

John 1:1-3 Excursus

By Kevin Alan Lewis

A. *John 1:1-3: Introduction*

Ἐν ἀρχῇ Gen. 1:1 – “In the Beginning” – John 1:1	
<i>The Uncreated & Eternal--God</i>	<i>Created Things (Not God)</i>
The Word was (ἦν ὁ λόγος) (“Was” is the Imperfect of verb “to be” Continuous action in past time)	All Things (πάντα)
With God (πρὸς τὸν θεόν)	Came into being by Him (δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο)
And the Word was God (καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος)	And apart from Him (καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ)
He was in the beginning with God [The Father]	nothing has come into being that has come into being (ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν ὃ γέγονεν)

1. There is only one Creator according to the Old Testament—God (Is. 44:24).
2. Jehovah did not create the Logos and then permit the created Logos to create the heavens and the earth [JW view].

B. “*In the beginning was the Word*” (ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος)

1. “In the Beginning” (ἐν ἀρχῇ)
 - a. The first clause of verse one refers the reader to the opening verse of the Bible, Genesis 1:1.
 - b. The “beginning” is the beginning of *ex nihilo* creation.
2. “Was the Word” (ἦν ὁ λόγος)
 - a. The Greek word translated as “was” (ἦν) is the imperfect form of the verb “to be” (εἶμι).
 - b. Basically, the imperfect tense is used to indicate continuous action in past time.¹
 - c. By using the imperfect of *eimi*, John is declaring that the Logos existed prior to the first moment of creation.
 - d. If the Logos exists prior to the first moment of creation—and all created things—He cannot be a created thing.
 - e. Since God is the only thing that is eternal and uncreated, and the Logos is uncreated and eternal, then the Logos is God.
 - f. Thus, this clause declares the eternal preexistence of the Logos.

C. *And the Word was with God* (καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν)

1. This clause declares that the Person of the Logos is with (πρὸς) the Person of God the Father.
2. John’s use of Greek preposition *pros* (προς), rather than *sun* (συν) may emphasize the intimacy of the Logos’s relationship with the Father.
3. This clause precludes the affirmation of Modalistic Monarchianism, because the Person of the Logos is eternally distinguished from the Person of the Father. Thus, the Logos cannot be the same Person as God the Father. In short, there is more than one Person who eternally preexists.

¹ H.E. Dana & Julius Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1955) 186.
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D. John 1:1 “. . . and the Word was God.” (καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος)

1. The Articular and Anarthrous use of *theos*

- a. As a general rule, the articular use of *theos* (*ho theos*) indicates a Divine Person, while the anarthrous use indicates the divine essence.²
 - (1) Articular: The Word was with God (*pros ton theon*).
 - (2) Anarthrous: The Word was God (*theos en ho logos*).
- b. In either case, the fact that the noun “theos” is employed is crucial regarding the deity of Christ, because there is only one true God.
- c. Also note the noun “theos” is used, rather than the adjective “theios” (θεῖος), which is translated “divine.” (See also Acts 17:29; II Peter 1:3) The noun is a stronger indicator of true deity.³

2. The Significance of the Anarthrous *theos*

- a. A noun is a substantive, that is, it is an existing thing that has distinct properties that make it what it is. Thus, to use the term “man” as a substantive is to declare that the thing indicated has the properties of a man—unless the context demands otherwise.
- b. In Greek, the article is used with a noun to “point out an object or draw attention to it.” This means the basic function of the Greek article is to “point out individual identity.”⁴ Thus, the use of the article makes the noun definite.
- c. Articular Nouns are nouns having a definite article, “the,” which primarily identifies a particular thing in a class of things (e.g., *the* man).
- d. Anarthrous nouns—those without the article—can be definite, indefinite or qualitative in meaning. The context will determine the meaning. There is no indefinite article in the Greek language.

