

Introduction

One of the most challenging experiences of my life was my time spent at the University of Aberdeen working on my second Master's degree, a ThM in systematic theology. Living in Scotland was exhilarating and my family and I launched into countless adventures. However, academically my convictions were repeatedly challenged and on some level punished. To some extent I knew this would be the case, and this fact was one of the primary reasons I chose to study in Europe. Up until that point all of my theological training had come from conservative evangelical institutions and I wanted to get out of that bubble and be thoroughly challenged. But I did not realize just how much my no-nonsense approach to theology would be despised. There were other conservative evangelicals like myself studying theology at Aberdeen, but most were content to not rock the boat. I wrote according to my convictions, for I know no other way.

An exegetical paper like the one I am about to embark on would be exactly the type of paper I could not write in a way that would be pleasing to my professors. This is because the text I am choosing addresses the deity of Christ. While most of my professors believed in the deity of Christ and would have even said that it was essential on some level, they would not have liked what I am about to say at all. The deity of Christ is absolutely essential to being a Christian. Christ is God and therefore to reject His deity is to reject His person. If Christ is not God, those who worship Him as such are idolaters. There is not a lot of middle ground here. Now this does not mean that a Christian must understand every theological point connected to His deity in order to be saved. This is especially true of new converts. However, if one has been in the church for some time and has been confronted with the deity of Christ, examines the

biblical evidence and denies Christ as God, this is a strong indication that this individual never truly embraced our Lord. We should never come to this conclusion in any sort of judgmental manner, as apart from the regenerating grace of God we would be no different than anyone else. However, for the sake of the individual and the dignity of Christ we must gently try to convince him or her of the truth.

With all of that said, it should be clear that the deity of Christ is a supremely important teaching of our faith. To worship Christ as God is to know Him as He truly is. It means praying to Him, meditating on His goodness and glory, serving Him, praising Him through song and prayer, submitting to His authority, and telling the world about Him. Hence, while all texts of the Bible are of the highest importance as the word of God, the texts addressing the deity of Christ are among the most important texts that we as Christians must embrace, teach, and defend. John 1:1 is one of these texts.

John 1:1

Preliminary Remarks

The first thing that must be stated here is a reminder that this paper is an exegesis paper and not a full apologetic paper. While this paper does have an apologetic bent, as the text clearly requires that, it is nevertheless not a fully orbbed apologetic paper. Such a paper would require not only a positive presentation of the position in question, but it would also require an offensive element where opposing positions are specifically refuted, as well as a defensive element where the objections of opposing positions are answered. Such apologetic facets are beyond the scope of this paper. Many of the objections leveled against the position of this paper will be implicitly alluded to along the way, others will be briefly explicitly

addressed, but for the most part this paper will stick to a positive exegesis of the text of John 1:1.

The second thing that needs to be done before diving into the text itself is to present some background information on two crucial points. The first is the hermeneutical approach of this paper and the second is the Gospel of John as a whole. To the first, the exegetical approach of this paper starts from the fact that the entire Protestant Bible, and only the Protestant Bible, in the original manuscripts, is the inerrant written word of God. Next, the exegetical approach of this paper flows from the fact that the copies of these aforesaid manuscripts, while imperfect, have come down to posterity in a way that has so faithfully preserved them that no major doctrinal deviations have penetrated them. The hermeneutic of this paper follows the literal and/or grammatical-historical approach to exegesis. The interpretive approach of this paper grows out of the reality that no new special revelation has been given beyond the books that comprise the Protestant Bible, which would include oral revelations of God. The exegetical framework of this paper embraces the necessity to fully take into account general revelation, while at the same time being cautious of general revelation as it is far more prone to abuse and misinterpretation than special revelation (and that should in no way be interpreted as any sort of naivety on the author's part in regard to how badly special revelation is often abused and misinterpreted).

