

EXPLORING JOHN'S GOSPEL

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PART 1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things that have been created were created through Him. Nothing that has been created was created without Him (Jn.1:1-3).

There is a consensus among many scholars that the reference to the "Logos" at the beginning of John's Gospel is borrowed from Plato. However, most scholars have their own concepts of typology which are generally foreign to the typology of Scripture, Jewish or Christian. Nikolai Sergeevich Trubetskoy developed his doctoral thesis "The Doctrine of the Logos" around this idea. Let us begin by observing that "In the beginning" is something about which the ancient Greeks were ignorant. To my knowledge Christianity and Judaism are the only religions that espouse it.

Plato's concept of Logos as cosmic intellect or reason is not the first place in Hellenic and Hellenistic thought where we encounter the expression. Heraclitos (d.475 B.C.), seems to have originated the concept of Logos/wisdom (though certainly not as an attribute of a Supreme Deity, but as an expression of pantheism) though some concepts of Logos originated with the Stoics. Anaxagoras uses "Logos" interchangeably with $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$, as a principle. The Logos idea occurs in Plato, but it is very difficult to see how the theological critics derived evidence of Platonic influence in John's Gospel, since the concepts in Plato bear no resemblance to the context of this Gospel. Plato was a dualist who had only contempt for the flesh (thus the heresies that arose from adaptations of his metaphysics). St Justin the Philosopher (*Apology.1*) sought to influence the Greeks by connecting the stoic Logos idea with the Logos of Scripture, but only unfortunately and unconvincingly. For stoics, "Logos" was either potential Reason, or manifested Thought. They, like Plotinus a spiritual monist), were pantheist. Their construct is radically different from John's Incarnate Hypostasis of the One God. The idea that John's use of Logos is Platonistic is not altogether consistent with his identification of Logos with the hypostatic Word of God. The Greek Logos is not God nor personal; nor could the Greeks have imagined that He would become incarnate. They generally despised the flesh and it was unthinkable that God or the Logos would join themselves to Him. Likewise, His crucifixion was folly to them as it was a scandal to the Jews.

Metropolitan Antony Khrapovitsky suggests that there is a word usage in the Hebrew Scripture that would be more consistent with the concept of Logos in John's Gospel. The word is "dabhar," and we can look at Metropolitan Antony's reasoning on this subject.

Clearly, the Jews did not have a concept of a term which combined in itself both the idea of "word" and "reason," as did the Greek philosophical term "Logos". There is, moreover, no compelling reason to conclude that the author of the Gospel according to John intends his "Logos" to signify "intellect" or "reason". John speaks of the Logos in a context which more clearly means only "word", but with reference to passages in the Hebrew scripture. The passages more feasibly use "dabhar" in a manner that can apply to a reference to the incarnate Son of God as "the Word", just as the term "Memra" seems to do in Jewish apocryphal literature.

Here are the references given by Metropolitan Antony (and we will paraphrase Metropolitan Antony in the bridges between the references):

The Lord Thundered from heaven and the Most-High voiced His Word (Psalm 17:13).

We find references in the Psalms, where many prophecies about the Messiah appear, and in Wisdom Literature. For example, where the psalmist speaks of Joseph in bondage, Psalm 104:17-19 ends with, "The Word of the Lord proved him." Further in Psalm 106, speaking of the Hebrews in the wilderness, when they were being bitten by poisonous snakes, "And they cried out to the Lord in their affliction, and out of their distress, He saved them. He sent forth His Word and He healed them, and delivered them from their affliction" (verses 19-20).

Moses was commanded at the time to make a bronze serpent on a cross-like staff as a sign of their deliverance (Deuteronomy 8:3). Later, the Jews so firmly identified this symbolic staff with the creator that it became an object of idolatry. Hezekiah destroyed it to stop the idolatry and the Psalmist wrote that they "were not saved by the object that they saw, but by Thee, the Saviour of all...for [it is] Thy Word, O Lord, that heals all things" (Wisdom 16:12).

All these references were cited by Saint Antony and he concludes, "...the expression used for 'God's Word' has the connotation of something living. When we turn to the Hebrew, the connection is clearly of something personified, not simply God's voice, but a continuously and identically acting divine, providential power."

Psalm 148 provides another example: He sends forth His word to the world; His Word runs swiftly [to accomplish its mission] (148:15-20). A profound example of the Word personified (hypostatic) occurs at Wisdom 18:s15-16. Referring to the taking away of the first born of the Egyptians, the author of Wisdom says, "Thine almighty word leapt from Heaven, from Thy royal throne...and it touched the heavens though it stood upon the earth. Moreover, it is the Word that saved the people in response to the prayer of Aaron (verse 22).

In John's revelation (the Apocalypse) we read: "...He was clothed in vestments dipped in blood, and His name is 'the Word of God'...and upon the thigh of His vestments, a name is written, 'King of Kings and Lord of Lords'" (Revelation 19:11-16).

Having extracted these references from an essay of Saint Antony Khrapovitsky, let us make some final observations. In his Gospel, John does not make a reference to "the Word," "Logos" that permits an interpretation in accord with Plato's metaphysical pantheism. Since he says that the Word (Logos) is "pros-ton-theon", literally "unto God", in context, "with God," and not "within God," as "mind" or "intellect" would be. Moreover the whole paragraph would not fit Plato's or the Stoics' concepts. The Word, according to John, was not only "with God," but the Word is God. Clearly, we are speaking of a hypostatic Word, and not an idea or concept.

If we accept the Apostle John as actually the author of our fourth Gospel, there would be little reason to think that he would be so conversant with Stoic or Platonistic philosophy as to use the term "Logos" in the framework of their concepts.

If, on the other hand, the Gospel consists in John's remembrance and relating the story written down by a well educated Greek disciple, it would be possible. The difficulty with this still remains the consistency of the opening verses of the Gospel according to John with the reference Saint Antony cites from the Hebrew scripture, and the clear assertion that the Word is not only "with" God, but that the Word is God, and together with God [the Father] was the active creator of all that exists. If the Logos was made flesh, is called the Son of God and is manifested in the person of the Christ, in Jesus, then the Greek philosophical concept of the "Logos" cannot be made to fit the use of the

term in the Gospel of John.

Together with Saint Antony Khrapovitsky we suggest that the term "Logos," expressed as a "personal," hypostatic being¹ (rather than an idea, an abstract intelligence or a cosmic mind) in the opening lines of this Gospel arises from Hebrew and not Hellenistic concepts and sources.

1. Of course one must be very cautious in using the word "being." The fathers taught us that God is "beyond being," (hyperousios). The Scholastics, on the other hand, defined God as "the Supreme Being." But since man is also "being", this implies an analogy or comparison between man and God. It thus subject God to human analysis. Being is the object of rational knowledge, but God transcends such knowledge. This is the basis of the Augustine's heresy of analogia entis.