

The Messiah by the *Vox Populi* versus the Messiah by the *Vox Dei*.

— An examination of the Relationship between Jesus of Nazareth and John the Baptist in the New Testament. Part IV: The Gospel of John. —

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Abstract

This is the last contribution to a series of studies regarding the relationship between the John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth. This study concerns the presentation of their relation in the Gospel of John, which in general differs significantly from the Synoptic Gospels in the presentation of this relationship. It concerns not only the accounts found in the Synoptic traditions but absent from the Johannine tradition, and *vice versa*, but also the basic statements regarding the dignity of Jesus and the function of John the Baptist, in which Jesus is the incarnate Son of God and John is the witness to Jesus, who leads the people to believe in Jesus as the Savior (Messiah). The main focus in John's witness is placed on Jesus' divine dignity.

Introduction

While in studies of the Synoptic Gospels the synoptic problem has been a major focus of scholars' interest, in the study of John's Gospel the focus has been on the problem of the redaction of the Gospel. The original version of the Fourth Gospel was subjected to several redactions at various times and for different reasons, before its final canonical text as we have it in the New Testament was established. This presents a challenge for those who attempt to study the whole Gospel or who are interested in one particular topic. My interest here is in one such limited topic, namely, the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth. There are five accounts relating to this topic in John's Gospel: Jn 1: 6–42; Jn 3: 22–36; Jn 4: 1–3; 5: 33–39; 10: 40–42. The redaction problem appears in the two largest accounts with which this study is concerned (Jn 1: 6–42; Jn 3: 22–36), which I treat here as two separate accounts of John's witness to Jesus.¹ The other three shorter accounts (Jn 4: 1–3; 5: 33–39; 10: 40–42) do

¹ Concerning the redaction problem of Jn 6: 1–42 and Jn 3: 22–36, cf. A. Kuśmirek, *Posłannictwo Jezusa Chrystusa Według Czwartej Ewangelii* [The Mission of Jesus Christ according to the Fourth Gospel], Warsaw, Vocatio 2003, 118–122; 129–131.

not involve redactional problems.

Because the topic of the relationship between John and Jesus as found in the Fourth Gospel stems from an independent tradition, in the structure of the study I will not include a comparative study between the different traditions regarding the same or similar accounts, as is usual in study of the Synoptic Gospels.

1. John the Baptist and his testimony (Jn 1: 6–42)

The first testimony of John the Baptist is not only the most extensive one, but also the most comprehensive in terms of the progression of the narrative, the socio-political background, the theological implications, and the presentation of the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth. This account, in fact, forms the basis of the general layout of all presentations of this relationship in the Fourth Gospel.

1.1. The text

⁶ There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came for a witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light but came that he might bear witness of the light. ⁹ There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. ¹¹ He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. ¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, ¹³ who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ John bore witness of Him, and cried out, saying, “This was He of whom I said, He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.” ¹⁶ For of His fulness we have all received, and grace upon grace. ¹⁷ For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him. ¹⁹ And this is the witness of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” ²⁰ And he confessed, and did not deny, and he confessed, “I am not the Christ.” ²¹ And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” and he said, “I am not”. “Are you the prophet?” And he answered, “No.” ²² They said then to him, “Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?” ²³ He said, “I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as Isaiah the prophet said.” ²⁴ Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵ And they asked him, and said to him, “Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” ²⁶ John answered them saying, “I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know. ²⁷ It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.” ²⁸ These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing. ²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming to him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is He on behalf of whom I said, after me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me. ³¹ And I did not recognize Him, but in order that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water.” ³² And John bore witness saying, “I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove

out of heaven, and He remained upon Him.³³ And I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.³⁴ And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”³⁵ Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples,³⁶ and he looked upon Jesus as He walked, and said, “behold, the Lamb of God!”³⁷ And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.³⁸ And Jesus turned, and beheld them following, and said to them, “What do you seek?” And they said to Him, “Rabbi (which translated means Teacher), where are You staying?”³⁹ He said to them, “Come, and you will see.” They came therefore and saw where He was staying; and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother.⁴¹ He found first his own brother Simon, and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which translated means Christ).⁴² He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him, and said, “You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter). (Jn 1: 6–42)

1.2. Analysis of the text

The narrative concerning the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth in the Gospel of John begins in an unusual way, since instead of a casual introduction of both agents John proceeds directly with strictly theological statements regarding Jesus and John the Baptist that from the beginning shape the paradigm concerning each of the persons. It starts with an exposition of the divine dignity of Jesus as the Word, the Life, and the Light (Jn 1: 1–5). The Word – λόγος (רַבִּי) is eternal like God, “*the Word was with God*” and “*the Word was God*”.² Also, Jesus is the Life (Jn 1: 3–4), which means He is the source of all that exists (ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν – in Him was life), since He created the universe from nothing. Finally, Jesus is the Light of humankind, because He reveals the will of God the Father concerning eternal life.³ In this way John at the beginning of His Gospel makes perfectly clear that he recognizes Jesus as God, who for the sake of humankind incarnated Himself in the material world and was rejected by His own creation (Jn 1: 8–10).

