

Perceiving the Other in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity

Edited by
MICHAL BAR-ASHER SIEGAL,
WOLFGANG GRÜNSTÄUDL,
and MATTHEW THIESSEN

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In May 2014, the editors of this volume met for the first time in the beautiful city of Heidelberg. We had been invited there as recipients of the Manfred Lautenschläger Award for Theological Promise, which we had been awarded for our first books. Over a weekend filled with Schlösser, Kaffeetrinken, Bier, and Spargelessen (and paper presentations, too), it became apparent that our various research interests overlapped. Each of us in our own way was tackling issues related to outsiders in antiquity, as well as interrogating the way in which modern scholarship narrates interactions between these different groups. We met a number of times during our visit to Heidelberg in order to plot out a way in which we could collaborate together. The current volume is the fruit of such plotting.

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Michal Bar-Asher Siegal, Wolfgang Grünstäudl, Matthew Thiessen

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An Ancient Debate of Disciples

Albert I. Baumgarten
Bar Ilan University

“Do Unto Others as They Do Unto You.”
With Apologies to Leviticus, Hillel, Jesus,
Rabbi Akiba, and Immanuel Kant

“We should forgive our enemies, but not
before they are hanged.”
Attributed to Heinrich Heine

”The historian knows ... that his witnesses
can lie or be mistaken. But he is primarily
interested in making them speak, so that
he can understand them.”
Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, 90.

Was There an Ancient Debate of Disciples?

In writing a historical account of John the Baptist, or – if that is too difficult due to the nature of the sources – at a minimum the way he was portrayed and perceived, a fundamental choice must be made at the outset. The gospels and Acts remain the principal sources on which a study of this sort must be based. Yet virtually all scholars have recognized that these texts have an explicit bias to lower the status of John at almost every possible opportunity in order to enhance the stature of Jesus. John was not only portrayed as second best, but he explicitly and repeatedly announced his inferiority to Jesus. These circumstances found their visual expression in medieval Christian art, in which one of the standard scenes had John present at the crucifixion declaring the superiority of Jesus (against all chronological logic, since, according to the gospels, John had been executed long before). One example of this theme is the Grünewald Isenheim altarpiece, now in the Unterlinden Museum in Colmar. In this masterpiece, John is pointing to Jesus on the cross, with an open book in his other hand and the lamb of God at his feet, not merely insisting that he is the forerunner of the Messiah (John 3:28), but also foretelling both his own future and that of Jesus by quoting in Latin, John 3:30: “*illum oportet crescere me autem minui*,” “As he grows greater I must

grow less.”¹ In another famous painting, this one by El Greco (again, against all chronological logic), John is portrayed holding a cross and pointing to the lamb of God.

If one follows this path, the critical question as Walter Wink posed it becomes, “What is the role of John the Baptist in God’s redemptive purpose? That is to say, what is the role of John the Baptist in the Gospels and Acts?”² Not surprisingly, if this is the leading question, John’s proclamations of subordination to Jesus will be taken at face value and the significance of any passage that might suggest tension between John’s disciples and those of Jesus will be diminished.³ Wink therefore summarized his conclusions as follows: polemic against the Baptist and his disciples played a secondary role at best in the gospels. John did not intend to form a movement. Most of those he baptized returned home to their ordinary lives. Only a few stayed with him, were his inner circle, and followed the lifestyle of fasting and prayer that he fostered. Jesus may have been a member of one of these two circles.

In their early experience, the disciples of John and Jesus fraternized freely with each other, since both groups endorsed the ministry of John. In the end, for the most part, the Baptist movement was absorbed into the *ekklesia* of Jesus. A few holdouts remained, whose voice can be heard in the Pseudo-Clementines. At the same time, many sects that had a central role for purifications in their practice flourished in the desert, and some may have claimed John the Baptist as their paradigm, but these groups quickly faded. They were not a real challenge to followers of Jesus. Therefore, the main goal of the evangelists was not to polemicize against these holdouts or schismatics, but to preserve John the Baptist for the Jesus movement, which was the one great survivor and heir of John the Baptist.⁴

In light of the way that Wink stated the question that guided his research, this conclusion is not surprising, but I beg to differ. At the very least, the fact that John taught his disciples a distinct prayer, Luke 11:1–4, perhaps what we call the Lord’s Prayer,⁵ indicates that there was a significant independent group of disciples of John, who should have posed a problem for the disciples of Jesus. This justifies a search for a meaningful debate of disciples.⁶

¹ The Grünewald Isenheim altarpiece can be viewed at <http://www.musee-unterlinden.com/en/collections/the-isenheim-altarpiece/>, El Greco’s “San Juan Bautista” can be viewed at http://www.xn-espaacultura-tnb.es/es/obras_de_excelencia/museo_de_bellas_arte_valencia/san_juan_bautista.html, and Caravaggio’s “The Beheading of Saint John the Baptist,” which will be discussed below, can be viewed at <https://www.stjohnscocathedral.com/caravaggio/>.

