

THEOLOGY

One Bite at a Time



A Theology of the Logos

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INTRODUCTION

The quest to identify a unifying principle which answers both the “how” and the “why” of creation and the universe has preoccupied philosophers, theologians and everyday folk from the dawn of mankind. How can the universe operate as it does? What holds the cosmos together? Why do things constantly change and yet remain the same? The physical realm as we observe it must certainly have some kind of unifying principle because we see balance and order in the day-to-day operation of the universe.

Yet the universe is more than just the physical realm. Any unifying principle must also unify the moral and spiritual as well. This is because the moral and spiritual realms interact with the physical realm. They are in fact “real.” The physical, moral and spiritual realms all coexist in a kind of choreographed dance of movement, time, thought, sight and sound.

Is goodness “good” everywhere and is wrong “wrong” everywhere? What is the source, the function and purpose of human reason and wisdom? And can any unifying principle conceived by man explain the physical, spiritual and moral realities we experience every day?

This paper will briefly explore the “Logos” as it has been conceived, sought and ultimately fulfilled down through the ages. The three main contributors to the study of the Logos come to us from the Greeks, the Hebrews and the Christians. The Greek and Hebrew concepts of the unifying principle or Logos will be presented as independent concepts. The Christian Logos will then be presented as the culmination of both of these concepts into the foundation of the Christian faith as realized in the man Jesus Christ.

What is Logos?

Logos is a word which has been used by many people for describing many things for thousands of years. *The Word (ho logos)*, according to Robertson is from *legō*, an old word from Homer meaning to lay by, to collect, to put words side by side, to express opinions and to speak.¹ The word logos has been considered parallel in meaning with reason and wisdom.

Logos was used by Heraclitus to identify the controlling principle of the universe.

The Hebrew word for logos (*memra*) was used to describe the manifestation of God and the Angel of God among other things. Robertson states the Stoics used logos as a descriptor for the “soul of the world” while others used it as the generative or creative principle in nature.²

As one begins the task of defining this word it becomes obvious that any attempt to render a formal equivalent or “word for word” translation of logos into any language is doomed to fail from the outset – be it Greek, Hebrew, Latin or English. Logos should not be confined or restricted to a single definition or even a single concept or idea. Logos is not something to be defined so much as to be acknowledged, appreciated and understood to the best of one’s ability.

In order to understand something of the Logos it is helpful at first to yield oneself to the Latin truism which states that **“*Finitum non capax Infinitum*”** – the finite cannot grasp, or better still, cannot “contain” the infinite. We cannot contain or control that which exceeds us by a magnitude of infinity. Therefore the Logos as understood in Christian theology is not ours to master or domesticate. Or as C.S. Lewis puts it, when describing Aslan the great lion, (symbolic of Christ), “He is wild you know [free], not like a tame lion.”³

¹ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures In The New Testament, vol. 4* (Nashville, TN: Broadman 1932) 3.

² *Ibid.*, 3.

³ C.S. Lewis, *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1950) 200.

The logos is used both in the abstract and the concrete sense. On the one hand logos is said to be from eternity past and not constrained by time (Gk, *en archēs* – Jn 1:1). While on the other hand the Christian Logos was a physical human occupying real time and space in history. “*And the Word became flesh,*” (Gk, *kai ho logos sarx egeneto* – Jn 1:14).

Another use of the term is to consider the logos as communication and information. That is to say that the Logos is intelligible information which is transmitted or revealed to an intended recipient. And this “reasonable” and useful information serves as the basis for creation and all revelation. This is posited by some modern theologians as the foundation of Judeo – Christian theology.

“Creation is an issue of information. It was *expressed*. It is significant that the fundamental title of the Creator is *The Logos*, the Word of God. He is that ultimate expression...The ultimate adventure is the adventure of ideas. The ultimate conversation – the dialogue with our Creator.”⁴

While the use of logos is oft times understood in the abstract, we as Christians must not permit ourselves the error of referring to the Logos only as “it” rather than “He”. The personification of the Christian Logos combines the wisdom of God, the creative force of God and the spoken word of God – all of these being manifested in the incarnate Christ Jesus.

⁴ Chuck Missler, *Cosmic Codes* (Coeur d’Alene, ID: Koinonia House, 1999) 346.

“*It may be that some day there will come forth from God a Word, a Logos, who will reveal all mysteries and make everything plain.*” Plato - ⁵

The Logos in Greek Philosophy

Heraclitus, (c. 525-475 B.C.) the Greek philosopher was born in the sixth century B.C. in the city of Ephesus. His contributions to the field of philosophy were many, but his work concerning the concept of the Greek Logos and its connection to the Christian Logos (i.e. the Son of God) is what will be of interest to us.

There are no extant manuscripts of Heraclitus’ writings. He is said to have completed a philosophical work entitled *On Nature* which he placed in the temple of Artemis at Ephesus (Diogenes, *Lives* 9.6). However, our knowledge of what he wrote and even a number of direct citations, (in the form of fragments – *Frg*) do exist in the later works of philosophers such as Diogenes, Plato, Plutarch and Aristotle. ⁶

Heraclitus’ development of the Greek Logos and how it parallels the Biblical Logos is staggering. This is not to imply that the Logos of Heraclitus was the source of the NT Logos. The Christian Logos is centered on the man Jesus Christ, and the proposition that the Logos could become flesh and live among us would be foreign and likely untenable to Heraclitus.