After clarifying in a very theological way the dignity of Jesus, John continues with an exposition of the dignity of the second agent, John the Baptist (Jn 1: 6–8). John begins with an obvious statement, presenting John the Baptist as a man (Jn 1: 6), not God or an angel. As man John was chosen by God to appear before the nation in order to bring witness to Jesus (the Light). By his witness (his ministry) the people had the opportunity to recognize Jesus as the Son of God (Messiah) and believe in Him (Jn 1: 7). In this way, John indicates the Baptist’s dignity (a prophet chosen by God), his purpose (to witness) and his goal (to make the people believe in Jesus). Although this description shows sufficiently the total difference in dignity between these two agents, John makes the additional clarification that John the Baptist was not the Light, hence not like Jesus, but he is the one to serve Jesus (Jn 1: 8).⁴ John the Baptist’s

² On the meaning of the word λόγος in Greek literature and philosophy, cf. F. Martin, W. M. Wright IV, *The Gospel of John*, Baker Academic: Grand Rapids 2015, 33.

³ S. Mędala, *The Gospel According to John*, Święty Paweł: Łódź 2008, 261.

⁴ It may suggest that John the Evangelist was aware of the continuing existence in the apostolic period of a group of followers of John the Baptist.

service to Jesus is presented in the narrative of Jn 1: 15, where his task as witness includes proclaiming that he himself is not the Light, but the One who comes after him, He is the Light.⁵

In the next part of the narrative John the Evangelist returns to the topic of Jesus to provide details about Jesus' dignity that have already been presented in the account of Jn 1: 1–5. This time the author focuses on the incarnation and the consequences of rejection or acceptance of Jesus (Jn 1: 9–14, 16–18). Between these two accounts the Evangelist includes a short account about John the Baptist (Jn 1: 16), where the meaning of the Baptist's witness to Jesus, which was presented in Jn 1: 6–7, is made explicit by John the Baptist. The account contains one statement and three comparative phrases: the statement concerns Jesus as the One about whom John speaks in the three phrases (*He who comes after me has passed ahead of me, because he existed before me*). The first phrase *He who comes after me* strongly points to the appearance of John chronologically before Jesus, which for some people (but not for John) may be understood as indicating John's superiority over Jesus in a teacher/pupil relationship, since his messianic activities had started first.⁶ In the second phrase *[he] has passed ahead of me*, John, in order to avoid a potential misinterpretation of his first saying, declares that Jesus was before him, which is a contradiction if it is taken strictly chronologically, since Jesus was born after John and the messianic activities of John started before Jesus' messianic activities. However, John's saying (*[he] has passed ahead of me*) has a strictly theological meaning, which is shown more fully in the last phrase *because he existed before me*, where the term "exist" refers to the term "word" used in Jn 1: 1–3.⁷ The last phrase makes clear that John is not speaking in chronological but in theological terms that serve his purpose, namely, to underline the Word's (Jesus') preexistence with God.

John the Evangelist in the prologue of his Gospel uses the same terms regarding the dignities of John the Baptist and Jesus. Although they differ radically in dignity John presents this in a complementary manner, which allows us to say the same about the relationship between John and Jesus as it is presented in the following narrative (Jn 1: 19–42).

The next narrative (Jn 1: 19–42) has three parts: the first concerns the Baptist's relationship with the authorities of the Jerusalem Temple (Jn 1: 19–28); the second concerns John's witness to Jesus (Jn 1: 29–34); and the last regards John's disciples following Jesus (Jn 1: 35–42).

The first part (Jn 1: 19–28) presents the expectation of the Temple authorities, represented by the priests and Levites, regarding the probable messianic dignity of John, as is suggested indirectly in Jn 1: 21. The question "*who are You*" concerns John's identity, and is occasioned

⁵ In Jn 5: 35 Jesus calls John the Baptist *the lamp of God* (*He was the lamp that was burning and was shining, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light*) but not the light. Since John is the one who will testify to the Light and because of his testimony the nation may recognize Jesus as the Light, the expression *the Lamp* suggests the very distinguished role of John the Baptist, but it still has a preparatory character. R.E. Brown, *The Gospel of John (I–IX)*, Doubleday & Company: Garden City 1978, 224.

⁶ The presentation of the relationship between Jesus and John in the Synoptic Gospels shows that some people had this opinion (Mk 6: 14–16; Mt 14: 1–2; Lk 9: 7–9).

⁷ It is worth noting that John in this saying goes from the earthly perspective to the divine perspective by using three different verbs ἐρχόμενος – *come*, γέγονεν – *passed ahead*, ἦν – *existed*.

by his activity in baptizing at Bethany on the far side of the Jordan (Jn 1: 28). Although the question itself does not express it (Jn 1: 20), John's answer directly points to the implication that the Temple authorities had John's possible messianic dignity in mind. In a very direct manner John rejects this possibility by stating the truth without further explanation: *I am not the Christ*. This answer probably provoked the messengers to ask him if he considers himself to be Elijah, who was expected to "restore the tribes of Jacob" according to Sir 48: 4–12 (Mal 3: 23–24), however his answer was even shorter than before: *I am not*.⁸ The last question asked by the messengers is very general and concerns the prophetic dignity of John the Baptist, but even to this question he answers with no more than a simple "no" (Jn 1: 21).⁹ The questions of the delegation led them nowhere but prepared them to learn John's self-understanding (Jn 1: 23), which is presented indirectly in the form of a quotation from Is 40: 3 that underlines that the eschatological times are at hand. John attempts to show to the people sent by the Temple authorities that the Messiah is coming, and that John himself only plays some role in his coming. It seems that John's answer was not correctly understood because his answer prompted the Pharisees to question his right to baptize if he is not the Christ nor Elijah nor a Prophet.¹⁰ John's answer seems to have little connection with the question itself, but it underscores John's subordination to the person coming after John, who is already present among the people of Israel, even though he is still unknown to them (Jn 1: 26–27).¹¹ The answer to this question is placed in the narrative regarding John's testimony about Jesus (Jn 1: 29–34) where John directly says, "And I did not recognize Him, but in order that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water" (Jn 1: 31).

