

Let us now turn to the Prologue, the first 18 verses of the Fourth Gospel to see what John has to say about Jesus as the *Logos*. We find that he has five things to say.

1. He tells us what Jesus personally was. He begins with a brief statement which provides the translator with a problem not far from insoluble in the English language. 'The Word', say both the AV and the RSV, 'was God' (John 1:1). Moffatt is one of the few modern translators who dare to depart from that rendering. 'The *Logos*', he translates, 'was divine.' In a matter like this we cannot do other than go to the Greek, which is *theos en ho logos*. *Theos* is the Greek for God, *en* for was, *ho* for the, *logos* for word. Now normally, except for special reasons, Greek nouns always have the definite article in front of them, and we can see at once here that *theos* the noun for God has not got the definite article in front of it. When a Greek noun has not got the article in front of it, it becomes rather a description than an identification, and has the character of an adjective rather than of a noun. We can see exactly the same in English. If I say: 'James is the man', then I identify James with some definite man whom I have in mind; but, if I say: 'James is man', then I am simply describing James as human, and the word man has become a description and not an identification. If John had said *ho theos en ho logos*, using a definite article in front of both nouns, then he would definitely have identified the *logos* with God, but because he has no definite article in front of *theos* it becomes a description, and more of an adjective than a noun. The translation then becomes, to put it rather clumsily, 'The Word was in the same class as God, belonged to the same order of being as God.' The only modern translator who fairly and squarely faced this problem is Kenneth Wuest, who has: 'The Word was as to his essence essential deity.' But it is here that the NEB has brilliantly solved the problem with the absolutely accurate rendering: 'What God was the Word was.'

John is not here identifying the Word with God. To put

it very simply, he does not say that Jesus was God. What he does say is that no human description of Jesus can be adequate, and that Jesus, however you are going to define it, must be described in terms of God. 'I know men,' said Napoleon, 'and Jesus Christ is more than a man.'

But no sooner has John presented us with a problem in translation than he presents us with a problem in theology. 'In the beginning', he says, 'was the Word.' 'He was in the beginning with God' (John 1.1, 2). Here we come upon the doctrine which is known as the doctrine of the pre-existence of the Word, or the pre-existence of the Son. There is no more difficult doctrine to understand in all theological thinking. It quite clearly cannot mean that this flesh and blood man Jesus existed before the creation of the world. What then does it mean?

We do not say that in what follows there is anything like a full account of the meaning of the pre-existence of the Son or of the Word, but, whatever else that doctrine may or may not mean, it does mean this. Let us remind ourselves what John basically means when he called Jesus the Word; he meant that in Jesus we see perfectly displayed in human form the mind of God. To put it at the very simplest, he meant that God is like Jesus. This means that, when we see Jesus feeding the hungry and healing the sick and being the friend of outcasts and sinners, when we see Jesus dying on the Cross, we can say: 'God is like that.' Now, if we go on to speak of the pre-existence of the Logos, one thing at least that we must mean is that God was always like that. The mind of God, the attitude of God towards men, was always from all eternity to all eternity that which we see in Jesus.

To grasp this is of the most crucial importance. There are certain ways of speaking about Jesus which imply, or even come near to stating, that Jesus did something to change the attitude of God to men, that somehow Jesus changed God's wrath into love, that somehow Jesus persuaded God to hold his hand and to pacify his anger and