

## John 1

### Introduction

Trinitarians seek to answer the following questions in respect of John 1:1, 14 —

- Who or what is the Word?
- What is the beginning?
- How was the Word God?
- How is the Word the maker of ‘all things’?
- How was the Word made flesh?<sup>1</sup>

The Trinitarian reading of John 1, 14 is very common and of all verses in the Bible these two are the most important for this doctrine. They are the verses that Trinitarians rely on most for proving their point of view.

It would be possible to review what scholars have said about the opening verses of John; they have sought a background in Jewish Wisdom theology and Gnosticism; they have referred to Philo. In doing this they have sought to explain John’s distinctive use of the idea of *the Logos* (translated ‘the Word’). Our interest is in the Jewish scriptural background rather than the ideas of the day.

The problem with background studies of the Logos is that they do not address the disparity that exists between the two source texts. Whereas texts from John’s day have a developed idea of the Logos, John’s own material is very thin, and if we restrict our attention to just the gospel, we have just two verses. We don’t have enough textual material in John to make a connection. Hence, it is worthwhile to see what might be said about John’s scriptural background.

The word *logos* is very common and within John (40x) it refers to what is said, a saying, a message, words, *and so on*. It is concrete rather than abstract in its range of meaning, although there is usage outside John which denotes more abstract entities such as reason and purpose. John’s use of the word in his opening verses is different from elsewhere in his gospel where it is concrete. Commentators have seen this difference and proposed personal conceptions of *the Logos* in John 1.

The personal conceptions that have been proposed are: the second person of the Trinity, God’s first created being, and the person of Jesus; some have proposed that there is a personification of *the Logos* which is then viewed as an abstract entity such as the reason and purpose of God; others have said that *the Logos* is a hypostatization (linguistic or metaphysical) of an attribute of the Deity.

### The Word

The identification of ‘the Word’ (i.e. the referent of the expression) as Jesus in John 1:1 is the correct determination, but the subject matter dealt with is *not* the Genesis creation. The title ‘the Word’ refers to Jesus in John 1:1 for the following reasons:

- 1) The statement, ‘the Word was *with* God’, uses a Greek expression for ‘with’ (πρὸς τὸν θεόν) which indicates a person acting as a mediator. The main mediator in the OT is the high priest

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<sup>1</sup> We frame these questions using the KJV.

(See Exod 18:19, LXX; 2 Cor 3:4; Heb 2:17; 5:1;<sup>2</sup> 1 John 1:1-2; 3:21; Rev 12:5; 13:6), although the mediatorship of the Son on earth was not priestly (cf. Moses' mediatorship and see Heb 8:4). We would translate the Greek as 'towards God' or 'before God'.

2) The statement, 'the Word was God', makes a predication of the Word which suggests that the Word is a person.

3) The common demonstrative expression, 'the same' (John 1:2), is used of persons as well as objects like the temple (John 2:20). It is used of John the Baptist (John 1:6), and it is used elsewhere of Christ (e.g. John 1:15, 30, 33, 34; cf. Ps 102:27; John 7:18; Heb 1:12; 13:8).

4) John's reasoning is that 'in (or by) him (the Word) was life; and the life was the light of men' (John 1:4) and this coincides with the view of Christ as the Word of life (1 John 1:1).

5) The Son of God is referred to as 'the Word of God' (Rev 19:13), which invites the view that Jesus is 'the Word' of John 1.<sup>3</sup>

In view of (1)-(5), we reject the view that 'the Word' is personified in John 1:1, 14. The intertext of 1 John 1:1-4 is particularly clear:

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, of the Word of life... 1 John 1:1 (KJV)

This clearly refers to the apostles' experience of being with Jesus. The language of John 1 is picked up in 1 John 1 and given an exposition in terms of 'the Word of life'. We reject therefore the view that *the Logos* is personified in John 1 and for the same reason we reject the proposal that *the Logos* is a hypostatization. The language of John 1 is too personal for this option: the Logos was towards God and was God.

### Creation

Does John 1 *refer to* just the Genesis beginning? Is Christ the creator of this creation? Or does John 1 primarily *refer to* a New Creation? And is Christ the creator of this creation? To answer these questions, we have to look at the usage of the expression 'all things'.

The apostles understood their age to be radically new, and they used creation language to describe their work and experience. It was a creation of *creatures* — a creation of a new man in each believer. James pinpoints God the Father as the Creator in this creation (Jms 1:18), but this does not exclude the possibility that God the Father was carrying out His creative work *by* Jesus. And in fact we shall see that **Jesus is involved**, because it is a creation of new men and women in him.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Greek is consistent and is particularly clear in Hebrews where we read, 'a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God' (Heb 2:17). The use of the expression helps us see the priestly role of Rev 12:5 in being 'caught up unto God', and the false priesthood implicit in the 'blasphemy against God' of Rev 13:6.

<sup>3</sup> For these reasons I do not present the view that John 1 presents a *personification* or *hypostatization* of 'the Word'.

<sup>4</sup> See 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Eph 2:10; 4:24; Col 3:10; Jms 1:18; 1 Pet 1:23.

This is how it was in Genesis. *Partnership* is not a foreign idea to the Genesis creation. *All the things* of the Genesis creation were created by God in partnership with the angels. This relationship is seen in the expression *let us make* (Gen 1:26). This relationship between God and the angels in heaven is reflected on the earth when man is brought into partnership with God. His work is to be one of ordering and governing creation (lordship) and this is a *kind of creative work*. The partnership is reflected *again*, when the woman is given unto the man as a helpmeet in the creative work of bearing children to the honour and glory of God. This principle is found also in the making of the sanctuary, where there is partnership in creative work (Heb 8:5) between the Angel of the Lord and Moses.<sup>5</sup> And the Levites are again explicitly ‘given’<sup>6</sup> to the priests to be helpmeets in this sanctuary.<sup>7</sup>

One of the tests for good doctrine is that it is based on clear statements of Scripture. There is no clear statement of Trinitarian doctrine. Had the doctrine been true, it would have been reasonable to expect a statement to the effect that God is one in three,<sup>8</sup> instead we only get affirmations of the unity of God. A general statement about God and the creation of all things is this:

...there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. 1 Cor 8:6 (KJV)

This text establishes the fundamental relationship: all things are *of* the one God, the Father, but *by (through)* the one Lord Jesus Christ. Here there would have been a golden opportunity to make a Trinitarian statement, but none is made.<sup>9</sup>

Paul uses the expression ‘all things’ and his point is about the New Creation not the Genesis creation, because it talks of the *things* including people alive in Paul’s day — (the ‘we’ in him) - *of God by (through) Christ*. The idea of *reconciliation* connects people with the concept of *all things*, as is shown by the following parallelism:

...through him were all things created... [whether] ...in the heavens... [or]...in earth...  
Col 1:16cb (KJV revised)

...by him... [were]...all things [reconciled]... whether...in earth...or...in the heavens...  
Col 1:20bc (KJV revised)

The reconciliation of things *under* heaven, that is, things in the earth was achieved through the Gospel, and Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles (Col 1:23), but how was it accomplished for things in the heavens? The contrast between heaven and earth here is also illustrated in Ephesians:

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<sup>5</sup> Moses made things on the earth; Christ’s role in making things extends to heaven.

<sup>6</sup> Hence in John 17, the disciples are repeatedly referred to as the ones that have been *given* to Christ, the man, the priest.

<sup>7</sup> We read that God builds *all things* (Heb 3:4) and is the architect (1 Cor 3:10). We read also that Christ *builds* the church — this is a creative work of reconciliation, and we read that Paul builds the church also laying foundations, so creative work is proceeding in a co-operative partnership.

