

# A PHILOSOPHICAL AND HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE CONCEPT *LOGOS* IN JOHN 1:1 FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ORALITY AND LITERACY

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## Abstract

*The article will address the philosophical and historical interpretive interest of the concept *logos* in the Johannine narrative from the perspective of orality and literacy research in the New Testament. The *Logos* in the Gospel of John serves as a forceful intellectual and ideological stimulus in the context of the Johannine community. The article will employ a multi-disciplinary approach in reading the concept *logos* logocentrically (orally) rather than graphocentrically (textcentrically) from the perspective of orality-literacy which unfolds a new dimension for oral and written hermeneutics in the light of the reading of *Logos* in Jn 1:1.*

**Key Words:** Orality; Literacy; *Logos*; Textcentrism; Logocentrism; Spirit

## Introduction

Underneath the written construction of the Johannine tradition lies an oral history and oral community which encapsulates the power relations of the spoken *logos* in relation to the Johannine narrative. This is a history that supersedes the written authority of the Great Western tradition of writing or the tradition of the Enlightenment. The *logos* in the Prologue of John may be described as obsessional. From the year 1805 in the work of Coleridge, Logosophic system, the *logos* theme constantly recurred as he agreed with Joseph Priestly that the spoken Word can be seen as an expression of an attribute of God, of the divine power and the intelligence which was God. *Logos* is much more than a philosophical and theological system but can be reconciled with the concrete experiences of human beings as an eternal neutral sign in the formation of meaning (Perkins 1994:19).

The *logos* as unifying system provides an intersubjectivity of communication without the loss of an objective reality, because the *logos* is interpersonal. Both the essence and the ideal existence of humanity is *logos* principle. *Logos* is both logocentric and anthropocentric. It is the key principle through which life and reality and mind could be communicated about the external world in which humanity finds itself (Perkins 1994:22-23).

In the prologue of John's Gospel from the perspective of orality-literacy research in the context of the Johannine narrative, *logos* opens a new dimension for oral, written and interpretive interest. Orality in the Gospel of John has been taken for granted, as the written text has 'exiled' or 'caged' the spoken authority of the Word and transformed it into traces of more written text. The expression, 'In the beginning was the Word' provides us with a key principle to understanding the authority of the Word in relation to primarily oral communities in the Johannine tradition. The *logos*, the creator and communicator of God to man, is the most perfect expression of the divine Word which is light and life. The Word as written does

not diminish the importance of its audible presence (Graham 1987:123). The λόγος in the historical framework of the John's Gospel remains logocentric in essence.

The λόγος in the Johannine narrative exists outside the realm of the written construction of text. For Marcel Jousse (1997), the Celestial Tradition of the *logos* is rooted in the Gallo-Galilean methodology and calls for an interface between World Below (the tradition of the other) which is a reflection of the World Above. The Gallo-Galilean methodology challenges the historical and written validity of the λόγος tradition, which calls into account the authority of the *logos*, the Word, to construct the representation of meaning of the Johannine community. Each utterance of λόγος in the context of the Johannine community, remains time bound, renewable, alterable and freshly original.

The *Logos* hymn in the Johannine narrative reveals praise for the coming of the Word in human flesh (σάρξ). In the place of the historical criticism's fixation of λόγος in the written text as a singular originality of the *ipsissimum verbum*, an oral and literacy hypothesis was developed that features the multi-originality and primodality of the λόγια (sayings) of Jesus as λόγος, which moves from plurality of λόγια in the written biblical text to a single λόγος in the Johannine narrative. This collective cultural memory comprised discourse and chirographs, by speaker and hearer alike. The *Logos* hymn is in honour of the coming of the incarnate Word in human flesh (σάρξ) – a paradigmatic shift from charismatic speech of *Logos* in the Johannine text to narrative construction of the written text.

### The Greek Tradition of the *logos*

The philosophical use of the concept λόγος (Word) reflects the determinate structure of thought and intelligible unity of being. There are two distinct Greek usages of the concept λόγος. In the first instance, the concept λόγος προφορικός is used for 'word, utterance, revelation' not in the sense of something 'proclaimed and heard', but rather something 'displayed'. Secondly, λόγος ἐνδιάθετος refers to 'thought' or 'rational power' (Kittel 1967:89).

