

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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In the Beginning

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By your gracious invitation I am here this morning to lecture, as it was suggested to me, on the first verse of John's Gospel, where Christ is called the *Logos*. In 1972 I published a small book on *The Johannine Logos*, and if anything in this short lecture interests you, you will find amore complete exposition in that book.

Statistics may not provide the most interesting type of introduction, but it does not burden the brain nor injure the intellect to know that John's Gospel uses the term *logos* forty times. What is more surprising, indeed disconcerting, is that the Greek term *logos* can be translated by forty different English words. Liddell and Scott's great lexicon has more than five columns, each 90 lines long, of its various meanings. The word word is hardly ever the correct translation. Liddell and Scott say explicitly that it "rarely means a single word."

The reason our Bibles translate *logos* as *word* is that Jerome, a monk of the early fifth century, mistranslated it as *verbum*. Jerome's *Vulgate*, as it is called, became the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church, and the texts Jerome used became the mainstay of contemporary liberal versions. The Latin term *verbum* became *word* in English, though I do not know why it did not become *verb*, as it actually is in a new Catholic French version, *La Bible de Jerusalem*. At any rate, *logos* hardly ever means a single word. But it has forty or more other meanings.

I have not listed all the meanings, nor shall I read you my abbreviated list. Just survey it from your seats.

Computation rule narrative

Reckoning pretext story

Accounts reason speech

Measures case oration

Sum theory phrase

Total argument message

Esteem principle tradition

Consideration law dialogue

Value thesis oracle

Reputation hypothesis proverb

Relation formula language

Fashion definition sentence

Ratio debate Wisdom (of God)

Proportion reflection

The Philosophic Background

The particular interest in the *Logos* as used in John's first verse derives from its philosophic background. Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher about 500 B.C., used the term to designate the Supreme Intelligence who rules the universe. Neither Plato nor Aristotle had a *Logos*-doctrine; but the Stoics, the most vigorous of all schools from 300 B.C. to A.D. 200, adopted the view of Heraclitus. Then Philo Judaeus, a contemporary of Christ, used the Stoic *Logos*-doctrine to interpret the Old Testament. Some Christians in the third century, and some others in the nineteenth century, thought that Philo had anticipated the doctrine of the Trinity. This was far from Philo's intention, though no one can deny that he influenced the early church in that direction.

In addition to the Greek Stoics and the Jewish Philo, there is another source that seems to have influenced John more directly. At an unknown date, possibly in the early second century, an unknown author wrote the tractate *Poimander*. This became the first of a series of eighteen that were collected and published, perhaps in the fourth century, under the name of *Hermes Trismegistus*. The whole was supposed to be a revelation from the Egyptian god Tot or Toth. The tractates are not consistent with one another, and one or two of them seem to be a form of Christianity.

Now, *Poimander*, by which Reitzenstein tried to explain away Paul's doctrine of redemption, bears a striking resemblance—or, better, a striking non-resemblance—to the Prologue to John's Gospel. *Poimander* says that the *Logos* was not in the beginning, the *Logos* was not God, not all things were made by him, and therefore the darkness could comprehend it. The contrast is so definite that one can hardly refrain from concluding that John wrote his Prologue for the express purpose of refuting *Poimander*.

This may seem to conflict with a second century date for *Poimander*. However, two considerations preserve the possibility. First, the tractates were written at different times and were collected later. Second, even if *Poimander* was not written before A. D. 125, its religion was more ancient and could

have had a deleterious effect on first century evangelization.

We today are not much interested in the religion of *Poimander*; but we should be interested in Christ as the *Logos*, despite the fact that even the members of conservative churches mainly react negatively.

The Doctrine of Creation

A study of the person of Christ could hardly begin more appropriately than with *John* 1:1. Echoing the Septuagint, John uses *Genesis* 1:1, "In the beginning." Not only is deity asserted in these two words, but also John repeats the idea at the end of the verse: "the *Logos* was God."

Jehovah's Witnesses try to evade the force of this verse. They translate it, or rather mistranslate it, as "the *Logos* was a god." They thus adopt polytheism. More to the point, they do not know the Greek rules on the use of the article; and they mistakenly assume that there is no indefinite article in Greek. But let us proceed.

