John 1:1 The Word

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)*

John immediately brings his Jewish readers to their roots and links the Word to their eternal relationship with God. Beginning his gospel of Christ with these most familiar words from Genesis, “In the beginning,” he shows that his story of Jesus is the fulfillment of history, prophecy, and faith.

The Greek term *Logos*, which is translated "Word" in this and the following verses, can be used with reference either to speaking or to thinking; and so it can mean either "word" or "reason." Among the Greek philosophers and others, *logos* was constantly used in the sense of "reason," while in LXX we find that it was by the Logos (the Word or Reason) of God that the heavens were made (Ps. 33:6), while in Psalms 107:20 we are informed that God "sent his word [his *Logos*] and healed them." It is of interest to note that those who prepared the targums (or Aramaic par aphrases of the OT) constantly substituted the expression "the Word of the Lord" for the terms "the Lord" or "God”—as in Genesis 3:8: "They heard voice of the Word of the Lord God walking in the garden" (Etheridge).

It is now generally agreed that this usage helped to prepare for the idea of the Logos or "Word" as a mediator between God and men (cf. Plummer). Commentators contend that the primary meaning of "Logos" as John employs it in chapter 1 of his Gospel, is "Word" rather than "Reason" (see Thayer); while in commenting on this passage, Loisy holds that "the word is not the Reason of God . . . but, if one may say so, the Expression of God" (L'expression de Dieu).

The "Word” was a variously interpreted concept in Greek philosophy from about the 6th century B.C.E. [before the Common Era], according to *The Dartmouth Bible.* This version also comments that “the 'Logos' ['Word'] denotes the Divine principle regulating all things, manifesting itself so that man might perceive it.” For Christian theology, that manifestation took form in the life and ministry of Jesus the Christ.

Basic to an understanding of the gospel writer's statement regarding the Word is its connection with the first chapter of Genesis. God spoke, and the Word was realized in the act of creation. The Greek word *logos,* used in the NT text is difficult to translate exactly into English. It, however, refers to the power of God to create out of His own will and intelligence.

*Interpreter's* says the Word is God's "mind and purpose and the agent of his self-disclosure." Abingdon continues: "The Word is God's self-revealing activity within God himself before the world was, distinguished but not separated from God (vv. 1, 2) within the creation of all things (v. 3)....” WBC notes: "The statement recalls the first word of the Hebrew Bible ‘In the beginning' was the Jewish name for 'Genesis.' In that beginning God *spoke,* and the universe was created.... This representation was entirely comprehensible to Jews, since to them, as to other peoples throughout the ancient Orient, the Word, especially the Word of God, was not so much an expression of thought as a powerful *action*...."

Plummer observes: "The meaning must depend on the context. In Gen. 1:1 it is an act done 'in the beginning'; here it is a Being existing 'in the beginning' and therefore prior to all beginning," and he contends that the reference is to "eternity, transcending time." Scholars have observed that in the Greek of John 1:1, as in the Hebrew of Genesis 1:1, the phrase translated "in the beginning" actually has a much wider range of meaning.

The element of time is only one possible aspect, and in any case is subordinate to the idea of primacy, rule, or dominion. Noting that what is said to be in the beginning "precedes earthly time, within which alone we can speak of time," Delling says of John 1:1, “Here, then, that which is *en arche* is that which is 'before' all time, or, more correctly, that concerning which no temporal statement can be made" (*TDNT*).

Here John adapts to specifically Christian use a term—*logos* ("Word”)—familiar to both Jews and Gentiles. Hastings' five volume *Dictionary of the Bible* explains, "It was a leading term by which religious thought was striving to express the idea, though with much misconception, of an all-comprehensive, all-wise, and directly active revelation of God to the world." The opening of this verse is directly parallel to both Genesis 1:1 and I John 1:1. The Greek noun *logos* is used with the definite article, and might be translated in this case "the divine expression." J. B. Phillips has, "At the beginning God expressed himself." NEB translates, "When all things began, the Word already was."

To Heraclitus it meant "the omnipresent wisdom by which all things are steered" and "the divine word received by the prophet, which becomes almost equivalent to God." Philo of Alexandria, whose thought developed entirely independent of the author of the Fourth Gospel, saw in the Logos "the agent of creation," "the means by which man may know God," ". . . an Advocate *[parakletos,* or Comforter] for the forgiveness of sins," "the Perfect Man, the man of Gen 1, made in the image of God, as distinct from the man of the earth of Gen 2."