² Walter Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition*, SNTSMS 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), xii.

³ Wink, *John the Baptist*, 11.

⁴ Wink, *John the Baptist*, 107–15.

⁵ Much depends on how one understands both the *kathōs* in Luke 11:1 and the absence of any connection between the Lord’s Prayer and John in Matt 6:9–13. I plan to devote a paper to analysis of the Lord’s Prayer against the background of Jewish belief in the Second Temple period, in particular to compare that prayer to the maxim of Antigonos of Socho, as analyzed by Elias J. Bickerman, “The Maxim of Antigonos of Socho,” *Studies in Jewish and Christian History*, 3 vols., AGJU 9 (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 2:270–89.

⁶ Ernst Lohmeyer, *Das Urchristentum 1. Buch, Johannes der Täufer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1932), 116. Other scholars attach this same significance to Luke 11:1–4. See, e.g., Mau-

From another vantage point, what if one suspects that the gospels protest too much in making John subservient to Jesus? What if one follows the advice of Jonathan Z. Smith, who insisted:

While the “other” may be perceived as being LIKE-US or NOT-LIKE-US, he is in fact most problematic when he is TOO-MUCH-LIKE-US, or when he claims to BE-US. It is here that the real urgency of a “theory of the other” emerges. This urgency is called forth not by the requirement to place the “other” but rather to situate ourselves ... This is not a matter of the “far” but, preeminently, of the “near.” The problem is not alterity but similarity ... at times even identity.⁷

What if John, Jesus, and their groups of disciples were too close to each other and the problem of “similarity ... at times even identity,” engendered a debate of disciples, which, in turn, was behind the insistence on subordinating John to Jesus in the gospels?

However, if there really was a debate between the followers of John and Jesus, which continued until after their deaths, how can one reconstruct it with any degree of certainty? The gospels tell us only one side of the story and that is an inadequate basis for constructing the tenor of a debate. How can we learn what was said by the other side? More than one hundred years ago, at the end of the nineteenth century, Wilhelm Baldensperger attempted just that, focusing his attention on the Gospel of John and particularly on the prologue to that gospel as a basis for reconstructing what John’s disciples thought or said in defense of their belief in John’s place in the scenario of the end of days.⁸ Not surprisingly, one contemporary reviewer of Baldensperger’s book, Rush Rhees, remarked:

This discussion has all the charm of great ingenuity, backed by wide learning; its lack is the failure of any adequate evidence of the existence of so well-defined a Baptist party as this argument requires. The chief evidence for our author is this gospel; for those who find his thesis over-ingenious such evidence is inconclusive.⁹

In this light, Jean Daniélou is notable for accepting the gospel accounts as true testimony to the Catholic Christian heritage and its interpretation of these texts, insisting that John’s greatness allowed him “to be set aside, as he entered upon the mystery of self-abasement ... despite the fact that precursors usually want to live on”¹⁰ and refuse to step aside, just as the Jews refused when the truth of Christianity was

rice Goguel, *Au Seuil de l’Évangile: Jean-Baptiste* (Paris: Payot, 1928), 75. See also Carl H. Kraeling (*John the Baptist* [New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1951], 172–75), who argued that John’s disciples were an important component of the early Jesus movement. There was close fraternization at the outset; the split and polemics came later, but the polemic did certainly come.

⁷ Jonathan Z. Smith, “What a Difference a Difference Makes,” in *To See Ourselves as Others See Us: Christians, Jews, “Others” in Late Antiquity*, ed. Jacob Neusner and Ernest S. Frerichs (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 47.

⁸ Wilhelm Baldensperger, *Der Prolog des vierten Evangeliums: Sein polemisch-apologetischer Zweck* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1898). Along the same lines as Baldensperger, see Goguel, *Seuil*, 75–85.

⁹ Rush Rhees, “Review of Baldensperger, *Prolog*,” *AmJT* 3 (1899): 370.

¹⁰ Jean Daniélou, *The Work of John the Baptist*, trans. J. A. Horn (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966), 109.

revealed, “wanting to keep to the past when the future was already present.”¹¹ John, according to Daniélou, willingly fell into obscurity, but for John “the fact of falling into obscurity was nothing compared to the joy in his soul as he beheld the fulfillment of the mystery.”¹² Nevertheless, and despite the warnings sounded by Rhees, even Daniélou conceded that at least during the period when John the Baptist and Jesus were both baptizing (as described in John 3–4) there was

some kind of conflict between John’s disciples and those of Jesus – and the impression certainly is given that the evangelist sought to cover it up as much as possible ... There was, then, an entire history of relations between the Johannine community and the Christian community. We have only one version of the situation, that of Jesus’ disciples. It is certainly unfortunate that we do not have any documents to give us the point of view of John’s disciples. Nevertheless, we can be sure that it was quite a dramatic situation at that time.¹³