The word λόγος carries an extensive range of meanings. Λόγος can be related to the mind as 'thought' and 'word.' Λόγος as 'Word' is never the assemblance of sounds φωνή, but the word as determined by a meaning and conveying meaning (φωνή σημαντική). The concept Λόγως, as 'thought', is neither the faculty nor the process of thinking as such, but an articulated unit of thought capable of intelligible utterance, whether a single word (ῥήμα), a phrase or a sentence. Whether the concept λόγος is written or spoken remains secondary to the matter. Behind it lies the idea of that which is rationally ordered, or what we called 'law' in nature (Dodd 1953:263).

In the LXX (Septuagint) λόγος almost always renders דבר (or its Aramaic equivalent), a term whose range of meaning overlaps that of λόγος but is not co-extensive with it. It is derived from the root דבר which means speak, and דבר is essentially the 'spoken word as means of communication'. In the Old Testament דבר is frequently used to refer to God's communication with humankind: "His self revelation, especially through the prophets, to whom the Word came" (Dodd 1953:263).

The philosophical use of the concept λόγος goes back to the Greek philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus in the 5th Century B.C., who established the term *logos* in Western philosophy. Heraclitus believes that "Everything is in a state flux (...), the universe remains in a state of change, whereas *logos* can be seen as both the fundamental source and order of the kosmos." Heraclitus referred to the λόγος as a 'word', 'speech' or 'content of speech'. It is the λόγος

that evoked the words or the work of men (generically). The *λόγος*, according to Heraclitus, can be understood as oracle or spoken word, for humankind is bound by the *λόγος*. It is the transcendent and lasting order in which the eternal flux occurs, binding the individual to the whole, amidst all the change in the universe (Kittel 1967:91). Heraclitus saw that the *λόγος* can be seen as a potent metaphysical force in order to bring order to the universe and humanity. This eternal principle is 'evidenced', both in nature and humankind (Howard 1965:34-35).

Heraclitus has suggested that there is both an inner and outer truth of *λόγος*. The inner truth gives strength and sustenance to the powers of human thought. The outer truth is the life in all things and the living power of the universe. All human understanding is nourished by one Divine Word. Heraclitus describes the power in nature and in the mind as the 'ever-living force' through the disposing of the Word. Language can be seen as a sacred fire in the temple of humanity (Perkins 1994:28).

Heraclitus shows that the unifying principle of the 'One and All' concept of *λόγος* remains an instrument of thought. The *λόγος* now becomes predominantly the rational power set in humankind, the power of speech and thought. In the political life of the Sophist, it plays a distinctive part as the means of persuasion and direction (Walker 1983:69).

## **The Sophist**

Although Sophists were the first to work out a theory of *λόγος*, only with the Stoics does it emerge as a universal cosmic and religious principle. For the Sophist, speech was a powerful ruler. With these words, the Sophist rhetor and rhetorician, Gorgias, invoked what for him was the critical issue of language. The idea of language that he had in mind was shaped by the media conditions of culture. The *λόγος* was perceived here neither as sign nor signification, nor as a carrier of meaning or revealer of truth, but rather as a potent ruler intent on governing its subjects (Kelber 1995:412).

Gorgias' idea of the *λόγος* flowed directly from the experience of oral speech. Language was perceived to be a force orally processed and operative in relation to the hearers. What interested Gorgias about speech was not the process of verbal composition, but the aesthetics of reception, as seen in the following quotation:

Of *λόγοι* (words) some give pain, some pleasure, some cause fear,  
some create boldness in hearers, and some drug bewitch the soul  
by a kind of evil persuasion (Kelber 1995:411).

