made) flesh.”<sup>106</sup>

Putting aside the pedantic discussions about *how* the incarnation could have occurred, John’s logos Christology nevertheless affirms a breaking-in to the temporal-spatial realm by the eternal-transcendent Word who is God. John stands in diametric opposition to the Hellenistic aversion to the co-mingling of the material and spiritual realms. For the Jew, the coming of God’s word was expected. John declared it had come, not in the Jewish expectation of Temple or Torah, but in the flesh of an

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<sup>99</sup>A.S.V., R.S.V., N.R.S.V., N.A.S.B., N.I.V., N.E.B., and N.K.J.V. So also the standard lexicons: B.A.G.D. includes it under the definition “of pers. and things which change their nature, to indicate their entering a new condition: *become something*.” See also Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon Of The New Testament*, Vol. 1, *Introduction And Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 154.

<sup>100</sup>K.J.V., J.B., and C.V.

<sup>101</sup>*St. John*, 138.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup>*John (i - xii)*, 31.

<sup>104</sup>*Greek-English Lexicon*, 154.

<sup>105</sup>“The Word Did Not ‘Become’ Flesh,” *Zeitschrift fur die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 82 ((1991): 125 - 127.

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*, 127.

itinerant preacher from Nazareth. For modern ontology and epistemology, John's category of special revelation is uncritical and irrelevant. The incarnation and inscripturization of the Word of God are dinosaurs of a primitive past. Ultimate coherence, purpose, and value are the products of human cognitive capabilities. With modern secular metaphysics, it is the pseudo-logos of human reason alone that tabernacles among us. John's logos is radical for every time and culture.

μονογενῆς<sup>107</sup> θεός ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς (1:18). Those who argue for the variant μονογενοῦς υἱός do so against the textual evidence (see footnote 6).<sup>108</sup> Westcott and Hort argue:

*The substitution of the familiar phrase ὁ μονογενῆς υἱός for the unique μονογενῆς θεός would be obvious...The converse substitution is inexplicable by any ordinary motive likely to affect transcribers.*<sup>109</sup>

That μονογενῆς naturally connects to υἱός (3:16, 18) might explain the very reason John used it with θεός in 1:18. The Word was θεός in 1:1c and μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός (i.e., the Son) in 1:14. John effectively joins the two in 1:18: As “in the beginning,” the logos is once again πρὸς τὸν θεόν (1:1), this time expressed by the phrase εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς. The latter phrase expresses a more intimate relationship of God the Son to God the Father reflecting the Word's journey through the incarnation. This relationship can only be anticipated by the reader in 1:1.

The rendering of the Roman Catholic New American Bible (“God the only Son”) best expresses what has been said above and may be the closest to John's intent. D. A. Fennema convincingly supports this reading in an article written only ten years ago.<sup>110</sup> First, μονογενῆς θεός is the correct reading as the textual evidence (cited above) and the New Testament usage of μονογενῆς as “only child” (not “only-begotten”) clearly indicate. In addition to this evidence, and contrary to those who argue that τοῦ πατρὸς demands the correlative μονογενῆς υἱός,<sup>111</sup> the proper correlative to πατρός is simply μονογενῆς (1:14). The filial element is fully present in the term, without the use of υἱός. The proper correlative to μονογενῆς υἱός is θεός as the undisputed Johannine

<sup>107</sup>For the strong arguments against translating μονογενῆς with the antiquated and misleading “only-begotten,” in favor of simply “only,” see Frederick C. Grant, “‘Only-begotten’—A Footnote To The R.S.V.,” *Bible Translator* 17 (1966): 186 – 193.

<sup>108</sup>Of the major English translations, the N.I.V. and N.A.S.B. use the θεός variant. Also, the Roman Catholic N.A.B. translates “God the only Son.” Surprisingly, the K.J.V., A.S.V., N.K.J.V., R.S.V., N.R.S.V., N.E.B., J.B., and C.V. use the υἱός variant.

<sup>109</sup>B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, *Introduction To The New Testament In The Original Greek: With Notes On Selected Readings* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1882), Appendix, 74.

<sup>110</sup>“John 1:18: God The Only Son,” *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985): 124 – 135.

