

Dear readers

For some time, I have been asked to write a section on the meaning of “the Word” as recorded in John 1: 1. This has been the subject of robust discussion among Christians from various traditions. The uncertainty of its meaning has led some religious groups attempting, with various degrees of success, to ground the group’s complete doctrine, dogma and worldview on this one text.

In its simplest form, such thinking encourages the memberships’ dependency on the group for the attainment of salvation and blessings, as opposed to worship of and devotion to God’s only-begotten Son, the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ<sup>1</sup>. Such dependency may lead followers of such to perceive that spoken words by clergy and fellow members are those of God Himself.

Such an approach appears short-sighted for any Christian belief which adopts this interpretation of John 1:1 as the dictum of the reason the group’s authority, wisdom and reason for existence. It appears that groups that adopt an approach where the central claim is the group’s exclusivity to the truth of Jesus Christ, through the teaching of such a dictum, makes one question whether some of us do not have the ability to discern between the Word who is God, Jesus Christ and the “word of God”, which is the gospel of salvation (the preaching, teaching and testimony of Jesus Christ as the Son of God).

When one speaks a word or words, one reveals something of oneself (Barron, 2011). Our words are expressions of ourselves but is limited as it only reveals one small aspect of what a person is thinking at a certain time. God as the perfect reality, the source of all creation<sup>2</sup> can speak Himself utterly, so He speaks the Word who truly and fully explains who He is. So God the Father speaks the Fullness of Himself into His Son, Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> John 3:16

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1-2; Isaiah 45:12; Hebrews 11:3; Colossians 1: 16; Exodus 31:16-17; 2 Peter 3:5; Revelation 4:11; Psalm 19:1; Job 38:1-5



This clear from the early Nicene Creed (325 AD) where the early Christians confessed:

*God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made,  
one in Being with the Father.*

The Word (Jesus Christ) is the Fullness of God, of the same Being and Substance of the Father. This is so essential for understanding the Holy Trinity (Barron, 2011).

But before we continue, it is important to look at a few basics regarding the Gospel of John. This is important as without understanding the context and the audience for which it written, confusion may detract from the true meaning of the text.

So here is an attempt to explain something about the Gospel of John. I shall only look at the Prologue of John, which is Chapter 1, verses 1-18. First we shall look at how the gospels came to be.

### **The formation of the Gospels**

As Apostolic Christians, we accept since time immemorial that God is the author of the Holy Bible and that the role of the human writers was significant in the ultimate formation of the Bible. However, we also believe that the truth of Holy Scripture comes from the Holy Spirit who guided the early Christian Church in producing the Scripture to begin with.

There were three basic stages of Gospel Formation (Brown, see also 1997; see also Charpentier, 1983; NCRS, 2016a)

1. The **first stage** consisted of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God, while He lived amongst us until the day of His Ascension<sup>3</sup>;
2. The **second stage of Gospel formation** was that of the oral tradition also known as the Apostolic preaching about Jesus Christ. This covered the period after our Lord's Ascension when the Apostles preached their witness of Jesus Christ's life, death, resurrection, appearances unto many and ascension into heaven. This preaching and evangelisation was inspired by the Holy Ghost given at Pentecost.<sup>4</sup> Our Lord promised that He will return one day<sup>5</sup>, which is known as the second coming or second advent, the first advent being the birth of Jesus Christ, our Lord<sup>6</sup>; and
3. The **third and last stage** was the writing down of the Gospels between 65-100AD (Brown, 1997; see also NCRS 11C, 2016). The stage took place after many years when those that have been witnesses to the wonderful deeds of the Son of God have started to pass and was it important to retain a record for those who wish to seek the Truth.

The four Gospels of the New Testament gives us four different portraits of the same Jesus. Mark presents Jesus as the all-powerful suffering servant<sup>7</sup> whereas Matthew presents Jesus as Israel's Messiah. The Jesus of Luke is the loving caring Jesus while the Jesus of John is the eternal Word of God, who is the Light of the World and who is God's "incarnate" presence on earth (Walker, 2010).

The Gospels today serves as testimony to the **Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead as a real and true event** and the nexus of truth of the Christian faith.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Acts 1:6-11

<sup>4</sup> Acts 2: 1-4

<sup>5</sup> John 14:3

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2: 1-20

<sup>7</sup> Is 53: 1-10

<sup>8</sup> Luke 24; Apostles creed; Nicene creed; Pauline creed.