While the arousal of pain and pleasure, of fear and pity, is the primary incentive of the *λόγοι* (words), Gorgias did not entirely dismiss the rational aspects of speech. The *logos* is a powerful force which can be used nefariously to convince people to do things against their own interest. It can take the form of poetry (metrical language), divine incantations, or oratory. *Logos* is described as a 'powerful lord' (B11.8) and "[t]he effect of speech upon the condition of the soul is comparable to the power of drugs over the nurture of bodies" (B11.14). This should be contrasted with the view of Isocrates that *logos* is a 'chief' or 'commander' (Nicoles 5-9). Occasionally, he would refer to speech as *τεχνή*, an acquirable art. His main interest was in elaborating a psychology of the emotive powers of oral communication's efficaciousness and the words engaged with the form of the soul, impacting it, molding it, and converting it. It was this affectionate persuasion of the soul that lies at the heart of Gorgias' theory of language (Kelber 1995:411). Gorgias himself introduced the

metaphor *φάρμακόν* (pharmakon) which was later adopted by Plato.

Central to the notion of *φάρμακόν* was the power of words that affects the soul as the drug does the body. In speech, the processes of healing and poisoning were mysteriously mingled, swaying the psychic condition for better and for worse. Under the powerful spell of speech, the soul was likely to be cured or deceived. Gorgias was aware that words can also be used for flattery, manipulation and the fulfilment of personal longings for power (Kelber 1995:412). Speech, divine in origin, can be seen as a form of divine madness. The concept *λόγῳς* was not restricted to the thinking of Heraclitus and the Sophists but it found a place in two of the most prominent philosophical schools, e.g. Platonism and Stoicism.

## Platonism

In Socrates and Plato, a deeper conception arose in which the thought, the power of the *λόγος* is linked to *κοινός λόγος*, as a means to establish fellowship. This was widespread in the Greek world. In his doctrine of Forms, Plato draws a dualistic contrast between the invisible, 'real world beyond' (above) and its inferior copy in this world (below). With this basic conception arises a further contrast between man's superior mind and his inferior flesh. For Plato *λόγος* means 'connected meaningful utterances', the stream of speech which flows out and serves intelligence, the exteriorisation or representation (*μιμήμα*) of a pre-linguistic mental experience. *Λόγος* is the thought that the soul has with itself prior to the exteriorisation in speech with the potential for significance; the opposite of which it termed *ψοφός*, which is insignificant noise (Irvine 1994:27).

In the famous reading of Phaedrus (274c-277a) Socrates is represented as being suspicious of the art of writing. Though it is supposed to be a help to the memory, it actually leads to more forgetfulness, since it encourages one to rely on written characters rather than on memory (Greene 1951:152). Socrates' role in forming the literate culture of Athens was seminal. He encouraged his students to think constructively in the patterns and forms of the emerging culture of literacy. In order to achieve this, he did not need to write but rather used oral speech in a new way. Socrates, like Jesus, was an oral teacher who did not write but trained his followers. He did this by forming their minds to think about ideas objectively. Socrates was later martyred for his role in initiating cultural and religious change (Boomershire 1995:25).

Eric Havelock argued that Plato banished the poets from the Republic because he wanted to break the ways of knowing that were a characteristic of oral culture. Plato identifies Socrates as a person who established a new way of knowing. In Plato's writings, Socrates encourages his dialogue partners into reflection on ideas, instead of continuing to identify with the heroes of great poetic epics. Socrates' questions were a steady invitation to step back from the immediacy of experience and to reflect critically on the presuppositions and ideas that were implicit in a conversation. This is what Havelock calls 'the separation of the knower from the known,' in which the known can be examined as an object which is the essential turn of the mind that makes it possible to participate in the world of literacy (Havelock 1963:197-233). Plato's theory of forms shifts the definition of reality of the world of sense experience to a world of *a priori* – ideas present in the mind. This Platonic move established the foundations for the communication culture of literacy over and against the culture of orality.

For Plato, knowledge acquired by imitation, repetition and empathy was of little value. What really interested Plato was to determine what each object really was. This can be seen

as a conversion away from plural or multiple expressions towards abstracted objective and timeless truth. The philosophical purpose of Platonism was “to accelerate the intellectual awakening which converts the psyche from the many to the one, and from becoming to beingness” (Havelock 1963:258-259). This new type of intellectual activity was related to the methods of mental storage and has undergone changes since the period of the Homeric bards. For Plato the written text did more than distance the individual from the tribal encyclopedia. For Plato the resentment against the poets in the Republic could thus well be understood as a revolt of the literate mentality against the oral traditional hegemony of the Homeric poetic structure. This resulted in the bringing about of the alphabetisation of the Greek language and chirographic (written) cultural tradition (Irvine 1994:23-27).