In this first part (Jn 1: 19–28) it is shown that the nation had some expectations about John as a leader (Jn 1: 19). At the same time the narrative shows the total rejection of these expectations by John the Baptist (Jn 1: 20–23).

The second part (Jn 1: 29–34) regards John the Baptist's testimony about Jesus. The context of the testimony is Jesus' coming toward John (Jn 1: 29), which offered an opportunity for John to make several declarations about Jesus. The narrative begins with the phrase "the

⁸ In John's Gospel, John the Baptist is not identified with Elijah, unlike in the Synoptic Gospels, where he is often clearly identified as Elijah. M.M. Thompson, *John. A Commentary*, West John Knox Press: Louisville 2015, 44.

⁹ Contrary to the presentation of this issue in the Synoptic Gospels, the Gospel of John completely rejects all people's expectations of John the Baptist. This may indirectly indicate that John's actions were not intended to meet the expectations of the people but were intended solely to serve Jesus as a witness. F. Martin, W. M. Wright IV, *The Gospel of John*.

¹⁰ Concerning the discussion of the scholars concerning sudden appearance of the Pharisees in the narrative, despite the fact that they were not mentioned in Jn 1: 19, cf. R.E. Brown, *The Gospel of John (I–IX)*, 43–44.

¹¹ Contrary to the synoptic Gospels, John does not directly link his baptism with water, with the baptism of Jesus with the Holy Spirit, which John mentions in the context of the anointing of Jesus with the Holy Spirit. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, John Evangelist does not directly connect the baptism of John the Baptist with water, with Jesus' baptism with the Holy Spirit, which is mentioned by him in the context of Jesus' anointing with the Holy Spirit (Jn 1: 32). S. Mędala, *The Gospel According to John*, 297–298. Note the fact that John's narrative does not mention the baptism of Jesus by John.

next day” that appears also in this section in Jn 1: 35 and Jn 1: 43 to indicate a new topic, suggesting several separate events rather than a developing narrative of the same event. Although the author indicates that Jesus was coming toward John, the narrative does not contain a direct account concerning Jesus’ baptism by John. The first testimony of John about Jesus: “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” relates directly to the soteriological interpretation characteristic of Christian theology that does not correlate exactly with the Jewish interpretation.¹² John’s relating the Lamb with “taking away the sins of the world” is unique to the New Testament, and it is John’s theological understanding of Jesus’ work.¹³ Jesus is the Lamb that was sacrificed, and this sacrifice is the direct cause of the forgiveness of the sins of the world.¹⁴ The second testimony of John concerns Jesus’ messianic dignity (*This is He on behalf of whom I said, “After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me”*) that was already presented in Jn 1: 15, where its function was to show the difference between John and Jesus. However, here its function is to point to the Lamb of God as the Messiah, and it is given a clear soteriological meaning. The third testimony shows that it was the first meeting of John and Jesus, despite John’s conviction that his activity in baptizing was indispensable for the revealing of the Messiah.¹⁵ The fourth testimony (Jn 1: 32–34) regards the anointing of Jesus with the Holy Spirit (Jn 1: 32), an event that allows John to recognize the Messiah (Jn 1: 31). God established John to be witness to Jesus, and the anointing with the Holy Spirit is the sign preceding the appearance of the Messiah who will baptize with the Holy Spirit (Jn 1: 33).¹⁶ All these lead John to the concluding statement that Jesus is the Chosen One of God, and he makes this known to the world (Jn 1: 34).¹⁷

The second part (Jn 1: 29–34) offers two important details regarding the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus. The first concerns John as the person who shows Jesus to be the Messiah (the Lamb of God) to the world. The second concerns the source of John’s witness to Jesus, which is identical with the source of Jesus’ dignity, namely God Himself, who revealed to John the sign that will point to the appearance of the Chosen One of God.

The third part of the narrative (Jn 1: 35–42) contributes the most to the topic of this study,

¹² In the Jewish tradition (Lev 16: 8–18) it is the scapegoat that carries Israel’s sins into the wilderness. The lamb never was used for this purpose, but lamb was used as a guilt offering or as offering for cleansing (Lev 9: 3–13; 14: 2–13). M.M. Thompson, *John. A Commentary*, 46–47.

¹³ In the Book of Isaiah there is a text that includes the idea of “lamb” (Is 53: 7) and “carrying the sins of all” (Is 53: 12), however these two expressions do not form one idiomatic expression as in Jn 1: 29. For a short discussion concerning Jesus as the Lamb of God (Jn 1: 29) that includes the three principle ideas (1. The Lamb of God as the apocalyptic lamb; 2. The Lamb as the Suffering Servant; 3. The Lamb as the paschal lamb), cf. R.E. Brown, *The Gospel of John (I–IX)*, 58–63.

