

# Beauties of the Truth

A Forum for the Publication of Scriptural Viewpoints  
Thought to be Harmonious with God's Plan of the Ages  
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## Development of the "Trinity Doctrine"

*"Hold fast the form of sound words" (2 Timothy 1:13).*

The apostles who walked with Jesus during his ministry, and led the Church in the first decades of the Christian era, knew Jesus as Messiah, the anointed of God. He was "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). He had existed from the beginning of God's creation. Later he was "made flesh," born a human being, walked among men, taught his disciples, and gave his life a ransom for all (John 1:14, 1 John 1:1-3, Matthew 9:6, 20:28).

However, as the apostles passed away, confusion entered respecting the nature of Jesus. His followers debated who he was and his relationship to the Heavenly Father. Perhaps this was because there never was another person like Jesus, and he sometimes spoke cryptically about who he was. Remarkably, the matter is murky in the minds of many Christian even today.

### HISTORICAL SETTING: THE ROMAN EMPIRE

In 325 AD, the Roman Emperor Constantine called a great church council to debate and decide the matter. Why would Constantine do this? Why did he care whether there was agreement about who Christ is and his relationship to God, our Heavenly Father?<sup>1</sup>

On May 1, 305 AD, the co-emperors Diocletian and Maximian abdicated their rule of Rome. They named Galerius and Constantius I, father of Constantine, in their place. Constantius was Augustus or ruler in the West. A year later, Constantius was killed in battle in Britain, with Constantine by his side. Constantine was immediately declared Augustus in his father's place by the Roman troops. The Roman Senate and Praetorian Guard, however, named Maxentius as Augustus of the West. Battle with Constantine immediately ensued.

In 312, Constantine met Maxentius at the decisive Battle of Milvian Bridge. The night before the battle, Constantine saw a vision in the sky. Bishop Hosius, who accompanied him, helped him interpret the vision as a cross, meaning Christ would intervene to give Constantine the victory.

Some accounts say that Constantine had his soldiers paint crosses on their shields. Constantine defeated Maxentius, and decided that Christianity was the true religion.

In 313 AD, in Milan, Constantine met Licinius, who had replaced Galerius as Augustus in the East. Among the agreements they reached was a statement of religious toleration known as the Edict of Milan.<sup>2</sup> Although Licinius joined Constantine in this statement of toleration, he personally had not made any commitment to Christian theology. The following is an excerpt from the Edict of Milan:

"When I, Constantine Augustus, and I, Licinius Augustus, fortunately met near Mediolanurn [Milan], and were considering everything that pertained to the public welfare and security, we thought ... that we might grant to the Christians and others full authority to observe that **religion which each preferred**. And thus by this wholesome counsel and most upright provision we thought to arrange that no one whatsoever should be denied the opportunity to give his heart to the observance of the **Christian religion**, of that religion which he should think best for himself ... it has pleased us to remove all conditions whatsoever ... concerning the Christians and now any one of these who wishes to observe the **Christian religion** may do so freely and openly, without molestation."

The ultimate goal of both Constantine and Licinius was sole power. Hostilities broke out 316. War erupted again in 324 and Constantine defeated Licinius twice. Constantine initially spared his brother-in-law Licinius, but early in 325 he broke his oath and ordered Licinius executed.

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Constantine was now sole Emperor. With no rivals remaining, Constantine turned his attention to uniting the Empire. He soon realized that a great debate was dividing the Christian church, and concluded there would be no unity in the Empire unless this controversy was settled.

### **HISTORICAL SETTING: CONTROVERSY IN THE CHURCH**

The “nature” of Christ, specifically his “divinity” or “divine nature,” had been a subject of debate within the church and in particular the words of the Apostle John. Church leaders asked, how can such scriptures as

- “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30), and
- “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9),

be reconciled with scriptures like

- “My Father is greater than I” (John 14:28), and
- “Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God.” (Matthew 19:17, Mark 10:18, Luke 18:19).

This debate had led to all sorts of conflicting theories and explanations about the nature of Christ and his relationship to the Father. Was Jesus co-eternal with the Father, i.e. without beginning? If not, when was he created, in far distant ages, or when he was born of Mary? If created, was it “out of nothing” or out of God’s own spiritual “substance?” Was or is Christ subordinate in authority and power, or equal with God? If Jesus is divine, is his divinity in any way less than the Father’s divinity? Was he divine when here on earth? Was he perfect and complete here on earth, or did he grow and mature in some way?

Alexandria, Egypt, was the center of learning in the Roman Empire at that time, **and** the center of the debate over these questions. The bishop of Alexandria in the early 4th century was named Alexander. Because of his position, he was perhaps the most influential church leader at the time. His views were trending in the direction of equating Christ with God. One of his senior presbyters, Arius, was shocked by this trend, believing the Son of God was always, at least in some way, subordinate to the Father. Those who rallied around Arius’ view were branded “subordinationists” by Alexander and those who agreed with him.

