

Misquoting Philip B. Harner

On page 416-417 of my copy of *Reasoning from the Scriptures*¹, Greek scholar Phillip B. Harner is quoted for support of the New World Translation² rendering of John 1:1. The quote is taken from Dr. Harner's article which appeared in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*. This article, in fact, argues against the rendering that *Reasoning from the Scriptures* gives it, mainly because of the purposeful misquoting practiced by the Watchtower. I will first give the layman picture of what was said by Dr. Harner, and then those who are more adept in the Greek can follow through with fuller quotes by Dr. Harner himself.

Dr. Harner clearly states in his article **that had** the Greek sentence of John 1:1 been constructed in a particular way (*ho logos en theos*), that it **could** be translated as "the word was a God." But John **did not use** that construction. Rather, he wrote the sentence in such a way (*theos en ho logos*) that it could **only** mean that the Word is as fully God as the other person called "God" (the Father), with whom He existed "in the beginning" – "the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

The quote found in *Reasoning from the Scriptures* is as follows:

Is rendering "a God" consistent with the rules of Greek grammar? Some reference books argue strongly that the Greek text must be translated, "The Word was God." But not all agree. In his article "Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns: Mark 15:39 and John 1:1," Philip B Harner said that such clauses as the one in John 1:1, "with an anarthrous predicate preceding the verb, are primarily qualitative in meaning. They indicate that the logos has the nature of theos." He suggests: "Perhaps the clause could be translated, 'the word had the same nature as God'." (*Journal of Biblical Literature*, 1973, pp. 85, 87)³

The truth is that the Jehovah's Witnesses have misunderstood the term *qualitative* as used by Harner and other grammarians. Assuming the qualitative use of the anarthrous predicate noun preceding the verb applies in John 1:1, it is beyond dispute that this makes the Word "God" to the same degree or extent as the "God" with whom the Word existed (though not the same person). That is, in fact, Harner's own conclusion, based on what *he* meant by the term *qualitative*:

Perhaps the clause could be translated, "the Word had the same nature as God." This would be one way of representing John's thought, which is, as I understand it, that *ho logos* ["the Word"], no less than *ho theos* ["the God"], had the nature of *theos*.⁴

With this fuller quote, not taken out of context, one can see that Dr. Harner is meaning the opposite of what the Watchtower attributed to him, however, to make this point clearer, Dr.

¹ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (Brooklyn, New York: 1989).

² The Jehovah's Witness Bible.

³ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (Brooklyn, New York: 1989), pp. 416-417.

⁴ Philip B. Harner, "Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns: Mark 15:39 and John 1:1," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92 (1 March, 1973), p. 87.

Harner discussed John 1:1 in respect to Rudolf Bultmann's interpretation of John 1:1, where he concludes:

In terms of the analysis that we have proposed, a recognition of the qualitative significance of *theos* would remove some ambiguity in his [Bultmann's] interpretation by differentiating between *theos*, as the nature that the Logos shared with God, and *ho theos* as the "person" to whom the Logos stood in relation. Only when this distinction is clear can we say of the Logos that "he was God."⁵

One should easily see that by taking the article as a whole, the misquote by the Watchtower seems to be purposeful to try and twist the words of one of the most respected and well-known Greek scholars. All in an attempt to make the Bible fit a doctrine rather than making a doctrine fit the Bible.

Misquoting John L. McKenzie

Another well-known and respected Greek scholar is John L. McKenzie. On page 417 of *Reasoning from the Scriptures* we find:

John L. McKenzie, S.J., in his *Dictionary of the Bible*, says: "Jn 1:1 should rigorously be translated 'the word was with the God [+ the Father], and the word was a divine being'." (Brackets are his. Published with nihil obstat and imprimatur.) (New York, 1965), p. 317.

