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JOHN THE BAPTIST AND THE JOHANNINE PROLOGUE

The Johannine Prologue is not only one of the most important passages in the New Testament, but also one of the most controversial. There is disagreement regarding its character, its relationship to the rest of the gospel, and its integrity, as well as regarding detailed points of exegesis.

The great majority of modern commentators regard the Prologue as a hymn or poem which has been taken over by the author of the Fourth Gospel and adapted to his purpose by various additions. These additions can be detected, it is suggested, by changes not only in theme but also in the poetic structure. However, the changes are not so obvious as to lead to any unanimity regarding the precise limits of these additions. Although they are generally considered to include the references to John the Baptist in verses 6-8 and 15, there is a considerable variety of opinion as to how much more may be regarded as additional material.¹

An exception to this approach is that of C. K. Barrett,² who points to the lack of agreement among those who seek to remove the 'insertions' as an indication that the original poetic structure which they are attempting to recover never in fact existed. Moreover, 'the whole passage shows, on careful exegesis, a marked internal unity, and also a distinct unity of theme and subject-matter with the remainder of the gospel'.³

Nevertheless, on either approach, the references to John the Baptist remain an enigma. If we agree with Professor Barrett that the Prologue is one with the rest of the gospel, we are nevertheless left wondering why the author has introduced the references to John in such an abrupt manner. If we agree with those who think that the Prologue (in a shorter form) once had a separate existence, then the references to John are even more puzzling. It is not enough to dismiss these verses as the author's additions; we must explain why he made these additions at these particular points—and it must be admitted that they are very odd additions. They have aptly been described by J. A. T. Robinson as 'rude interruptions'.⁴

To omit passages as 'additions' because their subject-matter seems foreign to their context can never be an adequate explanation unless one can suggest also why they should have been placed precisely where they are. In the case of the references to John the Baptist, it has been suggested that they were

¹ The variety of opinion is summarized by R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (i-xii) (1966), pp. 21-3.

² *The Gospel According to St. John* (1958), pp. 125 f.

³ *Op. cit.* p. 126.

⁴ 'The Relation of the Prologue to the Gospel of St. John', *N.T.S.* ix (1962), 100-10.

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'perhaps originally the opening verses of the Gospel, displaced when the Prologue was prefixed to the Gospel by the final redactor'.¹ But why did this 'final redactor' insert them into the Prologue? Was he insensitive to the poetic structure which the commentators have uncovered? Why not leave the 'original' introduction to follow after the Prologue, and lead into vv. 19 ff.? One possible explanation which has been offered is that vv. 6-8 deliberately contradict the claims of a sectarian group who thought of John the Baptist as the light.² This would explain the insertion at this point, though unfortunately direct evidence that any such claim was ever made is lacking.³ The insertion of v. 15 is even more difficult to explain. R. E. Brown's suggestion 'that the final redactor, seeing that it might be useful here to emphasize the theme of pre-existence, copied into the Prologue the sentence from v. 30'⁴ is no real answer. J. A. T. Robinson is correct when he writes: 'It is hard to see it being added as an explanation, because (unlike other verses to be considered) it explains nothing in the context: it merely interrupts.'⁵ It will perhaps assist our investigation if we look a little more closely at these two references to John the Baptist, and consider their relationship to the evangelist's account of John the Baptist's witness to Jesus which is found in i. 19 ff.

The first statement, in vv. 6-8, introduces John as one who was sent from God to bear witness to the light. This section emphasizes the function of John as witness: we are told first that he came εἰς μαρτυρίαν, and this statement is twice amplified in the explanatory clause ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός. On the first occasion this clause is linked with a further, positive explanation of John's function as witness—ἵνα πᾶντες πιστεύσωσιν δι' αὐτοῦ—and on the second a negative statement makes clear that John's witness was not to himself—οὐκ ἦν ἐκεῖνος τὸ φῶς, ἀλλ' ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός. This brief statement is similar in substance to i. 19-28, the first section in the evangelist's material about John the Baptist. These verses are introduced with the words καὶ αὕτη ἔστιν ἡ μαρτυρία τοῦ ἰσχυροῦ, and the theme of John as witness is continued in the words καὶ ὁμοδόγησεν καὶ οὐκ ἠπρόσῃστο, between John and the priests and Levites from Jerusalem: the main point is John's denial of any role for himself save that of a voice preparing the way of the Lord, and his emphasis on his own unworthiness in comparison with the

¹ R. E. Brown, *op. cit.* p. 22. Cf. also J. A. T. Robinson, *op. cit.* and W. F. Howard, rev. C. K. Barrett, *The Fourth Gospel in Recent Criticism and Interpretation* (1955), pp. 118 f.

² R. Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (17th edn. 1962), pp. 4 f.

³ There is, of course, evidence here and in the Clementine literature that messianic claims were being made on John's behalf, and this would explain the Johannine denial—but not why it is placed at this specific point and in these terms. See the discussion of the Baptist sect in W. Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (1968), pp. 98-105, and C. Scobie, *John the Baptist* (1964), pp. 187-202.

