Parallelisms and revelatory concepts of the Johannine Prologue in Greco-Roman context

This article builds on the increasing recognition of divine communication and God’s plan as a central concept in the prologue to the Fourth gospel. A philological analysis reveals parallel structures with an emphasis on divine communication in which the Logos takes a central part. These should be understood within the context of this gospel, but have their roots in the Old Testament. The Septuagint offers parallel concepts, particularly in its wisdom literature. Apart from these derivative parallels, the revelatory concepts and terminology involved in John 1:1–18, also find functional parallels in the historical environment of the fourth gospel. They share similarities with the role of Apollo Phoebus in the traditionally assigned geographical context of the region of Ephesus in Asia Minor. This functional parallelism served the reception of John’s biblical message in a Greco-Roman cultural setting.

Introduction

Traditionally the prologue (πρόλογος) to John’s gospel has been interpreted as a passage that deals with the pre-existence of Christ and his subsequent incarnation. The headers added in several bible translations reflect this: ‘The Word Became Flesh’ (NRSV, NIV, ESV). Although this seems a valid conclusion on the basis of the contents of the text for readers of the 21st century, the Good News translation with its header ‘The Word of Life’ does greater justice to the communicative aspect of this passage. The central role of the Logos in communicating between God and humanity is confirmed by a philological analysis of John 1:1–18, read within the context of this gospel and its Greco-Roman world. A careful reading suggests that the author is proclaiming a cosmic theology of revelation, and presents the incarnation of Christ and his pre-existence with God as part of a revelatory process. John Ashton (2014:145–156) phrases this differently, but essentially suggests the same when he says (Ashton 2014:3) that the prologue is essentially about ‘God’s plan for humankind’, and not about creation as previously argued. Of course the latter is an important issue in the prologue, but its context is that of God revealing his plans. He does so as creator, and consequently in a special relationship with mankind. There are several arguments for this view.

In the first place, an analysis of the passage will show that the author distinguishes a source, mediation process, and earthly effects of divine revelation in this passage. This sender (God), message or messenger (Logos), and receiver (world or humanity) structure of the text suggests that John does not present the incarnation as a goal in itself but subservient to a communication mediation process, and earthly effects of divine revelation in this passage. This sender (God), message or messenger (Logos), and receiver (world or humanity) structure of the text suggests that John does not present the incarnation as a goal in itself but subservient to a communication aim. Generally speaking, this agrees well with the overall structure of this particular gospel, where revelation from God to humans on earth is a central thought.

In the second place, on a philological level, the author uses revelatory terminology for his key concepts, applying philological and religious parallelism to this end. This has parallels in the Qumran community. Daniel Harrington (2005):

For both groups the most important object of knowledge is God and God’s plan being unfolded in history. And the most effective way toward this knowledge is through divine revelation. (p. 136)

In the third place, it made sense to do it in this way because of the first historical context of the fourth gospel. Van Tilborg (1996) already firmly positioned John’s gospel in Ephesus in his ‘Reading John in Ephesus’. Although he mentions Apollo and the presence of his temples (Van Tilborg 1996:71, 94, 135–137, 159, 205), ‘Reading John in Ephesus’ does not include a treatment of the particulars of local worship, that of Phoebus Apollo. Peter Phillips mentions the Apollo

1 Literary critical approaches to the prologue have proven largely inconclusive. Bultmann, Kasemann, Schnackenburg and Haenchen supposed a hymn lay at the basis in some way, but scholars’ opinions differ as to the point where the original hymn should be located in the prologue. Peter Borgen (1972:129) follows C.K. Barrett in his conclusion that it is impossible to draw this sort of division that might enable the readers to assign some verses to a source written in poetry, and others to a prose-writing evangelist: ‘the structure of the Prologue of John must primarily be understood on the basis that it is meant to be an exposition of Gen. i f.f. The question of poetry or prose is therefore of subordinate significance’. Masanobu Endô (2002:184) concludes likewise: ‘The question is whether the criteria which scholars apply to the evaluation of the style of the prologue can be suitable for understanding the style of the Fourth Gospel. For example it seems subjective to judge the literary style’.

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Parallelisms and revelatory concepts of John 1:1–18 in the context of the Gospel

In this section, the parallelisms and revelatory concepts of John 1:1–18 will be analysed philologically in the context of the gospel and wider Biblical literature. Following this analysis, the particular Greco-Roman context of John’s gospel, as suggested by the early Church, will be considered. Others have already worked on the direct textual context (1:19–2:12) and its revelatory aspects. Francis Martin and William Wright (2015:42–61) distinguish four days of revelation in chapter one (1:19–51) and a subsequent revelation of glory in chapter two (2:1–12).

Logos

John 1:1–18 is a passage about communication: ὁ λόγος, derived from speaking or communicating. Bauer, Aland and Aland (1988:968) see communication (das Sprechen) as the first meaning of λόγος. One should be aware that Koiné Greek often uses the definite article in a generic and not in a definite way, as English and other modern European languages do. For this reason, a translation like ‘Communication’ would reflect the intention of the author for our day and age: ‘In the beginning was Communication, and Communication was with God, and Communication was God’. (v. 1) And likewise (v. 14): ‘And Communication took on a body and temporarily dwelt among us and we have seen his glory, a glory like one would expect the only begotten to have when he comes from his Father, full of grace and truth’. In the traditional Greek use of the term, λόγος may communicate (cf. Liddell & Scott 1996:1057–1059): value (1), correspondence or proportion (2), explanation (3), inward thoughts (4); or contain a narrative (5), a message or verbal expression (6), or a divine utterance (or an oath calling on the gods respectively). It may also refer to subject matter (8) or any speech (9). In biblical literature several traditional elements of λόγος come together in Christ as God’s representative agent. It is he who functions as the Word and Wisdom of God, through whom God creates the world and exercises government. He communicates God’s thoughts, commandments, and salvation to humanity (cf. Jn 1:1, 2, 7, Rv 19:13). Paul Anderson points to the similarity in syntax between the prologue and 1 John 1:1–5 (2008:329): ‘much of its language and syntax is closer to 1 John 1:1–5 than to the rest of the Gospel’.