Arius took strong issue with what his bishop, Alexander, was teaching and spoke out publicly in opposition to Alexander’s views. The bishop stripped Arius of his position as a presbyter, or elder. Arius appealed this action to another influential bishop, Eusebius of Nicomedia. Eusebius shared many of Arius’ views and became the leading spokesman and strategist for those who did.<sup>3</sup>

Alexander was a capable proponent, but another young, rich, zealous, senior presbyter, Athanasius, became the most visible and radical spokesman. He was an uninhibited factional fighter and no course of action to oppose the Arians seemed outside the bounds of his ethics.<sup>4</sup> Over time, the two sides became known as the Arians and the Athanasians.

The debate became more polarized and hostile. There were two major schools of thought, but also many smaller



*Nicholas strikes Arius at the Council of Nicaea*

groups holding interpretations that were variants of the two major ones. And they were all changing and redefining their thoughts as the debate went on.

Though the debate occurred among church leaders and scholars, it was followed by the common people and they all took sides. You could go to the bakery or the barber shop and hear those present debating this subject.

Passions were high and there were repeated, massive street fights and riots between those who supported the differing views. The leadership on each side condemned and excommunicated bishops and presbyters on the other side. They accused one another of extortion, theft, kidnapping, bribery, murder, assassination, even treason against the Emperor in hope of gaining his support. Many of the accusations were true, but both sides were prone to exaggerate based on rumors and flimsy evidence.

They played “dirty tricks” on one another. In one instance, an Arian bishop allegedly directed two of his priests to disguise themselves and hire a prostitute to sneak into the bedroom of an anti-Arian bishop while he slept so that he could be accused of and discredited. But apparently even prostitutes had positions on the controversy, because rather than carry out the scheme, she exposed those who planned and arranged it, and they were discredited.

With the Church and the Empire in an uproar over this theological debate, Constantine decided the issue needed to be resolved. With the barbarian tribes on the frontiers of the empire temporarily at bay, he saw this controversy as the major threat to the unity of the Empire.

### **THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA**

Constantine called for a council of church leaders to resolve the matter. He hosted it at his seaside palace in Nicaea, on “his turf,” where he could influence it. He paid the travel expenses of the 250 bishops who attended and treated them royally during the council. He even sent money to rebuild or refurbish their churches. Constantine participated in the debates at the council and approved the words of the creed that developed.

He appointed Bishop Hosius of Cordoba, Spain, to preside at the council. He was the one who had helped Constantine interpret the vision in the sky the night before the Battle of Milvian Bridge in 312 and continued on as

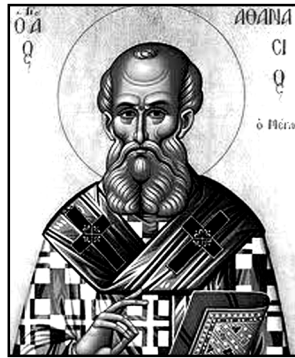
Constantine's spiritual advisor. In the year previous to the council, Constantine had sent Hosius to Alexandria to resolve the dispute, but without success. Consequently, he suggested to Constantine that he call a church council.

The most prominent figures at the council were Arius and Athanasius, the most vocal proponents of the two views. Both of them were presbyters who served under Bishop Alexander of Alexandria. Because they were not bishops, they could not participate in the debates.

Arius is described in historical records as a man of austere habits and considerable learning who had a smooth, winning manner of speaking. None of Arius' writings have survived; they were all destroyed by his opponents after his death. What we know about him and his views comes from the writings of his opponents. The silence of his enemies regarding any character flaws conclusively proves that his moral character was irreproachable — a huge contrast to Athanasius.

In promoting his views in Alexandria and elsewhere, Athanasius used force and violence to back them up. He was repeatedly accused of beatings, bribery, theft, extortion, sacrilege, treason, murder, and instigating riots. He was rarely convicted.

Nearly all of the 250 bishops who came to the council were from the eastern half of the empire. Only a handful came from the west (Europe). They began their deliberations in early June 325. The doctrinal controversy they debated only involved the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit was not part of the debate.



Depiction of Athanasius

The "Arian controversy" was the first order of business and consumed more than two weeks. As the bishops worked on a creed that could not be interpreted in an Arian fashion, thus preventing Arians from subscribing to it, Constantine suggested (probably with prompting from Bishop Hosius) use of the coined Greek word *homoousios*, meaning "of the same essence or substance."<sup>5</sup> Many bishops, including anti-Arians, objected because the word is not in the scriptures.