¹⁴ Note the universal aspect of taking away the sins, which here refers to all sins, without making any distinction or imposing any condition.

¹⁵ This testimony shows the preparatory character of John’s baptism with water, and it is a more detailed version of his witness as given in Jn 1: 6–7. S. Mędala, *The Gospel According to John*, 304.

¹⁶ F. Martin, W. M. Wright IV, *The Gospel of John*, 46.

¹⁷ M.M. Thompson, *John. A Commentary*, 48.

showing the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth on the level of their disciples. The narrative starts with the characteristic indicator that separates events (*the next day*) and shows another level of the development of the narrative. The main point of the narrative regards John's introduction of two of his disciples to the truth that Jesus is the Lamb of God (Jn 1: 35). The narrative points to the fact that when Jesus came again to the place where John was baptizing, John gave testimony to his disciples that Jesus is the Lamb of God, however this time (unlike Jn 1: 29) without including the soteriological implication. The result is that these two disciples begin to follow Jesus (Jn 1: 30), probably not because of a decision of their own, but following a suggestion, perhaps even a direct order, by John. This supposition may be confirmed in the narrative where John's characteristic as the witness to Jesus was to work in order that Jesus may appear to the world (cf. Jn 1: 30). The information provided in Jn 1: 30 directly suggests that the first disciples of Jesus were former disciples of John the Baptist. This implies also that John's testimony to Jesus included the preparation of the disciples who will follow the Chosen One of God when He appears.¹⁸ The narrative shows that Jesus, without any hesitation, accepted John's disciples' request to become his own the disciples (Jn 1: 38–39). Only one disciple, Andrew, is identified, while the second disciple remains anonymous (Jn 1: 40). This is probably due to the narrative strategy that makes Andrew, the former disciple of John the Baptist, the disciple who introduces Jesus the Messiah to his brother Simon Peter (Jn 1: 40), whom Jesus at their first meeting renamed Cephas, which means Rock (Jn 1: 42).¹⁹

This short, schematic and quickly narrated account, without any exposition of the background or reason for the outcome, indirectly creates the circumstance that reinforced the author's theological intent to show that not only the appearance of the Messiah but also the followers of the Messiah have been to some extent prepared by John the Baptist and his disciples.²⁰ It is also noteworthy that in the narrative of John's Gospel regarding the recruiting of the first five disciples, two (Andrew and the unnamed disciple) were directly connected to John the Baptist, while the third, probably Peter, was familiar with John the Baptist's movement, but he was not directly involved in it. The two last disciples (Philip and Nathanael) were not familiar with John's movement. This shows that while the first two disciples were former followers of John the Baptist the group of twelve came from different strands within

¹⁸ The information found in Jn 1: 30 differs greatly from the information concerning Jesus' disciples provided in the Synoptic Gospels (Mk 1: 16–20; Mt 4: 18–22; Lk 5: 1–11). There is no satisfactory explanation for this contrast. Cf. R.E. Brown, *The Gospel of John (I–IX)*, 78–80. We suggest taking the information in Jn 1: 30 in a strictly theological context rather than in chronological terms. In the Fourth Gospel, John the Baptist does everything for Jesus, but he does nothing for himself or by himself (Jn 1: 29–34).

¹⁹ The narrative introducing Simon Peter is strongly theologized and directly points to Peter's primacy among Jesus' disciples, even though Andrew became Jesus' disciples before Peter. S. Mędala, *The Gospel According to John*, 328–329. Noteworthy also is the fact that only the Fourth Gospel uses the transliteration (*Messiah*) of the original Hebrew term משיח, while the other Evangelists use the Greek term (Χριστός).

²⁰ Although the Synoptic Gospels have different narratives regarding the recruiting of Jesus' disciples, Ac 2: 21–22 seems to follow the author of the Fourth Gospel by connecting directly the discipleship of Jesus's followers with John the Baptist's activity in baptizing. Cf. R.E. Brown, *The Gospel of John (I–IX)*, 77.

Judaism.²¹

The third part of the narrative shows directly that the first disciples of Jesus were former disciples of John, who himself urged them to follow Jesus, which is another aspect of his preparatory function in the realization of God's plan, and it leads naturally to a strong cooperative connection between these two movements. The group of John's disciples was not the only source from which Jesus' disciples came, but they were the first stones that went towards building up the group of Jesus' disciples.

2. The second (and last) testimony of John the Baptist (Jn 3: 22–36)

After the very extensive testimony of John the Baptist in the narrative of Jn 1: 6–42, the author of the Gospel presents another, and at the same time the last direct testimony of John about Jesus (Jn 3: 22–36).²² Although, the second part of this testimony (Jn 3: 27–36) mostly contains information that has already been included in the first testimony of John (Jn 1: 6–42), the first part of the second testimony contains new and unique material that contributes much to the topic of this study.

2.1. The text

²² After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing. ²³ And John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and they were coming and were being baptized. ²⁴ For John had not yet been thrown into prison. ²⁵ There arose therefore a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purification. ²⁶ And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have borne witness, behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him." ²⁷ John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing, unless it has been given him from heaven". ²⁸ You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before Him. ²⁹ He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. And so, this joy of mine has been made full. ³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease. ³¹ He who comes from above is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. ³² What He has seen and heard, of that He bears witness; and no man receives His witness. ³³ He who has received His witness has set his seal to this, that God is true. ³⁴ For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure. ³⁵ The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand. ³⁶ He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (Jn 3: 22–36)

2.2. Text analysis

The text may be divided into three parts: the first (Jn 3: 22–24) contains the narrative background including extremely interesting information about the performance of baptism.

