

In the Seminar on «The Language of the New Testament» of the *Studiosum Novi Testamenti Societas*, whose Annual Meeting took place recently at Lund at my colleagues' and my invitation, Prof Dr Jan van der Watt of Pretoria, South Africa, and I read our pilot study on «The Grammar of John 1:1». This was a paper of 51 pages, so, naturally, only a summary was presented to the seminar for its discussion. The whole study will be published in *Filologia Neotestamentaria*, Górdoba, Spain. But even from this 'whole' study, I have removed the following section on «The Concept of Logos» in order to reduce the size of the article. This section is given here as a kind of appendix to the article which is to appear in *Fil. Neot.*

The Concept of Logos

Having discussed the grammatical-structural evidence of the various clauses of our verse, it is now time to take up for discussion the concept of Logos, which is both a grammatical item as well as a conceptual one with theological implications.

The background to the Johannine Logos has occupied the pen of many scholars¹. The Greek background to the Logos concept had been entertained in earlier discussions, but as the twentieth century progressed and especially following the holocaust, the Jewish background became the dominant setting within which to explain our concept. The ideas that have figured here are mainly the דבר of the OT, especially as the creative word of God (Gen 1), the wisdom of God in the Wisdom literature, the Targumic *memra* (utterance) of God, etc. The most plausible of these would appear to be the wisdom of God, which in Prov 8:22 is said to have been created before time²: ὁ Κύριος ἔκτισέν με ἀρχὴν ὁδῶν αὐτοῦ εἰς ἔργα αὐτοῦ, πρὸ τοῦ αἰῶνος ἐθεμελίωσέν με ἐν ἀρχῇ. In analogous

¹ For example, see the almsot exhaustive discussion in *TDNT*, IV, 69-192, with extensive bibliography. See further C. H. Dood, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 263-85, the first part of which shows a fine grasp of the main issues. For Logos in Greek thought in general and particularly in Herakleitos' thinking, see W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* Cambridge: CUP pb. rp. 1978-95, in 6 Vols., Vol. I, esp. 419-88, and literature in it.

² Similarly *Sirach* 1:4; 24:9-22.

fashion, *Sapientia* at 9:9 speaks of wisdom as being present when God created the world (ἡ σοφία ἢ εἰδυῖα τὰ ἔργα σου καὶ παροῦσα, ὅτε ἐποίεις τὸν κόσμον)³ and even as πάρεδρος τῶν σῶν θρόνων⁴. None of these passages, however, ascribes to wisdom what Jn 1:1 ascribes to Logos; in fact, according to the Book of Proverbs wisdom is “created” by God, whereas the Logos is understood as uncreated, and said to exist already in the beginning. Nearer to the demands of the case would come *Sapientia* 9:1, according to which God created everything by means of his word (ὁ ποιήσας τὰ πάντα ἐν λόγῳ σου). However, this, too, appears to be only a mere reflection of the דבר of Gen 1. There is, thus, no sufficiently intrinsic value in the proposed Jewish backgrounds to further detain us⁵.

John writes of the Logos, and λόγος was a mighty concept in the language in which John communicated his message. There is, perhaps, no other word in the entire Greek language for expressing the mental, intellectual, and spiritual life and activity of man in all its rich ramifications that is more significant than λόγος⁶. Λόγος (<λέγω: I. “gather”; II. “say”) is at once the “conceived word” in thought (λόγος ἐνδιάθετος) and the “uttered word” (λόγος προφορικός)⁷, which functions as a “seed” in bringing forth in those who hear it (λόγος σπέρματικός)⁸. But λόγος is also ratio⁹, “the ability to think”, and to “reason” (e.g. τὸ λογικόν), which (according to Aristoteles) distinguished man from beast¹⁰; and “proportion”¹¹ and “relation” in created things, which orders the cosmos. In Platon’s psychology, τὸ

³ See also the entire passage 6:22-9:18.

⁴ *Sapientia* 9:4.

⁵ The argument that what was contemplated in Jn 1:1 was the Jewish wisdom, but σοφία in Greek being feminine, John had to use the masculine Λόγος, is not convincing.

