Chapter 9

John the Baptist: Witness and Embodiment of the Prologue in the Gospel of John

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I. Introduction

In the introduction to his work on the passion narrative in the Gospel of John, Charles Giblin claims that

> as every Irishman knows, the meaning of a story lies largely in the way it is told. For each storyteller wants himself to be understood appreciatively through his own way of telling the tale, whether that tale is not as yet known or, and indeed preferably, if it already is. That is how the storyteller functions as a teacher.[1]

Giblin's assertion is certainly pertinent to the characters and characterization in the Gospel of John. This evangelist is the consummate storyteller, and his distinctive style has captivated readers and writers since he first composed his version of the good news of Jesus Christ. This attraction to the Fourth Gospel, however, has not mitigated the difficulty in getting at just what is happening as these characters act and interact across the narrative. The present study therefore builds upon recent work on storytelling techniques in the Fourth Gospel to examine the role of John the Baptist through a narrative lens that focuses on his key appearances through the Gospel's first three chapters, including 1.1-18 (esp. vv. 6-8, 15); 1.19-37; and 3.22-42.[2] Examining the Baptist's role through the prism of dialogue will shed light upon the evangelist's intention for these complex interactions on both the narrative level and the discourse or, using Giblin's term, the 'teaching' level of the Fourth Gospel. Focus thus rests upon the dialogical nature of the revelatory process and incorporates scholarship that suggests a relationship between the Fourth Gospel and ancient drama, rendering a speech-as-action structural model.[3]

1 Charles Giblin, 'Confrontations in John 18, 1-27', *Bib* 65 (1984), pp. 210–31 (215).

2 As is often noted, John is not called 'the Baptist' in the Fourth Gospel. This title, however, distinguishes him from the Gospel's traditional author.

3 E.g., Jo-Ann A. Brant, *Dialogue and Drama: Elements of Greek Tragedy in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004). Her work on index in dialogue is helpful here. In the three-part typology of artificial language (icon, index, symbol), dramatic texts rely heavily upon index: any sign that refers to objects denoted by being affected by those objects. *Deixis* is

The bridge from the Prologue to this action of the body of the Gospel is manifested in John, the human witness sent from God (1.6-8, 15). His character becomes the embodiment of the Prologue as he gives valuable information about Jesus and the story to come, now in the form of dialogues with other human characters (1.19-37; 3.22-36).

Much like the chorus in ancient Greek dramas, the Prologue gives readers a synthesis of events to come. It tells readers the *who* and the *what* of the events at hand, but leaves open the *how*. The story itself is necessary to understand how it all plays out. John the Baptist is presented in the Prologue as 'sent from God' (v. 6) and crosses into the body of the narrative as the one true witness whom the reader can trust to give accurate information about Jesus. As John's role draws to a close in chapter 3, he continues to defy human expectations precisely because his role lies outside human bounds, so that his very decline in the face of Jesus' increase means that his duty is complete and his role fulfilled. Herein lies the Baptist's particular characterization and catechetical role in the Gospel of John as the witness to perfect faith in relationship with both God and the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

II. Beginnings: The Prologue to the Body of the Gospel (1.1-18)

As a first page, the Prologue is fundamental to the narrative structure of the Gospel.[4] Its positioning must be understood as part of the evangelist's strategy, the threshold for the narrative to come.[5] Readers come to the body of the Gospel with the information in the Prologue – information only the narrator and readers have. Although readers may not fully understand the enigmatic ideas of the Prologue, these are precisely what create the tension that begs the question of the 'how' of God's action in the world. The subsequent narrative 'shows' what the Prologue 'tells'.[6] The Fourth Evangelist's use of the poetic Prologue as a foundation for

language used to point to subjectivity, temporality, spatiality and modality, particularly personal and demonstrative pronouns and adverbs such as 'here' and 'now'. Employing this language, including indices of movement, setting and conflict, attracts attention and identifies contextual elements (pp. 77–8).

4 Francis J. Moloney, *Belief in the Word: Reading John 1–4* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), p. 23.