Heraclitus described the Logos using many words; The Logos contained the sum total of wisdom, reason, harmony in nature and unity in a sea of flux – also order and cohesion. In essence the Logos was “Mind.” The Logos was the “fire” or the light which keeps the world illuminated in mind, thought and deed. But mankind cannot comprehend the fire and must live out their days in varying degrees of wakefulness and sleepwalking, (i.e. lightness and dark).

⁵ J.M. Boice. *Foundations of the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1986) 300.

⁶ Crandall University – Course Data - <http://www.abu.nb.ca/Courses/GrPhil/Heraclitus.htm> (accessed November 19, 2009).

“Heraclites states that those who seek wisdom hear the voice of harmony which is lost to most. Hearing and responding to the voice allows one to enter into the loving of wisdom.”⁷

Jeremiah Grosse draws striking parallels between Heraclitus and the Johannine Logos. He points out that Heraclitus states “All things come into being according to the Logos” (Frg.1): The Apostles John writes “*All are made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made*”(1:3); Heraclitus states that the Logos is “common to all” men (Frg. 2), while John says the Logos “*is the true light which gives light to every man*” (1:9); Heraclitus holds that “men fail to understand” the Logos (Frg.1); John states “*And the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it*” (1:5); Heraclitus asserts that men “lack experience” of the Logos (Frg. 1); John says though the world was made through Him “*the world did not know Him*” (1:10). Finally Heraclitus stated that it was “necessary to follow the Logos” (Frg. 2) whereas John stated that not all will follow the Logos, “*He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe on His name*” (1:11-12).⁸

J.M. Boice comments on the connection between Heraclitus and John; “For him [Heraclitus] the *logos* was the creative and controlling mind of God: it kept the universe going. It was therefore with a stroke of divine genius that John seized upon this word, one that was as meaningful to Greeks as to the Jewish people.”⁹

⁷ Jeremiah Grosse, *The Heraclitus-Jesus Connection*, Lifeissues.net/writes/gro/gro-042Heraclitus.htm (accessed November 24, 2009).

⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁹ J.M. Boice. *Foundations of the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1986) 300. In his book, Dr. Boice does an excellent job of showing the connection between the Logos of Heraclitus and that of John’s Prologue. He also gives a brief but insightful look at how John’s Prologue blended the Greek and Hebrew concepts of the Logos to become the Christian Logos.

Philo of Alexandria (c. 25 B.C. – 40 A.D), also known as Judaeus Philo, was a Hellenized Jew living in Alexandria Egypt who developed his concept of the Logos during the times of Jesus. Philo wanted to synthesize the Greek Logos with the Jewish “Logos” (Heb *davar*) of the LXX. The Hebrew Logos was the Word of God (*Memra*) and the Wisdom of God (*Hokhmah*).

Philo was significant in part because of his influence on early the Church fathers the like of Clement of Alexandria and Origin. This influence consisted of Philo’s perspective that the Hebrew Bible was subject to allegory. Epstein gives an example wherein Philo contends that the Exodus was not narrated to show God’s salvation of the Jews by His miraculous words, “but as an exhortation to escape the disturbances of the spirit.”¹⁰

But it was Philo’s work in developing his Logos that is of significance to this paper, this because of his personification of the Greek logos as the creative force in the universe.

“Philo’s most important contribution for the history of philosophic- religious thought was his conception of the Logos (Word). Carrying further the idea of the Book of Wisdom, Philo developed the Greek notion of the Logos, conceiving it as a personality whom he calls ‘the second God’ and also sometimes the ‘son of God’, and who is the instrument of God’s creation and revelation, and of His immanent activity in the Universe.”¹¹

While Philo’s concept of the Logos is reminiscent of the Christian Logos, it should not be confused with the Logos of the Apostle John. Epstein states that Philo’s Logos is inferior to God, “and therefore not identical with the dogma of the Logos, ‘the Word made Flesh’ of Christian theology.”¹²

¹⁰ Isidore Epstein, *Judaism* (New York, NY: Penguin, 1959) 197.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹² *Ibid.*, 197. For a Christian, it can at times be unsettling to read the works of Heraclitus and Philo because we want to see our faith as being unique unto itself and isolated from all other religions which are false. Insecurity may come when we read terms that sound familiar to the Biblical record but are not quite the same - as if to say that the Bible had its origins in another religion. This insecurity is unnecessary when we realize that much of the Bible is a polemic against false religion and doctrines. The Bible was not written in a vacuum. The Bible addressed the religions and philosophies of the day and explains, clarifies or corrects them, and in some cases condemns them. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16).

As a Jew, Philo was, in a number of ways, less a philosopher and more an OT commentator – one who interpreted and paraphrased the writings of Moses. As a Greek, Philo had a deep respect for Plato, referring to him as “the most holy Plato” (*Prob.13*).¹³ This said however, Philo saw Greek philosophy as a natural development of the teachings of Moses.

