

Names and Titles: A Simple Response to Jehovah's Witnesses on John 1:1-18

*©Dr. John H. Niemelä at ETS Annual Meeting, San Francisco, CA, 16 Nov 2011

Introduction

The final clause in the New World Translation (NWT) of John 1:1 is infamous: “In [the] beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god.”¹ Witnesses often contrast the King James Version (KJV) with their NWT. Contrast the two in John 1:1c:

The Word was God (KJV, and other translations) The Word was a god (NWT)

Many English translations replicate the KJV rendering, but few translations favor the NWT view.² The Watch Tower Society (WTS) welcomes its underdog role and has a strategy.

They publish for mass consumption, not for scholarly review. Witnesses shun academic forums, but go door-to-door *en masse*. They claim the average member (of 7½ million worldwide) spends four hours a week on doorsteps (1.6 billion hours in 2010).³ Prestigious scholars may scoff at them and few translations support them. Though underdogs, they relentlessly canvass neighborhoods, swelling their numbers through new converts, as they sow doubt in believers. Mr. Average Christian (who only vaguely recalls hearing preaching on Colwell's obscure Greek rule) will sound foolish on John 1:1, probably even to himself. Even neophyte Witnesses gain skill in twisting a Trinitarian view of John 1:1 into a seemingly illogical and hopeless complexity.

This paper will not empty Kingdom Halls. Instead, it aims to reinforce believers. Christ—who gave them eternal life—keeps His word, precisely because He is God without beginning.

Basic Approaches to John 1:1c: The Word Was θεός

This paper argues that three approaches to the passage exist (but Witnesses only discuss the first two—their omission of the third approach has significant repercussions):

1. Word equals God, i.e., Word is⁴ God and (interchangeably) God is also Word.
2. Word is divine, i.e., Word has lesser divinity than 1:1b's “the God” (qualitative).
3. Word is DIVINE, i.e., Word has same level of deity as 1:1b's “the God” (qualitative).

Witnesses exclusively follow view 2, while Evangelicals accept views 1 or 3. The nomenclature: “the Word is DIVINE/divine” groups views 2-3 together for preliminary analysis.⁵

*Professor of New Testament Literature and Exegesis, Rocky Mountain Seminary, Englewood, CO

¹ *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, rev. ed. (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower, 1984). Witness writings have many brackets, so single brackets [] appear as such in their writings. Double brackets [[]] originate with me. Underlining in Witness quotes = links to the online NWT.

² *The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower, 1985), “Appendix 2A,” 1139, lists three English non-Society texts with *a god*: *New Testament*, trans. William Newcome (London: Johnson & Longmans, 1808; *Monotessaron*, trans. J. S. Thompson (Baltimore, MD: N.p., 1829); and *Emphatic Diaglott*, trans. B. Wilson (New York: Fowler & Wells, 1864). It also lists *Bible: An American Translation*, trans. J. M. P. Smith, E. J. Goodspeed & T. J. Meek (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935), with the ambiguous *divine*. It may mean DIVINE or divine (in this paper's nomenclature), so it may not support NWT.

³ “Statistics for 2010,” http://www.watchtower.org/e/beliefs_and_activities.htm, accessed 3 Nov 2011, tallies membership and total 2010 hours. Membership by nation is in “Statistics: 2010 Report of Jehovah's Witnesses Worldwide,” http://www.watchtower.org/e/statistics/worldwide_report.htm, accessed 3 Nov 2011.

⁴ Some of my renderings of 1:1 use present tense, because 1:1's imperfects do not deny continuation.

⁵ Pp. 1-7 of this paper group these points together; pp. 8-12 separate them.

What Witnesses Say about John 1:1 and a Response

Witnesses present only two options for John 1:1c (A1: *Word interchangeably equals God*; A2: *Word has lesser divinity than 1:1b's "the God"*). They ignore view A3: *Word has same level of deity as 1:1b's "the God."* This paper proves that omission and its ramifications.

What Witnesses Say about John 1:1c

The Witness case is so simple that neophytes easily master and propound it. To highlight the incompleteness of their case, [*Some*] in point A1 and point A3 appear italicized in brackets.

- A. Options in understanding John 1:1c
 - 1. [*Some*] Trinitarians see 1:1c as Word interchangeably equals God, the Almighty
 - 2. Witnesses see 1:1c as Word was divine (qualitative); less than God, the Almighty
 - [3.] [*Witnesses omit: Word was DIVINE (qualitative), as part of Trinity*]
- B. Arguments against taking 1:1c as Word interchangeably equals God, the Almighty
 - 1. The Word (= God, the Almighty), so God, the Almighty, was with Himself
 - 2. Anarthrous predicate nominatives generally are qualitative
 - 3. Colwell's disclaimer precludes his rule from being probative
- C. Witnesses conclude: The Word is divine (qualitative), but less than God, the Almighty

The problem is less about what Witnesses say and more about what they omit (point A3). Witnesses assume that rejecting *interchangeable equality between the Word and God* (A1) proves that *the Word is divine, not DIVINE* (A2). No, they must also disprove *the Word is DIVINE, not divine* (A3). The next section carries the argument forward.