5 See the literary analysis in Frank Kermode, 'St John as Poet', *JSNT* 28 (1986), pp. 3–16. For the Prologue's unity with the rest of the Gospel, see C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 2nd edn, 1978), pp. 125–6. Elsewhere he concludes, 'The Prologue is not a jig-saw puzzle but one piece of solid theological writing'; *The Prologue of St John's Gospel* (London: Athlone Press, 1971), p. 27.

6 'Showing' and 'telling' are the two means by which narratives reveal character; Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2nd edn, 1983), pp. 3–9. Tom Thatcher elaborates: '"Telling" occurs when the narrator makes direct evaluative statements or gives information not normally available in the readers' experience. "Showing" occurs when the narrator offers selective information about the actions of the characters and allows readers to draw conclusions from them. By combining "telling" and "showing" the author enables readers to develop "both intrinsic and contextual knowledge" of the characters': 'Jesus, Judas, and Peter:

his Gospel that suddenly and definitively breaks into prose narrative can also be understood as a reflection of his theological perspective. The incarnation of the Word suddenly and definitively turns the custom and 'truth' of the world on its ear.

The structure of these 18 verses is elusive. For the purposes of this study, however, the work of Alan Culpepper proves most insightful.[7] Recognizing the complexity of these verses, Culpepper acknowledges that more than one structuring technique may well be in play and is open to the fluidity of the evangelist's style. Nonetheless, he is convinced that the underlying framework of the Johannine Prologue is the chiasm. Therefore, he builds upon the work of his predecessors to determine the Prologue's flow and pivot.[8] He concludes that the evangelist's extended chiasm has seven corresponding elements that turn on v. 12b.[9] The crux of the Prologue, and thus the focus of the narrative the Prologue introduces, is the mission of the Word of God who gives those who receive him 'power to become children of God'. A detailed analysis of the Prologue is beyond the scope of this study, therefore the focus in what follows is the Baptist material of vv. 6-8 and 15.

Werner Kelber remarks that, 'Both in life and in literature beginnings are consequential, but risky undertakings' that often create the central predicament of the coming story.[10] Further, beginnings are the manner by which the evangelists present keys to understanding all that follows.[11] This role of the Prologue coupled with Culpepper's structure serve as the guide to examine the key the Fourth Evangelist provides to open the passageway into his Gospel.

a. In the Beginning was the Word (vv. 1-11)

The first words of the Gospel, ἐν ἀρχῇ, are identical to the opening words of Genesis in the LXX. They serve to bring readers to 'the beginning', not only of

Character by Contrast in the Fourth Gospel', *BSac* 153 (1996), pp. 435–48 (435). See also William J. Harvey, *Character and the Novel* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965), p. 32.

7 R. Alan Culpepper, 'The Pivot of John's Prologue', *NTS* 27 (1980), pp. 1–31. D. A. Carson concurs that this is the most persuasive structure presented to date; *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 13. For other recent scholarship, see Mary Coloe, 'The Structure of the Johannine Prologue and Genesis 1', *AusBR* 45 (1997), pp. 40–55; Charles Giblin, 'Two Complementary Literary Structures in John 1:1-18', *JBL* 104 (1985), pp. 87–103; Jean Irigoin, 'La composition rythmique du prologue de Jean (I, 1-18)', *RB* 98 (1991), pp. 5–50.

8 Quoting Willem van Unnik, Culpepper fears the upshot of his study will be 'the new things he said were not true and the true things he said were not new' ('The Purpose of St John's Gospel', *StudEv* 1 [1959], pp. 382–411 [383]). Culpepper nonetheless determines to refine recent scholarship ('Pivot', p. 1).