“Philo’s philosophy represented contemporary Platonism which was its revised version incorporating stoic doctrine...elements of Aristotelian logic and ethics and Pythagorean ideas...But it seems that Philo also picked up his ancestral tradition, [Judaism], though as an adult, and once having discovered it, he put forward the teaching of the Jewish prophet, Moses, as the ‘summit of philosophy’ (Op. 8), and considered Moses the teacher of Pythagoras...and of all Greek philosophers and lawgivers.”¹⁴

The Logos as Philo conceived it had a number of distinct characteristics which, to partially summarize Hillar, are as follows;

- A second individual in union with God who is the Creative Power – Wisdom
- Wisdom flows from the Logos
- The Logos are the utterances or Word of God
- The Logos is the Mind of God
- “The First Born Son of God” – i.e. a unique extension of God
- The Logos produces harmony
- The Logos is the bond of the Universe
- The mediator between God and man
- God is the eternal Father and the Logos is His chief messenger
- The Logos was not made or begotten
- The immortal part of man’s soul comes from the breath of the Father as a part of the Logos

¹³ *Prob. 13 - Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit*: - One of Philo’s many works;

¹⁴ Marian Hillar, “The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy,” <http://www.iep.utm.edu/philo/> (accessed November 20, 2009).

Final Thoughts on the Greek Logos

There exists an expansive chasm between the Logos of Greek philosophy and the Christian Logos which can never be bridged. For the Greeks the likes of a Heraclitus, Plato or Philo the Logos is a force of nature and of God. Even as they attempted to personify the Logos they would never agree that the Logos could become human. The very idea that the “Word became flesh and dwelt among us” would be a logical absurdity. The spiritual was that which was to be sought after and the flesh (physical) was that which was to be denied. The spiritual and the physical could never and should never be unified into one being, especially a human.

“Now John describes this unique person of his as the Logos. More specifically, he claims that “the Logos became flesh and dwelt among us.” If anyone ever wanted to dream up something that would be foolishness to the Greeks, John has outdone him. What he is saying is preposterous. It’s like saying “the circle became square” or “infinity became zero.” It can’t become the latter while still remaining the former. More to the point, it’s like saying, “Purity became filth and dwelt among us.” It’s not only absurd; it’s offensive. The Logos would never, ever saddle itself with a distracting, misleading body. That would defeat the whole purpose of being the Logos, and would permanently destroy any chance at true knowledge. By Plato’s standards, John couldn’t possibly be right.”¹⁵

On one level we must admire and thank the Greeks. Their insights into the Logos and the way they define and give attribute to it are valuable to Christians, especially when contemplating the complexity and beauty of the Logos. Without the Greeks, the reading of John’s Prologue can be superficial and devoid of cultural or philosophical context.

Becoming more familiar with the portrait of the Greek Logos, which is an incomplete picture, has enhanced the appreciation of this writer for the stunning works of our gracious God who has indeed completed His Logos in Jesus Christ. The Greeks could never hope to see and touch the Logos; they could never know the Logos while they lived. But we can see Him and we can know.

¹⁵ Sarah Hinckley Wilson, *Plato was wrong (Jn. 1-1-9, 10-18)*, (Christian Century Foundation; 2004) 16. <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=3200> (accessed November 18, 2009).

The Hebraic Logos

It is a misnomer to use the term “Hebraic Logos,” this because Logos is a Greek word first used in the Septuagint (LXX) and not found in the Hebrew Bible. However the term does serve the purpose of focusing ones attention upon certain critical attributes of God when comparing Hebrew and Christian theologies.

The OT Hebraic concepts which parallel the Greek and Christian Logos should be viewed as the beginning or foundation stone upon which the Greeks and the Christians developed their constructs of the Logos. As discussed elsewhere in this paper, Philo, a Hellenized Jew, considered Moses as the “summit of philosophy.” The Apostle John, a Palestinian Jew, however was immersed in OT theology.

The OT reveals numerous attributes of God, some of which parallel the Logos of the Greeks and the Christians. A sampling of the many Hebrew words and concepts used to describe these parallel attributes include; Wisdom of God (*Hokhmah*); Instruction or information about God (*Torah*); the presence of God (*Shekhinah*); the Word of God (*Memra*); and the concrete promise of God, or His “deed done” (*Dabar*).

These parallel terms describe not only the conceptual but the functional as well. Each of the above concepts speaks about the actions of God, in contrast to a static or passive attribute of God. These are attributes which emanate from God in real time and space and directly affect the creation and humanity in an on-going and immanent manner. When these Hebraic attributes of God are compared to Jesus, (the NT *Logos*) in terms of function, the similarities are striking. Where Judaism and Christianity diverge can be seen in the deification of Jesus. Torah and Wisdom are not considered to be God but they do speak of Him and promise divine intercourse. For example the study of Torah is said to be a personal encounter with God.¹⁶

¹⁶ “Study [of the Torah] for the spiritually involved Jew is an active and participatory encounter with the Divine.” Rabbi David Zaslow, *Roots and Branches* (Ashland, OR: The Wisdom Exchange, 2006) 26.

Wisdom – (*Hokhmah* - *Gk Sophia*), is an abstraction to the mind of modern man. You and I do not visualize *Wisdom* as a person or a living entity. But to the ancient Hebrew and Scripture, *Wisdom* was (and is) as much a concrete reality as an abstraction or attribute.

The Book of Proverbs personifies *Wisdom* as a feminine entity, active and vital in creation. While the argument can be made that Proverbs is using figurative language, the presentation is more than mere metaphor as it stretches beyond abstraction.

Wisdom is given a role in the physical creation event, being “possessed” by and with God before all of His creative acts.¹⁷ She was at God’s side during creation (Prov 8:30a), she helped Him like a master craftsman (8:30b), and was His delight (8:30c).