While Plato availed himself of a new chirography (meaning hand, the study of penmanship and handwriting in all of its aspects writing). Plato lamented its corrosive effects on memory, discourse and culture, basing his objections on a thoroughly oral perception of language. Writing, far from assisting memory, implants forgetfulness in the soul (Phaedrus:275a). Written words were anti-social because they segregated themselves from living discourse. Written products were rather like children who had lost their parents and were unable to defend themselves. Plato knew that it was inevitable for writing to fall into the hands of the wrong people (Phaedrus:275a). Finally to Plato, writing was an unacceptable exteriorisation of thought that only gave the appearance of wisdom (Phaedrus:275e). What is clearly observed in the argument between Plato and Socrates is that Plato’s mind is rooted in an oral culture in that he displays a distrustfulness of writing, and is committed to the living, dialogical, and interiorising speech (Boomershire 1995:25).

## **Stoicism**

Stoicism owes its origin to Zeno (335-203 B.C.), who came to Athens from Cyprus in 313 B.C., and attended Plato’s academy of philosophy. The Stoics’ major concern was to search for stability in the universe rather than salvation (Smalley 1978:43). The Stoic’s point of departure on *λόγος* is Heraclitus’ doctrine of an all-pervasive formula of organisation which the Stoics considered divine. *Λόγος* is the active force in the world and the pervasive presence in the universe (Peters 1967:112).

Stoicism defined *λόγος* as the ordered and teleologically oriented nature of the world, a term equated with the concept of God. The Stoics made a clear distinction between the *λόγος ἐνδιάθετος* (word in the mind), *λόγος προφορικός* (uttered word), the *λόγος* in the mind and the uttered *λόγος* (thought and word) (Kittel 1967:92). *Λόγος* is the active force in the universe, creative in the fashion of a sperm. Stoics identified *λόγος* with the cosmic law of reason: it is this principle which creates the world. *λόγος προφορικός* (uttered word) is the power that extends throughout matter, the organic power which fashioned unformed and unorganic matter (Brown 1978:1084). All powers proceed from the *λόγος*, and they all return to it. The *λόγος* of man (generically) is only part of a general *λόγος κατὰ τοῦ κοινού θεοῦ καὶ ἀνθρώπων λόγον*, a sense of awareness in humankind (Kittel 1967:93, Eliade 1987:11).

The duality of *λόγος* as reason and speech developed in Stoic doctrine immanently. For the Stoics the whole concept of *λόγος* refers to the rational power of order. A parallel to Stoicism has been suggested by John’s technical terminology in the Prologue, since the *λόγος* as the creative principle was a popular term in Stoic thought. Although early commentators say that John leaned on Stoic thought in his usage of *λόγος* in the Prologue (1:1-18), this argument is disputed by Schnackenburg (1968:482) and Brown (1966:LVII). According to the Stoics the *λόγος* sustains

the *κόσμος* (world) and serves as a well-ordered harmonious unified principle.

This appears to be different in John 1:10, as the world rejects and opposes the *λόγος*. The *λόγος* in the Prologue of John does not just sustain the universe but appears to be in existence from the beginning, as He disclosed life and truth to the world. The *λόγος* hymn in John had its own history within the Johannine community and it remains risky to argue from terminological parallels in the Prologue (1:1-18).

### The Hellenistic Judaeoan Tradition of the *Logos*

The concept *logos* in Hellenistic Judaism was brought to its highest peak by Philo, an Alexandrian Jew (20 BC-AD 42) and a contemporary of Jesus. Philo represented in his work an attempt to interpret Judaism allegorically (deeper mystical meaning), in the light of a synthesis of Platonic and Stoic thought, as he wedded the Old Testament idea of *חכמה* (wisdom) with the Stoic concept of *λόγος* (Lindars 1972:39; Brown 1966:LVII).