²¹ S. Mędala, *The Gospel According to John*, 316–320.

²² M.M. Thompson, *John. A Commentary*, 93.

The second part (Jn 3: 25–26) concerns the agreement between John the Baptist and his disciples following a discussion on Jesus' baptism activity.²³ The third part (Jn 3: 27–36) contains the second testimony of John the Baptist, which is a direct outcome of the discussion between John and his disciples. The testimony similar to the second part of the first testimony is presented in a strongly soteriological perspective, although the testimony itself is presented in a poetical and figurative manner.

The first part (Jn 3: 22–24) presents the socio-geographical background of John's testimony and it offers a quite different version of Jesus' activity in comparison with the versions known from the Synoptic Gospels. According to the author of the Fourth Gospel, Jesus and his disciples were actively involved in missionary activity in the region of Judea, where they were also baptizing (Jn 3: 22).²⁴ This information is not given in the Synoptic tradition. Even more peculiar is the information strongly suggesting that Jesus' and John's activity as Baptists, at least at the end of John's ministry (Jn 3: 24), were concurrent (Jn 3: 23). It points to the conclusion that the baptism of Jesus (more precisely the baptism of Jesus' disciples) was of the same character as the baptism of John.²⁵ More information about the kind of baptism performed by John and Jesus is indirectly provided in the second part of the narrative (Jn 3: 25–26), where the author mentions the discussion between the disciples of John and a Jew, during which the issue of "purification" seems to have been the topic of the debate (Jn 3: 25).²⁶ The next verse 26 contains John's disciples' report regarding Jesus' activity and its consequences. Even though verses 25 and 26 form one unit, there is a sudden change of agent between these two verses, where in Jn 3: 25 the agents are the disciples of John the Baptist and a certain Jew, in Jn 3: 26 the agents are the disciples of John and John the Baptist with whom they talk about Jesus.²⁷ This puzzle could be easily solved if the Jew in Jn 3: 25 be identified as Jesus, who is the subject in Jn 3: 26. This interpretation, however, while making logical sense for Jn 3: 25–26, is not supported by the progress of the narrative.²⁸ The more important element for this study, however, is the complaint of the disciples which the author presents in this way: "*Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have borne witness, behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him.*" The sentence offers several important details regarding the relationship between John's disciples and Jesus. The sentence has following structure ABA¹B¹:

²³ F. Martin, W. M. Wright IV, *The Gospel of John*, 77.

²⁴ More specifications about Jesus and his disciples' baptizing activity will be provided in Jn 4: 1–3.

²⁵ R.E. Brown, *The Gospel of John (I–IX)*, 151.

²⁶ This kind of debate was common between the many religious sects of Judaism, and it covered a wide variety of topics. In this context it concerns in a very general way the value of the baptism performed by John and Jesus in comparison with the standard Jewish purificatory rites. S. Mędala, *The Gospel According to John*, 438; R.E. Brown, *The Gospel of John (I–IX)*, 151–152.

²⁷ The manuscript P⁶⁶ has the plural (Jews), but most manuscripts have the singular.

²⁸ On the narrative level the text of Jn 3: 25–26 probably has two levels of redaction, the first coming from the so-called John I (verses 23 and 25) and the second from the so-called John II-B (verses 24 and 26–30). S. Mędala, *The Gospel According to John*, 434–436.

A (*Rabbi*) presents John's disciples respecting him as the teacher,

B (*He who was with you beyond the Jordan*) shows the previous relationship between John and Jesus,

A¹ (*to whom you have borne witness*) refers to John's evaluation of Jesus,

B¹ (*behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him*) seems to present a comparison made by John's disciples.

Following the current text of the Gospel of John, the disciples of John after arguing with "a Jew" went back to the Rabbi complaining about Jesus, who (at least in the eyes of the John's disciples) is subordinated to John, since he was the disciple of John during John's activity beyond the Jordan River (Jn 3: 26), during which John bore witness to the dignity of Jesus. Now, however, Jesus is no longer following John but, on the contrary, he seems to have become a rival to John's movement because he also began to baptize, and with greater success than John.²⁹ John's disciples seem disturbed by this situation, and at the same time worried about the future of John's movement, since the people begin to prefer Jesus to John the Baptist. The honest and also almost embarrassing account presents one of the characteristics regarding the relationship between these two movements, which to some extent reveals an attitude of defiance on the side of John's disciples towards Jesus' messianic movement.³⁰ In an indirect way, Jn 3: 26 strongly suggests that after Jesus' messianic movement started in the region of Judea, John's movement seems to begin to lose its impact.³¹ This may explain the way in which John the Baptist reacts to his disciples' complaint: he unconditionally subordinates himself to Jesus and His movement through this second testimony (Jn 3: 27–36). Jn 3: 27 attests John's conviction that Jesus' movement is from heaven, which naturally underlines its superiority over John's movement. Next, in Jn 3: 28 John again declares that he is not the Messiah but the one who was sent before the Messiah, which is a repetition of a statement that has been presented already (Jn 1: 19–23). After two direct declarations, John changes to a figurative exposition using the figures of the bridegroom and the bridegroom's friend to portray the relationship between himself and Jesus, where the joy of the bridegroom is shared by the bridegroom's friend (Jn 3: 29a). Based on this figurative exposition John confesses that he felt like the

²⁹ R.E. Brown, *The Gospel of John (I–IX)*, 154–155.

