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DOCTORAL FIELD: THEOLOGY

**St. John the Baptist,**

**Prophet of the Old Testament and witness of Christ**

Thesis Summary

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Keywords: Ioan Botezătorul, Gospel, prophet, Ilie redivivus, Old Testament, judgement, restauration, witness, tertimony, Jesus Christ, Jordan, disciple.

*"I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John"* (Luke 7,28)

Each of the four canonical Gospels begins with the presentation of the public ministry of Jesus Christ and a description of St. John the Baptist as the Forerunner of the Savior. Without being portrayed in the Gospels, St. John would probably have remained an erratic figure in the history of the Jews, mentioned by Josephus Flavius in his *Antiquities*, and perhaps the subject of a footnote in some academic writings. But because of John's mention in the Gospel texts, he gained considerable weight.

None of the authors of the Holy Gospels, who mention his life and activity, did not intend to treat this subject exhaustively. Nor could it, because of the countless details of the theme, each of them, in turn, opening up multiple and challenging research prospects. Even though in the Scripture John the Baptist remained in the shadow of the Savior Jesus Christ, our concern for his life and work outlines the theme of this work.

2000 years ago, one of the most outstanding personalities in the history of mankind, whose name has a tremendous significance in Christianity, was born near Jerusalem: Jochanan Ben Zaharia (John the son of Zechariah). His birth, his life and his death are surrounded by mystery. The New Testament speaks a little about St. John the Baptist, leaving him in some obscurity. The Gospels leave many questions unanswered. Who really was this ascetic, preacher or popular hero? How he lived? What mission did he accomplish? What were the reasons for his decapitation by Herod? Was he a member of the secret brotherhood of the Essenes?

His charisma, his ability to determine the people of his time to action, as well as the esteem and veneration enjoyed by his contemporaries can not be summed up by the few phrases we find about him in the New Testament. It must have been a lot more that has led many Palestinians to walk long distances in order to hear his word. What skills did the preacher characterize? Who were his mentors? What were his living conditions? And last but not least: what was his purpose?

These were the questions I was left with, after a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, in the Jericho area, where it is said to be the original place of the baptism of Jesus Christ, just a few miles from the place where the Jordan flows into the Dead Sea. I sought to answer these dilemmas and to do this research that would be useful to others. My intention was to lift the veil, to show the true course of the Baptist's life, and to emphasize the impact of his mission.

It is one of the reasons why I chose to examine this subject, considering that the role of St. John the Baptist in the history of salvation is not a subject to be spoken only in the past. The belief comes from the experience of the Divine Liturgy, where, in its preparatory part, the proscomidia, the second part of the third bread, comes out in honor and remembrance of "the righteous, the great Prophet, the Forerunner and the Baptist John". He continues to be, through the Divine work of the Holy Spirit, in a state of constant and continuous prayer for the Church everywhere.

At that time, I knew almost nothing about the Essenes. About the life and work of John the Baptist I knew as much as any Orthodox priest, minister in a parish, and who reads the evangelical fragments that directly concern St. John on the occasion of the feasts dedicated to him. Full of curiosity, I started researching, informing myself. I wanted to discover if there is a link between the content of St. John the Baptist's claims and his biblical and historical mission. I also wondered if the Forerunner's spiritual messages were in harmony with the ideas of the Essenes. During my research on the life and work of St. John the Baptist, I soon had to admit that an overview can only be achieved by collecting and sorting many and small puzzle pieces. I found more than I hoped. Only in this way was it possible to shed light on the mystery of St. John the Baptist and to proceed to the writing of a doctoral thesis on his quality as a prophet and witness.

An exhaustive study of all aspects of the life and mission of the Lord's Forerunner is impossible to achieve within the limit of a PhD thesis. The complexity of the beliefs and directions of the last research make it impossible to fit into a systematic research of each element. For these methodological reasons, I

have stopped on two of the attributes of St. John, the Prophet and the Witness. In fact, these two ministries also impose the structure of the work. After, in the first chapter, I analyze the aspects of John the Baptist's historical and biblical life, the following parts will emphasize the assertion of John the Baptist's two roles, prophet and witness.

The motivation to choose the theme proposed for research resides, first of all, in the tendency to clarify in the Romanian theological space the correct reception of the person of St. John. The subject of the research of the doctoral thesis is the identification and study of the personality of St. John the Baptist, to capture the two essential aspects of his ministry, prophet and witness. I also want to identify passages that speak of John the Baptist in the sources, and describe how the writers of the first century of the Christian era portray John the Baptist, whose mission was to „come as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe (In 1,7).

We must recognize that the Romanian theology school, in terms of the personality of St. John the Baptist, does not have a profile and a direction of analysis based on a research program that is in the forefront of international attention. In the concern of Romanian scholars in biblical studies, the subject was treated insufficiently or superficially.

Except of the work of PS Justin Hodea<sup>1</sup>, I do not find in Romanian research a systematic work on St. John the Baptist, to be proposed as the "Orthodox" hermeneutics of the evangelical pericops about St. John. For this reason, my work will be a topical one, a work that was needed in the field of biblical theology.

Secondly, my research also deals with the mechanism of reporting and evaluating, from the perspective of Christian-Orthodox theology, of the most recent bibliographic acquisitions, about the person of St. John, seeking to point out, in the perspective of an inter-confessional dialogue, convergences, correspondences, but also the differences on which a possible dialogue can be built, especially with those in the Protestant environment. This research should not be regarded with reticence or suspicion, in the sense that it would reduce the devotion and piety of the simple believer to St. John. On the contrary, it highlights the value of Christian religion as the only one that guarantees the salvation.

For the Orthodox theologian, the New Testament is the chief book of this approach, because in Orthodoxy, the theological thinking emphasizes God's initiative in restoring humanity from the wickedness of sin, giving Christians the privilege of divine communion and making them able to live a conforming life with the existential transformation that has occurred within them. The parenetic nature of the works or studies of Orthodox theologians about St. John the Baptist thus produces a praxeological doctrine by its nature. It clearly validates the belief that the Divine work of Christ by the Holy Spirit is effective in helping the human being to overcome the limits of his nature and to tend towards divine likeness, thus knowing God. The Orthodox theologian does not make a scientific reading of the New Testament. He reads the New Testament with the eyes of piety, never thinking of reading it scientifically, as is the case today, for example, in Protestant theological schools. The study of theology is a matter of faith, not of science. Protestants, on the contrary, approach theology as a science, following the example of mathematics. They study holy books as botany or chemistry are studied. Once, St. John Chrysostom did not dare to touch even a letter from the sacred text. He just asked for forgiveness to God that he approached his eyes open to divinity.

The exegesis he makes to the sacred text is far from how it is done today in Protestant theology schools, which put God under a microscope, and the object of my piety is naked, put on the table as a body on the dissection table. St. John Chrysostom, on the other hand, would never have had the courage of correcting a single word, not even a mistake of transcribing the Gospel, for the Gospel is a kind of new incarnation of Christ in letters.

In this work I do not intend to create an artificial need to create a new image of St. John, who lived on earth about 2000 years ago. In fact, I believe that every study of the Lord's Forerunner, as a historical figure, should aim to provide an insight to those interested in different aspects of his ministry. As a Christian theologian, I can not treat this subject abstractly by the truths of Christian faith fully revealed in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, coming in ontological proximity to us through the Incarnation and presented to the world by St. John the Baptizer. I will keep in mind that the interest of Orthodox believers is especially to increase their piety to St. John, without pursuing any hypothetical construct.

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<sup>1</sup> Sf. Ioan Botezătorul. *Mărturie evanghelică și mesianism iudaic*, Ed. Mega, Cluj-Napoca, 2013.

Although my research focuses on the person of St. John in the light of the Christian tradition, this does not mean I will avoid interacting with the researchers who have imposed their views on the subject, even if their views question the Gospels. Therefore, when a researcher made a statement about St. John as a historical figure, even if it is a hypothetical construct, I think it is justified to deepen and verify that statement about the Lord's Forerunner.

In this work we will examine two central elements of the work of St. John the Baptist, defined by his roles as prophet and witness. This examination is made within the social, cultural and historical context of Judaism in the Second Temple period, in order to determine the significance of the two elements in this context. This work is not a study of all the data on John the Baptist, but rather focuses on its prophetic and kerismatic ministry. We chose St. John's identity as the prophet and witness of Christ because they best circumscribe the public role he played in the eyes of his audience.

The conclusion of the thesis can be summed up as follows: John's public roles, the prophet and the witness, can best be understood in the socio-historical context of Judaism of the Second Temple period. We engage in an inductive investigation of St. John, as a prophet and witness in a Jewish context, rather than formulating deductive arguments, designed to establish certain affirmations about St. John. The paper will produce some conclusions about Christ's Forerunner, with a historical probability, I hope, quite large.