Finally, the hermeneutic of this paper strongly embraces the paradigm that all of Scripture must be taken into account when exegeting any text. This bent often makes some exegetes nervous, even very solid and conservative ones, because the fear is that later texts can then be used to interpret older texts. The reason this is seen as dangerous is because,

allegedly, the authors of these older texts would have had no notion of what the later texts were saying precisely because the later texts had not yet been written. This fear is unfounded. The truth is that there is no way to know all that had been revealed to the authors of the Bible or the people of God as a whole at any given point of redemptive history. Far too often the fact that God until the latter days of the apostles gave His special revelation both orally and through the written word is downplayed. Many believe that anything that was revealed orally would make its way to the written pages of Scripture shortly thereafter, but there is very little biblical evidence for this doctrine. Today, of course, God's people have the written word alone, but it was certainly not always this way. Hence, if later texts shed clear interpretive light on older texts there is no reason to discount or explain away this light. None of these points of backdrop can be defended here, but at every point they will form the backbone to how the text of this paper will be dissected, and suffice it to say that each and every point is fully supported by the evidence.¹

As to the Gospel of John itself, the evidence, despite liberal musings to the contrary, overwhelmingly supports the facts that the Apostle John wrote the work and that it was written around 90 AD (if not much earlier), probably in Ephesus. John is rightfully distinguished from the synoptics because it presents a much deeper theological landscape and focuses a great deal more on the long discourses of Christ. The Apostle John also wrote the three epistles that bear his name as well as the Book of Revelation.²

¹ Obviously the reader would need to engage in a fully orbited apologetic study of his own in order to see this demonstrated and a full bibliography that would suffice for such a task will not be given here. I will say that one of the best books (although it is certainly not without its problems and shortcomings) I have read on the subject as of late is Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011).

² Cf. Norman Geisler, "The Historicity of the New Testament," in *Introduction and Bible*, vol. 1 of *Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2002), 461-494; and Timothy Jones, "Truth About the Authors of the

The Text Itself

First Clause

The first clause of John 1:1 reads in English, “In the beginning was the Word.” In Greek it reads, *En arche en ho logos*. *En* (in) *arche* (beginning) is an undeniable reference to the first two Greek words of Genesis 1:1 found in the Septuagint. It is true that often the New Testament refers to “the beginning” in a manner that is clearly not alluding solely to the initial moment of creation. It often refers to it in the sense of the creation week and the events that happened shortly thereafter. However, only here and in John 1:2, which is simply reiterating the points made in 1:1, is this particular Greek construction used. Every time *arche* is used in the New Testament either the context clearly indicates that it is not talking about the first moment of creation or creation week and shortly thereafter, or another Greek construction is used, usually *ap arches* (from the beginning) rather than *en arche*. This is true even of John himself (John 8:44; I John 1:1; 2:13-14; 3:8). Even in Hebrews 1:10, where in most English translations it sounds identical to John 1:1 and 2, the construction is different.

Genesis 1:1 is clearly describing the first moment when God created time, space, and matter *ex nihilo*, and this fact will be defended in a moment. It also seems clear that at this moment the angels were created as well. Despite all the theological wrangling that has occurred over the years concerning this question, Job 38:4-11 definitively answers this inquiry. In this text the angels (sons of God, see Job 1:6) are described as shouting for joy at the sight of the first stage of the earth. It is clear that this is the first stage of the earth and not a reference to God filling out the creation of the earth because this passage talks about the sea being

Gospels,” in *Misquoting Truth: A Guide to the Fallacies of Bart Ehrman’s Misquoting Jesus* (Downer’s Grove: IVP Books, 2007), 95-107.

wrapped in thick darkness, clearly indicating that this is before the creation of light.³ If it is argued that this would make the angels eternal because they would have already existed at the first moment of creation, the sound exegete must respond by pointing out that all God is saying here in Job is that from the first moment of the creation of the angels they saw the newly formed earth that had just been created at the same time and shouted for joy.

If it is asked why more is not said about the creation of angels in the Genesis narrative it can only be surmised that the reference to the heavens sufficed because it is clear from later Scripture that the highest heaven is the abode of the angels. The people of God through oral special revelation must have known the basics of the creation story, including the creation of the angels and the highest heaven, and Moses was simply given the task of filling in the details especially in regard to the earth and humankind.

