

The importance of logos christology in the gospel of john



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The Importance of the Logos Christology in the Gospel of John John wrote the immortal words of the Prologue into a desperately troubled world. The Romans held most of the known world in their political grasp. The Greeks had infiltrated every part of Jewish life with their philosophies and ways for over 500 years; the Jewish obsession with ethnic purity divided the race even from itself. One key issue Jew and Greek could agree on was the existence of the Logos, though not in the same way. To the Greek, the logos meant thought, reason, and order in the universe.

To the Jew, it meant the spoken word; personal, a real being, the Supreme Mediator. Logos philosophy permeated just about every philosophical conversation as an argument for one side or the other. However, John's logos-inspired Prologue defined succinctly the entire logos from a uniquely Christian perspective: the creative force and reason in the universe that had become flesh in the form of Jesus Christ for the purpose of redeeming mankind back into relationship with the Creator. John, in essence, defines Christ as God's supreme mind embodied in flesh.

John's high Christology reveals a crucial gospel in Graeco-roman times, bringing coherence between the philosophies of both internal (Greek) and external (Jewish) logos functions. In addition, John's presentation represents a clear statement on the pre-existence of Christ, supporting Jesus' preeminent position in the first century as Messiah. The Logos Christology: Connecting Jew & Greek The concept of logos is not a simple one but this essay will attempt to simplify it under the constraint of space.

Depending on viewpoint (either as a Gentile/Greek or a Jew) it would vary greatly in definition but, interestingly, have the same functional ability – creation. The Greeks held that thought was creative, the Jews that the spoken word was creative. The Jews acknowledged that even Pagan philosophers and poets had the “ seeds of truth” generally understood to be the logos. Philo defined it as “ inherent in God – corresponding to reason in man. Logos emanates from God – corresponding the spoken Word as the revelation of thought.

Ultimately, it is the rational order manifested in the visible world” (International Bible Encyclopedia). Philo “...was not an isolated phenomenon, but a spokesman for other like-minded men of his race” (Beasley-Murray, p. liv). Keener, in his commentary on John, states that there were problems with the universally present Logos; it led to pantheism which was intolerable to John as a Christian Jew. The Stoic Logos “ permeated the world, the Johannine Logos is opposed by the world (John 1: 10).

Certain writers recognize the Jewishness of John’s thought process but suggest he employed Greek philosophical terminology to express it to his “ implied audience. ” The implied audience being the Jews; however, John showed great wisdom in his use of logos because he asserts the deity of Christ to the Hellenized Jewish society (Keener, p. 342-343). One must take at least a cursory look at the Graeco-Roman world and some of the more prominent aspects in order to gain a better grasp of John’s audience. The culture emphasizes a disposition to the arts, using the goddess Isis as a frequent subject for frescoes in home-art.

Isis was often portrayed as a savior and the subject of Greek and Roman hymns humanizing her, for “ the destiny of every man then depended on the goddess who, in her love for the suffering, oppressed, imprisoned, and imperiled, became a succor and a savior of mankind. ” It was the Hellenized portrayal of Isis that “ conquered the Mediterranean world. ” (Brenk, quoted in Balch, p 48-49). Graeco-roman society subtly indicated their propensity for a real savior and unknowingly made themselves candidates for receiving Jesus. The unbelieving world displayed their desires and ideals openly on the walls of their halls and homes.

The Jewish dispersion lasted for several hundred years. Consequently, the Jewish social structures of the era were well established into classes: wealthy landowners, priests, scribes and slaves for the most part. Roman citizenship further complicated things. Palestine bustled with an infusion of Greek and Roman influences in everything from food and dress to social norms and practices. A constant consciousness regarding the purity of one’s ethnicity as a Jew: pure, partly-illegitimate, or completely illegitimate, permeated social judgments.

The super-natural constantly evident both in the Greek and Jewish circles as charlatans, pagan priests, magicians, Pharisees and Sadducees vied for attention to their view-points on religion and apocalyptic eschatology. “ The distinction ... between the temporal and spiritual plane, between the political and the religious, among specialized institutions in the different domains of human activity, did not exist in the same way...” (Houtart, p. 22). The first century world perceived as a dangerous and volatile place where socio-

political obedience was expected at the point of a sword, unishable in the most despicable ways for anyone who did not comply.

Logos: The Word Made Flesh; The Word Animated by Spirit In verse 14 of the Prologue, “ And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth,” John states the basis for the embodiment of the Logos. According to the Word Biblical Commentary, the Logos, by becoming flesh, participated in man’s creaturely weakness, the “ characteristic meaning of “ flesh” in the Bible” (pp. 3-14). Here John identifies Christ as first becoming flesh and then identifying Him as the only begotten of the Father, hence God becoming flesh in order to do what man cannot.