This work is divided into three parts. In the first part we examine the traditions and sources that speak of John the Baptist in order to understand how they portray the Lord's Forerunner and determine to what point these sources can be used in a historical investigation.

In the second and the third parts, I will examine the ministry of John, defined by the roles of prophet and witness. The approach in each case is an analysis of relevant data on the subject.

The second chapter focuses on John as a prophet. Because John's prophetic announcement refers to a Person who will also make the judgment and restoration, we analyzed John's perception of the judgment to come and the restoration. We considered John's prophetic role in comparison with other prophetic figures. I used the documenting method, bibliographic research method, text or document analysis method and comparative method.

What is particularly noteworthy are the following authenticity criteria, which can sometimes be applied to the texts on which I will insist.

Among the Romanian scholars who have leaned on some aspects of the work of St. John the Baptist, I mention the bishop Ioan Justin Hodea, the author of a doctoral thesis defended in 2011 at the Faculty of Theology in Cluj-Napoca, under the coordination of Prof. Univ. PhD. Stelian Tofană. The work is titled "The Personality of St. John the Baptist between Jewish Testimony and Messianism in the description of the Gospels and of the non-Christian tradition". In 2013, the work saw the light of the printing at the Mega Publishing House in Cluj-Napoca, under the title "St. John the Baptist. Evangelical testimony and Jewish messianism". Of less documentary value are the works of Gheorghe I. Ghia<sup>2</sup>, Diac. Ioan Caraza<sup>3</sup>, Onufrie Pop<sup>4</sup>, Camelia Muha<sup>5</sup> sau Simona Manuela Tomescu<sup>6</sup>.

Other theologians did not intend to dedicate a whole book to any side of the Forerunner's activity, but they have surprised interesting aspects in the studies they have published. I mention, among them, Fr. C. Dron<sup>7</sup>, Fr. T. Negoiță<sup>8</sup>, Fr. Niculai Donos<sup>9</sup>, Fr. Atanasie Negoiță<sup>10</sup>, Prof. Emanuel Copăcianu<sup>11</sup>, Fr. prof.

<sup>2</sup> Gheorghe I. Ghia, *Sf. Ioan Botezătorul după Evangeliile canonice*, Craiova, Ramuri, 1926.

<sup>3</sup> Diac. Ioan Caraza, *Sfântul Ioan Botezătorul – Înainte-Mergătorul Domnului. Botezul cu Duh Sfânt în Hristos*, Slobozia, Editura Episcopiei Sloboziei și Călărașilor, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Onufrie Pop, *Sfântul Ioan Botezătorul, cel mai mare dintre profeti*, Timișoara, Mirton, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Camelia Muha, *Sfântul Ioan Botezătorul*, Iași, Editura Sf. Mina, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Simona Manuela Tomescu, A putut oare face parte Sfântul Ioan Botezătorul din comunitatea de la Qumran?, Brăila, Editura Sfântul Ierarh Nicolae, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Pr. C. Dron, „Capul lui Ioan Botezătorul”, în *M.M. II* (1926), nr. 9, p. 186-188.

<sup>8</sup> Pr. dr. T. Negoiță, „Pusnicul de la Iordan. Sfântul Ioan Botezătorul”, în *R.T. XXX* (1940), nr. 1-2, p. 59-65, disponibil online la [http://documente.bcucluj.ro/web/bibdigit/periodice/revistateologica/1941/BCUCLUJ\\_FP\\_279893\\_1941\\_031\\_001\\_002.pdf](http://documente.bcucluj.ro/web/bibdigit/periodice/revistateologica/1941/BCUCLUJ_FP_279893_1941_031_001_002.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Pr. Niculai Donos, „Sfântul Ioan Botezătorul”, în *M.M.S. XXXI* (1955), nr. 1-2, p. 1-10.

<sup>10</sup> Pr. Atanasie Negoiță, „Sfântul Ioan Botezătorul a fost qumranit sau esenian?”, în *S.T. XXVII* (1975), nr. 5-6, p. 377-387

<sup>11</sup> Prof. Emanuel Copăcianu, „Ioan, proorocul deșerturilor”, în *M.B. XXV* (1975), nr. 1-3, p. 20-37.

Boris Răduleanu<sup>12</sup>, Fr. Ion Buga<sup>13</sup>, Fr. Ioan Bude<sup>14</sup>, Deac. Ioan Caraza<sup>15</sup>, Pr. Prof. Univ. PhD. Stelian Tofană<sup>16</sup>. Recognizing their full spiritual charge, I see some of these studies as not exceeding the stage of biographical catechesis.

The orientation of these latter studies on John the Baptist, in the wider context of recent historical research on the history of Christianity in the first century, indicates that it is time for an extensive, mature analysis of St. John the Baptist, using the insights and accents developed in research conducted in the last years.

In the first part of the thesis – "St. John the Baptist and the Age He lived in", I talked about the Jewish world in the time of John, especially on **Society and politics**.

At the border between the Old and the New Testament, the majestic figure of St. John the Baptist rises. Chronologically, he is the last of the prophets (Matt. 11: 9), but can also be assimilated to the category of witnesses of Christ, especially by the overwhelming dignity of Forerunner of the incarnate Word. It is very important the exact knowledge of the events that took place in the 1st century BC and 1st century AD.

A correct study of the prophet John the Baptist will first seek to understand the conditions existing at the time the prophet lives. We should read the message as if we were living in that day and could make the primary applications according to the political and spiritual conditions that existed. After we understand what the meaning would have been to the prophet's hearers, we are then able to make our own applications. History has a way of repeating its course, and rich and powerful lessons can be gleaned for today as parallels are developed. Faith in God is increased by having this inspirational insight into the immutability of God's Word.

The Siege of Jerusalem (63 BC) occurred during Pompey the Great's campaigns in the east, shortly after his successful conclusion of the Third Mithridatic War. Pompey had been asked to intervene in an internecine war between Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II for the throne of the Hasmonean Kingdom. His conquest of Jerusalem, however, spelled the end of Jewish independence and the incorporation of Judea into the Roman Republic as a client kingdom.

In 49 BC, a civil war broke out in the Roman Empire. Pompey was defeated by Julius Caesar, who pursued his enemy to the east. Caesar chose to cooperate with Hircan II, but called Antipater as *epitropos*. The Hasmonae remained an important presence among the ruling class during the reign of Hircan II, even if General Antipater seemed to have held much of the real control over the country. Antipater was assassinated in 43, but Herod, his son and ally of Rome, took his place. During this reign (37-4 BC), Jerusalem gained great glory and remained a beautiful city until the Temple was destroyed in AD 70. Herod built beautiful palaces and cities throughout the country, the most representative being Massada, Caesarea and Herodion. Herod's reign ended with his death in 4 BC. Antipa was not the first option of Herod the Great for the throne. This honor was returned to Alexander and Aristobulus, the sons of Herod from Princess Mariamne. But after they were executed (c. 7 BC), Herod revised his will, designating Archelau to become king of Judea, Samaria, and Edom, while Antipa had Galilee and Pereea, over which he will reign with the lower title of tetrarch. Philip received Gaulanitis (Golan Heights), Batanaea (southern Syria), Trahonitida and Auranitis.

Since Judea was a satellite kingdom of Rome, Herod's succession plan had to be ratified by Augustus. Therefore, the three heirs went to Rome, where Augustus confirmed the division of the territory, established by Herod. Archelau had to contend with the title of ethnarch instead of the king, ruling in Samaria, Judea and Idumea, but exercising his power with tyranny and brutality. Some of these abuses are recorded in Mt 2:20-23. The murders, riots and social turbulence in the territory controlled by Archelau exceeded the patience of the Roman authorities. In the year 6 AD, Emperor Augustus deposited and exiled

<sup>12</sup> Pr. prof. Boris Răduleanu, „Sfântul Ioan Botezătorul”, în G.B. XXXV (1976), nr. 7-8, p. 725-742.

<sup>13</sup> Pr. Ion Buga, „Sfântul Ioan Botezătorul, primul martor public al Fiului lui Dumnezeu Cel Întrupat”, în O. XLV (1983), nr. 1, p. 73-82.

<sup>14</sup> Pr. drd. Ioan Bude, „Moartea Sfântului Ioan Botezătorul după Sfintele Evanghelii și după istoricul Iosif Flaviu”, în S.T. XXXVIII (1986), nr. 4, p. 66-78.

<sup>15</sup> Diac. Ioan Caraza, „Sfântul Ioan Botezătorul - Înainte-Mergătorul Domnului nostru Iisus Hristos”, în S.T. XLIX (1997), nr. 3-4, p. 71-152.

<sup>16</sup> Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Stelian Tofană, „Iisus – <<Mișcarea lui Dumnezeu>> în mărturia lui Ioan Botezătorul (In 1, 29) - o perspectivă a hristologiei ioaneice”, în Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai. Theologia Ortodoxa 2 (2008), p. 107-118.