<sup>111</sup>Barrett, *St. John*, 141.

passages demonstrate (Jn. 3:16, 18; 1 Jn. 4:19).<sup>112</sup> In the phrase μονογενής θεός the two words are in apposition (“the only Son, God”), rather than modification (“the only–Son God”) which suggests two Gods. Sonship (μονογενής, 1:14) and deity (θεός, 1:1) taken in apposition do not demand two Gods, but only one—the only Son, God and the Father, God.<sup>113</sup>

Fennema’s next line of evidence is the way John uses the term θεός in the prologue relative to the way he uses it throughout the whole gospel.<sup>114</sup> John uses the articular θεός two times (1:1b, 2), and the anarthrous six times (1c, 6, 12 – 13, 18a,b). In the narrative the articular is used fifty–eight more times, the anarthrous only eight more times. This suggests the high frequency of the anarthrous in the prologue has significance. In the first and last instances (1b, 18b) the anarthrous constructions refer to the logos, forming an inclusio. The intervening four refer to God (the deity). Thus, John through this literary device equates the logos and God.<sup>115</sup> I have already pointed out the fact that the anarthrous θεός in 1b, sandwiched between the only two articular uses of θεός (1b, 2, clearly indicating the deity), also points to an equation of the logos and the deity.

Fennema also argues Harner’s point (see footnote 82) that the anarthrous θεός emphasizes the qualitative sense of the noun, rather than identity. I am still not convinced this distinction is so sharp as to exclude identity. However, Fennema’s final conclusion reflects this idea whether he so states it or not:

*For the theme of the Prologue, summed up in 1.18 and explicated throughout the Gospel, proves to be this: He who has revealed God the Father is none other than ‘God the only Son.’<sup>116</sup>*

## THE FUNCTION OF THE PROLOGUE

It matters little whether or not John wrote the prologue incorporating sources, or whether he wrote it prior to, at the same time, or following the writing of the narrative.<sup>117</sup> In its canonical form, the prologue functions as an introduction to the narrative enabling the reader to realize John’s purpose (20:30 – 31). It serves to deepen the

<sup>112</sup>Fennema, “God The Only Son,” 125 – 126.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., 128.

<sup>114</sup>For statistics see Griffiths, “The Anarthrous Predicate,” 315.

<sup>115</sup>Fennema, “God The Only Son”, 129.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., 131.

<sup>117</sup>J. A. T. Robinson, “The Relation Of The Prologue,” argues for the literary unity of the gospel, probably as the work of a single author, but “it was certainly not written at a single sitting,” 120. He suggests the following order of (temporal) priority: 1) the gospel narrative, 2) 1 John, and 3) the gospel prologue, 123 – 125.

theological understanding of *the reader* beyond that of the participants in the narrative. With regard to John's readers, it is irrelevant, for this study, whether John was addressing unbelievers in order that they might *come to faith*, or believers in order that they might *continue in faith*.<sup>118</sup>

John's objective was to establish the identity of Jesus as ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ,<sup>119</sup> resulting in the gift of life for those who confess that identity.

The confession "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" is the confession "Jesus is God." The reader understands this from the prologue, but for the first time it is confessed by Thomas (20:28).<sup>120</sup> John's statement of purpose immediately following this climatic confession, cannot help but include it. Jesus declared those who believe what Thomas confessed—without having first hand evidence—are blessed (i.e., have life). Thus, John immediately connects his purpose for writing to Thomas' confession and Jesus' promise (οὐδὲν...ταῦτα δὲ γέγραπται ἵνα πιστεύ[σ]τηε...).

Although *logos* is not used after the prologue in the titular sense, it is frequently used (see footnote 47). It is difficult to imagine that John made some kind of formal disassociation between *logos* in the prologue and the narrative, especially since the term is pregnant with meaning in the prologue. The "Word" in the prologue is not only the instrument of revelation, it *is* revelation. The reader, passing from the prologue to the narrative, cannot dismiss what John has just said about *logos*, it is too startling. It is a passage from the noumenal to the phenomenal realm: "The prologue thus emphasizes the universal and cosmic importance of the *Logos* before the highly particularistic incarnational work of the *Logos* is presented."<sup>121</sup>

Can a direct relationship between the prologue and the narrative be demonstrated? R. Brown suggests that 1:11 summarizes the first twelve chapters concerning the rejection of Jesus by the Jews (οἱ ἴδιοι), and 1:12 summarizes chapters 13 – 20 concerning the words and salvific work of

<sup>118</sup>This issue is raised by the textual variants πιστεῦητε (pres. subj. suggesting *continuance*) and πιστεύσητε (aor. subj. suggesting *inception*). The textual evidence is not strong in either direction. See R. Brown, *The Gospel According To John (xiii – xxi)*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday And Company, Inc., 1970), 1059 – 1061, who leans to the former view, and D. A. Carson, "The Purpose Of The Fourth Gospel: John 20:31 Reconsidered," *Journal Of Biblical Literature* 106 (1987): 639 – 651, for the latter view.