9 Culpepper, 'Pivot', p. 8. His analysis is based upon (1) language; (2) conceptual parallels; and (3) content (pp. 9–17). The chiasm is diagrammed as: **A:** vv. 1-2; **B:** vv. 3a; **C:** vv. 3b-5; **D:** vv. 6-8; **E:** vv. 9-10; **F:** v. 11; **G:** v. 12a; **H:** v. 12b; **G′:** v. 12c; **F′:** v. 13; **E′:** v. 14; **D′:** v. 15; **C′:** v. 16; **B′:** v. 17; **A′:** v. 18 (p. 16). The Baptist material is marked **D** and **D′**.

10 'Transcendental and earthly beginnings, this double gesture of centering and decentering . . . creates the central predicament for the subsequent narrative'; Werner Kelber, 'The Birth of a Beginning: John 1:1-18', *Semeia* 52 (1990), pp. 121–44 (121).

11 Morna Hooker, *Beginnings: Keys That Open the Gospels* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), p. xiii. For the Prologue as the key to this Gospel, see pp. 64–83.

this narrative but also of their sacred narrative of history, when God literally spoke creation into existence (Gen. 1).[12] By resonating this shared story of God's action in history, the evangelist grounds his story to come in the realm of the sacred scripture of Israel. This literary intention is furthered with the fullness of the initial clause: 'In the beginning was the Word' (λόγος). The use of *logos* terminology here allows for rich and varied symbolism, evoking God's revelation in Torah as well as the broader voice of the sages through the cultural milieu.[13] On the narrative level, it allows for a fundamental identification of the *Logos* with the creative activity of God. The 'word' introduced here corresponds with God's word of creation in the beginning.[14] Verse 2 parallels and affirms the claims of v. 1. The chiasm pushes forward as the nature and role of the *Logos* is presented as the vehicle for creation (v. 3) who is the giver of life (v. 4) and stands fast in the darkness lighting the way for humankind (vv. 4-5). This presentation affirms what 'came to be' (ἐγένετο) through the *Logos* that always existed (ἦν, v. 1). The final words of v. 5 further hint at the conflict to come between the Word of light and the darkness that exists among the people who are the caretakers of God's creation (Gen. 1.26-30). This leads to the introduction of John, the one who comes to give testimony to the light and who becomes the driving force to the Prologue's crux.

The next segment introduces the first human being (ἄνθρωπος) into the story, a man named John (vv. 6-8).[15] He is described as having come to be (ἐγένετο) like the rest of creation, in distinction to the eternally existing *Logos*. Simultaneously, however, the evangelist describes this man as 'sent from God', the only fully human character in the narrative identified as such. John, then, is special: he is sent into the world from God with a mission. Readers are alerted that this man is to be trusted. His mission is to testify (vv. 7-8). John bears witness (μαρτυρήσῃ) to the light of the eternal *Logos*. As he is the witness sent from God, everything John says

12 For the Prologue as a targumic exposition of Gen. 1.1-5, see Peder Borgen, 'Observations on the Targumic Character of the Prologue of John', *NTS* 16 (1970), pp. 288–95; idem, 'Logos was the True Light: Contributions to the Interpretation of the Prologue of John', *NovT* 14 (1972), pp. 115–30. Similarly, see Daniel Boyarin, 'The Gospel of the Memra: Jewish Binitarianism and the Prologue to John', *HTR* 94 (2001), pp. 243–84 (267).

13 *Logos* terminology has roots in the Jewish wisdom tradition as well as the Hellenistic philosophical tradition; Thomas Tobin, 'The Prologue of John and Hellenistic Jewish Speculation', *CBQ* 52 (1990), pp. 252–69. Derek Tovey suggests the *Logos* functions as a 'character-substitute' that prompts readers to wonder about the identity of this mysterious figure. The audience thus becomes determinative of the formative background of the *Logos* concept; 'Narrative Strategies in the Prologue and the Metaphor of ὁ λόγος in John's Gospel', *Pac* 15 (2002), pp. 138–53 (141).

14 Boyarin, 'Gospel of the Memra', pp. 255–9; Martin McNamara, 'Logos of the Fourth Gospel and Memra of the Palestinian Targum: Ex 12:42', *ExpTim* 79 (1968), pp. 115–17.