Arhelau, sending him to Galia, and his domain became the Roman province of Judea. Thus, Judea was under direct Roman administration, the province being governed by procurators appointed directly by the Roman Emperor.

Unfortunately, Judea provided few benefits to Rome, being poor in agricultural products and mineral treasures. However, its location in the eastern Mediterranean, between the Aegyptus and Syria Roman provinces, the neighborhood of Nabatean territory of Arabia, and its unstable political history required a strong Roman control to ensure security in the region. Augustus was forced to place Judea under the direct control of the Roman Governors, set in Caesarea of Palestine, who were also placed under the supervision of the legatee or governor of Syria.

When Herod Antipa, the ruler of Galilee, began building the new city, Tiberias, on the west bank of the Sea of Galilee, expected revolts from the population, burdened by tax burdens. His vigilance was maximal, especially since the next decade saw a new Jewish religious movement. It was led by an apocalyptic visionary, St. John the Baptist, who called his auditors to confess their sins, to live an ascetic life, and to prepare for the imminent coming of a God who would punish evil. The increasing popularity of John the Baptist among the peasant population alarmed Herod Antipa, who probably feared that the new movement, with the promise of an apocalyptic intervention, could lead to riots. Preventively, he arrested and beheaded St. John the Baptist. But the execution of the Baptist, a so popular prophet, sparked strong popular resentment.

The next sub-chapter is dedicated to **the religious parties of the time: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots, Samaritans and Herodians**. They were the main Jewish political and religious movements in the years between c.150 BCE and 70 CE, according to Josephus Flavius (Antiquities 13.5, § 9). The Pharisees were an independent religious group that arose shortly after the **Maccabean Revolt**. They became very influential in Jewish society, focusing on eating habits and rituals of purification, aspects that were grounded primarily on their oral traditions, and not on the Scriptures.

The Sadducees, on the other hand, rejected any appeal to the oral tradition and to the five books of Moses, ignoring also the writings of the prophets. This group included the elite of the Jerusalem society. At the time of St. John the Baptist, they had expanded their power by affirming control over the temple in Jerusalem. Each of these religious groups preserved the traditions and doctrines they believed were essential to religious life. But because they did not have the guidance of a true prophet, they remained at their own interpretations.

Regardless of religious belief, ordinary people were looking forward to the coming of the Messiah, seeing the arrival of the Davidian King to save His people.

A group for whom the expectation of the Messiah was a priority of their religious life was that of the Essenes. They believed that the priests of the temple in Jerusalem were corrupt, and the temple needed serious reforms. In their opinion, the coming of the Messiah was near. They believed that He would crush the oppressive yoke of Rome, which conquered Palestine about 60 years before the birth of St. John the Baptist.

But without a prophet to guide them, the Jews were divided on the meaning of the Scriptures and the Person of the Messiah. While most were expecting a Davidian Messiah, one descended from King David, others were waiting for a sacred Messiah, a son of Aaron. Others, on the other hand, were no longer waiting for the Messiah to come. These many expectations, built by different groups during the intertestamental period, have made these groups confused in the recognition of the true Messiah when He was incarnate. None of the groups of scribes, Pharisees, Essenes, or Sadducees accepted St. John the Baptist as a prophet, nor Jesus as the Messiah. Some members of these groups became primary adversaries of St. John and of Jesus Christ during their ministries (Mt 21,23-46).

Although St. John related to the various socio-political groups and religious ideologies of his time, he had his own vision. He had a position that, in some places, interfered with or was in opposition to the political-religious currents of the time. Some scholars compare John with a scholar named Hillel, his near-contemporary. Both John and Hillel had a deep respect for Thora, being renowned for preaching compassion, forgiveness, and love. Their ministry was deeply human. However, St. John was more than a rabbi. He was perceived as a prophet, a defender of the poor and oppressed, and as the one who presented the Messiah to the world. The distinctive character of St. John must be appreciated in the context of his life

and age, a context in which religion and politics were linked in a much more complex way than we think of them today.

**Chapter 2** of the thesis provides an overview on **biographical data of St. John the Baptist**. I talked about his birth and childhood.

His birth, as well as the birth of Christ, is dated around 6 - 4 BC<sup>17</sup>. And the period of the year he saw the light of the day is either February-March or August-September.

In the description of childhood, St. Luke reports the expectation and birth of St. John in a family of the priest Zacharia, in rural Judea (Lc 1,5-25, 39-45, 57-79).

From the sources of time, we know that there was an important Jewish movement that considered St. John the Baptist to be the expected Messiah. The Mandean sect draws its roots from the St. John the Baptist movement in Jordan area. Their testimonies and John's Mandean Book bring extra information to this research. The Mandaeans consider St. John the Baptist to be the true Messiah.

Another sub-chapter is dedicated to **the Prophet's Activity in the Jordan's Desert**. The estimation of the beginning of St. John's work is made in the Gospel of Luke 3,1-2, which states that his work preceded that of Jesus Christ: „In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness”.

I continue to find out about the education, clothing, food, the place of John's activities. The New Testament, along with Joseph's historical passages, testify to St. John's fame. In remote places, away from Palestine, just a few years after Jesus was resurrected, there were Jews who knew about St. John, but not about Jesus Christ. Certainly, his great popularity also brought Herod's decision to be eliminated, beheaded, and not crucified, for the crucifixion could trigger a popular uprising, hard to manage for the authorities.

Herod was married to the daughter of Aretas IV, a Nabatean king, but on a certain trip to Rome he stopped to visit his half-brother, Philip, and was “smitten” with Philip's wife, Herodias. He influenced her to leave his brother, and then he himself divorced his own wife. The two, Antipas and Herodias, thus entered an “unlawful” live-together relationship. It was inevitable, therefore, that John and Herod would clash. Actually, Herod had some interest in John's message. The ruler knew that the prophet was a righteous and holy man. He feared John. Josephus says that Antipas was afraid that John's popularity might generate a revolt (*Antiquities* 18.5.2).

The discovery and subsequent study of the Dead Sea scrolls and the ruins of Qumran's religious community have led to speculation about whether and how Essenes and John the Baptist might have been connected. In the sub-chapter named **”St. John the Baptist and the Qumran community”**, I tried to analyze all possible connections and some obvious divergences. In this chapter, I seek to discover how closely John and the Essenes were connected, if at all. Their proximity only proves they were neighbours, but not necessarily connected.

Both John and Essenes practiced „baptism”, the washing of the body in water for the purpose of ritual purity and to indicate a spiritual repentance. Both tied baptism and repentance for the immediate advent of the Messiah. But John preached a one-time baptism of repentance. The Essenes demanded ritual washing on a daily basis. John's baptism was open to any repentant sinner who wanted to „prepare the way of the Lord”. Instead, the Essenes baptism was limited to those initiated into the band of the pure and separated ones.

If we ask: „Was John the Baptist an Essene?”, we can answer in a simple word: NO. Any connection between the two is only speculation based on the similarities discussed in the chapter of the thesis. Interestingly, the writers of the New Testament did not mention the Essenes at all, and Josephus in his account did not connect the two.

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<sup>17</sup> Paul L. Maier, „The Date of the Nativity and Chronology of Jesus”, în Jerry Vardaman & Edwin M. Yamauchi (eds.), *Chronos, kairos, Christos: nativity and chronological studies*, 1989, p. 113-129; Craig Evans, „Josephus on John the Baptist”, în Amy-Jill Levine et al. (eds.), *The Historical Jesus in Context*, Princeton Univ. Press, 2006, p. 55-58; *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, Amsterdam University Press, 2000, p. 249.

Who was St. John the Baptist? The last of the prophets? A Qumran essenian? The first of the apostles? Is he who opens the way of the Lord and witnesses to him? Christian tradition saw in him the last prophet of the Old Testament, but also the Forerunner of Jesus Christ, the only prophet of the new age, which opens the messianic age. There is also called the prophet, the friend of the Bridegroom, the light, the voice, the angel, Elijah, the Baptist of the Lord, the announcer of the Judgment and the Emperor's Forerunner.

The etymology of the word "prophet" reflects a dual mission: the verb *phaino* sends to "the one who looks with anticipation," while *phēmi* designates the prophet as "the one who speaks for another." Distinguished by the message transmitted, the prophet seems to refer to the saint's ability to announce by divine grace the imminent arrival of the Savior and to prepare his contemporaries, using the capacity of words bearing warnings. But it is difficult to give an unambiguous meaning to the word "prophet", as well as to place St. John into a category hard to define. On the other hand, the fact that the Evangelist describes him as "more than a prophet", a formula borrowed from Christ (Mt 9: 7-11 and Lk 7: 24-28), contradicts this appellation designating the Baptist. St. John appears as a person caught between his role as a mediator of divinity and a transformation that remains unformulated. It is like a hinge of history, the birth of which coincides with the end of the Hashmon dynasty and the appearance of foreign kings, a buffer between the desert, the traditional place of God's encounter with the Jewish people, and the river where he baptized, prefiguring the New Law.