Response to what Witnesses Say about John 1:1c

The response includes A3: *the Word is DIVINE (qualitative) and is fully God*. Then four arguments (C1-C4) lead to conclusion (D): *the Word is DIVINE (qualitative) and is fully God*.

- A. Options in understanding John 1:1c
 - 1. Some Trinitarians see 1:1c as Word interchangeably equals God, the Almighty
 - 2. Witnesses see 1:1c as Word was divine (qualitative); less than God, the Almighty
 - 3. Some Trinitarians see 1:1c as the Word was DIVINE (qualitative)—part of Trinity
- B. Arguments against A1: the Word interchangeably equals Almighty God
 - 1. The Word (= God, the Almighty), so God, the Almighty, was with Himself
 - 2. Anarthrous predicate nominatives generally are qualitative
 - 3. Colwell's disclaimer precludes his rule from being probative
- C. Arguments against A2 (qualitative; but Word is less than God, the Almighty)
 - 1. Semantics of God as a title, not a name, argue against A2
 - 2. 1:14 and 18 argue against A2
 - 3. Audience factors argue against A2's double-entendre (God/god) in Prologue
 - 4. Thomas' confession at the end of the book's body argues against A2
- D. Conclusion: The Word is DIVINE (qualitative) and is fully God (part of Trinity)

This Paper's Outline

Postponing the *DIVINE versus divine* issue streamlines this paper. It initially postpones citing Witness texts calling the Word ontological inferior. The initial presentation only includes citations that allow *DIVINE/divine*, not requiring *divine*.

Common Ground with Witnesses

- A. Options in understanding John 1:1a
 - 1. Some Trinitarians see 1:1c as Word interchangeably equals God, the Almighty
 - 2. Some interpreters see 1:1c as the Word was DIVINE/divine⁶ (qualitative)
- B. Arguments against Option A: the Word interchangeably equals God, the Almighty
 - 1. The Word (= God, the Almighty), so God, the Almighty, was with Himself
 - 2. Anarthrous predicate nominatives generally are qualitative
 - 3. Colwell's disclaimer precludes his rule from being probative

Differences with Witnesses

- C. Options in Approaching a Qualitative Predicate Nominative in 1:1c
 - 1. Witnesses: Word is divine (qualitative), but Word is less than God, the Almighty
 - 2. Response: Word is DIVINE (qualitative)—part of Trinity
- D. Arguments against C1 (qualitative; but construed as substandard deity)
 - 1. Semantics of θεός as a title, not a name, argue against C1
 - 2. 1:14 and 18 argue against C1
 - 3. Audience factors argue against C1's double-entendre (God/god) in Prologue
 - 4. Thomas' confession at the end of the book's body argues against C1
- E. Conclusion: The Word is DIVINE (qualitative) and is fully God (part of Trinity)

Common Ground: Options in John 1:1c

Determining whether θεός is qualitative in John 1:1c is the starting point.

[Some] Trinitarians Say 1:1c Means Word Interchangeably Equals God, the Almighty

Should You Believe in the Trinity? rightly raises the interchangeable equation view. It incorrectly asserts, "Trinitarians claim. . ." Rather, "Some Trinitarians claim. . ." This will come back to haunt the WTS (on page 11 of this paper).

AT JOHN 1:1 the *King James Version* reads: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." [[Some]] Trinitarians claim that this means that "the Word" (Greek, *ho lo'gos*) who came to earth as Jesus Christ was Almighty God himself.⁷

Witnesses Say 1:1c Means The Word Was DIVINE/divine

Witness literature quotes a Trinitarian affirming the Word to be DIVINE, though the WTS almost seems to regard it as an admission that the Word is only divine.

Many Greek scholars and Bible translators acknowledge that John 1:1 highlights, not the identity, but a quality of "the Word." Says Bible translator William Barclay: "Because [the apostle John] has no definite article in front of *theos* it becomes a description. . ."⁸

Their three arguments against the interchangeable equation view follow.

⁶ Capitalized *DIVINE* means qualitative and equal, lower-case *divine* means qualitative and inferior.

⁷ *Should You Believe in the Trinity?* (1989; electronic reprint at <http://www.watchtower.org/e/ti/index.htm>, accessed 3 Nov 2011). Underlining is in the electronic reprint. Double brackets are mine.