If John begins with the first word of *Genesis*, the second word of *Genesis* comes in John's third verse: the *Logos* created all things. John of course is not the only apostle who tells us this. In *Ephesians* 3:9, Paul says, "God created all things through Jesus Christ." Then in *Colossians* 1:16, 17, Paul not only says that Christ created all things, but more explicitly that Christ "organized the universe." It should be remembered that *ta panta* in Greek, though usually translated "all things," is the regular designation for the universe. Christ, the *Logos*, the Intelligent Deity, organized the universe.

The doctrine of creation, asserting that the universe is not an everlasting mechanism but a teleological construction of Intelligence, needs great emphasis today because it is so widely denied in the public schools. Purposeless differential equations have replaced an omnipotent and omniscient Mind. Nor does this theology affect the subject of physics only. Its implications are even more easily seen in its effects on morality, extending from Sodom on the Hudson to Gomorra across the Golden Gate. However, before going into these derivative

subjects, we must yet awhile continue with the basic theology. For theology is basic.

The Wisdom of God

Associated with logic, intelligence, and mind, is the concept of wisdom. Before congratulating himself in 1 *Corinthians* 2:16, where Paul says that he has the mind of Christ, he had declared that Christ is "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (*1 Corinthians* 1:24). *Jude* 25 acknowledges Christ by referring to "the only wise God our Saviour." *Psalms* 104:24 connects wisdom with creation by asserting, "O Lord, how manifold are thy works; in wisdom thou hast made them all." The subject is vast. A lecture like this can give only a few indications of it. For example, *Ephesians* 3:10 speaks of "the manifold wisdom of God." This wisdom is Christ, for Paul had just said in *Ephesians* 1:7-8 that in Christ's redeeming work God "abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence."

The Gnostics had made wisdom or *Sophia* the lowest eon in God's mind, and by her sin the lower world came into being. The New Testament mentions *sophia* or wisdom fifty-one times, but it is not the *Sophia* of the Gnostics. *James* 1:5 admonishes us that "if any one of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God ... and it shall be given him." We often pray for health, and this is not improper, but how often do we pray for knowledge and wisdom?

Christ is the wisdom of God. Nevertheless Christ is also something else, something basic and more fundamental than wisdom. The New Testament uses the word 110 times, of which 25 occur in John's Gospel. The scholarly existentialists or neo-orthodox, such as Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, and the totally unscholarly Pentecostals unite in stressing emotion and ecstatic experience. But nowhere does Christ say, I am the Emotion. What he says is, I am the Truth. Many good Christians, indeed all *good* Christians, say that God is love; and so he is. But if it were not *true*, he would not be love. Truth is basic. Listen to what the apostle said.

Truth Is God

John 1:14. "The Word [or *Logos*] was ... full of grace and truth." Three verses below, we read, "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." The third chapter of *John*, whose sixteenth verse is so well known, in verses 20-21 teaches that morality depends on truth. In his profound theological conversation with the Samaritan woman, who had five husbands and was then living with a man who was not her husband, Christ insisted that one must worship God in spirit and in truth. To some Jewish believers Jesus promised, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"(8:32). Later in the same chapter, negatively, Jesus denounces the devil because he did not abide in the truth, because there is no truth in him (8:44). The next two verses continue the emphasis. Then there is the well-known verse, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (14:6); and one may comment that if it were not true that Christ is the way, there would be no reason for walking that way. The Holy Spirit, sometimes called the Spirit of Christ, is three times called the Spirit of truth (*John* 14:17; 15:26, and 16:13), verses bearing directly on the doctrine of the Trinity. Christ also says that he himself is sanctified through the truth, as we too are sanctified through the truth (17:17, 19). If any Christians wish to increase in sanctification, they must learn more truth. The verses quoted are most of John's verses that identify Christ as the Truth. Anyone interested can search out the remainder of the 110 verses in the New Testament and meditate on their truth.

The Evangelical Churches

No one should be surprised that the *Logos*, the logic, the reason, the wisdom, the message, the language, the reflection of God is truth. What is surprising and depressing is the fact that the churches called evangelical have almost totally eliminated this intellectualism from their thoughts. If they have not become ecstatic Pentecostals, speaking charismatic gibberish, and if they have not become existentialists who find little or no truth in the Bible, they have nonetheless repudiated theology in favor of a comfortably blank mind. Permit me to ask you, When did you last hear a sermon on the Trinity? I remember one by Clarence Edward Macartney in 1924, and another really

excellent one by a Greek Catholic priest in 1979. But even references to the Trinity, let alone complete sermons, have been few in number. References to Christ are frequent, but too often meaningless. Many times evangelists have stressed "a personal relationship to Christ." This makes no sense. Even Satan has a personal relationship to Christ. He hates him, and hatred is very personal. What people need is a statement of the proper personal relationship, and that depends on who Christ is. One can sympathize with humble people of low I.Q. who cannot understand. But one can only upbraid people of higher intelligence who refuse to understand.