John resembled an Old Testament prophet. The prophetic voice of God had been silent for centuries. When John came as a prophet, even as Elijah, the people and more important Jesus recognized him as such. John sought a broader hearing. He came to prepare the ordinary person for the end times. He spoke to soldiers, Pharisees, and ordinary people alike. His approach was inclusive.

He claimed to be the divinely chosen „voice in the wilderness”, whose job was to prepare the nation for the end times. He preached a fiery, apocalyptic judgment in conjunction with the coming of Messiah. The prophet preached repentance and ethical living, not a mechanistic keeping of the Law. He said that living in faith that results in kindness to one's fellow man was the best way to prepare for the coming of Messiah.

For a more faithful position of the mission of St. John the Baptist in Hebrew prophecy, we have deepened the call and mission of the prophets in Chapter I, entitled: **"The Prophetic Institution in the Old Testament."**

The Jews from the Second Temple period and Christians have not ceased to believe in prophecy. God did not cease to send His servants to invite all to return to Himself for obedience. Many Jews at this time confused the prophecy with the prediction. In this context many pseudo-prophets have appeared. Josephus Flavius notes that these prophetic manifestations have triggered many revolutionary actions<sup>18</sup> and that this was very dangerous because it allowed the bandits and impostors to act at will.

A first subchapter is titled „**The Role of the Prophets in the History of Israel.**” In Israel, there was a long history of individuals who served as Lord's messengers to the nation and to the world. The true prophets in the Old Testament were loyal servants of God and convinced enemies of idolatry. They often risked their lives by confronting wicked kings, princes or rulers with the Word of God.

The prophets interceded for the sinners, they poured their souls into their pleas that sinners rejoice and turn back to God. Moses in fact was the greatest of the Old Testament prophets and his experience as a prophet became a paradigm for later prophets as the vocabulary and relationships of divine communication through Moses became standard for God's revelations to other true prophets (Dt 18:15). Several elements often characterize the relationships between the Lord, the prophets and their hearers: 1) the authority of the Lord over both the prophets and their audiences; 2) the obedience of the prophets, though sometimes with initial protest; 3) the authority of the prophets as representatives of the sovereign God; 4) the requirement of the audience to choose covenant obedience or disobedience; 5) The report of the prophetic back to the Lord in the form of prayer.

It is a mistake to think of the biblical prophets primarily as predictors of the future. To be sure, prediction was an essential part of their preaching, but their primary function was to call people to obedience

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<sup>18</sup> Josephus Flavius, *Rāzb. iud.* 2, 259.

and dependence upon God. The content of prophetic messages were shaped by God's covenant with His people and by particular historical circumstance of the individual prophet. The covenant was established to make Israel a holy nation that worshiped only one true God. But the history of Israel was characterized by persistent rebellion against God, and these rebellions had a marked impact on how the prophetic messages were framed and presented. These messages often took the form of lawsuits initiated by God against His people for breach of covenant. The prophetic lawsuit typically included: 1) arraignment in the divine court; 2) accusations; 3) pronouncement of judicial sentence; 4) description of coming punishment; 5) promise of restoration.

A subchapter is intended for **the prophet and his personal destiny**. The purpose of this incursion in the lives of profets is to show that their activities and destiny is very similar to that of St. John the Baptism. So, undoubtless, John is the follower of the old tradition of prophecy coming from the Old Testament. I shed light on cocation or call to the prophecy; the prophet's life and work, seen as a message to the people; the prophet as a men of toubles; the death of the Prophets, the sign of the belief in their mission. Another part of the sub-chapter treats **"The Prophet, as Defender and Promoter of High Moral Values."** I talked about the significance of the Law, about the care for tradition, between continuity and renewal, and the ambiguous attitude of the prophets towards sacrificial cult. The Priorities of the prophetic message concerned the Divine Judgment, the annunciation of Redemption / Salvation and the announcement of the New Covenant.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to **the Prophetic Role of St. John**. I analyzed the socio-political orientation of the prophetic ministry of St. John, and **the Opponents of John and his Movement: the Temple authorities, Herod Antipa and the Romans**.

The next chapter is dedicated to the **Contents of St. John Prophecies**. I was concerned about the **identity of the Forerunner**. I have dedicated space for his testimony that he is not Christ (Jn 1: 19-28), but the „voice of the one crying in the wilderness”. Seven centuries before the birth of John, the prophet Isaiah spoke of “the voice of one that cry,” indeed, of him who would “prepare in the wilderness the way of Jehovah,” and “make level in the desert a highway for our God” (Is. 40:3). While many commentators find in this prediction an immediate application to Judah's return from the Babylonian captivity, the New Testament writers see in it an ultimate fulfillment in the preparatory work of John the Baptist (cf. Mt. 3:3; Mk. 1:2-3; Lk. 3:4-6; Jn. 1:23).

Than I treated the theme of **St. John the Baptist as Elijah**, because In the New Testament we have the testimony of the angel Gabriel (Lk. 1:16), and that of Christ himself (Mt. 11:12-15), that this “Elijah” to come was none other than John. Finally, at the end of this sub-chapter, I deal with the meaning of the words **“I baptize you ...”** His influence was phenomenal. Hundreds, if not thousands, were immersed by him. And his success was solely in the message he proclaimed

The second sub-chapter is dedicated to **„The content of the preaching of St. John about the expected Messiah and the distinction between his baptism and that of Christ”**. The declaration of John that he was unworthy to either carry Jesus' sandals or to unloose the thongs thereof (Mt. 3:11; Jn. 1:27) was stunning testimony. John characterized the Lord as “the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world” (Jn. 1:29). The Baptizer identifies Christ as the antitype of the Passover sacrifice and affirms the universality of the Savior's mission. Moreover, though John was chronologically older than Jesus, he declared that Christ “was before” him (Jn. 1:15, 30), stressing the eternity of the preincarnate Word (Jn. 1:1), hence, the Lord's divine essence. This section includes different theme I treated: **The Baptism with Holy Spirit and Fire**, **The Metaphor of the area and its theological significance** and **The Theological Meaning of Biblical Expressions “Lamb of God” and “Ebed Yahweh”**.

Another sub-chapter is entitled **„The Sermon of St. John and His Perception on the Eschatological Judgment and the Apocalyptic Lamb”**. Here, I talked about **Eschatological particularities of St. John's Age and the Apocalyptic Lamb**. John's message had a biting edge. He spoke of divine retribution, “the wrath to come” (Mt. 3:7). There are several figures of speech employed by the prophet to provide thrust to his message. He talked about the “ax” that lies at the root of the trees, he spoke of an “unquenchable fire,” and of a “fan” in the Lord's hand (Mt. 3:10-12). The fan was the winnowing shovel with which the harvested grain was tossed into the wind so as to separate the kernel from the chaff. It thus signified the great separation between the righteous and the wicked in the ultimate ordering of God. Finally, the “unquenchable fire” vividly pictured the eternal pain that will accompany the suffering of hell.

The forth sub-chapter analyzes **the relationship among the three baptisms: St. John's, Christ's in the Jordan, and the Christian Baptism**. This will be discussed as separate items: **Baptism, the object of the St. John's sermon; Baptism in the Jordan and traditional rites of purification; Baptism of John, Preamble of Christian Baptism**. In this sub-chapter, attention is given to the baptism administered by John. I had some points for consideration: What was its “mode” or manner of administering? What elements accompanied it? What was the purpose of the ordinance? What was the consequence of rejecting John’s baptism? John’s ministry was unique. “The law and the prophets were until John: from that time the gospel of the kingdom of God is preached” (Lk. 16:16). John’s message prepared honest Jews for entrance into the kingdom.

The fifth chapter is dedicated to **St. John's Invitation to Repentance**. The chapter is divided in two parts: **1. The Inminence of Eschatological Judgment and Private Judgment and 2. Repentance, the central idea of the preaching of St. John**. He preached about the coming kingdom and the need to repent. The Palestine in which the prophet’s ministry was launched was firmly in the grip of a grossly pagan force, the Roman empire. Moral corruption had made deep inroads into Judaism as well. Read carefully the second chapter of the book of Romans. It was into this world that John came with his piercing message: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt. 3:2; cf. Mk. 1:4). John’s message of “repentance” entailed a deep consciousness of offense to God within the sinner’s heart, with a required reformation of life. When he saw superficial Hebrews submitting to his immersion, void of any radical change of conduct, he rebuked them: “You offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth, therefore, fruit worthy of repentance” (Mt. 3:7-8). “Fruit” is the outward expression of deep inner conviction. Without fruit there is no real repentance.