In sum, according to Daniélou, unlike John himself, his “disciples never completely understood what it meant to be the disciples of a precursor,”¹⁴ and echoes of this lack of understanding and of the conflict with the disciples of Jesus it engendered can still be heard in the gospels. This line of interpretation forced Daniélou to work hard and heavy to explain why John continued to baptize while Jesus was also baptizing, despite the fact that, according to Daniélou, John gladly accepted both his role as precursor and the fact that he was destined to diminish while Jesus would flourish. But then, when John himself was baptizing (John 3:22–24, with great success; see also John 4:1) and the disciples of Jesus were also baptizing (John 4:1–2; observe that the text specifies that Jesus was not baptizing, only his disciples), why did people see Jesus and John as competitors (John 4:1)?¹⁵ Daniélou continued to put the blame on John’s disciples and not on John himself (even though the texts are explicit that it was John himself who was baptizing; blaming disciples or successors for later sectarian separation and polemic debates has a long history in many religious traditions),¹⁶ conceding, nevertheless, that at least during the period when both John and Jesus were baptizing there was “some kind of conflict between John’s disciples and those of Jesus – and the impression certainly is given that the evangelist sought to cover it up as much as possible.”¹⁷

¹¹ Ibid. Daniélou (*Work of John*, 113) went so far in following the gospels and arguing for John’s self-abasement that he maintained that John 3:30 (“He must increase but I must decrease”), a saying that was at the center of the portrayal of John in later Christian art as noted above, was a genuine logion of John.

¹² Daniélou, *Work of John*, 113.

¹³ Daniélou, *Work of John*, 108–9.

¹⁴ Daniélou, *Work of John*, 111.

¹⁵ Daniélou, *Work of John*, 95–108.

¹⁶ For ancient Jewish and Christian examples, viewed against the background of classical parallels, see Shaye J. D. Cohen, “A Virgin Defiled: Some Rabbinic and Christian Views on the Origins of Heresy,” *USQR* 36 (1980): 1–11; now reprinted in idem, *The Significance of Yavneh and Other Essays on Jewish Hellenism*, TSAJ 136 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 535–47.

¹⁷ Daniélou, *Work of John*, 108. Cf. Goguel (*Seuil*, 92), who understood these verses as evidence of competition and a rupture between Jesus and John themselves.

It is therefore not surprising that in the many years since Baldensperger wrote there have been numerous attempts to reconstruct the debate between the disciples of Jesus and John, and to overcome the difficulty that almost all our evidence comes from one side, with the position of the other side determined by reading the sources of their opponents against the grain. I have found special merit in the studies by Martin Dibelius,¹⁸ Maurice Goguel,¹⁹ Ernst Lohmeyer,²⁰ and Carl Kraeling.²¹

¹⁸ Martin Dibelius, *Die urchristliche Überlieferung von Johannes dem Täufer*, FRLANT 15 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1911).

¹⁹ Goguel, *Seuil*. See his summary of the issues that guided his work on p. 12.

²⁰ Lohmeyer, *Urchristentum*. Lohmeyer (1890–1946) was notable among German Protestant scholars of his time for his friendship with contemporary Jewish scholars, and for his conviction, expressed in a letter to Martin Buber, that “the Christian faith is only Christian as long as it retains in its heart the Jewish faith.” See Andreas Köhn, *Der Neutestamentler Ernst Lohmeyer: Studien zu Biographie und Theologie*, WUNT 2/180 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 298. Lohmeyer opposed the Nazis but served as an officer in the Wehrmacht. After the Soviet occupation of East Germany, he was arrested and executed in September of 1946. Nevertheless, despite his consistent attempt to draw a portrait of John that was both historically accurate and sympathetic, and from which I have learned a great deal, Lohmeyer’s Christian (Protestant) convictions were expressed most explicitly in his concluding chapter. There he insisted that John (*Urchristentum*, 174), despite his protest against conventional Jewish beliefs of his time, never uttered a statement of strong personal belief of the sort made by Luther, “Here I stand, I can do no other.” In addition, according to Lohmeyer (*Urchristentum*, 179–80), John demanded faith in his baptism, but never defined the nature of that faith. As far as John was concerned, his baptism was effective, *ex opera operato*, as in the Judaism of the time, as exemplified by sacrifice. Inevitably, this is more than somewhat demeaning of Judaism and of John from a Protestant perspective. Or, again (*Urchristentum*, 185), John’s baptism was a “magical” rite. Alternately, John’s baptism could lead to all sorts of strange and stranger consequences, foreign to Judaism, which ultimately found expression in “syncretistic Gnosticism.” Last of all, according to Lohmeyer (*Urchristentum*, 182–84), John’s baptism was limited. At most it could create a sect, but not become the basis for a world religion. That possibility only entered the picture with Christianity, where the wide-ranging implications of John’s work were effectively expressed in the gospels. John was a prophet of redemption, at best a witness (as seen clearly and correctly in the Fourth Gospel), pointing to a greater one to come. That is all John was. It is therefore not surprising that Lohmeyer (*Urchristentum*, 183, 185) concluded that John only had a small group of followers, lost in the greater mass of the Jewish people. Their belief in baptism was insufficient to prescribe a way of life for them; it was too abstract. Only a few could bear this burden. Because his baptism was ultimately so incomprehensible, a miracle of forgiveness and a divine gift, according to Lohmeyer (*Urchristentum*, 103), it did not have the power to mandate a lived life in history, in which people would remain pure and holy. Not surprisingly, therefore, John’s baptism made its ultimate and everlasting impact only when it became Christian baptism (*Urchristentum*, 188–89).