“Thus ‘wisdom’ is personified in dramatic form in the proverbs. *Wisdom* is the first of the acts of God, the first creation and therefore before all creation. *Wisdom* is the coherence of creation. Through wisdom kings know how to rule. It is through wisdom that the skies are firm above and water stays under the earth. *Wisdom* is thereby the agent of God in the rest of creation. This wisdom is divine; it partakes of the nature and authority of God. It is not simply a tool or a reflection of God. It is (or rather she) seems to be part of God.”¹⁸

Wisdom is preexistent and has no end (Prov. 8:22-23). The Septuagint states; “*He established me before time [was] in the beginning, before He made the earth*” (8:22). This statement is staggering! For it is seen here that even time is a creative act of God and that *Wisdom*, like the Logos is before or “outside” of time.

The attributes of *Wisdom* do indeed parallel the NT Logos. While she is not the same as the Logos she can be considered a type of the incarnate Christ – similar in function and nature.

¹⁷ The Hebrew word *qanah* is translated as “*possessed*” in most of the modern translations. However the Septuagint, as noted by many study Bibles, states “*The Lord made me the beginning of His ways before His works*” (8:1). This is taken by some to mean “created.” For those who press the idea that “*Wisdom*” is the personified Christ, a degree of tension can be generated at this hint of Arianism. The heretic Arius (c 250-336 AD) held that while Jesus is the Logos, He was “made” or created by God and as such is lower than the Father – being of a *similar* substance, *homoiousios*, to the Father but not the same. The Council of Nicea (335 AD) affirmed that Jesus Christ was of the *same* substance, *homoousios*, as the Father. The Council condemned Arius’ teachings as heresy holding that the doctrine of Arianism watered down the divinity of Jesus.

This all said, it is the opinion of this writer that the tendency to equate the OT “*Wisdom*” with the Logos of Christianity, is to stretch the point and impose a NT teaching upon an OT text. “*Wisdom*” is not the Father nor is she the “Christ.” The Logos of the NT is a new concept not the restatement of an OT idiom.

¹⁸ John Yoder, *Preface to Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002) 184.

Torah

“For this they willingly forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.” II Peter 3:5-7

The concept that the Word of God is the mechanism by which God created the universe is not unique to Peter. Jews for centuries have equated the Torah with the Word of God; the Wisdom of God; and the Unity of God from which all creation came to be and in which all is held together. Torah, or Instruction of God, held pre-eminence in the life of the Talmudic Jew:

“It [Torah] was not merely the foundation upon which his life was built up, but it was considered the only secure basis of the entire cosmic order. Without the Torah there would be moral chaos, and for that reason Torah must have existed always, even before the creation of the world. ‘Were it not for Torah, the heavens and earth could not endure; as it is said, “If it were not for My covenant (i.e. the Torah), I would not have appointed day and night (sic) and the other ordinances of heaven and earth.” (Jer. xxiii. 25)’ (Pes.68b).”¹⁹

To the Jew, Torah has numerous parallels and similar functions as the *Logos* of the Greeks and the Christians. In Jewish thought, Torah is as much a physical reality and force of creation as it is a form of communication or a written document – Torah can be both oral and written. As with Christian theology, the Word, i.e. Torah, is the mechanism of creation and the revelation of God to the Jewish people and the world.

Peter states the Word of God is the creative force of God (II Peter 3:5a). The Word is the power which brought the flood that condemned the world (3:6); the Word preserves this current world (3:6) and it is the power which will judge the world to come (3:7).

While the Torah is not worshiped by the Jews, it does have similar functions and attributes which are identified in the Christian Logos. But as stated above, it is the incarnation of the Logos which distinguishes the Christian Logos from all others.

¹⁹ Abraham Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud* (New York, NY: Schocken, 1949) 131-132.

Shekhinah – is a term that has come to be equated with the “Glory of God.” This is often seen as the light or brilliance of God as pictured in the fire and smoke of the Exodus or the Transfiguration of Jesus on the mount. But the better and more accurate translation of *Shekhinah* is “*dwelling*.”

Brilliance and light do indeed emanate from God, but the real idea to be conveyed in using this word, is the Presence of God or the Immanence of God. That is to say that God is among His people and He is making a place with them in order to build a relationship.

“*Dwelt among us (eskēnōsen en hēmin)*... indicative of *skēnoō*, old verb, to pitch one’s tent or tabernacle (*skēnos* or *skenē*), in N.T...”²⁰ Robertson explains that *dwelt* is used by John to explain that the Logos, identified by John as God, has come to live among His people.

“God’s Shekinah glory here among us in the person of his Son.”²¹

To the Jew of his day, John was describing that which was an absurdity at best and blasphemy at worst. To be sure, Jews hold to the doctrine of immanence, but they reject the idea that God would become human;

“With the object of utilizing the doctrine of immanence of God in the world, while avoiding the suggestion that He could be located in any spot, the Rabbis invented certain terms to express the Divine Presence without giving support to a belief in His corporeality. The most frequent of these terms is Shechinah which literally means ‘dwelling.’ It denotes the manifestation of God upon the stage of the world, although He abides in the far-away heaven.”²²

To John the Logos is the Shechinah. It is remarkable to note how Jewish concepts of God and His nature so closely parallel the NT presentation of the Father and the Logos. And yet maybe not so remarkable when one considers that Christianity is after all rooted in Judaism.