In the creed that was adopted, the Father and Son were declared to be equal — "of the same essence or substance." All but two bishops signed the creed; they were stripped of their positions and banished with Arius to Illyria (Yugoslavia and Albania). To the creed of affirmations, the council appended anathemas condemning Arian views.

After Arius and his followers were expelled, the council remained in session for more than a month. Having unified the church doctrinally (so they thought), they turned their attention to unifying it administratively. The bishops adopted 20 canons or rules governing the organization of the church and the behavior of its clergy.

## THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA DID NOT SETTLE THE MATTER

In reality the bishops had not unified the church doctrinally. They could not erase passages of scripture that directly contradicted the assertion of their creed:

- "Anyone who acknowledges that Jesus Christ came as a human being has the Spirit who comes from God. But anyone who denies this about Jesus does not have the Spirit from God. The spirit that he has is from the Enemy of Christ" (1 John 4:2-3, *Today's English Version*).

- "Many deceivers have gone out over the world, people who do not acknowledge that Jesus Christ came as a human being. Such a person is a deceiver and the Enemy of Christ" (2 John 1:7, TEV).

A creed had been issued with the approval of Constantine. However, subsequently Constantine alternated between approval of the two enemies, Arius and Athanasius. It was not that Constantine was unstable, but he was influenced by broad public opinion, which fluctuated. Constantine alternately approved of one and exiled the other. Each time, the exiled one or his followers would appeal to Constantine with a letter or new statement of beliefs. Arius repeatedly wrote to the emperor with words that Constantine approved as "orthodox." Athanasius, on the other hand, repeatedly caused such trouble in Alexandria or elsewhere that Constantine condemned and exiled him. Athanasius was exiled no less than five times.

## POST-NICENE HISTORY

In 330 AD, Constantine dedicated his new capital, which he called "New Rome," but which the people called "Constantinople." Arians and their sympathizers were in control of Antioch, Caesarea, Tyre, and Nicomedia.

Athanasius was reported to be maintaining power in Alexandria by intimidating and terrorizing his opponents. Some of his opponents charged that he was engaging in financial extortion. Charges against Athanasius multiplied in the spring and summer of 331 AD. Someone charged he had given a gold casket to a high court official who was suspected of plotting against the Emperor. At one point, Athanasius was charged with murdering an opponent and imprisoning five bishops who questioned his position.

Constantine reacted angrily and ordered the bishops to a Council at Tyre in 334 AD, to judge the charges. The council sent a group of "commissioners" to Alexandria to investigate the charges. For the next two months, Alexandria and Egypt were in an uproar. It was clear that their report would indict Athanasius, so he fled Tyre.

The bishops, meanwhile, had left Tyre and gone to Jerusalem to dedicate the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Upon their return, hearing the result of the investigation, they excommunicated Athanasius. Riots broke out in Alexandria upon hearing the news.

On November 6, 335 AD, Constantine returned to Constantinople from his various travels. At a parade, a figure dressed in rags of mourning burst through the line

of soldiers holding back the crowd and threw himself on his knees before the emperor. It was Athanasius and he begged the emperor to save him from his enemies. He asked the emperor to summon the Council of Tyre to Constantinople to explain their decision to excommunicate him.

Constantine granted his request and the bishops were summoned. The Arian bishops presented the evidence, describing the Athanasians as unscrupulous gangsters and liars. Finally, Eusebius of Nicomedia, an Arian, presented a staggering charge — that Athanasius had told his friends he would not attend the Council of Tyre, and if the Emperor tried to force him to attend, he would exercise his control over the harbor of Alexandria to stop Egyptian grain shipments throughout the Mediterranean.

Constantine was outraged. Constantinople, Antioch, Athens, Rome, and other great cities of the empire depended on regular deliveries of Egyptian grain. To delay those shipments would trigger riots throughout the empire. Athanasius denied everything, but Eusebius promised he could produce witnesses to verify the charges.

Constantine berated Athanasius in violent fashion. Athanasius shot back with threats and warnings to the emperor. Enraged, Constantine condemned Athanasius to indefinite exile in Gaul. He called Athanasius a trouble-maker, not to be trusted with affairs of the church.

Exiled on the German frontier, Athanasius did not sit idle. He began a campaign to persuade the Western bishops of his views. He worked, planned, and waited for his opportunity to return to Alexandria, his base of power.