15 These verses, with their counterpart in v. 15, interject striking prose into the fluid hymn-like poetry of the rest of the Prologue, leading to the argument that they are interpolations to the *Vorlage* of the Prologue. John A. T. Robinson, for example, refers to these verses as 'rude interruptions'; 'The Relation of the Prologue to the Gospel of John', *NTS* 9 (1963), pp. 120–9. For the accepted argument that these verses are an integral connection to the body of the narrative to follow, see Morna Hooker, 'John the Baptist and the Johannine Prologue', *NTS* 16 (1970), pp. 354–8. Culpepper concurs and argues that the double articulation of John and his role is further evidence of the chiastic presentation of the Prologue ('Pivot', pp. 12–13).

about Jesus is true. Through the introduction of John and his role, the evangelist also introduces the concept of 'belief' in the Word. John the human witness is carefully distinguished from the light, but his purpose is crucial to point to the light and thus facilitate the process of belief (ἵνα πάντες πιστεύσωσιν δι' αὐτοῦ, v. 7).

Focus then returns to the light in vv. 9-10, flowing from the final words that introduce John. The light is further characterized by way of truth: τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀ λῃθινόν (v. 9). The true light whose reign reaches everyone was coming into the world. The incarnation foreshadowed here comes to pass in the counterpart to these verses, v. 14. The imminent conflict of the Gospel story is also reaffirmed, this time in terms of knowledge (v. 10; see v. 8). The *Logos*, instrumental giver of life and light in intimate relationship with God, comes into what is his own and is not received by his own people (v. 11). Giving, receiving and rejecting in relationship thus become the operative interactivity of the incarnation of the Word.

b. The Children of God: The Chiastic Centre of the Prologue (v. 12)

Readers now arrive at the pivot of the Prologue (v. 12b) and the hinges upon which the pivot turns (vv. 12a and 12c).[16] The force of the entire Prologue is poised on the fulcrum of the mission of the Word 'to give them power to become children of God'.[17] The evangelist's syntax allows the central assertion of the Word's giving action to be framed by the introduction (v. 12a) and description (v. 12c) of the potential recipients of the gift of the Word. These verses are thus corresponding phrases that hinge the core assertion of v. 12b, the crux of the Prologue's message.[18] This crux also determines the rest of the corresponding elements that balance the Prologue.[19] The claim is that those who receive the Word are given the power to become children of God, and one receives him in order to achieve this childhood by believing in his name (v. 12c).

c. Gift upon Gift: The Word Became Flesh and Dwelt among Us (vv. 13-18)

The remainder of the Prologue thus sheds light on what it means to become 'children of God' and how this could be the *telos* of John's Gospel. Verse 13 stands in apposition to v. 12 and also corresponds antithetically to v. 11. Verse 12c describes the role of 'receivers' in this relationship, while v. 13 describes the

16 Culpepper, 'Pivot', pp. 15–17.

17 Ernst Käsemann also identifies this climax: 'Verse 12 specifies the gift which is his to bestow and the goal of his redeeming effectiveness'; 'The Structure and Purpose of the Prologue to John's Gospel', in *New Testament Questions of Today* (London: SCM, 1969), pp. 151–2.

18 For correlation of these phrases (not identified as a chiasm), see Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (AB, 29; New York: Doubleday, 1966), p. 10.

19 The correspondence of receiving the Word to becoming children of God also suggests 'while Israel, which had been given the Torah, nevertheless rejected the Logos, some others, not necessarily Israel by virtue of flesh-and-blood parentage, became children of God' by receiving the *Logos* (Boyarin, 'Gospel of the Memra', p. 278). See also C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1960), p. 271.

role of God and the 'how' of becoming God's children. Spiritual birth comes from above.[20] Because of the Word's coming into the world and the rejection by his own, the privilege of becoming the covenant people of God likewise changes forever.[21] Concluding this initial characterization of the children of God, the evangelist returns to what God did to make this possible. Corresponding to the proclamation in vv. 9-10, v. 14 announces how the true light came into the world, who the *Logos* becomes, and what is given in the process: 'And the Word became flesh'. With regard to the Prologue's flow, these words announce an event long coming, made possible by the plan of God to re-envision the covenant people as children of spiritual, not human, birth. Just as God's action in the covenantal giving of Torah changed the nature of God's relationship with creation, the incarnation of the Word, while very much in accord with that history, once again decisively alters the manner by which creation relates to God.