²⁰ Archibald Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman 1932) 13.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 13. Robertson states categorically that by using the phrase “*We beheld his glory*” with reference to Jesus, “John insists that in the human Jesus he [John] beheld the Shekinah glory of God who was and is the Logos who existed before with God.” Robertson also identifies the Greek word *doxa* as the equivalent to the Hebrew concept of the Shekinah Glory. “The personal experience of John and of others who did recognize Jesus as the Shekinah glory (*doxa*) of God – as James the brother of Jesus, so describes him (James 2:1).”

²² Abraham Cohen, *Everyman’s Talmud* (New York, NY: Schocken, 1949) 42.

Memra (*mē'mrā'*) – is a Hebrew word which was employed by the writers of the Targums and other Rabbinic literature as a substitute for “the Lord.” The translators of the Targums wanted to stay true to a strictly monotheistic doctrine and avoid diminishing the holiness of God by using words which were applied mostly to humans. Hence the Rabbis used *memra* to avoid anthropomorphisms for words such the “Wisdom of God,” “Angel of the Lord,” the “Hand of God,” or the “Word of God.”

In writing about rabbinic usage, Kaufman Kohler says the following about *memra*;

“ ‘The Word,’ [*memra*] in the sense of the creative or directive word or speech of God manifesting His power in the world of matter or mind; a term used especially in the Targum as a substitute for “the Lord” when an anthropomorphic expression is to be avoided.... In the Targum the Memra figures constantly as the manifestation of the divine power, or as God’s messenger in place of God Himself, wherever the predicate is not in conformity with the dignity or the spirituality of the Deity.”²³

What makes *memra* noteworthy for the study of the Hebraic concepts of the Logos is the fact that the Targums were oral translations of the Hebrew Scriptures being transmitted in Aramaic to Palestinian Jewry during first century. As such John would most likely have been familiar with the term and would have incorporated it into his use of the Christian Logos, who was the personification and incarnate power of God.

“The Hebrew *memra* was used in the Targums for the manifestation of God like the Angel of Jehovah and the Wisdom of God in Prov. 8:23.”²⁴ By equating Jesus to the *Memra* John would be telling the Jews of his day that Jesus was in fact Deity.²⁵

²³ Kaufman Kohler, *Memra*
<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=399&letter=M#ixzz0XglX8B6Q> (accessed Nov, 22, 2009).

²⁴ Archibald Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1932) 3.

²⁵ How do we know that John equated *memra* to Jesus Christ? This is a good question especially in light of the fact that the Gospel of John as written in Greek used *ho logos*. The answer comes from the overwhelming number of scholars who demonstrate what is known about the usage of *memra* in the Targums and the definitions attributed to it. This is coupled with what is understood about the Johannine Logos in its historical and literary context to first century Jewry.

Mashiach – Chief among those percepts which separate the Hebraic “*Memra*” and the Christian *Logos* are those concerning the Messiah. The Rabbinic / Talmudic concept of the Messiah is that he is not divine. “On one point the Rabbis were unanimous, viz. he [Messiah] would be just a human being divinely appointed to carry out an allotted task. The Talmud nowhere indicates a belief in a superhuman Deliverer as the Messiah.”²⁶

The Jewish expectation of the Deliverer was in keeping with the Prophet of Deuteronomy 18:15, “*The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me [Moses] from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear*” NKJV. The one like Moses would be a man not the Holy One of Israel.

There was much debate among the sages in first century Palestine as to where and when the anointed Deliverer would appear. But the presentation of Jesus as the “I am” would not be equated with the Messiah. Jesus the man could indeed be considered as the Son of David who would present himself at the gates of Jerusalem as the “blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” (Matt 21:19).

One interesting parallel between the Jewish Messiah and the *Logos* was the attribute of existence before the creation. The *Logos* of John was established before creation (Jn 1:1), and this is also true of the Messiah of Israel. “The belief was general that the sending of the Messiah was part of the Creator’s plan at the inception of the Universe.”²⁷

There are numerous examples which both the *Logos* of John and the Jewish Messiah share. But when all is said and done, John’s presentation of the Christian *Logos* is very much different than what the Jews were looking for, and it is small wonder that the unbelieving Jews rejected John’s claims that Jesus was divine “*The Word was with God and the Word was God.*”

²⁶ Abraham Cohen, *Everyman’s Talmud* (New York, NY: Schocken, 1949) 347.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 347.

The Christian Logos

The Johannine Logos – If the Prologue 1: 1-14, found in the Gospel of John had been conceived and articulated solely by the mind of the Apostle, it would be a work of genius unto itself. But since it is inspired by God, the Logos of John’s Gospel is the *sine qua non* – which captures the essential nature of the God-Man Jesus Christ – without whom Christianity is nothing more than mere philosophy.

What we have in John’s Prologue is nothing less than a proclamation that the Logos of the Greeks and Hebrews has come to the physical world in both time and space. That is to say that what the Greek philosophers had postulated for millennia, and that through a glass-darkly, is now clear and evident; and what the Jews had anticipated with God’s promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has now been fulfilled.

