

THE FUNCTION OF JOHN THE BAPTIST IN Q AND MARK

by
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1. In his detailed treatment on the figure of John the Baptist from a redaction - critical point of view, W. Wink¹, starting from the important rôle of John the Baptist in the Gospel tradition, came to the conclusion that 'the church stood at the centre of John's movement from the very beginning and became its one truly great survivor and heir'². Although this conclusion might not be completely justified, it directs attention to the relations between John and the Christian movement at a very early stage. Wink³ went on to show —and this in my view is more convincing—how the Christian conception about John — without any sign of antagonism between the Church and John's sect being prominent in the four Gospels and Acts⁴ —went through a process of development. This development is traced from the image of 'Elijah-incognito' in Mark to that of Jesus' ally against the hostile front of Judaism in Matthew, to the traditional figure of the forerunner in the panoramic conception of *Heilsgeschichte* in Luke, to reach in

1. *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (Cambridge, 1968). Wink's study was based on previous suggestions mainly by M. Dibelius, *Die urchristliche Überlieferung von Johannes dem Täufer* (Göttingen, 1911); W. Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist* (ET, New York, 1969); C. H. Kraeling, *John the Baptist* (USA, 1951); W. Trilling, 'Die Täufertradition bei Matthäus', *BZ* 3 (1959), pp. 271-89; E. Käsemann, 'The Disciples of John the Baptist in Ephesus' in *Essays on New Testament Themes* (ET, London, 1964), pp. 36-48; Other major contributions on the Baptist studies are the monographs: M. Goguel, *Au seuil l'évangile Jean Baptist* (Payot, 1928); E. Lohmeyer, *Das Urchristentum. I Buch: Johannes der Täufer* (Göttingen, 1932); C. H. H. Scobie, *John the Baptist* (London, 1964). For further bibliography see these books. See also Γ. Σ. Γρατσέα, 'Ιωάννης ὁ Βαπτιστής βάσει τῶν Πηγῶν', (Athens, 1968).

2. *Op. cit.*, p. 110.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 110-11.

4. Wink insists on the 'fundamental error of regarding the two groups (Church and Baptist's sect) as separate and alien'! (*ibid.*).

the Fourth Gospel its climax with a complete christianization of John⁵.

W i n k's study, however, did not include any thorough examination and comparison of the figure of John in Mark and Q⁶, and it is with this that we shall be concerned here, starting with Q.

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2. Accounts of John's ministry and his relationship with Jesus in Q are to be found in Lk 3.7-9, 15-18=Mt 3. 7-12, and in Lk 7. 18-35=Mt 11. 2-11, 16-19. There is also a reference to John in Lk 11. 1 where one of Jesus' disciples asked him to teach them how to pray *καθώς και Ἰωάννης ἐδίδαξεν τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ*; this, in my view, is not likely to have been taken by St. Luke from Q; it has been supplied rather by St. Luke himself. This material, amounting to no less than 20 verses in a document consisting of about 200 verses, (*i.e.* one tenth of the entire document), indicates that John and his relation to Jesus played some part in the thought of the community reflected in Q⁷. This becomes more evident if we take seriously into account the location in Q of Lk 7.18-35 par., the main body of Q's references to John. For if we are right in classifying this passage along with Lk 7.2ff. par. and Lk. 9.57ff par. under the heading, 'Response to Jesus' Teaching'⁸, then a very revealing situation emerges with regard to the relations between the Q community and John's disciples. And this situation can be described neither as favourable to nor as hostile to John's disciples, but rather as one of mutual understanding.

To seek for various strata in Q is as legitimate as in the Gospels, and in any of their sources⁹. If we compare the children-in-the-market

5. In fact the process of the incorporation of John into the christian theology of history had already started in Matthew (*ibid.*, p. 40).

6. *Op. cit.*, p. 18, n. 1. W i n k speaks of Q 'not so much as a "redaction" but as a collection, a miscellany of logia without sufficiently clear or extensive editorial data (in most cases)'.

7. Cf. B. H. S t r e e t e r, *The Four Gospels* (London, 1924), p. 292.

8. Cf. F. C. G r a n t, *The Gospels* (London, 1957), pp. 59f. The other suggestion by T. W. M a n s o n, *The Sayings of Jesus* (London, 1949), pp. 39-71, adopted also by M. J. S u g g s, *Wisdom, Christology, and Law in Matthew's Gospel* (Massachusetts, 1970), p. 38, that the material up to Lk. 7.35 should be classified under the head 'Jesus and John the Baptist', though it does not affect our argument (it rather strengthens it), nevertheless it poses a lot of difficulties when we consider the classification of Q as a whole.

