

Illustrations of Colwell's Canon S. M. Baugh, Ph.D.

(From the *A First John Reader*):

ARTICLE USES WITH PREDICATE NOMINATIVE NOUNS. (Colwell's canon;¹ see especially Wallace, pp. 256–70.) When a noun is used as a predicate nominative in a predicate statement, the presence or absence of an article with that noun may be determined by word order rather than by whether the noun is definite or not. Colwell identified the normal pattern as: (1) Definite predicate nouns that *follow* the copulative verb (usually εἰμί, “to be”) tend to have the article expressed: ἐγὼ εἰμι τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου, “I am *the* Light of the world” (John 8:12). The definite, predicate noun φῶς follows the copulative verb εἰμί, hence the article τό was expressed. (2) Definite predicate nouns that *precede* the copulative verb tend to omit the article, even though they are specific in meaning: φῶς εἰμι τοῦ κόσμου, “I am (*the*) Light of the world” (John 9:5). Here, Jesus is clearly not saying: “I am a light (among many) of the world”; this is the same assertion he made in v. 8:12. And notice that the noun φῶς can be considered definite because it is joined with an articular τοῦ κόσμου (cf. §15 above).

Colwell's canon should be handled carefully—one must always leave room for variations in style, conflicts with other rules of article usage, the anarthrous noun focuses on a quality, etc. And we should stress this: the canon shows that a pre-verbal anarthrous predicate noun *may* be definite in meaning, not that it *always* is definite; φῶς in 1 John 1:5 is one example where the anarthrous predicate is not definite but focuses on the noun's quality (see the Reading Notes). Colwell's canon is a helpful description of an important Greek idiom, but it must be used with care.² It's a canon with one “n” not two.

- θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος, “The word was *God*” (John 1:1); not “a god.”
- εἰ ὁ θεὸς πατήρ ὑμῶν ἦν ἠγαπᾶτε ἄν ἐμέ, “If God were *your Father*, you would love me” (John 8:42). The fact that πατήρ is anarthrous is determined by its function as the predicate noun; it is still definite in conjunction with ὑμῶν. Not “a father of yours.”
- βασιλεύς εἰμι τῶν Ἰουδαίων, “I am *the* King of the Jews” (John 19:21). Like the previous example, βασιλεύς is confirmed to be definite according to Apollonius' canon explained above (§15).
- Ὁ δὲ ἑκατόνταρχος καὶ οἱ μετ' αὐτοῦ τηροῦντες τὸν Ἰησοῦν . . . ἐφοβήθησαν σφόδρα, λέγοντες· ἀληθῶς θεοῦ υἱὸς ἦν οὗτος, “Then the centurion and those where were guarding Jesus with him . . . became exceedingly afraid and said, “Truly he was *the Son of God*” (Matt. 27:54).

¹ E. C. Colwell, “A Definite Rule for the Use of the Article in the Greek New Testament,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 52 (1933): 12-21.

²I am not aware of studies of this construction outside the NT, yet one can observe it elsewhere. I have noticed it particularly in the LXX of the Psalms; e.g., υἱός μου εἶ σύ, “You are my Son” (Psa. 2:7; cf. 15[16]:2); σὺ δέ, κύριε, ἀντιλήμπτωρ μου εἶ, “And you, O Lord, are my Helper” (Psa. 3:4).

πατήρ δ' ὁ Ζεὺς, “Now Zeus is *our father*” (Plutarch, *Roman Questions* 40 [274B]).

Other examples:

John 3:29 **ὁ ἔχων τὴν νύμφην νυμφίος ἐστίν·** ὁ δὲ φίλος τοῦ νυμφίου ὁ ἐστηκὼς καὶ ἀκούων αὐτοῦ χαρᾶ χαίρει διὰ τὴν φωνὴν τοῦ νυμφίου. αὕτη οὖν ἡ χαρὰ ἢ ἐμὴ πεπλήρωται.

John 4:18 πέντε γὰρ ἄνδρας ἔσχες καὶ νῦν **ὃν ἔχεις οὐκ ἔστιν σου ἀνὴρ·** τοῦτο ἀληθὲς εἶρηκας.

John 4:19 λέγει αὐτῷ ἡ γυνή· κύριε, θεωρῶ ὅτι **προφήτης εἶ σὺ.**

John 4:34 λέγει αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· **ἐμὸν βρῶμά ἐστιν ἵνα ποιήσω** τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πέμψαντός με καὶ τελειώσω αὐτοῦ τὸ ἔργον.

John 5:27 καὶ ἐξουσίαν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ κρίσιν ποιεῖν, ὅτι **υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου ἐστίν.**

John 6:35 εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· **ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ἄρτος τῆς ζωῆς·** ὁ ἐρχόμενος πρὸς ἐμὲ οὐ μὴ πεινάσῃ, καὶ ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ οὐ μὴ διψήσῃ πώποτε.