<sup>8</sup> After all what is special about the third and fourth centuries C.E. — why did we (supposedly) have to wait until then to get the right expression of the doctrine of God? In Deut 6:4, we have ‘The Lord our God is one Lord’, so why is not there here a Trinitarian formula 1400 years B.C.E.? Is it credible to suggest that the Israelites (or the apostles) were *too thick* to understand such a doctrine?

<sup>9</sup> The expression ‘one Lord’ is related to the *Hear, O Israel the Lord our God is one Lord*.

That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in the heavens, and which are on earth; even in him... Eph 1:10 (KJV revised); cf. John 11:52

In a dispensation called *the fulness of times*, all things are gathered together in Christ. The type is clearly the gathering of the animals to Noah (by God) in the ark (Gen 6:20), but the type also goes back to the gathering of the animals to Adam (by God). This widens the meaning of *all things*. We saw in Colossians 1 that the term embraces the creatures of the New Creation. Here in Ephesians 1 the term refers to those in Israel (the heavens) and the Gentiles (the earth) who were being gathered together in Christ (prior to a destruction) — to make out of two, in him, one (Eph 2:15). This view makes it easier to see how there are things in the heavens and in the earth which are reconciled.

God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, making peace through the blood of the cross, and *by* Christ He was reconciling all things unto himself (2 Cor 5:18; Heb 2:17). Paul is not teaching universalism here, since all things are not reconciled as a *fait accompli*. Paul goes on to say that the Gospel was preached to every creature and *those to whom* Paul was writing *had been* reconciled. This shows that the character of the work of creation has to do with the position and status of men and women (Eph 2:10).

The relationship between Christ and God is clear, but elsewhere the “for” and the “by” are predicated of God alone:

For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things... Heb 2:10 (KJV)

But the stress on people is still found, because the text goes on referring now to Christ:

...for whom are all...by whom are all...both he... and they...are all of one [flesh?]  
Heb 2:10-11(KJV)

And again in this next text, the expression ‘all things’ is tied to a mention of people:

For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy on all...For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Rms 11:32-36 (KJV); cf. 1 Cor 11:2

The expressions *to him* and *for him* are conveying the point that those who receive God’s mercy ascribe *to him* the glory and they are *for him* as a belonging. A summary of NT teaching on ‘all things’ is set out below in Tables 1 and 2.

It is this connection between *things* and *people* that is made by John:

...All things were made by him; and without him there was not anything made. That which hath been made was life in him; and the life was the light of men... John 1:3-4 (RV and RV mg.)<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The companion volume to the UBS Greek New Testament, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), 195, observes that “the consensus of ante-Nicene writers (orthodox and heretical alike)” interpret the Greek in the same way as the RV, and it was not until the fourth century that orthodox writers preferred to take “that which was made” with the third verse. Athanasius (4c.), Irenaeus (2c.), Clement of Alexandria (2c.),

<b>The New Creation and All Things</b>	
For of him, and through him, and to him are all things Rms 11:36, Heb 2:10	Here we have the three main prepositions: <i>out of, to, and through</i> the Father are all things.
By him to reconcile all things unto himself Col 1:20, 2 Cor 5:18	God does the reconciling.
Whom he hath appointed heir of all things Heb 1:2	Here the Father has gathered together things and the Son is the rightful heir.
All things...for him Col 1:16	All things given for the Son.
All things are delivered unto me of my Father Matt 11:27, John 17:7	The Father is passing down to his Son his inheritance.
The Father loveth the Son and giveth all things into his hand John 3:35, 13:3	Again, the Father has things ready made to give to the Son.
For he hath put all things under his feet 1 Cor 15:27	The Father does the putting.
Head over all things, to the church Eph 1:22	This is the headship of the church.
Subdue all things unto himself Phil 3:21	This has an element of opposition.
Among all things he might have the pre-eminence Col 1:18	This includes principalities and powers.

**Table 1**

<b>The New Creation and All things</b>	
The Father, of whom are all things, and we in him;... Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him 1 Cor 8:6	A statement of partnership.
Who created all things by Jesus Christ Eph 3:9	
All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made John 1:3	
For by him were all things created Col 1:16	
All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore I said, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you John 16:5, 1 Cor 2:10	All things are given to believers through the holy Spirit.
How shall he not with him also freely give us all things Rom 8:32, 1 Cor 3:21	
By him all things consist Col 1:17, Heb 1:3	Christ as sustainer.
Old things are passed away, behold all things are become new 2 Cor 5:17, Rev 21:4	Relationship between old and new things.

**Table 2**

The first five verses of John concern the person of Christ and his relationship to the *things* of the New Creation. The claim of John is the same as that of Paul — all things were made from

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Origen (3c.), and Tertullian (2c.), all quote John 1:3 without the phrase “that was made” at the end of the verse. It is possible that the majority text and the *Textus Receptus* differ because of the use made of John 1:3-4 by Arians to prove the derived nature of the Holy Spirit. The Byzantine manuscript tradition may have punctuated the Greek to consciously avoid this use of John, but the earliest manuscripts do not have any punctuation in these two verses (P66, P75, Ⲛ, A, B). See P. Comfort, *Early Manuscripts and Modern Translations*, (Cambridge: Tyndale Press, 1990), 104-5, for the evidence. Comfort uses *theological considerations* to determine the text at this point.

God *by (through)* Jesus; or, in other words, all things were made (by God) by Christ. This approach is confirmed by the phrase ‘*without* him there was not anything made’ (John 1:3), which implies *partnership*. (We would say today, of a colleague, ‘*without* him I would not have got the job done’).

A similar stress on partnership is seen regarding man and woman: ‘neither is the man *without* the woman, neither the woman *without* the man’ (1 Cor 11:11). Christ is **not** therefore presented as the Creator *sui generis* (that is, as uniquely the creator), but as one **with** whom the New Creation took place (Rms 8:32). This *partnership* in the New Creation is a reflection of the cooperation between the Father and the angels in the original creation: ‘...Let *us* make man in our image...’ (Gen 1:26).<sup>11</sup> And so of Christ it is written, ‘...for to *make* in himself of twain one new man so making peace...’ (Eph 2:15).<sup>12</sup> Here we read that Christ is our peace, having abolished in his flesh the enmity in order to make (n.b. creative word) in himself one new man by reconciling both Jew and Gentile unto God. Nevertheless, in Col 1:19-20, we read that God makes peace through the blood of his cross, and by Christ, reconciling all things unto himself, in the body of his flesh. So both God the Father and His Son are involved with this work.

This ‘life’ made through Jesus (the Word) is defined as ‘light’:

...that which hath been made was life in him; and the life was the light of men...  
John 1:3-4(RV and RV mg.)

This distinguishes the Word from the light, but what is this ‘light’? The definition of light is ‘life’, and this is a clue. The subject of life made from Adam is the topic of Genesis 2 — and this life was *Eve*. Indeed, the meaning of ‘Eve’ is life, and it is the same underlying Greek word (ζωή) in John that we find in the LXX of Genesis 2. Eve was ‘life’ because she was the mother of all living. Therefore, John is saying that that which was built through Jesus ‘in him’ was Eve (cf. 1 John 4:9).<sup>13</sup> The type of Eve here is a type of the church, the bride of Christ. This was a light, which was then shining in John’s day (remember John is looking back to ‘the beginning’), but the darkness did not comprehend the light (John 1:5).

