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John 1:1 in the Russian Biblical Studies: the Main Results of the Researches

There are two main questions that were discussed during the study of John 1:1 in the Russian Orthodox Church. The first question is about the source and the origin of the term λόγος used by St John. The second question is the theological explanation of the term "the Word of God".

The origin of the term λόγος

The early scholars of the 19th century considered only the Divine origin of the term lo,goj analyzing the idea of God's Word in the Old Testament.

Priest D.G. Levitsky (Д.Г. Левицкий) in his article "Explanation of the Gospel Reading on the Easter" published in "Additions to the Holy Fathers Writers" journal in 1850[1] points out two texts of the Old Testament as sources for the term Logos in the Forth Gospel: Ps 33:6 (32:6 in MT) and Haggai 2:5. He considers the mention of word and spirit of God in the Old Testament as the Second and the Third Persons of the Holy Trinity[2]. But for him the term λόγος in the Forth Gospel has Divine origin itself. "At Patmos [island] on the days of great prophetic revelations John saw Him, Who is Faithful and True, Which name was written on Him and this is the name Word of God (Rev 19:11, 13[3]). In this way the Lord Himself pleased to open His name to John"[4], – D.G. Levitsky wrote.

Archpriest M. Skryabin (М. Скрябин) 24 years later offers much more particular analysis of the Old Testament texts in the article "God the Word: the Common Viewpoint of John Theologian the Gospeller on the Divine Person of Jesus Christ and His Messianic Service for the Human Race" published in "The Works of Kiev Theological Academy" journal in 1874[5]. From his viewpoint it is possible to find personified Logos in the phrase

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[1] [*Левицкий Д.Г., свящ.*] Изъяснение Евангелия в день Св. Пасхи (Ин., зач. 1) // Прибавления к Творениям святых отцов. 1850. № 9. С. 188-232.

[2] *[Левицкий Д.Г., свящ.]* Изъяснение Евангелия в день Св. Пасхи (Ин., зач. 1) // Прибавления к Творениям святых отцов. 1850. № 9. С. 191.

[3] *NAS:* And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True (*BYZ:* πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός), and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. <...> And {He} is clothed with a robe dipped in blood; and His name is called The Word of God (*BYZ:* ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ).

[4] [*Левицкий Д.Г., свящ.*] Изъяснение Евангелия в день Св. Пасхи. С. 191.

[5] *Скр[яби]н М., йроѝ.* Бог Слово : Общий взгляд св. евангелиста Иоанна Богослова на Божественное Лицо Господа Иисуса Христа и мессианское служение Его роду человеческому (1:1-19) // Труды Киевской духовной академии. 1874. № 5. С. 162-188.

"and God said..." in Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, as well as personified Holy Spirit in the phrase "spirit of God" that "was moving over the surface of the waters" (Gen 1:2b NAS)[6]. For him as well as for D.G. Levitsky the term lo,goj in the Forth Gospel has direct Divine origin, taking into consideration Rev 19:11-13. But he asks the question: if the phrase "Word of God" was the new direct Divine revelation to St John, why he starts to use this unknown term without basic explanation?[7] The Gospel was written about 10 years later after the book of Revelation so this term as one of Jesus Christ names became quite known between Churches. He defends this interpretation giving the examples from the ancient history proving that the idea of "God's word" was well knows long time before the incarnation of Jesus Christ[8]. He gives extensive overview of this idea in different ancient civilizations. He tries to find the traces of this idea in the philosophical-religious teaching of ancient Persians (Zoroastrianism), Indians, Egyptians, in the philosophy of Plato and Philo[9]. He mentions gnostics who had their own interpretation of this idea[10]. But all these ancient and modern for St John interpretation were not acceptable for the Gospeller. M. Skryabin supposes that members of Early Church were already acquainted with the teaching about Christ as the Word of God remembering the text from the Luke 1:2: "eyewitnesses and servants of the Word (τοῦ λόγου)" (NAS). M. Skryabin thinks that Theophilus, the addressee of Gospel of Luke, knew this name of Christ. Therefore this is the reason why St John starts his Gospel using this term, without basic explanation of it, but gives the concrete teaching about it in the prologue, making the distance from non-Christian understanding[11].