(1) **The Indefinite Use**

- (a) The indefinite anarthrous use indicates you have identified a class of things (e.g., men) and the one in the class to which you are referring is uncertain or indefinite (unidentified). Thus, in English, you would use the indefinite article “a” or “an.” Thus “a man” could be anyone who is in the class of “man.”
- (b) The Logos cannot be “a god,” [the indefinite sense] as the JWs assert, for the following reasons:
 - i. There is only one true God in Jewish monotheism (Is. 43:10; Jn. 17:3).
 - ii. John would not refer to the class of “theos” or God in the indefinite. Since there is only one in the class, it is never indefinite—unless a “false deity” is the referent.

² Dana & Mantey, 139-140.

³ See Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 76-79 and fn. 15.

⁴ Dana & Mantey, 137.

(2) **The Qualitative Use**

- (a) The qualitative anarthrous use of the noun emphasizes the character or properties of the noun. Thus, if one uses the term “man” to describe, one is emphasizing the qualities of “manness.” You must be a man to have “manness.” Also, you must be God to have “Godness.”
- (b) The qualitative anarthrous usage can be seen in the question, “What is man?” There is no definite or indefinite article. Here the question is asking what the qualities or properties of man are.
- (c) Since an indefinite sense is ruled out by Jewish monotheism, the anarthrous noun “theos” should be understood as indicating the qualities or character of the noun.

3. **Subject and Predicate Identification in “the Word was God”**

- a. A subject is the thing being discussed or the doer or receiver of the action. Grammatically, subjects provide a foundation for predication. (i.e., attributes, properties, etc.)
- b. A predicate makes a statement about the subject. Grammatically, attributes or properties (adjectives and predicate nouns) can be predicated to a subject. E.g., the Dog is brown. Dog is the subject, brown is a property predicated of the dog. The dog has brownness.
- c. In Greek, an article is used in a copulative sentence to distinguish the subject from the predicate.⁵
- d. In John 1:1, the subject is “the Word” (*ho logos*), the qualitative anarthrous predicate is “God” (*theos*), the copula is “was” (*en*).
- e. In clause c of John 1:1, the qualitative anarthrous predicate (*theos*) precedes the verb (*en*) [*theos en ho logos*]⁵—probably for emphasis.
- f. One could not use the article with *theos* here, because *ho theos en ho logos* would be a statement of identity,⁶ meaning, everything that God is, the Word is—in sum, God and the Word would be identical in every respect. This would preclude any Person but the Word from being God.

4. **Conclusion**

- a. The qualitative anarthrous predicate noun (*theos*) that precedes the verb (*en*) indicates that “the Logos has the nature of theos,”⁷ that is, the Word has the nature of God.
- b. The construction rules out Arianism, because the Word is of the nature, character, essence of God.
- c. The construction rules out Modalism, to have used the article (the Word was the God) would be to say that the Word and only the Word was God, which would rule out the Trinitarian distinctions.
- d. Note the same type of construction in 1 Jn. 4:16, “God is love.” (ὁ θεός ἀγάπη ἐστίν) (and other passages, e.g., Jn. 4:24)) One cannot reverse it to say “Love is God” because God cannot be reduced to a single property or attribute. Also, God cannot be reduced to a single Person.

⁵ Dana & Mantey, 148-149.

⁶ See “identity” in Robert Audi, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd Ed. (Cambridge University Press, 1999) 415-416.

⁷ Philip B. Harner, “Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 92, Philadelphia, 1973, p. 85.

E. John 1:2- He was “in the beginning.”

1. This is also *en arche*, which should be distinguished from the *ap’ arches* (ἀπ’ ἀρχης) of I John 1:1.⁸
2. *En arche* in John 1:2 indicates the Word was already present in the beginning, while the *ap’ arches* of I John 1:1 draws attention to what occurred *from* the beginning and onward.

F. John 1:3- “all things” were created “by Him” (the Word).

1. This indicates that the Logos is the personal agent who created all created things.
2. If all created things were made by the Logos, He cannot be one of the created things.
3. The Logos, then, is the Creator—God.

⁸ Morris, 72-74 and fn. 7.