This light, or Eve, is different to the Light of John 1:7ff and the KJV translators mark this with a capital ‘L’. (Of course, the Greek Cursives do not have such capitals, while the Uncials are all capitals). The content of John 1:4-5 and John 1:7ff is *light*, but the subjects are different.<sup>14</sup> John is positioned in the second paragraph of John’s prologue as the forerunner to ‘the *true* (as opposed to typical) Light’, who was Christ; but ‘the light’ of the first paragraph is the anti-typical Eve (Matt 5:14). The use of ‘true’ marks out Christ in a way that the light of his bride is not marked, for Eve is the glory of the man (1 Cor 11:7).

Our Genesis perspective on John 1 is reinforced by the mention of darkness, because light requires darkness (Isa 6:9-10). This darkness was the state of the world at the time that Christ came into the world (John 1:9), and it persisted after his ascension, for the believers subsequently

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<sup>11</sup> The male and the female are, together, *man*.

<sup>12</sup> See also John 5:17; 1 Cor 12:6; Eph 1:11; Phil 1:6; 3:21.

<sup>13</sup> The concept of life is important in the NT — believers rise from the dead to new life (Col 2:12-13).

<sup>14</sup> Israel were to be the ‘light’ to the nations, and the Angel of the Presence stands to Israel as Christ stands to the New Israel. This is shown by the fact that Israel had light when Egypt was in darkness (Exod 10:23); it is shown by the fact the Angel of the Lord gave them light, but Egypt darkness (Exod 13:21); it is shown by the fact they would have appeared as a train led by the Light in the wilderness; and it is also shown by the fact the candlestick represents Israel.

shone as lights in the darkness. This is what we would expect from Genesis 1, because in the beginning when God created the heaven and the earth, the earth was without form and empty, and darkness covered the face of the deep. The world of John's day was then a place of *darkness*.<sup>15</sup> Such darkness is as much the work of God as the subsequent introduction of order.

This darkening should not be diminished, for it is part of the pattern of creative redemption and New Creation *through* a destruction of the old creation. When creations in God's purpose are destroyed, they return to darkness. If the people are darkened, then the creation of that people, which was initiated in light (!), has ended. Hence, the Gospel of John introduces us to a dark world into which the Light comes, and in which the light subsequently shone.<sup>16</sup>

## Beginnings

The reference to 'a beginning', and things which are made<sup>17</sup> *in* such a beginning, clearly echoes the Genesis 1 creation. The intention is clearly to place Jesus as the Word in a position parallel to what God says: '...and God *said*...' (Gen 1:3ff). The parallel involves the idea of doing *something by an agent* or doing something by some *instrument*. The original creation was created by God the Father *by* the angels by his delivery of fiat or commands (cf. Heb 11:3). For the ongoing work of the New Creation, Christ now held the position of the Word of God, and the angels would be under his feet. Hence, the New Creation is now being created by God the Father, *by* the Word, *by* angels,<sup>18</sup> who are sent forth to minister unto those who would be heirs of salvation. This is why Jesus is called the Word in John 1 rather than just 'Jesus'.

This is an unusual idea: that a person could *be* a Word. But this is not *quite* the point. The point involved is that Christ is the *anti-type* to the word of Genesis 1, these fiat type Christ. This is no more unusual than saying that the light of Genesis 1 types Christ, or that an ark, mercy seat, or the Holy of Holies, type Christ. Consequently, we should not dismiss this title of Christ. When we think of Christ as 'the Word', we think of him as the creative word of God, and what is created is meant to be a mirror of him. This is how it was in Genesis: 'God said, *Let there be*...and there *was*...it *was* so'.<sup>19</sup> What was created was the substance of what was said. With the New Creation, what is created is Christ *in us* (Gal 4:19), a reflection of the Word of God (1 Pet 1:23).<sup>20</sup>

In Genesis, words are spoken and these produce an effect. In the Gospel of John the Word is also said to be *with* God and also said to be God. The ideas of being "with God" as well as "God" are extra details not found in Genesis. It is important to see that these details are an

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<sup>15</sup> It is also what we would expect at the time of the Exodus: the plague of darkness still saw Israel with lights, thus indicating that they were lights in that darkness (Exod 10:23).

<sup>16</sup> Pharaoh (Egypt) had his heart hardened, and destruction followed, with the emergence of the New Creation of Israel.

<sup>17</sup> The Greek is ἐγένετο, and it occurs in vv. 3, 6, 10, 14 and 17. It is like a refrain in the narrative reinforcing the topic of creation, albeit of various entities - *all things* (v. 3), *John* (v. 6), *the World* (v. 10), *the Word* (v. 14), and *grace and truth* (v. 17).

<sup>18</sup> I do not exclude here the work of the apostles who were sent forth, and were directed by the Holy Spirit in their *creative* work, but my point primarily concerns angels.

<sup>19</sup> This refrain in Genesis of a series of 'was' verbs is reflected in John 1:1 with its emphasis on 'was...was...was'. There is much intertextual subtlety in John.

<sup>20</sup> This makes the effect of what is said by God a mirror of what he has said: if he says, 'let there be light', then the light mirrors and points to what he has said. This may be the divine basis for a correspondence theory of truth, when we consider that *language* originates with *God*. If this is so, philosophy of language gets it the wrong way round: the problem is not how language can correspond to reality, but how reality corresponds to language - the language is *first*.

*addition*, because the text has fused teaching from Genesis 1 with the other OT passages. The idea behind the Greek of ‘with God’ is mediatorship and priesthood, so a more correct rendering would be ‘the Word was *toward* God’. Because Christ is a *person*, mediatorship is not as strange an idea like that of being a *word*. Of course, as regards creation, there is a similarity of function between a word and a mediator.

The mention of the Word as ‘toward (with) God’ and also *as* God (was God) in John 1 has been a matter of controversy. The doctrine of the Trinity sees in this text a mention of the plurality of the Godhead; others see an affirmation of Christ’s essential deity or divine nature. We suggest however that this dual aspect of Christ as ‘toward God and God’ is based on a Mosaic typology, who was also a man ‘toward God and God’ (Exod 4:16; 18:19; cf. Exod 4:31; and see Zech 12:8 for a similar reason justifying the application of ‘was God’ to the house of David).<sup>21</sup>

The Mosaic typology is forged by John’s use of the same idea of “toward God” in Exod 18:19,

...and the Word was toward God... John 1:1 (KJV revised)

...the Word of Life...toward the Father and... manifested to us... 1 John 1:1-2, cf. 2 Cor 3:4 (KJV revised)

...be thou for the people to God-ward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God... Exod 18:19 (KJV)

The type is also forged by the position of Moses as God: ‘...thou shalt be to him instead of God...’ (Exod 4:16; cf. Exod 4:31). This idea is not found in Genesis 1,<sup>22</sup> but it is packed into the text of John 1 from Exodus 4. This should not surprise us, as it is a characteristic of Scripture that texts often carry allusions to many places. A mediator can create, deliver the commands of God, and bring order to chaos, as did Moses. Accordingly, we conclude that John is not asserting that Jesus is in essence God, but that he was God in relation to the disciples (his “Aaron” – see John 17) as Moses was God in relation Aaron.

How can a human being be God? John is not saying Jesus is a god. He uses the predicate ‘was God’ of Jesus. For example, take the text,

And the Lord said unto Moses, See, I have made thee god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet. Exod 7:1 (KJV revised)

Here we see that Moses was made god by God. The word translated ‘god’ is the ordinary word for God and could equally be translated ‘God’. Moses manifested the power of God and the Spirit of God was within him (Isa 63:11). Such a person could be God and this is like saying Jesus was God in the beginning.