For the preceding fifteen centuries — since the inauguration of the Mosaic system — the “reign” of God had been focused in the Hebrew people. This was by divine design in preparation for the arrival of Heaven’s Messiah (Gal. 3:24-25). Now, though, a new phase of the “kingdom of God” was about to commence (Mt. 21:43). The old theocracy (a combined religious and political system) will be not more available. The kingdom of Christ is not to be a this-world oriented system (Jn. 18:36).

The Gospels focus either on the role of St. John as messenger and preacher of God, or provide the proof that St. John is “more than a prophet.” Superiority to his predecessors lies in the fact that he participated in the fulfillment of his own prophecy: he baptized Jesus and recognized Him as the Messiah. At the same time, the expectations expressed by the prophetic tradition are accomplished. Isaiah, Malachi, and Zechariah had announced his arrival. Moreover, his activity and suffering place him beyond any taxonomy. The holiness lies into St. John, because he is both a hermit in the desert and an apostle of Jesus and a martyr by decapitation.

The discourse of John’s audacious disciples contradicts Zechariah and the angel Gabriel when they want to see in him not Jesus’ Forerunner, but His equal, and claim that their mentor has been diminished because of Jesus. The systematic exploitation of the parallels between Christ and John confirms the jealousy of John’s disciples. Luke really mentions their relationship of kinship and intertwines the narratives of their childhood. St. John was conceived five months before the angel Gavriil announced the birth of Jesus to the Virgin Mary. Elizabeth is honored by the Virgin’s visit and notified of the approach of “The Mother of my God” by bringing her infant John into her womb. Evangelist Matthew, who most often compares John and Jesus, recounts the similarities between the two ministies: John baptizes, and Jesus preaches, some of Jesus’ disciples being first in the Baptist’s circle. Ultimately, their mission and martyrdom are part of God’s plan, announced in Scripture, Herod Antipas being a key character through which this plan is accomplished.

Leaving himself baptized by John, the Lord Jesus Christ indicated his agreement with the message of St. John. He must have heard John proclaiming his message. The prophet announced to Israel that, as a people of God, he sinned, attracting the imminent, eschatological judgment of God. In order to be saved from this judgment, the Jews have to change fundamentally internally and externally, in behavior, and express this repentance by receiving baptism. Those who responded by repentance and baptism were exempted by imminent judgment and participate in the eschatological reconstitution of true Israel, God’s Chosen Remnant, Whose coming is imminent.

At least at this moment of His life, Jesus is in agreement with John. Such a conclusion is not surprising at all, and it brings a number of implications regarding the ideological framework that

characterized the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. First of all it implies that Jesus began his work in the ideological framework of an eschatology characterized by imminent judgment and the closeness of the Kingdom of Heaven. Subsequently, the eschatology of Jesus Christ developed beyond this point.

Secondly, this implies that Jesus' ministry began in an ideological setting to reconstruct the people of Israel around the real remnant. Jesus participates in the baptism of John in agreement with the redefinition of Israel made by John. This suggests that an examination of Jesus' later ministry may reveal a similar concern for the restoration of Israel. An example of this concern in the service of Jesus is the choice of the "twelve", symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel (Mt 10: 1-4 = Mc 3,13-19a = Lc 6, 12-16, cf. Mc 6, 6b-7 = Lc 9,1-1, Mt 19,28 = Lc 22,28-30).

Thirdly, the principle agreement between Jesus and John at the beginning of His ministry implies that judgment and restoration, as well as reconsideration of Israel, will be through divine participation.

St. John is not innovative by creating new paths in his renewal work. His prophecy is also continuity of the Old Testamentary tradition, but also a rupture. John assumes the change of trajectory from his birth, when he refuses to bear the name of his father. Taking the name of John, a name given by his mother, and not that of Zechariah, he is somewhat detached from his family. His birth contradicts the biological laws of natural filiation. He also breaks the connection with the world, withdrawing into the wilderness and dressing as the prophets. According to Scripture, John is dressed in a way similar to Elijah's, with a belt and a camel skin, a sign of rupture, not of regression to the animal state. The animal's skin opposes the web that, through its plant fibers, is a symbol of continuity.

St. John is not compromised with secular power, assuming to the members of society and King Herod the ability to object, a propitiation of the prophets. The figure of Elijah, presented in the text of Malachi, returns. The word of the saint unfolds in sermons where the metaphorical language of the Gospels turns into a direct and virulent message in which he, the Forerunner, warns the common people, the tax collectors and the Pharisees about the imminence of the outbreak of God's wrath and preaches repentance for get rid of the judgment. He denounces political and oppressive sovereignty and the accumulation of riches. Here is the essence of prophecy: attention to the weak and small, especially in the field of righteousness. Respect for God, and respect for others are the two commandments to which the Law of Prophets is reduced. The discourse reveals a conservative view of the world and human history. His denunciation is fulminant and the whole society is caught under the glance of the preacher. Grafted on the criticism of the Pharisees, customs officers, or Herod, John's discourse can be both moral and political. He scratched the ears of those tempted by luxury and adornment, condemning the hierarchy of Jewish society that neglects the mutual duties of its members, and often forgets the need for solidarity: the indifference of the rich to ordinary people, the pride of the tyrants who abused their power, the hypocrisy of the perpetrators, the moral decay. More often, John's discourse focuses on current issues and contemporary events. He is opponent of the insatiable greed of the leaders, as well as the fiscal and monetary aspects of Roman politics, which, through its officials, led to the ruin of the peasants.

The assessment of the society is based on an eschatological vision of history. As a prophet, he tried to read the signs of God's grace and of the end of the age, establishing a close connection between political and eschatological events.

The author of the Gospel takes care to remind the historical background of the life and work of the Forerunner: John was born during the time of Octavian Augustus when the Jews did not have a king, when the rulers lost their kingdom because of their sins. The sons of Alexandra, Hyrcan and Aristobol, were responsible for the end of the dynasty. At the death of the two sons of Aristobolus, a foreign king, Herod, was called to reign over Palestine. The king's rights were no longer protected by divine protection.

Judaism, even in the era preceding the coming of the Messiah, could not render prophecy. The message, obviously religious, is marked by history and goes beyond the sacred sphere, assuming political valencies, capable of replacing any misanthropic orientation.

The third part of the thesis is entitled "St John – Witness of Christ" and is divided in 3 chapters. The first chapter concerns conceptual delimitations and meanings of the word "witness". The term „μάρτυς”, which means witness, comes from the field of law. In Hellenic antiquity, it was used not only by law specialists but also in the usual language, designating the one who testified about certain events in which he took part directly or where he was present. We can talk about a witness to the judgment, voluntarily bringing

his own testimony, action expressed through the verb „μαρτυρῶ” (to testify). Gradually, „μάρτυς” (witness) and „μαρτυρία” (testimony) have gone beyond the legal sphere, being terms used in the sense of expressing certain truths and opinions of a person.

In Hebrew, the word "witness" is the translation of the nouns 'edh (עֵד) and of the verb "anah".

Among some people who were not accustomed to writing, proof of a transaction was made through a certain memorial, tangible, or a significant ceremony. Thus, Abraham gave seven lambs to Abimelech as evidence of his property on the wells of Beersheba.

The testimony was so important in Judaism that God Himself is portrayed as a witness of human society. He assists the individual and social life of man. God is witness in cases of agreements between individuals, concluded before Him, at the marriage concluded between man and woman (Mal.2,14), at the oath between Jacob and Laban (Face 31,44-54), to the understanding and the oath between David and Jonathan (1 Kg 20:1-42), to the separation of the prophet Jeremiah from the Jews who went to Egypt. God also appears as a witness in some official situations: in judgment against sinners (Mal 3,5; Jer 29:23), as a defender of Samuel's innocence (1 Kg 12:5), as a witness to Job's innocence (Job 16: 19) or of the Jews who were ready to die on the Sabbath day. Regarding the word "testimony" (martyrdom, testimony), it quickly becomes religiously nuanced.

The word "testimony" receives the meaning of revelation of the divine commandments: "the tabernacle of the testimony" (Lev 1,1,4,4,7, Num 1,50,53, Dt 31,14), but also the "ark of the testimony" or "the tables of testimony". The word designates the commandments of God given to Moses. God's commandments are testimonies because they contain the will of God and testify His presence. Later, during the two centuries before Christianity, the terms of witness and testifying have got another sense, in connection with the Jews who suffered persecutions from the Hellenic emperors of Antioch, as we read in the books of the Maccabees. In that context, the fact of being witness meant confessing the truth of the law (the Torah) of God. It overlaps with the image of the prophet, which for the mission, for his faith, suffers mockery, persecution and even death. The authentic prophet does not say anything that sounds nice in the ears of the hearers; his word is a continuous urge to repentance, and therefore it is necessary that he suffer the consequences of his behavior. This experience culminated in the persecution of the Syrians, when the religious zeal, faith and obedience to the Law of some Jews were sealed with suffering and death. The martyrdom of the Maccabees, who sacrificed their earthly life in eternal hope, according to the promise of God (2 Mac 7,36), resembles in detail a Christian martyrdom, which made the Maccabees martyrs to be counted together in the tradition of the Church with those of Christians.