It is clear from Genesis 1:1 and the rest of the creation narrative (through Genesis 2) that the text is indeed referring to the very first moment of creation. This is the case due to three key factors. First, the words, "In the beginning," certainly seem to be a clear reference to the beginning of time given that this is a creation narrative and so why would Moses not start from the very beginning of time. Second Genesis 1:31 makes it abundantly clear that this creation narrative is comprehensive of all that was created up to the first Sabbath and so if something was created before the material mentioned in 1:1, why is it not mentioned? Third, if

³ A possible objection to this interpretation could be the reference to the sea in this text. It could be argued that the sea is not mentioned in Genesis until after the creation of light. However, it seems to me that the reference to the sea in Genesis is talking about when God gathered the seas and officially named them, whereas this text in Job is referring to the sea as a whole before the creation of land. If it is argued that this text talks about the sea being given its limits and so it is unlikely that God then turned around and moved the sea so shortly after making such a firm statement, I would respond by saying that it does not in any way seem superfluous to me to talk about an initial creation of the earth and how only God can set the limits for all things even though God had every intention of filling out the cosmos, especially the earth, after this initial moment. In the end, the reference in the Job text to thick darkness seems to me to be thoroughly definitive.

something was created before the event described in 1:1, what was it and where is this event described later in Scripture? There is no answer to this question because the only thing described as being created outside of the creation week, other than God reproducing things such as the human soul for example, is hell and it makes perfect sense that hell would be created only after the fall. For these reasons it is clear that Genesis 1:1 is alluding to the very first moment of creation.

Before moving forward, it must be briefly noted that many try and make the case for *ex nihilo* creation in Genesis 1:1 based on the Hebrew words *bara*, *asah*, and *yasar* in the Genesis narrative. It is often said that *bara* simply means *ex nihilo* creation, while *asah* means “make,” and *yasar* means “form or shape.” Then it is pointed out that *bara* is the word used in Genesis 1:1.⁴ However, this argument is not in any way supported by the facts. For example, *bara* is used in Genesis 1:27 of man who was clearly not created in his entirety *ex nihilo*.

The Hebrew word for “In the beginning” is *bere’shit*. The word combines the Hebrew letter *bet* with the Hebrew word *reshit*, which means beginning or firstfruits. Some have argued that since the letter *bet* has both a locative and instrumental function, as well as the fact that there is no definite article, that the more traditional translations are too slanted in an orthodox Christian direction. It has been argued that examples of better translations would be, “At the time of a beginning...,” and, “By means of beginning, God created....” It is further pointed out that many ancient rabbis picked up on these facts, giving credence to this interpretation, and asked what was before this beginning or what exactly is this “beginning” if

⁴ Cf. Terry Mortenson, “Did God Create (*bara*) or make (*asah*) in Genesis 1?,” *Answers in Genesis*, 15 August 2007 [article on-line]; available from <http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/aid/v2/n1/did-god-create-or-make>; Internet; accessed 5 September 2013; and Tom Henderson, “Did God Create from Nothing? (Creation Ex Nihilo),” *Answers from Science and the Bible*, April 2002 [article on-line]; available from <http://users.hal-pc.org/~tom/creationexnihilo.htm>; Internet; accessed 26 August 2013.

the instrumental approach is adopted. The rabbis in large part answered this question by pointing to Proverbs 8 and asserting that wisdom existed before this beginning, or was in some sense this beginning and was the instrument God used to create the heavens and the earth. It is also asserted that the exegesis of Genesis 1:1 based on the instrumental use of *bet* was popular at the time of John and so it is quite reasonable to believe that John picks up on this and takes it one step further by making it clear that this wisdom is not merely some abstract concept but was the preexistent Son of God.⁵

There are problems with this exegesis that are beyond the scope of this paper,⁶ but suffice it to say that the instrumental interpretation seems to make nonsense of the text, and even if the locative interpretation that emphasizes the lack of the article were granted, it in no way affects all that has been said about the first clause of John 1:1 in this paper thus far. If this interpretation is correct all that would need to be concluded is that Moses is trying to safeguard any notion that this beginning is the beginning of all things including God. God has no beginning and therefore as far as raw existence is concerned there is no beginning as there has never been a point when there was nothing as God has always been the living God. This could have been the best way for Moses to safeguard this truth. It still has to be asked to what beginning is Moses referring, and as has been shown, the context and the rest of the creation narrative do not leave us in the dark on this point.