Jesus himself addressed this issue:

The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God. Jesus answered

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<sup>21</sup> Notice that Zechariah juxtaposes the application of ‘as God’ and ‘as the Angel of the Lord’ in his description of the house of David. This shows the crucial role of the Angel of the Lord in an understanding the establishment of the kingdom and therefore the work of the Messiah.

<sup>22</sup> The idea of mediatorship is however implicit in Adam’s role of dominion over creation.

them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? John 10:33-36 (KJV)

Here Jesus quotes Ps 82:6 in which the children of Israel are called gods. More importantly Jesus corrects the Pharisees by asserting that he had claimed to be the Son of God rather than making himself out to be God.

Jesus manifested God, his father, and consequently those who saw him saw the father; he manifested him in character and, in possessing the Spirit of God, he manifested him in the mighty works that he did before the people. John is encoding these facts in his simple opening that the Word was God, and he confirms this in his *inclusio* in the Thomas episode where Thomas exclaims to Jesus ‘My Lord and my God’ (John 20:28). Here Thomas is affirming that he had *seen* the father in Jesus in calling him ‘my God’. This is why Jesus replies to him, ‘Thomas, because thou hast *seen* me, thou hast believed’ (v. 29).

### *Incarnation*

The main text used for affirming the incarnation is John 1:1, 14. There are four ‘incarnation’ type questions about John 1:1-14,

- What is the beginning?
- How is Christ before John the Baptist?
- How is v. 14 related to v. 1?
- How was the Word made flesh?

### *In the Beginning was the Word*

John’s Gospel was written sometime after the preaching of the apostles began in Acts 2. If we picture John at his table, writing the Gospel, of what beginning is he thinking? Is it, as some say, some timeless beginning beyond the aeons of time — before the Big Bang? Was it the Genesis beginning (Gen 1:1)?<sup>23</sup> Was it the Exodus beginning (Hos 9:10)? Was it the birth of Christ (Matt 1:1)? Was it the event of Pentecost (Acts 11:15)? Was it Jesus’ baptism and the beginning of his ministry?<sup>24</sup> We favour the last approach for the following reasons:<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The term ‘beginning’ does refer to the Genesis beginning in the NT, (e.g. Matt 19:4 (RV), 8; 24:21 (RV); Mark 10:6; 13:19), where it is part of the expression ‘from the beginning’.

<sup>24</sup> The first visit of Paul to Macedonia is the ‘beginning of the gospel’ there (Phil 4:15). When he departed he took gifts, and these, as previously in another much earlier beginning, rose as a sweet smell, a sacrifice well pleasing to God (Gen 8:21).

<sup>25</sup> The Greek of John 1:1 *quotes* the Hebrew of Gen 1:1, as suggested by the LXX — which like the NT has the form Ἐν ἀρχῇ. (Genesis and John are the only two Biblical books which open in this identical way). But the expression’s value is transformed by its use in John 1 so that it refers to a *new beginning*. That this is the case is shown by the OT use of the concept of ‘beginning’, a use which sometimes involves the same Hebrew term from Gen 1:1 (and by the same token, the LXX term in Gen 1:1). This use is a *re-use* in a fresh application of the concept. The purpose in this is to get us to see the new context in a Genesis light.

1) This opening is *retrospective* (John is writing years after the beginning of the ministry), for in the rest of the Gospel he describes a beginning which is *at* the baptism and ministry of Christ (John 2:11; 6:64; 8:25; 15:27; 16:4).<sup>26</sup>

2) And so in the first Epistle of John we read,

That which was from the beginning,<sup>27</sup> which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of Life...<sup>28</sup> 1 John 1:1 (KJV revised); cf. 2:7, 3:11<sup>29</sup>

This is the beginning, which is the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It involved the apostles and it contrasts with the Genesis beginning, because from this beginning, a man had been seen and heard - a man who was the Word of Life and the embodiment of the Wisdom of God.

3) Both John and Mark (Mark 1:1) start their Gospels with the expression ‘...*beginning*...’. Both omit the birth stories, and focus directly on the beginning of the ministry of the Gospel. Both first describe the ministry of John and then the start of the ministry of Christ, which *began* when he was about thirty years old (Luke 3:23).<sup>30</sup>

4) Luke confirms the view of an end and a beginning at this time,

The Law and the Prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it. Luke 16:16 (KJV); cf. Acts 1:22

The expression ‘enter (presseth) into [the kingdom of God]’ is unusual, but it is carefully chosen to connect up with the concept of *entry into God’s rest* or entry into the land of promise (Heb 3:11, 18). This was the thrust of the preaching of Christ: the kingdom of God was near, in type it was as if they were at Kadesh-Barnea, near to the Promised Land; the appeal was ‘to enter’, but they refused.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> The expression ‘the beginning’ does not refer to a particular day or week, but rather it is that undefined period of time which the apostles thought of as ‘the beginning’ of the Gospel.

<sup>27</sup> The expression ‘from the beginning’ (1 John 1:1) is taken from Proverbs 8:23 but this quotation is by way of an allusion. The quotation of itself does not establish a time frame for ‘the beginning’, because it could be a comparison between two time frames: a comparison between the Genesis beginning and the Gospel beginning. Handling and seeing clearly invokes a physical reference for the expression ‘the Word of Life’ and therefore this is a title for Jesus.

<sup>28</sup> The title ‘Word of Life’ is an exposition of ‘the Word’ of John 1 and its juxtaposition with the ‘life’ that was created by him as described in John 1:3-4. In this way 1 John 1:1-4 shows that John 1:1 refers to Jesus.

<sup>29</sup> Notice here that John is quoting from Isa 64:4: he quarries the following concepts *in order* from the Isaiah text — *from the beginning, hearing, and seeing* — ‘For since the beginning of the world [men] have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, besides thee, [what] he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him’. John is pointing to a man who did wait for God and who had been seen and heard by them (the apostles) ‘from the beginning’.

<sup>30</sup> The Greek for ‘began’ here (ἀρχόμενος) is unusual, indicating that Christ ‘made a beginning’ when he was thirty years old.

<sup>31</sup> Entry into the tabernacle and entry into the congregation of the Lord are parallel kinds of entry. These are types of the kingdom of heaven.

5) Luke is the Gospel writer who was concerned to stress that he had enquired of those ‘who from the *beginning* were eyewitnesses and ministers of **the word**’ (Luke 1:2).

6) The apostles clearly had a conviction that the preaching of the word began at a certain point in time:

...all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us... Acts 1:21-22 (KJV)

The word which [God] sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ...That word, [I say], ye know, which was published throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached... Acts 10:36-37 (KJV)<sup>32</sup>

How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was conformed unto us by them that heard [him]... Heb 2:3 (KJV); cf. John 19:39

7) Jesus was the ‘beginner’ and finisher of the Christian faith (Heb 12:2, KJV mg.).

Looking through the NT, this is the only beginning<sup>33</sup> which is stressed sufficiently to make it *the beginning at that time*, and it is the beginning that best *fits* the main perspective of John 1.<sup>34</sup>

### The Structure of John's Prologue

How do we know that the Gospel of John has a ‘prologue’? What do we mean by the word ‘prologue’? The opening verses of the first chapter are made up of statements about such topics as the Word, John the Baptist, the Light, and the Law. But are all of these statements part of a prologue? Does such a prologue end in vv. 6, 14 or 18? When does John begin *narrating* his story? Where scholars demarcate the prologue is important to our discussion of this chapter and Trinitarian misinterpretation.