The overall communicative emphasis of the prologue is hard to miss (Giblin 1985:89): ‘The author insists on the act of communication’. Although on a horizontal level, the term has seen some development in Greek philosophy, long before...

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3. John 1:18: ‘And the true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 10He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 11But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 12who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the wish of man, but of God. 13And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.’

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was in the beginning with God. 3All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 4The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. 5There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 6He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 7He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 8The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. 9He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 10He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 11But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 12who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the wish of man, but of God. 13And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.’

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John’s gospel (Lincoln 1996:2), this is not relevant for its use in the prologue. The Gnostic use of λόγος as a spiritual principle applied to rid the soul of the bondage to the material world is likewise a different field of meaning (Van den Broek 1979:280).

From the Old Testament there is also particular association with divine commands in an oracular context, God speaking verbally to the people of Israel (e.g. The Decalogue, cf. Ex 20, 34:28 LXX). When God speaks, obedience is called for. This aspect also strongly reflects in the Gospel according to St. John (cf. John 15:10–20). God’s λόγος requires human response and discipleship. There is also a revelatory aspect in the activities of the λόγος. In the words of John 1:18: ‘No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known’. What would be otherwise inaccessible is made known and communicated from God through the λόγος. The term goes hand in hand with Revelation and obedience in the writings of the New Testament (cf. Mt 15:6, Mk 7:13, Jn 5:38, 8:55, 10:35, Rm 3:4). Like Moses, the Logos acts as God’s agent, but is at the same time more than that.6

Communicator creator

John 1:1 explains the origin of the λόγος in place and time, as something literally out of this material world. He points to the ultimate prehistory of Genesis 1:1, even then, God’s λόγος already existed. Although two different ideas about the generation of the Logos prevailed in early Christianity,7 both agreed that he was there before time and perception started for human beings. Nothing was created without him, 1:3: πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἕν ὃ γέγονεν. This connection between the Logos and Creation is extensively treated by Masanobu Endô (2002). The echo from Genesis 1 is reinforced by the use of ἐν ἀρχῇ (1:1–2) and ἐγένετο (1:3), reminiscent of God who spoke in the beginning and it was. The Logos’s place of residence is ‘with God’ (πρὸς τὸν θεόν) – that is, effectively, heaven; although for the writer of John’s gospel ‘with God’ suffices as location. One observes the same generic use of the article in πρὸς τὸν θεόν as in ὁ λόγος. Subsequently, the Word is identified with the only true God himself (καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος).

Logos was God. One observes that in all respects (time, origin, and identity) the λόγος belongs to the realms of God, not to the cosmos or this world. It is divine communication from the realms of glory that is going to arrive in this world in a personal way.

Logos, light, and revelation

The divine communication is aimed at reception. God’s communication process through the Logos is not general, but specific. It is aimed at earth, the world of humanity. It facilitates communication between two parties: God and the children of Adam.

The use of the word ‘light’ is significant. In the Johannine communication process, light and revelation go together (Borgen 1972:115–130). The parallelism between λόγος, φῶς and ζωή is worth observing. The Logos provides light in the darkness. The light reveals what would otherwise remain unseen. Just as the plants and trees receive the life-giving light of the sun and grow as a result, the λόγος shines in the spiritual darkness of humanity to provide, not only light, understanding, and direction, but also life and inherent energy.

This connection of light and Word is a very old concept, which is found in the very beginning of the Torah. The first words of God in Genesis concern the creation of light. God speaks and light comes forth:

Genesis 1:3–5 (LXX): καὶ έκακον ὁ θεὸς Γεννήθησα φῶς. καὶ ἐγένετο φῶς. καὶ έδειξεν ὁ θεὸς τὸ φῶς ὅτι καλόν. καὶ διεσώρυσεν ὁ θεὸς ὁ έκάκον τὸ φῶς καὶ ἀνά μεσον τοῦ φωτός καὶ ἀνά μεσον τοῦ σκοτίας. [And God said, Let there be light, and there was light. And God saw the light that it was good, and God divided between the light and the darkness.]8

Light is created and intended for creatures. Darkness belongs to the uniformed state and the earliest beginnings of the creation of the world. It is only when God speaks that light appears. Divine Word and light go together. The creation connection of the Johannine Logos and Genesis is prominent. Paul Anderson (2008) writes:

From the creation narratives of Genesis 1–3, the Logos motif can be seen as rooting in the creative-redemptive work of Yahweh, whose life-producing Word brought forth the created world and the breath of life itself. (p. 332)

After Genesis 1, one has to continue reading well into Exodus before light (θής/φῶς) returns with any theological significance, or at all. This happens when ‘Israel was in Egypt’s land’, during the episode of the Ten Plagues. The king was not prepared to do without the slave labour of the Israelites for his favourite projects. Through the hand of Moses, God punishes Pharaoh and his people with pitch-black darkness. He takes away his light and leaves the Egyptians in a state not dissimilar to the world before God spoke his creative words (Gn 1:1–3):

Exodus 10:22–23 (LXX): ἐξήτευσαν δὲ Μωυσῆς τὴν χεῖρα εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, καὶ ἐγένετο σκότος γήρως ἀπὸ πᾶσας γῆς Ἀιγύπτου τρεῖς ἡμέρας, καὶ οὐκ έδειξεν οὐδές τὸν ἄδελφον τρεῖς ἡμέρας, καὶ οὐκ ἐξήνασεν οὐδές ἐκ τῆς κοίτης αὐτοῦ τρεῖς ἡμέρας πάντων δὲ τοῖς νοοῖς Ἰσραήλ. ἦν φῶς ἐν τοῖς αἵωνοι ὡς κατάγεναι. [And Moses stretched out his hand to heaven, and there was darkness very black, even a storm over all the land of Egypt three days. And for three days no man saw his brother, and no man rose up from his bed for three days: but all the children of Israel had light in all the places where they were.]