Lastly, it is important when reading the Gospels that we remember that although we read the Gospels one way (from the birth of Jesus to His death and Glorious Resurrection), the Gospels were written in the opposite direction (starting with the death and Resurrection and going back through the public ministry to birth and even pre-Existence-John 1:1). Therefore, the evangelist wrote knowing how everything turned out in the end. This might surprise some.

### **Historical Background of the Gospel of John**

John, an original eyewitness of the life of Jesus (Walker, 2010), was the son of Zebedee and one of the 12 apostles (Mark 1:19; 3:17; John 21:2; see also Just, 2015). John's Gospel was the last to be written at about 90AD (Just, 2015). John was writing to a group of believers of Jewish and Gentile background, who have lost their source of life especially with the Romans destroying the Temple in Jerusalem and their banishment from Jerusalem by the Roman authorities. He writes to strengthen a group ostracized by other Jews for their faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the promised Messiah (Just, 2015). His Gospel is a meditation and reflection on Jesus as the Word of God (Charpentier, 1982). The reason for writing this Gospel is given in John 20:31 which states:

*But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*

It was not written to emphasise blind obedience 2000 years later.


### **The Structure of John 1: 1-18: The Prologue**

The first verse recalls the majesty of the very first line of Genesis (Pennock, 1982) as "In the beginning" are also the first words of the Old Testament (Gen. 1:1 see also Barron 2011). It shows that the coming of Jesus was a new beginning for the world (Charpentier, 1982). The central theme of the Christology, the meaning of Jesus, in John's Gospel is the understanding that Jesus Christ came to us first from above (John 1:1-13), and that He had to use the language from below to convey His message (Brown, 1997) and reveal the will of Father (John 1:14-18; see also Brown 1997) with whom He was One. The birth of Jesus is shown through theology of the incarnation, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (1:14; see also Just, 2015; Strong, 2001, #3056).



### Titles Given to Jesus in Chapter 1 of the Gospel of John

Some of the titles given to Jesus by John in the opening chapter is as follows (Walker, 2010, p. 210).

By John in his Prologue (opening)	By John the Baptist	By His Disciples on first meeting Jesus	By Jesus Himself
<p>The Word;</p> <p>An eternal Being involved in the creation of the world;</p> <p>The source of all human life;</p> <p>The one able to make all people God's children;</p> <p>The one who became incarnate as a human being;</p> <p>The only Son of the Father;</p> <p>The source of Grace and Truth;</p> <p>The one who makes the invisible God known</p>	<p>The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world;</p> <p>The one who comes to His own people and who must be revealed to Israel;</p> <p>The one on whom the Holy Spirit remains and who baptizes with the Holy Spirit;</p> <p>The Son of God</p>	<p>Rabbi;</p> <p>Messiah;</p> <p>The one whom Moses and the prophets wrote about;</p> <p>Jesus of Nazareth;</p> <p>The King of Israel</p>	<p>The Son of Man</p> 

Felix Just in his translation of John 1:1 from Greek into English, notes that the Greek used in John 1:1-3 illustrates that John wished to emphasize the Divinity of Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, His Divine Word. His use of “the Word” is as a noun and represents the Divine. It is not used as an adjective as used later in 2 Peter 1:3-4, referring to "divine power" and "divine nature". His translation would thus render a meaning closer to, “In the beginning was the Divine, ...”

### Who? as opposed to what is the Word of God, the Logos?

As John was writing for new believers coming out of the Judaic tradition, he connects their knowledge of Genesis (Hebrew Old Testament Writings) by denoting Jesus Christ as the *Logos* through which all was created. This immediately puts it in a biblical context of the Old Testament (Charpentier, 1982) and establishes a connection point for these Christians, seeking reassurance that their belief in Jesus and the New Covenant surpasses the blessings of the Old Covenants.