⁵ Cf. Skip Moen, "The Problem with Bet," *Skip Moen*, 15 December 2012 [article on-line]; available from <http://skipmoen.com/tag/genesis-11/>; Internet; accessed 26 August 2013.

⁶ I do believe John has the "Wisdom" of Proverbs, especially Proverbs 8, in mind in John 1:1, but only indirectly. I think if John wanted to explicitly refer to this "Wisdom" he could have easily done so by using the word "wisdom" instead of Logos. Because he uses Logos I believe he was trying to focus more on the fact that Christ is the ultimate revelation of God, which certainly includes the concept of wisdom, but goes far beyond it in my estimation. More will be said about this later in this paper.

Jumping back to the first clause of John 1:1 with all of that in mind, it is quite clear that John is telling his readers that at the first moment of creation the word or Logos (*ho logos*) was there. At first blush from the English this could simply mean that God created the Logos at the first moment of creation alongside the angels. A cursory reading of Proverbs 8 would even at first glance seem to offer some support for this exegesis. However, John carefully uses the verb *en* (was). Of this word James White, who has proven himself time and again in his books and debates to be a Greek expert of the first order, writes, “It is a timeless word – that is, it simply points to existence before the present time without reference to a point of origin.”⁷ It does not appear, however, that the word alone can bear the full weight of proving the eternity of the Logos. With that said, John’s usage of it in his prologue is unmistakable. He repeatedly contrasts it with the verb *egeneto*. This verb means “to become” and is used in verses 6, 10, and 12, all of things that came into existence or were brought from one state to another. John then uses it of the Logos to describe the Logos becoming human or flesh. Hence, his meaning in the first clause of John 1:1 is difficult to miss. If he had in any way intended to indicate that the Logos came into existence at the time of the first moment of creation he would have used *egeneto* in keeping with the rest of his prologue.

It may be asked why John even included a reference to creation at all if his contrast between *en* and *egeneto* is so stark and clear. After all, could not John have simply said, “The Logos was...,” left it at that, and still made his point just as clearly? The answer on some level is yes. However, John is not simply trying to score theological points here. He is also being poetic, beautiful, provocative, radical, and bold. By pointing to the first moment of creation

⁷ James White, “John 1:1 Meaning and Translation,” *Alpha and Omega Ministries* 1, [article on-line]; available from http://vintage.aomin.org/JOHN1_1.html; Internet; accessed 26 August 2013.

with a clear reference to the first word of the Bible and saying that the Logos was not just present at this moment but was already present before this moment, he would have grabbed the attention of his readers in a remarkable fashion.

A great deal of speculation has been put forth for centuries in regard to all that John was trying to convey with his use of the term *logos*. The word simply means "word." It has always seemed to the author that the simplest and best interpretation of John here is to see this as primarily a reference to God's special revelation. God's word is referred to constantly in the Old Testament as coming in both oral and written form and should be treated as if it had come directly from the mind of God untainted. Hence, it seems that John in a poetic way is trying to say that the Logos is the ultimate special revelation of God, and thus really the ultimate revelation of God period as special revelation is clearly higher than general revelation.

At this point the identity of the Logos becomes more clear. The Logos must be God, because only God is eternal and is the only thing that precedes the first moment of creation. But the Logos must in some sense be distinguished from God in order to be the ultimate revelation of God. Hence, there must be more than one person that shares the nature or essence of God. Therefore, from the first moment of creation the Logos was God, and was also with God ever ready to do God's will as the ultimate revelation of God. So it becomes clear that all that is explicitly said in the next two clauses is already implied in the first.

Now if it is argued that this line of thinking would make the Logos not truly the Logos until the moment of creation even if He was God before that moment because before the first moment of creation God would have had nothing to reveal Himself to, it must be said that the Logos did not fully fulfill His duty as the ultimate revelation of God until becoming flesh and yet

He is still called the Logos well before that moment. It must be remembered that even if God had chosen not to create anything at all or another world where the Son of God would not have needed to become incarnate, the Logos would still be the Logos simply by virtue of ever possessing the role within the Godhead of being God's potential ultimate revelation to the world if God chose to put into effect a world that would need God's ultimate revelation to fulfill His purposes.