³⁰ One of the problems in the study of the Fourth Gospel is the identification of the different stages of redaction before the canonical Gospel of John took its final shape. Concerning the issue of the relationship between these two movements it seems to be reasonable to assume that the final account about the relationship between these two movements may contain not only narratives that came from the earliest redaction (e.g., the comparative attitude between the both movements) but also the later redaction showing re-evaluations of the relationship between John and Jesus (e.g. John's subordination to Jesus). Concerning the redactional problem, cf. S. Mędala, *The Gospel According to John*, 64–81.

³¹ How far this conclusion correlates to the times of these two movements' activity, and how far it reflects the real situation at the end of the 1st century is difficult to determine. However, considering the strongly theological character of the Fourth Gospel, it is reasonable to think that the account reflects the time of transition when John's movement was gradually incorporated into the rapidly developing Jesus' movement, in the manner presented in Ac 19: 1–7.

bridegroom's friend when he heard about Jesus' successful activity, ignoring the fact that it negatively affected his own movement (Jn 3: 29b). John's attitude shown in Jn 3: 29b is possible because of his basic conviction that his role in God's salvation plan is to grow less in order that Jesus may grow greater (Jn 3: 30). Jesus came from above (heaven) and it is the reason for his superiority over John, who came from earth and belongs to the earthly reality, and for this reason he speaks in the manner of this world (Jn 3: 31). This text as well as the next account of Jn 3: 32–34 presents the superiority of Jesus' teaching over the teaching of John the Baptist. The superiority of Jesus' teaching comes from the fact that it concerns things which Jesus knows because he came from heaven.³² From Jn 3: 32 the narrative turns into strictly theological discourse, where the following theological issues are presented.³³ The first issue concerns the rejection of Jesus' teaching by the people (Jn 3: 32), with an exposition similar to that presented in Jn 1: 11. The second issue concerns those who accepted Jesus' teaching and who are the witnesses attesting that God is true (Jn 3: 33), which corresponds to Jn 1: 12. The third issue is the presentation that Jesus is the son of God and he teaches God's words in the power of the Holy Spirit (Jn 3: 33–34), which is a similar idea to that found in Jn 1: 14. The fourth issue affirms that God entrusted everything to his son because of his love for his son (Jn 3: 35), which is similar in thought to Jn 1: 18. The fifth issue concerns those who believe in Jesus and who have eternal life, as well as those who reject Jesus and will not have eternal life (Jn 3: 36). This narrative concerning the theological issues (Jn 3: 32–36) seems to be partly a repetition of the prologue of the Fourth Gospel (Jn 1: 1–18), or it also can be considered to some extent as an alternative redaction of the prologue.³⁴

3. The activity of Jesus (Jn 4: 1–3)

The next text concerning the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth concerns Jesus' departure from the region of Judea and his return to Galilee. The main cause of this move was possibly the Pharisees.

3.1. The text

¹ When therefore the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John ² (although Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were), ³ He left Judea, and departed again into Galilee. (Jn 4: 1–3)

3.2. Text analysis

Despite its brevity the text contains not only very important information concerning the

³² This is another presentation (after Jn 1: 1–5) of the author's theological conviction about Jesus' divine dignity.

³³ The identity of the "speaker" in Jn 3: 32–36 remains a problem. Some scholars think that he is John the Baptist as the narrative seems to affirm, but others think that the speaker is Jesus. R.E. Brown, *The Gospel of John (I–IX)*, 159–160. The scholars prefer to identify the speaker as John the Baptist.

³⁴ F. Martin, W. M. Wright IV, *The Gospel of John*, 93–95.

topic of this study, but also offers a unique presentation of this relationship in comparison with the Synoptic Gospels. The text of Jn 4: 1 creates a direct background for Jesus' decision that is presented in Jn 4: 3. The information that Jesus became aware of the Pharisees' discontent about the fact that he (and his movement) attracted more disciples than John and his disciples, shows that the Pharisees, who had questioned John's right to baptize (Jn 1: 24–25), after he was arrested by Herod (Jn 3: 24), turned their attention to Jesus' activity. As in the case of their opposition to John's baptizing people, they wished to prevent Jesus from performing similar activity.³⁵ Their effort was successful when Jesus, probably to avoid being arrested by Herod, returned to Galilee.³⁶ This narrative shows that the Pharisees in the Fourth Gospel are presented as being opponents not only of John the Baptist but also of Jesus, which indirectly shows them to be opponents of the realization of God's plan of salvation. It is possible that the information that "*Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John*" may suggest indirectly that Jesus' activities exceeded considerably John's preparatory baptism for the forgiveness of sins, taking John's preparatory mission to another level in the realization of God's salvation plan that will later reach a state of full realization. It is reasonable to assume that after John was arrested, those who were coming to him for baptism had no other option than to turn to Jesus for baptism and contributed greatly to building Jesus' network in Judea.