⁸ In *Should You?* It quotes William Barclay, *Many Witnesses, One Lord* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1963), 23. Underlining and single brackets both appear in the pamphlet's electronic reprint.

1:1c Does Not Interchangeably Equate the Word with God, the Almighty

Witnesses give three reasons (which follow) against seeing 1:1c as an interchangeable equation.

If the Word = God, the Almighty, then God, the Almighty, Was with Himself

Witnesses raise an argument concerning the logical relationship between 1:1c and 1:1b:

Even the *King James Version* says, “The Word was *with* God.” (Italics ours [[ours = the WTS]].) Someone who is “with” another person cannot be the same as that other person. In agreement with this, [[Philip Harner in]] the *Journal of Biblical Literature* . . . notes that if the latter part of John 1:1 were interpreted to mean “the” God, this “would then contradict the preceding clause,”⁹ which says that the Word was *with* God.¹⁰

Imagine a man saying, “I am Robinson Crusoe, and I am with Robinson Crusoe.” By analogy, Witnesses perceive the identity view saying: “God, the Almighty, was with God, the Almighty.” They rightly object. In 1:1b the word for *with* is πρὸς. Saying A is πρὸς B (in accusative) distinguishes them (to a degree, as in note 11, below).

Harner, a Trinitarian they cite, also objects to viewing John 1:1c’s predicate as interchangeable. Significantly, Witnesses cite Trinitarians for this. They know some Trinitarians hold the Word to be DIVINE, but conveniently ignore this later, to their own detriment.¹¹

Even so, Witnesses rightly note that taking 1:1c as an interchangeable equation between subject and predicate nominative would contradict 1:1b.

Anarthrous Predicates Generally Are Qualitative

Witnesses correctly distinguish interchangeable subjects and predicates (when both are articular) from those which are not (only the subject is articular). The anarthrous θεὸς in John 1:1c (θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος) precludes interchangeability. Note the following:

Interchangeable propositions make sense, even after interchanging subject with predicate. Both nouns are articular in Greek interchangeable propositions:

Twelve is a dozen (true); a dozen is twelve (true); therefore, a dozen = twelve.
Water is H₂O (true); H₂O is water (true); therefore, Water = H₂O.

Non-interchangeable propositions do not make sense, after interchanging subject with predicate. Greek non-interchangeable propositions have anarthrous predicate nominatives:

Pecans are nuts (true); nuts are pecans (false); pecans and nuts cannot interchange.
Dogs are animals (true); animals are dogs (false); dogs and animals cannot interchange.
Word is God (true); God is Word (false); Word and God cannot interchange.¹²
Λόγος is θεὸς (true); θεὸς is λόγος (false); λόγος and θεὸς cannot interchange.

⁹ Secondary citation is from Philip B. Harner, “Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns: Mark 15:39 and John 1:1,” *JBL* 92 (March 1972): 85.

¹⁰ In *Should You?* The elided words mention Joseph Fitzmyer as the editor of *JBL*.

¹¹ Page 11 of this paper shows that, through this, the WTS inadvertently renders their own case illogical.

¹² It does not interchange. The Son is God (part of Trinity), but Trinity is not the Son, since the Father is not the Son; the Spirit is not the Son. Christ is fully God, but is not all-that-is-God. God also includes Father and Spirit.

Witnesses know that articular predicates interchange with their subjects. A. T. Robertson's assertion about interchangeability in Matt 13:38 yields: the field is the world (true); the world is the field (true); therefore, the field equals the world. The WTS asserts:

Bible scholar A. T. Robertson recognizes that if both subject and predicate have articles, "both are definite, treated as identical, one and the same, and interchangeable." Robertson considers as an example Matthew 13:38, which reads: "The field [Greek, *ho a-gros*'] is the world [Greek, *ho ko'smos*]." The grammar enables us to understand that the world is [[e.g., equals]] also the field.¹³

They know that articular predicates can interchange, but anarthrous predicates cannot. The next two citations explain:

Similar examples [[anarthrous predicates]] are found at John 4:24, "God is a Spirit [[*πνεῦμα ὁ θεός*]],"¹⁴ and at 1 John 4:16, "God is love [[*ὁ θεός ἀγάπη ἐστίν*]]." In both of these verses, the subjects have definite articles but the predicates, "Spirit" and "love," do not. So the subjects and predicates are not interchangeable. These verses cannot mean that 'Spirit is God' or 'love is God.'¹⁵

The WTS cites Hewett, who argues that subject and predicate cannot interchange:

What, though, if the subject has a definite article but the predicate does not, as [[with *θεός*]] in John 1:1? Citing that verse as an example, scholar James Allen Hewett emphasizes: "In such a construction the subject and predicate are not the same, equal, identical, or anything of the sort."¹⁶

In the following, are limousine drivers (the subject) the *same, equal, identical, interchangeable, or anything of the sort* to chauffeurs (the predicate)? *Limousine drivers are chauffeurs.*

Many would equate them. That is almost true, but paid drivers of any vehicle can be chauffeurs (sometimes even unpaid ones). R. G. LeTourneau spoke of *wheelbarrow chauffeurs*.¹⁷ Subject and predicate do not quite interchange, but limousine drivers are chauffeurs.