Truth and Virtue

A few paragraphs back made mention of morality. Let us ask, Why do so many women murder their own babies, or at least pay a hired assassin to kill—or half-kill—the child and throw his quivering body into a garbage can? Few people give the basic answer. A woman kills her baby because she rejects the doctrine of the Trinity. The Ten Commandments forbid murder. But why should anyone pay attention to the Ten Commandments? The answer to this *Why?* is found in the introduction: "I am the Lord thy God." If that statement were not true, then abortion, child abuse, torture, drug addiction, and anything else are matters only of personal preference. The basic question is not what is right or wrong, though this question has its derivative status. But the basic question is, What is true?

For a good 1,500 years, Christian theologians have described human nature as intellectual and volitional. Jonathan Edwards, for example, wrote, "God has endued the soul with two principal faculties: the one, that by which it is capable of perception and speculation, or by which it discerns and judges of things, which is called the understanding. The other, that by which the soul is some way inclined with respect to things it views or considers: or it is the faculty by which the soul beholds things,.. either as liking, disliking, ... approving or rejecting. This faculty is called ... inclination, will, ... mind, ... often called the heart."

The Lutherans too, at least those who, like the Missouri Synod, have preserved their orthodoxy, pay little or no attention to the emotions. Even in this decadent century their notable theologian, Pieper, in his *Christian Dogmatics* (519) very briefly, but twice, states the Lutheran position that the image consists of intellect and will. There is no mention of emotions.

This emphasis on the will has almost totally disappeared from what now passes as Christian preaching. Freudianism has replaced it with the emotions. Most pew-warmers do not realize that this emphasis is a very modern development. If one goes back to the Westminster divines, to Calvin, even to Aquinas, and especially to Augustine, he will find that human nature is regularly divided into will and intellect. The point is important because faith in Christ is not an emotion but a volition. One does not feel for Christ, he decides for Christ. The Scripture says, Jesus himself said, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (*Luke* 13:3). Note very carefully that repentance is a change of *mind*. Its root is the word *noeo*, to think. The noun *nous* is the intellect. And faith, by which one is justified, is a belief, a voluntary assent to an understood proposition. Begging your pardon, and with what modicum of modesty I can muster, may I remark that this month The Trinity Foundation has completed the publication of my book on *The Biblical Doctrine of Man*.

Now today, in contrast with the Christianity of the past, Freudian emotionalism has replaced intellectualism, and volition seems to have been totally forgotten. Finney reduced evangelism to psychological brainwashing. A contemporary evangelistic, but non-ecclesiastical, group boasted that it could convert almost anybody in twenty minutes. They were astounded to discover that in England they needed thirty-five minutes. This was not the attitude of Jonathan Edwards, nor of Whitefield, nor of Calvin, nor of Luther, nor of Augustine and Athanasius. These men emphasized the truth and urged people to believe the truth. Faith is no emotion. Faith is intellectual understanding with volitional assent.

Knowledge and Salvation

To prepare for a short concluding paragraph, may I here include a few more Scripture verses. They are the words of God's prophet Hosea. "The Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, no mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land" (4:1). "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee" (4:6). "For I desired mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings" (6:6).

Permit me to repeat and emphasize that the *Logos* was full of grace and truth. He said, "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." Christ was sanctified, and if we are also, we are sanctified by the truth.

O God of truth, whose living Word
 Upholds whate'er has breath,
 Look down on thy creation, Lord,
 Enslaved by sin and death.
 Set up thy standard, Lord, that we
 Who claim a heavenly birth,
 May march with thee to smite the lies
 That vex the groaning Earth.
 Then, God of Truth, for whom we long,
 Thou who wilt hear our prayer,
 Do thine own battle in our hearts
 And slay the falsehood there.