The word “*Logos*”, (The Word) used, is masculine in gender<sup>9</sup> (Talbert, 1992) and “He” reveals God the Father. The Word, Jesus Christ, is the complete and personal manifestation of God in His fullness and reveals Jesus Christ, as God incarnate in human form (Strong, 2001, #3056; see also Charpentier, 1982; Flor, 2013a). God created through His Word (Gen1; Isa:40:26; Ps. 33:6). Jesus was **God-become-flesh** who, as the Word of God, is the Light who brings life and reveals the glory of God (Flor, 2013a; see also Pennock, 1982). **Thus being the historical Jesus also professed in the Apostles Creed and the Apostolic Church of Queensland’s (UACNZ) Confession of Faith**<sup>10</sup> (Flor, 1993, 2000; 2010a; 2010b; 2010c, 2013a, 2013b, 2017).

Jesus is God’s creative Word who existed from all time and pre-existed with the Father (Pennock, 1982). The Jesus portrayed in the Gospel of John offers a new religious reality and reveals how He, as the Word of God, brought life and light to the human condition (1:1-18; John 10:10 see also NCRS, 2016). The prologue emphasises the pre-existence of Jesus Christ, the incarnate of God in human form (Strong’s, 2001, #3056).

<sup>9</sup> Logos is Masculine form

<sup>10</sup> We believe in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God the Father our Lord and Saviour, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered on the Cross by Crucifixion, died and buried, descended into Hades, on the third day arose, taught His disciples for 40 days of the mysteries of the kingdom of God, ascended up and into Heaven, and as the High Priest sitteth at the right hand of God the Almighty, from thence He will come again to take the Members of the Elect unto Himself and on the last Judgement Day to judge the Quick and the Dead.

Contemporary Apostolic teaching on Jesus being the Word of God is clear in Apostle Flor's teaching (2013, p.5) which reads:

*Let us dwell first of all upon the statement that **God is called the creator of heaven and earth**<sup>11</sup>. This means that God is the beginning of all things, the **primal source, the primal power from which all things were created**. John said, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him" (John 1:1-3). The allusion is to the origin of all things, namely the eternal Word, i.e. the being of God. John did not perceive reality and essence to be in creation, but in God. He considered that there is a relationship between the visible creation and the invisible existence of God; this he termed the eternal **the "Word"**.*

Apostle Flor cautions against an error that we might take this to mean that the words of the leadership of a church is God Himself, as this was not the intention of John's Gospel. His teaching on this reveals that the "Word of God" does not merely imply the imparting and spreading of a number of dogmas, principles or rules (Flor, 2013a, p. 71; see also 2013b). He clarifies this by saying that (Flor, 2013a):

*Now at times the expression "Word" is misunderstood. It is clear from the original text that we are **not talking about a human spoken or written word**, but about the primal power (logos), from which everything has come, a power that is linked with rationality, order and cohesion. **By "Word" we therefore understand a creating power which is God Himself.***

Jesus Christ being "the Word" is further attested when Jesus spoke to Nicodemus, said, "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the **Father, the Word**<sup>12</sup>, and the **Holy Ghost**: and these three are one<sup>13</sup> and there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit; and the water, and the blood<sup>14</sup>: and these three agree in one." (1 John 5:7-8).

<sup>11</sup> Genesis 1: 1; John1: 1

<sup>12</sup> The Word is Jesus Christ, part of the Holy Trinity

<sup>13</sup> Holy Trinity: Father, Son (the Word) and Holy Spirit.

<sup>14</sup> Baptism, Sealing and Communion

Most importantly in Revelation 19:11-13, Jesus Christ is identified as the Word of God at His Second Coming. The heading in the KJV is: **“Christ on a White Horse.”** The text that follows makes the connection between Jesus Christ as the Word of God clear.

*<sup>11</sup> And I saw heaven opened, and behold a **white horse**; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.*

*<sup>12</sup> His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.*

*<sup>13</sup> And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: **and his name is called The Word of God.***

Jesus is God’s ultimate act of speech, the incarnation and the inscription of the very nature and truth of God (Zacharias, 2016). The book of Hebrews (1:1-2) tells us that in the days of old, God spoke through the prophets, but in these last days, God has spoken to us by His Son. John tells us that the ultimate, final, definitive word of God, is *the Word made flesh*, Jesus Christ (Zacharias, 2016). In summary we can conclude that in this context, the **Word of God** is another title for Jesus Christ (1John 1:1;5;7 and Rev19:13). The Jesus of John is conscious of His pre-existence, who through death returns to a state He temporarily left during His stay on earth (John 17:5<sup>15</sup>; see also Brown, 1986)

<sup>30</sup> Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; <sup>31</sup> but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

- John 20:30-31

<sup>15</sup> <sup>5</sup> And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.



