

Exegetical Analysis of John 1:1-5

The Deity of Christ

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Juxtaposition of John 1:1-5 Between the MGNT and Major English, Spanish, and Italian Translations

MGNT	NKJ (EN)	ESV (EN)	NASB (EN)	RVA-2015 (SPA)	NR-2006 (ITA)
<p>Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος,</p> <p>καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦ πρὸς τὸν θεόν,</p> <p>καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν θεὸς</p>	<p>In the beginning was the Word,</p> <p>and the Word was with God,</p> <p>and the Word was God.</p>	<p>In the beginning was the Word,</p> <p>and the Word was with God,</p> <p>and the Word was God.</p>	<p>In the beginning was the Word,</p> <p>and the Word was with God,</p> <p>and the Word was God.</p>	<p>En el principio era el Verbo,</p> <p>el Verbo estaba con Dios</p> <p>y el Verbo era Dios.</p>	<p>Nel principio era la Parola,</p> <p>la Parola era con Dio,</p> <p>e la Parola era Dio.</p>
<p>οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν.</p>	<p>He was in the beginning with God.</p>	<p>He was in the beginning with God.</p>	<p>He was in the beginning with God.</p>	<p>Este estaba en el principio con Dios.</p>	<p>Essa era nel principio con Dio.</p>
<p>πάντα ἐγένετο δι' αὐτοῦ,</p> <p>καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ οὐδὲ ἓν ἐγένετο</p> <p>ὃ γέγονεν.</p>	<p>All things were made through Him,</p> <p>and without Him nothing was made</p> <p>that was made.</p>	<p>All things were made through him,</p> <p>and without him was not any thing made</p> <p>that was made.</p>	<p>All things came into being through Him,</p> <p>and apart from Him not even one thing came into being</p> <p>that has come into being.</p>	<p>Todas las cosas por medio de él fueron hechas,</p> <p>y sin él nada de lo que ha sido hecho</p> <p>fue hecho.</p>	<p>Ogni cosa è stata fatta per mezzo di lei,</p> <p>e senza di lei neppure una delle cose fatte</p> <p>è stata fatta.</p>
<p>ἐν αὐτῷ ἦν ζωὴ,</p> <p>καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων.</p>	<p>In Him was life,</p> <p>and the life was the light of men</p>	<p>In him was life,</p> <p>and the life was the light of men.</p>	<p>In Him was life,</p> <p>and the life was the Light of mankind.</p>	<p>En él estaba la vida,</p> <p>y la vida era la luz de los hombres.</p>	<p>In lei era la vita,</p> <p>e la vita era la luce degli uomini.</p>
<p>Καὶ τὸ φῶς φαίνει ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ,</p> <p>καὶ ἡ σκοτία οὐ κατέλαβεν αὐτὸ</p>	<p>And the light shines in the darkness,</p> <p>and the darkness did not comprehend it.</p>	<p>The light shines in the darkness,</p> <p>and the darkness has not overcome it.</p>	<p>And the Light shines in the darkness,</p> <p>and the darkness did not grasp it.</p>	<p>La luz resplandece en las tinieblas,</p> <p>y las tinieblas no la dominaron.</p>	<p>La luce splende nelle tenebre,</p> <p>e le tenebre non l'hanno sopraffatta.</p>

Introduction

The goal of this paper is to exegetically explore the opening verses of the Johannine Gospel (John 1:1-5) in order to elucidate the Christological doctrine of Christ's divinity and pre-existence. The paper will further explore the connections between the Johannine portrayal of the Word and the description of the Creative Word in the Genesis creation narrative. By analyzing these parallels between the Word in John and the Word in Genesis, it will be stipulated that the two descriptions correspond to the same Person. Thus establishing the idea that the Word in John's prologue is the same creative Word that spoke the world into existence in Genesis, namely God Himself.