The enfleshed *Logos* made his dwelling 'among us'. The narrator begins to speak inclusively from the perspective of the children of God.[22] The visible and powerful manifestation of the glory of God dwelling in creation also harks back to the revelation of the glory of God to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod. 34.15-16).[23] The glory of the incarnate Word is then described in the context of a father's uniquely begotten son who is πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας.[24] In keeping with the evocation of the OT concept of God's covenant love, a translation that takes seriously this careful diction and allows for the continuing articulation of the mission of the Word renders χάριτος with its more widely held denotation of 'an unexpected favour, a kindness' and reads the καί as epexegetical, thus allowing the second term, ἀληθείας, to explain the first. The phrase is thus 'full of a gift which is truth'.[25] The Word, giver of light and life, now incarnate, is filled with a new gift: truth. The giving and receiving of this gift of truth is intimately connected to the power to become children of God (v. 12b) and thus to the crux of the mission of the incarnate Word.[26]

This incarnate Word is then firmly grounded in history as the narrator returns in v. 15 to John, the human witness sent by God (vv. 6-8). In this role, John provides

20 Carson, *John*, p. 126; Brown, *John*, Vol. 1, p. 11; Kermode, 'St John as Poet', p. 10.

21 John Pryor, 'Covenant and Community in John's Gospel', *RTR* 47 (1988), pp. 44–51 (48). Heritage and ethnic identity have become irrelevant to birth from God.

22 This inclusive narration also draws the reader into the potentiality of becoming part of that group; Clayton R. Bowen, 'Notes on the Fourth Gospel', *JBL* 43 (1924), pp. 22–7 (22).

23 Brown, *John*, Vol. 1, p. 34. Morna Hooker reads all of John 1.14-18 as midrash on Exod. 33–34; 'Johannine Prologue and the Messianic Secret', *NTS* 21 (1974), pp. 40–58 (53–6).

24 Raymond Brown argues OT covenant love is evoked here (Exod. 34.6; *John*, Vol. 1, pp. 14, 35). See also Andrew Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John* (BNTC 4; London: Continuum and Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), p. 105.

25 Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (SP, 4; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1998), p. 45; LSJ, s.v. χάρις; BDF §442.9, 16.

26 Andrew Osborn asserts that the NT use of the word means more than truth in utterance: 'It refers to that truth in character which not only leads to truth in speech, but manifests integrity in action, together with a firm belief in that which is real and true as opposed to vanity and hypocrisy'; 'The Word Became Flesh: An Exposition of John 1:1-18', *Int* 3 (1949), pp. 42–9 (46). In OT terms, this also encompasses the relationship with God in covenantal obedience.

the first direct speech about the Word and the first direct speech of the Gospel. To assert both the correspondence of this verse to vv. 6-8 as well as the trustworthy nature of John's message, the evangelist places in John's mouth the narrator's major verbs about him thus far and has him repeat them, thereby confirming in direct speech what the narrator claimed for him.[27] Thus, John is the readers' accurate witness, but not the true light. This role of direct speech in Hebrew narrative is not uncommon: 'Phrases or whole sentences first stated by the narrator do not reveal their full significance until they are repeated, whether faithfully or with distortions, in direct speech by one or more of the characters.'[28] The technique here affirms the integrity of this human witness. John testifies that the Word is 'the one who comes' after him temporally, but ranks before him. He further explains that this is so 'because he was before me'. With this historical grounding and temporal designation in place, as well as the corresponding element to John's initial witness (vv. 6-8), the Prologue surges forward with the mission of the Word.