⁴ *Op. cit.* n. 92.

one who follows him. Questioned concerning his baptism, he links his water-baptism with the one to whom he bears witness. In other words, John 'came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light' (i. 7-8).

The second statement in the Prologue concerning the Baptist is found in v. 15. Again we find John introduced as one who bears witness—and presumably we are to conclude from the present tense, *μαρτυρεῖ*, that this witness continues. This time John himself is made to speak (*λέγει*), and his words point the contrast between himself and the one to whom he bears witness. His successor is greater than he, and indeed comes before him, and this priority is based on his pre-existence. Again there is a parallel with the material regarding the Baptist which occurs later in the chapter, this time with the second section, vv. 29-34, which describe the events of 'the next day'. Unlike vv. 19-28 the emphasis here is entirely positive: John is said to have pointed out Jesus as the lamb of God and to have witnessed to him (*ἐμαρτύρησεν*) as the one on whom he has seen the Spirit descend. John himself emphasizes his role as witness—*μαρτυρήσας* ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ. The closest link with v. 15, however, is found in the fact that John's words in v. 15 are repeated in v. 30, both passages referring to a previous statement which has not itself been recorded.

Isolated from their context in the Prologue, therefore, these two statements about John in vv. 6-8 and 15 seem to point forward to the two sections which are to follow, to his own denial of any position for himself and his emphasis upon the role of Christ who, though he follows John, has priority in every other way. But what is the function of these passages in their present setting? At this point we must examine the remaining material in the Prologue.

Once again we immediately meet difficulties because of the variety of opinions which are held. But there is at least some measure of agreement that a major division occurs at v. 14. This is supported both by the repetition of the term *λόγος* and by the introduction of a new stage in the argument at this point. It is, of course, by no means certain that this is the first reference to the incarnation; most commentators believe that it is first referred to in v. 9 or v. 10, or even earlier.¹ Nevertheless, the reference to the Logos 'becoming flesh' is certainly a new and significant statement.

If we omit for the moment the 'interruptions' in vv. 6-8 and 15, we find that the remaining material falls into the following pattern: A (i) vv. 1-5. The Logos in relation to God; active in creation; as life—which is light. (ii) vv. 9-13. The light lightens men; but the world (created by him) did not accept him; those who did were made children of God through him. B (i) v. 14. The incarnate Logos—his glory, full of grace and truth. (ii) vv.

¹ Cf. C. K. Barrett, *op. cit.* in loc.; R. E. Brown, *op. cit.* p. 29, points out how the phrases in this section link with the activity of Jesus in the rest of the gospel. W. H. Cadman, ed. G. B. Caird, *The Open Heaven* (1960), pp. 20-2, interprets v. 5 as a reference to the incarnation. Similarly R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John*, 1 (1968), in loc.

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16-18. Men have received of his fullness, and grace and truth have come through him; God, whom no one has seen, has been made known through him.

It will be noted that each main section is built to some degree in chiasmatic form. The first moves from the theme of the Logos' relation to God and creation to the idea that he is life and so light. After the 'insertion' we move on from the theme of light to the reaction of the world (created by him cf. v. 3) and to the new life as children of God given to those who receive him. The second part of this first main section, therefore, picks up from the first ideas of life and light, of the relationship of the *λόγος* to creation and his relationship with God. In the second main section, we are told that we have seen the glory of the incarnate Logos, as of the *μονογενῆς*, full of grace and truth. Again, these themes are taken up after the 'insertion' in v. 15; the language emphasizes the links—*πλήρωμα*, ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια, ἐόπα μόνογενὴς Θεός, Πατήρ. The references to John the Baptist occur at what may be described as the turning-points of the two sections—at that point in each where the themes already stated are taken up and developed; each in the 'development' sections works out more fully what has been stated in the preceding verses. In each case this is done in terms of the meaning for man of what has been already stated. The Logos, eternally with God and agent of creation, is the bearer of life and light, which shines in the darkness; the world (made through him) did not know him and his own people rejected him, but to those who accepted him he gave power to become children of God. (Already we meet the division caused by Christ's presence among men, which is the theme of John's gospel.) The Logos became flesh and we saw his glory: grace and truth have come to us through him, and he has made known to us God himself, whom no one has ever seen.¹

The positioning of the references to John the Baptist suggests that they serve a particular function at these points, and that they are not merely parenthetical. Their function becomes clearer when we remember that these passages are not primarily 'about John the Baptist'; rather, like John himself, they point to the one to whom John witnessed. They refer to the historical 'event' of Jesus Christ, that is, to the appearance of the Logos among men. Their importance lies in the fact that each refers to John as a witness who confirms the truth of what has just been said, that light is shining in the darkness, and that we have seen the glory of the incarnate Logos.² It is to these basic statements of truth that the Baptist, in his own way, witnesses. He bears witness that the one who follows him is 'the light' when he describes himself as a voice and as one who prepares the way; he bears witness to the incomparable superiority and pre-existence of his successor when he declares

¹ John here contrasts Jesus with Moses, through whom the Law was given to us, and according to Exod. xxxiii. 17-23, was unable to see God.

² The parallelism between these two statements, together with their similar positioning, supports the interpretation of v. 5 as referring to the incarnation; see above, p. 356 n. 1.