Christological Teaching of the Text

The Gospel according to John has endured the intense scrutiny of thousands of minds throughout dozens of centuries, yet, its Spiritual riches and Theological significance remain unextracted to fullness. Indeed, great is the mystery of godliness (1 Tim. 3:16). The particular literary nature of the Johannine Testament has allowed it to be distinguished from the rest of the Gospels since the early years of the New Testament Canon. A particular discriminative element has been its portrayal of the person of Christ. This is especially true of John's introduction to his letter, often titled "The Prologue," which encompasses the first eighteen verses of the book. Of special significance are the first five verses of this section, a passage that some have come to label "The Preamble."¹ In this passage, the apostle John develops some of the sweetest and most

¹ J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 42.

profound teachings regarding the Divinity of Jesus Christ.² It is clear from this passage that John deems it very important that his audience possess a clear understanding of who Christ is—namely YHWH incarnate³— before he develops his epistle. John’s description of the person of Christ concentrates on His divine attributes. The apostle knows that his letter will be understood only if his audience is under the clear idea that Jesus Christ is God. He wants to assure the reader that he is not introducing a new god, but rather expanding on the knowledge of the God from the Hebrew Scriptures. For this reason, he writes an introduction to his letter that aims to settle this from the outset.⁴

Exegetical Analysis

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος

The primary focus of the gospel of John is to reveal the identity of Jesus Christ. His gospel is a gospel of revelation.⁵ For this reason, he writes the commencing words of his introduction in a form that makes it almost impossible to read the first sentence without being transported to Genesis 1:1.⁶ In the beginning, before God created the world, “the Word already was into being”⁷ (Jn. 8:58). In other words, John is delivering that the existence of the Word

² Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2012), n.p.

³ Charles A. Gieschen, “The YHWH Christology of the Gospel of John,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 85, no. 1 (January 2021), 10.

⁴ Jan G. van der Watt, R. Alan Culpepper, and Udo Schnelle, *The Prologue of the Gospel of John : Its Literary, Theological, and Philosophical Contexts*, Papers Read at the Colloquium Ioanneum 2013, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck GmbH & Co. KG, 2016), 77.

⁵ Michaels, *The Gospel of John, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 42.

⁶ The Septuagint (LXX).

⁷ Donald MacLeod, *The Person of Christ*, (Westmont, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 46.

extends “behind and beyond creation,”⁸ nothing of what was made came in the absence of His presence (Col. 1:15). The similarity in language to the Genesis story is one that John will employ for the rest of his prologue. The first verse of the letter opens by introducing the Word and the fifth verse will close with an emphasis on the Light.⁹ Thus, strengthening a “connection, a continuation, and even a development with the [God of] the Old Testament.”¹⁰

καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν θεὸς

The use of the term *λόγος* is not because John lacks a name, he will introduce the Name, Jesus Christ, in verse seventeen. Rather, some stipulate that he structures this sentence to resemble the philosophical writings of his time, “most particularly in the writings of the first-century Jewish philosopher Philo.”¹¹ He uses this language in order to convey the message that he has in mind: the Word is the visible expression of the invisible God in the same way that words are the audible expression of a person's inaudible thoughts.¹² Thoughts, expressed in words, belong to a person because they are rational creatures, to God, on the other hand, pertains the highest form of goodness, and His goodness is not expressed through words, plural, but through the Word, Christ.¹³ By employing the concept of the *λόγος* in connection to the invisible

⁸ Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, n.p.

⁹ Michaels, *The Gospel of John, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 42,

¹⁰ Edward W Klink III, *John*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 2016), n.p.. [Note: brackets mine].

¹¹ Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, n.p; Percy Hartill, *The Unity of God: A Study in Christian Monotheism*, (London: A. R. Mowbray, 1952), 37.

¹² Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, n.p..

¹³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, rev. ed., 22 vols. (New York: Benziger Bros., 1947), III, Q. 1, Art. 1.

God, John enables his audience to link the *λόγος* with the *σὰρξ* (in verse 14) that the *λόγος* took on, “a true human body and...a reasonable human soul”.¹⁴

καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦ πρὸς τὸν θεόν.