### A Closer look at the Prologue

The prologue, John 1:1-18 contains an introduction and summary of the life the incarnate **Word, Jesus Christ** (Brown, 1997).

John 1:1-18

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was **the Word**, and **the Word** was with God, and **the Word** was God<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> **The same**<sup>17</sup> was in the beginning with God.

<sup>3</sup> All things were made by **him**<sup>18</sup>; and without **him** was not anything made that was made.

<sup>4</sup> In **him** was **life**; and the **life** was the **light** of men<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> And the **light** shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

<sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

<sup>7</sup> The same came for a witness<sup>20</sup>, to bear witness of the **Light**<sup>21</sup>, that all men through **him** might believe.

<sup>8</sup> He was not that **Light**, but was sent to bear witness of that **Light**.

<sup>9</sup> That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

<sup>10</sup> **He** was in the world, and the world was made by **him**, and the world knew him not.

<sup>16</sup> In Genesis, it says in the beginning, God.... thus the Word was in the beginning there, when only God was there and is therefore part of Trinity from the start.

<sup>17</sup> As the Word is masculine in Greek, the same can be replaced with Jesus Christ

<sup>18</sup> The Word, male in gender in Greek now becomes clearly male.

<sup>19</sup> In this male person was life and it was the light of men

<sup>20</sup> John the Baptist testified of the Light, a person, not a religious group's teaching or rules and regulation, but Jesus as the Son of God.

<sup>21</sup> This Light, which was the Word in verse 1, and who brought life, came in to the world which was created in the beginning by Him, who is the Light, the Word, Jesus Christ.

<sup>11</sup> He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

<sup>12</sup> But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

<sup>13</sup> Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> And the Word was made flesh<sup>23</sup>, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

<sup>15</sup> John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>16</sup> And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace.

<sup>17</sup> For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

<sup>18</sup> No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father<sup>25</sup>, he hath declared him.<sup>26</sup>

The structure of the Prologue is so that the second half balances the first half, with subsections in reverse order (Just, 2014). They are called chiasmic texts as they do not have the climax at the end but in the middle as illustrated in the prologue of John's Gospel (1:1-18) (Just, 2014; see also Talbert, 1992).

<sup>22</sup> Attests to the virgin birth, which was how God stepped into human life; see also Apostles creed

<sup>23</sup> The birth in Bethlehem in Judea

<sup>24</sup> John could not testify of a new spiritual teaching or religious not yet in existence for another 1800 years, but of Jesus Christ truly God and truly man as we confess in our confession and attested to by God himself at our Lord's Baptism (Luke 3: 22).

<sup>25</sup> Remember, this was written nearly 60 years after the Ascension of Jesus up and into Heaven where He, at the time of its writing, was and is still today seated at the right hand of God the Father as our new High Priest (Mark 16:9; Hebrews 4: 14-16).

<sup>26</sup> So in these first 18 verses there is a clear progression from the Word of God, which is then referred to as a person, him, in which there was life and who then became the "Light", who came into the world, which was created by the Light, him, the Word, and then took on flesh (the Virgin Birth) and of whom John the Baptist testified preaching that he is not worthy of the task. From His fullness, the believers received grace and truth.

So we read A and then A' and then B and then B' etc. The climax is G and is the major point that John is trying to make.

- A) 1-2: The Divine WORD was with God eternally.
- B) 3: All things came into being through it/him (the Word).
- C) 4-5: In him was life and light, which darkness did not overcome.
- D) 6-8: [John was not the light, but came to testify about the light.]
- E) 9-10: The True Light was in the world, but the world did not recognize him.
- F) 11: He came into his own realm, but his own people did not accept him.
- G) 12: THOSE WHO DO BELIEVE IN HIM (The Word of God: Jesus Christ: The Son of God) BECOME CHILDREN OF GOD.**
- F') 13: These believers are not ordinary human offspring, but are born of God.
- E') 14: The Incarnate WORD (Jesus Christ) reveals God's glory, full of grace and truth.
- D') 15: John testified about the priority of the one coming after him.
- C') 16: Out of his (the Word's) fullness, we all received grace upon grace.
- B') 17: Grace and truth came into being through Jesus Christ.
- A') 18: The only-begotten Son has revealed God.

