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.1-19 of chapter one so that those conversant with New Testament Greek can compare my translation of those verses to that text.

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 of ἁμαρτία by English word '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' (in 8.7) and 'error' (in 1.29) 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 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 usually 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 MSS with such departures noted in the commentary which commentary is to be published separately. An extract from that commentary - chapter one, vv. 1-29 - is given in an appendix to illustrate my methodology.

David Myatt
2017

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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 ἕν. ὃ γέγονεν
4 ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν, καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων·
5 καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, καὶ η σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν.
6 Ἐγένετο ἀνθρώπου, ἀπεσταλμένος παρὰ θεοῦ, θυσία αὐτῷ Ἰωάννης:
7 oútoς ἦλθεν εἰς μαρτυρίαν ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός, ἵνα πάντες πιστεύσωσιν δι’ αὐτοῦ.
8 οὐκ ἦν ἐκείνος τὸ φῶς, ἀλλ’ ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός.
9 Ἡν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἄλληθινον, ὁ φωτιζεῖ πάντα ἀνθρώπου, 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 δόσι δὲ ἐλαβον αὐτόν, ἐδώκεν αὐτοῖς εξουσίαν τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ δύομα αὐτοῦ,
13 οἱ οὖν εξ αἰμάτων οὔθε ἐκ θελήματος σαρκός ἐκατά θελήματος ἀνθρώπος οὐκ ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν.
14 Καὶ ὁ λόγος σάρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν εἰς ἡμᾶς, καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός, πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας.
15 Ἰωάννης μαρτυρεῖ περὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ κέκραγεν λέγων· οὗτος ἦν ὃν εἶπον· ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος ἔμπροσθέν μου γέγονεν, ὅτι πρῶτος μου ἦν.
16 ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ πληρωμάτος αὐτοῦ ἡμεῖς πάντες ἐλάβομεν καὶ χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος·
17 ὅτι ὁ νόμος διὰ Μωϋσέως ἐδόθη, ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀληθεία διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐγένετο.
18 Θεὸν οὐδείς ἑώρακεν πώποτε· μονογενὴς θεὸς ὁ ὦν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκείνος ἐξηγήσατο.
19 Καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ μαρτυρία τοῦ Ἰωάννου, ὅτε ἀπέστειλαν πρὸς αὐτὸν Ἰουδαίους ἱερεῖς καὶ Λευίτας ἵνα ἐρωτήσωσιν αὐτοῦ· σὺ τίς εἶ;

Greek Bible text from Novum Testamentum Graece, 28th revised edition, Edited by Barbara Aland and others, copyright 2012 Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart.

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 presenced 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.

15 John was a witness for him and loudly said, "This is he of whom I spoke: the one who, arriving after me, takes precedence because he came-into-being before me.
16 Out of his plenitude we have been given benevolence after benevolence
17 For while the nomos was received from Moses, benevolence and veritas came to be through Jesus Christ.
18 No one has ever yet beheld Theos; but the being in the greada of the Father has made him known."
19 For such was the evidence John gave when the Jews dispatched priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him: "Who are you?"
20 And he admitted, he did not deny but admitted, "I am not the Christ."
21 So they asked him: "Who, then? Are you Elijah?" And he said: "I am not."
"Are you the Prophet?"
And he replied, "No."
22 So they asked him: "Who, then? For we have to give an answer to those who despatched us. What have you to say about yourself?"
23 He replied: "I, a call sounding out in forsaken places, straightening the way for the Master, just as Isaiah the Prophet said."
24 Now those dispatched were from the Pharisees
25 And they asked him, saying: "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, not Elijah, not the Prophet?"
26 John, answering them, said: "I baptize in water yet standing in your midst is someone you do not recognize
27 Who, proceeding me, arrives after me whose sandal strap I do not deserve to unfasten."

28 Such was what came to pass in Bethany, on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.
29 The next day he saw Jesus approaching him and said: "Observe! The Lamb of Theos who removes the error of the world."
Appendix
Extracts From The Commentary On Chapter One

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 – qv. 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) θεός

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 φάος of human beings.”

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

An alternative for ζωή 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 φάος [the being] of human beings.”