The *λόγος* plays a considerable role in the work of Philo. This is shown by the fact that he uses the concept over 1300 times, as he identifies the wisdom (*חכמה*), of the Old Testament text with that of the concept *πρόνοια* (Kittel 1967:89). The concept 'wisdom' of the Old Testament relates to Yahweh's creative activity in the world, which is closely related to the 'Word of God' in the Old Testament, whereas the Philonic *λόγος* is a mediator between God and the material world (Eliade 1987:11).

According to Philo's doctrine of creation, the wisdom (*σοφία*) of God has begotten the world of eternal forms (*κόσμος νοητός*) as His first born. The *λόγος* is the mediating figure which comes forth from God, to establish a link between the remotely transcendent God and the world of humankind. The world of eternal Forms (*κόσμος νοητός*), forms the basis of God's creative powers (Kittel 1967:89). Dodd clearly sets out parallels between Philo's *logos* doctrine and that of the Prologue in John in the wisdom literature:

#### Fourth Gospel

ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος.

ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν.

#### Wisdom Literature

κύριος ἔκτισέν με ἀρχὴν ὁδῶν αὐτοῦ.  
(Prov.8:12)

ἤμην παρ' αὐτοῦ. (Prov.8:30)  
(Dodd.1953.274)

While this is not conclusive, it is sufficient to show that in composing the Prologue, the author's mind was moving along lines similar to those of Jewish writers of the wisdom school. The concept of the *λόγος* in the Prologue shows clear parallels with the 'Word of God' in the Old Testament.

Scholars such as Brown (1966) and Schnackenburg (1968) see no clear evidence that Philo was known in first century Palestine and therefore contended that if John was dependent on Philo, it would show that his work originates outside Palestine (1966:LVIII). However, John is a reflection of the penetration of the Jewish thought world by Graeco-Roman culture which was true even for Palestine. Philo's concept *λόγος* is not simply the uttered Word, or a command of God. Rather it is the meaning of the universe conceived as transcendent as well as immanent, as the thought of God formed within the eternal mind and projected into objectivity (Ladd 1974:278).

The λόγος of Philo refers to God's power and action as well as His thought. This idea is even stronger in the Gospel of John, as the λόγος is not simply a philosophical, cosmological idea, but the λόγος takes on σάρξ (flesh), or authentic being, to dwell among humankind, revealing the glory of God. The Johannine Λόγως is not a mere idea, but a personal entity that is equal to *Theos* (God). Philo's λόγος remain a metaphysical reality whereas John discloses the personhood of Jesus the Son of God. The λόγος shows closed affinity to the Old Testament Torah. Neither the personhood nor the pre-existence of the λόγος was clear in Philo. The Philonic λόγος is a metaphysical idea, a mediator between the purely spiritual God and the material world, which seems to be closely related to Stoicism and Platonism. The Johannine λόγος enters the realm of the material and existential reality and becomes (flesh) σάρξ and connects with truth ἀλήθεια, and life (ζωή) and can be traced back to the Semitic Palestinian milieu.

### **The logos of Hermes**

In more recent years, much attention has been given to the Hermetica, writings that originated in the second and third century in Egypt (Smalley 1978:48; Howard 1965:40). For Hermetica there is no incarnation of the λόγος, but the equation of a revealing and cosmogonic principle with one of the deities of popular religion. This identification is found in the philosophical system of the Stoics, e.g. Zeus, the concept λόγος is seen as a god and being identified with God (YHWH). There is no question of the divine word of power and creation that became incarnated in human flesh. Hermes, as mediator and revealer, as a ἄγγελος (envoy), declares and makes known the will of the gods. His is a soteriological (salvation) role. As far as the λόγος is present for σώζειν, Hermes is the great power of conception and creation (Kittel 1967:88). In the Hermetica the λόγος comes forth from νοῦς (knowledge), who is the Son of God, to bring order and form into the world (Schnackenburg 1968:137). Thus, the λόγος is also a Son of Hermes, because Hermes is the supreme deity. The λόγος is an εἰκών of God and man is an image of the λόγος.