Second Clause

The second clause reads in English, "and the Word was with God." In Greek it reads, *kai ho logos en pros ton theon*. There is not a ton of debate surrounding this clause other than the orthodox understanding of the verb *en* as discussed earlier. The clause essentially states that the Logos existed with God (*ton theon*, the God) from the moment of creation. But as has been shown, what John is really saying is that this existence is an eternal existence alongside God. The one word that is striking in this verse is the preposition *pros*. The Greek word goes far beyond the English "with." It denotes close fellowship, being face to face with someone. The distinction between the Logos and God could not be more strongly stated and makes quite explicit what was only implicit in the first verse. It is truly remarkable that modalistic/Unitarian/Sabellian interpretations ever surfaced given John's language here.

Third Clause

In English the third clause reads, "and the Word was God." In Greek we find, *kai theos en ho logos*. Unlike the previous clause this one is drowning in controversy, horrible translation, misunderstanding, and poor interpretation. The primary problem that is created by this text is that *theos* is anarthrous. Just as the lack of the article created interpretive problems

with Genesis 1:1, the same thing occurs here. The only difference is that in Genesis 1:1, granting the opposing translation does not affect much, whereas in this text it cuts to the heart of Christian theology and devotion. To translate this verse as saying that the Logos was a god, as opposed to God Himself, is heresy of the first order.⁸ The article is clearly lacking so as to not overly identify the Logos with the reference to God in the previous clause. John is very careful to avoid any doctrine that would posit God as only one person. The Logos is the subject throughout the verse and John makes this clear by the repeated use of the article in regard to the Logos, while *theos* in this clause is clearly intended to function as the predicate. This is also precisely why God in the second clause is in the accusative (*theon*); at every point the Logos is the subject and in the second clause God is the object of the action (being with, *en pros*) of the Logos.

The appalling ignorance of this translation is demonstrated by the fact that in every other instance in the prologue where John refers to God the Father he does not use the article (vv. 6; 12; 13; and 18). Furthermore, as has been proven, such a translation makes a mess of the first clause where the Logos is clearly presented as eternal. A mere god could never be eternal, but must be a creature.

The final nail in the coffin of this translation is John 20:28. Here Jesus appears to the famous doubting Thomas, shows him His wounds, and Thomas makes his well-known declaration, "My Lord and my God!" Some have tried to get around the force of this declaration as well as the fact that Jesus in no way corrected or rebuked Thomas by saying that Thomas was simply saying something along the lines of, "Oh my God," as people often say

⁸ This of course is the well-known translation of the New World Translation from the Jehovah's Witnesses. However, I have read many Mormons and others supporting this translation as well.

today.⁹ This interpretation can be quickly dismissed by the fact that such a statement is a clear instance of taking the Lord's name in vain and Thomas would never have done so right in front of Jesus, at least not without a correction from Christ. Thomas is clearly saying to Jesus that Jesus is his Lord and God and John does not hesitate to record this episode. In Greek Thomas' exclamation reads, *ho kurios mou kai ho theos mou*, which literally means, "the Lord of me and the God of me." The article precedes both "Lord" and "God." This proves beyond doubt that John did not avoid the use of the article before *theos* in the third clause of the first verse of his Gospel because he was trying to safeguard the creaturely nature of the Logos. Again, his clear reason is because the reference to God in that clause is the predicate and must be carefully distinguished from the reference to God in the second clause.

The only response that can be given to all of this evidence is a last desperate attempt to point out that the term "God" or "god" is not always used of God Almighty, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.¹⁰ The idea is that if other entities can be called "god" in some sense, entities that are clearly not the Almighty, then it follows that any admitted references to Jesus or the Holy Spirit as being "god" in some sense do not demand the interpretation that they are God in the fullest sense of that term. Hence, so the argument goes, Thomas could simply be calling Jesus his "god" in this passage in the sense of recognizing that Jesus was his master on some level even if Jesus is not his ultimate master, a position reserved for the Almighty alone. However, every instance in the New Testament where something is called "god" other than the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit, the usage is always negative. If there

⁹ Cf. "Jesus Christ," *Watchtower Online Library*, English Publications 2000-2013 [Encyclopedia on-line]; available from wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1200002451#h=26:0-27:1235; Internet; accessed 5 September 2013.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

were one single reference to a godly person or angel being called a “god” in some sense then this interpretation would have some validity. But there is no such instance.