How can one explain the oneness of God in light of verse two is a great dilemma. One thought is clear, however, that God is a relationship within Himself¹⁵ and He necessitates the company of none. Before the angels were created and the physical world was spoken into existence, YHWH already was in relationship with Himself.¹⁶ This is a puzzling concept primarily because this type of relationship to self is not found anywhere else in creation. Aquinas offers the idea that “relations exist in God really; in proof whereof we may consider that in relations alone is found something which is only in the apprehension and not in reality.”¹⁷

A grammatical aspect worth highlighting is John’s use of the accusative to depict the relationship between the *λόγος* and *θεόν*. The two nouns are grammatically associated not by “one of the two major Greek words for ‘with’ (syn and meta) but the more intimate preposition pros,”¹⁸ which can convey not only relationships but even presence.¹⁹ This is a grammatical expression that Jesus would also later exercise in chapter seventeen, verse five, “...δόξασόν με σύ πάτερ παρὰ σεαυτῷ...” Hence, this line reinforces John’s theological idea introduced in his last sentence, that is, Christ’s pre-existence which “shines through these words unambiguously. Jesus

¹⁴ MacLeod, *The Person of Christ*, 161.

¹⁵ Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, n.p..

¹⁶ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John : 2 Volumes*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), n.p..

¹⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Q. 28, Art. 1.

¹⁸ Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, n.p.;

¹⁹ Klink, *John*, n.p..

had glory before the world was: and *He*²⁰ has it in the presence of the Father (para soi, ‘with you’).”²¹

καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν θεός

The apostle casts more light upon the Oneness of God by asserting that the Word was not only in the presence of God, He was God Himself. Thus, he is not introducing a second god. He was not “a god,” as Arians would have it, but He was the very YHWH, “which is why, in turn, he is the unique revelation of God.”²² John knows that “The Word must be identified, and can only be identified in relation to God, the God of Israel.”²³

οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν

Verse two stands as a compacted form of everything that was said in verse one.²⁴ It emphasizes the points: who the Word was, from when He was, and where He was.²⁵ He was not a subordinate to God, He was God. Hence, when the reader encounters verses three to five of chapter thirteen, they can be sure that “before washing his disciples' feet he knew he came from God...”²⁶ The reference to Christ by means of the Word can be safely assumed given that when John introduces Jesus Christ for the first time in verse sixteen, it is a given, without explanation

²⁰ Capitalization of the personal pronoun “he” mine.

²¹ MacLeod, *The Person of Christ*, 46.

²² Ibid., 74.

²³ Michaels, *The Gospel of John, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 42.

²⁴ Klink, *John*, n.p..

²⁵ Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, n.p.

²⁶ MacLeod, *The Person of Christ*, 77.

nor introduction.²⁷ It is crucial to note that John's *ἀρχῇ* does not speak of a beginning in time, for eternity does not have a beginning.²⁸ Rather, the apostle seeks to emphasize, once again, that there was not a time when God was and the Word was not, because the Word is God.

πάντα ἐγένετο δι' αὐτοῦ, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ οὐδὲ ἓν ἐγένετο

Once the identity of the Word has been securely established, the text introduces His role as Creator. This picture resurfaces to the mind the creation story in Genesis,²⁹ bolstering the divinity of the Word once more. If God created the world (Gen. 1:1), and if it pertains to God alone the act of creation³⁰ (Isa. 44:24), and if everything was created through the Word (Col. 1:16), then it follows that the Word is God. The creator role of Christ, thus, gains even more strength by the employment of the verb *ἐγένετο*, the same verb used in the LXX of Genesis one, “where it serves as a foundational term that expresses the creation power and activity of God.”³¹

ὁ γέγονεν.

As the apostle prepares to develop the Christology of the Word in the following verses, he is quite careful to add a qualification to the adjective *πάντα* in his last statement, lest his audience gets the idea of a duplicity of sons, as some have in the past.³² The Word did create all things, but it is clear that the only things able to come into existence through Him were those

²⁷ Michaels, *The Gospel of John, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 44.

²⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III, Q. 16, Art. 12.

²⁹ Michaels, *The Gospel of John, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 45.

³⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Q. 44, Art. 1.

³¹ Klink, *John*, n.p..

³² Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*, Edited by John Anthony McGuckin. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995, 68.

whose nature is not eternal.³³ Hence, the Word, who is also the only begotten son (Jn. 1:18) could not have been created if He, Himself, is the Creator. The same can be said of love, life, wisdom, or any attribute of God, which share in His eternal and uncreated nature. As intrinsic facets of His essence, they exist wherever and whenever He exists.³⁴ It must be said, then, that the Word was born in the flesh (Jn. 1:14) but not created through the flesh. Rather, through the incarnation “God adds human being to his divine being.”³⁵

ἐν αὐτῷ ἦν ζωὴ, καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων.

Verse four introduces two new concepts to the text: Life and Light, passing from the role of the Word to the nature of the Word. The term Life is used by the apostle a total of 36 times³⁶ and every time it has a connotation beyond biological existence. In this passage, the term Life is used to connect the Creator with His creatures. Not only was the Word life, but that Life became Light to all man (Jn. 8:12). “The creature, Jesus of Nazareth...came into being in the womb of his mother Mary by the work of God the Father’s Holy Spirit...[and]³⁷ the Creator Word came down from heaven and united with Jesus.”³⁸ God displayed His selflessness when he resolved to share Life with that which He had created (Phil. 2:7).³⁹ We can say, then, that “precisely because He was in the form of God he recognized equality with God as a matter not of getting but of

³³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Q. 45, Art. 5.

³⁴ Michaels, *The Gospel of John, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 45.

³⁵ MacLeod, *The Person of Christ*, 190.

³⁶ Klink, *John*, n.p..

³⁷ Brackets mine.

³⁸ Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, n.p..

³⁹ Hartill, *The Unity of God: A Study in Christian Monotheism*, 27.

giving.”⁴⁰

The apostle’s elucidation of the phrase “[He] was the Light⁴¹ of all man,” is rather complex, due to the predominantly metaphorical use of the term “light” throughout the gospel.⁴² Some commentators, taking into consideration verse nine, have proposed an interpretation for *φῶς* that connotes the universal capacity for love and reason granted to all humans from birth.⁴³ This interpretation lacks compelling support. Notably, *φῶς* is used in the fourth Gospel almost exclusively in reference to Christ either by other individuals or by Christ Himself (Jn. 8:12; 9:5). A more plausible explanation is that the light of all man has a similar meaning to the Son who was given for the world (Jn. 3:16). Alluding to its availability to all those who would have Him. As the sunlight shines upon the good and the evil (Matt. 5:45), so the True Light (1:9) shined upon all humans without distinction. This interpretation reinforces Christ’s assertion that He will be light to all those who would receive His illumination (Jn. 12:35-36). He is the light to those “not only as they are in act, but as they are in potentiality.”⁴⁴

Καὶ τὸ φῶς φαίνει ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ, καὶ ἡ σκοτία οὐ κατέλαβεν αὐτὸ

A sudden shift in time is introduced into the narrative. The language of the account has suddenly passed from the past tense to the present tense,⁴⁵ articulating that the Light *shines*.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ MacLeod, *The Person of Christ*, 214.

⁴¹ Capitalization mine.

⁴² Michaels, *The Gospel of John, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 45.

⁴³ Michaels, *The Gospel of John, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 45.

⁴⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III, Q. 8, Art. 3.

⁴⁵ Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, n.p.

⁴⁶ Italics mine for emphasis.

Although the picture of the passage, no doubt, paints similar strokes to the creation story once again (Gen. 1:3-5), John wants to emphasize that this is not an action that happened at a specific point in time, but an event that is presently and continuously happening.⁴⁷ The present tense action modified by the noun Light is contrasted with the past tense action modified by the noun darkness, which could not overcome or apprehend⁴⁸ the Light (the verb *κατέλαβεν* allows for both interpretations). Thus, the Light shines, and will continue to shine, but the darkness is defeated and defeated forever.⁴⁹ Many instances of tension between Light and darkness are provided in the epistle of John, but perhaps the one that ascends higher is the glorious triumph of our Lord Jesus Christ over death. Darkness might have reigned for a fleeting moment (Lk. 22:53) but it was stripped of all its power shortly after (Lk. 24:5-8). Christ has ascended to the right hand of the Father (Act. 2:33) because “it belongs to no one else, angel or man, but to Christ alone, to sit at the right hand of the Father.”⁵⁰ Furthermore, upon His ascension “it was most fitting for [Christ’s body] to be set above all bodies,”⁵¹ especially above the bodies of His enemies (Psa. 110:1). Christ’s work did not end after the resurrection. His role as King of kings (Rev. 17:14) is and will be active (Eph. 1:20-23), precisely because activity is in the nature of the Word. From the beginning He moved upon the waters (Gen. 1:2). It must be said of Him, then, that “He is not an absent Christ once active in history but now withdrawn. He is an ever-present one, the great freedom fighter that has already destroyed the powers and who, following his