The question that needs to be asked is, 'What affinity is there between Hermes and the Johannine writings?' For some scholars there are interesting parallels of thought and vocabulary in the Hellenistic concept, but John seems to relate more closely to Hebrew concepts of creation by the power of God's spoken word, for example 'Let there be light' (Genesis 1:3). Dodd further argues that Poimandres also used the Hebrew creation myth to sustain his teaching (1953:33). The λόγος in the Hermetica remains an expression of the mind of God and the usage of the concept λόγος in the Greek context remains different from that of the Gospel of John. The following observation is clear, that the λόγος of Hermes leans more to Gnosticism and the whole idea of secret γνώσις (knowledge) as a means to obtain salvation. Hermetica were more dependent on Stoic and Platonic thought than the Johannine writings and borrowed from the creation myth of Hermes. The λόγος in John becomes incarnated (1:14), unlike Hermes that enters the realm of evil to bring light and truth to the Johannine community.

### **The Palestinian Judaean Tradition of the Logos**

We now have the meaning of λόγος in the two traditions of Greek and of Hellenistic Judaism. The third tradition in which the λόγος needs to be examined is the Old Testament tradition of the Word. "All over the ancient Orient, in Assyria and Babylon as well as in Egypt, the word, particularly the Eternal Λόγος, was not only an expression of thought, it was also a mighty

and dynamic force. The divine λόγος possesses peerlessly a dynamic force” (Dodd 1953:264).

In the Septuagint logos renders דבר (*dabhar*) a term whose range of meaning develops that of the λόγος but is not co-extensive with it. The concept *logos* is derived from the root דבר which means ‘to speak’ and essentially means ‘the spoken Word as means of communication.’ The use of דבר to seek the ‘background of a matter.’ Nothing is דבר in itself, but all things have a background or ‘meaning.’ The analysis of the term shows two main elements: the dianoetic and the dynamic (Dodd 1953:264-265).

Dianoetically דבר contains a σοῦς, or a thought. It displays the meaning of things, so that the דבר always belongs to the field of knowledge and what is known becomes subject to thought. To understand something is like taking hold of the thing itself. Along with the dianoetic element of דבר is the dynamic. Every דבר is filled with power that is comprehended by the one who receives the Word and takes it to himself (Dodd 1953:264).

These two elements of דבר, the dianoetic and the dynamic, may be seen most forcefully in the ‘Word of God.’ The prophets in the Old Testament had a profound grasp of both concepts. In the (Septuagint) LXX the meaning of λόγος is strongly influenced by the basic Hebrew. The nature of the Greek word λόγος has mainly a dianoetic value, but receives the dynamic element from the Hebrew דבר (Dodd 1953:265). It is clear that the (Septuagint) LXX concept cannot be fully explained in terms of the Greek λόγος but can be fully understood against the background of the Hebrew דבר.

In the Hebrew דבר means both ‘word’ and ‘event’. It is not something you see in space, as the written word is ‘seen’ on the page. According to oral cultural understanding, the incarnation of the ‘Word in flesh’ is not so much the advent of an idea but a ‘word event’, the Christ event. In primarily oral cultures the ‘word’ is always an ‘event’. The word דבר can only be sounded by applying inner power: it really is breath or רוח. That is why the Word was always thought of as having powerful magical properties. Words cannot exist in time as sound without inner power being breathed into them (Dodd 1953:264).

The notion דבר expressed a dynamic character and possessed tremendous power. There is a distinction between ‘word’ and ‘voice’ (דבר and קול) of YHWH. For ‘word’ signifies the power through sense laden utterances of God, whereas ‘voice’ in both these cases represents God’s working through the forces of nature. For the Hebrews ‘voice’ signifies the sound of speech, but ‘word’ means the utterance or what is said itself (Moreau 1970:61; Dodd 1953:264).

The idea דבר is frequently used for God’s communication with humankind in His self-revelation through the prophets. The whole idea of revelation in the Old Testament is determined by the analogy of the Word spoken and heard, which is distinctively different from the idea of revelation as vision. This preserves the ontological distance between God and humankind. The idea is that God at the same time addresses ‘a word’ to what we call inanimate things, and by means of such a ‘word’ He called the universe into order out of chaos. The ‘word’ that came to humankind by the prophets was to bring justice into human affairs under the rule of the Torah (Dodd 1953:264). For the Hebrews there was no ‘word’ which was not a reality. There was no reality which was not a communicable word. Word and action were bound together. The Hebrews, clearly observed that דבר once spoken had a kind of substantive existence of its own. A blessing once pronounced continued to bless, and a curse once uttered works itself out.