6. The author takes responsibility for indented translations from the Septuagint and classical authors, but acknowledges dependence on Brenton (1994) and Perseus Project Texts Loaded under PhiloLogic Greek and Latin Morphology (2010).
Significantly, the Israelites continue to enjoy God’s light, whereas the Egyptians are no longer able to distinguish the world around them. It affects relationships (no one could see his brother for three days: καὶ οὐκ εἶδον οὖν ἤδην τὸν ἄδελφον, cf. Gn 1:2) as well as productivity (nobody left his sleeping quarters for three days: οὐδὲς ἐκ τῆς κοίτης αὐτοῦ τρέχει ήμέρας). The Hebrew Bible suggests thick darkness (BHS: מְחָרָא, carrying the literal meaning of ‘darkness of concealment’) only, without mentioning the storm, which could point to a supernatural darkness for the Egyptians and a supernatural light for the children of Israel, arguably similar to when God created light before the sun, moon, and stars came into being (cf. Gn 1). This theory would presume light in Goshen and supernatural darkness across the provincial border, as it were. Although this line of thought would reinforce the spiritual significance of the passage, it is perhaps not the most likely interpretation. Even for the Genesis passage, light might not be a supernatural occurrence. Its original light (in Gn 2:2) seems to refer to the creation of light as a phenomenon, while afterwards material producers (sun, moon, stars) and finally perception of light (fish, birds, animals, humans) are put in place.

If the Septuagint translation (3rd century BC) is any indication, early Jewish tradition did not read supernatural darkness and light into Exodus 10:22–23. This was at a time when Hebrew and Greek were not dead languages as yet and the Septuagint translators spoke both languages fluently. They acknowledge that the darkness is a punishment from God, but point the reader to a secondary cause: a heavy storm, a hurricane (θύελλα, f.). It was the wind which produced the darkness by heaping up clouds and dust. In the Torah, primary (spiritual) and secondary (material) causes are all a natural part of the same world view. One often finds similar situations. To the Septuagint author’s mind, there is no doubt that God opened the Sea, but he is also convinced that this happened instrumentally by a strong wind from the East (Ex 14:21, cf. 13:17–14:29). Similarly, in this earlier context of Exodus 10:22–23, there is no reason to presume a supernatural source of darkness, or of light with the Israelites, for that matter. Moses lifted his hand to heaven, the storm raged as God responded, and Egypt was covered in darkness. Just as the immediate cause for the darkness was a hurricane, sweeping up dust and driving dark packs of cloud over the country, the light in the houses (lit. ἐν τῶι χώρων, ὡς καταδίων) of the Israelites may have come from oil lamps, as the Israelites were forewarned by Moses and prepared for the event.

Primary and secondary causes aside, for the author it is ultimately God who causes darkness for the disobedient, taking away creation blessings from the Egyptians; and who also continues to provide light for his people. The light of the Egyptians was concealed by darkness, but just as God’s light once overcame the darkness of the uniformed world (Gn 1:2: οὐκ ἦν ὁ οὐρανός ἐπάνω τῆς ἀβύσσου, without form and empty, while darkness was over the abyss), he now judges his enemies and provides light for his people, the children of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The light of the world, the lux mundi presented by John in the fourth gospel, has similar traits. In the prologue the darkness of the world and the antagonistic welcome that the Logos is about to receive, recall the pre-creation state of the world as well as God’s later judgements. Although John does not specifically mention the Fall, he describes a fallen world, which is in need of God’s recreation that will provide life and light. Although the darkness of this present, fallen cosmos may be thick and gloomy, it will be unable to overcome the light of the Logos (καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτοῦ οὐ κατέλαβεν).

This connection between Word and light is also particularly prominent in the Old Testament wisdom literature. When God speaks, humans receive insight, moral direction, and spiritual guidance for their situation. This was also the Jewish experience of the written Word of God as it was passed from one generation to the next. For instance:

Psalm 119 (118 LXX) 103–105: ὡς γλυκέα τῷ λάρυγγί μου τὰ λόγια σου, ἐπεξήριζε μέλι καὶ κηρύν τῷ στόματί μου. ἀπὸ τῶν ἐντολῶν σου συνήκα διὰ τοῦτο ἐμέμψασο πάνω ὁδὸν ἀκάθαρτον. Λόγος τοῖς ποσίν μου ὁ λόγος σου καὶ φίλες ταῖς τρίβοις μου. [How sweet are your oracles to my throat! more than honey to my mouth! I gain understanding by your commandments: therefore I have hated every way of unrighteousness. Your law is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my paths.]

Logos source of life

Johns describes the Logos as the source of life: ἐν αὐτῷ ἦν ὡς γλυκέα τῷ λάρυγγί μου τὰ λόγια σου καὶ φίλες ταῖς τρίβοις μου. [καὶ ή ἴωθ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων] (v. 4). This threefold parallelism of Word, light, and life is also found in the Old Testament wisdom literature. The God who creates also provides life through his breath and light for his creatures (Anderson 2008:332) to distinguish the world around them. Thus, he enables them to interact with their environment both intelligently and spiritually:

Proverbs 6:23: ὁ λόγος σου καὶ φίλες ταῖς τρίβοις μου καὶ φίλες ταῖς τρίβοις μου. [For the commandment of the law is a lamp and a light; a way of life; reproof also and correction.]