⁶ Δ. Δημητράκου, *Μέγα Λεξικὸν ὅλης τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς Γλώσσης*, 9 Vols., Athens 1933-53, rp. 1964, lists 163 words containing the element λόγος.

⁷ Cf. Philon Mechanikos (III B. C.) 3: ἐν ἀνθρώπῳ δ’ ὁ μὲν [λόγος] ἐστὶν ἐνδιάθετος ὁ δέ, προφορικός. Similarly Ploutarchos, *Moralia* 777c.

⁸ See e.g. Chrysippos, *Frg.* 413.33: ὁ σπέρματικός λόγος.

⁹ E.g. Herodotos, I. 134; *Bekker’s Anekdotia*, 1193.

¹⁰ Aristoteles,

¹¹ E.g. Theognis 418; Herodotos, VII. 36; Platon, *Timaios* 29 c.

λογιστικόν is the highest part of the human soul (being distinguished from the θυμοειδές and the ἐπιθυμητικόν)¹². The word also means “account”, “worth”¹³. Further, λόγος relates to semantics, as when Sokrates and his interlocutors ask one another: τί λέγεις;¹⁴ The expression does not mean: “what are you saying?” but “what do you *mean* by what you are saying?” The word here is not merely a sound, but above all a carrier of “meaning”, a “message”. Exactly the same significance is expressed by John in 2:22. The disciples had misunderstood a saying of Jesus, which following his resurrection, they came to understand: ὅτε οὖν ἠγέρθη ... ἐμνήσθησαν οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ ὅτι τοῦτο ἔλεγεν, καὶ ἐπίστευσαν (“... that this was what *he meant* [by what he had said], and they believed”).

Herakleitos (fl. c. 500 B.C.) had used λόγος of the highest metaphysical principle that gave existence to all creation¹⁵. For him λόγος is eternal (αἰώνιος), θεῖος¹⁶, comparable to eternal fire (αἰώνιον πῦρ)¹⁷ (cf. Det 4:24: κύριος ὁ Θεὸς σου πῦρ καταναλίσκων ἐστίν), giving existence and order (κόσμος) to the whole universe¹⁸. This λόγος, which is in the world as well as in the human soul has always been there and will always be there, varying its form like the flames of fire, being kindled and extinguished according to certain norms¹⁹. That is why existence is not static but dynamic. Existence is not something that *is* or *was*; it is something that is all the time becoming (γίγνεσθαι)²⁰. That is the reason why one cannot step into the same river twice:²¹ τὰ πάντα

¹² Platon, *Republic* 439 d.

¹³ Herodotos, *Frg.* 39.

¹⁴ E.g. Platon, *Phaidon* 117; *Hipparchos* 225; *Protagoras* 309 d; *Hippias major* 300 e.

¹⁵ Herakleitos, *Frg.* 1.

¹⁶ Herakleitos, *Testimonia*, 15 and 16.

¹⁷ Herakleitos, *Testimonia*, 5.8-13.

¹⁸ Herakleitos, *Testimonia* 1.30; 1.40; 8.1-6.

¹⁹ Herakleitos, *Frg.* 30; *Testimonia*, 10.

²⁰ Herakleitos, *Testimonia*, 6.1 ff.

²¹ Herakleitos, *Frgs.* 49 and 91.

ῥεῖ²². Λόγος is the inner law which determines “becoming” and “existence” (τὸ γίνεσθαι καὶ τὸ εἶναι). Herakleitos had left a school behind him in Ephesus, where John, according to tradition, wrote his Gospel.

The Stoics used λόγος of the order that is in the world. With them λόγος, which is an eternal concept for God, for νοῦς, for Εἰμαρμένη, and for Zeus,²³ is the principle that creates, orders, and holds together the world²⁴ (cf. Heb 11:3). Thus, in his creative activity Logos is λόγος σπερματικός²⁵, whereas as the law in the cosmos and in man, who gives man the ability to think and to know, it is the “rational logos” (λόγος ὀρθός)²⁶. Thus, λόγος exists in man, but this is only a part of the great, universal Logos²⁷. In its relation to man, λόγος is the “faculty of thinking”, the “mind” (λόγος ἐδιάθετος), but since thoughts are also articulated, it becomes the “uttered word” (λόγος προφορικός)²⁸.