Professor of Kazan Theological Academy Mikhail I. Bogoslovsky (М.И. Богословский; 1844-1916) was the first Russian scholar who in 1878 in his article "The Prologue of the John's Gospel" published in "The Orthodox Interlocutor" journal asked the question: "does the Gospeller borrowed [the teaching about the Word], as some Western theologians suppose, from Judaic-Alexandrine theosophy, specially from Philo, in which system the teaching about the Word occupies a fitting place?"[12] M.I. Bogoslovsky agrees that Alexandrine Jews knew the teaching about Logos long before Christ's birth ("at least two centuries before"[13]), but he compares the main features of the teaching about Logos of Philo and St John. He resumes that "there is no reason to suppose that St John borrowed his teaching from Philo or from the common with Philo source" and rather St John "intended to refute <...> the modern [for him] teaching of the Alexandrine philosophy"[14].

The first experience of the very detailed consideration of the connection between the teaching about Logos of St John and Philo in the relation to the previous tradition was

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[6] *Скр[яби]н М., йрош.* Бог Слово : Общий взгляд св. евангелиста Иоанна Богослова на Божественное Лицо Господа Иисуса Христа и мессианское служение Его роду человеческому (1:1-19) // Труды Киевской духовной академии. 1874. № 5. С. 174-175.

[7] Там же.

[8] Там же. С. 179.

[9] *Скр[яби]н М., йрош.* Бог Слово. С. 179-185.

[10] Там же. С. 185-186.

[11] Там же. С. 186-188.

[12] *Богословский М.И.* Пролог Евангелия св. апостола Иоанна (1:1-18) // Православный собеседник. 1878. 1. С. 402.

[13] Там же. С. 403.

[14] Там же. С. 405.

offered in the series of articles by professor of Moscow Theological Academy M.D. Mure-tov (М.Д. Муретов; 1851-1917) in the journal "The Additions to the Holy Fathers Writ-ings" in 1881-1883 years[15]. He notes, that the teaching about Logos of St John is "very short" so it can be interpreted in different ways by scholars who are not share the Church viewpoint, while the Philo's ideas are "very unstable and mutually contradictory"[16]. He makes the short review of the modern for him concepts between Western scholars about the both teachings[17]. He puts in the basis of his research the thesis that the the St John's teaching is "the religious theism" while the teaching of Philo is "the speculative philo-sophical theism".[18] Then he considers the three mainstreams in the teaching about Logos before Philo: the optimism and panlogism of the Greek philosophy, deism and pessimism of the Judaic-Palestinian speculation and (between them) the Judaic-Alexandrine theoso-phy[19]. The second part of his research is dedicated to the analysis of Philo's concept about Logos and concludes that in this concept "God, Logos and world form the organic uni-ty and undivided integrity of the being but in pantheistic-stoic meaning".[20] There is no St John's idea of the self-depended and personal Logos in Philo's teaching[21].

The teaching about Logos in its history was considered profoundly by prince E.N. Trubetskoy (Е.Н. Трубецкой; 1863-1920) in his book of the same name published in 1900.[22] He gives the analysis of this term in Greek philosophy and in works of Philo. From his viewpoint Philo "is very complex literary phenomenon"[23], and in some as-pects Philo is "the forerunner of patristic literature"[24], but in others – "the forerunner of Kabbalah, Talmud, gnosticism and neoplatonism".[25] For E.N. Trubetskoy "the teaching about Logos in the early Church was not formed by the infection of the Christianity with the Greek speculation or with syncretism of Christian and Greek ideas, but was formed by the evolution of the Christian consciousness in its historical environment"[26]. This en-vironment was very complex including not only Greek influence but also the influence of the messianic ideas of the modern to Jesus Christ Jews.

Bishop Kassian (Besobrasov; 1892-1965) in the middle of 20th century support-ed this concept also shared by the Western scholars of his time about complex situation with the origins of the term Logos, connecting it with the Old Testament term 'dabar' as well as with some aspects of Greek philosophy. This approach is very close to the view-point of our days.

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[15] *Муретов М.Д.* Учение о Логосе у Филона Александрийского и Иоанна Богослова в связи с предшествовавшим историческим развитием идеи Логоса // Прибавления к Творениям святых отцов. 1881. № 28. С. 163-293; 1882. № 29. С. 496-540; 1883. № 31. С. 565-618; 1883. № 32. С. 3-85.

[16] *Муретов М.Д.* Учение о Логосе... 1881. № 28. С. 167.

[17] Там же. С. 167-169.

[18] Там же. С. 171.

[19] *Муретов М.Д.* Учение о Логосе... 1882. № 29. С. 496-540.

[20] *Муретов М.Д.* Учение о Логосе... 1883. № 32. С. 37.

[21] Там же. С. 44.

[22] *Трубецкой С.Н.* Учение о Логосе в его истории: Философско-историческое исследование. М., 1900. 461 с.