The narrator continues to speak in the collective voice of the children of God as he details the process of God's action in creation in terms of their reception of God's gifts (v. 16). What God has done through the enfleshed Word is give a gift upon a gift: χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος.[29] These gifts are illuminated in v. 17: 'For the law (ὁ νόμος) was given (ἐδόθη) through Moses; the gift which is truth (ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια) came to be through Jesus Christ.' The law was a gift from God, and the reference to Moses ensures that the covenantal gift of Torah resonates through this proclamation. The gift which is truth came to be (ἐγένετο), harking back to v. 14 (ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο). This gift of truth is likewise a gift of God that acts in history in covenant with creation. The giving of the gift of the law was God's revelatory covenantal activity at Sinai. The incarnation of the Word that is full of the gift which is truth is God's revelatory covenantal activity in and through Jesus. The final verse of the Prologue returns to the beginning while elucidating the relationship of Jesus as 'only son' who is turned toward the Father, now in history

27 Jeffrey Staley, 'The Structure of John's Prologue: Its Implications for the Gospel's Narrative Structure', *CBQ* 48 (1986), pp. 241–63 (252).

28 Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), p. 182. Jo-Ann A. Brant (*Dialogue and Drama*, pp. 77–8) would refer to this as *Redundant Narration*, a technique whereby the narrator uses language that refers to objects, time and place that is then also used by the characters in dialogue (usually verbatim). This technique confirms the veracity or integrity of those characters.

29 I continue to follow Moloney for the rendering of χάρις; *John*, p. 46. Typically the preposition ἀντί is translated *upon* to render the idea of a superabundance of grace, though this translation is questionable. For more detail, see Ruth B. Edwards, '*Charin anti charitos* (John 1.16): Grace and Law in the Johannine Prologue', *JSNT* 32 (1988), pp. 3–15. I retain the English 'upon' to include the full range of meaning – since ἀντί could denote 'instead of', 'for', or 'on behalf of' in addition to the stricter 'instead of' (BDAG, s.v. ἀντί) – and to avoid reference to replacement or supersessionism, a tragic misreading of the Fourth Gospel. As Boyarin asserts, 'Jesus comes to fulfil the mission of Moses, not to displace it' ('Gospel of the *Memra*', p. 280). See the evidence in John Suggit, 'John XVII. 17, Ο ΛΟΓΟΣ Ο ΣΟΣ ΑΛΗΘΕΙΑ ΕΣΤΙΝ', *JTS* 35 (1984), pp. 104–17.

(v. 18; see vv. 1-2).[30] He is the one who makes God known (ἐξηγήσατο), and in this way gives humankind the ability to become children of God. This is indeed a new covenantal move in history, but the gift of truth in no way supersedes the gift of the law, for this is the Word made flesh. The remainder of the Gospel will narrate the 'how' of the covenantal claim that the Prologue introduces. In essence, the new covenant gives the power to become children of God which comes to pass in the receiving of the gift that is truth as revealed by the Word incarnate, Jesus Christ the only son who is in perfect relationship with God the Father.

III. John the Baptist: The Prologue Embodied in the Gospel Action (1.19-42)

The function of the Prologue in the Gospel of John, as in Greek literature in general, is to give a synthesis of the story to come, to communicate to readers at the onset just who the protagonist is and what he has done. The revelatory impetus of this story is thus the in-breaking of God into human history through Jesus Christ. Misunderstanding occurring throughout the dialogues of the story to come is rooted in this in-breaking and occurs because the characters have not read the Prologue. Only the storyteller and the audience know the Prologue. This literary technique draws readers into the narrative world of the evangelist as insiders and gives them everything they need to know to make right decisions about Jesus along the way. John the Baptist, introduced by the narrator so effectively in 1.6-8 and 15 as the human witness sent from God, opens the narrative as the first character in the story with dialogical force. Since the narrator placed the readers' didactic trust in this man named John, this character, upon launching the story, thus becomes the Prologue embodied. He is the one character who always witnesses accurately to the Word made flesh.[31] His first dialogue at 1.19-28, followed by the monologue of 1.29-34, together with his final initial witness in 1.35-42, provide readers with the grounds from which to form decisions about the characters in the narrative, and about their own belief in the Word.