The International Critical Commentary of the Gospel of John provides insight into collaborative texts found at Nag Hammadi in 1945. McHugh states the text supports the Jewish logos philosophy, even though it has gnostic overtones, which will not be discussed in this essay. “ when the Word (logos) appeared...it is not a sound alone, but it became a body” (pp. 3). This further corroborates John’s use of the Logos to communicate effectively the idea of thought and reason not only being spoken but becoming, by God’s own choosing, the flesh and blood body of the living Christ; Jew or Greek, anyone familiar with the concept of logos as thought, reason or a creative force becoming substantive and physical would connect with what John proposed as fact. A basic reading of Genesis 1 makes evident that God made everything. Yet John 1 states the Word made everything.

The Bible does not contradict itself; therefore, the only conclusion that can be drawn is that God and the Word are the same. This may come off as simplistic, but scripture declares it to be true. Further, Gundry aptly quotes the Paris Papyrus 574 in succinct contrast of the Jew and Greek views of the logos: the Spirit-animated Word that John describes as being responsible for creation, vs. the internal, silent, unspoken logos of the Greek philosophy which admits it to be living and incorruptible. . god. The Greek document exclaiming, "...God's visible speech, the Word contrasts with the Hellenistic divine title " Silence" (Gundry, p. 266, text and inset). "

From the Jewish perspective, the logos is believed to speak through the prophets and it is accepted that the logos does the speaking. Logos being the Divine Word in action, the " unifying presence of the Logos in scripture... the primary creative agent, the prophet just the vehicle through whom the " word" (logos) presents itself" (Bates, pp. 47-548). When the Hellenized Jews and Gentile Greeks read John's use of the logos, in John 1: 3 & vs. 10 and then read Genesis 1 (where God speaks everything into existence), it only furthered the concept of a completed logos concept: one that begins with Divine Thought, animated by the Spirit of God, embodied by Jesus, who subsequently created all things. The full train-of-thought made clear in a brilliant 'aha!' moment of first century writing by the Apostle. Christ, pre-existent and pre-eminent

Robert Kysar, in *Christology and Controversy*, speaks of John's logos Christology as the " clear echo of Genesis 1: 1", directing the reader to that " supra-temporal first," and that "...amid the creation motif Christ is not spoken of as existing before all creation, but as the first of all creation (pro to <https://assignbuster.com/the-importance-of-logos-christology-in-the-gospel-of-john/>

tokos pases ktiseos) and as the first (arche) of the resurrected. ... are safe in concluding that the author of the prologue is asserting Christ's pre-existence. (p. 4)" Kysar feels the Prologue pushes the existence of Christ as logos way past the norms of human imagination.

Isaiah 44 and 45 give a tremendous example of the Judaic Logos as a declaration: 44: 6 Thus saith the Lord...I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God. 44: 8 Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any. 45: 3 I, the Lord...am the God of Israel. 45: 5 I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: 45: 6 That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me.

I am the Lord, and there is none else. 5: 7 I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lorddo all these things. 45: 14 Thus saith the Lord... they shall make supplication unto thee, saying, Surely God is in thee; and there is none else, there is no God. 45: 15 Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour. (King James Version)

In these key scriptures every function of the logos is defined both as thought and creation and all attributed to the LordHimself; there is " none beside" him. From this the position of the Logos (Christ) is elevated to being virtually indistinguishable from the Father.

Christ is not beside him: He is Him in embodied form, having been always with the Father (John 1: 1) and having made all (John 1: 10) because He was God (John 1: 1). In essence, John's elevation of the Christ to equality with, or existence within, the Father was the culmination of the Old Testament

concept of the logos as creative Word without violating the one-ness of God. It is tragic, really, that the Jewish world both understood this and yet chose not to embrace Jesus as the Word-made-flesh because He did not fit their political aspirations.

On the other hand, the Greeks readily accepted Jesus because they 1) had an understanding of logos in an incomplete form (thought, reason, Silence) and 2) were looking for a savior as much as the Jews were, as discussed earlier in this essay. " John identifies Jesus with figures featured in the Old Testament and Jewish apocalyptic expectations: the Servant of God...the apocalyptic lamb...the King of Israel...the Holy One of God..." and does so in a fundamental order in the Prologue to make it easy for the Jew to identify the Christ as the Savior (Baker, p. lxx).

The world of the first century hints at desperation for a savior regardless of culture - everyone knew the socio-political landscape was squeezing the life out of the soul of mankind and something had to change. The Graeco-roman world groaned under the burden of knowledge; education in philosophy, art and history were a part of everyday life...but for what? Underneath it all, the resonant vibration of the Logos bubbled up from Jewish antiquity and Greek antique philosophy until it culminated in the Prologue of John in his revelatory Gospel: Jesus revealed as the embodied Logos.

The Greek logos that permeated their thoughts and reason now come into their world by reason of the Word made flesh, not " of" the world, but definitely now in it. John's unique presentation of the Logos as Christ, using language understandable to both Jew and Greek, made the difference in

understanding Him: as pre-existent to the creation of everything else God made. John's use of Logos helped connect the limited, and silence-based, Greek philosophy to the more complete Jewish understanding of the Logos as Supreme Being, Incarnate Word, ultimately, Creator and most importantly, by extension, Savior of all.