Others have tried to get around this interpretation by positing the idea that *theos* in the final clause of the text in question is intended more as an adjective.¹¹ But *theos* is not in its adjectival form (*theios*), it is in its noun form. It is clearly the predicate nominative of the clause.

Finally, some have argued that the orthodox interpretation of this text is too literal. It is said that all John is trying to convey is that God’s wisdom or revelation is being personified here, that God entered human flesh in order to fully reveal Himself, and that to assert a plurality of persons in God is going way too far.¹² Appeals to Proverbs often accompany this interpretation because Proverbs, so it is said, personifies wisdom but is not intending to teach that a distinct person from God exists who is somehow both the wisdom of God and also God Himself at the same time.¹³ This approach will not wash because even though John is clearly being quite poetic in the prologue, the language of distinction is too strong and cannot be made to fit with a purely figurative interpretation. As R.C.H. Lenski states:

The preposition [pros], as distinct from [en], [para], and [sun], is of the greatest importance.... The idea is that of presence and communion with a strong note of reciprocity. The Logos, then, is not an attribute inhering in God, or a power emanating from him, but a person in the presence of God and turned in loving, inseparable communion toward God and God turned equally toward him.¹⁴

¹¹ Cf. White.

¹² Cf. Roger Garza, “A Defense of the Holy Trinity vs. Modalism,” 1998 [article on-line]; available from <http://www.philvaz.com/apologetics/a63.htm>; Internet; accessed 4 September 2013.

¹³ Cf. *A Deeper Walk*, 19 June 2012 [discussion on-line]; available from deeperwalk.lefora.com/2012/06/19/what-is-modalism/; Internet; accessed 5 September 2013.

¹⁴ R.C.H. Lenski, *St. John’s Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1943), 32-33, quoted in Garza, 4.

As far as Proverbs is concerned, it is certainly true that a great deal of the language in regard to wisdom is figurative, but the language of distinction between wisdom and God in Proverbs is also so strong that it is clearly an allusion to the distinction between the Father and the Son. The Son is explicitly called the wisdom of God's people in I Corinthians 1:22-24 and 1:30 in a way that clearly goes beyond the mere personification of the divine attribute of wisdom, and it is in this sense that wisdom is being sharply contrasted with God Himself throughout the early part of Proverbs. This is especially true of Proverbs 8.¹⁵

The language of John in this first verse of his Gospel cannot be explained away. The Logos is God and yet He has ever been with God. John goes on to make it clear throughout his Gospel that the Logos is the Son of God who became incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated beyond doubt that John 1:1 emphatically teaches the deity of Christ. Therefore, if the Gospel of John is part of the inerrant word of God, it follows by a resistless logic that Jesus Christ of Nazareth is Almighty God. This is certainly not an easy teaching. To believe that a historical person, a man, was and is God goes against our natural instincts. Most of the time claims to deity are quickly dismissed as a joke, or insanity, or worse, and rightfully so. But the Gospel of John and its witness to Christ cannot be so easily dismissed. In fact, there is ample evidence to prove that John's Gospel is part of the inerrant Christian canon. Hence, Christ is in fact God, and so let us get about the business of approaching Him accordingly!¹⁶

¹⁵ I am not in any way trying to deny the clear personification that is taking place in Proverbs, including Proverbs 8. My point is that the personification cannot exhaustively explain all that is going on in that section of Scripture precisely because the language of contrast is too striking in my estimation.

¹⁶ For further reading on John 1:1 and/or the deity of Christ see any of the classical and orthodox systematic theologies that have come down through the ages. Each of them provide lengthy and excellent sections on the

deity of Christ. For a non-systematic theology and probably the best treatment of the subject see Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Lord of Glory: A Study of the Designations of our Lord in the New Testament with Especial Reference to His Deity* (Forgotten Books, 2010).