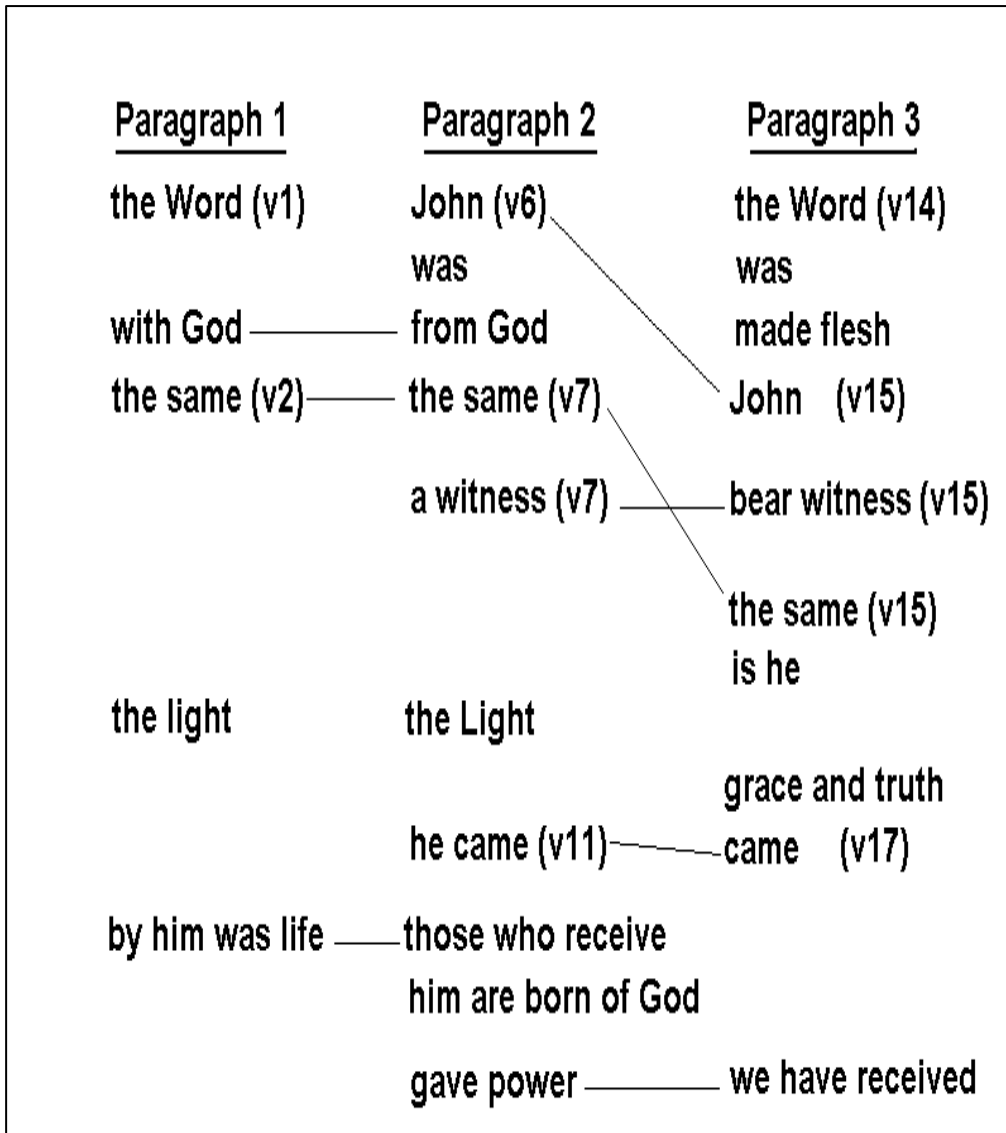
It is important to see how the opening verses of John are structured. Some commentators turn vv. 2-13 into a kind of parenthesis, because they focus on the mention of the Word in v. 1 and v. 14 and connect these two verses together in a kind of sequence — in the beginning was the Word and then the Word was made flesh. The bedrock of the doctrine of the incarnation is this sequence, and this concentration on v. 1 and v. 14 has the effect of relegating vv. 2 to 13 into a kind of parenthesis. But this misunderstands the relationship between the sentences and phrases of these opening verses. The main pattern is a threefold paragraph structure, see Figure 1.

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<sup>32</sup> Compare (but contrast) Heb 6:1, (KJV mg.), which reads, ‘the word of the beginning of Christ’

<sup>33</sup> Note carefully the *historical* argument: as time passes the length of a beginning stretches. A few years after the death of Christ, the apostles look upon the start of Christ’s ministry as ‘the beginning’; some several thousand years on, the ‘beginning’ becomes the ministry of Christ as a whole.

<sup>34</sup> The nature of typology is such that the information we have on the anti-type enlarges our knowledge about the type. As a result, we can profitably place the major beginnings of God’s purpose (Creation, Flood, Exodus, and the Gospel) in parallel columns. Various parts of the Scripture will be *mainly* about one beginning or another, but this does not exclude our use of later parts of Scripture to teach about earlier events. So it’s perfectly possible to think of passages about the New Creation, and ask how that information is to be placed into the context of the Genesis or Exodus beginning.



**Figure 1**

These paragraphs are collections of sentences grouped according to their focus. The first paragraph (vv. 1-5) is concerned with the relationship between the Word and the New Creation. The second paragraph (vv. 6-13) is a contrast between Jesus and John. The last paragraph (vv. 14-18) is about the fulness of Jesus in contrast to the Law. There are points in each paragraph which 'hold' each of them together as coherent wholes.

The paragraphs (starting in v. 1, v. 6, and v. 14) are indicated by the fact that they introduce two different individuals — firstly, the Word (v. 1), then John the Baptist (v. 6), and then the Word again (v. 14). The two different subjects mark the beginning of their respective paragraphs, and each paragraph contains a very different focus. The first paragraph is about the Word and the creation of all things. The second paragraph is about the Light and the World, and John's witness to the Light. Even though Jesus is both the anti-typical Word and the anti-typical Light, we must still recognise the different focus of this second paragraph. The third paragraph begins in v. 14; we can see this in the way that the apostle John has tied v. 14 to v. 18 with common expressions. He begins the paragraph using expressions such as 'only begotten' and 'of the Father'; and he

rounds off the paragraph by repeating these expressions (v. 18). Over and above this, we can see that this third paragraph has a very tight focus upon the theme of fulness and grace in contrast to the Law, and this focus begins in v. 14.<sup>35</sup> Although the opening verses have this paragraph structure, there are points of contact between the paragraphs, and these are shown in Figure 1.

### Before John the Baptist

One reason why commentators have thought that vv. 2-13 of John 1 are a parenthesis is the repetition in v. 2, 'the same was in the beginning with God'. What does this mean? Linking v. 2 and v. 7 (and translating the Greek consistently) shows the purpose of this repetition:

"The same<sup>36</sup> was in the beginning with God" John 1:2

"The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light..." John 1:7

Both uses of 'the same' occur in the same *position* in the development of thought in each paragraph,<sup>37</sup> and the purpose is to stress two different and contrasting roles:

- 'This one was in the beginning' v. 2.
- 'This one came for a witness' v. 7.

There was a need for this stress, since part of the aim in John 1 is to define both John the Baptist and Jesus and their relationship to one another. In defining these roles, John the Baptist's words of witness are repeated *no less than three times*. This priority is reflected in v. 2: it is Jesus, 'this one', who was in the beginning with God, and *not* John the Baptist. This second verse then is not an incomprehensible repetition, but part of the text's contrast between Jesus and John the Baptist, a contrast made repeatedly.

