

The Logos and Carmen Christi

Conventional discussions about the theology of JW's revolve around translation issues. Dueling experts argue about various rules of Greek translation. Trinitarians argue that John 1:1 must be translated so that "the Word was God." Non-Trinitarians object, and say that it is more correct to say "the Word was a god." No one resolves anything except to get the other side upset.

It is not necessary for us to become Greek scholars to understand the truth of Jesus Christ's divinity. If we are careful to examine the context of the key passages describing Christ, we can identify the truth contained in them. In doing so, we can avoid arguments about the validity of the scholarship of those who by all rights are better qualified than we are. We can also lead the JW into understanding, rather than confrontation. Our first task is to understand John 1, that glorious prolog to the gospel written to demonstrate the divinity of Christ.

John wrote his gospel, the three epistles, and the book of Revelation toward the end of the first century. This was about thirty years after the last of the other books of the NT were written. And, as we will soon see, ravenous wolves were among the flock (Acts 20:29). Gnosticism was the trendy new (to paganism) religion that was invading Christianity. It's concepts of soul/body division with the spiritual aspects good and physical evil was taking over from the pure truth of the being of man. Along with this was a dual concept of God, where a spirit Logos was the ultimate God. His subordinate, the Demiurge, a god who didn't mind getting his hands dirty, had actually created the world. Of course, the Demiurge didn't realize that he wasn't really the true God. And neither did the Christians who lacked the secret knowledge (*gnosis*) of the Gnostics. It was this syncretistic pollution of the truth that John set out to correct.

Our first task (Q1) is to realize that there is only one God. Jehovah says this in multiple places, and multiple ways. But in no more clear voice does he say it than in Isaiah, where, in the very passage that the Jehovah's Witnesses take their name from (Is 43:10), he declares that he is the only God that has ever been, and the only that will ever be. This of course places the JW's in a bind. They can either accept John's statement in John 1:1 that Jesus is God (which would destroy their entire theology), or translate it the Jesus was "a god." Unfortunately, this places them squarely at odds with Jehovah's explicit statement that He is the ONLY God. So they play games semantically with saying that Jehovah is "Almighty God," while Jesus is some lesser god. Unfortunately, this won't wash when placed against Jehovah's explicit statement. So they search for other help.

Psalms 82 (Q2) is the only other passage in scripture (quoted from John 10:34-35) which mentions other gods as actually existing. So the JW reaches out to this passage to support the idea that Jesus is a lesser god: a created being. So we must carefully examine this Psalm. In verse 2, we find that these gods have been acting as judges, and are judging unjustly. True gods will not be unjust, so we can immediately see that they are false gods, not true gods. In fact, the reference is actually to human judges who are also called *elohim* in Hebrew. This we find in Exodus 18, where Moses is acting in God's place when the people come to him to judge their disputes. Isaiah uses almost the exact same language (Is 10:1-11) as Psalm 82 in describing the unjust Jewish judges. God finally concludes the matter by stating that the "gods" will die. Therefore, these "gods" are not truly gods, but the term is being used satirically. Unfortunately, even though this destroys the possibility that Jesus is a lesser god in John 1:1, it does little to help convince the JW of the truth. So we must look further.

As we mentioned above, Gnosticism was becoming a serious problem in the church. And John took this heresy on squarely. In Revelation 13, he develops the picture of the mark of the beast and the seal of God. Everyone will have either one mark or the other. Finally, he tells us:

18 Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.

This is a challenge (Q3) to the Gnostics. They thought that they had special knowledge and wisdom not accessible to everyone. And they gained much of this knowledge through mathematical calculation. So John tells them to calculate the number. If they rely on their own "*gnosis*", then they may be able to deduce it. But when they find it, they will discover that it is a man's number. It is not the number of a specific man, but the number found by man, as opposed to being the number revealed by God, which is 666. This number turns out to be one of the Gnostics central secrets.

666 is the gematria value of Syene. This town on the Nile at the tropic of Cancer is a location where, on the summer solstice, at noon the sun casts no shadow from buildings. Because of this, Syene was considered to be the place where the laws of celestial harmony were manifested on earth. This made it a holy place of sun worship. 666 is also the sum of the magic square of the sun. It is the string ratio of the perfect fifth, another Gnostic mystery. And it is the number of "the God Hermes," another of the pagan pantheon. These are just some of the "secrets" revealed by God to be phony. John's message is simple. The true God knows all secrets, and you don't have any. Because you rely on your own knowledge, you will be destroyed. Only those who rely on God will be saved.

John continues his assault in his first epistle (Q4). Here he begins by pointing out that he is one of the eyewitnesses to the incarnation. He tells that they had heard, seen, and touched Jesus. This denies the heresy of Docetism, which denies that Jesus physically came to the earth. Because a good god would not foul himself with physical flesh, Jesus was alleged to have been an apparition. But John denies this by his eyewitness report. But this is not enough. In 2 John 7 (Q5), he expressly declares Docetism to be antichrist. It is hard to find a more direct condemnation of Gnosticism. Finally, we visit the story of the 153 fish in the unbroken net. In this simple story, we find that obedience to Jesus yields great rewards. Yet, for the Gnostic, this seemingly innocent story contains a Gnostic number puzzle of surprising complexity. Its inclusion in the closing verses of the gospel stands as a bookend attack on Gnosticism by stating that the true God knows all the Gnostic secrets, and the very idea of secret *gnosis* is a fraud. They should believe in the true God.