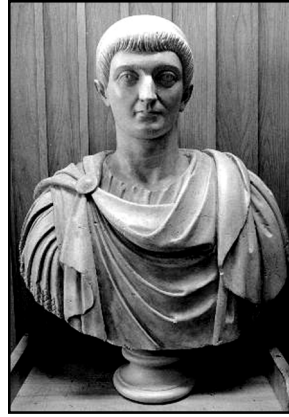
### **ARIANISM ALMOST WON**

In the summer of 336 AD, the Eastern bishops met in Constantinople with the emperor in attendance. A creed written by Arius was read and discussed. The emperor himself interviewed Arius. All there declared themselves satisfied with the creed and ordered Arius readmitted.

The council ordered Bishop Alexander, of the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople, who was an Athanasian, to admit Arius and serve him communion. On Sunday, when Eusebius, Arius, and bishops closest to them arrived at the church, Bishop Alexander refused to admit them. Eusebius warned him about thwarting the order of the council and gave him the night to think it over, promising they would return the next morning.

That evening, as Arius, Eusebius, and their followers discussed strategy for the next day, Arius was stricken with a severe stomach ache and urgent need to use the bathroom. When he delayed returning, his friends went to investigate. They found him sprawled on the floor, dead.

Arius' death was tragic, occurring on the eve of what could have been his final triumph. Not surprisingly, there were whispers of assassination, poison being the weapon of choice at that time in the Roman Empire. On the other hand, he would not have been the first person of his age (probably in his seventies) to die of an intestinal ailment, or possibly of a



*Constantine*

heart attack brought on by illness and the tension of awaiting one of the most important days in his life.

Athanasius would later declare Arius' untimely death to be a divine judgment on the heretic and his cause. He said it showed that the Lord Himself "condemned the Arian heresy, as being unworthy of communion with the Church." He compared Arius' death to that of Judas Iscariot.

A few months later, in May of 337, Constantine died. His death generated a wave of violence between Arians and Athanasians, battling with new ferocity in the streets of major Eastern cities.

Constantine's son, Constantius, became ruler in the East. Constantius was close to Eusebius of Nicomedia, one of the Arian leaders. He made Eusebius Bishop of Constantinople. He sympathized with the "subordinationist" views of most of the Eastern bishops.

Constantius considered Athanasius a trouble-maker who, among other things, had allied himself with several of Constantius' rivals. His brother, Constantine II, had written a letter to the church in Alexandria exhorting the faithful to welcome Athanasius back to Alexandria once more.

Shortly after Athanasius' return, a church council in Antioch, of mostly Eastern bishops, again brought charges against him. With Constantius attending, they convicted him of violence and mayhem, and again ordered him deposed as bishop. On March 16, 339 AD, a company of troops set out to arrest him. Warned by his agents, Athanasius fled. Constantius might well have had him executed for capital crimes. Violence in Eastern cities ended for a time, with the forcible eviction of the leading anti-Arian bishops.

Many of them followed Athanasius to the Western empire, specifically to Rome. The uncalculated effect of these deportations would be to make the Bishop of Rome a major participant in the controversy and a protector of those deported from the East. This drove a great wedge between the churches of the Greek East and the Latin West.

In 353 AD, Constantius became sole Emperor. He convened at least nine church councils. Like his father, he sought unity in the empire by seeking unity in the church. He forced the adoption of a "middle-of-the-road" creed that avoided both the words of the Nicene Creed and the slogans of Arianism. However, he made the same mistake as his father Constantine — believing that agreement could be reached if only the right words, the right formula, could be found, without an organic or foundational agreement.

### **ATHANASIUS' INFLUENCE GROWS**

In 361 AD, Constantius became ill and died. His nephew, Julian, became emperor. His base of support had been in the

West and the largely anti-Arian Western bishops anticipated he would liberate the East from Arianism. However, he surprised them by announcing he had come to liberate the entire empire from “the cult of the Galilean.” Julian’s agenda was to reinstate Paganism as the religion of the empire. He is known to history as Julian the Apostate.

Julian thus became the enemy of both sides. Athanasius exploited this opportunity to unite Christians against Julian and increase his own influence and views. Athanasius succeeded to the point that Julian noticed the growing Christian solidarity. Julian sent troops to arrest Athanasius, but again he eluded capture, going into voluntary exile.

In June 363 AD, Julian was killed in battle attempting to take Persia. His officers immediately proclaimed a popular Christian general named Jovian their new commander. Athanasius went to meet Jovian in Mesopotamia. To Athanasius’ delight, he found that Jovian was a Nicene Christian.



Julian the Apostate

When Jovian returned to Antioch, the center of Arian support, he rode into the city with Athanasius by his side.

A few months later, Jovian died an accidental death. His successors were Valentinian (a Nicene Christian) in the West and Valens (an Arian Christian) in the East. Both were largely tolerant of others’ views and were more interested in enforcing civility than taking sides in the debate.

## THE DOCTRINAL QUESTION WIDENS AND CONCLUDES

Into this atmosphere came a new element — what is the nature of the Holy Spirit? This was not a factor at Nicaea.