Someone might say, but surely John the Baptist was with God in the beginning; he was a faithful prophet full of the holy Spirit and God was with him. The question arises from the English translation 'with' which doesn't carry any particular point of contrast between Jesus and John. It is only when we render the Greek, πρὸς τὸν θεόν, as 'towards God' and see a statement about mediatorship that we see how Jesus was unique in respect of John.

There is some evidence to support the view that the people (and their leaders) were confused over John the Baptist and Jesus, as to exactly who was the Messiah. Today, we have no doubt, but it is worthwhile trying to think ourselves into the first century frame of mind, and ask ourselves: *What is the relationship between these two prophets, who is the greater?* Imagine we are talking with a disciple of John the Baptist. What would we think if he made the following points?

1) John was pre-announced by an angel, just like Jesus (Luke 1:13). He was declared to be a 'great' prophet (Luke 1:15).

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<sup>35</sup> Notice that this third paragraph begins with the Word like v. 1, and then mentions John's witness like v. 6-7, i.e. the same sequence of thought is followed.

<sup>36</sup> This is just the ordinary Greek for 'he' or 'this one'; hence, the KJV of v. 15 has 'this was he'.

<sup>37</sup> The same expression occurs in the third paragraph, also in its second sentence. This reads, "The same was he of whom I spake..." (John 1:15) This shows that each paragraph is concerned to correctly identify Jesus distinctly from John. The Gospel writer is clearly picking up John the Baptist's *stress* on Jesus' identity, and using the same Greek word (in vv. 2, 6 and 15) to make this link.

2) John's childhood is described in terms very similar to that of Jesus, and these terms are picked up from the type of Samuel (Luke 2:80, 3:52, cf. 1 Sam 3:19).

3) John came first, and *he* baptized Jesus (Matt 3:13), so was he greater?

4) His style was that of Elijah (Matt 11:14), who was the great prophet of the OT, while Jesus' style fitted Elisha.

5) The Law and the prophets were until John, who therefore represented the beginning of a new phase in God's purpose (Matt 11:13).

6) John's ministry had a great impact (Luke 1:16, 3:3), he preached about things of which we have no record (Luke 3:18).

7) Many were baptized by John, and they were not re-baptized by Jesus' disciples (Luke 7:29).

8) John's message was much like the message of Jesus. He preached repentance and baptism for the remission of sins. He inveighed against any confidence in the Jews' natural lineage from Abraham (Luke 3:8).

9) The people wondered whether he was the Christ (Mark 1:4, Luke 3:15).

10) Jesus said that no prophet born of woman was greater than John, and the people thought of him as *that prophet* (Matt 21:26, Mark 11:32, cf. Deut 18:15).

11) The people thought that Jesus might have been a resurrected *John the Baptist* (Matt 14:2, 16:14).

12) John had his own band of disciples, whom he taught as a master (Luke 5:33, 11:1, Acts 19:1). These points show that there was a clear need to state the relationship between John and Jesus, and establish Jesus as the Messiah. This was a burning requirement in the presentation of the Gospel, because all the people venerated John as a prophet.<sup>38</sup>

The opening chapter of John's Gospel therefore emphasizes the priority of Jesus over John the Baptist:<sup>39</sup>

..for he was before me...He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me...After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. John 1:15, 27, 30 (KJV)

It is possible to mistake this emphasis by inferring that Christ was 'before' John in time, as if to say that he was a pre-existent being in heaven. But to understand John's message, we need to look at its OT background. Are there any OT types behind John's testimony?

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<sup>38</sup> Dating the Gospel of John is another subject, but this would be one argument for an early date in the later thirties or early forties C.E.

<sup>39</sup> This requirement is fulfilled in various ways, for example, although we read 'there was a man...whose name was John' (v. 6), this mention of John's *name* contrasts with the role given to Christ's name - 'to them gave he power...even to them that believe on his *name*' (v. 12).

John's testimony (John 1:30) was 'after me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me' (KJV). The Greek uses two different words for 'before' here (ἐμπροσθέν and πρῶτός), which mean, roughly, 'before in place' and 'first' respectively. Furthermore, the Greek for 'preferred' is literally 'became' (γέγονεν), and the Greek for 'man' (ἄνθρωπος) is very often used when referring to a husband. A literal rendering of John's testimony therefore could just as well be, 'after me cometh a husband, who has become before me, for he was first of me'. In addition to this John states that he was not worthy to unloose the Messiah's shoe latches (John 1:27).<sup>40</sup>

A main stress in John's testimony is a 'before...after' relationship - he says that one coming after him had become before him. This use of 'after' is often used in contexts denoting genealogical relationships.<sup>41</sup> It is reasonable to suggest that Jesus was 'after' John in the sense that he was after him in descent - a younger cousin. But John's testimony is that Jesus 'became before him'. How so?

Jacob was a man who came 'after' Esau (Gen 25:26), and later he 'became before him', when he sold his birthright to Jacob. Esau was a man of the earth, earthy — typical of the first Adam. Jacob however, was typical of the second Adam. The privileges of the firstborn were sought by him. These included among other things, wealth and the family inheritance; the duties of priesthood, and responsibility to act as redeemer to the name of a dead brother. So this is one example of someone being 'after' and then becoming 'before'. Turning to the story of Ruth there is another example of the first giving way to the second:

- Naomi needed a redeemer (Ruth 4:14) to raise up the name of the dead (Ruth 4:5) according to the law. Jesus was a redeemer who was willing to raise up the name of the dead.
- Boaz was a kinsman but there was a 'nearer' kinsman before him; he was 'after' that kinsman (Ruth 4:4). John and Jesus were kinsmen. John was before Jesus who was 'after' him.
- The nearer kinsman was unwilling to be a husband, but after him there was a husband — Boaz. John was not the redeemer or the bridegroom, he was (part of) the lover of the bridegroom (John 3:29); Jesus was the husband.
- The nearer kinsman relinquished his right and transferred his rights to Boaz by taking off his shoe, he made Boaz *first* kinsman in this transaction. John the Baptist pronounced himself unworthy to untie Messiah's shoe latches, and declared that he must decrease; and he pointed to Christ.

In both these cases there is a common pattern of the second man<sup>42</sup> becoming the first man. This pattern is reflected in Paul's words that Christ was a 'second' man. Both cases also illustrate how the second man was 'first *of me*', to use John the Baptist's own words: Jacob was first *of* Esau, and Boaz was first *of* his near kinsman.

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<sup>40</sup> The KJV has 'preferred' because it is trying to make sense of two Greek words in combination — the Greek word for 'become' and the Greek word meaning 'before' in a spatial sense. My construction is neutral in using 'after me cometh a husband, who has become before me, for he was first of me', however, I am not averse to 'preferred' since the typology is one that involves position in a family structure.

<sup>41</sup> See Gen 17:6-10; Deut 1:8; Josh 22:27; Ruth 4:4; 1 Kgs 3:12; 2 Chron 1:12; Ecc 4:16; Isa 43:10; Acts 7:45.

<sup>42</sup> There are a number of 'second man' types in the OT

John is not saying Christ was before him in time, but rather alluding to that OT pattern of a first man giving way to a second man, where the 'first' man has a part in the handover to the second man.<sup>43 44</sup>

### The Word made Flesh

We have said that some commentators see a *sequence* in the flow of the narrative from v. 1 to v. 14, rather than a separate third paragraph beginning at v. 14. This is why they are led to say that v. 2 to v. 13 is a single parenthesis:

In the beginning was the Word...and the Word was made flesh<sup>45</sup> and tabernacled (KJV dwelt) amongst us..." John 1:1, 14 (KJV revised)

This sequence is interpreted as saying that there was a 'time' before the Word was made or became flesh. And so it is argued that the Word *existed* before being made flesh. This view envisages that the person of the Word of God existed in heaven before his birth. To avoid this conclusion, an ancient proposal is that the Word *as God's purpose* was in the beginning, and it was this that was made flesh.