a. Testimony Declared (1.19-28)

All of 1.19-42 occurs over the course of three consecutive days (1.29, 35) during which John testifies, just as the Prologue articulates he was sent to do. The detail of John's witness over this three-day progression parallels the pattern set forth in vv. 6-8. On day one John declares he is not the light (vv. 19-28), on day two he witnesses positively to the light (vv. 29-34), and on day three people begin to believe through him (vv. 35-42).[32] On the first day John is approached by a

30 Francis J. Moloney, 'John 1:18 "in the Bosom of" or "Turned Towards" the Father?', *AusBR* 31 (1983), pp. 63–71.

31 Cornelis Bennema, 'The Character of John in the Fourth Gospel', *JETS* 52 (2009), pp. 271–84 (272–4).

32 C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 248; Brown, *John*, Vol. 1, p. 45; Dirk G. van der Merwe, 'The Historical and

delegation and finds himself in dialogue over his identity. His task at this point is primarily to assert their misconceptions about who he is and what he is doing; thus his initial testimony is largely negative.

The opening of this scene connects the action of the day at hand with information provided in the Prologue: 'And this is the testimony (καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ μαρτυρία) given by John' (v. 19). Both the demonstrative pronoun and the subject noun are indices that point back to John's mission as stated in the Prologue and focus readers' attention to the beginning of the action proper. John is first interrogated by a delegation 'sent . . . from Jerusalem' (ἀπέστειλαν . . . ἐξ Ἰεροσολύμων). The one who is sent from God (ἀπεσταλμένος παρὰ θεοῦ, v. 6) is confronted by 'the Jews' sent by others of this world. They are identified as 'priests and Levites', which alerts readers that they will be interested in John's activity as it pertains to ritual purity. They approach him with the question that will mark these first days and, indeed, the first part of the body of the Gospel: 'Who are you?'[33] Again, their use of a deictic pronoun in direct speech, this time the personal pronoun σύ, emphasizes and focuses attention on the person of John and the identity and self-identification in question.

The beginning of John's testimony is a response that characterizes what he is not. 'He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ"' (v. 20). The pleonastic introductory formula of his initial response correlates the content of the testimony (ἡ μαρτυρία, v. 19) with the act of confessing (ὡμολό γησεν [twice], v. 20). When confronted with official interrogation, the witness can choose to confess or deny his identity and self-understanding, and John chooses to confess.[34] In response to their general question, 'Who are you?' John chooses to turn the dialogue to the question of Christology.[35] He asserts, 'I am not the Christ' (ἐγὼ οὐκ εἰμὶ ὁ χριστός). Using his own deictic pronoun ἐγώ, John points negatively to his own agency in a manner that will correspond to the positive claim that Jesus will make time and again over the course of the Gospel.[36]

Theological Significance of John the Baptist as He is Portrayed in John 1', *Neot* 33 (1999), pp. 267–92 (273, n. 18); opposing Jeffrey Staley who sees ironic tension between John's portrayal in the Prologue and 1.19-28; *The Print's First Kiss: A Rhetorical Investigation of the Implied Reader in the Fourth Gospel* (SBLDS, 82; Atlanta: Scholars, 1988), pp. 76–7.

33 The delegation asks John this at 1.19 and 1.22. This identity question is put in various ways to Jesus and to others about Jesus throughout his ministry (5.12, 8.25, 9.13-41 and 12.34).

34 Moloney (*John*, p. 58) correlates John's act of confessing with the Johannine community's situation where 'uncompromising confession of Jesus as the Messiah was leading to exclusion from the synagogue'. The verb ὁμολογέω also appears at 9.22 and 12.42 where synagogue exclusion is at stake.

35 Although, historically, questions of the Baptist's messianic claims could have circulated and spurred this delegation (Barrett, *St John*, p. 172), the rhetorical force of John turning the dialogue to the question of Christology affirms the Baptist's role as the witness sent from God.

