
Nota Bene: As this translation is a work in progress, it will be updated as and when newly translated verses are available and is subject to revision. Extracts from the accompanying Commentary are given in the appendix. I have also included the Greek text (NA28) of vv.1-13 of chapter one so that those conversant with New Testament Greek can compare my translation of those verses to that text.

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The Gospel According to John

A New Interpretation

Preface

The genesis of this interpretation of meaning was some marginal notes I made, in 1977 while a Christian monk, in my copy of τὸ κατὰ Ἰωάννην εὐαγγέλιον, for as the title indicates this is an interpretation and not a literal translation.

As I have sometimes done in translations of mine from Hellenic Greek (for example tractates of the Corpus Hermeticum), I have here opted for some transliterations (such as logos and theos) in an endeavour to avoid reading into the text the meanings that some of the English words conventionally used may now suggest, or do suggest often as a result of over a thousand years of exegesis. For the hope is that such transliterations, and eschewing some other English words that have traditionally been used will enable the reader to approach and to appreciate the text in a new way, sans preconceptions, and hopefully appreciate how it might have been understood by those - both pagans and new converts - who first heard or read this evangel in the formative years of Christianity before Christian doctrine became formalized, before disputations about heresy, and before there were extensive theological commentaries on the text.

To give just two examples. (i) In 8.7 and in respect of ἀναμάρτητος I have eschewed the common translation involving the English word 'sin' [without sin] and which English word, through centuries of Christian exegesis and preaching, has become a theological abstraction and a pejorative term, whereas the the original meaning of the English word syn imputed the sense of doing what was wrong, of committing an error, of making a mistake, of being at fault; of in some way overstepping the bounds or transgressing limits imposed by others, and thus of accepting responsibility for such an infraction, a sense which the suggested etymology of the word syn implies: from the Latin sons, sontis. While my translation of 'mistake' may well be controversial, to me it imparts something important regarding the teachings, and the life, of Jesus of Nazareth: something quite human, something rather different from a stern preacher preaching about 'sin'; something which

seems to express what the Beatitudes express, and something which individuals such as Julian of Norwich, George Fox, and William Pen, many centuries later tried to say and write about Christianity and about the teachings and the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Thus the interpretation of this particular verse is "So, as they continued to ask he straightened himself, saying to them: Let he who has never made a mistake throw the first stone at her." (ii) In 1.10 - ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἦν καὶ ὁ κόσμος δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο - I take the sense of ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἦν as suggesting not that "he was in the world" but rather that he was "of the world", among - with - those of the world, with his mortal body subject to pain and bodily death, with καὶ ὁ κόσμος δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο thus implying not that "the world was made/created through him" but that the world was presenced in him, past, present, and future, with the English word 'presenced' - etymon: Latin praesentia - suggested by how he came to be embodied, presenced, in the Eucharist (qv. the phrase "This same presence may be called moste fitly, a reall presence, that is a presence not fained, but a true & a faythfull presence," in John Foxe's *The first volume of the ecclesiasticall history: contaynyng the Actes and monumentes of thynges passed in every kynges tyme in this realme*, 1570).

In respect of the Greek text, I have followed Nestle-Aland (NA28), although I have on occasion favoured some variant reading such as from the Textus Receptus (Stephanus, 1550) or from a particular MS with such departures noted in the commentary and which commentary is to be published separately. An extract from that commentary is given here in an appendix to illustrate my methodology.

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Text

- 1 Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.
- 2 οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν.
- 3 πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν. ὃ γέγονεν
- 4 ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν, καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων·
- 5 καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν.
- 6 Ἐγένετο ἄνθρωπος, ἀπεσταλμένος παρὰ θεοῦ, ὄνομα αὐτῷ Ἰωάννης·
- 7 οὗτος ἦλθεν εἰς μαρτυρίαν ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός, ἵνα πάντες πιστεύσωσιν δι' αὐτοῦ.
- 8 οὐκ ἦν ἐκεῖνος τὸ φῶς, ἀλλ' ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός.
- 9 Ἦν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν, ὃ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον, ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον.
- 10 ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἦν, καὶ ὁ κόσμος δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ ὁ κόσμος αὐτὸν οὐκ ἔγνω.
- 11 εἰς τὰ ἴδια ἦλθεν, καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον.
- 12 ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν, ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ,
- 13 οἱ οὐκ ἐξ αἱμάτων οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρὸς ἀλλ' ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν.

Chapter I

- 1 In primacy was the logos, and the logos was [melded] with theos, and theos was the logos
 - 2 For this was, in primacy, [melded] with theos
 - 3 Who brought into being all beings and without whom no beings would exist:
 - 4 Who was Life and which Life was the phaos of human beings.
 - 5 And the phaos illuminates the dark and is not overwhelmed by the dark.