From the Horror File

A few years ago I wrote a short essay titled "The Trouble with Conservatives," the trouble being, of course, that they are not Christians. Now *Policy Review*, a journal of opinion published by the Heritage Foundation in Washington, D.C., has published an article entitled "Sex and God in American Politics—What Conservatives Really

Think" (Summer 1984). The editors interviewed 13 conservatives—Irving Kristol, Midge Decter, Ronald Godwin, R. Emmett Tyrell, Jr., Howard Phillips, Milton Friedman, Paul Weyrich, M. Stanton Evans, Jerry Falwell, Orrin Hatch, Jack Kemp, Phyllis Schlafly, and Seymour Siegal—on various moral issues, and here are a few of their responses:

Question: Why are so many marriages ending in divorce these days?

Milton Friedman (Nobel Prize-winning economist): "And I am not even sure that this development is a bad thing.... So I am not prepared to judge whether on balance the greater frequency and ease of divorce has been a good or a bad thing."

Question: Should mothers of young children stay at home rather than work?

R. Emmett Tyrell, Jr. (syndicated columnist): "Mothers' first commitment, I think, should be to their children and to their husbands. If that sounds Biblical, well it is an old book full of foolishness, but there are some good things in it."

Question: Under what circumstances should the state intervene in the treatment of handicapped infants?

Milton Friedman: "I think the state should keep out of the Baby Doe kind of case."

Question: Is abortion always wrong? Is abortion permissible in cases of rape or incest? If the life of the mother is endangered?

Milton Friedman: "It is an issue on which there is an enormous difference of views and moral values among the populace as a whole. It is, therefore, utterly inappropriate for the government to try to impose the views of one large section of the population on the other.... The fundamental principle justifying the use of the state is unanimity among its citizens."

Question: What explains the sudden prevalence of overt homosexuality?

Jerry Falwell (president of the Moral Majority): "I don't believe that state punishment of homosexuals provides any answer whatever. I personally believe that homosexuals should be afforded total civil rights like all other Americans. Equal access to housing accommodations and job opportunities is guaranteed to all Americans in the Constitution. The problem with homosexuality is that most people look on this sin in a different way than all other sins. Most Americans look with great contempt on the homosexual. That is why we cannot help homosexuals. They immediately perceive this contempt and realize there is no love or reaching out there."

"As long as the homosexual is not flaunting his or her behavior as an acceptable lifestyle, and is not recruiting students, there is no supportable reason for not allowing him to teach in public school."

Question: How do you interpret the establishment clause of the First Amendment?

Milton Friedman: "I am opposed to the tax exemption of universities, churches, etc. All of that is an indirect way of subsidizing religious establishments, and ought to be in violation of the First Amendment."

Question: Would you like to see prayers said in the public schools?

Howard Phillips: (national director of the Conservative Caucus): "If everyone has good will, I believe it should be possible to formulate a prayer that would not be offensive to any religious groups, such as the Regents prayer in New York. We could have what I would call an equal time system—some time to Christians, some time to Jews, or whatever other significant religious groups are present."

Irving Kristol: (coeditor of *The Public Interest*; member of the board of contributors of *The Wall Street Journal*): "It is good for students to learn to stand in silence for a few minutes in an attitude of deference to something or someone."

Milton Friedman: "I am opposed to requiring or permitting prayers in public schools."

Paul Weyrich (executive director, Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress): "I favor whatever prayers the local community wants.... The U.S. Senate provides a perfect example of what could be done. Everyday it opens with a prayer, sometimes by a rabbi, sometimes a Catholic priest, sometimes a Mormon. No one takes any offense."

Orrin Hatch (senator from Utah): "An intellectually sound argument—though I disagree with it—can be made against vocal prayer. There are very few intellectually sound arguments against silent prayer or meditation."

Question: Would you call America a Christian country?

Midge Decter (executive director of the Committee for the Free World): "I am fiercely loyal to the public school system, which is dreadful and in very bad shape and a failure and everything else you want to say against it.... I am against tuition tax credits, and I am against all those things that will undermine the public school system."

Editor's note: Both the secular and religious Right are intellectually and morally overdrawn. The Bible and the Bible alone furnishes the wisdom that informs a civilized society. Unlike conservatives, who are old windbags full of foolishness, Christians must defend the Bible, private education, and tax exemption; and oppose abortion, infanticide, divorce-on-demand, sodomy, and impious public prayer. --*John W. Robbins*