²¹ Kraeling, *John the Baptist*. This list shows my clear preference for the older scholarship on the topic, as opposed to more recent scholarship, which tends to grasp at any opportunity, real, imagined, or invented, to minimize tensions between the Jesus movement and other varieties of Judaism at the time, whether the Baptist and his disciples or the later Rabbis, all suspiciously in service of contemporary agendas, which laudable as they may be may also do a disservice to history. See the note of caution sounded by Robert Kraft (“The Weighing of the Parts: Pivots and Pitfalls in the Study of Early Judaism and their Early Christian Offspring,” in *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, TSAJ 95 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003], 87–94 [92]) that scholars must pay attention to the issues that were important to the historical participants and the way these issues affect our historical understandings. This means that there should be a limit to “redemptive criticism” in the name of current theological or political loyalties, or to attempts to achieve some sort of contemporary rapprochement by setting the clock back to a more favorable time and situation.

Among contemporary scholars, the forthcoming study by Joel Marcus, of which he has kindly sent me a copy in advance of its publication, clearly analyzes the pertinent issues from the perspective of what Marcus calls the “competition hypothesis.”²²

Christian Supersessionism and The “Johannine” Response

In order to achieve greater clarity, let me state the premise on which this article is based from another perspective. John and his baptism had a foundational role in the career of Jesus. This was a fact that the gospel authors could not deny.²³ At the same time, the gospels went to great lengths to subordinate John to Jesus and to insist that John was a forerunner of a greater truth yet to come, at the very best, as John himself asserted over and over again in the gospels. This strikes me as a rough analogy to what will later be known as Christian supersessionism, or replacement theology, vis-à-vis Judaism. The foundations of Christian belief in the Hebrew Bible were never denied, however the Hebrew Bible was understood as pointing in every place possible to Jesus as Christ and as the absolute fulfillment of the promises of the Hebrew Bible, eternally intended for that role. Despite this goal of Christian interpretation, the Jews were not convinced. In Daniélou’s succinct formulation (cited above at n. 11), the Jews wanted “to keep to the past when the future was already present.” At least some of the ways Jews pushed back against Christian supersessionism can be found in Jewish texts, so that Jews can speak in their own voice on this matter.²⁴

I take Christian supersessionism as a paradigm for the way the gospels dealt with the John/Jesus relationship. I see the John/Jesus connection, as set forth in the gospels, as an early example or anticipation (in the context of the discussion in this article, dare I write forerunner?) of the Christian supersessionist strategy in dealing with predecessors. Therefore, if Jews refused to be demoted and replaced, then I would also expect the disciples of John to deny the attempt to make their master a mere herald proclaiming the truth, whose task was only to prepare the way for a greater one to come, specifically, Jesus. This expectation encourages me to look for this “Johannine” response, even if it involves the difficulties and uncertainties of reconstructing a missing voice based almost only on the sources written by their opponents, as already noted by Rhees more than a century ago.

²² Joel Marcus, *John the Baptist in History and Theology*, The Personalities of the New Testament (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, forthcoming). In contrast, despite the claim that the book offers a new approach in light of recent (i. e., Qumran) evidence, by setting John firmly in a Second Temple Jewish context, I have found less merit and too much theologizing in Joan E. Taylor, *The Immerser: John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

²³ See Goguel, *Seuil*, 141: “Peu de traits de la vie de Jésus ... nous paraissent d’une historicité aussi incontestable.” This conclusion is shared by numerous other scholars.