9. Despite his hesitation as to the type of the Q-Document (cf. n. 6 above) W i n k himself accepts different strata in some cases (*op. cit.*, pp. 13ff).

parable, (which concludes with the *sophia-logion*) with the preceding verses, the existence of various strata may be discerned in this very group of sayings (Lk 7.10-35 par.). In Lk 7. 31-35 par. both John and Jesus are *wisdom's envoys* and they are both referred to, or at least they were referred to at an early stage, as equals¹⁰. This becomes more evident if we read Ἰησοῦς instead of υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου in 7. 34 par¹¹. The collector/compiler of the Q-Document has given the parable a christological significance by ascribing to Jesus the august title 'Son of Man'¹². In Lk 7. 18-30, on the other hand, Jesus is identified with the Messiah (vv 22f)¹³ by means of Is. 61.1f¹⁴, whereas John is given the characterization of a prophet or 'more than a prophet' (v 26)¹⁵; in other words he is the *forerunner* (ἄγγελος)¹⁶ of the Messiah, being thus subordinate to Jesus (cf. also v 28b). Even so, he is still the 'greatest born of women' (v 28a).

But even in Lk 7. 28=Mt 11. 11 itself it is possible to discern two

10. Cf. M. J. Suggs, *op. cit.*, pp. 33ff.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

12. We can go even further: v 34 can be taken not as an integral part of the parable, as J. Jeremias takes it, but as a secondary interpretation already taken up in Q (cf. M. J. Suggs, *op. cit.*, p. 34).

13. Although both St. Luke and St. Matthew understood this saying as an enumeration of miracles performed by Jesus (cf. τὰ ἔργα τοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ in Mt 11.2 and the entire verse in Lk 7.21), in Q the original saying was understood as an eschatological cry of joy for the dawn of the time of salvation, as in Is. 61.1f. Lk 7.22f=Mt 11.5f is indeed a free combination of Is. 35.5 ff and 29. 18f. with Is. 61.1f., and if we contrast, as J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, Vol. I (ET, London, 1971), p. 104, the Tannaitic list in Ned. 64b Bar 'Four are compared with a dead man: the lame, the blind, the leper, and the childless', the analogy becomes more evident. Now, if we read this situation through another O.T. saying also from Isaiah (52.7), we can say with some hesitation that Jesus was understood in Q as the Messiah.

14. G. N. Stanton, 'On the Christology of Q', in *Christ and the Spirit in the New Testament* (Festschrift to C. F. D. Moule, ed. by B. Lindars and S. S. Smalley (Cambridge, 1974), pp. 27-42, maintains that Is. 61.1f has influenced deeply the Q-material.

15. It is quite clear that in Q John is designated προφήτης in the sense of a forerunner of the Messiah (for a detailed investigation of the title «prophet» see O. Cullmann, *The Christology of the N.T.* (ET, London, 1959) pp. 13-50, where also bibliography). Nevertheless it is possible that the collector/compiler has used sayings in which John appeared as a Prophet in the sense of the forerunner of God himself (cf. n. 18 below).

16. Both in Mal 3.1 and in Ex 22.23 ἄγγελος corresponds to 'angel', but in Q it clearly indicates the 'forerunner'.

different strata of tradition: a pro-Baptist logion (v 28a) and a christian commentary on it (v 28b)¹⁷.

The other unit concerning John in the earlier part of the Q-Document, *i.e.* the continuous verses Lk 3. 7-9, 16-18 = Mt 3. 7-12, shows affinities with both strata. On the one hand, John appears as an eschatological figure¹⁸ with a significance of his own, proclaiming the divine judgment to come, and warning people 'to flee from the wrath to come' for 'the axe is already laid to the root of the trees'. On the other hand, it accords with Lk 7. 24-28 par. in that he proclaims the coming of the 'mightier one', though the two figures referred to in Lk 7. 22 par. and Lk 3. 6-18 par. can hardly be equated. In Lk 3. 16-18 the 'mightier one', who 'will baptize with the (Holy) Spirit and with fire'¹⁹, could easily be identified with a Son-of-Man-type of figure whose function is always placed somewhere in the future; but the Messiah implied by Lk 7. 22f par. is definitely a present reality.