No one would claim, "Hewett denies that limousine drivers are chauffeurs, because he says, 'the subject and predicate are not the same, equal, identical, or anything of the sort.'"

Witnesses recognize predicates that interchange from those that do not. Even so, watching for exaggerations of Hewett's words may be wise. However, Witnesses reach a proper conclusion: anarthrous predicates (as in John 1:1) are qualitative. Even apart from relating 1:1c to 1:1b, John 1:1c uses a construction not meant to interchange.

¹³ "Is Jesus God?" Within this is a quote and an allusion to A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 4th ed. (1923; reprint, Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1934), 768.

¹⁴ Witnesses use the *Kingdom Interlinear*, which uses the Westcott-Hort text.

¹⁵ "Is Jesus God?" The citation is from the electronic reprint, which has underlined links to the online NWT Bible, so underlining is in the source document. Double brackets are mine.

¹⁶ "Is Jesus God?" The secondary citation is from James Allen Hewett, *New Testament Greek: A Beginning and Intermediate Grammar* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986), 24.

¹⁷ R. G. LeTourneau, *Mover of Men and Mountains* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1960), 135.

Colwell's Disclaimer Precludes His Rule from Being Probative

Witnesses rightly note Colwell's disclaimer, but Evangelicals often ignore it:

Colwell had to acknowledge this [[anarthrous pre-verbal predicates can be non-definite]] regarding the predicate noun, for he said: "It is indefinite ['a' or 'an'] in this position only when the context demands it."¹⁸ So even he admits that when the context requires it, translators may insert an indefinite article in front of the noun in this type of sentence structure [[anarthrous pre-verbal predicate]].

Does the context require an indefinite article at John 1:1? Yes, for the testimony of the entire Bible is. . .¹⁹ Thus, not Colwell's questionable rule of grammar, but *context* should guide the translator in such cases.²⁰

Significantly, Colwell emphasizes context over form. By contrast, the WTS response emphasizes dogma over both context and form. Two responses are necessary (one to what Colwell said and another to the Witness response):

1. Colwell admits that John 20:28, as John's context, outweighs sentence position.
2. Witnesses use Colwell's appeal to context to ignore John 20:28 and to ignore John.

Colwell neither claimed nor proved (despite popular opinion) that pre-anarthrous predicate nominatives must be definite. He ultimately depends on John's context:

[A] The absence of the article [in John's opening verse]²¹ does *not* make the predicate indefinite or qualitative when it precedes the verb; [B] it is indefinite in this position only when the context demands it. [C] The context makes no such demand in the Gospel of John, for this statement cannot be regarded as strange in the prologue of the gospel which reaches its climax in the confession of Thomas [John 20:28, near the end of the body of the book].²²

This has three parts: Part A warns against a reflex assumption that John 1:1's pre-verbal anarthrous predicate is indefinite or qualitative. Part B acknowledges theoretic possibility of context requiring 1:1c to be indefinite. Part C argues that the contextual link between 1:1c and 20:28 precludes 1:1c diminishing Christ's full deity.²³

¹⁸ Colwell, "Definite," 21.

¹⁹ My citation elides the denial of Jesus being fully God, because it is a WTS rabbit-trail outside of John. The answer is simple. Witnesses confuse (in John and elsewhere) Jesus' Son-to-Father obedience with ontological inferiority, a non-sequitur.

²⁰ *Should You?* Italics in original. Single brackets in original; double brackets are mine.

²¹ Colwell, "Definite," 21, begins the paragraph containing the overall citation with "the opening verse of John's Gospel," so his discussion focuses on John 1:1, not on the construction in general.

²² Colwell, "Definite," 21. Italics in original; underlining is mine.

²³ The thrust of Colwell's argument is that John 1:1c must correspond to 20:28. It corresponds if the Word is DIVINE; but does not if the Word is merely divine. That is, Colwell's contextual argument aims at the Witness sub-deity position. He may have sought to eliminate a Trinitarian qualitative view, but the critique leaves that view unscathed.