By quoting Dr. McKenzie out of context by quoting only a portion of his article, he is made to **appear** to teach that the Word (Jesus) is less than Jehovah because he said "*the word was a divine being.*" To again put this simply at first followed by the more in-depth,

"On the same page McKenzie calls *Yahweh* (Jehovah) 'a Divine personal being'; McKenzie also states that Jesus is called 'God' in both John 20:28 and Titus 2:13 and that John 1:1-18 expresses 'an identity between God and Jesus Christ'."⁶

Again, the contention that this respected Greek scholar agrees with the Watchtower interpretation of John 1:1 is shown to be fallacious. **The evidence becomes incontrovertible when the sentence misquoted is read in its larger context:**

The word *theos* is used to designate the gods of paganism. Normally the word with or without the article designates the God of the Old Testament and of Judaism, the God of Israel: *Yahweh*. But the character of God is revealed in an original way in the New Testament; the originality is perhaps best summed up by saying that God reveals Himself in and through Jesus Christ. The revelation of God in Jesus Christ does not consist merely in the prophetic word as in the Old Testament, but in an identity between God and Jesus Christ. Jn 1:1-18 expresses this by contrasting the word spoken by the prophets with the

⁵ Ibid., pp. 86-87.

⁶ Robert M. Bowman, *Why You Should Believe In the Trinity*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House; 1989), p. 95

word incarnate in Jesus. In Jesus the personal reality of God is manifested in visible and tangible form.

In the words of Jesus and in much of the rest of the New Testament the God of Israel (*ho theos*) is the Father of Jesus Christ. It is for this reason that the title *ho theos*, which now designates the Father as a personal reality, is not applied in the New Testament to Jesus Himself; Jesus is the Son of God (of *ho theos*). This is a matter of usage and not of rule, and the noun is applied to Jesus a few times. In 1:1 should rigorously be translated “*the word was with the God [= the Father], and the word was a divine being.*” Thomas invokes Jesus with the titles which belong to the Father, “*My Lord and my God*” (John 20:28). “*The glory of our great God and Savior*” which is to appear can be the glory of no other than Jesus (1t 2:13).⁷

Again, evidence that the Watchtower quoted out-of-context... seemingly on purpose, to once again distort the Bible to fit a doctrine, rather than the opposite.

Misquoting Julius R. Mantey

I can go through – methodically – every quote by a Greek scholar that the Watchtower has quoted and show similar boondoggles. Walter Martin personally interviewed Dr. Mantey, and the interview will allow for the casual reader to glean the type of purposeful misquoting the Watchtower practices:⁸

In the interview, Walter Martin asked Dr. Mantey about the Watchtower translation of John 1:1, “*The Word was a god.*” Mantey responded: “*The Jehovah's Witnesses have forgotten entirely what the order of the sentence indicates – that the ‘Logos’ [or Word] has the same substance, nature, or essence as the father. To indicate that Jesus was just ‘a god,’ the Jehovah's Witnesses would have to use a completely different construction in the Greek.*”

Dr. Martin then responded, “*You once had a little different opinion with the Watchtower about this and wrote them a letter. What was their response to your letter?*”

Dr. Mantey said, “*Well... I was disturbed because they misquoted me in support of their translation. I called their attention to the fact that the whole body of the New Testament was against their view. Throughout the New Testament, Jesus is glorified and magnified – yet here they were denigrating Him and making Him into a little god of a pagan concept.*”

Noting that the Jehovah's Witnesses are notorious for quoting Biblical scholars in support of their theology, Dr. Martin asked Dr. Mantey, “*Do they quote these people in context?*”

⁷ John L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible*, (New York: Macmillan; 1965), p. 317.

⁸ Julius Mantey; cited by Walter Martin in, “*The New World Translation*,” *Christian Research Newsletter*, 3:3, p.5

Dr. Mantey responded, “No, they use this device to fool people into thinking that scholars agree with the Jehovah's Witnesses. Out of all the Greek professors, grammarians, and commentators they have quoted, only one (a Unitarian) agreed that ‘the word was a god’.”

Dr., Mantey then spoke of the deceptive nature of the New World Translation: “I believe it’s a terrible thing for a person to be deceived and go into eternity lost, forever lost because somebody deliberately misled him (or her) by distorting the Scripture!... Ninety-nine percent of the scholars of the world who know Greek and who have helped translate the Bible are in disagreement with the Jehovah's Witnesses. People who are looking for the truth ought to know what the majority of the scholars really believe. They should not allow themselves to be misled by the Jehovah's Witnesses and end up in hell.”