²⁴ For recent examples from the extensive literature on the topic see Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); idem, *The Jewish Jesus: How Judaism and Christianity Shaped Each Other* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

Awkward Landings

In favor of this attempt to get behind the John/Jesus story and to tell the John story the gospel authors did not want to tell is appreciation of the diverse, fractious, and contentious world of the Second Temple period. Individuals were moving in and out of different groups (e.g., Josephus and Paul), creating longer and shorter term “awkward landings” in which elements of past and present loyalties did not always come together in ways that look coherent or consistent to us, especially when we view them from the perspective of the systems in which these different beliefs and practices were later organized into “orthodoxies.” Put otherwise, it would take some time for those later orthodoxies to work through all the diverse and sometimes contradictory elements that they inherited and put some order into the way of life observed and package of beliefs expected to be held by the members of the various movements.²⁵ It may be that Daniélou, more than any other scholar whose work I have read on John the Baptist, took advantage of the idea that movements do not move forward in full steps in assessing the gospel accounts concerning Jesus and John the Baptist, arguing that the stages of salvation overlap rather than succeed one another by replacement.²⁶

In Acts 18–19 we read about two strands of “Johannine Christians”²⁷ in Ephesus, two similar but somewhat different “immature” forms of Christianity from the perspective of Luke-Acts, two “awkward landings” in the terms I have proposed. Each strand required a different sort of correction – Apollos, who only knew the baptism of John (Acts 18:25), needed a doctrinal lesson in the “New Way,” as taught by Priscilla and Aquila. The twelve disciples needed a ritual correction – baptism.²⁸ I begin

²⁵ This is my way of restating the larger point made by numerous colleagues concerning “the ways that never parted,” although, as I have argued elsewhere, this valid perspective has sometimes been taken too far in the enthusiasm engendered by a powerful notion that has potential implications for contemporary relations between Jews and Christians. See Albert Baumgarten, “The ‘Rule of the Martians’ in the Ancient Diaspora: Celsus and his Jew,” in *Jews and Christians in the First and Second Centuries: How to Write Their History*, ed. Peter J. Tomson and Joshua Schwartz, CRINT 13 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 398–430.

²⁶ Daniélou, *Work of John*, 106. Although, I must note that Daniélou made this point in service of his explicitly Christian perspective in reading the gospels. Note his comment on the Jews, who wanted “to keep to the past when the future was already present.”

²⁷ This term, adopted by Joseph A. Fitzmyer (*The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 31 [New York: Doubleday, 1998], 639), goes back to Hans Conzelmann. Robert L. Webb (“John the Baptist and his Relationship to Jesus,” in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans, NTTS 19 [Leiden: Brill, 1994], 179–229 [213]) attempted to reduce the anomalies posed by these Johannine Christians in Ephesus by arguing that since Jesus began as a baptizer in the name of John even those who had only received the baptism of John could be considered in some sense disciples of Jesus.

²⁸ Hans Conzelmann (*Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, trans. J. Limburg, T. Kraabel, and D. H. Juel, Hermeneia [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987], 158) suggested that in light of these differences the two stories were originally independent. Cf. Goguel (*Seuil*, 100), who proposed that despite their differences the fact that both these episodes took place at Ephesus indicated that they were connected to each other. Goguel (*Seuil*, 104) added the observation that the fact that the Fourth Gospel, whose final form has some connection to Ephesus, polemicized against the disciples of John strengthened the historicity of the account of the presence in Ephesus of disciples who only knew the baptism of John according to Acts 18–19.

with Apollos. He was preaching in synagogues, had full knowledge of Jesus,²⁹ but only knew the baptism of John. How and why did Apollos put these pieces together as he did – beginning by teaching accurately in synagogues the facts about Jesus but knowing only the baptism of John – and then (perhaps after having been instructed in the “New Way” by Priscilla and Aquila) offering in Corinth strong proof from scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah based on the Scriptures? Although it is not mentioned explicitly, perhaps after learning and accepting the “New Way,” Apollos was then baptized into the baptism of Jesus, but that may only be an inference to be drawn from the continuation of the story – would the community in Ephesus have written letters recommending him to the community in Achaia had he not received the baptism of Jesus?³⁰ In any case, Apollos appears to us as a strange hybrid. Just what he was missing and what he needed to learn from Priscilla and Aquila in order to bring him fully into line with the outlook and practice of the disciples of Jesus, whose perspective was represented in Acts, remains unclear.³¹ However, just to complicate the picture, that