Further examination of Lk 3. 7-9, 16-18 = Mt 3. 7-12²⁰ makes possible again a further distinction of two strata as in Lk 7. 28 = Mt 11. 11: an earlier one derived perhaps from a baptist source (Lk 3. 7-9 = Mt 3. 7-10), and a later christian addition (Lk 3. 16-18 = M. 3. 11-12).

In any case, whatever the meaning of the separate small units may have originally been, the function of John at the last stage of the tradition, as this was conceived by the collector/compiler of the Q-Document, is quite clear: *he was the forerunner of the Messiah; and yet he was still an autonomous figure with significance of his own.*

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3. In Mark references to John and his relationship with Jesus are to be found at the beginning of his Gospel, 1. 1-11, 14; in 6. 14-29; and in 9. 9-13; some scattered mention being found also in 2. 18; 8. 28;

17. W. Wink, *op. cit.*, pp. 23f. and bibliography there. I find this explanation better than that proposed by O. Cullmann, 'Ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος', in *The Early Church* (ET, London, 1956), p.p. 175-182, esp. p. 180, which takes the μικρότερος to refer to Jesus (as a disciple of John): 'He who is least (*i.e.* Jesus as a disciple of John) is greater than he (*i.e.* John) in the kingdom of God'.

18. Lk 3.7-9 par. is very close to the characterization of John as the forerunner of God himself, and it is not unlikely to have originally had that sense.

19. It is not unlikely that in the pre-Q original form the saying (Lk. 3.17 par) lacked the reference to the Holy Spirit, but there is no question of its being present in the Q form.

20. That all these verses stem from Q forming a unity is unquestionable,

and 11. 30ff. Verses 2. 18 and 11. 30ff — about the fasting of John, and the derivation of John's baptism respectively — both belong to pre-Marcian sources and they have been preserved unchanged, at least in so far as the Baptist himself is concerned²¹.

The key, and indeed the only one, for recovering the Marcan understanding of John the Baptist is 9. 9-13. W i n k has rightly pointed out its importance²²; Even though his interpretation of the crucial verse 9. 12 is doubtful²³, his main point that in Mark John was identified with Elijah is fully justified²⁴. St. Mark, however, has taken a further step; he has given the title the suffering-motif²⁵ so prominent in his theology. It was for this reason that he placed the 'bazaar rumour'²⁶ - story about John's death at this point in his Gospel²⁷. If now 9. 11-13, namely the idea of a *suffering - Elijah*²⁸ who 'will restore all things', is the starting point for the part John the Baptist plays in Mark, it becomes quite clear why the ministry of Jesus has been prefaced with a brief reference to the ministry of John which ends with his being handed over shortly before

21. It is striking, however, that both these references belong to the same sort of material (conflict-stories) alleged to have originally formed a single collection; cf. M. A l b e r t z, *Die Synoptischen Streitgespräche* (Berlin, 1921), pp. 5-36; but see also W. L. K n o x, *The Sources of the Synoptic Gospels, I* (Oxford, 1953) pp. 8ff.

22. W. M a r x s e n, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-53 has paid no attention to the significance of Mk 9. 31-33, limiting his investigation only to the opening verses of Mark.

23. W i n k has taken the Son of Man in 9. 12 to refer to Elijah (= John), following a suggestion by C. C. R i c h a r d s o n : 'Elijah does come first to restore all things; and how is it written of that son of man (Elijah), that he should suffer many things...'. (*op. cit.*, p. 14, n.). However, this interpretation poses a lot of difficulties; mainly because, in my view, the word $\pi\alpha\lambda\lambda\acute{\alpha}$ reflects clearly the first prediction in 8.31. Cf. also H. E. T ö d t, *The Son of Man in the Synoptic Tradition* (ET, London, 1965), pp. 169, 196.

24. This is made clear by the omission in Luke both of Mk 9.9-13 and 6.17-29. This deliberate act by Luke is also found in John in explicit form (v. 1.21). Matthew, on the other hand, has retained the analogy.

25. There does not seem to be a non-Christian tradition, at least known to us, which speaks of the suffering of Elijah; moreover it is completely alien to the Jewish Elijah-belief (cf. W. W i n k, *op. cit.*, p. 14).

26. In A. E. J. R a w l i n s o n's term (*The Gospel according to St. Mark*, London, 1947⁷, p. 82).

27. Cf. the analogy between Elijah as the victim of Ahab and Jezebel (I Kg 16.29 ff) and John as the victim of Herod and Herodias (Mk. 6. 17-29). This is a further indication that John was thought of by St. Mark as Elijah.