Another way of looking at the concentric structure of the prologue of Gospel of John is (Talbert, 1992, p. 66):

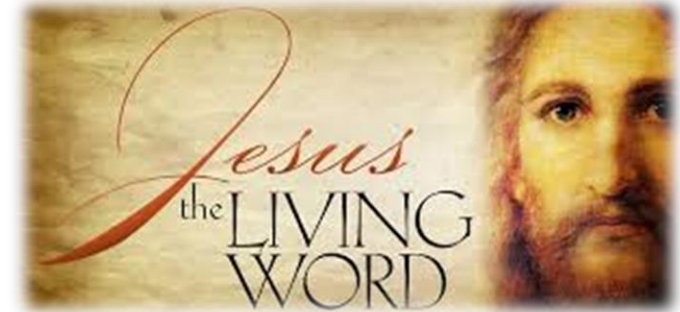
Verses 1-5	The relation of the Logos (the Word of God) to God, creation and humans
Verses 6-8	The witness of John the Baptist to the Word
Verses 9-11	The Coming of the Light and His rejection by His own
Verses 12-13	The benefits of believing in the Logos/Word
Verse 14	The coming of the Logos/Word and His reception
Verse 15	The witness of John the Baptist to the Word
Verse 16-18	The relation of the Logos (the Word of God) to humans, re-creation and God

### General Analysis of John's message

There is **no evidence** to suggest that Apostle John implied in his prologue that religious groups, hundreds of years later, should interpret his writings as meaning that their own spoken words of teaching will become God Himself to those that listen to their teaching. Apostle Paul in 2Thessalonians 2:1-11 warns against such thinking so does Bishop Ignatius, one of the early Christian Fathers, in his letter to the Christians in Smyrna in the 1<sup>st</sup> century (Sparks, 1978).

Neither did John imply that faithful Christians, should abandon common sense and believe that their own words of preaching and teaching will empower them to become “saviours”<sup>27</sup> of those that know not the true “way” and are still in “the world.”

Apostle John is telling about a start of a new creation, the completion of one creation and the start of something fresh and new (Barron, 2011). His view of **Jesus Christ is as the Divine Being (the Word), who is also the Light and God's only Begotten-Son** (John 3:16), who comes to the world and **becomes flesh** and even though He is rejected by His own people, He empowers all that believe on **His name to become God's children** and share in God's enduring Love that outdoes the loving gift of the Law through Moses (10 Commandments + 613 rules) in the Old Testament (Brown, 1997; see also Talbert, 1992). John teaches that the One, who saves, is also the One who created (Talbert, 1992).




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<sup>27</sup> Acts 4:12; I John 4:14; Ephesians 2:8-9; Galatians 3:26; John 17:3; 1 Corinthians 8:4-6; Ephesians 4:6; Mark 12:29-34; 1 Timothy 2:5

### Concluding thoughts...

In this section, I attempted to answer *Who the Word of God?* as recorded in John 1:1, as opposed to *What the Word of God is?*. This discussion did not include other texts which refer to the “word of God” as the evangelisation of the Good News regarding Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1: 25).

*But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.*

In the words of Felix Just, “rather than fixate on any particular English translation<sup>28</sup>, even the best of which might confuse us or lead us astray, we should try to continue deepening our understanding of what **John's entire Gospel says about the uniquely close relationship between Jesus (The Word) and the Father (God) from before the start of creation** (2013)<sup>29</sup>.



I believe that this can be best achieved by our faithful belief in John 3:16,

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<sup>28</sup> of Bible

<sup>29</sup> not just the first verse

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*

, followed by our adherence to the New Commandment as recorded in John 13: 34, which states,

*A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.*

The most powerful example of the acceptance of **Jesus as the Word of God** is the amazement of Thomas when the Risen Jesus appears to him. When seeing that it is really Jesus, he simply puts aside his unbelief and exclaims,

***My LORD and my God!***

(John 20:28)



Tot wedersiens. God bless, Nag Ou Grote, Fluit-Fluit, my storie is uit.

*Br Theo PhD*

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