The first verse, “*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God*” speaks to the pre-existence, the relationship to the Father and the Deity of Christ. “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.”²⁸

Gordon Clark states that from the very outset, John leaves no doubt as to the eternal identity of God and His Logos. Clark then soundly refutes attempts by the Gnostics and modern day Jehovah’s Witnesses who deny Christ’s equality with the Father and try to make Christ a created angel.²⁹

²⁸ Gordon Clark, *The Johannine Logos* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1998) 23.

²⁹ Ibid., 23. Clark tells of how the Jehovah’s Witness Bible - *The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (NWT), renders verse one, “and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god.” This in order to support their doctrine that Jesus and the Father are not truly of one substance. Using his own considerable scholarship and that of other NT and Greek experts Clark shows how the NWT mistranslated the verse.

It is in John 1:3 that the creative power of the Logos is made clear. *“All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.”* The Logos is the Creator proclaimed by John and confirmed by Paul; *“For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities. All things were created through Him and for Him”* (Col 1:16). No-thing is apart from Him. He is the cosmic glue which holds all things in balance and unity (1:17).

This is not the Logos of the Greeks and pagans who held that there were gods and demiurges and ranks of angels or spiritual beings that made up the creative order. Numerous critics over the centuries have sought to link the pagan Logos with the Logos of John, saying that John borrowed his ideas from the pagans. To answer these critics Gordon Clark points to John 1:3 as a polemic against the charge of pagan influence.

“Here soon is the second piece of evidence that the author [John] did not get his ideas from pagan sources. They had no notion of fiat creation, such as Genesis describes. For that matter, why should anyone search through the pagan religions to find sources of John’s thought? Some of these critics seem to forget completely that the first Christians were all Jews. Why should they not use the Old Testament?³⁰

“In Him was Life, and the life was the light of men” (1:4). The Logos possessed life and in turn gave life and illumination to mankind. The pre-existent Logos was not a physical man at the dawn of creation, so what is this life and light that John is speaking of? It is the spiritual life granted by God to mankind through the Logos. The power of the Logos is to give life to the dead (Jn 11:25-26). This life is a rational life which conveys the concept of the Philonic Logos of reason and unity. It is also the Hebraic concept of the Wisdom of God, a measure of which has been imparted to humankind so that God may have fellowship with His children.

³⁰ Ibid., 24.

The light which the Logos gives to humans is both the intellectual life and the moral life. The intellectual life grants to us the ability to gain understanding and knowledge. And the moral life grants to us the ability to choose between right and wrong. This light is unique to men among the rest of creation. It is this light which separates mankind from animals which are below mankind and cannot be moral. It is this light which is a spark of the Divine, i.e., to be created in the image of God.

“And the Light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it” (1:5).

We have discussed in small measure the Light, but what is the darkness? Robertson refers to this darkness in the Greek as *skotiāi* which is kin to *skia* or “shadow.” It is the darkness brought about by sin. This verse speaks of the Light which is continuing to send the light of truth and morality in a place of moral and intellectual darkness. Darkness here may appear to be almost personified in that it the *“darkness did not comprehend it.”* However to suggest that the darkness might have the ability to understand the Light is not what is in view in the Greek text.

Robertson explains that the phrase *“auto ou katelaben”* is John’s way of saying that the darkness *“apprehended it not.”* That is to say that darkness cannot “overtake” or overwhelm the Light. The Logos continues to shine through sin which would overwhelm the Light if it were possible. Darkness then is cast in an almost adversarial role to the Light. Darkness is a shadow or black void in which one can become lost. “The Light kept on shining in spite of the darkness [of sin] that was worse than a London fog as the Old Testament and archaeological discoveries in Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Crete, Asia Minor show.”³¹

³¹ Archibald Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman 1932) 8. In referring to the darkness of the OT, Robertson may be referring to the pagan gods and or real demonic forces which kept a vicious strangle hold on those societies for centuries. This conflict between the powers of light and darkness are reminiscent of the spiritual battle of Daniel 10: 10-21, wherein the messenger from God and the Angel Michael are locked in battle with the Prince of Persia and of Greece. These adversaries are of sufficient power to delay the messenger of God for 21 days. Yet the darkness is not able to overcome the light of understanding which is delivered to Daniel and his people.

For Gordon Clark the darkness is a spiritual and intellectual darkness that clouds rationality and reason. Clark rejects the idea that the grammar implies a kind of darkness that can overwhelm or overtake the Light.³² The darkness, according to Clark cannot “grasp” or intellectually comprehend the Light of reason – this is less a statement about the adversarial role between light and darkness and more a statement about the nature of man’s fallen intellect.

The doctrine of the fall of creation and the condition of sinful man is in view in verses 5-11. Darkness exists in the world (1:5); the necessity for a witness sent by the Light so that they could know Him (1:8); but the world did not know Him (1:10); or receive Him (1:11). All of these verses speak to the plight of mankind and his inability to save himself. The fall was complete and total. The Logos did not come into the world to condemn it, because the world stood condemned already. The Logos had to intervene or creation could not endure.

“But as many as received Him, to them he gave the right to become the children of God, to those who believe on His name” (1:12). How does a person “receive” the Logos / Christ? Is it an act of human will? The text here, according to Robertson is that of an “effective aorist” tense *“as many as did receive him.”* This is in contrast to someone (the believer) who voluntarily performed an exceptional act of faith of his own accord or will.³³ According to Clark what is in view here is the sovereign election of God – not the will of the believer.