⁴⁷ John Paul Heil, *The Gospel of John: Worship for Divine Life Eternal*, (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2015), 14.

⁴⁸ Keener, *The Gospel of John : 2 Volumes*, n.p..

⁴⁹ Michaels, *The Gospel of John, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 46.

⁵⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III, Q. 58, Art. 4.

⁵¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III, Q. 57, Art. 4.

death and resurrection, continues to bring liberation to the world's spiritual slaves.”⁵²

Relevance for Today

The Johannine prologue stands as a formidable support of Christian apologetics against the worldviews of our day,⁵³ offering not merely a theological exposition but a firm defense of the faith. Its profundity takes the reader into a philosophical journey that resonates with the essence of the Kalam Cosmological argument by presenting the Creator as the prime mover of all existence. The only one for whom it was fit to create because He is the only uncreated One.⁵⁴ In addition, its refutation of heterodox ideologies such as Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Unitarianism, steadfastly upholds the divinity of Christ, affirming His eternal existence from the beginning of time.

Yet, the significance of this passage transcends the lines of philosophical arguments and systematic Theology. By approaching the passage from the realm of practical Theology, we encounter the truth that God, in His omnipotent sovereignty, crafted the entirety of creation, including the forces that wrestle against our faith. Thus, it provides us with assurance and security about His power to keep us (Jn. 10:27-30). Even amidst the ever-growing darkness of the world, it declares with certainty that the light of Christ shall never be extinguished,⁵⁵ for He is the very essence of life itself. Hence, as we walk the path of salvation (Mat. 7:13; Jn. 14:6), may our hearts be filled with adoration⁵⁶ for the One who, in His abounding grace, will grant eternal life to those who have placed their trust in Him (Jn. 11:26).

Blessed be His precious name forever!

⁵² MacLeod, *The Person of Christ*, 260.

⁵³ William J. U. Philip, “The Light of Glory: An Exposition of the Prologue of John’s Gospel,” *Churchman* 116, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 115.

⁵⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Q. 45, Art. 2.

⁵⁵ Sheri D. Kling, “Wisdom Became Flesh: An Analysis of the Prologue to the Gospel of John,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 40, no. 3 (June 2013): 182.

⁵⁶ Heil, *The Gospel of John: Worship for Divine Life Eternal*, 14.

Conclusion

In conclusion, John's preamble (Jn. 1:1-5) provides a rich exposition of the most important subject of Christological doctrine, namely His divinity and eternity.⁵⁷ By analyzing the Johannine description of the Word and the description of the creative Word in Genesis 1, it can be deduced that the text is aiming for a parallel between the two⁵⁸. This parallel makes evident the idea that the Word in John and the Word in Genesis refer to the same being, God. Additionally, the text leverages the terms light and life to offer a descriptive concept about the nature of the Word. The Word gives life and the Word shines upon all humans. Thus, John lays a solid foundation for understanding the identity of Jesus Christ as God incarnate, a notion that will be carried out throughout the rest of his Gospel. With this in mind, let us live holy lives (2 Cor. 7:1) that attract others to Him and let us have peace in our hearts, for He holds all control of the universe (Col. 15-20).

Glory to the eternal King, Jesus Christ! Amen.

⁵⁷ Kling, "Wisdom Became Flesh: An Analysis of the Prologue to the Gospel of John," 181.

⁵⁸ Philip, "The Light of Glory: An Exposition of the Prologue of John's Gospel," 115.

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