As breath is used for speaking, God spoke and there was life; and his life-giving breath made Adam a living soul. The Wisdom of Solomon (ΣΟΦΙΑ ΣΛΑΔΜΩΝΟΩΣΗ, included in the Septuagint) elaborates on this parallelism:

Wisdom 7:24–25: πάσης γὰρ κινήσεως κινητικάτερον σοφία, δήμια δὲ καὶ χαιρέ διὰ πάντων διὰ τὴν καθορισμένη ἄμης γὰρ ἐκ τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ συμμετοχῆς καὶ ἀπόρροια τῆς τοῦ παντοκράτορος δόξης ἀποκριθεὶς διὰ τόσον σόφον μεμιαμένον ἐς αὐτὴν παραχρηματίσε. [For wisdom is more moving than any motion: she passes and goes through all things by reason of her pureness. For she is the breath of the power of God, and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty: therefore can no defiled thing fall into her. For she is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspetted mirror of the power of God, and the image of his goodness.]

The Wisdom of Solomon also reflects on the darkness in Egypt and the light that was provided for God’s people. It also spiritualises the imagery of the desert journey of the Israelites as God gave the Israelites a light (column of fire) by night and cloud coverage against the rays of the sun by day.
God’s guidance is the overall aim of these provisions. The Egyptians, by contrast, were deprived of light and imprisoned by darkness, showing God’s judgment and echoing the pre-creation state of the world before the Logos changed it during the six days of creation:

Wisdom 18:1–4: To θεὸν ὃς ἐν φωσιν μν ἀκολουθησε μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν ἀκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολουθησε μν φωσιν μν ἁκολο...
packed up and travelled on, like Abraham and the patriarchs of old. The picture is also reminiscent again of the desert journey of the Israelites. God provided light through the fiery column, but it was only for the duration of the journey. And God’s actual presence resided in the tent of witness, the tabernacle. Whenever God’s light and cloud directed the Israelites to move on, the tent was unpitched. In a similar way the incarnate Logos of John’s gospel did not come to stay. In Johannine terms, his body would continue to exist, but not on earth. Although the fourth gospel does not mention the Ascension specifically, it is implied by the temporary residence that is not only indicated by the prologue, but by several other passages throughout the gospel.

Primary communication: the work of father and spirit

The intimacy also reflects in the anticipated reception and rejection of the Logos. Unlike the sunlight, which shines on all people indiscriminately, his light is not automatically received. This constitutes a central line of thought in John’s gospel. Only those who are born of the Spirit will make the connection (cf. John 3), but the idea is also stressed elsewhere in the gospel. Miller (1993):

No doubt the best summary of the centrality and power with which ‘word’ functions in the fourth gospel is at 6:63: ‘It is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you, they are spirit and they are life’. (p. 452)

In John’s gospel regeneration or re-creation is an activity in which Father, Son, and Spirit participate. No one can come to Jesus unless the Father draws him (Joh 6:44). Those who the Father gives to him will draw near (Jn 6:37–39). Disciples don’t choose Jesus, but Jesus chooses them and causes his disciples to bear fruit (15:16 οὐ μὴς με ἐξελέξασθε, ἀλλ’ ἐγὼ ἐξελέξαμην ὑμᾶς καὶ θέμα μιᾶς οὐκ ἔχετε ὑπάρξει καὶ καθίσετε καὶ ο ὁ κατ’ ὑμᾶς μέγεθος, ἵνα ἐν αὐτῷ ἀπετύχῃ τὸ πατέρα. (p. 455)). It is the Father who gathers a human family for the Logos. Similarly, those who are given to the Logos by the Father are prayed for and projected to be Jesus in his anticipated glory after his suffering and death (Jn 17).

Consequently John sees the intermediation process between God and humanity as an intimate interaction of Word, Spirit, and Father. It is a re-creation process. God’s light ends concealment of what was otherwise hidden in darkness and his breath gives life (cf. Gn 2:7). This thought of spiritual rebirth is particularly reflected in verse 13: οὐκ ὡς ΖΩΗ ἐὰν ὑμεῖς ἔχετε ἐν τῷ φωτὶ αὐτοῦ πηγὴ ζωῆς ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν ἡμῖν οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρὸς ἀλλ’ ἐκ θεοῦ γενέσθαι ἡμᾶς. This indicates some further spiritual work in humanity, however, is without specific discernment of sex: boys and girls (τέκνα).

Secondary communication: witness

The prologue, however, doesn’t consider God’s communication-strategies a sole divine venture. The gospel calls attention to the role of mere mortals as well, who are being taken into the service of the Light. Firstly the author points to the role of John the Baptist as a herald and witness to the Logos. He was a man sent from God, but not in the sense that he came from heaven, like the Logos. John belongs to this earth. He is not Logos, but ἀνθίσσω: ἐγένετο ἄνθρωπος ἀπεσταλμένος παρὰ θεοῦ, ὃνα αὐτῷ Ιωάννης.

The Baptist’s function is one of relay, giving witness about the light (οὐκ ἦν ἐκεῖνος τὸ ἐν οἷς μαρτυρισμὸς, ἡ γέννησις περὶ τοῦ φωτός) so that humanity would embrace it as trustworthy (ἰδοὺ πάντες πιστεύσοντες δί αὐτοῦ). The prologue puts him on the horizontal level of this world, not the vertical, heavenly dimension of the Logos. John the Baptist belongs to creation, points to the light and recommends it, maybe even mirrors it, but the light itself has its source elsewhere (οὐκ ἦν ἐκεῖνος τὸ φῶς, ἀλλ’ ἡ γέννησις περὶ τοῦ φωτός).