Colwell sought to suggest a definite predicate. Paul Dixon recognizes Christ's full deity, but is less sanguine about definiteness than Colwell:

The rule does not say: an anarthrous predicate nominative which precedes the verb is definite. This is the converse of Colwell's rule and as such is not a valid inference (From the statement "A implies B," it is not valid to infer "B implies A." From the statement "Articular nouns are definite," it is not valid to infer "Definite nouns are articular." Likewise, from the statement "Definite predicate nominatives preceding the verb are anarthrous," it is not valid to infer "Anarthrous predicate nominatives preceding the verb are definite.")²⁴

Witnesses correctly note that Colwell attached no probative value to the construction itself. For Colwell, context is the final basis for deciding between definite, indefinite, or qualitative. He claimed John 1:1c's relation to 20:28 as the contextual basis for rejecting any view that diminishes Jesus' deity.

Witnesses note Colwell's appeal to John's context, but immediately appeal to all the books other than John. They give context lip service, ". . . *context* should guide the translator in such cases."²⁵ Yet, they immediately abandon John's context, "Does the context require an indefinite article at John 1:1? Yes, for the testimony of the entire Bible is. . ."²⁶ The WTS does discuss John 1:1 and 20:28. Of course, they treat them in isolation, not testing them as a possible *inclusio* (encompassing most of John's Gospel).²⁷

They rightly point out that Colwell admits that pre-verbal predicates are not automatically definite. Many Evangelicals have not recognized this.

Conclusion: John 1:1c Does Not Equate the Word with God, the Almighty

1. If 1:1c meant, "Jesus = God, the Almighty," God, the Almighty, was with Himself.
2. 1:1c's anarthrous predicate nominatives are generally qualitative.
3. Colwell's rule does not prove definiteness of pre-verbal predicate nominatives.

These are three good reasons for not equating subject and predicate nominative in John 1:1c. Trinitarians who hold to "the Word is DIVINE" view agree with much of the foregoing. The next section challenges Witnesses on all remaining issues.

Differences with Witnesses

The foregoing shows that John 1:1c asserts: "the Word is DIVINE/divine." This presents an option. Is it that "the Word is merely divine"? Or, is it that "the Word is DIVINE (in the fullest sense)"? Thus far, the paper considered common ground with Witnesses. The remainder examines the gulf between Witnesses and Evangelicals.

²⁴ Paul Stephen Dixon, "The Significance of the Anarthrous Predicate Nominative in John" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1975), 11-12. Cf. Harner, "Qualitative," 75-87.

²⁵ In *Should You?* Italics in original.

²⁶ Note 19 explains why my citation elides the denial of Jesus being fully God. It is a rabbit-trail outside of John. The problem is that Witnesses confuse functional obedience with ontological inferiority.

²⁷ Page 11 of this paper relates John 1:1c and 20:28 as Colwell suggests.

Witnesses View the Word as a Lesser Deity than God, the Almighty

Witnesses forsake John to claim ontological inferiority. The following surmises that a qualitative sense of 1:1c must deny Christ's full deity, although the WTS quotes Trinitarians like Barclay and Hewett, favoring qualitative in 1:1c.²⁸ Remember the omitted point A3 (p. 2).

So [[based on the qualitative anarthrous predicate nominative]] John 1:1 highlights the quality of the Word, that he was "divine," "godlike," "a god," but not Almighty God. This harmonizes with the rest of the Bible, which shows that Jesus, here called "the Word" in his role as God's Spokesman, was an obedient subordinate sent to earth by his Superior, Almighty God.²⁹

The possibility of Christ's subordination being purely functional receives no attention.³⁰

Trinitarians Believe the Word Is DIVINE and Fully God

Four Johannine arguments dispute Witnesses' view that the Word is a substandard deity:

- A. the semantics of θεός as a title, not a name,
- B. the context (John 1:1-18, especially vv 14 and 18),
- C. the audience and purpose of John's Gospel,
- D. the culminating story of the body of the book: Thomas' confession.

The Semantics of Θεός as a Title, Not a Name. Names and titles have distinct semantics. Daniel Wallace differentiates semantics of proper names from that of titles:

A good rule of thumb to follow is that a proper name is one that cannot be pluralized. Thus, Χριστός, θεός, and κύριος [pluralize] are not proper names [but titles]; Παῦλος, Πέτρος, and Ἰησοῦς [cannot pluralize and] are [proper names].³¹

Names do not meaningfully pluralize: *100 John Does* are all males named John Doe. All else (age, race, color, creed, citizenship, etc.) may differ. Titles meaningfully pluralize: *100 kings* each is a nation's ruler by right of birth. Consider titles under David and Solomon's co-regency:

David as sole regent David and Solomon as co-regents (973-971 BC) Solomon as sole regent

Assume David and Solomon were together in 972 BC (in co-regency). Statements 1-2 resemble: 1. each other, 2. John 1:1b-c, 3. and the statement about the Father (in Trinity).