[23] *Трубецкой С.Н.* Учение о Логосе в его истории. С. 160.

[24] Там же.

[25] Там же. С. 161.

[26] Там же. С. 165.

Theological explanation of the term "the Word of God"
(ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ)

The second question is the theological explanation of the term "the Word of God". Priest D.G. Levitsky uses for this the ideas of Holy Fathers. Firstly, it means the revelation of God Father to the world. He cites St Gregory Theologian who writes that "Son is called the Word because He relates to Father just as word to mind, <...> and {He} reveals {the Father}".[27] D.G. Levitsky mentions also St John Chrysostom and St Jerome who shared this idea[28]. Secondly, it is the symbolical designation of the special manner of Christ's birth. Summarizing D.G. Levitsky marks out ideas in the term "the Word of God": 1) *relation of the Son to the Father*, including the Son's spiritual and dispassionate birth and also His Divine nature; 2) *the Son's relation to creature,* the Son as a cause of world existence; 3) *the Son's relation to rational beings*, first of all – human beings, taking into consideration that the Son reveals Divine mysteries to them.[29] Using these 3 types of relations D.G. Levitsky gives the interpretation of the prologue.

M.I. Bogoslovsky follows D.G. Levitsky and cites the same ideas and texts of St John Chrysostom and Gregory Theologian[30].

Bishop Mikhail (Luzin) (Михаил (Лузин); 1830-1887) in his "Commentary on the Gospels" (first time published in 1874) follows D.G. Levitsky, adding to the 3 types of the Son's relations also *co-eternity of the Son to the Father*, citing Theophylact of Ohrid: "a mind does not exist without a word, in the same way the Father and God without the Son"[31].

Archpriest M. Skryabin takes the more wide context of the Ancient Greek literature. He mentions, that there were two similar words in Greek world: r`h/ma and lo,goj and that the first word signified speech or style of speaking, while the second implied the meaning itself as well as the concrete order for this meaning[32]. Therefore a human son is in a some meaning a "word" of the human *nature* of his parents (not of his parents, but of their nature), so the Word of God is also the the Son of God[33]. Also lo,goj was understood as the instrument for ordering. In the same way the Word of God orders things in the world – in their creation and then giving life for them[34].

G.K. Vlastov goes much more closer to the modern for us understanding of the significance of the term ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ used by St John. G.K. Vlastov says that "in first three Gospels this mystery [of unity between the Father and the Son] was revealed quite enough, but it was not put in this clear form as in the first time in John's Gospel"[35].

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[27] *[Левицкий Д.Г., свящ.]* Изъяснение Евангелия в день Св. Пасхи. C. 192. He quotes the Russian translation of the 13 word of St Gregory: *Григорий Богослов, свт.* Слово 13 // Творения св. отцов в русском переводе. Т. 3. Кн. I. C. 99.

[28] *[Левицкий Д.Г., свящ.]* Изъяснение Евангелия в день Св. Пасхи. C. 192-193, 193, прим. д.

[29] Там же. C. 193-194.

[30] *Богословский М.И.* Пролог Евангелия св. апостола Иоанна. C. 409.

[31] *Михаил (Лузин), еп.* Толковое Евангелие. Кн. 3. Евангелие от Иоанна. 2-е изд. М., 1887. C. 12.

[32] *Скр[яби]н М., прот.* Бог Слово. C. 168.

[33] Там же. C. 168-169.

[34] Там же. C. 170-172.

[35] *Власто́в Г.К.* Опыт изучения Евангелия св. ап. Иоанна Богослова. Т. 1. СПб., 1887. C. 55.

Professor Nikolay N. Glubokovsky (Н.Н. Глубоковский; 1863-1937) in his work "God the Word" published in 1928[36] demonstrates that in Jn 1:1 lo,goj means "the word but in the highest and perfect meaning as an organ for exact and full revealing of mind activity"[37]. Consequently λόγος is eternal because God is eternal; and He is a Person because God is a Person, Who "naturally express Himself in His Word". In this case absolute and personified λόγος as eternal "image" of God is also God[38]. He resumes that "the term λόγος for the Son of God marks 1) eternity; 2) personality and 3) Divine nature"[39]. This interpretation is still actual for the biblical studies.

[36] *Глубоковский Н.Н.* Бог Слово: Экзегетический эскиз «пролога» Иоаннова Евангелия (1:1-18) // Православная мысль. 1928. 1. С. 89-121.

[37] Там же. С. 91.

[38] Там же. С. 92.

[39] Там же. С. 93.