This horizontal relay is reflected by the distinction between light and witness of the light. While the latter is the radiation or the consequence of light, the former is the light source, which resides with the Logos. It is reminiscent of the light and life parallel in Psalm 36:9 (BHS)/35:10 (LXX): ὃποῖοι σοὶ πήγη ζωῆς, ἐν τῷ φωτὶ σου ὑπάγεσθε ἀλλ’ ἦν σῶμα ίσον τῷ φωτὶ. With God is the source of life, in his light we see light. While the source of light belongs to the realm of God, humanity is able to observe φῶς as a result. Similarly, in the prologue, John becomes a witness of the light (φῶτον γενιτίνε) and testifies about it to the individual men and women who listen to his message. However, as the observable spiritual light is a direct radiation or perhaps emanation of the Logos, exposing oneself to its rays brings into direct contact with the life-giving Logos. So the Word generates light and this provides life on earth. In the nominative sense φῶς belongs to God as the source. When the Baptist is portrayed in the context of horizontal testimony, however, he is described to have φωτός. Later in the Gospel, Jesus compares him with a lamp (5:35): οὗτος ὁ λόγος ὁ καίμηλος καὶ φαίνων, ὑμῖν δὲ ἂν ἠθελήσατε ἀγαλλιάθηναι πρὸς ὅραν τὸ φωτὶ αὐτοῦ. This indicates some further spiritual parallelism between the Logos and his herald. Just like the incarnation of the Logos provided just a temporary presence on earth, John the Baptist’s presence and witness on earth are only pros ὅραν (for a while). Jesus tells his disciples that his own presence as light of this world is going to have similar restrictions. This is already intimated by the particle ὅποτε in John 9:5 (ὅποτέ ὃν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἔχεις, ὁ ὃς μὴ ἔχει τοῦ κόσμου, but becomes obvious in chapter 12:35–36 where Jesus warns them that his light is only going to be with them for a short while: ἐπὶ μικρὸν ὁ φῶς ὑμῖν ἐστίν ἐπερεάτε ὡς τὸ φῶς ἔχετε, ἵνα μὴ σκοτιά ὑμῖν καταλάβῃ καὶ ὁ περιπατῶν ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ οὐδὲ ὑπάγεται, ὡς τὸ φῶς ἔχετε, πιστεύετε εἰς τὸ φῶς, ὃνα ὑπήρξε. As long as they have the light, they should trust it and receive its guidance.

The ultimate result of the Light and its testimony on earth is changed human lives. Those who trust the light and use it for
their guidance cannot remain in darkness. John 12:46: ἐγὼ φῶς ἐις τὸν κόσμον ἐλάληθα, ἵνα πάς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ μὴ μάθῃ ἀλήθειαν. Spiritual light is received by being yeeded heed to Jesus’s message (e.g. 12:47: καὶ έάν τις μου ὄχος τοῦ γέματος καὶ μὴ φυλάξῃ, ἵνα πάς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ μὴ μάθῃ ἀλήθειαν). Friendships with Jesus is described in terms of obeying his commandments (15:14: μένεις φίλοι μον ἐστε έάν ποιήσητε ἃ ἐγὼ ἐνέπλησα ἢμῖν). Although John doesn’t use the actual phrase ‘kingdom of God’ often (cf. 3:3, 18:36), in this respect the fourth gospel is not different from the other gospels and Acts in its emphasis on the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. The Logos is both Creator and Lord, who is presented as the Son of God and the King of Israel (cf. 1:50, 12:13–15, 19:12–15). This echoes the Mosaic notion that light is produced and presented not merely for human convenience, but that God should be pleased. In other words: not just a witness to humanity, but particularly also witness and ceremonial service before God, whether it affects humans in any way being of a secondary concern. In Exodus the Aaronic priesthood was commanded to have a perpetual light, fuelled by high grade olive oil, before the ark in the ‘tabernacle of testimony’ (Ex 27:20–21). This was to be a perpetual light, eternally burning from one generation to the next. Interestingly, there is an early tradition that places the apostle John in this priestly tradition, probably even wearing the oracular ephod (H.E. 3.31.2–3, cf. 3.39.6): John, who was both a witness and a teacher, who reclined upon the bosom of the Lord, and being a priest wore the sacerdotal plate. He also sleeps at Ephesus.7

Parallelisms and revelatory concepts of John 1:1–18 in their Greek cultural context

Early church: John in Greco-Roman culture of Ephesus region

The previous section considered the prologue in the textual context of the fourth gospel and Biblical Literature. An analysis showed the Logos to function as Creator and Revealer, while diverse parallel communicative levels or spheres of function were identified. However, the revelatory concepts of John 1:1–18 have a non-literal context as well, in the historical Greco-Roman environment where the gospel was written (cf. Irenaeus Adversus Haereses 3.1–2, Eusebius Historia Ecclesiastica 3.1, 3.20.10–11).8

Much has been written about the Roman imperial cult and the hardships implied for John’s readership in Asia Minor (e.g. Cassidy 2015:21). R.J. Apart from this, the cultural setting for this gospel was Greek.

Eusebius also quotes a tradition preserved in Clements of Alexandria, which points to a continued ministry in Ephesus after John’s exile at Patmos (H.E. 3.23.6–7). According to Polycarp (Eusebius, Historia Ecclesiastica 4.14.6) John was in the habit of visiting bath houses with his Christian friends, embracing Greco-Roman culture in that respect.9

One of John’s motivations for also writing a gospel account apparently was that he felt that he had more stories to share on the life of Jesus before the execution of John the Baptist (H.E. 3.24.11–14). These first acts that Eusebius refers to (τὰ πρῶτα τῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ πράξεων) in sharing John’s motivation to write his Gospel, the creative deeds of the Logos before all time, as well as his incarnation, seem to have been part of the Apostle’s considerations.10

Quoting from a letter by Polycrates (c. 130–196 AD) to Victor, Eusebius also places John’s death and burial in Ephesus (H.E. 3.31.2–3, cf. 3.39.6).

This cursory overview shows that the earliest Christian sources point to a Greco-Roman context for the fourth gospel. About Ephesus they are as unanimous as they are old (2nd century) and geographically spread: Western Europe (Irenaeus), Asia Minor (Polycrates), and Egypt (Clemens Alexandrinus). Otherwise, this tradition is confirmed by subsequent history and archaeology,11 which e.g. places the site of John’s tomb in Ephesus (cf. Plommer 1962:124).