<sup>119</sup>It is interesting that the narrative opens with an identity *question* concerning "the Christ" (1:19 – 20), and closes with an identity *confession* (20:28) concerning "the Christ, the Son of God" (20:28 – 31).

<sup>120</sup>In 5:18 and 10:30 – 33 the Jews *charge* Jesus with identifying himself as God, yet they obviously do not believe it. The inference they drew from Jesus identifying himself as God's Son (5:17 *cf.* 20:31) and his statement "I and the Father are one" (10:30) was correct. The irony is that the reader knows it is true, the Jews in the narrative believe it to be false.

<sup>121</sup>Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, And Authority*, Vol. III, *God Who Speaks And Shows* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, Publishers, 1979), 184.

Jesus for those who received him.<sup>122</sup> More elaborate and complex theories have been advanced based on the interrelationship between the literary structures of the prologue and narrative.<sup>123</sup> These approaches, although interesting, may be finding literary relationships the writer had no intention of making.<sup>124</sup> Nevertheless, a direct relationship can be established through certain motifs defined in the prologue which are central to the narrative.<sup>125</sup> I maintained above, the prologue provides insight *for the reader* concerning the identity of Jesus (see **CONFESSIONAL IDENTIFICATION**) without which the purpose of the book (20:31) could not be realized. Jesus' identity is set within the framework of certain motifs which strongly favor the unity of the prologue and the narrative.

Similar to the incarnational time-scheme outlined above, the structure of the prologue can be outlined as follows:

1. The *identity* of the Logos as God: eternal, creator, sustainer, and revealer 1 – 4
2. The *testimony* and *response* to the Logos: the revelation of God rejected and believed 5 – 13
3. The *identity* of the Logos as Jesus: incarnate, pre-existent, and exalted 14 – 18

The major motifs are the *identity* of Jesus as God, the *testimony* given to that truth, and the *responses* (belief and unbelief) to that testimony. To this I might add the implied *blessing* of "life" (4, 12 – 13)<sup>126</sup> which results from believing the testimony. These are the central motifs of the narrative summarized in John's statement of purpose (20:31): "These [signs] have been written in this book [the testimony] that you may believe [the response] that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God [the identity]; and that believing you may have life [the blessing] in his name."

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<sup>122</sup>John (i – xii), 19.

<sup>123</sup>See for example, Deeks, "Structure Of The Fourth Gospel," 107 – 129, and Staley, "Structure Of John's Prologue," 241 – 264.

<sup>124</sup>The lack of consensus on the precise definition of the internal structure suggests, at the very least, it is not unambiguous and should not be depended upon too much to argue the book's unity. Such fanciful reconstructions may increase the skeptic's criticism.

<sup>125</sup>Warren Carter identifies four themes in the prologue central to the gospel: "(1) the origin and destiny of Jesus the *logos*, (2) Jesus' role as the revealer, (3) responses to Jesus, and (4) the relationship of Jesus the *logos* to other figures." "The Prologue And John's Gospel: Function, Symbol, And The Definitive Word," *Journal For The Study Of The New Testament* 39 (1990): 37. Although I agree with this analysis, I proceed along slightly different lines.

<sup>126</sup>On the meaning of "life" in John's Gospel see J. W. Roberts. "Some Observations On The Meaning Of 'Eternal Life' In The Gospel Of John," *Restoration Quarterly* 7 (1963): 186 – 193.