28. In fact the idea of rejection of John is found in Q (cf. Lk 7.33=Mt 11.18), but this is to be understood against a wisdom background, and has nothing to do with the more-advanced suffering theology of Mark.

the start of Jesus' ministry, and why the two ministries have been so sharply divided chronologically in v. 14²⁹.

We have seen that John's function was perceived by Q as that of the forerunner of the Messiah. The wilderness motif³⁰, the quotation from Mal 3.1³¹, and the *logion* about the coming of the mightier one³², as well as the tension in the relations between John and Jesus prominent in every reference to John, all belonged to Q. St. Mark maintained all these, but he took on his part a further step: he identified the ἄγγελος of Malachi (v. 3. 1) with Elijah, probably by the use also of Malachi (v. 4. 5f), and this could be explained as a revision by St. Mark of the Q picture in the light of his own understanding of John as Elijah, to be found in 9. 11-13³³.

W. M a r x s e n³⁴ has stated that 'there is no reason for departing from the conclusion of K. L. S c h m i d t³⁵, who regards the introduction (to Mark's Gospel) as the evangelist's own composition'. I accept this view, at least in its general outline; it is more suggestive and plausible than E. L o h m e y e r's assumption that Mark is reproducing a traditional unit³⁶. M a r x s e n has also suggested that Mark was composed backward³⁷. However true this may be for the entire Gospel,

29. M a r x s e n has shown throughout his study on John the Baptist (*op. cit.*, pp. 30 ff.) how the evangelist uses statements which in themselves were chronological and topological for theological purposes.

30. Cf. Lk 7.24=Mt 11.7

31. Cf. Lk 7.27=Mt 11.10

32. Cf. Lk 3.16-18=Mt 3.11-12

33. It is generally held that Mark and Q were mutually independent of each other, and that the detection of the Marcan theology from the way the author of the second Gospel used and revised the Q-Document is an unsafe criterion (cf. R. H. S t e i n, 'The Proper Methodology for Ascertaining a Marcan Redaction History', *NT* 13 (1971), pp. 181-198, esp. p. 189, n.2). This view, however, has to be reconsidered to a considerable extent (see my 'Prolegomena to a Discussion on the Relationship between Mark and the Q-Document', *Δελτίον Βιβλικῶν Μελετῶν* 3 (1975), pp. 31-46). Without suggesting a literary dependence of Mark on Q, we must allow at least some acquaintance by St. Mark of the traditions current in the community that lies behind Q.

34. *Op. cit.*, p. 32.

35. *Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu* (Berlin, 1919), pp. 18-19.

36. *Das Evangelium des Markus* (Göttingen, 1937), pp. 10ff.

37. In M a r x s e n's view it is the resurrection that gives meaning to the passion which in turn makes meaningful the healings, exorcisms and parables; in the same way it is the ministry that has given birth to the introduction (*op. cit.*, p. 32).

it does not apply to the opening verses³⁸. Mk. 1. 1-11 can be better explained as an expansion by St. Mark of earlier views, evidenced in Q, about the Baptist and his relationship with Jesus, by means of the identification of John and Elijah. The genesis in detail of the Marcan introduction may be rebuilt as follows³⁹.

Verse 2 can be accounted for by Q (Mt 10. 11=Lk 7. 27)⁴⁰. The same is true for verses 7-8 preserved in Mark without the crucial word *πρὸς* and the following 'fan'-verse (cf. Lk 3. 16-18=Mt 3. 11-12)⁴¹. In v. 6 details about John's dressing are deliberately introduced in order to equate John with Elijah according to 2 Kg 1. 8 and Zech 13. 4⁴²; his diet is also given to accord with the notion of the wilderness, also to be accounted for by Q (Lk 7. 24=Mt 11.7). Verse 3, the O. T. quotation from Is. 40.3, is a further example of St. Mark's supplying scriptural evidence of John's rôle in accordance with the wilderness motif⁴³. Verse 4, a brief report of John's function (*βαπτίζων ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ*), and his proclamation (*κηρύσσων*) of a 'baptism of repentance for the remission of sins', and verse 5, the description of the mass response by the people (*πάντα, πάντες*), are information given by St. Mark, so that the John-Elijah analogy can be further illuminated⁴⁴. The remaining

38. According to Marxsen, (*op. cit.*, pp. 32f.) vv 1.9-11 point back to vv 1.4-8, and so on. Wink also is in disagreement with Marxsen's thesis in some cases (*op. cit.*, p. 4).