John 7:39 τοῦτο δὲ εἶπεν περὶ τοῦ πνεύματος ὃ ἔμελλον λαμβάνειν οἱ πιστεύσαντες εἰς αὐτόν· **οὐπω γὰρ ἦν πνεῦμα,** ὅτι Ἰησοῦς οὐδέπω ἐδοξάσθη.

(8) John 8:12 Πάλιν οὖν αὐτοῖς ἐλάλησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς λέγων· **ἐγὼ εἰμι τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου·** ὁ ἀκολουθῶν ἐμοὶ οὐ μὴ περιπατήσῃ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ, ἀλλ' ἔξει τὸ φῶς τῆς ζωῆς.

John 8:31 ἔλεγεν οὖν ὁ Ἰησοῦς πρὸς τοὺς πεπιστευκότας αὐτῷ Ἰουδαίους· ἐὰν ὑμεῖς μείνητε ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῷ ἐμῷ, ἀληθῶς **μαθηταὶ μου ἔστε**

John 8:33 ἀπεκρίθησαν πρὸς αὐτόν· **σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ ἐσμεν** καὶ οὐδενὶ δεδουλεύκαμεν πώποτε· πῶς σὺ λέγεις ὅτι ἐλεύθεροι γενήσεσθε;

John 34 ἀπεκρίθη αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν **δοῦλός ἐστιν τῆς ἁμαρτίας.**

John 8:37 Οἶδα ὅτι **σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ ἔστε·** ἀλλὰ ζητεῖτέ με ἀποκτεῖναι, ὅτι ὁ λόγος ὃ ἐμὸς οὐ χωρεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν.

John 8:39 ἀπεκρίθησαν καὶ εἶπαν αὐτῷ· ὁ πατήρ ἡμῶν Ἀβραάμ ἐστίν. λέγει αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· εἰ **τέκνα τοῦ Ἀβραάμ ἔστε,** τὰ ἔργα τοῦ Ἀβραάμ ἐποιεῖτε·

John 8:42 εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· εἰ **ὁ θεὸς πατήρ ὑμῶν ἦν** ἠγαπάτε ἂν ἐμέ, ἐγὼ γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐξῆλθον καὶ ἤκω· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀπ' ἐμαυτοῦ ἐλήλυθα, ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνός με ἀπέστειλεν.

John 9:5 ὅταν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ᾶ, **φῶς εἰμι τοῦ κόσμου.**

John 9:28 καὶ ἐλοιδόρησαν αὐτόν καὶ εἶπον· **σὺ μαθητὴς εἶ ἐκείνου,** ἡμεῖς δὲ τοῦ Μωϋσέως ἐσμὲν μαθηταί·

John 10:2 **ὁ δὲ εἰσερχόμενος** διὰ τῆς θύρας **ποιμὴν ἐστίν τῶν προβάτων.**

John 12:31 νῦν **κρίσις ἐστίν τοῦ κόσμου τούτου,** νῦν ὁ ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου τούτου ἐκβληθήσεται ἔξω·

John 19:21 ἔλεγον οὖν τῷ Πιλάτῳ οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς τῶν Ἰουδαίων· μὴ γράφῃ ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων, ἀλλ' ὅτι ἐκεῖνος εἶπεν· **βασιλεὺς εἰμι τῶν Ἰουδαίων.**

Ps 13:6 βουλήν πτωχοῦ κατησχύνατε ὅτι κύριος **ἐλπὶς αὐτοῦ** ἐστίν

Ps 49:6 καὶ ἀναγγελοῦσιν οἱ οὐρανοὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ ὅτι ὁ θεὸς **κριτὴς** ἐστίν διάψαλμα

Ps 58:10 τὸ κράτος μου πρὸς σὲ φυλάξω ὅτι ὁ θεὸς **ἀντιλήμπτωρ μου** εἶ

Ps 58:18 βοηθός μου σοὶ ψαλῶ ὅτι ὁ θεός **ἀντιλήμπτωρ μου** εἶ ὁ θεός μου τὸ ἔλεός μου

Ps 77:35 καὶ ἐμνήσθησαν ὅτι ὁ θεὸς βοηθὸς αὐτῶν ἐστίν καὶ ὁ θεὸς ὁ ὑψιστος λυτρωτὴς αὐτῶν ἐστίν

Ps 88:27 αὐτὸς ἐπικαλέσεται με πατήρ μου εἶ σύ θεός μου καὶ ἀντιλήμπτωρ τῆς σωτηρίας μου

Ps 118:99 ὑπὲρ πάντας τοὺς διδάσκοντάς με συνῆκα ὅτι τὰ μαρτύριά σου μελέτη μού ἐστίν

Ps 118:174 ἐπεπόθησα τὸ σωτήριόν σου κύριε καὶ ὁ νόμος σου μελέτη μού ἐστίν