²⁹ This is inherently paradoxical from the perspective of later belief of the followers of Jesus. How could one know *ta peri tou Iēsou*, “everything about Jesus” but not know baptism? To solve this problem, Baldensperger (*Prolog*, 94) suggested that *ta peri tou Iēsou* meant “messianic stuff” in general, without any special connection to belief in Jesus as the Messiah. However, Baldensperger’s suggestion falters in favor of the usual view. As Dibelius (*Überlieferung*, 93–94) pointed out, at least according to some sources, Paul’s knowledge of Jesus came from direct revelation but did not include baptism. See 1 Cor 1:14–17 (whose relevance to the story in Acts 18–19 was pointed out by Benjamin W. Bacon, “New and Old in Jesus’ Relation to John,” *JBL* 48 [1929]: 40–81 [81]), where Paul asserted that he preached the gospel, and had only baptized Crispus, Gaius, and the household of Stephanus, insisting “that Christ did not send me to baptize.” Thus, even Paul, who practiced minimal baptism, knew that faith in Jesus included widespread baptism as performed by others. In light of these circumstances, it is therefore ironic that it was Paul who supposedly offered Christian baptism that brought the gift of the Holy Spirit in Ephesus. Underlying Baldensperger’s understanding of these passages in Acts was his insistence that later Christian sources positioned John’s disciples among Jewish sects and as such separated them completely from believers in Jesus. According to Baldensperger, this was anachronistic. It represented taking as accurate and historical the retrospective perspective of the later winners; the separation of Church and synagogue had not yet taken place in earlier centuries, such as at the time of the events described in Acts. One needed to reconstruct the earlier situation, without being misled by sources that portrayed it from a later perspective. In this, Baldensperger (*Prolog*, 100–1, 153) anticipated contemporary scholars on the “ways that never parted.”

³⁰ See B. T. D. Smith, “Apollos and the Twelve Disciples at Ephesus,” *JTS* 16 (1915): 241–46 (245–46). Another possibility, however, is suggested by the end of the story. Whatever Apollos’s accurate knowledge about Jesus might have been at the beginning, perhaps it only consisted of the simple details of his life and death. The end of the story suggests that Priscilla and Aquila taught him that Jesus was the Messiah, based on scripture, the point concerning which Apollos then strenuously confuted the Jews (Acts 18:28). This explanation of the account keeps the focus on doctrine from beginning to end.

³¹ Cf. Dibelius (*Überlieferung*, 95), who argued that Apollos was not a follower of John who then saw the light with the help of Priscilla and Aquila and then was baptized into the baptism of Jesus. Apollos, according to Dibelius, already “lived in the spirit” (Acts 18:25). He did not need the baptism of Jesus to acquire the Holy Spirit. In that case, however, one may wonder just what Apollos learned about the “new way” from Priscilla and Aquila. Continuing his dissent from the usual understanding of Apollos’s “conversion,” Dibelius (*Überlieferung*, 97–98) suggested that prior to meeting Priscilla and Aquila Apollos was unaware that Jesus began his career when he was baptized by John. I find this explanation unlikely, as Jesus’s baptism by John was one of the best known

same Apollos had a following in Corinth (1 Cor 1:12) and the community there was divided between followers of different apostles. Paul viewed Apollos as a friendly figure, a collaborator, and not as a rival, although one is entitled to wonder whether Paul was trying to put a good face on a potentially tense relationship (1 Cor 3:4–5; 4:6).

Something analogous took place when Paul arrived in Ephesus, as narrated in Acts 19. There Paul met converts who only knew the baptism of John and therefore had not received the Holy Spirit. From the perspective of Acts, these hybrids were stuck at an earlier intersection along the road to salvation. They needed ritual correction, and when Paul baptized these folks in the name of Jesus they began to speak in tongues and prophesy. The Holy Spirit became active in them and this was proof that they had reached the final destination as believers in Jesus.

The events narrated in Acts 18–19 were told from the perspective of believers in Jesus. For that reason it was easy for Wink to assert that Luke ignored the apologetic/polemical possibilities of these incidents. This supposedly showed that the circumstances described were of little consequence to Luke or possibly no longer existed.³² However, this understanding of the passage is typical of Wink's overarching interest/objective in reading sources about John from the perspective of the gospels, as discussed above, in a way that loaded the dice in favor of the portrait drawn in the gospels and Acts. Obviously they related the success of apostles of Jesus, Paul in particular. For that reason, the gospels and Acts need to be read with more than one grain of salt. We must ask, "What do these sources want to hide? To what reality are they testifying despite themselves?" Therefore, even if the gospels and Acts told stories from the triumphalist perspective of believers in Jesus they reflected the diverse, fractious, and contentious world of Second Temple Jewish experience and its aftermath, with two strands of "Johannine Christians" as evidence of the diverse "awkward landings" and hybrid combinations of religious identity, in which John's disciples continued to offer and practice "his" baptism, in some form or other, well after his death and in the diaspora.³³

Returning to Acts 18–19, debates about the status of Jesus were central to the critique of Celsus's Jew, effectively the only topic on which he wrote.³⁴ According to Acts 18 lively discussions about the messianic status of Jesus were taking place in diaspora synagogues, with Apollos confuting the Jews (who should have known

and most widely attested facts of his life. See n. 23 above. Accordingly, if Apollos knew *ta peri tou Iēsou* accurately (*akribōs*), how could he not have known this?

³² Wink, *John the Baptist*, 84. In Wink's favor, however, it should be noted (as pointed out by Ernst Bammel, "The Baptist in Early Christian Tradition," *NTS* [1971–1972]: 95–128 [122]) that Q shows no signs of conflict between disciples. Matthew 14:12 (if Q) emphasizes strict continuity between the two movements.