Various sub-themes support these major motifs. For example the contrast between φῶς and σκοτία has an emphasis on Jesus as *revealer* (1:4 – 5, 7 – 9 with 3:19 – 21; 8:12; 9:5; 11:9 – 10; 12:35 – 36, 46). Jesus as “the one coming,” has implications concerning his origin and identity (1:9, 11, 15 with 1:27, 30; 3:19, 31; 4:25; 5:43; 6:14; 7:27 – 28, 31, 41 – 42; 8:14, 42; 9:39; 10:10; 11:27; 12:13, 15, 46 – 47; 14:3, 18, 23, 28; 15:22; 16:28; 18:37; 21:22 – 23). The purpose of the Word coming into the world—in order that all men might believe (ἵνα with the subjunctive)—is echoed in the purpose statement (20:31, ἵνα with the subjunctive in some MSS, with the participle in others). This same construction of purpose (ἵνα with the subjunctive) is carried throughout the narrative (6:29 – 30; 9:36; 11:15, 42; 13:19; 14:29; 17:21; 19:35).<sup>127</sup> That faith must be εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ (1:12) is also echoed in 2:23, 3:18, and 20:31. Otherwise the phrase is connected with prayer (14:13 – 14; 15:16, 21; 16:23 – 24, 26). It is nevertheless always faith in (εἰς) Jesus that is the issue (2:11; 3:36; 4:39; 6:29, 35, 40; 7:5, 31, 38 – 39; 8:30; 9:35 – 36; 10:42; 11:25 – 26, 45, 48; 12:11, 36, 42, 44, 46; 14:1, 12; 16:9; 17:20).<sup>128</sup>

The witnesses testified as to having seen (θεάομαι) Jesus’ glory (δόξα) (1:14). This theme is picked up throughout the narrative. His glory was revealed through his miracles (2:11; 11:4; 12:37 – 41 with 2:23; 6:19; 7:3). This gave those who believed a glimpse at his eternal glory (17:5, 24). Another hint at Jesus’ identity is suggested in 1:18 where John states that “no man has ever seen (ὀράω) God,” but Jesus as God has revealed (ἐξηγήομαι) him. John repeats that no one has seen God (5:37; 6:46), but the reader understands that to see Jesus was to see God (1:34; 14:7 – 9).

These major motifs and sub-themes are not in seminal form, as one might expect at the beginning of the book. Rather they are in consummate form. The narrative only allows glimpses into the motifs fully revealed in the prologue. These glimpses culminate in the confession of the apostle Thomas only *after* he witnesses the irrefutable evidence of the risen Christ. For the reader, Thomas’ confession is long over due. The reader has known from the beginning who Jesus is and is frustrated by the failure of the people to understand. However, the characters in the narrative lack the insight given the reader by the prologue. I suggest John may be informing the reader that the “signs” are insufficient *in and of themselves*. The identity of Jesus is a matter that extends beyond the “facts” that can be revealed in the natural realm. It is an identity that can be explained only by special revelation, and received by faith: “Blessed are the ones not seeing and believing”

<sup>127</sup>ἵνα with the participle is found in 3:15 – 16. The subjunctive without ἵνα is found in 8:24; 11:40.

<sup>128</sup>Cognates of λαμβάνω are used as synonyms of πιστεύω (1:11 – 12 with 3:32 – 33; 12:48; 13:20).

(20:29). The testimony can be understood only through the eyes of faith, “seeing” alone is of little value. That is why the μαρτυρία motif is so critical.<sup>129</sup> It is this “witness” that John appeals to as having been “written” in his book (20:30 – 31). Without the prologue, Jesus’ true identity remains a mystery.

Herbert Schneider addresses the questions, “Why was Jesus not more effective in revealing himself? and “Why could the fullness of the revelation not be given to men till after the death and resurrection of Christ?”<sup>130</sup> Throughout the narrative Jesus reveals his identity (5:18 – 24; 6:46 – 58; 7:28 – 29, 37 – 38; 8:23 – 24, 58; 10:30; 14:9; 16:28; 17:5; et.al.), but it is grasped by no one until after the cross. Why? Jesus provides the answer in terms of the cross (3:14 – 15; 12:31 – 32) and the Spirit which could not be given until he (Jesus) was glorified (7:39; 16:12 – 15). In short, Jesus had to fulfill his incarnational mission as the totally obedient self-sacrificing Son before he could be fully revealed.<sup>131</sup> Thus, “the cross becomes the place of the full revelation of the Son and the Father and the Father’s love for the world.”<sup>132</sup>

From a slightly different perspective, Morna Hooker discusses the “secret” of the Logos doctrine in the narrative by drawing parallels with Mark’s Gospel.<sup>133</sup> For Mark, it is the “Messianic Secret” and the identity of Jesus as “Son of God” that are not fully understood by the characters in his narrative. The reader, however, is introduced to Jesus as such in the prologue (1:1 – 13). In contrast, the characters in John openly declare Jesus as Messiah (1:41; [4:24 – 25]; 11:27), seemingly without the same misunderstanding as in Mark.<sup>134</sup> Likewise, he is declared Son of God by believers (1:34, 49) and himself (3:16 – 18, if spoken by Jesus; 10:36; 11:4; 1:7). In Mark Jesus does not refer to himself directly as “Son of God” (cf. 13:22; 14:61 – 62). Outside of Mark’s prologue (1:1, 11) only the demons (3:11; 5:7), God (9:7), and the centurion (15:39) recognize Jesus as the Son of God. The centurion’s confession serves a similar