1a Solomon	was King	1b Solomon	was with the King	<i>They are co-regents</i>
2a David	was King	2b David	was with the King	
3a The Word	was God	3b The Word	was with [the] God	<i>They are in Trinity</i>
4a The Father	was God	4b The Father	was with [the] God	
1a Βασιλεύς	ἦν ὁ Σολομών	1b ὁ Σολομών	ἦν πρὸς τὸν Βασιλέα	<i>They are co-regents</i>
2a Βασιλεύς	ἦν ὁ Δαυίδ	2b ὁ Δαυίδ	ἦν πρὸς τὸν Βασιλέα	
3a θεός	ἦν ὁ λόγος	3b ὁ λόγος	ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν	<i>They are in Trinity</i>
4a θεός	ἦν ὁ πατήρ	4b ὁ πατήρ	ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν	

²⁸ Notes 8 and 16 show the WTS citing Barclay and Hewett, Trinitarians arguing for a qualitative view.

²⁹ In *Should You?* Similarly, when Colwell appealed to John's context, the same pamphlet abandoned John, instead appealing generically to the whole Bible. Cf. pp. 6-7 of this paper.

³⁰ If applied to Eph 6:5 (slaves should obey their *human* masters), slaves would be subhuman.

³¹ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1996), 246, n. 77.

The four statements (both Greek and English) parallel each other grammatically and semantically. Notably, if anarthrous predicate nominatives (on the left) imply inferiority to their articular counterparts (on the right), then

Solomon was inferior to David AND David was inferior to Solomon (Nonsense).

The Word was inferior to τὸν θεόν AND the Father was inferior τὸν θεόν (Nonsense).

Anarthrous predicate nominative constructions do not imply ontological subordination.³²

Co-regency implies kingship-in-common. Both “David was King” and “Solomon was King” are qualitative statements. Each (in co-regency) belongs to the category of King, but (by definition) neither (in co-regency) exhausts the category of King. Each has a co-regent.

Similarly, the relation between Father and Son in the Trinity is deity-in-common. Both “the Word was God” and “the Father was God” are qualitative statements, because each (within the Trinity) belong to the category of God, but (by definition) neither (within the Trinity) exhausts the category of God. Father and Son are distinct, but are in the Triune Godhead.

Co-regency is an analogy that approaches (however imperfectly) a qualitative Trinitarian view of John 1:1. God the Father’s relation to God the Son in Trinity resembles the co-regent relation between David (father) and Solomon (son).³³

John 1:14 and 18 Weigh against Ontological Subordination

And the Word became flesh, and lived among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the Father’s only begotten [μονογενῆς], full of grace and truth (1:14 in *Logos 21*).³⁴

No man has ever seen God. The only begotten [μονογενῆς] Son [*or* God],³⁵ who is nearest to the Father’s heart—He has made Him known (1:18 in *Logos 21*).

Witnesses interpret μονογενῆς as “only begotten” and apply it to His deity. They view Him as a created and non-eternal being, less than truly God.³⁶ However, μονογενῆς derives from μόνος + γίνομαι, not μόνος + γεννάω (it is μονογενῆς, not μονογεννής). The Lxx uses it in Psalm 22:20; 25:16; 35:17; Amos 8:10 and Zech 12:10 to translate *yāhîd* (unique, only). Dale Moody’s 1953 analysis of μονογενῆς offers extensive validation.³⁷

John 1:18 has a variant. Witnesses accept μονογενῆς θεός, rejecting μονογενῆς υἱός. Both relate This One, who is God’s Son, directly to the Father, explicitly as Father. John 1:14 links Christ, the μονογενῆς, to the Father. Witnesses and Evangelicals acknowledge this. The rest of John calls Jesus God’s Son (with 5:18 linking that to claiming equality with God).

³² Neither do the statements indicate *existence of* or *direction of* any functional subordination. Solomon probably answered to his father during co-regency, but the grammar is silent on this (or, the same grammar would make David functionally subordinate). The grammar is also silent when the Father or the Word is subject.

³³ One cannot construe Father and Son (as Witnesses do) to make Christ a created being. The next section of the outline (John 1:14 and 18) explores this issue.

³⁴ Logos 21 in *Living Water: The Gospel of John with Notes*, 5th rev. (Glide, OR: Absolutely Free, 1996).

³⁵ A variant occurs here: υἱός versus θεός. Witness texts say θεός, following their *Kingdom Interlinear*.