The Old Testament’s understanding of the Hebrew word for ‘wisdom’ (חכמה) shows



parallels in detail with the description in the Prologue in John. It is never said in the Gospel of John, apart from the Prologue, that Christ is the divine λόγος. He utters the λόγος the Father has given Him, and so He gives it to humankind as power unto life. The λόγος is equated with ἀλήθεια (truth). Jesus not only gives the λόγοι (words), which is the truth, but He is the truth. Jesus is embodied in His words (Dodd 1953:268). Wisdom is identified with the Word of God, which is implicit in Jewish Wisdom Literature (e.g. Sirach 24:3). Wisdom can be seen as divine (e.g. 7:25-26) and active in creation (Wisdom 9:9), and wisdom (חכמה) came into the world only to experience rejection (Wisdom 9:10; Sirach 15.7). These are parallels to what John claims of the λόγος in the Prologue of the Gospel of John (Dodd 1953:268).

The Hebrew word ‘wisdom’ (חכמה) in the wisdom writings represents the thought of God immanent in the world. A list of parallels is sufficient to show that – in composing the Prologue – John’s mind was moving along thought patterns similar to that of the Jewish writers of the wisdom schools (Dodd 1953:275). The Prologue shows many parallels with the Word of God in the Old Testament, but it is also closely related to the concept of Jewish personified Wisdom. That is to say that the thought of God is projected in creation and is perceived as an imminent power within the world and humankind. For Brown, the concept of Jewish personified wisdom and the Old Testament ‘Word of God’ had evolved into a single Rabbinic motif and influenced the Fourth Evangelist (Brown 1966:520-524).

In the Greek, the concept λόγος primarily had to do with understanding (reason) and its intellectual possession. In the Old Testament, the ‘Word of God’ is never a human possession but an historical act by which God addresses humankind. The prophetic ‘Word’ and divine Wisdom (חכמה) were increasingly evident in post exilic Judaism. It is that combination which lies behind the Johannine *logos* doctrine (Brown 1966:523). Schnackenburg (1968:493) finds reason to believe that Jewish wisdom ideas and thought provided meaningful links with the historical tradition of the *logos* doctrine. However, he still believes that the λόγος concept must be seen as a Greek idea that had been taken over by the Evangelist to include notions of the ‘Word of God.’

Bultmann (1971), on the other hand, argues for a Gnostic background of the λόγος hymn in the Prologue (1:1-18) and shows a lack of historical objectivity and inconsistency with the Johannine tradition. However, the Johannine understanding of λόγος remains diametrically opposed to the *gnostic* view where the world and human flesh were seen as evil. The Johannine λόγος entered the world of evil in the form of human flesh (σάρξ) (1:14) as the light and truth (ἀλήθεια). For Brown the Prologue’s description of the λόγος is closer to Jewish thought than Hellenistic.

The λόγος in the Prologue of John can be seen as the creative Word of God, the Word that came down from the prophets, and has now become personal or flesh (σάρξ) in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the divine Wisdom, pre-existent, who came among men to teach them and to give them life. (1966:524). Not the Torah but Christ Jesus is the eternal source of life. In the Hebrew language each word has an ontological and spiritual significance. The oral phenomena of the Johannine *Logos* are both Creator and life.

On the basis of this evidence I argue that John was most influenced by the Jewish modes of thought, although there were also non-Jewish influences already at work in Palestine in the first century CE. Thus, I have located the λόγος tradition of John in a Jewish *milieu*. The evidence for a non-Jewish setting has not been convincing while the λόγος in the Gospel of John, found closer affinity to the Old Testament and Jewish Palestinian *milieu* (setting), in the concept Jewish wisdom (חכמה) and the Hebrew concept דבר. Nevertheless I have also

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shown that the Jewish thought world, even in Palestine had been thoroughly penetrated by Greek culture and thought by the first century CE.