 - 6 There was a man, a messenger from theos, named John
 - 7 Who, arriving as a witness so that others might trust him, gave evidence concerning the phaos
 - 8 For he himself was not the phaos but rather gave evidence regarding the phaos:
 - 9 Of the advent into the world of the genuine phaos who could enlighten any person.
 - 10 He who was of the world with the world presented in him but whose own did not recognize him.
 - 11 For having ventured to his own his own did not receive him
 - 12 While those who did receive him he confirmed as children of theos including those affirming his nomen,
 - 13 Who were begotten not of blood nor by the design of mortals but of theos.
 - 14 And the logos became corporeal and dwelt among us and we perceived his numinosity, the numinosity of the only begotten of the Father, abounding in veritas, benevolence.
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Appendix Extracts from the Commentary

1.

a) Ἐν ἀρχῇ

I have eschewed the conventional, and the somewhat bland, 'in the beginning', for the more descriptive 'in primacy', a sense which the Greek suggests.

b) λόγος

It is, in my view, better to transliterate this than give a definite interpretation such as 'Word', especially since I incline toward the view that λόγος (as the following verses indicate - cf. the note on πρὸς τὸν θεόν below) is used here in the sense of divine wisdom as manifest in the divine Law (as for example in the LXX text of Exodus 34.28), and thus implying a fundamental principle which describes/reveals the nature of Being and beings, and thus the relationship between Being and beings. In this case, between the divinity and we mortals, and the duties and responsibilities of mortals.

Thus the translation 'In primacy was the [or that] logos...'

c) θεὸς

A transliteration for two basic reasons. (i) Because this is the very beginning of the text, with nothing having been mentioned so far about the nature or the attributes of the deity, and (ii) because the English word God now implies a particular cultural interpretation, the assumption being of God, as father. It is here just *theos*, or *Theos* if one reads Θεόν rather than θεόν, which after much reflexion, I am inclined to do.

The nature and attributes of *theos* do become revealed, as the text proceeds, and to transliterate here is to approach the text as the evangel it was, and to thus possibly appreciate how it was received by those who first heard it or read it in the formative years of Christianity.

2.

a) πρὸς τὸν θεόν

What does πρὸς τὸν θεόν mean? Perhaps not exactly what the conventional translation of 'with' implies, given πρὸς here is a preposition (with the accusative) which is generally indicative of movement (*toward*, or to interact with, or *unto*, something) and that, for the reader of the translation, 'the Logos was *with* *theos*' is not very clear. With, the reader might well enquire, in what manner? As in the sense of being beside, or close? As in the Shakespearean Heaven doth with us as we with torches do? [1] As in - a sense not relevant to the Greek here but which English usage might suggest - supporting?

The English word *with* - with all its possible meanings, recent and otherwise - is not therefore in my view altogether satisfactory in suggesting the sense of the Greek. In the subsequent verse of John - 1.42 πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν - the sense is *to* Jesus, and in Hebrews 2:17 τὰ πρὸς τὸν θεόν suggests the sense of 'concerning', of relating to, which the English word *with* can also denote.

Positioned as it is between 'the primacy of the Logos' and the 'Logos was *theos*', the sense - because of the repeated ἦν - suggests melded, with a free, non-literal, interpretation therefore being:

In primacy, the Logos, with Logos and *Theos* melded, for the Logos was the *Theos*

This evangel does not, therefore in my view, begin with some sort of philosophical statement of a neo-Platonist kind about some metaphysical principle termed Logos, but rather is a reminder that, for mortals, what has and had primacy was Logos understood as the divine guidance manifest in the wisdom that is the Law, and that this wisdom, given to mortals by the divinity is, of itself and for us, a divine manifestation, a presencing, of the divinity. A sense which the mention of John the Baptist in v. 6-7 confirms, for John was sent by the divinity to testify - μαρτυρήσῃ - as to this truth. For God is Wisdom, the Law, and the Law is of God and, importantly according to the Old Testament context of this gospel and of the other gospels, how we can know and understand and be in the presence of God. As Paul of Tarsus expressed it in relation to the evangel of Jesus of Nazareth:

πλήρωμα οὖν νόμου ἡ ἀγάπη

love is the completion of the law [2]

b) Οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν

This line, with its repetition of ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ and of πρὸς τὸν θεόν from line 1 is very interesting, especially in relation to οὗτος which here imputes the sense of “for *this* was in [that] primacy [already melded] with theos,” a translation which in my view is somewhat more meaningful than the conventional [3] “the same was in the beginning with God” and certainly more accurate than the “He was with God in the beginning” of some newer translations.

3.

πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο

ἐγένετο – born, or (even better) *came into being*, rather than the more prosaic 'made' as if in illusion to something having been manufactured. The sense is of things – of beings – coming into being, given existence, because of and by Theos.

4.

a) ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων

Literally, “in whom The Life was” (that is, in whom The Life had being, existence) and “which Life was [became] the φῶς of human beings.”

b) ἄνθρωπος – human beings, rather than the archaic 'man/Mankind'.