³⁶ Cf. *Should You?*

³⁷ Dale Moody, “God’s Only Son: The Translation of John 3₁₆ in the Revised Standard Version,” *JBL* 72 (Dec 1953): 213-19.

Religious leaders accused Jesus of making “Himself equal with God,” by calling God His Father (John 5:18). Similarly, leaders charge, “[You] make Yourself God” (John 10:33). If they profoundly misinterpreted Jesus, John would insert a parenthetical disclaimer, as he sometimes did. These contexts lack remarks guiding readers to Witnesses’ view.

Μοϋσηνης calls Jesus the unique God or unique Son. He is uniquely God and man without confusion. He is the only one of the Trinity to become flesh. John 1:14 says the Creator became flesh, while 1:18 speaks of Him as the only One who can reveal the unseen God.

Also, John 1:1-2 says that the Word with God was at a beginning before creation. Thus, familial closeness underlies the Father-Son relationship, not sequence. Leon Morris says, “There never was a time when the Word was not. There never was a thing that did not depend on him for its existence. The verb ‘was’ is most naturally understood of the eternal existence of the Word: ‘the Word continually was.’”³⁸ This combines with Ἐν ἀρχῇ (1:1a and 2) and Him as Creator (1:3). John’s Prologue accords naturally with Trinitarianism, but Witnesses isolate 1:1 from context. Their case is wanting here.

Audience Factors Argue against Ontological Subordination though Double-Entendre

John’s Gospel is the only NT book written to unbelievers. John 20:30-31 uses *you* twice to address John’s original readers:

³⁰ Jesus actually performed many other miraculous signs [σημεῖα (neuter)] in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹ But these [ταῦτα (neuter) = signs] are written so that *you may believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing *you may have life* in His name (*Logos 21*, emphasis mine).

John wrote for the purpose that “you (original readers) may believe” and that “you (original readers) may have life in His name.” They had not yet believed,³⁹ so they were dead and did not yet have life everlasting. The book is evangelistic.⁴⁰ Christ guarantees everlasting life. John 6:47 promises: “Amen, amen, I tell you, whoever believes in Me has everlasting life.” He makes an infinite promise: everlasting life. Only an infinite Promisor (God) can keep an infinite promise (everlasting life).

John translates such common Jewish religious terms as *rabbi* (1:38) and *Messiah* (1:41), suggesting readers with little background. This accords easily with an evangelistic purpose.

John’s readers did not know simple terms (*rabbi* and *Messiah*). Could he expect them to differentiate 1:1b’s reference to Almighty God from 1:1c? Witnesses assert that “a god” means some sort of super-angel, who created everything (except Himself). The Witness view ignores the minimal background of the unbelieving readers. Such a double-entendre is far too subtle for the intended readers. Instead, John intended something simple, analogous to co-regency.

³⁸ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 65.

³⁹ Though many accept the present, not the aorist, in 20:31, John does use ἵνα and present subjunctive for yet future purpose. Cf. John 9:39, “I came into this world . . . so that those who [now] do not see may see [present subjunctive].”

⁴⁰ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003) 1:469, observes, many scholars “assume too much knowledge of Semitic languages on the part of Diaspora Jews.”

Thomas' Culminating Confession Treats Jesus as Lord and God

The book's body ends with Thomas' confessing the risen Christ. The book's opening (John 1:1) links with Thomas' confession (John 20:28) late in the book, forming an inclusio. This linkage led Colwell to regard 1:1 as affirming the Word as fully God.

The absence of the article [in John 1:1]⁴¹ does *not* make the predicate indefinite or qualitative when it precedes the verb; it is indefinite in this position only when the context demands it. The context makes no such demand in the Gospel of John, for this statement cannot be regarded as strange in the prologue of the gospel which reaches its climax in the confession of Thomas [20:28].⁴²

Unfortunately, Witnesses view John 1:1 and 20:28 in isolation, not (as Colwell suggests) linking them. After a paragraph discussing John 1:1, the following appears, "But what about the apostle Thomas' saying, 'My Lord and my God!' to Jesus at John 20:28? To Thomas, Jesus was like 'a god,' especially in the miraculous circumstances that prompted his exclamation."⁴³ Treating this verse in isolation lets them ignore 1:1 and 20:28 without fear of detection.

Neither Jesus nor John corrects the content of Thomas' faith, appearing as the finale of the book's body. John's original unbelieving readers had limited background, needing definitions even for rabbi and Messiah. Would John expect such readers to catch non-obvious Witness nuances? No, he would have made such points leap off the page.

Colwell correctly highlights John 1:1 and 20:28 as an inclusio. Even opponents (John 5:18 and 10:33) perceive Jesus claiming equality with God and making Himself God. Jesus also makes an infinite promise (everlasting life), which requires an infinite Promisor.