Given that φάος 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 φάος 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 ζωή and θεός and ἐγένετο and Ἄνθρωπος in the Corpus Hermeticum, thus echoing the evangel of John:

φῶς καὶ ζωή ἐστιν ὁ θεός 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.

[...]

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.

καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ. Compare the beginning of the Ιερός 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, 'numen' expresses the religious sense of δόξα better than ordinary (now overused) words such as 'splendour' and 'glory', and with 'numinal' more expressive and more appropriate there than 'divine'.

πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθεία. In respect of χάρις the English term benevolence is more appropriate than 'grace' given over a thousand years of exegesis is respect of 'grace', including the sola gratia of the Reformation. In respect of ἀληθεία I have chosen the Latin veritas in order to avoid the disputations - philosophical and otherwise - and the assumptions that the English word 'truth' so often now imputes and engenders, with the reader (or the listener) thus having to reflect on what veritas might, in this context, signify.

15. ἔμπροσθέν μου γέγονεν ὅτι πρῶτός μου ἦν

The sense of γίνομαι here is 'came-into-being' (before me), rather than simply 'was before me' for the usage is metaphysical as often in the Corpus Hermeticum, for example Poemandres 17, tractate III:3, tractate IV:4.

17. νόμος. A transliteration - nomos - since as with logos a particular metaphysical principle is implied and one which requires contextual interpretation; a sense somewhat lost if the English word 'law' is used especially given what the word 'law' often now imputes.
18. Reading μονογενὴς θεὸς with NA28 and not the 'Byzantine textual' variant ὁ μονογενὴς υἱὸς which most translators - ancient and modern - have favoured given the difficulty of translating μονογενὴς θεὸς in context, although the meaning seems clear: "while no one so far has beheld Theos, the being [ὁ ὢν] in the greada [κόλπον] of the father has now explained [ξηγήσατο] him."

Regarding greada, this Old English word - qv. the eleventh century Anglo-Saxon version of Luke 16:23 - is a fitting translation of the Greek given that the alternatives, lap, and bosom, seem too anthropomorphic to be used in the context of Theos especially as "no one has ever seen him" with it only being said that Jesus has "explained" who and what Theos is. Interestingly, for this verse of the Gospel of John the Anglo-Saxon translator used the synonym 'barme' as does the Lindisfarne Gospel in respect of Luke 6:38.

23. ἔφη ἐγὼ φωνὴ βοῶντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμ. I have opted for a fairly literal translation, with ἔρημος retaining its original meaning of an 'unpopulated, deserted, forsaken' place, and with βοάω suggestive of a caller 'calling out aloud' in such a place. Hence, "I, a call sounding out in forsaken places" rather than the conventional (KJV) "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness."

26. ὃν ὑμεῖς οὐκ οἴδατε. One - someone - "you do not know" in the sense of not perceiving (seeing) them; that is, not recognizing them. Cf. συννοίᾳ δὲ δάπτομαι κέαρ ὁμαυτὸν ὧδε προυσελούμενον (Aeschylus, Prometheus Bound, 438), "disturbing things devour my heart since I recognize just how mistreated I have been."

Interestingly, the Anglo-Saxon version of the Gospel of John has ne cunnan so that the text can be read "not acquainted/not familiar with." Cf. Beowulf:

metod hie ne cuþon,
daeda demend, ne wiston hie drihten god,
ne hie huru heofena helm herian ne cuþon,
wuldres waldend. (180-183)

[they were] unacquainted with The Chief,
Judge of deeds, and with the Lord God,
as well as unacquainted with how to praise
That Defender of Heaven, the King of Glory.

29. ὁ αἴρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου. As noted in the Preface, I translate ἁμαρτία not by the conventional 'sin' but rather by 'error' or 'mistake', which is quite apposite here considering the use of the singular and the preceding
mention of Jesus as the Lamb of God: of Jesus having arrived to remove the error, the fault, that 'the world' has made, has fallen into, with 'the Lamb of God' thus healing the injury so caused. Which is quite different from some preacher sternly preaching about 'sin' and warning about the 'fire and brimstone' that await sinners.

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:

hamster ἠτέομεν δὲ θεὸν φήναι τέρας: αὐτὰρ ὃ γ᾽ ἡμῖν
dεῖξε, καὶ ἠνώγει πέλαγος μέσον εἰς Εὔβοιαν
tέμνειν, δώρα τάχιστα ὑπὲκ 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