An alternative for ζωὴ would be 'being' in the sense of having existence as opposed to non-existence (death), suggesting “Who was Being and which being became [through Theos] the φῶς [the being] of human beings.”

Given that φῶς metaphorically (qv. Iliad, Odyssey, Hesiod, etcetera) implies the being, the life, 'the spark', of mortals, and, generally, either (i) the illumination, the light, that arises because of the Sun and distinguishes the day from the night, or (ii) any brightness that provides illumination and thus enables things to be seen, I am inclined to avoid the vague English word 'light' which all other translations use and which, as in the case of God, has, in the context of the evangel of Jesus of Nazareth, acquired particular meanings mostly as a result of centuries of exegesis and which therefore conveys or might convey something that the Greek word, as used by the author of this particular Greek text, might not have done.

Hence my transliteration – using the Homeric φῶς instead of φῶς – and which transliteration requires the reader to pause and consider what phaos may, or may not, mean, suggest, or imply. As in the matter of logos, it is most probably not some sort of philosophical principle, neo-Platonist or otherwise.

Interestingly, φῶς occurs in conjunction with ζωὴ and θεός and ἐγένετο and Ἄνθρωπος in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, thus echoing the evangel of John:

φῶς καὶ ζωὴ ἐστὶν ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατήρ, ἐξ οὗ ἐγένετο ὁ Ἄνθρωπος [4]

Life and phaos are [both] of Theos, The Father, Who brought human beings into existence

c) τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει

Here, the value of using the transliteration phaos is evident, for 'phaos illuminates the dark' rather than 'light shines into the darkness' since the suggestion appears to that there is a revealing [5] of what has been obscured; that 'phaos dispels the obscurity' as the illumination brought by the Sun dispels the obscurity that is a feature of the night, or least was, in the days when the evangel of Jesus of Nazareth was revealed, when the dark night could only partially (and not very far, in distance) be illuminated by items such as small oil lamps or by candles or by the flicker of burning torches.

5.

ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν

καταλαμβάνω is an interesting word to use, suggestive here, given the context, of an activity - overcome, seize, take - rather than 'comprehend' which is somewhat anthropomorphic.

Hence, 'not overwhelmed by', as the dark of the night cannot overwhelm the illumination that the Sun brings but rather is itself overwhelmed.

10.

ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἦν καὶ ὁ κόσμος δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο

I take the sense of ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἦν as suggesting not "he was in the world" but rather that he was "of the world", among - with - those of the world, with his mortal body subject to pain and bodily death, with καὶ ὁ κόσμος δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο implying not that "the world was made/created through him" but that world was presenced in - within - him.

12.

Nomen: ὄνομα. Not simply 'name' as we understand a name but rather a term, an appellation, 'a word', which expresses or signifies his very nature, his being, his physis.

13.

θέλημα: not 'will' but 'design/desire', giving thus "not by the design/desire of mortals/human beings." The English term 'will' has too many modern and post-Hellenic connotations (qv. JS Mill, Nietzsche, JS Huxley, καὶ τὰ λοιπά.

14.

a) καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ

Compare the beginning of the Ἱερός Λόγος tractate of the Corpus Hermeticum: Δόξα πάντων ὁ θεὸς καὶ θεῖον καὶ φύσις θεία, *The numen of all beings is theos: numinal, and of numinal physis*. As noted in my commentary on that tractate [6], 'numen' expresses the mystical sense better than ordinary (now overused) words such as 'splendour' and 'glory', and with 'numinal' more expressive and more appropriate there than 'divine'.

b) πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας

In respect of χάρις, I have chosen 'benevolence' since it is closer to the meaning of the Greek here - concern, affection - than the more usual 'grace'. Similarly, ἀληθείας here implies not some abstract, impersonal, 'truth' but rather truthfulness, sincerity, integrity: the type of person that Jesus of Nazareth is. Hence my use of the Latin 'veritas' to suggest such truthfulness and sincerity (qv. the entry for veritas in *Lexicon Totius Latinitatis*, volume 4b).

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Footnotes

[1] Measure for Measure. Act One, Scene One, v. 32

[2] Romans 13.10

[3] King James version, following Tyndale

[4] 1.21 (Ποιμάνδρης)

[5] φαίνω as a revealing is much in evidence in classical Greek literature, often in relation to theos. For example:

ἤτέομεν δὲ θεὸν φῆναι τέρας: αὐτὰρ ὃ γ' ἡμῖν
δειῖξε, καὶ ἠνώγει πέλαγος μέσον εἰς Εὐβοίαν
τέμνειν, ὄφρα τάχιστα ὑπέκ κακότητα φύγοιμεν.

About this we asked the god to reveal to us a sign
And he exhorted us to cut through the middle of the sea to Euboea
In order to swiftly pass that bad luck by.

The Odyssey, Book 3, 173-5

[6] Ἱερός Λόγος: An Esoteric Mythos. A Translation Of And A Commentary On The Third Tractate Of The Corpus Hermeticum. 2015.

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