36 ἐγώ εἰμι . . . (4.26; 6.20, 35, 41, 48, 51; 8.12, 24, 28, 58; 10.7, 9, 11, 14; 11.25; 13.19; 14.6; 15.1, 5; 18.5, 8; Barrett, *St John*, p. 172). For the negative Christological nature of this assertion and its effect on later positive claims by Jesus, see Edwin Freed, 'Ego Eimi in John 1:20 and 4:25', *CBQ* 41 (1979), pp. 288–91.

The delegation continues with its quest for identification, 'What then?' (v. 21). Even as they take the lead in suggesting possible titular claims, dialogically they continue to point emphatically to the subjectivity of John's role with the personal pronoun: 'Are you Elijah? . . . Are you the prophet?' (σὺ Ἠλίας εἶ; . . . ὁ προφήτης εἶ σύ;). With his unambiguous Christological refutation of v. 20, John's succeeding denials progress more concisely, cutting short any designs his interlocutors may have for information or even the dialogical upper hand: 'And he said, "I am not" . . . And he answered, "No."'[37] With the transitional conjunction οὖν of v. 22 ('so . . .'), one can almost feel the frustration of the interrogators as they find themselves where they began: 'Who are you?'[38] They must have an answer 'for those who sent us', but they concede all identification power, and thus the dialogical lead, to John: 'What do you say about yourself?'

Only then does John testify positively regarding who he is by accepting the role of the Isaian voice (v. 23; see Isa. 40.3).[39] The canonical Gospels agree in giving John the Baptist this Isaian voice (Mk 1.3 // Matt. 3.3 // Lk. 3.4), but unlike the Synoptic evangelists who narrate this identification, the Fourth Evangelist allows John the witnessing agency to give voice to his own self-identification. The Baptist 'says' (ἔφη) that he is the 'voice' (φωνή) 'crying out in the wilderness' in order to prepare the people to 'make straight the way of the Lord'.[40] He allies his own voice with that in the book of the prophet Isaiah and finally positively asserts his testimonial role. Isaiah refers to the role of the angels, who level hills and fill valleys to prepare the way in the wilderness for the children of Israel to return to Judah from the Babylonian captivity. By contrast, 'John the Baptist is to prepare a road, not for God's people to return to the promised land, but for God to come to His people'.[41] However, these two contexts are not mutually exclusive. As the human link between the Prologue and the Gospel narrative, John also prepares a way for the new children of Israel to receive the Word and come to the promised gift of truth, thereby becoming children of God.

37 For Jewish expectations of the eschatological figures of the Messiah, Elijah, the prophet (like Moses), see Brown, *John*, Vol. 1, pp. 46–50. Regardless of his conception in the larger Gospel tradition, the Baptist here gives no indication of himself in the role of Elijah; John A. T. Robinson, 'Elijah, John and Jesus, and Essay in Detection', *NTS* 4 (1957–58), pp. 263–81. This could result from the Evangelist's desire that the Christ should not be interpreted as dependent upon the Baptist; Marinus de Jonge, 'John the Baptist and Elijah in the Fourth Gospel', in Robert Fortna and Beverly Gaventa (eds), *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John in Honor of J. Louis Martyn* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), pp. 299–309.

38 Daniel B. Wallace (*Greek Grammar*, p. 674) notes that the 'transitional force of οὖν' sometimes approaches 'inferential force, as here' (2.18, 20; 3.25; 4.33, 46; 5.19; 6.60, 67; 7.25, 40; 8.13, 57; 9.10, 16).

39 For detail, see Martinus J. J. Menken, 'The Quotation from Isa 40:3 in John 1:23', *Bib* 66 (1985), pp. 190–205.

40 For contrast of the voice (φωνή) of John and the word (λόγος) of Jesus, see Oscar Cullmann, *Christology of the New Testament* (trans. Shirley Guthrie and Charles A. M. Hall; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), p. 260.

41 Brown, *John*, Vol. 1, p. 50.