The new creed that came out of this discussion redefined the whole picture. While the Nicene Creed anathematized both those who denied that the Father and Son were one in “essence,” and those who denied that they were one in “being,” the new creed separated these concepts and stated that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were three separate “beings,” but one and the same “essence” — *homoousios* — the Greek word coined for the first Nicene Council.

In 373 AD, Athanasius died. Valens, the Arian emperor, was not sorry to see him gone. In the early 370s, the Huns moved from Russia into northeastern Europe. In a series of battles and conflicts that followed, Valens was killed in 378 AD in a battle with the Visigoths.

The man appointed Valens’ successor was a Spanish general named Theodosius. After putting down barbarian

uprisings on the frontier, he went to the city of Milan. There, in January 380 AD, he asked the passionately pro-Nicene bishop, Ambrose, to instruct him in the Catholic faith.

The following month, he issued an edict declaring that true Christians are those who believed in “the single divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit within an equal majesty and an orthodox Trinity.”

The doctrinal battle was over. Theodosius labeled Arians and other dissenters heretical madmen deserving punishment. He outlawed Arianism and enforced his position.

## THE FALLOUT

As a result of the triumph of Nicene theology, not only did Jesus become God, but God also became Jesus. Thus the Christian Church broke its fundamental tie with its Jewish brethren, the monotheistic belief in one God, Jehovah.

This created a huge chasm between Jews and Christians, and enmity between them increased significantly. Not long after the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD, attacks on Jewish communities and burning of Jewish synagogues began and was tolerated by the emperor.

## WHAT ARE THE LESSONS FOR US?

- Insist on a “Thus saith the Lord” for your faith.
- Ask yourself whether it is necessary to have agreement on a matter, or whether it is a matter on which we can permit liberty of thought.
- Even when you believe there is no room for liberty of thought, do not try to force your beliefs on others.
- Avoid involvement of civil rulers in church matters.
- Be suspect of political activism of religious leaders. At best, it leads to compromise of principles. At worst, it leads to intrigue, greed for power, oppressing those who think differently, and other evils.

— Bro. Tom Gilbert

(1) The historical background for this article was largely drawn from the book, *When Jesus Became God*, by Richard E. Rubenstein, 267 pages, Harcourt, Inc., 1999.

(2) Editors note: Diocletian’s “Edict against the Christians” was published February 24, 303. Diocletian’s failing health led to his abdication in 310 AD, though he lived until December 3, 311 AD. His successors continued the official persecution until Galerius rescinded the edict in 311 AD, but all persecution did not cease until the ascent of Constantine in 313 and his famed “Edit of Milan.” The 10 year period, 303-313 AD, is often cited as fulfilling Revelation 2:10, “The devil shall cast some of you into prison ... ye shall have tribulation **ten days**: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”

(3) Editor’s note: Arius had urged that Alexander become the bishop rather than himself.

(4) Editor’s note: The Greek-speaking church retained the scriptural titles of “presbyter,” or “elder” and *episcopus* or overseer, the English word “bishop” is a corrupted pronunciation of this Greek word.

(5) Editor’s note: this was considered a clever compromise since *homoousios* was a coined word with an uncertain meaning.

# Understanding John 1:1, “Towards God”

“In the Beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was towards [in the service of] God, and the Logos was a god” (John 1:1, literal translation).

The opening verses of John’s Gospel, John 1:1-2, are familiar. But they have been misunderstood.<sup>1</sup>

(1) The translation “with God,” as appears in most Bibles, is inaccurate.

(2) The correct translation is “unto God,” or, “towards God.” The correct understanding of this idiom is that it means “pertaining to God,” or, “in the service of God.”

(3) The use of Bible study helps such as the Wilson Emphatic Diaglott and more modern Diaglots greatly aid our understanding.

(4) The Logos had a special privilege of office in the creation of both the visible and invisible universe.

The beloved Apostle John was so intent that we focus on a single Greek phrase, pronounced *pros ton theon*, that he used it twice in the first two verses of his Gospel. This is equivalent to underlining and highlighting an important concept on a written page. For this reason, understanding the sense of this phrase should engage our attention.

The Marshall Diaglott (1968 original), one the best Diaglots available, also uses “with – God” for the interlinear in John 1.<sup>2</sup> The comparably excellent McReynolds Diaglott uses “towards God.”<sup>3</sup>

The Wilson Emphatic Diaglott, a ground-breaking scholarly work from the time of the American Civil War, treats this text the same way.<sup>4</sup> Reading John 1:1 from King James and other translations, the phrasing may not seem confusing at all. It seems perfectly normal that the “Logos,” or “Word” should be “with” God. After all, individuals are “with” one another. This is a natural state of affairs.