“...no individual in the human race stands out so unusually gifted or meritorious or strong of will that he can become a believer in Christ. Some people think that a man is regenerated because he wills to be, and others are not regenerated because they do not will to be. Here it is stated [Jn 1:12-13], that a man’s will has nothing to do with regeneration. John says pointedly the only way is to be born of God. Human initiative counts for nothing because there is no human initiative. A man believes because he has first been made alive.”³⁴

³² Gordon Clark, *The Johannine Logos* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1998) 25-26.

³³ Archibald Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman 1932) 11.

³⁴ Gordon Clark, *The Johannine Logos*, 31-32.

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory of the Father, full of grace and truth” (1:14). It is here that we see the culmination of John’s Prologue. The incarnation of the Logos is the fulfillment of God’s promise to His covenantal people – be they Jew or Gentile. *“I will be their God, they will be My people and I will dwell among them.”* The Logos has come into the world as the direct provision and decree of God and it is through Him only that this could be accomplished.

The concept of the Logos becoming flesh, as we have stated elsewhere, is totally foreign to both the Greeks and the Hebrews. But against the philosophy of the Greeks and the Jews; the mind, wisdom, creative power, and the unifying force, both spiritually and physically have now come to planet Earth in real time and space – and this Logos is the man Jesus.

“John said of the Logos more than it meant before. According to him, this Word, the rationality of the eternal divine mind, became flesh. That is not Greek. That is not typical of the way Greek philosophy would speculate about the divine mind or eternal divine rationality. It is not Jewish either for God’s self or God’s wisdom to become visible. The true God is image. A Jew cannot say, “He became flesh.” It would be especially unworthy of God, in the Jewish mind, to be visible.”³⁵

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life – the life was manifested to us... we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us...” (1 Jn 1:1,2a, 3a). In citing the above passage, John Yoder adds a critical dimension to the Logos becoming flesh. The Logos as a flesh and blood man is a most difficult concept requiring that one be a child of God, (i.e. born of the Spirit) in order to fully understand it.

Hence, For Yoder the coming of God in the flesh is not simply an affirmation of an OT covenant or even a statement of Christology, but a test of our faith. “It is a test statement and a key to faithfulness. It is also the center of our witness.”³⁶

³⁵ John Yoder, *Preface to Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002) 121.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 121.

How do we test a doctrine? How do we test ourselves? and how does the Church witness to the world? For the Apostle John (and John Yoder), the test is all about what we say and do with the incarnation of the Logos.

After a person hears the good news that God has come in the flesh, what is his/her response? In John's day, many in the general public, not to mention the Greek philosophers and Rabbinic Jews reacted with incredulity – the very idea was absurd. But John stated clearly that some would believe that God had come in the flesh and others would not. His purpose in writing his letter and testifying to the reality of the incarnation was so that some would believe and in believing obtain life (Jn 20:30-31).

So for a Christian, the incarnation as a test of faith is of great importance. Jesus came in the flesh, He lived as man, and He died as man. His resurrection as a man is the hope of every believer – if His flesh could be raised so can ours – This is the Gospel!

“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which preached to you – unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received; that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.” (I Cor 15:1-4) NKJV

Conclusion to the Johannine Logos;

As we have seen, the Johannine Logos is the revelation of the true Logos. The Greek *Logos* and the Hebraic *Memra* were clarified and brought into sharp focus with the coming of Christ. The Holy Spirit, through John, was declaring that if we want to see the Father we are to look at the Son. That which is of the flesh can only see the visible – and now through Jesus of Nazareth, the ability to see and touch the Creator was possible – even commanded.

Early Christian Beliefs – The development of the Theology of the Christian Logos did not begin with John nor did it end with him. The fledgling Church of the late first and second centuries, (and beyond), experienced a number of great debates concerning the integration of the Christian Logos, Greek philosophy and Jewish Theology. This was no small task as many came to Christ from both the pagan cultures of the day and the various sects of Judaism.

These people were called by the sovereign election of God to faith in Jesus Christ. Yet in order to become disciples they would need to be instructed in the fundamentals of their new faith. As such the teachers of the post-Apostolic period, many of whom were themselves new converts to Christianity, had to go about the difficult work of searching the Scriptures in order to make sense of them in light of the NT revelations – given only a few years before.

The discussions and debates of the Early Church concerning the Logos and the incarnation involved to a great extent the Trinity. What is the nature and relationship of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit? If the Son was truly flesh how could he be truly God? Was the Son a lesser being to the Father? These were only a few of the discussions being held at the time. Much of our current understanding and doctrinal statements today come from this period and it is a worthwhile study.

There were at the time a number of competing religions and philosophies, which included “schools” of Christian thought and teaching. Many of which did not agree. One of the more influential schools of Christian thought centered in the city of Alexandria Egypt. Alexandrian Christianity was dominated primarily by Greek Christians who were influenced by Plato and Philo thus favoring their concepts of the Logos and the Trinity. ³⁷

³⁷ W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1984). In his book, Frend does an extensive review of the various schools of thought and the individual theologians who contributed to the Christological thought of their day. Dr. Frend’s book is must read for those who want to understand not only the history of the early Church but also the theology of the early Church as well.