Summary: The Word Is DIVINE (Fully God)

Witnesses rightly deny that John 1:1c equates the Word with God, the Almighty, but falsely assert that Trinitarianism requires such an equation. This is despite the WTS citing Trinitarians favoring a qualitative view.⁴⁴

A ramification of the WTS recognizing the existence of a qualitative Trinitarian view of John 1:1c is simple. Page 2 of this paper shows that they think that denying the interchangeable equation view disproves Trinitarianism. However, the qualitative Trinitarian view is alive and well. The WTS case is horrendously flawed.

Many Evangelicals (including this paper's author) see 1:1c qualitatively, but deny Witnesses' assertion that 1:1c involves ontological subordination. Evangelicals affirm the Word is DIVINE (as part of Trinity), but the WTS the Word is divine (less than God, the Almighty).

Four arguments from John test whether the Word is DIVINE or merely divine: names and titles, John 1:14 and 18, audience issues, and Thomas' confession at the body's conclusion.

Names and titles. John 1:1b's structure does not work with names. A man alone on an island saying, "I am Robinson Crusoe and I am with Robinson Crusoe," may be beside himself (mentally, rather than physically).

⁴¹ Colwell, "Definite," 21, begins the paragraph containing the overall citation with "the opening verse of John's Gospel," so his discussion focuses on John 1:1, not on the construction in general.

⁴² Colwell, "Definite," 21. Italics in original.

⁴³ In *Should You?* Underlining in electronic reprint.

⁴⁴ Notes 8 and 16 show the WTS citing Barclay and Hewett, Trinitarians arguing for a qualitative view.

By contrast, titles pluralize. In David and Solomon’s co-regency, two men have kingship in common. Likewise, the Word and the Father have deity in common. The grammar does not suggest ontological subordination. The four sentences are meaningful, but “I am Robinson Crusoe and am with Robinson Crusoe” is not. Names and titles have distinct semantics.

1a Solomon	was King	1b Solomon	was with the King	<i>They are co-regents</i>
2a David	was King	2b David	was with the King	
3a The Word	was God	3b The Word	was with [the] God	<i>They are in Trinity</i>
4a The Father	was God	4b The Father	was with [the] God	

John 1:1-18 presents the reader what is akin to co-regency, where both Christ and His Father are God. This does not mean that the reader would immediately catch the whole picture, but there are twenty-one chapters. Reading further clarifies.

John 1:14 and 18 do render the Word into the Father’s offspring. *Μονογενής* means “unique, only,” and does not speak of procreation. Father and Son refer to a close familial relationship with functional subordination, but no ontological inferiority.

John addresses unbelievers. He could never expect such readers to perceive a two-tiered model of deity. Witnesses impose unrealistic expectations onto the original readers. Only an infinite Promisor (God) can fulfill an infinite promise (everlasting life). John 6:47 promises: “Amen, amen, I tell you, whoever believes in Me has everlasting life (*Logos 21*).” The promise Jesus makes is infinite: everlasting life.

Thomas’ confession, “My Lord and My God” met with Jesus’ approval. It corresponds to John 1:1, as Colwell noted. This ends the body of a book written to unbelievers with little background. Thomas affirms what religious leaders charged against Christ. John 5:18 regards calling God His Father as making “Himself equal with God.” In 10:33, “You . . . make Yourself God.” John’s Gospel does not correct these through parenthetical editorial remarks, but the whole book affirms Jesus as fully God.

Conclusion

The Witness two-tier model of deity lacks support in John, even in 1:1. Isaiah 45:6 says that Yahweh is the first God, the last God, and the only God.

Thus says the LORD [יהוה], the King of Israel, and his [Israel’s] Redeemer, the LORD [יהוה] of hosts: “I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God.”⁴⁵ (NKJ)

The Triune God is first, last, and only. In the final analysis, Witnesses mean that the Word really is not even a god, but only a super-angel. Yet, this paper shows Jesus accepting worship from Thomas. Jesus who is God (DIVINE, as part of the Trinity) was with God (who is called Father and who is also part of the Trinity).

John 1:1b-c is akin to co-regency, where two men have one kingship in common. Both Father and Son are God, but are not two gods. Each is God and each was with the other.

⁴⁵ No one before, after, or beside Yahweh is legitimately θεός. Both traditional polytheism and subordinate deity (the Witness view of Christ) face difficulties here. However, a Triune God (as the only God) meets what Isa 45:6 requires. Starting at Gen 1:26-27, the OT gives Trinitarian hints which the NT, including John 1:1, explains.

Message of Life (www.MoL316.com or www.TheMessageOfLife.com) posted this paper today, 16 Nov 2011.