Phoebus Apollo in the Ephesus region

Oracular centre of Apollo worship

In the 1st century, all of the main centres of Apollo worship, except for Delphi, were concentrated around Ephesus, in what is now halfway western Turkey. Apollo and his twin sister Artemis were quite popular and their worship had old papers in this region. Ephesus prided itself in the great temple papers in this region. Ephesus prided itself in the great temple of Apollo, which also served as oracle. Nearby Didyma to the south was even more important. It boasted the second centre of Apollo worship in the Greek world after Delphi. But the office differed in that the prophetess was described in terms of spiritual light is received by paying heed to Jesus’s message (e.g. 12:47: καὶ εἰσίν οἱ ἀκηκοότες αὐτοῦ ὅτι Ἰωάννης ὁ τοῦ κυρίου μαθητὴς ἐν τῇ Ἐφέσῳ πορευθεὶς λούσασθαι καὶ ἰδὼν ἔσω Κήρινθον ἐξήλατο. (But after Domitian had reigned fifteen years, and ἤτοι τὸ †ς τοῦ Χριστοῦ πράξεων περιέχει, ὡς ἐν τῷ Κήρινθῳ τοῦ τῆς ἀληθείας ἐχθροῦ μείνῃ ὃς ἐγὼ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ μὴ μάθῃ ἀλήθειαν.)

9. Eusebius, Historia Ecclesiastica 4.14.6 also confirms John’s residence in Ephesus and his immersing in Greco-Roman culture, when he relates an anecdote from Polycarp about the apostle, who fled the bathhouse because of the presence of a renowned heretic, Cerinthus: καὶ εἶπεν οἱ ἀκηκοότες αὐτοῦ ὅτι Ἰωάννης ὁ τοῦ κυρίου μαθητὴς ἐν τῇ Ἐφέσῳ λούσασθαι καὶ ἰδὼν ἔσω Κήρινθον ἐξήλατο. (But after Domitian had reigned fifteen years, and ἤτοι τὸ †ς τοῦ Χριστοῦ πράξεων περιέχει, ὡς ἐν τῷ Κήρινθῳ τοῦ τῆς ἀληθείας ἐχθροῦ μείνῃ ὃς ἐγὼ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ μὴ μάθῃ ἀλήθειαν.)

10. Eusebius, Historia Ecclesiastica 3.24.13: βαπτίστης μονομάχιος οὖν τούτου ἡμῶν, ὃς καὶ επιστημόνη ἄκοψεν ἐν δόξῃ ὑπερθέρμανεν ἀλλ’ ἐπιστημόνην τῆς ἐνδοτικής ἑαυτοῦ ἀλληλοθητοῦτος ἐπετυγχάνει. (But after Domitian had reigned fifteen years, and ἤτοι τὸ †ς τοῦ Χριστοῦ πράξεως ἠπάθητοι πᾶν ἀλληλοθητοῦτος ἡμῶν ἐπετυγχάνει. (But after Domitian had reigned fifteen years, and ἤτοι τὸ †ς τοῦ Χριστοῦ πράξεως ἠπάθητοι πᾶν ἀλληλοθητοῦτος ἡμῶν ἐπετυγχάνει.)

11. Most of the archeological data for the ruins of St. John’s Church in Ephesus, on the supposed site of the apostle’s tomb, are summarised by H. Plommer (1962:119–129).
Miletus effectively functioned as the harbour of Ephesus (cf. Acts 20:17–38, 2 Timothy 4:20), so that the commercial and cultural ties within this region are apparent. When St. Paul was active in Ephesus, this did not remain a local affair, but resulted in reaching the entire province of Asia as a result (see Ac 19:10, 20; 1 Cor 16:9).

Also, the two centres were religiously intertwined, as both Apollo and his sister Artemis were worshipped in both places. In Didyma excavations have revealed a temple of Artemis near to that of the more prominent Apollo temple. Interestingly, both sanctuaries in Didyma were built on the sites of ancient springs (Tuchtelt 1991:90). The very name of the town also conveys the idea of twinship (Apollo Διδύμος), which refers to these divine twins. Although a minor oracular sanctuary to Apollo in Ephesus only dates back to the 2nd century AD, the long established oracle at Claros was not far away, and neither was the Miletian one in the south. Herodotus indicates that the oracle in Didyma was used for consultation by the whole region, including the citizens of Ephesus (Historia 1.157–158):

The Cymaeans resolved to make the god at Branchidae their judge as to what course they should take; for there was an ancient place of divination there, which all the Ionians and Aeolians used to consult; the place is in the land of Miletus, above the harbour of Panormus. The men of Cyme, then, sent to Branchidae to inquire of the shrine what they should do in the matter of Pactyes that would be most pleasing to the gods; and the oracle replied that they must surrender Pactyes to the Persians. When this answer came back to them, they set about surrendering him. But while the greater part were in favour of doing this, Aristodicus son of Heraclides, a notable man among the citizens, stopped the men of Cyme from doing it; for he did not believe the oracle and thought that those who had inquired of the god spoke falsely.17

Parallelism between the Johannine Logos and Apollo Phoebus

Difference
Before one starts a comparison of deities in different religions, it is important to briefly consider the limitations of such an enterprise. Despite the parallels that will become obvious in this section there is sufficient discontinuity in religious context and definition to prevent endorsement of the thesis that the Logos was a Christian remake of a Greek deity. First and foremost, although Apollo is part of a pantheon of gods, the Johannine Logos functions in a monothestic setting. Secondly, one of the important roles that John claims for him is that of the Creator of all things. This role is not claimed for Apollo. He arrived on the scene much later. If anything, he stole the oracular site at Delphi from the earth goddess Gaia. In Greek mythology she was the personification of this planet

Cultural unity of Ephesus/Miletus/Didyma region

Ephesus and Didyma were quite close, not only geographically, but also culturally and historically. Didyma was politically part of Miletus (Mîlûto), where inhabitants built the oracle.