One of the more notable theologians of Alexandrian Christianity was Clement of Alexandria (c 180-230 A.D.). Clement taught that the Father was absolutely transcendent, “He could be known, however, through his Son, or Word (*Logos*), [who was] not a Demiurge or a lesser creator-god, but his image, mind, and reason, inseparable from himself.”³⁸ While the Logos was “inseparable” from the Father, according to Clement there can be seen a divergence from Orthodoxy in how Clement viewed the Trinity. For Clement the Trinity was three distinct beings who were in a graded hierarchy.

W.H.C. Frend points out that Clement derived his concepts from Platonism and from this, much of his teaching about God and the Logos.³⁹ Clement elevated and spiritualized Jesus in a way that tended to diminish the human aspects of Jesus. “In Jesus, Clement committed the Word-flesh Christology to a permanent tendency to undervalue Christ’s humanity.”⁴⁰

While Clement was certainly not the most noteworthy of the Alexandrian theologians (Origin being perhaps the most notable), he does embody the basic teachings about the Logos and Trinity held by Alexandrians in general. That is to say that the Logos is part of God and that the Father is revealed by the Son. Yet to Clement, the Trinity should be considered a hierarchy of beings on a graded scale and not the Trinity of orthodox Christianity today.

Dr. Frend sums up the Greek-Christians of Alexandria that had evolved toward the middle and end of the first century; “Representative Greek Christians were already moving towards radically different understandings of the Trinity, eschatology, and Christian ethics – from those held in the West... Those who founded their faith on Jesus of Nazareth and his saving example would find scant support amount the intellectual Christians of Alexandria.”⁴¹

³⁸ Ibid., 371.

³⁹ Ibid., 371.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 372.

⁴¹ Ibid., 372-373.

For the early Church, the task of articulating a clear doctrine concerning the nature of the Logos and the Trinity in general would never be fully completed or agreed upon by all. But the early Christian patriarchs cannot be faulted for lack of trying. There were numerous contributors to the concept of the Logos and much debate in the nascent Church. Many of their concepts about the Logos are still with us today in various forms.

Tertullian (160-240 A.D.), advanced the concept of the Logos with his coining of the term “Trinity” (*trinitas*). Building upon the work of Irenaeus,⁴² Tertullian declared that God is indeed one in substance with the Logos. This said however, God expresses Himself in three different “economies” or functions. Tertullian saw three distinct persons (*personas*), yet having one substance. By using the term “persons” Tertullian was not saying there were three different beings. The *persona* was how each member of the Trinity appeared to function in the cosmos. The Logos performed the function of the Creator – He was God’s “hands” so to speak. For Tertullian, the Logos emanated from God – He was from the Father and the Father sent Him.

“As for me, I derive the Son from no other source than from the substance of the Father. And I believe He does nothing without the Father’s will and that He received all power from the Father... I testify that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are inseparable from each other... My assertion is that the Father is one, the Son is one, and the Spirit is one – and that they are all distinct from each other.”⁴³

The above quotations show that Tertullian was emphatic in declaring that the Logos and the Father are inseparable, yet none the less distinct.

Laurie Guy, in his book *Introducing Early Christianity*, gives a great deal of credit to Tertullian for his contributions to our understanding of the Logos. But he points out the no one theologian can be credited as having got it right. “Tertullian greatly advanced a Trinitarian understanding of God, but by no means did his thought provide the final answer.”⁴⁴

⁴² Irenaeus (c 180), introduced the idea of the “economic Trinity” or ordering of tasks or labors of God.

⁴³ David Bercot, ed., *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998) 653.

⁴⁴ Laurie Guy, *Introducing Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2004) 262.

Conclusion

Our minds reel when we attempt to grasp the complexity and richness of the Logos in terms of the Greeks and Hebrews – not to mention the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The early church fathers struggled with this their entire lives and so will we. But the quest to understand the Logos of the Bible perhaps should not be looked upon as a quest at all – i.e. something to be accomplished or won. Perhaps we will be better served if we look upon the Logos as an enormous water-bearing tornado – immense in dynamic power and size. And then seeing ourselves as a people dying of thirst, humbly approaching the storm with a thimble, hoping to get a mere drink of life-saving water.

The Logos of God is so many things. Many of those things we cannot fully or even partially grasp or contain within our minds. But this should never prevent us from digging deep into God's word to seek a better understanding of the Logos. Truly the Prologue to John's Gospel is the starting place as it gives us the Logos in the person of Jesus. He is tangible and tactile. We can see Him and experience Him as a man. He shows us the personage of God in a way like no other. We can appreciate the wonder of His creation and be humbled by it. We can recognize that it is the Logos which is holding everything together in time and space – even the ink on this paper and the electrons which show it on a digital display.

Appendix I

A Passage from Goethe's *Faust*

'Tis writ, "In the beginning was the Word!"
I pause, perplexed! Who now will help afford?
I cannot the mere Word so highly prize;
I must translate it otherwise,
If by the spirit guided as I read.
"In the beginning was the Sense!" Take heed,
The import of this primal sentence weigh,
Lest thy too hasty pen be led astray.
Is *force* creative, then, of Sense the dower?
"In the beginning was the Power."
Thus should it stand; yet, while the line I trace,
A something warns me, once more to erase.
The spirit aids! From anxious scruples freed,
I write, "In the beginning was the Deed!"

Note:

Goethe's repeated selection and then rejection of the descriptors of the Logos is interesting - from "*Word*" to "*Sense*" to "*Power*" and finally to "*Deed*." He summarizes very nicely, in a few short sentences, what is a most perplexing question – "What is the Logos?"

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