We can conclude that martyrdom is still in Judaism the expression of a faithfulness to God (Is 43: 9-14), that the Jewish religion of the Old Testament is a religion of witness / testimony, while the Old Testament community is a community of witnesses confessing the true God with their blood.

By obeying the law, the Israelites are witnesses to the work of the Lord in the time of the exodus and to the laws given on Sinai. The biblical testimony proves to be contagious because people become witnesses only by hearing another witness. It's like a travel companion, a witness pointing to God and the divine will. Deuteronomy links the covenant / law, on the one hand, and the configuration or continuation of this group as the people of God, on the other, and extends this connection in time: "I am making this covenant, with its oath, not only with you who are standing here with us today in the presence of the LORD our God but also with those who are not here today. You yourselves know how we lived in Egypt" (Dt 29,14-16a).

In this way, Scripture transcends time, extending the covenant proclaimed hinc et nunc in the distant future, and the people of the distant past turn into "us," the contemporary generation, who interpret Scripture according to its dynamic content. Actually, the law (Thora) has an eternal present, is addressed to the people, generation after generation.

Indeed, the nature of Deuteronomy as a witness and the connection that the book makes between Moses and its future readers becomes paradigmatic for Scripture itself. While Moses does not enter the country with the Israelites, his voice is entering through the "Law of Moses":

"Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful." (Joshua 1: 7-8).

In fact, the entire Pentateuch become the testimony of Moses, who continues to approach future generations long after his death. Written by Moses, the books must be understood as a continuous witness, as a perennial presence of their author among the Jews. In turn, the Gospels reflect their role as a witness, ending with an anonymous common confirmation: "We know that his testimony is true" (Jn 21:24).

In the OT, people confess the work and wisdom of God within the state of Israel and beyond, by word and deeds. But while biblical documents testify of the revelation of God in the past, they also demand a faithful answer at present.

In the synoptic Gospels we meet the legal meaning of the word, designating the witness of certain events. When St. John, Lord's Forerunner, testifies to the Messianism of the Coming One to Jordan to receive Baptism, such an event is part of the history of Jesus Christ, which the hagiographers treat objectively. However, the Messianity of Jesus was first received through faith. We are talking about a reality located on a different plan than the historical one, one that can not be seen objectively by eyewitnesses, but can be trusted and confessed. The word „μάρτυς” brings together both meanings, the presentation of events, the witness of facts, and the confessional preaching.

Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles, puts in the mouth of Christ the words, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem" (Acts 1: 8), for the Apostles can inform about the Resurrection (2,32,3,15,5,31) about the history of Jesus (10,39). Only certain persons, from a narrow circle, had the chance to personally meet the risen Christ (10: 41; 1,22), becoming "His witnesses to the people" (13,31). And St. Paul is called a witness, although he did not personally recognize the Lord in his earthly life. He is the witness of the truth and testifies of Christ.

In the New Testament, I can quote the testimony of John the Baptist (In 1,7: „οὗτος ἦλθεν εἰς μαρτυρίαν, ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός”; In 1,19: „Καὶ αὕτη ἐστίν ἡ μαρτυρία τοῦ Ἰωάννου\* ὅτε ἀπέστειλαν πρὸς αὐτὸν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι ἐξ Ἱεροσολύμων ἵερεῖς καὶ Λευίτας\* ἵνα ἐρωτήσωσιν αὐτόν Σὺ τίς εἶ”), Christ Himself (In 3,11,32-33; 8,13), God and the signs that Jesus does (In 5,32,36), as well as the Evangelist, whose book is entirely a testimony („Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ μαθητὴς ὁ μαρτυρῶν περὶ τούτων καὶ ὁ γράψας ταῦτα, καὶ οἴδαμεν ὅτι ἀληθῆς αὐτοῦ ἡ μαρτυρία ἐστίν” - In 21,24).

The second chapter concerns **qualification criteria of St. John the Baptist as an honest witness**. According to the evaluation scale that VT provides us with regard to the testimony of witnesses, we believe that St. John qualifies brilliantly for the role of a qualified witness, which makes his message worthy of consideration. The Scripture gives us clues that allow us to attribute this quality of witness to the Forerunner of the Lord without hesitation.

John's work is a fulfillment of the prophecy made in the time of Isaiah. St. John was recognized as a prophet by the people. He was a righteous man, without gluttony, pride or desire of personal power, an adversary of sin and hypocrisy. The Gospels contain enough passages where St. John clearly states that his work was to prepare the way for the Coming one. We would expect him to know who is This and to identify Him accurately when He came. What is John's testimony about this?

We can find his testimony in different places of the New Testament: Jn 1,14-15; Jn 1,29-30,35,36; Jn 1,30-33; Jn 1,34; Jn 3,22-30; Jn 10,40-41; Acts 19,4-5.

John was expressly sent as a man of God to prepare the way and testify of Christ so that the people can believe in Him. The Baptizer testified to the superiority of the Lord Jesus, that He is the Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world and the Son of God. This testimony was given by the one whose qualification as a witness was irrefutable.

It is true that after John was imprisoned, he sought to make sure that Jesus was indeed Christ (Lk 7: 18-23; Mt 11: 1-6). Perhaps because, like the Apostles and other Jews, St. John was disturbed when Jesus did not act according to the Jews' expectations. This demonstrates that the prophets have revealed inspired, infallible messages coming from God, but that, while remaining natural men, they did not always understand all the valences of their own messages, nor the way in which God would stage the fulfillment of the prophecies. In turn, they had to study their own messages to interpret them properly. And the Apostle Peter has gone through the difficulty of understanding the message he has revealed about the conversion of the Gentiles (cf Acts 2,39,10,11,15 and Gal 2). However, by remaining the miracles to which John's disciples had access, the Lord Jesus was able to give the assurance that John had sought. So, if we take John's

testimony and add the miracles of the Savior and the fulfillment of the prophecies spoken of Him, we can also entrust ourselves to the identity of Jesus as the eternal Son of God.

I developed all these testimonies of the Forerunner in the following chapter of the thesis, dedicated to **the relationship between St. John the Baptist and Jesus Christ, as it is reflected in the Gospels.**

The historical relationship between John and Jesus continues to stir up a matter of discussion and debate. This problem is complicated because of the lack of relevant indications concerning the extent to which St. John and Jesus knew each other. Matthew and John offer some evidence of mutual knowledge (Matthew 3: 13-17: 1,15-18, 26-36, 5:33), while Mark and Luke are more reserved about the nature of their relationship.

St. John is mentioned in the NT for over ninety times. Only Jesus, Peter, and Paul are mentioned more often than him. In addition, St. John is the only saint whose birth is celebrated by the Church: announced by the angel Gavriil to Zechariah, is celebrated on June 24, and his martyrdom/ beheading on August 29.

The references to St. John in the New Testament Gospels indicate that Evangelists have a passion in negotiating the relationship between the two personalities of the time: John and Jesus. In this chapter, we will carefully explore the similarities and differences in the accounts of the evangelists concerning St. John. We will go through the synoptic passages on the one hand and the Gospel of John on the other.

All four Gospels associate John with the inauguration of Jesus' ministry. In Matthew and Mark, John baptizes Jesus, although Matthias screams to do it. At Luke, John is imprisoned before Jesus comes to baptism, but he has already met Him as a conceived infant in his mother's womb at the meeting with the Virgin Mary. The Fourth Gospel does not present any history of childhood, but, like Luke, it does not mention anywhere that St. John baptized Jesus. His relationship with Jesus was just to confess Him.

Mark, Matthew and Luke refer to John as a "Baptist," although the fourth Gospel does not use such an epithet. Mark, Matthew and Luke refer to the purpose of John's baptism as a fulfillment of the conversion that led to the forgiveness of sins, while Josephus Flavius states that baptism only cleanses the body after an earlier purification through righteousness. The notion of "forgiveness of sins" is specific to the Gospels only. Only the fourth Gospel states that Jesus Himself, or at least His disciples, have begun a baptismal ministry in Judea at the same time as John still baptizes. The Gospels generally counteract John's baptism, only with water, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit which Jesus will offer in the future.

In the first part of this chapter, I focus on the Synoptic Gospels.