³³ I expand here a point well made by Lohmeyer, *Urchristentum*, 26. See also Hermann Lichtenberger, "Täufergemeinden und frühchristlicher Täuferpolemik im letzten Drittel des 1. Jahrhunderts," *ZTK* 84 (1987): 36–57 (50–51). That John's disciples formed a movement that continued after his death, whose traces were found in the Ephesus incidents related in Acts 18–19, was acknowledged by Daniélou (*Work of John*, 140), although he hastened to add "that the history of this movement cannot be traced very far."

³⁴ On Celsus and his Jew see Baumgarten, "Rule of the Martian."

something about scripture, as opposed to the gentiles who were Paul's primary audience according to his letters!) that Jesus was the Messiah, according to scripture. However successful or not Apollos was in these debates,³⁵ the account in Acts, when combined with that of Celsus's Jew, is credible testimony to the existence of such debates in diaspora synagogues.

It is therefore significant that the other contentious issue in diaspora synagogues, according to Acts, was the baptism of John versus that of Jesus, as discussed above. The disciples of John and Jesus were apparently in the same diaspora synagogues, but the disciples of Jesus felt the need to encourage disciples of John to complete their spiritual journey either by experiencing the baptism of Jesus or through full belief in Jesus as Messiah. In other words, these were allied but somewhat competitive movements, as has been recognized by many scholars, such as Robert L. Webb, who noted that John's disciples were the closest analogy for the disciples of Jesus.³⁶ This seems like a situation tailor made for the narcissism of small differences to be a dominant force, for the circumstances indicated by J. Z. Smith, cited above, to come into play. These groups were not "far" but preeminently "near." Their problem was not alterity but similarity ... at times even identity. I suggest that this was the context in which the vehement and persistent demotion of John to Jesus was located. It is here that we should devote attempts to read the texts against the grain and attempt to reconstruct how the disciples of John saw the John/Jesus relationship.³⁷

Jesus as the Resurrected John

Despite all these considerations from differing points of view, the warning sounded by Rhees concerning the speculative nature of the effort to retrieve the perspective of the disciples of John noted at the outset of this paper remains real. At best, such speculation cannot be avoided but only minimized. In order to reduce that risk this article focuses on one of the few sets of passages in the gospels in which John's subordination to Jesus was understated, expressed tacitly rather than explicitly. Here we may find traditions about John and his followers that have been less reworked in service to the superiority of Jesus and the inferiority of John. I therefore will take up the traditions reported by Mark, Matthew, and Luke that Jesus was perceived as a reincarnation or resurrection of John the Baptist (Mark 6:14–16; Matt 14:1–2; Luke 9:7–9).³⁸

³⁵ A dialogue between Apollos and Celsus's Jew is an interesting event to imagine. Celsus's Jew claimed that he knew the "true" account of the life of Jesus (Origen, *Contra Celsum* 2.13), an anti-gospel, as opposed to that told by Jesus's disciples, but we have little or no information about the contents of that account. Perhaps the only hint we have is the charge made by Celsus's Jew that Jesus's biological father was a Roman soldier named Panthera (Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.32).

³⁶ Webb, "John the Baptist," 228.

³⁷ For an extended analysis of the passages in Acts 18–19 see Dibelius, *Überlieferung*, 87–98, and Goguel, *Seuil*, 98–105.

³⁸ My impetus for pursuing the analysis proposed below comes from the discussion in Lohmeyer (*Urchristentum*, 16–17), whose conclusions I want to take a step further.

John was known to be dead, as he had been executed at the order of Herod Antipas (according to Mark 6:29, the gory work was done by a “professional” and experienced executioner, a *spekoulator*,³⁹ as in the painting by Caravaggio in Malta: the bloody sword was already on the floor, and the executioner held a large knife behind his back, ready to sever the last tendons holding the head). At least as far as the gospel authors were concerned, John’s disciples also knew that he was dead since they had buried him themselves; they even informed Jesus of John’s death (Mark 6:29// Matt 14:12). From the perspective of the disciples of Jesus the curtain had come down on the final act in the drama of the life and career of John. He was no longer a factor in the scenario of salvation.⁴⁰

One may wonder how the information in Mark 6:14–16; Matt 14:1–2; Luke 9:7–9, which I want to suggest was more favorable to John and reflected the incidents from the perspective of his disciples, managed to make it through the chain of transmission in the gospels without their being reworked to reflect the lower standing of John vis-à-vis Jesus. The first part of the answer is in Mark 6:29// Matt 14:12. For the gospel authors, Jesus and his disciples knew that John was dead and buried. His career on earth was over and his role in salvation was complete. Furthermore, both the gospel authors and their audiences knew that the popular identification of Jesus with John, Elijah, or one of the prophets was mistaken. The correct explanation of why Jesus was able to perform his miraculous deeds was because he was Jesus. For these reasons, even if Mark 6:14–16; Matt 14:1–2; Luke 9:7–9 can be understood as favorable to John and deprecatory to Jesus, this possibility did not apparently disturb the gospel authors. Any possible difficulty raised by these verses for the authors or readers of the gospels was thus effectively refuted in advance.