39. B. W. Bacon, 'The Prologue of Mark', JBL 26 (1908), pp. 84-106, had earlier suggested that the opening verses of Mark seem to be echoing or abridging Q.

40. A. E. J. Rawlinson, (*op. cit.*, p. 6); V. Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (London, 1952), p. 153 (there also a list of other supporters before 1952); and J. A. T. Robinson, 'Elijah, John and Jesus' in NTS 4 (1957-58) pp. 263-81, esp. p. 268, have all considered it a later interpolation (in Robinson's view under the influence of Lk 7.27=Mt 11.10). However, since there is no textual evidence this explanation should be excluded.

41. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John* (London, 1960), p. 144, wrongly prefers the D reading which omits the phrase 'and had a leather girdle around his waist', having in mind that the identification of John and Elijah is secondary.

42. In any case, it is unanimously agreed that the Q-version is prior to the Marcan one. If, however, the latter is to be taken as redaction, it becomes clear how St. Mark tried to weaken the emphasis on the future activity of Jesus and lay more emphasis on the past.

43. We are not concerned here with the question of the existence of such testimonies (*i. e.* vv 2 and 3) prior to Mark but only with their use by St. Mark.

44. In Judaism this restoration came to be conceived of as a mass repentance

verses 9-11 describe Jesus' Baptism. We are not concerned here with a detailed discussion of its origin and christological meaning; what concerns us only is the relationship between Jesus and John, and to that purpose this passage is exceedingly important. In Q the entire passage, Lk 7. 18-35=Mt 11. 2-19, leaves the reader still puzzled as to the degree of superiority between the two figures. St. Mark in a very carefully structured passage in 1.9ff.⁴⁵ has settled the problem: John has been given a comparatively high function; he was Jesus' baptizer and yet Jesus remained totally autonomous and independent of John⁴⁶. What happened at the baptism cannot be described as due to a relation between John and Jesus, but as an interrelation between the Father and the Son, John's participation being limited to the minimum.

If, however, all the passages concerning John can be thus accounted for, is it possible to account for the omissions, too? For St. Mark appears to have had other information available to him (cf. 2. 18; 11. 32), but he has not made use of them possibly because they were not related sufficiently to the idea of fulfilment⁴⁷; since his conception is built upon 9. 11, John concerns him in what he *is*, not in what he says or does⁴⁸.

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4. To sum up. The Q-Document, in so far as the figure of John and his relationship with Jesus are concerned, already discloses signs of a theological development, but although John is presented in it as functioning in the context of *Heilsgeschichte* he still remains outside the Christian *kerygma* with a significance of his own. *It was St. Mark who took the step to incorporate John in the kerygma by identifying him with Elijah and depriving him of any significance of his own.*

on the part of all Israel. 'If "all" have now repented at the word of John, is he not Elijah who is to come?' (Wink, *op. cit.*, p. 3, where there is further bibliography).

45. It is very important that it was Jesus who took the initiative and responsibility for his baptism. He 'went' (ἦλθεν), he 'was baptized' (ἐβαπτίσθη), he 'saw' (εἶδεν) what took place, and finally he was addressed *privately*: «σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱὸς μου...». In that very important detail Mark was not followed by the other synoptics; perhaps because the problem of the relations of John with Jesus had already been settled by then.

46. It is not a coincidence that ὑπὸ Ἰωάννου has been put at the end of the whole sentence.

47. J. M. Robinson, *The Problem of History in Mark* (London, 1957), p. 25.

48. Wink, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

In this he was followed by all his successors. His further step, however, of introducing the concept of the suffering Elijah⁴⁹ was not reproduced by all the evangelists in the same way⁵⁰.

49. Paul, on the other hand, is even more radical. From the data we attain from the authentic epistles of St. Paul (I take Ac 13.24f, 19.3f as due to St. Luke's hand), he appears to keep the Baptist outside the *kerygma* which he confines solely to Jesus' death and resurrection. Thus, Mark seems to be standing in the mean position between Q and Paul, in so far as the function of John the Baptist is concerned.

50. W i n k also speaks of a 'Elijanic secret' (Elijah incognito,) but this is not very clear in the text (*ibid.*, pp. 16-7).