John as a witness who confirms the truth of what has been said

that he has seen the Spirit descend upon Jesus, and therefore knows and bears witness that he is the Son of God.

The function of John the Baptist in these two short passages is therefore the same as that which he has in the rest of the Fourth Gospel: his purpose is only to serve as a witness to Jesus. This interpretation of his mission is reflected in i. 31, where the Baptist states what might otherwise surprise us, that the purpose of his baptism is to reveal Jesus to Israel: having identified him as the lamb of God, he declares *ἴνα φανερωθῇ τῷ Ἰσραὴλ, ὅτι αὐτός ἐστιν ὁ ἄμνος τοῦ θεοῦ*. The same emphasis is seen in two later references which look back to John's witness, as those in the Prologue look forward. In iii. 26 John's disciples speak to him of Jesus as the one *ὃς σὺ ἑαυτὸν φέρεις* to John's witness. Again, in v. 33, Jesus

Within the Prologue, the references to John the Baptist serve to link the subsequent historical statements with the metaphysical truths there outlined: they make clear that it is Jesus who is the true light which gives light to men, and who is the full revelation of God. Whether or not they are additions to an original 'hymn', they are by no means 'interruptions', as at first appeared. Rather the author has used them to link firmly the introductory philosophical passage (which may well be his own composition) to the events which he is going to portray in the rest of his gospel. The Logos who was eternally with God is the one to whom the Baptist pointed: the Logos who became flesh is the one who follows John although he is before him. The references to John thus play as important a role within the Prologue as John himself plays in the gospel.²

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THE DISCIPLE'S CROSS

Mark viii. 34 contains a well-known saying of Jesus: 'If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross (ἀνέστω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ), and follow me.' It is found also in Matt. x. 38 and xvi. 24; and in Luke ix. 23 and xiv. 27. In Mark x. 21 it is spurious.

A serious difficulty about the saying is that it is the only reference in the New Testament to 'taking up the cross' apart from the statements referring to the crucifixion of our Lord.³ The clause ἀνέστω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ is found

¹ Note the use of *ἀνέστω* and *ἐσπορεύω* in *vv.* 14-18, echoed by *ῥησέναι* and *ἐσπορεύω* in *vv.* 23 and 34.

² I am grateful to Professor C. F. Evans for helpful criticism of the first draft of this article.

³ Cf. R. H. Lightfoot, *The Gospel Message of St Mark* (Oxford, 1950), p. 36.

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in Luke ix. 23 with the strange addition of καὶ ἑαυτὸν. Otherwise the verse has little significance: Matt. x. 38 has *ὅς οὐ λαμβάνει τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ* and Luke xiv. 27 *ὅστις οὐ βαστάζει τὸν σταυρὸν ἑαυτοῦ*. In Mark xv. 21 up our Lord's cross. Is it possible to avoid the conclusion that the reference to the disciple's cross is based on the later experience and interpretative

The latter is the conclusion reached by the Swedish scholar Rik Koolmeester¹ after a lengthy and elaborate survey of New Testament exegesis on this theme. He begins with the Greek and Roman material showing that martyrdom or extreme self-denial is the meaning usually rather than literal, crucifixion; Calvin too stresses the *regula imitatio*. From the seventeenth century onwards the saying is viewed as implying either part of the early Church. G. L. Hahn² in 1892 seems to have been the first to emphasize that crucifixion was a common mode of punishment in the temporary Palestine; but no one has suggested a political significance in more recent times. Indeed Koolmeester's valuable survey is defective in one respect: he does not record such recent suggestions. He himself sees in viewpoint of the early Church in the fact that the saying is given a general application (p. 90). At the same time he is ready to argue that the form *ὅς* is earlier than that with *ὅστις* or *εἰ τις*; if so, the earlier syntax will not in a universal connotation, but an address to the twelve disciples will not in

Another study of this theme which has appeared in a *Festschrift* for Erich Dinkler.³ Unlike Koolmeester, he has a new and highly original explanation to offer, though he adds a caveat at the end (p. 129) that offers it only as a tentative hypothesis. To carry the cross, according to him means to bear on one's forehead, hand or arm the *Tau*-sign which is a special σημεῖον of Yahweh in the light of Ezek. ix. 4. This cultic use of identity, penitence and especially devoted service; hence its use in baptism, argues Dinkler, the *Tau*-sign would have been affixed to the Cross in Christian sense. With reference to the disciples the saying will therefore refer to the devotion and service demanded of them, and it is assumed that the sign will have become familiar enough in symbolism to enable a set proverbial use of the phrase. This ingenious theory has the merit

¹ Selbstverleugnung, Kreuzaufnahme und Nachfolge: eine historische Studie über Mt. xvi. in *Charakteria Iohanni Köpp* (Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile, No. 7, Stockholm 1954), pp. 64-94.

² *Ibid.* pp. 83 f.

³ 'Jesus Wort vom Kreuztragen' in *Neu Testamentliche Studien für Rudolf Bultmann* (Berlin, 1951), pp. 110-29. Cf. Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Codex's Rule and Kingdom* (tr. John Murray, London, 1951), p. 111 n. 58.