What is confusing is that a straightforward reading of the Greek does not support this thought. First, the preposition *pros* (Strong’s 4314) has not been properly rendered. Strong writes that *pros* is “a preposition of direction; forward to, i.e. toward.” It appears 710 times in the New Testament, translated as “unto” or “to” a total of 544 times. John uses this very preposition again in John 1:29, “The next day, John seeth Jesus coming **towards** him.” Of the 99 uses of “pros” in John’s Gospel, it is translated “unto” or “to” 86 times, but not again even a single time as “with.”

A completely different Greek word is usually rendered “with.” An example is John 15:27, “You have been **with** me from the beginning.” This is the Greek word *meta* (Strong’s 3326) which means accompanying, being in the midst of a group. This same word, *meta*, is used a little later in the account of our Lord’s last discourse on the road to the Garden. John 17:12. “While I was **with** them in the world, I kept them in thy name.”

## Pros Rarely Means “With”

Aside from the confused rendering of John 1:1-2, the preposition *pros* is seldom used in the sense of “with.” One of the strongest supporting scriptures for the translation “with” is 2 Corinthians 5:8, “Willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present **with** the Lord.” J.C. Sunderlin (R180) asks whether Paul refers to the body of the church, rather than his physical body. If so, this text harmonizes with the other idiomatic uses of the phrase.

There are additional examples where *pros* should be rendered “with,” and lacking further examination, this might be sufficient proof for an accurate reading of John 1:1, 2. Matthew 13:56 and its parallel Mark 6:3, respecting Jesus’ family, says “And his sisters, are they not all **with** us?” All our Lord’s siblings were not necessarily present, but they were well known in the community. Luke 9:41 illustrates a point, “O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be **with** you, and suffer you?” Other examples: Mark 9:10, 16, 19, 11:31, 14:4 (“within”), Luke 9:41, 18:11, 20:5, Acts 15:2, 17:17, 1 Corinthians 2:3, 13:2, 16:6, 7, 10, 2 Corinthians 11:9, Galatians 1:18, 2:5, 1 Thessalonians 3:4, 2 Thessalonians 2:5, 3:1, 10, Philemon 5, 13.

The “comforter,” *parakletos*, is at our side, not “towards” us. But *pros* is the preposition for opposition in the following texts. Acts 24:19, “ought **against** me,” 2 Corinthians 6:14, 15, “What communion hath light **with** darkness? ... Christ **with** Belial?” It is used in this formal sense, but with the thought of reconciliation in Hebrews 10:16, “This is the covenant that I will make **with** them after those days.”

## PROS MEANING “DIALOGUE”

The preposition seems to have particular use respecting a reasoning dialogue. Matthew 26:55, “I sat daily **with** you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me.” Often, teachers do sit facing, *pros*, “towards,” their students, so this is a harmless, but unwarranted rendering. Mark 9:10, 16, 19 “They kept that saying **with** themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean.” This discussion occupies verses 10-19 and appears also in Mark 11:31, “And they reasoned **with** themselves.” An unhappy internal dialogue is meant in Mark 14:4, “Some ... had indignation **within** themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made?” Other renderings of this type are in Luke 18:11, “the Pharisee prayed **with** (towards) himself,” also in Luke 20:5, Acts 15:2, and Acts 17:17.

## IDIOMATIC USE

To correctly understand this phrase “towards the God” where *pros* means “towards” and *ton theon* means “the God,” we need to recognize that it is an idiom used by Hebrew

speakers of Greek. Aside from the two uses in John 1:1, 2, the only place the phrase appears in the four Gospels, John uses the phrase three additional times in his first epistle. In 1 John 1:1, 2:1 the variation is “towards the father.” Here the translators have rendered it “with,” however, when the phrase appears in 1 John 3:21 it is “If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence **toward** God.”

To get a sense for the idiom we can examine Hebrews 2:17 which uses *pros ton theon*: “Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be like unto his brethren that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things **pertaining to** God, to make reconciliation for the people” (King James).

The Rotherham translation is nearly identical: “that he might become a merciful and faithful high Priest in the things **pertaining unto** God.”

This casts a different light on John 1:1-2. “Towards God” actually means “in the things pertaining to God” or “in the service of God.” The High Priest was *pros ton theon*, in the service of God. Literally, he did the service on the Great Day of Atonement facing towards the mercy seat. It would not be correct to say that he was “with” God. Let us see how some translators have worked with this problem.

Hebrews 2:17 uses the identical phrase as in John 1:1 but in the Marshall Diaglott the Greek phrase is there rendered “in regard to – God.” The Wilson Diaglott says “as to the God.” Wilson makes sense out the grammar and sets Hebrews 2:17 this way: “That he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest **as to the things relating to God**, in order to expiate the sins of the people.”