The statement in Jn 3: 26 that Jesus was baptizing is repeated in Jn 4: 1, but this seems to be corrected in Jn 4: 2 with a detailed specification that de facto Jesus himself was not baptizing, but his disciples were. The reason for this correction is disputed. Taking into consideration the fact that (at least some of) the disciples were previously associated with John the Baptist, it is possible that Jesus himself was not involved in baptizing, but some of his disciples were. However, the information provided in Jn 4: 1 clearly points to the fact that baptizing with water was something characteristic of the activity of the Jesus movement in Judea, at least in the eyes of the Pharisees. This seems to reduce the possibility that the practice of baptism with water by the Jesus movement was merely occasional. For this reason, there must be another explanation for the correction in Jn 4: 2. As a correction it must be attributed to someone other than the author of the statements included in Jn 3: 26 and Jn 4: 1. In its present form the text of the Fourth Gospel shows signs of several stages of redaction, and this correction would belong to one of these stages. A possible reason for this correction may be an attempt to retain in the narrative a basic difference in dignity between John the Baptist and Jesus, which could be weaker if Jesus were presented as a kind of imitator of John the Baptist because he was performing the same baptism as John.

The last piece of information provided by the text concerns the conclusion of activity in Judea by Jesus and his disciples, who probably retreated to Galilee (Jn 4: 3) for the reason

³⁵ It is the second time that information about Jesus' baptism activity is mentioned (Jn 3: 26), which naturally attests that such activity was undertaken by Jesus – more accurately by his disciples (Jn 4: 2) – which, however, does not change the fact that the activity of the Jesus' movement in Judea included baptism. R.E. Brown, *The Gospel of John (I–IX)*, 159–160.

³⁶ The Pharisees' opposition to Jesus and his movement, which is attested by all four Gospels, shows that their opposition had its roots in Jesus' activity in Judea and it was continued also in Galilee.

given in Jn 4: 1. This allows us to assume that the pressure put on Jesus and his disciples was something more dangerous than a simple disagreement between Jesus and the Pharisees.³⁷

4. The witness to Jesus' dignity (Jn 5: 33–39)

The text of Jn 5: 33–39 is a part of the redactional account (Jn 5: 31–47) containing several narrative layers concerning the same topic, namely Jesus' self-presentation of the witnesses he has received during his messianic activity.³⁸ The witness comes from John (Jn 5: 33–35), as well as from Jesus' deeds (Jn 5: 36), from God (Jn 5: 37–38), and finally from the Scripture.³⁹

4.1. The text

³³ "You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. ³⁴ But the witness which I receive is not from man, but I say these things that you may be saved. ³⁵ He was the lamp that was burning and was shining, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. ³⁶ But the witness which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me. ³⁷ And the Father who sent Me, He has borne witness of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form. ³⁸ And you do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent. ³⁹ You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me." (Jn 5: 33–39)

4.2. Text analysis

Jesus speaks to the Jews, pointing to the fact that they know John's witness to Jesus (Jn 5: 33).⁴⁰ That means: the Jews are familiar with John's opinion that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, which is information of crucial importance, if we consider the preceding narrative regarding Jesus' healing miracle at the Pool of Bethesda (Jn 5: 1–18). John's testimony about Jesus was the first one to be heard by a wide audience that included the leading group within Judaism (Jn 1: 19–26).⁴¹ However, this testimony, although it is important, does not constitute the basis for Jesus' dignity (Jn 5: 34), since his dignity does not come from man's recognition of Jesus (Jn 5: 36a) but it comes from the deeds Jesus accomplished according to the will of God the Father (Jn 5: 36b).⁴² The deeds performed by Jesus are not of a kind that any man can do; they are an expression of divine power, and the performing of such deeds should lead people to recognize the divine dignity of the performer. John the Baptist was but the lamp which cast some light on Jesus' dignity (the Messiah); the deeds performed by Jesus show the full dignity

³⁷ S. Mędala, *The Gospel According to John*, 453.

³⁸ Concerning the controversial literary aspect of Jn 5: 31–47, cf. S. Mędala, *The Gospel According to John*, 528.

³⁹ The text *de facto* contains one single witness to Jesus which is presented in four different aspects (John the Baptist; Jesus' deeds; God the Father; the Scripture).

⁴⁰ Most likely the text refers to Jn 1: 19–28 and Jn 3: 27–30.

⁴¹ A similar witness is included also in Mk 11: 7–11.

⁴² R.E. Brown, *The Gospel of John (I–IX)*, 227.

of the One sent by the Father (the Son of God). The fact that Jesus can perform divine deeds is God's testimony about Jesus' divine dignity (Jn 5: 37). It is uncertain which testimony Jesus refers to (his baptism? or some theophany?) since the Gospel of John does not include such testimony.⁴³ Based on 1 Jn 5: 9–10 a possible interpretation is that Jesus refers to the testimony within Jesus himself.⁴⁴ Considering the contradiction between Jesus' statement in Jn 5: 37a and his critical evaluation of the Jews in Jn 5: 37b–38, this could mean that Jesus, the Son of God, hears, sees and trusts God who testifies of Him, unlike the Jews who did not, and consequently believe neither in God nor in Jesus (Jn 5: 37–38).⁴⁵ The fourth testimony to Jesus is given by the Scripture (Jn 5: 39). The Scripture properly understood bears testimony to Jesus in the sense that the Law comes from God, and it concerns the realization of God's plan of salvation in which the main agent is Jesus.⁴⁶

5. The recognition of Jesus (Jn 10: 40–42)

The last narrative regarding the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist contains the testimony of the people about John's witness to Jesus (Jn 10: 40–42). Even though John's testimony about Jesus was indirect, his testimony somehow led people to believe in Jesus.