The Apollo oracle was known to be consulted by kings in the time of Herodotus (Historia 1.46) and was also patronised by Seleucis I (c.300BC) and Emperor Trajan (53–117AD). Seleucis returned its famous bronze Apollo statue after it was stolen by Xerxes, as were also the other temples, except that at Ephesus. The Branchidae gave over the treasures of the god to the Persian king, and accompanied him in his flight in order to escape punishment for the robbing and the betrayal of the temple. But later the Milesians erected the largest temple in the world, though on account of its size it remained without a roof. At any rate, the circuit of the sacred enclosure holds a village settlement; and there is a magnificent sacred grove both inside and outside the enclosure; and other sacred enclosures contain the oracle and the shrines. Here is laid the scene of the death of Branchus and the love of Apollo. The temple is adorned with costliest offerings consisting of early works of art. Thence to the city is no long journey, by land or by sea.12
and its fertility. Her marriage with Uranus (earth and space) produced the Titans, Cronus, and other divine and primordial beings. In other words, unlike the Logos, Apollo is far removed from the era of creation and has no claims on humanity as a creator. Thirdly, Apollo also does not need incarnation. He appears on earth with a body every now and then, but there is no permanently becoming part of humanity in the Johannine sense. Despite his notoriously unsuccessful love affairs, he always and exclusively continues to belong to the realm of the gods. The Johannine Logos is not a genitor; neither does the incarnation facilitate this. The Logos has no son in the carnal sense, unlike the Apollo of Greek mythology. The Jesus of the gospels is not interested in procreation, producing a family line. The Logos functions only in leaving a spiritual offspring, but even this, according to John, is essentially the province of the Spirit. He gives the sort of life that cannot be produced by the body (Jn 6:63).

Apollo, light, and revelation

This being said, there are parallels between Apollo and the Johannine Logos, which would have made several characteristics of the Logos sound familiar to 1st century Greek in the Ephesus region and elsewhere. As communication between God and humanity was a central idea in the prologue, it should be noted that Apollo was primarily worshipped as a god who responded to human enquiries. Almost, if not every, Apollo sanctuary was also an oracular site. This was for a reason, as he was known as the god of light and prophecy. All ancient Apollo sanctuaries – Delphi, Delos, or Didyma (all dating back to the 8th century BC), worshipped him as the god of light with prophetic insight that could be useful to those who consulted him.

To reflect this light connection, the Greeks gave him the epithet Φοίβος (Latin: Phoebus), bright, radiant, or pure. This title is associated with the prophetic oracle in Delphi. Plutarch (De E apud Delphi 388–389, cf. 393.C) says that the more enlightened called him Phoebus because of his purity and stainlessness, so the epithet Φοίβος in itself is not sufficient to establish the connection with light, although Greeks and Romans used it in its Greek and Latin form to refer to Apollo as the god of light. Perhaps Phoebus was to denote the cleansing, purifying powers of the artificial light at the time: fire. It is probably not a coincidence that 1 John 3:3 states: “καθὼς ἐκεῖνος ἁγνός ἐστιν πᾶς οἱ ἔχων τὴν ἐλπίδα ταύτην ἐπ' αὐτῷ ἁγνίζει ἑαυτόν” (as he is pure, all who possess this hope cleanse themselves). The Logos is a purifying presence.

Otherwise the association of Apollo with light was non-ambiguous, as he was also called Αἰγλήτης (light of the sun). This direct identification with light was widespread, although it was condemned by Plutarch (De E apud Delphi 393.D). To stress Apollo’s prophetic abilities, he was also referred to as Απολλόνιος Μαντικός, or Apollo the Seer.

Although both light and revelation are prominent in Apollo worship, the two are connected in a different way than in the Johannine Logos with its clear connection between light and prophetic revelation. Light in the sense of illumination seems to be lacking in the religious imagery around Apollo. Although he radiates purity, this is not the general light with its disclosing properties that one finds with the Johannine Logos. Although Apollo has light too, this is more in the sense of ritual purification than revelation of the divine will. For John’s gospel, light and revelation go together, but with Apollo these are separate qualities, although they do belong to one another at a secondary level. Plutarch makes this clear when he compares Apollo’s prophecy with a deflected ray of light that is captured in the vehicle of poetry, as oracles were often delivered in verse (De Pythiae Oracula 407E). So although not with the same intensity, still with a measure of the same symbolism, Phoebus Apollo is also the revealer. According to Euripides he carries this trait par excellence, because Apollo fears neither the gods, nor the people who come to make enquiries of him.

Euripides (Phoenissae 958, cf. Plutarch, De Pythiae Oracula 407D):

The man who practices the prophet’s art is a fool; for if he happens to give an adverse answer, he makes himself disliked by those for whom he takes the omens; while if he pities and deceives those who are consulting him, he wrongs the gods. Phoebus should have been man’s only prophet, for he fears no one.14

Phoebus and prophecy go together. Aeschylus makes clear that the memorable words of Orestes (Ὀρέστης) in his Eumenides 740: “O Phoebus Apollo! How will the trial be decided?” (ὦ Φοῖβ Ἀπόλλω, πῶς άγνώ κρυθήσεται?) This same connection between Phoebus and divine pronouncements comes through in the opening verses of the tale that describe Jason’s quest for the Golden Fleece (Apollonius Rhodius, Argonautica 1.1):

Beginning with thee, O Phoebus, I will recount the famous deeds of men of old, who, at the behest of King Pelias, down through the mouth of Pontus and between the Cyanean rocks, sped well-bench Argo in quest of the Golden Fleece. Such was the oracle that Pelias heard, that a hateful doom awaited him to be slain at the prompting of the man whom he should see coming forth from the people with but one sandal.15

So, despite the difference in scope and intensity with the Johannine Logos, revelation and the symbolism of light are present with Apollo. There is a level of parallelism that would have been apparent to Greek people in the Ephesus region. They were familiar with the idea of a god who reveals divine will and is referred to as the god of light at the same time.