However, not everyone saw things that way. Jesus was performing all sorts of miracles, which showed that he had some sort of super-human power. He was a holy man far and above the usual sort (Mark 4:35–5:43), whose actions even reached Herod Antipas. These circumstances required an explanation. According to Mark 6:14–16:

King⁴¹ Herod heard of it, for the fame of Jesus had spread; and people were saying, “John the Baptist has been raised to life, and that is why these miraculous powers are at work in him.” Others again, “He is a prophet like one of the old prophets.” But Herod, when he heard of it said, “This is John, whom I beheaded, raised from the dead.”

³⁹ A loanword from Latin, Dibelius, *Überlieferung*, 80 n. 1. The *spekoulator* was one of the principal “attendants” of Antipas, whose responsibility included executions, as noted by Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 314.

⁴⁰ Jean Steinmann, *Saint John the Baptist and the Desert Tradition*, trans. M. Boyes (New York: Harper, 1958), 103.

⁴¹ This is famously the place where Antipas was called a king, even though he was only a tetrarch. His lack of full royal status was an increasing irritant, which culminated in conflicts that resulted in his deposition and exile according to Josephus. Joel Marcus (*Mark 1–8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 27 [New York: Doubleday, 2000], 398) suggested that the title “King” is not accidental but was meant to be ironic. See also n. 45.

At least two possibilities for explaining the deeds of Jesus were abroad: he was either the resurrected John or one of the ancient prophets come back to life. Faced with these choices, Herod, who had ordered John beheaded and therefore should have been well informed, endorsed the notion that Jesus was the resurrected John, and this despite the fact that Jesus had become known for his miracles while no source reports that John performed such deeds of power; in fact, for whatever it is worth as historical evidence, according to John 10:41, "John gave us no miraculous sign."⁴² Nevertheless, John, in his new incarnation as Jesus, was the beneficiary of powers that John may not have possessed when alive. In returning to life, John had been transformed and empowered; this was no mere encore. As Joel Marcus has summarized: "There is no other evidence that John the Baptist had a reputation as a wonder worker and indeed John 10:41 seems to imply that he was not ... The emphasis here is on the transformation wrought by his supposed resurrection."⁴³

Matthew was more direct: "It was about that time that reports about Jesus reached the ears of Prince Herod. 'This is John the Baptist,' he said to his attendants; 'John has been raised to life, and that is why these miraculous powers are at work in him'" (Matt 14:1–2). There was one and only one way to explain the deeds of Jesus, and Herod voiced that understanding by identifying Jesus as John the Baptist raised to life.⁴⁴ Luke, a careful historian, treated this information differently and more circumspectly:

Now Prince Herod heard of all that was happening, and did not know what to make of it; for some were saying that John had been raised from the dead, others that Elijah had appeared, others again that one of the ancient prophets had come back to life. Herod said, "As for John, I beheaded him myself; but who is this I hear such talk about?" And he was anxious to see him. (Luke 9:7–9)

Several possibilities were circulating for identifying Jesus as a figure from the past come back to life: John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the ancient prophets. Herod was skeptical, "utterly at a loss,"⁴⁵ whether this was John, as he had beheaded John him-

⁴² W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr. (*An Exegetical and Critical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 3 vols., ICC [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991], 2:468, n. 19) suggested that this verse in John may not be historical but polemical, insisting that John the Baptist performed no miracles when in fact he did.

⁴³ Marcus, *Mark* 1–8, 393. In agreement with Marcus in stressing the supernatural powers that operated through the risen Baptist, see Willoughby C. Allen, *An Exegetical and Critical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 3d ed., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1922 [1993 repr.]), 157. See also Ezra P. Gould (*An Exegetical and Critical Commentary on the Gospel of St. Mark*, ICC [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1896], 109).

⁴⁴ Cf. Ulrich Luz (*Matthew 8–20: A Commentary*, trans. J. E. Crouch, Hermenia [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007], 306), who argued that Herod Antipas had a bad conscience because he had executed John and was afraid that John had been raised by some miracle worker. Luz dismissed the possibility that Matthew and his Jewish-Christian readers would have attributed to the "evil" Herod Antipas any pious ideas such as, for instance, the resurrection of martyrs or even expectations of an eschatological prophet.

⁴⁵ Cf. François Bovon (*Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50*, trans. C. M. Thomas, Hermenia [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002], 350), who explained that Luke described