The Jewish author, Philon, who uses λόγος not fewer than 1300 times, while using Greek terminology and conceptional categories, often fills them with Jewish content. For Philon, Λόγος Θεοῦ is not God himself—as in Stoicism—but a work of God²⁹. Though divine (θεῖος)³⁰, λόγος is a second-class god³¹, an εἰκὼν τοῦ Θεοῦ δι’ οὗ σύμπας ὁ κόσμος

²² Herakleitos is often said to have expressed this position, e.g. Platon, *Kratylos*, 399 d; Alexander Phil., *In Aristotelis topicorum libros octo commentaria*, 560.2; Simplicius Phil., *In Aristotelis physicorum libros commentaria*, X. 1313.11.

²³ Diogenes Laertios, *Zenon*, 135: ἔν τε εἶναι θεὸν καὶ νοῦν καὶ εἰμαρμένην καὶ Δία

²⁴ See Sextus Empeirikos, *Against the Mathematicians* IX. 107. Further, Diogenes Laertios, *Zenon*, 134

²⁵ See Sextos Empeirikos, *Against the Mathematicians*, IX. 101 and Diogenes Laertios, *Zenon*, 135-36: καὶ ὡς περ ἐν τῇ γονῇ τὸ σπέρμα περιέχεται, οὕτω καὶ τοῦτον σπερματικὸν λόγον ὄντα τοῦ κόσμου ...

²⁶ Chrysippos, (J. v. Arnim, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*) 3.4 and Klemes Alexandreus, *Paidagogos* III. 11, 74. From the combination of these words comes the Greek term ὀρθολογισμός = “rationalism”.

²⁷ Cf. the Gnostic divine spark given to man by God.

²⁸ See J. v. Arnim, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, 2.43.

²⁹ Philon, *Sacrifices of Abel and Cain*, 65.

³⁰ Philon, *Allegorical Interpretation*, III. 8, 217, etc.

³¹ Philon, *Allegorical Interpretation*, II. 86.

ἐδημιουργεῖτο³². Being not fully God, the λόγος is a mediator between the transcendent God and the world³³, as well as man's ἀρχιερεύς to God³⁴.

From the above it must have become obvious that the rich and variegated characteristics and meanings of the concept of λόγος in Greek thought constitutes the background to John's λόγος. This does not mean that John's Logos is to be identified with the Herakleitian or the Philonian Logos, or the Logos of the Stoics, but that the term as such had been already used with such rich content, and that the various meanings and usages of Logos in philosophy and in daily life were such as to make this term the best candidate for John to use as a vehicle to present and describe his own Logos.

Sociolinguistically, this had the advantage of using a term well-known, whose rich associations in Greek thought and culture rendered it an appropriate receptacle to be filled with new content. Greeks who read the prologue would each identify the Johannine Logos with their own Logos. There is hardly anything in the prologue down to vs. 14 that would seriously disurb a Herakleitian (if there were any such in John's day), a Stoic, or any other. Everyone might think that John was describing their own Logos. Until vs 14! But when in that verse John claimed that this Logos "became flesh", any Greek would have to halt. That would, indeed, be a stumbling-block to anyone versed in Hellenic education and culture. But would it not have been a stumbling-block to a Jew as well?³⁵

I conclude, therefore, that the Johannine Logos is John's Logos. The idea, the concept and its rich associations he has taken from the Greek language and Greek thought, but the content is his own, and it is determined by the view of Jesus held by the early Church.

³² Philon, *The Special Laws*, I. 81.

³³ Philon, *The Giants*, 52; *Life of Moses*, 133 ff.

³⁴ E.g. Philon, *On Dreams*, I. 215.

³⁵ Thus, to propose the Jewish background as being more congenial to John's thought is not possible here.