The testimony of Hebrews 2:17 is sufficient enough reason to rework our reading of John 1:1, 2. The High Priest was in the service of God and the Logos was in the service of God. However, the evidence for this is even stronger when we examine other New Testament usages. With only one exception (Romans 5:1), the King James translators kept reaching for different phrases to explain the idiom.

1 Thessalonians 1:8, 9, is a strong supporting text. It employs *pros ton theon* twice: “From you sounded out the word of the Lord ... your faith **to God-ward** is spread abroad ... how ye turned **to God** from idols.” Paul adds the definite article “the” before “to God-ward” that is usually left untranslated. But it clearly indicates that he used the phrase as a noun. Hence, following Wilson on Hebrews 2:17, this commendation should read: “in every place your faith **as to the things relating to God** is spread abroad.” Further, this turning is “towards God” from idolatry. Elsewhere we find:

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος	In [the] beginning was the Word, and the Word
ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.	was with - God, and God was the Word.*
Ὁὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν.	This one was in [the] beginning with - God.
Ἄπαντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς	All things through him became, and without

John 1:1, 2, Marshall Interlinear

17 ὅθεν ὤφειλεν κατὰ πάντα τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς	Whence he owed by all means† 'to the 'brothers
ὁμοιωθῆναι, ἵνα ἐλεῆμων γένηται καὶ	'to become like, in order that 'a merciful 'he might become and
πιστὸς ἀρχιερεὺς τὰ πρὸς τὸν θεόν,	faithful high priest [in] the in regard to - God,
εἰς τὸ ἰλάσκεσθαι τὰς ἀμαρτίας τοῦ	for the to make propitiation for the sins of the

Hebrews 2:17, Marshall Interlinear

Acts 24:16 “I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offence **toward God**.” Paul means in the service of God, as he does when he uses this phrase in Romans:

“Being justified by faith, we have peace **with God**” (Romans 5:1). Clear our peace is **in respect to God**, not that we are “with” him in his physical presence.

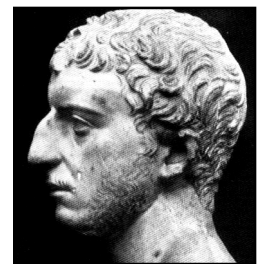
Romans 15:17, “I may glory through Jesus Christ in those things **which pertain to God**.” (Also Revelation 12:5, 13:6)

2 Corinthians 3:4, “And such trust have we through Christ **to God-ward**.” A variation using “Lord” rather than “God” appears in 2 Corinthians 5:8 and is commented on above.

## FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS

In the disastrous war that destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD, a defeated Jewish general, Flavius Josephus, became an historian defending the record of his people. Josephus was contemporary with the writing of John’s Gospel and epistles, and he uses this phrase over **eighteen times**. Josephus always uses *pros ton theon* in the sense of “in the things pertaining to God,” or, “towards God.” He never uses it in the sense of “with God.”

In “Antiquities” (9.11.2) he writes that righteous King Jotham was pious “**in the things pertaining to God**.” Here he uses the identical phrase we find in John 1:1-2, and Hebrews 2:17. He uses this again when King David upon his death bed charged Solomon to be “just to your subjects, and pious **towards God**.” (Steven Mason, *Flavius Josephus on the Pharisees*, Brill Academic Publishers (2001), page 87.) The sense is clear. This phrase is idiomatic. To be “towards the God” has the sense of “being in the service of God.” The Logos was in the service of God, even as the High Priest was in the service of God.



Josephus

## JEROME — THE LATIN VULGATE

How did confusion in the translation of John occur? What is the tradition that almost everyone follows? How did we get the current accepted but inaccurate reading?

Rebellions in Israel, followed by crushing defeats, reinforced the Christian belief that God’s judgment was upon that unworthy people. Thus, though the writings of Josephus were copied and preserved for their historical interest, they

were not widely read in early Christian Churches. Thus the correct interpretation of this idiomatic phrase was not maintained.

But a greater problem for maintaining the correct understanding was a war in “Heaven.” After a tolerant reign of nearly 20 years, Emperor Diocletian issued edicts in 303 to re-establish imperial values and exterminate Christianity.

Diocletian’s name is forever sullied by permitting some of the severest, most inhuman persecutions in history. Failing health forced him to retire in 305. But despite a reversal of the edict in 311, his policies continued in force until 313.

When Constantine became the leading contender for the throne, a startling reversal of state policy ensued. Constantine was not a baptized Christian, but he claimed to have two visions setting a course for Christianity to become dominant. First was a vision of the sun emblazoned with the formerly despised Christian cross, reading in Greek, “By this sign shall you conquer.” This reportedly was followed by a vision the following night of Christ himself.