All of this brings us back to John 1. In identifying this continuing theme of John, we can see that it is likely to be present in his gospel prolog. We first confirm the fact (Q6) that the "Word" is in fact Jesus. But, having explored the Gnostic mysteries, we step back and notice that the Greek word for "word" is "Logos", the name of the supreme Gnostic deity. Realizing that the name is not to be translated, we find that John has explicitly stated that the supreme Gnostic deity is Jesus, and that he has come in the flesh. This is a frontal assault on Gnosticism. But it does not end there. When we realize that Jesus is the Logos, there becomes only one way that John 1:1-3 can be properly translated:

1 In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God and the Logos was God.

2 He was in the beginning with God.

3 All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him, nothing came into being that has come into being.

This is the only translation which is in keeping with John's head-on assault on the Gnostic heresy (Q7). This apology is present in all of his writing. It clearly states that the creator of the world is the same god as the ultimate deity. This denies the dualistic approach of the Gnostics. Their separate Logos and Demiurge are declared to be the same god, and their secrets have been revealed to be known by the true God, who is Jesus. They have no choice but to drop their Gnostic heresies, and come to belief in the true God.

One could argue that there may be another explanation which allows the "a god" translation of the JW's. However, no such explanation has been proffered. And even if it were brought forward, it would fail due to the denial of the existence of other gods by Jehovah. We have only one option. The classic interpretation is correct, that Jesus is God, but the translation is incorrect, in that John intended for the word "logos" to be taken as a name, not a title. Further, it begins the understanding of the Trinity by clearly identifying Jesus as both by nature God and by position part of God.

At this point we must take a moment with definitions. The Trinity states that there is one God, whose name is Yahweh (or Jehovah). Within God are three persons, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who are different in function from each other. As a result they have relational differences between themselves, but have an infinite unity which is beyond human comprehension. All three are by fundamental nature God. That is, there is one being who is made up of three persons. This must be distinguished from Modalism, where all three names are said to be the same person. Frequently a JW will attempt to argue a point on the divinity of Christ by arguing against Modalism. We should be careful to identify the point and agree that Modalism is incorrect. Then we should steer the discussion back to the Trinity.

It is now time to turn our attention to the "Carmen Christi", or Hymn to Christ. This was almost certainly part of the music of early churches, and was taken by Paul into his epistle to the Philippians. As we begin to read, we immediately find that various translations place a different emphasis on the word "*harpagmos*". Some take it as the act of grasping, and others use words which emphasize "holding on." In

order to determine the proper translation, and to identify the intent of the passage, we need to examine the context.

Paul begins this section (Q8) with a plea for the believers to be humble. They are to place the welfare of their neighbors over their own welfare. Then (v. 5) Paul explains that Jesus had the same attitude (Q9). But, in His place, He gave no thought to "*harpagmos*" equality with God. We are as yet unable to tell whether this is holding on to equality with God or reaching to gain equality with God. In verse 7 we then find that Christ "emptied himself." The word translated "emptied" is "*kenoo*" which means to deprive of force or power. Thus, Christ deprived himself of a status where he had certain powers. This is not an action which a created being can take (Q10). God can do this to a created being, but the being is restricted by its own nature to the powers intrinsic to its nature. It cannot change from one type of created being to another without God's help. Yet Jesus did this by himself.

Similarly, when we examine the concept of humility (Q11), we find that humility is a sense of lowliness, such that one owes all his gifts to God. The root from which the Greek word is drawn is used classically to denote unworthiness. If a created being is acting within his own station, that is not humility. In particular, if a created being were to choose not to reach above his own station (unlike Lucifer), that would not be humility, it would be simple obedience. Thus, when we read that Jesus humbled Himself, He lowered Himself from His prior status. When He "emptied" Himself, he gave up prerogatives by His own power (Q12). Therefore, it is impossible for the Savior to be a created being. Only God Himself can do the things Paul is describing. The magnitude of this love is beyond understanding. Jesus gave up his position as God of the universe to risk permanent destruction if He were to fail in his task of living the perfect life. He owned the infinite, and emptied himself of his power over it for us.

After the cross (Q13), we find that Jesus is given the name which is above every name. We should note that the NWT puts it "above every [other] name." While the NWT is honest in placing the word "other" in brackets, it reads in such a way as to diminish the impact of this statement. The Jews held the name of Yahweh to be so sacred that they would not say it. This led to its exact pronunciation being lost! In Revelation we find that Jesus has a name which only He knows. This indicates the extreme holiness of the name, and the fact that it is the highest name possible. Not even the name Yahweh is higher. Since in the ancient mind one's name was his position, Paul is saying that Jesus received the highest position in the universe, that of God.

This sounds strange, since we have developed the idea that Jesus IS God. However, we must note that once Jesus emptied Himself (Q14), He no longer had the power to elevate Himself. It was necessary for the Father to re-establish the status of the Son. In other words, the Father had to bestow the name on Jesus in order for Jesus to resume his position as the third member of the godhead. This status is emphasized by Paul's quotation of Isaiah 45:23. In this passage, Jehovah tells that His own name will require everyone to bow to Him. This is applied by Paul to Jesus, implying that Jesus is now God, because everyone must worship him. But the quote does not stop there. In Isaiah, we find God swearing by Himself, because everyone swears by one greater than himself (Heb 6:13-16), and no one is greater than God. He says that everyone will swear that in Jehovah there is righteousness and strength. Paul paraphrases this part by saying that everyone will acknowledge that Jesus is Lord.

There can be no doubt that Paul's intention is to tell us that Jesus is the third part of Yahweh. He did not give any thought to holding onto his divine status, but humbly divested himself of all His prerogatives. He gave up His status as God, potentially forever, to become the lowest of the low, a man. This surpassing love led to his death on the cross for us. After the victory over sin, the Father welcomed Jesus back by giving Him the highest honor possible, reinstatement as God. This status was symbolized by the highest name and worship from all the universe.

What a Savior!