God has had a purpose from the beginning with the earth, but this does not mean that this is what John describes by saying 'In the beginning was the Word'. The Word was *towards* God and was God, and these are things we would say of a *person*.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, the typical basis for this language is the role and position that Moses had with the nation of Israel. So there does not seem to be a *biblical case* for arguing that the Word is the purpose of God. This however does not deny the attractiveness of the idea that the purpose of God became flesh in Christ; in Christ all the promises of God are yes!

But before taking this line of exposition, we should not concede that there *is* a sequence in *time* from v. 1 to v. 14. Instead of seeing a sequence from a beginning (v. 1) to a later event (v. 14) — the Word becoming flesh, we can see that the *reverse is the case*: the time reference for John 1:14 is the birth of Christ, and the time reference for John 1:1 is the beginning of the ministry.

The first indicator that v. 14 concerns the birth of Christ is the immediately following remark, 'we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only *begotten* of the Father'. A second pointer is that v. 14 follows v. 13 which talks of being born of the will of God, and this connects to the thought of being begotten of the Father, so that those who are adopted sons are seen to be born upon the same principle as the Son of God - through the will of God (Jms 1:18).

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<sup>43</sup> The stress on 'before me' contrasts with Malachi 'Behold I send my messenger *before thy face*' (Mal 3:1).

<sup>44</sup> This places John's testimony after Jesus' baptism and wilderness temptation.

<sup>45</sup> Some translations have 'became flesh', and this might lend support to the suggestion that the Word of himself decided to become flesh, but the sense is not that of a subject acting upon himself. It is the narrator's perspective of what was done *by God* i.e. the Word was made flesh by God.

<sup>46</sup> A common suggestion about John 1 is that the language of personification is used of the Word. If something like the purpose of God is the reference of 'the Word', then it could be argued that this is a personification. Support for such a view can be found in the personification of wisdom in Proverbs, or in the personification of the Word of God in the OT or contemporary Jewish Targums.

It is perhaps unusual to read that the Word was *made* flesh, since this is not something we would say of our own children when they are delivered on a maternity ward.<sup>47</sup> We might have expected to read, ‘and the word was born’, but that Jesus was *made flesh* was clearly an emphasis required by the early heresy that bombarded the church, viz. that Christ had *not* come in the flesh (1 John 4:1-3; 2 John v. 7).<sup>48</sup> This heresy was also combated by Paul in his letters. Consequently, in the Gospel, John remarks, ‘and the Word was made flesh’ (by God).<sup>49</sup>

God has formed men in the past. Adam was the first man to be *made* (Gen 2:7), and he was made out of the dust of the ground. If Christ is the second Adam, it is *part of this typology* to think of him as being made, just as Adam was made or formed. It is like God remarking to Jeremiah that he was known before he was formed in the womb. Christ was known before he was formed in the womb, and he was made flesh *by God*. This emphasis is needed because Christ was born through the operation of the Holy Spirit, he was not a *mere* man, but to block any idea that Christ was not like us, the apostles constantly had to stress his humanity. It is perhaps an irony that passages that stress his humanity are inverted by Trinitarians so that they become expressions of the incarnation of God (the Son), i.e. expressions of his *deity*.

We might query whether John says the Word *became* flesh as many translations have it; translations influenced by Trinitarian thinking. The Greek is very common (γίνομαι) and it occurs in several places in John 1 where it is usually translated with the verb ‘to make’:

All things were made (ἐγένετο) by him; and without him was not anything made (ἐγένετο). That which was made was life in him. John 1:3-4 (KJV revised)

He was in the world, and the world was made (ἐγένετο) by him, and the world knew him not. John 1:10 (KJV)

Set against these texts, ‘the Word was made flesh’ is a contrast and preferable to ‘became’ flesh.

Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh... Rom 1:3 (KJV)

As well as the Genesis beginning, John alludes to the Exodus beginning in that the Word was made flesh and *tabernacled* amongst the disciples.<sup>50</sup> The allusion to the tabernacle forces us to see v. 14 in an Exodus light. But what is it for the Word to tabernacle amongst the disciples?

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<sup>47</sup> We do say, ‘you should not *bring* a child *into* this world’ which is an odd idiom. Where do we bring him from? Do we drag him kicking and screaming *into* the world? Since God (unlike us) *is* outside the world, is not it natural for him (unlike us) to say, ‘I have *sent* my child *into* the world’.

<sup>48</sup> The Letter to the Hebrews states that Christ Jesus was faithful to him that ‘made him’ (Heb 3:2, KJV mg.).

<sup>49</sup> In the context of the Genesis creation the Word of God went forth and it also became ‘flesh’ in a figure. God said ‘let there be light’ and there was light, *and so on*. This is equivalent - the Word becoming something. So in Genesis 2, when God says, ‘let us make man in our image’, and this utterance becomes reality, *this word does* become flesh. This makes Adam the first incarnation of the Word.

<sup>50</sup> I am not saying here that ‘the Word was made flesh’ means ‘the Word was made (of) flesh’, because ‘(of) flesh’ is not reflected in the meaning of the Greek. Such an interpretation just makes ‘the Word was made flesh’ a description of Jesus’ nature, but I see v. 14 as a description of his making.

The idea of ‘dwelling’ is not unusual, but the choice of word here is rare (σκηνώ) and related to the idea of dwelling in a tent. We could translate ‘the Word was made flesh and dwelt in a tent amongst us’ and the connection to the Tabernacle in the wilderness will become apparent. The verb is used elsewhere in the NT in Revelation (another book by John),

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and he will dwelt (σκηνώ) with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, *and be* their God. Rev 21:3 (KJV)

This text is unusual in saying that God tabernacles with men on earth; in the other uses of the verb, such tent-dwelling is for those in heaven (Rev 7:15; 12:12; 13:6).

Israel were redeemed from Egypt and given new life, but they rebelled and some rejected their salvation. It was then that the tribe of Levi was selected out from among them, because of their faithfulness. It was after this, and Moses’ intercession, that the Lord agreed to go among them as they journeyed to conquer the land. A tabernacle was built and the angel of God’s presence dwelt with the people (Exod 33:14; Isa 63:9) in that tent. This angel is a type of Christ dwelling with the people. Typically, the angel was made flesh when he dwelt in the goat-haired<sup>51</sup> tabernacle among the children of Israel.

Why would the Angel of the Presence be a type of Christ? The concept of the Word is a concept that implies *where God is* as well as *what God says*. Thus, the Word manifests God and implies his presence; (hence, ‘the Word was God’). During the Exodus period, the Angel of the Presence was the voice of God (e.g. Exod 3:18; 5:2; 15:26; 19:5; 23:21) and the manifestation of God; in NT times this was Christ. The typological pattern is laid out in Table 3.