Other Greek scholars who have been misquoted are here allowed to correct the misquote themselves:

A. T. Robertson: “So in Jo. 1:1 theos en ho logos the meaning has to be the Logos was God, not God was the Logos.” *A New Short Grammar of the Greek Testament*, by A. T. Robertson and W. Hersey Davis (Baker Book House, 1977), p. 279.

E. M. Sidebottom: “...the tendency to write 'the Word was divine' for theos en ho logos springs from a reticence to attribute the full Christian position to John.” *The Christ of the Fourth Gospel* (S. P. C. K., 1961), p. 461.

E. C. Colwell: “...predicate nouns preceding the verb cannot be regarded as indefinite or qualitative simply because they lack the article; it could be regarded as indefinite or qualitative only if this is demanded by the context and in the case of John 1:1c this is not so.” “A Definite Rule for the Use of the Article in the Greek New Testament,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 52 (1933), p. 20.

C. K. Barrett: “The absence of the article indicates that the Word is God, but is not the only being of whom this is true; if ho theos had been written it would have implied that no divine being existed outside the second person of the Trinity.” *The Gospel According to St. John* (S.P.C.K., 1955), p.76.

C. H. Dodd: “On this analogy, the meaning of theos en ho logos will be that the ousia of ho logos, that which it truly is, is rightly denominated theos...That this is the ousia of ho theos (the personal God of Abraham, the Father) goes without saying. In fact, the Nicene homoousios to patri is a perfect paraphrase.” “New Testament Translation Problems II,” *The Bible Translator*, 28, 1 (Jan. 1977), p. 104.

Randolph O. Yeager: “Only sophomores in Greek grammar are going to translate ‘...and the Word was a God.’ The article with logos, shows that logos is the subject of the verb en and the fact that theos is without the article designates it as the predicate nominative.

The emphatic position of theos demands that we translate '...and the Word was God.' John is not saying as Jehovah's Witnesses are fond of teaching that Jesus was only one of many Gods. He is saying precisely the opposite." *The Renaissance New Testament*, Vol. 4 (Renaissance Press, 1980), p.4.

James Moffatt: "The Word was God...And the Word became flesh,' simply means "The word was divine...And the Word became human.' The Nicene faith, in the Chalcedon definition, was intended to conserve both of these truths against theories that failed to present Jesus as truly God and truly man..." *Jesus Christ the Same* (Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1945), p.61.

Henry Alford: "Theos must then be taken as implying God, in substance and essence,--not ho theos, 'the Father,' in person. It does not = theios, nor is it to be rendered a God--but, as in sarx egeneto, sarx expresses that state into which the Divine Word entered by a definite act, so in theos en, theos expresses that essence which was His en arche:--that He was very God. So that this first verse might be connected thus: the Logos was from eternity,--was with God (the Father),--and was Himself God." *Alford's Greek Testament: An Exegetical and Critical Commentary*, Vol. I, Part II (Guardian Press, 1975; originally published 1871), p. 681.

Donald Guthrie: "The absence of the article with Theos has misled some into thinking that the correct understanding of the statement would be that 'the word was a God' (or divine), but this is grammatically indefensible since Theos is a predicate." *New Testament Theology* (InterVarsity Press, 1981), p. 327

Bruce Metzger: "It must be stated quite frankly that, if the Jehovah's Witnesses take this translation seriously, they are polytheists... As a matter of solid fact, however, such a rendering is a frightful mistranslation." *"The Jehovah's Witnesses and Jesus Christ," Theology Today* (April 1953), p. 75.

Julius R. Mantey: "Since Colwell's and Harner's article in JBL, especially that of Harner, it is neither scholarly nor reasonable to translate John 1:1 'The Word was a god.' Word-order has made obsolete and incorrect such a rendering... In view of the preceding facts, especially because you have been quoting me out of context, I herewith request you not to quote the Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament again, which you have been doing for 24 years." *Letter from Mantey to the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society*. "A Grossly Misleading Translation... John 1:1, which reads 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.' is shockingly mistranslated, 'Originally the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god,' in a New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures, published under the auspices of Jehovah's Witnesses." *Statement by J. R. Mantey, published in various sources*.