Life, healing, and well-being

Apollo was also the Greek god that was known for his healing powers. This was not an activity separate from his oracular powers. This is clear by the memorable words of Orestes (Ὀρέστης) in his Eumenides 958: “ὦ Φοῖβ Ἀπόλλω, πῶς άγνώ κρυθήσεται?” This same connection between Phoebus Apollo and divine pronouncements comes through in the opening verses of the tale that describe Jason’s quest for the Golden Fleece (Apollonius Rhodius, Argonautica 1.1):

14.Euripides, Phoenissae 958: ὦ μὲν Φοῖβ θεός σύ, τιμώριος, καθως γὰρ οἵ οὐκέτι κοίμος τοῖς θεοῖς, νομίζων τοις ἔργοις τί πάθην, τῇ παρατεταγμένη θετήτορι φόβοι τοῖς ἐν θείαις θεοῖς, αὐτῷ χρήσατο τομαῖος ἄγνω κρυθήσεται. Oracles were often delivered in verse (De Pythiae Oracula 407E). So although not with the same intensity, still with a measure of the same symbolism, Phoebus Apollo is also the revealer. According to Euripides he carries this trait par excellence, because Apollo fears neither the gods, nor the people who come to make enquiries of him.

15.Apollonius Rhodius, Argonautica 1.1: Αἰχμήλες σύ, Φοῖβε, πολεμηγόν καὶ φοβηθήσομαι, σὺ Πόντοιο κατε στίχοι καὶ διὰ κέρατα Κυανῆς θαλάσσης ἀπεκάλυψεν Πέλλων χρύσων μετὰ κόρας ἠθανάστη Αίγι. Τοῖς γὰρ Πέλλων χάπι κατέλεξεν, ἐκ μὴ ἔσπειρο μόρφῳ μένα σταυρή, ταῦτα άνευ, ὃν τούτῳ δόθησα παλαίτερον, ἐν τῇ ἔννοιᾳ δινόμενον, ἀρά λόγῳ οὐκ ἔμετέρατο τῇ πρώτῃ μέρει δόξῃ χαμηλοῦ μίσου θεοῦ Αιανοῦ.
role. His mantic abilities operate jointly with his healing powers. From Homeric times, Apollo was considered a god who could strike with disease, but also cause the pestilence to leave (Homer, Iliad 1.60–75):

But come, let us ask some seer or priest, or some reader of dreams—for a dream too is from Zeus—who might say why Phoebus Apollo is so angry, whether he finds fault with a vow or a hecatomb; in hope that he may accept the savour of lambs and unblemished goats, and be willing to ward off the pestilence from us.16

The combination of oracular and healing components is particularly visible in the Ephesus region, as Didyma was both an oracular and healing site. Significantly, Strabo in his Geography (c. 64BC – 24 AD) points out that Apollo was especially worshipped and consulted for his healing powers.17

Apollo and his twin sister were approached for bodily well-being, to keep calamity and disease at bay. There are profound parallels with the healing qualities of the Johannine Logos. Jesus pronounces a healing oracle to the official’s son (John 4:50), heals a long-term cripple at Bethesda (5:8–9), gives sight to a man born blind (John 9:1–7), and famously raises Lazarus from the dead (11:38–44). Jesus’ comparison of himself with the copper snake that was lifted in the desert to bring healing to the Israelites (John 3:14) would have been readily understood in this cultural context and to some extent familiar in its concepts and imagery to the Greeks of the Ephesus region. Since times immemorial (cf. Homer) Apollo had been associated with a snake, and his son Asclepius had the symbol of a single snake wrapped around a staff, not unlike the Mosaic serpent on a pole. He also inherited Apollo’s qualities of healing powers, plus protection against sickness and disease (cf. Apollonius Rhodius, Argonautica 2.500). It is perhaps no coincidence that the only reference in the New Testament to the Mosaic snake on a pole is found in John’s gospel.

So also at the level of life and healing there are several parallels between Apollo and the Johannine Logos. Phoebus Apollo reveals and heals.18

Conclusion

A philological analysis of John 1:1–18’s textual context emphasises the revelatory emphasis of the fourth gospel. The Logos as the divine Creator denotes his special relationship to this world and humanity. Divine communication takes place in a setting that is discontinuous with the first creation, the Logos becomes incarnate in a world that is in rebellion against God, a place of darkness, devoid of Divine revelation where his own receive him not. It is God’s speech, the fruit of his breath or spirit, that created in the beginning and recreates in John’s gospel. As revealing light the Logos also provides insight for humanity. In this way the Logos comprises the Old Testament notion on light, revelation, life, and healing, with particular parallels in Genesis, Exodus, Psalms, Wisdom, and Jesus Sirach. Light, life, and revelation function at equal semantic levels, whereas the communication strategies of the Logos are facilitated by the work of Father and Spirit. Because of its theological continuity this parallelism between the prologue and biblical wisdom literature may be regarded as derivative. The parallelism between the prologue and the Greek oracle religion, on the other hand, is functional. Although there is theological discontinuity, John uses the familiarity of his hearers with revelatory concepts to proclaim his biblical message in a Greco-Roman setting. The prologue’s concept of a God of light who reveals (communicates) and heals connects in a very basic way with the Greek notion of Phoebus Apollo and the Ephesus region, where a revelatory concept of a God who reveals (communicates) and heals connects in a very basic way with the Greek notion of Phoebus Apollo and the Ephesus region, where a revelatory

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From the 2nd century it became apparent that the oracles were in such decline that they even pronounced the end of pagan religion, or were at least attributed to do so. Beattie (1997:5) defines these as ‘special oracular utterances, mainly by Apollo and Hekate about the nature of the gothead, which became common in the pagan world from the end of the 2nd century CE to satisfy the increasing demand for religious certainties’. See Pier Franco Beattie (1997:5–22). These oracles of Apollo initially functioned in the defense of paganism against Christianity (cf. Augustine, De Civitate Dei, ch.17–19).