*The Word was with God (John 1:1)*

The rendering of the Authorized Version appears to imply that the Logos or Word was identical with God; but, if this had been the meaning intended by the writer, it is probable that, according to Greek idiom, he would have written the equivalent of "the Word was the God.” As the Greek stands, the more natural translation is surely that given by Moffatt: "The Logos was divine;" or Goodspeed, "The Word was divine," particularly in view of the fact that the Logos is spoken of as being "with God."

The Greek preposition *pros*, here rendered "with," is found in NT Greek in a wide variety of senses. Primarily, it has the implication of "motion towards" an object or a person, but it often corresponds closely to the French *chez*. McGregor contends that as used here "it expresses 'nearness' combined with the sense of movement towards God, and so indicates an active relationship," and he adds that in his view "the Logos and God do not simply exist side by side, but are on terms of living intercourse." A similar thought is expressed by Dr. Abbott, who suggests the translation: "The word was in converse with God," while he holds that another possible rendering would be: "was 'devoted to' God."

In the Greek text, *theos*, or God, is clearly the predicate; the phrase conveys the divine nature of the Word. So NEB renders it, "And what God was, the Word was."

*Word (John 1:1)*

In the first Christian century, the Greek term *logos* (*Word*) acquired a variety of meanings used by differing religions, philosophies, and cultures. In John 1, it was essential that Word be understood according to its Old Testament meaning: God’s spoken Word. John gives it fresh meaning by showing that the Word, the Christ, has always existed.

*All things were made by him and without him was not any thing made that was made (John 1:3)*

Literally, "came into being (occurred, became, were) through him." In LXX, this verb (stem *gen-)* is employed recurrently in the first chapter of Genesis to express God's creative activity. Two different forms of it are seen in "Let there be ... it was so." The Prologue to the Fourth Gospel deliberately evokes recollection of the creation story by the use of this verb. The Greek preposition *dia* here rendered “by" can also mean “through”; while the word rendered "without" may be alternatively translated "apart from." Moffatt suggests, "Through him all existence came into being; no existence came into being apart from him." Dr. Macgregor comments that " 'through' implies that the Logos is not the source of creation, but the 'agent' of God, who is Himself the Source." The direct linkage proclaimed here between the divine Word and creation contrasts with the complicated mythologies of late first-century Gnostic teachers and may be a deliberate refutation of them. *IB* comments, "The Gnostics interposed a long series of intermediaries between the supreme God and the creation.” Weymouth has: "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing that now exists came into being;" while Goodspeed has: "Everything came into existence through him and apart from him nothing came to be," and RNT: "All things came into being through him, and apart from him not one thing came into being that has come into being."

*And God saw every thing that he had made****,*** *and, behold, it was very good (Gen. 1:31)*

In view of the fact that the Hebrew verb *'asah* can mean either "to make" or "to do," the rendering, "God saw every thing that he had done," would be equally literal. The word translated "behold" is a word "that . . . emphasizes the immediacy, the here-and-now-ness, of the situation" (T. Lambdin). According to MH, "...this was the Eternal Mind's solemn reflection upon the copies of its own wisdom and the products of its own power." The Hebrew particle translated here as "behold" suggests enthusiasm, according to WBC, which conveys the emphasis by rendering the last clause as "it was really very good.” Another correct translation of "very good" as Von Rad explains in his commentary on Genesis would be "completely perfect." Referring to this verse, he writes, "No evil was laid upon the world by God's hand; neither was his omnipotence limited by any kind of opposing power whatever." Von Rad sees high significance in this "very good”: "... the concluding formula of approval for the entire work of creation ... is of great importance within the terse and unsuperlative language of [the author].” As some commentators note, "very" is added to the description of goodness only at this point, when creation is complete and regarded as a whole. Up to this point, acts of creation have been described as "good." Here, with all the elements of creation in place and functioning together, the description is upgraded to "very good." *AB* translates, "God looked at everything that he had made," continuing, "and found it very pleasing."

*These notes were compiled from research notes published in the Christian Science Sentinel and Journal over a 70-year period, all of which are still available in Christian Science Reading Rooms having copies of past publications and now may be found through* ***jsh-online.com***