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<sup>129</sup>the noun μαρτυρία is found 14 times, the verb μαρτυρέω 33 times in John’s Gospel. The two cognates together are found 30 times in the three epistles of John and Revelation, and 36 times in the remainder of the New Testament. Thus, John’s Gospel accounts for 42% of New Testament usage, John’s traditional material all together accounts for 68% of New Testament usage.

<sup>130</sup>“The Word Was Made Flesh: An Analysis Of The Theology Of Revelation In The Fourth Gospel,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 31 (1969): 351 – 352.

<sup>131</sup>This is probably what lies behind the words of Jesus to Mary Magdalene in 20:17. To speak of “the cross” in this sense involves all that it encompasses, including exaltation. “Lifting up” on the cross includes “lifting up” to the throne of God; they are two sides of the same coin (3:15).

<sup>132</sup>Schneider, “The Word Was Made Flesh,” 353.

<sup>133</sup>“The Johannine Prologue And The Messianic Secret,” *New Testament Studies* 21 (1974): 40 – 58.

<sup>134</sup>See M. De Jonge, “Jewish Expectations About The ‘Messiah’ According To The Fourth Gospel,” *New Testament Studies* 19 (1972– 1973): 246 – 270.

function in Mark as Thomas' confession in John (20:28) by returning the reader to the prologue.

If Jesus is understood as Messiah and Son of God in John, that which is hidden is the truth underlying this confession, i.e., that Jesus not only reveals God but *is* the revelation of God. By rejecting Jesus, the Jews rejected the Logos of God, they rejected God (5:37 – 40; 10:30 – 39). All that was involved in the confession “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” (20:31) was the “secret” of John’s narrative, but the revelation of his prologue.

If the reader closely follows the “confessions” in the Gospel of John, a Christological development is discernible:

|                            |                         |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| the Lamb of God            | 1:29, 36                |
| the Son of God             | 1:34, 49 <sup>135</sup> |
| the Messiah                | 1:41                    |
| the Holy One of God        | 6:69                    |
| the Prophet                | 7:40                    |
| the Son of Man             | 9:35 – 38               |
| the Christ, the Son of God | 11:27 <i>cf.</i> 20:31  |

Martha’s confession (11:27) is the last formal confession until Thomas’ (20:28). There are no faith confessions as to the identity of Jesus once he enters Jerusalem for his passion (12:12ff).<sup>136</sup> Martha’s confession is set in the context of a resurrection event which anticipates the ultimate resurrection event precipitating Thomas’ more profound confession. It is only from faith in the resurrected Lord that one can make the confession “Jesus is God.”

## CONCLUSION

The Gospel of John expounds the deity of Jesus as much as, if not more than, any New Testament document. John’s Logos Christology is revealed in his prologue, but merely hinted at in his narrative. The prologue informs the reader of what those who were eyewitnesses to Jesus’ incarnation could not understand until he was glorified, namely, his true identity. Whatever John’s readers initially understood of the term “logos,” and the term was loaded with meaning (especially the idea of *debhar Yahweh*), it took on a new dimension that would forever change

<sup>135</sup>Nathaniel’s confession “son of God” should probably be understood in relation to the phrase “king of Israel,” i.e., Son of God is intended in the sense of a Jewish messianic king (2 Sam. 7:12 – 17). See Barrett, *St. John*, 155.

<sup>136</sup>In fact, there is a refusal to confess, in spite of faith (12:42 – 43). The cry of the multitude—“King of Israel,” (12:31)—as Jesus entered Jerusalem is little more than the typical Jewish expectation of the Davidic king (*cf.* Nathaniel’s statement). The words of the disciples during the last supper—“you come from God” (16:30)—approaches the sense of a formal confession.

the face of monotheism. John did not address the philosophical implications of his doctrine. That has remained the purview of Christian thinkers for nearly twenty centuries. Perhaps no satisfactory explanation has been provided, or ever will, but the fundamental Christological affirmation of the Christian faith remains "Jesus is God."