In his Gospel, Mark portrays John in a double role: prophet and Baptizer. He urges people to repentance and baptism, announcing the imminent coming of the One who will inaugurate the Kingdom of God by the gift of the Holy Spirit (1,4-8). The answer of the people is positive, considering St. John the Baptist a true prophet (1,5; 6,14; 8,28; 11,30-32). The religious leaders, the scribes and the elders do not accept the preaching (11,30-33).

The Baptizer is understood as Elias-redivivus, whose suffering and death prefigure the Savior's passions (cf. 6: 17-29). Thus he contributes to the eschatological time of salvation (1: 14-15) and participates at the "beginning of the gospel" (1, 1).

In Matthew's Gospel, the presentation of the person and work of St. John the Baptist differs from the Gospel of Mark. Matthew portrays St. John as Baptist and Prophet, adding a new aspect: John not only sensitizes the crowds, but, as a result of their positive response, the marginalized members of society share the kingdom of God. In the Matean interpretation of John, the identity of John is more explicitly outlined as Elias-redivivus, an identification already present in the Gospel of Mark. The Gospel of Matthew reinterprets John's role toward Jesus. The Baptizer is presented more clearly, being subordinate to Jesus Christ, thus emphasizing the uniqueness of the Messiah. His own death prefigures the death of Jesus.

Concerning the relationship between John and Jesus Christ, the Gospel of Matthew states that after the death of the Baptist, "when his disciples came, they took his body, and buried it, and went to tell to Jesus" (Mt 14:12). The Savior declared that John was more than a prophet, that he was the one sent to prepare the people for the coming of Christ.

According to the Gospel of John, the Baptist recognized the divine nature of Christ when He came to Jordan to be baptized. But now he was locked in prison and wondered if he had made a mistake. If Jesus was the One promised, why did not he use his power to remove the unjust reign of Antipas and his wife?

Although John had been called to proclaim the work of Jesus, he was part of the old order, and he was the heir of a belief system in which men's violence was the reflection of a divine attribute. Priests, religious leaders, and ordinary people all believed that Messiah's Kingdom would be built on the tombs of the defeated enemies. And for this reason, Jesus said that although none of those born until that time had been greater than John, he was the least of those born to the Kingdom of Heaven, with different eligibility criteria.

"Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.<sup>12</sup> From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence,<sup>[a]</sup> and violent people have been raiding it." (Mt 11:11-12).

Although they were cousins with overlapping ministries, John and Jesus were different from one another in their outer life and inner convictions. Raised in the wilderness, John spent his life outside the cities and villages where most people lived. Jesus lived in the city. John fasted, without social contact with those considered "sinful" by the Jewish Law. But Jesus often stood at table with those considered to be sinners by the religious leaders. And he knew that this was fueling the criticism of His enemies. He also knew that the opponents admired John's asceticism, and Jesus found that, observing his own lifestyle, men were saying, "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'" (Mt 11:19).

The Gospel of Luke outlines John the Baptist in a wider context of the history of salvation; Luke portrays John as a preacher-reformer whose work prepares the path of Jesus' coming. Although he perceives John as part of the Messianic age, however, Luke carefully separates the activity of the Baptist from that of Jesus. John's interpretation of Elijah-redivivus is not as accentuated as in the Matthew Gospel, nor is it presented in the way that Mc 9:9-13 emphasizes it, where this identification is made implicit. However, in 1:16-17 and 7:26-27, Luke identifies John with the role of Elijah-redivivus.

Only Luca adds something more. He presents three types of people who approach John and ask for advice on what they should do: sons of Abraham, publicans and Roman soldiers. The Prophet tells them to share the coat and the food they have in addition, to collect only the required taxes, and not to exploit the people, but to be content with their salary. These are easy-to-accomplish commandments, and by bringing them here, Luke moderates the harshness of John's eschatological message in a realizable ethical program. We can not say that John has never offered moral advice. He certainly did this while he had disciples and taught them at least how to fast and pray. But are these economic promptings the essence of the advice he has given? It's impossible to know that.

First, while in Mc 1:9 Jesus is baptized by John, in Mt 3:14-15 St. John tries to prevent Jesus from being baptized. In 1:15-18 and 1:26-36, the Baptist speaks a lot about Jesus and confesses that He is the Messiah.

Secondly, Luke never places John and Jesus together until 7:18-35, and then only through the disciples of the Baptist. Unlike other evangelical accounts, John does not baptize Jesus in Luke, neither speaks directly with Him nor confesses about His identity.

Thirdly, Luke suggests that the imprisonment of John prevented him from testifying about the ministry of Jesus (3: 19-20).

Fourthly, in Luca's writings, the Gospel and Acts, nothing is said of any encounter between John and Jesus even though Luke's account of St. John is the most extensive of the NT. As a result of this literary portrait of how John and Jesus interact, the reader of the Gospel of Luke is left with the impression that both characters do not meet until the Baptist's question of 7: 18-23. In this passage John first tries to find out if Jesus is "He Who Comes" - a question that confirms the insinuation of the previous narrative that the Baptist did not know Jesus.

Jesus' Enlightenment of the Baptist, in Luke 7,24-28, is in apparent contradiction with the lack of knowledge of the two. At first glance, these laudatory words seem to testify about Jesus' personal knowledge of Jesus. However, as I have shown above, the previous narrative did not bind John and Jesus explicitly or directly. What is most supposed to be supposed is that Jesus speaks this way about the Baptist because he was among those who obeyed the proclamation of the Forerunner (3, 2, 22) or heard what other people had said about John (3,15; 5,33). Therefore, according to the narrative, the encomium does not reflect any

personal knowledge of John, but rather the deepest admiration of Jesus for someone he does not know, but whom he has never spoken about.

The reason why John asks Jesus if he is "the coming One", after he has identified Him as "the Lamb of God," does not find a simple answer within the gospel tradition. A pertinent answer to the relationship between Jesus and John should take into account all four Gospels with different themes and nuances in relation to this relationship.

The Lucan tradition has at least three distinct elements:

First, John questions the identity of Jesus because He did not recognize Him before (7: 18-23). After receiving the news of Jesus' work, John sees almost fulfilling his eschatological expectations and sends his disciples to confirm whether Jesus is the "One who comes." St. John receives confirmation through the wonderful works and words of the Lord, and probably recognizes that Jesus is the One he wonders.

Second, the encomium that Jesus does to John (7: 24-28) reflects his admiration for the Baptist, but there is no evidence of mutual knowledge between them. St. John is a man of principles, a prophet, the Forerunner of the Lord, and the greatest of those born of a woman. The prison temporarily deprived him of the new age. But in the salvation plan of God, St. John will inherit one of the privileged places in the Kingdom.

The book of the *Acts of the Apostles* contain seven references to John the Baptist. In Act 1,21-22, the Apostle Peter opens the discussion, stating the criteria by which some can be recognized as eligible for apostolic function: "Therefore it is necessary to select one of the men who have accompanied us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism until the day Jesus was taken up from us".

John's baptism is here understood as the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, and the apostles are those who have been the eyewitnesses of this ministry.

In the second passage, Acts 10:36-39, Jesus' work is presented as having its beginning in that of John. Water baptism was also practiced after the foundation of the baptism with the Holy Spirit, and this in the name of Jesus and not of John. The baptism of water is generally associated with John in the Gospels and understood to be the preliminary to the baptism offered by Jesus.

A second category of passages that mentions John contradict the two baptisms: of John and of Jesus. "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift the Father promised, which you have heard Me discuss. 5For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." (1:4-5)

This sequence puts in parallel the "baptisms" of Jesus, the first with water, and then through the descent of the Holy Spirit, who inaugurates his own ministry (Lk 3:21-4:30). And now, in Acts, the mission of the apostles will also be inaugurated through a "baptism", with the Holy Spirit, which Jesus alone offers.

In conclusion, we notice, in St. John's case, a discontinuity in understanding his baptismal role as a preparatory gesture. He preached about One who would come after him, who would complete the eschatological judgment that John was preparing the people for. We can not safely say, based on the criterion of historicity, that he understood that Jesus was that Person. He had disciples who practiced fasting and baptism. John taught his disciples to pray, but beyond that, we can not know exactly what he taught them.

Jesus' ministry has many features common to John: openness to marginals, the demand for repentance, the promise that the Kingdom of God is close, the opposition of Jewish religious leaders and death. But the ministry of Jesus differs from that of John in the absence of ascetic rigors. Evangelical tradition has contributed to the growth of Jesus' stature. These differences, initially of practice but gradually of faith, created a slight tension between John and Jesus, according to evangelical accounts, the climax being John's question whether Jesus was the One to come. In addition, the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles testify about the baptismal activity of Jesus and John's disciples, and about the competition between these movements not only in Israel but also in the wider Mediterranean basin. This is explicit in Acts and implicitly in the evangelist attempts to augment Jesus' reputation at the expense of John, in a manner that respects the tradition of the Baptist.