There is a similar thanksgiving in the final prayer of the *λόγος τέλειος* (the Latin *Asclepius* or the Greek *Mimaut*), one of the products of Hermetic mysticism. It shows clearly the difference between the Gnostic way of salvation and the Christian faith. The Gnostic says:

Through thy grace alone we have attained the light of knowledge.

Thou hast given us intellect (*νοῦς*), reason (*λόγος*) and knowledge

(*γνώσις*): intellect to grasp thee, reason to search for thee, knowledge that we

may rejoice to know thee (Schnackenburg 1968:276).

The Christian's thanksgiving is not for a knowledge which is ultimately concerned with the divinity of their own nature, an immanent experience of God in their own being, but because they have received superabundant gifts of salvation from the incarnate *Logos* or from the Lord who has returned to his glory, through the Holy Spirit (Schnackenburg 1968:276).

Jesus' appearance in human flesh became a new authority for the poor and marginalised Galileans in the Johannine cultural and religious setting. Jesus as oral performer set a precedent in his teaching by affirming a new authority of the spoken Word which serves as power for the poor and the oppressed. The spoken *λόγος* under the authority of Jesus became a new mechanism of resistance for the Galilean community over against the ideology of the written law. The written law was given to Moses for moral and social instructions for all people but it became a tool that was used to shape social boundaries of oppression for the poor Galileans. The authority of the *Logos* was not rooted in the written law although Jesus claimed that he did not come to destroy the law but to fulfill it and to provide new meaning and interpretation for interpreting the *Logos*, the *Ruach*, the eternal *Pneuma* (Spirit) for the poor and oppressed.

## Conclusion

For Kelber (1990) a genuine understanding of the concept *logos* from a historical perspective hinges on discovering its philosophical and theological background. From the Hellenistic philosophical traditions of Philo, Stoicism, Neoplatonism, Mandaeism all the way to Bultmann's Redeemer Gnostic myth, I have argued that the Hebrew notion of the creative function of *דבר* and that of Jewish Wisdom holds the principal key to the historical background of the concept *λόγος* in the Johannine narrative.

For Jousse (1997) the *λόγος* existed with the *Memra* at the beginning of creation as it echoes the Palestinian Celestial tradition the world above; a tradition where the 'world below' was prescribed as *mimeme* (replay) at it reflected the 'World above.' The spoken *λόγος* became a sign and a representation of the transcending tradition of the 'Word' in oral formulae, whereas the social and linguistic world that emerges from behind the written text is one constituted by the Spirit (*רוח*), which will manifest itself in efficacious speech. The preponderance and oral functioning of the *λόγοι* (words) are all features that have been profoundly nourished by an oral, prophetic and charismatic peasant community. The Spirit (*רוח*) arrival marks the hermeneutical turning point, separating the time of concealment from the time of remembrance. Remembrance in an era of *grammatology* is more fully accomplished with the production of the narrative text. This sets a norm for what is henceforth to be remembered in traces of more written text (Kelber 1990:119).

According to Kelber (1990), this does not bind oral Johannine communities and believers slavishly to textuality in the sense that all oral possibilities are extinguished. One of the functions of the *Paraclete* (Spirit) in the Johannine narrative is to teach what the earthly Jesus

did not and could not say. Now Jesus is the eternal *Logos* who harbours and administers himself the oral treasure of the spoken *λόγοι* (words) in the Johannine narrative. It may well be appropriate that Jesus presides as *Logos* over the written text which sets new standards for oral proclamation of the Word. This creative pneumatic speech will continue in the age of the Spirit (πνεῦμα) and that all *λόγοι* (words) from now will be measured by a norm, the authoritative record of the written text. The incarnate *λόγος* had now been re-incarnated into a new medium of the written text. This brings us back to the principal topic of the authority of the Word in John's Gospel, in responding to a multitude of words and authoritative speakers in the narrative text. John articulates a singular authority by personalising the Word and lodging it at the beginning of the Prologue (1:1). Once the speaker of *λόγοι* (words in time) was elevated to the *λόγος* he will assume position of control over the *λόγοι* in the narrative text. Placed in authoritative position, the *λόγος* will take charge of the *λόγοι* in and through the narrative text. The incorporation of the *λόγοι* that is presided over by the *λόγος* does not exhaust the Johannine hermeneutics of orality and writing.

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