

From Philip B. Harner, "Qualitative Anarthrous  
Nouns: Mark 15:39 and John 1:1" Journal of  
Biblical Literature 92 (1973): 75-87.

verb preceding an arthrous predicate, which is clearly definite. Do these parallels mean that the anarthrous predicates in 1:49 and 9:5 must also be regarded as definite?

In his study of this type of construction Colwell argued that the anarthrous predicates in these two verses should be regarded as definite.<sup>22</sup> The parallels are indeed persuasive, and it is quite possible that Colwell is right at this point. An anarthrous predicate preceding the verb, that is, may be definite if there is some specific reason for regarding it as definite. But the present study would indicate that the nouns in these two verses are exceptional cases. The majority of such predicates in the Fourth Gospel are like 1:14; 8:31, and 9:24, which were discussed above. There is no basis for regarding such predicates as definite, and it would be incorrect to translate them as definite.<sup>23</sup>

In light of this examination of John's usage we may turn to the verse in which we are especially interested, 1:1. Our study so far suggests that the anarthrous predicate in this verse has primarily a qualitative significance and that it would be definite only if there is some specific indication of definiteness in the meaning or context. As an aid in understanding the verse it will be helpful to ask what John might have written as well as what he did write. In terms of the types of word-order and vocabulary available to him, it would appear that John could have written any of the following:

A. ὁ λόγος ἦν ὁ θεός

B. θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος

C. ὁ λόγος θεὸς ἦν

D. ὁ λόγος ἦν θεός

E. ὁ λόγος ἦν θεῖος<sup>24</sup>

John 1:1 says "... θεός ἦν ὁ λόγος." [B.]

<sup>22</sup> Colwell, "A Definite Rule," 13-14.

<sup>23</sup> Variant readings for predicate expressions in John represent four types of modification: (1) inversion of the anarthrous predicate — verb sequence, with addition of the article (1:49; 10:2); (2) addition of the article to an anarthrous predicate preceding the verb (8:54; 10:36; 17:17); (3) inversion of the anarthrous predicate — verb sequence, without addition of the article (13:35); (4) inversion of the verb — anarthrous predicate sequence (18:15). The first two types of modification make the predicate noun unambiguously definite. Colwell discussed only the first type, with reference to John 1:49; Matt 23:10; and Jas 2:19. These indicated, he believed, that "the scribes felt that a definite predicate noun did not need the article before the verb and did need it after the verb" ("A Definite Rule," 16). But the first two types of modification listed above could also mean that the scribes believed that the definiteness of an anarthrous predicate was not sufficiently explicit before the verb, and so they modified the clause to make the noun unambiguously definite.

<sup>24</sup> The word *theios* appears only a few times in the NT: Acts 17:27 (v. 1.), 29; Tit 1:9 (v. 1); 2 Pet 1:3, 4. It is not used in the Fourth Gospel. But presumably John could have used it, or some other word meaning "divine," if he had wished to do so.

Clause A, with an arthrous predicate, would mean that *logos* and *theos* are equivalent and interchangeable. There would be no *ho theos* which is not also *ho logos*. But this equation of the two would contradict the preceding clause of 1:1, in which John writes that  $\delta \lambda \acute{o} \gamma \omicron \varsigma \eta \nu \pi \rho \acute{o} \varsigma \tau \acute{o} \nu \theta \epsilon \acute{o} \nu$ . This clause suggests relationship, and thus some form of "personal" differentiation, between the two. Clause D, with the verb preceding an anarthrous predicate, would probably mean that the *logos* was "a god" or a divine being of some kind, belonging to the general category of *theos* but as a distinct being from *ho theos*. Clause E would be an attenuated form of D. It would mean that the *logos* was "divine," without specifying further in what way or to what extent it was divine. It could also imply that the *logos*, being only *theios*, was subordinate to *theos*.

John evidently wished to say something about the *logos* that was other than A and more than D and E. Clauses B and C, with an anarthrous predicate preceding the verb, are primarily qualitative in meaning. They indicate that the *logos* has the nature of *theos*. There is no basis for regarding the predicate *theos* as definite. This would make B and C equivalent to A, and like A they would then contradict the preceding clause of 1:1.

As John has just spoken in terms of relationship and differentiation between *ho logos* and *ho theos*, he would imply in B or C that they share the same nature as belonging to the reality *theos*. Clauses B and C are identical in meaning but differ slightly in emphasis. C would mean that the *logos* (rather than something else) had the nature of *theos*. B means that the *logos* has the nature of *theos* (rather than something else). In this clause, the form that John actually uses, the word *theos* is placed at the beginning for emphasis.

Commentators on the Fourth Gospel, as far as I know, have not specifically approached the meaning of this clause from the standpoint of the qualitative force of *theos* as an anarthrous predicate preceding the verb. In many cases their interpretations agree with the explanation that is given above. But consideration of the qualitative meaning of *theos* would lend further clarification and support to their understanding of the clause. J. H. Bernard, for example, points out that Codex L reads *ho theos* instead of *theos*. "But this," he continues, "would identify the *Logos* with the totality of divine existence, and would contradict the preceding clause."<sup>25</sup> In a similar way W. F. Howard writes that *theos* and *ho logos* are not interchangeable. Otherwise, he continues, "the writer could not say 'the Word was with God.'"<sup>26</sup> Both writers, in effect, are arguing that the predicate *theos* cannot be regarded as definite in this clause. In terms of our analysis above this would mean that clause B should not be assimilated to clause A.

Bruce Vawter explains the meaning of the clause succinctly and lucidly: "The

<sup>25</sup> J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John* (New York: Scribner, 1929) 1, 2.

<sup>26</sup> W. F. Howard, *The Gospel according to St. John* (IB 8; New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1952) 464.