5.1. The text

⁴⁰ And He went away again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was first baptizing, and He was staying there. ⁴¹ And many came to Him and were saying, "While John performed no sign, yet everything John said about this man was true." ⁴² And many believed in Him there. (Jn 10: 40–42)

5.2. Text analysis

The direct context of the account is Jesus' activity in Jerusalem during the feast of Dedication (Jn 10: 22–39). It ended with another attempt by the Jews to arrest Jesus, which forced Jesus to flee to "the far side of the Jordan" where John had started his baptism for the forgiveness of sins (Jn 10: 40).⁴⁷ The first important piece of information concerns the fact that Jesus found shelter among the disciples of John, which indirectly indicates the close relationship between these two reformers' circles that continued even after John's death. According to the Fourth Gospel, Jesus is constantly connected not only with Judea but also with the circle of John's disciples.⁴⁸ The people who came to Jesus and spoke about John the

⁴³ F. Martin, W. M. Wright IV, *The Gospel of John*, 93–95.

⁴⁴ "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for the witness of God is this, that He has borne witness concerning His Son. ¹⁰The one who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the witness that God has borne concerning His Son." (1 Jn 5: 9–10)

⁴⁵ F. Martin, W. M. Wright IV, *The Gospel of John*, 108.

⁴⁶ R.E. Brown, *The Gospel of John (I–IX)*, 228.

⁴⁷ Most probable, the place was Bethany as Jn 1: 28 seems to suggest.

⁴⁸ R.E. Brown, *The Gospel of John (I–IX)*, 413.

Baptist were most probably John's disciples, who admitted that John did not perform miracles, which are usually interpreted as attestation of the divine origin of mission activity.⁴⁹ However, despite the lack of this sign in the ministry of John, his disciples were convinced that John's mission was of divine origin, and the reason for their confidence was the realization of all John's testimony about Jesus, which was finally recognized by John's disciples (Jn 10: 41).⁵⁰ This recognition was for some of them the direct reason for their becoming disciples of Jesus (Jn 10: 42). If this interpretation is correct, the last account regarding the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus as well as their movements, strongly suggests that some disciples of John became disciples of Jesus and that there was a partial merger of the two movements. Considering the redaction problem of John's Gospel, as well as its highly theologized character, it is reasonable to assume that this account reflects the stage of the emerging Christian movement, rather than the time of Jesus' activity.

Conclusion

The Gospel of John in its canonical shape contains the topic of the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth and their movements, which is also included in all the Synoptic Gospels. However, in the Gospel of John the topic is not only presented in a very different manner from the other Gospels, but also it includes traditions regarding the topic that are not found in the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, or Luke. Furthermore, the Synoptic Gospels concerning the topic of the relationship between Jesus and John concentrate mostly on Jesus' activities in Galilee, with only occasional direct encounter between the two agents, whereas the accounts in John's Gospel exclusively connect Jesus with John the Baptist in Judea. John gives witness to Jesus in Judea (Jn 1: 6-42; Jn 3: 22-36; Jn 5: 33-39) and Jesus' encounters with the Pharisees (Jn 4: 1-3) and the disciples of John (Jn 10: 40-42), take place in Judea. The background for the presentation of the relationship between John and Jesus is the region of Judea.

Even more peculiar is the content of the narrative concerning the relationship. It begins with John's theological conviction regarding Jesus' divine origin and dignity (Jn 1: 6-42), which is constantly underlined in the narratives referring to the relationship between them. John is always a witness to Jesus, and the purpose of John's activity is to lead people to believe in Jesus (Jn 5: 33-39).⁵¹ At the same time, Jesus is closely connected with John and his movement, by the fact that he once was a disciple of John (Jn 3: 26) and after his separation from John he began his own ministry of baptism (Jn 3: 26; Jn 4: 1-2). There is also the fact that Jesus' first two disciples were former disciples of John (Jn 1: 37). After John's death Jesus found shelter in John's community in Bethany (Jn 10: 40-42). The general picture regarding the relationship between them shows that John and Jesus walk hand in hand on the way of the realization of

⁴⁹ The Synoptic Gospels do not record any miracles performed by John. R.E. Brown, *The Gospel of John (I-IX)*, 413.

⁵⁰ The content of the phrase "whatever John said about this man" refers to John's testimonies in Jn 1: 29; Jn 1: 33; Jn 1: 39.

⁵¹ A. Kuśmirek, *Posłannictwo Jezusa Chrystusa Według Czwartej Ewangelii*, 118.

God's plan of salvation, but their separate roles are clearly distinguished. This means that in the Gospel of John the relationship between Jesus and John is seen as a form of synergy.

The unique approach of the author of the Gospel of John to the topic of the relationship between Jesus and John means that John's Gospel preserves a tradition about Jesus' activity in Judea that is omitted by all three Synoptic Gospels, in which the record of Jesus' ministry only begins from Galilee, omitting the entire narrative regarding his previous activities in Judea.⁵²

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⁵² However, the approach of the Synoptic Gospel is not aim of this study.