B. F. Westcott: "The predicate (God) stands emphatically first, as in v.24. It is necessarily without the article (theos not ho theos) inasmuch as it describes the nature of the Word

and does not identify His Person... No idea of inferiority of nature is suggested by the form of expression, which simply affirms the true deity of the Word.” *The Gospel According to St. John* (Eerdmans, 1958 reprint), p. 3.

Church Fathers Misquoted

Justin Martyr

The JW booklet, *Should You Believe in the Trinity?*, asserts the Justin Martyr “called the prehuman Jesus a created angel who is ‘other than the God who made all things.’ He said that Jesus was inferior to God and ‘never did anything except what the Creator... willed him to do and say’” (p.7 of my copy).

The fact is that Justin Martyr taught that the prehuman Jesus was God, not an angel. Justin did say that Christ was called an angel, but explained that this was because Christ, who was actually God, took on the appearance of an angel (e.g., Genesis 18 – 19:24, what is known as a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ). Thus, Justin writes that,

“the Father of the universe has a Son; who also, being the first-begotten Word of God, is even God. And of old he appeared in the shape of fire and in the likeness of an angel to Moses and to the other prophets...”⁹

Elsewhere, Justin calls Christ “both God and Lord of hosts” (that is, Jehovah).¹⁰ Also, “God the Son of God.”¹¹ Justin not only believed that Christ was God; he believed in a rudimentary form of the Trinity. Thus he stated that Christians worshipped God the Father, “the Son (who came forth from him...), and the prophetic Spirit.”¹² That this meant that Christ and the Spirit were both God is implied by his repeated statement that “we ought to worship God alone... to God alone we render worship.”¹³

In short, although Justin Martyr did not use such terms as “Trinity,” and his philosophical explanations of the relation of Christ to God were somewhat confused, he worshipped Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and regarded Christ a Jehovah God.

Irenaeus

One of John’s disciples was Polycarp who discipled Irenaeus. The Watchtower booklet says that Irenaeus, a late second-century theologian, held that Christ was inferior to God, “not equal to the ‘One true and only God,’ who is ‘supreme over all, and besides whom there is no other’”

⁹ Justin Martyr, First Apology 63, in *The Anti-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A. D. 325*, 1:184, 1969 reprint of the original 1885 edition. (hereafter cited as ANF)

¹⁰ Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho 36, in ANF, 1:212

¹¹ Ibid., 128, in ANF, 1:264

¹² Justin Martyr, First Apology 6, in ANF, 1:164

¹³ Ibid., 16, 17, in ANF, 1:168

(p.7). But in context Irenaeus was contrasting the “one true and only God” with the lesser gods of Gnostic speculation, not denying that Christ is God.

In fact, Irenaeus defended a view of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit that was implicitly Trinitarian. Thus, he states that the church has its faith “in one God, the father almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God,” and in the same context speaks of “Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God, and Savior, and King.”¹⁴ Irenaeus writes of “Christ Jesus, the Son of God; who, because of his surpassing love towards **His creation**, condescended to be born of the virgin, He Himself uniting man through Himself to God....”¹⁵ Thus, Jesus Christ was both God and man, the Creator who became a man to save his creation.

Clement of Alexandria

The JW booklet claims that Clement of Alexandria held that Christ was “a creature” and inferior to God (p. 7). In fact, Clement held the exact opposite. He taught that Christ is “truly most manifest Deity, He that is made equal to the Lord of the universe; because He was His Son,”¹⁶ and one and the same God as the Father.¹⁷ Clement explicitly called Christ the “eternal Son,”¹⁸ and denied that the Father had ever been without the Son.¹⁹

¹⁴ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.10.1, in ANF, 1:330

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, in ANF, 1:417

¹⁶ Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen* 10, in ANF, 2:202

¹⁷ Clement, *The Instructor* 1.8, 1.11, in ANF, 2:227, 234

¹⁸ Clement, *Exhortation to the Heathen* 12, in ANF, 2:206

¹⁹ Clement, *Miscellanies [Stromata]* 5.1, in ANF, 2:444