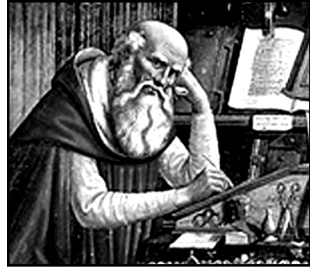
On this dubious authority, the armies of Constantine marched into battle with a stylized cross on their shields. They were victorious on October 28, 312. The ascension of Constantine heralded a new challenge for Christianity, with unprecedented trials. For with the Emperor involved in the working of the Church, corruption rapidly increased.

Constantine stopped the persecution of Christians by issuing an Edict of Milan in 313, closing ten years of cruelty. This edict supplemented and reaffirmed the Edict of Toleration by Galerius in 311, which had not stopped the persecution. But had the **character** of the beast really change?

Sadly, no. What did change were the tactics. All of this relates to the reading that would be adopted for John 1:1.

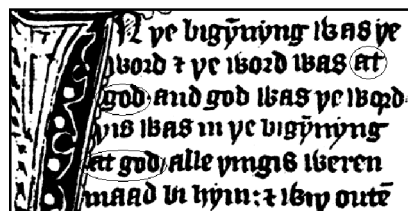
The future of the Empire did not rest in defending the troubled European frontier. Europe could not feed itself and was pressured by raids and frontier wars from southward migrations of the Vandals, Goths, and others, partially due to a cooling climate. The future did not lay with old, decadent Rome, that had been a rival to Constantine’s power base. Nor did the future of a diverse empire lie with insisting on Rome’s traditional pagan religion.

Constantine saw Christianity as a unifying force. He wanted a Christian empire, at a new capital, Constantinople, on the border between Asia and Europe. Then came a new



Jerome, laboring on the Vulgate

orthodoxy, a version of Trinitarian doctrine, and the Empire was set to enforce it. This was crippling, setting civilization on the wrong course.



Wycliffe version, giving “at God,” twice

## THE LATIN VULGATE

Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus, better known as St. Jerome, was born in 347 and died in 420. He lived a generation after Christianity was tolerated in the Roman empire.

The Western Roman empire spoke Latin, rather than Greek, as they had in the days that Paul wrote to the Romans in Greek. There was a very real need for a translation of the Gospels into the common dialect — Latin. Jerome undertook to translate the Greek into Latin because earlier attempts at translation were poor.

Thus Jerome was doing a good thing. Because this translation was in the “common” or “vulgar” language, we call it the Latin “Vulgate.” Jerome made more than a few mistakes, but it was a great advancement in Bible translation. But one of the mistakes he made was to include the Trinitarian thought that the Logos was “with” God.

English versions (including King James and even the Wilson Emphatic Diaglott) followed in step with the Latin Vulgate’s incorrect affirmation of Trinitarian belief. Any other preposition but “with” creates difficulties for Trinitarians. Following the Vulgate, John 1:1, 2 undeservedly became a Trinitarian support text. The correct rendering, to be “towards,” means “being ready for service” or “in the things pertaining unto.” If you did not know this idiomatic phrase, staying with Jerome might seem reasonable.



John Wycliffe

## HOW DOES “IN THE THINGS PERTAINING UNTO” APPLY TO THE LOGOS?

The Logos, or “Word,” was the father’s agent in every act of creation. The creation work in Genesis 1 moved forward when God spoke the Word. The Logos or the Word is how Creation came about. This is what verses 1-3 of John 1 focus on for us. We can read about the Logos, who is called Wisdom, in Proverbs 8.

One of the blessed aspects of holiness comes into our hearts from continually beholding the glory of God. We can continually reflect on God’s Love, Power, Justice, and Wisdom. As we reflect on these attributes shown in Divine Plan of the Ages, how can we also not wish to serve him?

— Bro. Richard Doctor

- (1) This expands on a brief article in *Beauties of the Truth*, May 2008.
- (2) Marshall, Alfred, *Interlinear KJV-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek and English*, Zondervan, 1991.
- (3) McReynolds, Paul R., *Word Study Greek-English New Testament*, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1999.
- (4) An account of the translation work of Benjamin Wilson, written by his nephew W.H. Wilson, appears in “Early Pioneers of the Truth,” *Herald of Christ’s Kingdom*, January/February 1962 (reprinted from an article in 1951). The Wilson Diaglott uses the Griesbach Greek recension, that represents scholarship from 1755 (with footnoted emendations based on the Codex Vaticanus 1209). It does not include major textual studies, including the Sinaiticus Codex (4th century), and earlier papyrus manuscripts discovered in the 20th century.