John 1	Exodus
A man sent v. 6	I will send thee Exod 3:10
Whose name was John v. 6	I know thee by name Exod 34:12, 17
To bear witness of the Light v. 7	Moses’ testimony to the Angel of the Lord
Lighteth every man v. 9	Pillar of Fire
Many received him not, but some received him vv. 11-12	Some murmured but not Levi
Believe on his name v. 12	Levi was faithful
Become sons of God v. 12	Adoption of Levi as the priestly tribe Exod 32:26
Dwelt among us v. 14	Go thou amongst us Exod 34:9 My presence shall go with you Exod 33:14
Word made flesh and tabernacled v. 14	Angel of the Presence in the tabernacle Exod 40:34; Isa 63:9
We beheld his glory v. 14	Show me thy glory Exod 33:18 Moses face shone Exod 34:29

**Table 3**

Why associate the title, ‘the Word’, with the ideas of the presence of God? The answer lies not only in the idea of *presence*, and not only in the idea of *what is spoken*, but also in the notion of a

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<sup>51</sup> Just as the Angel of the Presence came and dwelt in a goat-haired tent, so too Jacob put on goat-haired skins to deceive Isaac; both types illustrate the same thing.

*place* - the place of God's presence, and this is brought out when we look at, not the tabernacle, but the temple. The title, 'the Word of God', has another basis in the distinctive use of 'the Oracle' or 'the Word' to describe the Holy of Holies in Solomon's temple. The Hebrew word for 'the Oracle' (רַבִּיר) is unique to the Holy of Holies, and means 'word'. This was a *place* where God chose to dwell, and a *place* from which God chose to speak. It was the same with Christ:

Destroy this temple, and in three days I<sup>52</sup> will raise it up. John 2:19 (KJV)<sup>53</sup>

Behold the tabernacle of God is with men... Rev 21:2 (KJV)

Jesus was not only the antitype to the Angel of the Presence; he was the antitypical tabernacle and temple. He was a temple of God's presence, and his cleansing of the temple is meant as an object lesson of the fact that God was *in Christ*. He was the new Bethel, the house of God to which angels would ascend and descend (Gen 28:17; John 1:51). Around this place Solomon constructed 'ribs' or 'chambers', and the use of this word goes back to Genesis 2 when we are told that Eve was constructed out of the 'rib' (same word) of Adam. This is the body around the Holy of Holies — of one spirit with the Holy of Holies (cf. Col 2:9).

This concept of the *place* of God's presence is another key to John 1. This place was made flesh, for God manifested himself in flesh (1 Tim 3:16).<sup>54</sup> The use of the title 'the Word' points to a connection with the first temple, as well as going back to the tabernacle and Genesis.<sup>55 56</sup>

So it is that we can often interpret a stretch of language like the opening verses of John as having different levels of meaning. This is the nature of typology and meaning in the Scriptures — it is multi-faceted and multi-layered. Ingredients of meaning are drawn from all over the Scriptures to make up a basis for reflection upon the things of God.

### *And the Word was God*

How are we to think of the statement, 'the Word was God'? The Trinitarian proposal is that this shows that Christ is 'fully God', the second person of the Trinity. A counter proposal is that the Greek should be translated by 'the Word was *a* God', because the definite article is absent in the Greek. Such a counter proposal is not decisive, because a noun like 'θεός' ('God') may be used without an article before the verb 'to be'.<sup>57</sup> Another proposal is that the statement means, 'the Word was divine'. The problem with this proposal is that 'divine' is descriptive, and a different (but related) Greek word is translated 'divine', viz. 'θεῖος'. This word is found in the NT in Acts 17:29 and 2 Peter 1:3. Would John have used this word if he had meant to convey a point about the divinity of Christ?

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<sup>52</sup> This 'I' here is an example of God speaking through Christ, as a prophet declares the words of God.

<sup>53</sup> As Hebrews states, the flesh of Christ was the *veil* (Heb 10:20) enclosing the place of God's presence. This veil was done away with when Christ destroyed the flesh in his death.

<sup>54</sup> When I say that God manifested himself in flesh, I do not mean that God the Father placed himself in the body of Jesus of Nazareth. 'God manifested himself' in Jesus *while remaining in heaven*.

<sup>55</sup> It is worth pointing out that the ideas of a place where God dwelt, his actual presence, and the voice of God are all ingredients of the Garden of Eden. This is a parallelism we cannot explore at this point.

<sup>56</sup> Hence, in Genesis 1, there is not only what God says, but also 'the Spirit of God hovering over creation' (Gen 1:2).

<sup>57</sup> For example, see John 1:50; 10:24; 19:21; 1 John 4:8.

We have argued that John alludes to Moses when describing Jesus as ‘with (towards) God’, and when saying of Jesus that he ‘was God’. This double allusion is important because it helps us see why John wants to couple a description of Jesus as God with the time frame of the beginning. This description of Moses as God (Exod 4:16; 7:1) was also in a beginning. It was at *the beginning of the Exodus* when Moses first went to Pharaoh, and it was both in his message and in his miracle working that he was God. With John writing and looking back to the beginning of the Gospel, we can readily see his picture of Christ as one like Moses, powerful in both word and deed.

*There is however another basis for saying Jesus was God — he is not the creator of the Genesis creation, but he is a creator (with his Father) of the New Creation.*

Saying a person was God does not necessarily mean they have divine nature. It does not necessarily mean that they are of the same substance as God the Father. It does not have to imply that we believe that there is a number of co-equal persons of which the Son is one. It all depends on how we view the predication ‘was God’ to Jesus. A person like an angel could bear the divine (Hebrew) name (‘Yahweh’). A person with the role and function of a creator of a New Creation could properly be described as God (cf. John 20:28), but this does not mean that we need to construct a Trinitarian doctrine on this basis. If Christ has the role and function of God in respect of the New Creation and, if like Moses, all power and authority has been given unto him, it is correct to think of him as God in this framework. Because it is easy to misconstrue what John means, perhaps it would be a better translation to render the Greek of John 1:1 in this way:

“...and the Word was ‘God’...”<sup>58</sup>

This verse is used as a proof-text in the doctrine of the Trinity, but there is just a handful of verses where the title ‘God’ is applied to Christ, and there are over a thousand places where God the Father is called ‘God’ in the New Testament. The imbalance of evidence against the doctrine of the Trinity is striking, and for an impartial enquirer, it is decisive.

## Conclusion

J. D. G. Dunn observes that “that only in the Fourth Gospel can we speak of a doctrine of the incarnation”.<sup>59</sup> If this is the case, the doctrine is without any foundation. Jesus is the Word who

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<sup>58</sup> The word *theos* occurs in the expressions, ‘was toward God’ and ‘was God’. The first predicate (as it is used) conveys the ideas of mediatorship and priesthood between man and God the Father (1 Tim 2:5). The second predicate conveys some sort of identity between *logos* and *theos*. It is a mistake to simply assume that the reference of ‘God’ is the same in the two expressions ‘was toward God’ and ‘was God’. The first predicate (*...was toward...*) conveys a two-way relation that allows us to identify two referents for the associated terms. The second predicate is different, consisting of ‘x was God’. We should therefore not assume that John is asserting an identity. The first reason for exercising caution here is John’s previous assertion that the Word was toward God and what this implies for the referents of the terms involved. A second reason consists in the fact that John may not be using *theos* as a referring term in ‘...was God’. The mere occurrence of *theos* does not carry the implication that it is used as a referring term. It may be a fundamental part of a predicate, rather than a term slotted into a predicate. This is suggested by the fact that John drops the article in ‘was God’, whereas it had been present in ‘was toward God’. What John is predicating is the role and function of God.

<sup>59</sup> “The doctrine of the incarnation began to emerge when the exalted Christ was spoken of in terms drawn from the Wisdom imagery of pre-Christian Judaism”, J. D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, (London: SCM Press, 1980), 259.

was in the beginning; he was a new Moses, mediating between God and man, and acting as God delivering the people. He was superior in status to John the Baptist, but he was a man, made flesh and born of a woman.