The second part of this chapter is dedicated to the theological dimension of the prophetic message of St. John in the Fourth Gospel. Here, the presence and role of the Baptist are exclusively directed by the

author to the revelation of Jesus Christ. The entire attention of the Evangelist John is focused on John's role as a confessor of Jesus.

I outline the Christological and theological dimension of St. John's testimony about Jesus Christ, "the Lamb of God, who raises the sin of the world" (1:29). St. John testifies that God sent, through the baptism, the fullness of the Spirit on Jesus (cf. 1.32: "Καὶ ἐμαρτύρησεν Ἰωάννης λέγων ὅτι Τεθέαμαι τὸ Πνεῦμα καταβατὸν ὃς περιστερὰν ἐξ οὐρανοῦ, καὶ ἔμεινεν ἐπ' αὐτόν"). So Jesus is the only One who can bring to the men the baptism with the Spirit. John the Baptist knows and confesses that Jesus Christ is τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐρχόμενος.

The role of St. John, the confessor, is emphasized in the following places in the Gospel of John.

- 1) 1,6-8 - The mission of John the Baptist: to testify about the Light, so that all may believe in it;
- 2) 1.15 - The testimony of John the Baptist about the divinity of the incarnate Logos
- 3) 1.19-23 - The testimony of John the Baptist about his identity in light of Isaiah's prophecy
- 4) 1,24-28 - John the Baptist's Answer about his Baptism in the light of the Coming One
- 5) 1.29-34 - John the Baptist's Testimony about Jesus: "the Lamb of God, which raises the sin of the world!"
- 6) 1,35-42 - John the Baptist testifies to the identity of Jesus – "the Lamb of God!" to his two disciples who follow Jesus
- 7) 3,22-36 - The Last Testimony of John the Baptist on Jesus' Baptism
- 8) 4,1-3 - The Pharisees hear that Jesus makes more disciples and baptizes more than John the Baptist
- 9) 5,33-36 - The testimony of Jesus is greater than that of John the Baptist
- 10) 10,40-42 The testimonies of John the Baptist about Jesus "were true."

By introducing John, the Forerunner of the Lord, in the Prologue of the forth Gospel, the evangelist creates a strong contrast between the divine Logos, the eternal God, and the John the Baptist, the historical person with temporary existence. Reading the description of John the Baptist, we observe an antitetic parallelism: The Logos is described as θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος ("God was the Word" – 1:1); John the Baptist as "man" (ἄνθρωπος) (1:6). The Logos πρὸς τὸν θεόν (1:1); The Baptist, ἀπεσταλμένος παρὰ θεοῦ (sent from God, 1,6). The Logos is the Light (1:9), John, the testimony of the Light (1:7-8). The testimony of John the Baptist had the purpose that "all should believe in him (δι' αὐτοῦ) (1:7), but faith had to be anchored in the Logos - πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ (believe in His name" - 1:12). The Logos ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ ("was from the beginning" – 1:2); John the Baptist (ῆλθεν, came, 1:7), thus being linked to a given historical context.

After the brief presentation of St. John the Baptist, the Evangelist moves to the presentation of the new condition of the pre-existing Logos, that of the Incarnate, that is a true man, who lived in a well-determined historical time and who has a Forerunner, so a historical person. From here on, the focus of the evangelist is placed only on this side of the Logos, the one that will define his earthly, salvific work.

For purposes of this **subchapter**, I considered necessary to develop some issues as: The catechetical and Christological role of St. John, the witness and confessor of Jesus' messianity; The mission of St. John the Baptist: witness of the Light (Jn 1,6-8); John the Baptist, witness of the divinity and eternity of the incarnate Logos (1,15) and „ἡ μαρτυρία τοῦ Ἰωάννου" about Jesus Christ (In 1,19-42; 1-43 - 2,11).

I dedicated a special space to the important Messianic title that John gave to Jesus, "**The Lamb of God, Who takes away the Sin of the World**". The Evangelist does not mention the reason why Jesus comes to John but focuses his attention on the content of the solemn proclamation of the Forerunner, the recipient of a Messianic revelation. St. John the Baptist attributes to Jesus an: " the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world". This title appears twice in the Gospel (1:29, 36), being one of the great chryological titles of the theology of John, Apostle and Evangelist.

St. John the Baptist brings his testimony to his disciples concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. As a result of this testimony, some of John's disciples follow Jesus (1:37). So some of Jesus' first disciples were John's disciples (Act 1,22).

At the same time, the invitation to follow him, addressed to the disciples by the Savior, can be understood as having a polemic-apologetic goal, assuming that the answer of the first disciples can be an example to other John's disciples to do the same.

The Baptist himself explains: ὁ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐρχόμενος ἐπάνω πάντων ἐστίν "The One who comes from above is above all" (3:31). He is Jesus, not John, because John is not ἄνωθεν, is not from heaven, from above, but from the earth, as it is normal for a witness.

In conclusion, the mission of St. John the Baptist was that of witnessing the incarnate divine Logos (1,6-8) for "all to believe in his testimony" (1:8), and, on the other hand, his testimony was focused on the deity and eternity of the incarnate Logos (1:15).

The next chapter of the paper shaped on dilemmatic Issues concerning the relationship between the Baptizer and Jesus Christ. Nothing in Scripture indicates that St. John followed the Lord as a disciple, or that other disciples of John, besides the two, have ever become disciples of Jesus. Was St. John really aware of his role as "Forerunner"? How much was he willing to influence others to follow the Savior? I analyze this in this part of the paper.

The history of John and Jesus keeps an ambiguity that enhances the mystery of John's religious personality. He shows the most ambiguous attitude when he asks Jesus, through His disciples, to prove that he really is the Messiah. There is a curious passage in Matthew's record that warrants some comment at this point. While John was in prison, he heard of the activity of Jesus. He sent some of his own disciples to the Lord, asking this question: "Are you he that comes, or should we look for another?" (Mt. 11:2-3). This question, a reflection of uncertainty, suggests that at the time of death, St. John doubts the identity of the One he originally followed, which would contradict his own acknowledgment of Jesus and acceptance that He would be "the Lamb of God." It is a scene similar to that of his encounter with the messengers of the priests in Jerusalem, centered on the question of who he is. The Three Questions - Are You the Messiah? Are you Elijah? Are you a prophet? - John gives a negative answer, as in the Gospel of John. By this is a denial of the prophecy of Zechariah, who saw in him the "prophet of the Most High," and also the words of the angel and of Jesus who claim to be Elijah, an identification accepted by Mc 9:11-13 and Mt 17:10- 13. So Jesus sent a return message. "Go and tell John what you see and hear," i.e., my message and miracles. But why would John ask such a question? There are a couple of possibilities.

First, John may have had some difficulty in harmonizing the kind and gracious ministry of Jesus with the earlier message that the prophet himself had preached regarding the role of the Coming One, namely that he would inflict a day of wrath ("whose fan is in his hand ...").

On the other hand, as with most other Hebrews, John may have entertained the notion that the Messiah would establish a political regime, rather similar to David's kingdom of Old Testament fame. The Lord's disciples certainly held to this erroneous view (cf. Acts 1:6).

So when John heard more about the passive nature of Jesus' ministry, i.e., its non-political, benevolent thrust, he may have felt compelled to voice his confusion. And so, would there be "another" Messiah who would function in a different capacity?

The Lord assured the harbinger that his works authenticated his ministry as divine.

Incidentally, this honest revelation of John's doubt is powerful testimony to the integrity of the biblical record. No forger would have included such a detail. Nonetheless, the balance of Matthew's narrative reinforces the integrity of John in spite of the prophet's momentary confusion.

In the same tone, the evangelist says that the Forerunner is not light, but has to bear witness to the Light. The evangelist, saying that John is "the voice," does not insist on the content, but on the voice timbre. The voice is not the word, because the Word has to come. The words spoken by John show the indestructible connection that unites him to Christ in the play of the contradictions that meet in his discourse and in the tension of the terms that emphasize the paradox of his mission. After baptizing Jesus, whom he acknowledges to be the Messiah, he says, "He must increase; I must decrease/ He must become greater; I must become less". In these quick replies, it includes the sovereign majesty of Jesus and the exemplary humility of the Baptist.

Assuming his regress and a more modest place, John realizes the sacrificial need for the Word to be born in his voice. His speech, therefore, is required to be overcome or rather recovered or supplemented by that of Christ. St. John does not give up the temptation to shine, but only thinks of the glory of the One announced, before whom he humbles himself in total abnegation.

St. John remains present today, for he continues to remind Christian society of high, fundamental moral values, to renew virtue and to straighten the course of human history whose meaning deviates. It becomes evident that St. John's role is to be a mediator and to create an emulation. It remains the voice that speaks to all humanity to remain steady on the right path.

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