

PhD

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Thesis Summary:

THE PERSONALITY OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST  
BETWEEN TESTIMONY AND JEWISH MESSIANISM  
AS DESCRIBED IN THE GOSPELS  
AND IN THE NON-CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS

The personality of Saint John the Baptist is defined in the context of the Jewish testimony and messianism, as it is reported both in the gospels' description and in the non-Christian traditions. Thus, Flavius Joseph sees John the Baptist as an innocent martyr who wanted people to change, a victim of the political circumstances which understood that his preaching would have made possible a radical change; Mark the evangelist describes John as Elijah *redivivus*, comparing his suffering with the one of Jesus Christ. Matthew the evangelist outlines that John is the one who testified about Jesus Christ, but he is also confronted with the same religious and political opposition, hostile for their actions; Luke the evangelist describes John the Baptist as being part of the salvation's history, having a prophetic mission which includes "εὐαγγελίζω", the continuity between John and Jesus Christ, while John the evangelist sees him as the ideal witness of Jesus Christ with the role that through his testimony "everyone might believe in Him" (Christ).

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DOCTORAL THESIS

- Summary-

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### **Key words:**

John the Baptist, Flavius Josephus, Gospel according to Matthew, Gospel according to Mark, Gospel according to Luke, Gospel according to John, Elijah redivivus, prophetic dimension, Christological dimension, theological dimension

### **SYNTHESIS OF THE MAIN PARTS OF THE PhD THESIS:**

In the introductory chapter, "Introduction", I outlined an overview on the approaches of contemporary research about the personality of John the Baptist. In their light, I emphasized that the purpose of my PhD thesis research is to identify and to thoroughly study St. John the Baptist's personality which is shaped between the testimony and the Jewish messianism in the description of the Gospels and of the non-Christian tradition. I stated the necessity of this thesis by paraphrasing the contemporary approaches both of the international specialty literature and of the Romanian one. Justifying the presence of a non-Christian tradition, the one of Flavius Josephus, within our research, along with the Gospels relate, I established my thesis research objectives. In the last part of the introductory chapter I established the methodology, the steps to go through in the approach of every chapter and the paper's purpose.

In the first chapter, **"The traditions about John the Baptist in the work of Flavius Josephus *Ἰουδαϊκὴ Ἀρχαιολογία*<sup>1</sup>, and in the non-Christian literature"** I started from the premise that the biblical research's holism regarding John the Baptist's person focuses on the New Testament's data, in principle. For this reason, a major historical source referring to John the Baptist's personality, Flavius Josephus' *Ἰουδαϊκὴ Ἀρχαιολογία*, is summarily treated within the specialty biblical studies approach. Since the *Ἰουδαϊκὴ Ἀρχαιολογία* paper is both a valid source and a precious one for the historical researches, we set the intention to bring it to the area of biblical specialty

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<sup>1</sup> We can find the text to be analyzed, in Romanian, within the first chapter in Flavius JOSEPHUS, *Antichitățile iudaice II. Cărțile XI-XX. De la refacerea Templului până la răscoala împotriva lui Nero*, translation, notes and name index by Ion ACSAN, Hasefer Publishing House, Bucharest, 2001, p. 454. Another translation can be found in Prof. Vasile GRECU, „E autentic locul din Flavius Josephus despre Domnul Iisus Hristos?", in *Studii Teologice*, seria a II-a, 3 (1951), nr. 9-10, p. 560.

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researches, beginning the study on the traditions about St. John the Baptist with a reference about his life in *Ἰουδαϊκὴ Ἀρχαιολογία* 18, 116-119.

We tried to observe the way Flavius Josephus portrays John the Baptist in *Ἰουδαϊκὴ Ἀρχαιολογία* 18, 116-119 text, emphasizing the text itself, but the context it is related in, too. In order to obtain an image as accurate as possible on the perspective of Flavius Josephus, we appealed to a censorious version of the Greek text, rendered by Benedictus NIESE in his writing: *Flavii Iosephi Opera. Antiquitatum Iudaicarum*,<sup>2</sup> from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, censorious text which is still a reference point for the researchers up to the present.

While analyzing the text from 18, 116-119, we found out that, for Flavius Josephus, the narration about John the Baptist was an additional argument which maintained the anxieties among the Jewish people of Palestine, which has offered in the mean time a popular Jewish explanation for Herod Antipas' military defeat, too, by having, ultimately, the role of giving an example of what can happen when a leader, representing the Roman imperial power, carries on excessive and abusive actions.

The *Ἰουδαϊκὴ Ἀρχαιολογία* 18, 116-119 text reveals two important perspectives referring to John the Baptist. Firstly, John the Baptist continues to remain in the Jewish people's memory many years after his murdering by Herod Antipas, and secondly, JOSEPHUS identifies John being one who "was named the Baptist" (τοῦ ἐπικαλουμένου βαπτιστοῦ) appellative which we can find in the synoptic Gospels, too. He portrays John as a preacher with an ethical imperative described with Hellenistic terms. John the Baptist is the one who proclaims and observes the baptism that purifies man. JOSEPHUS outlines the uneasiness that John's teachings brought up that will determine Herod Antipas to consider him as a threat for his socio-political *status quo*. Describing him this way, JOSEPHUS leaves the impression, when interpreting through the Greco-Roman eyes (his readers), that John the Baptist is the political circumstances' victim, an innocent and unfortunate martyr who has just intended the people "to be good" and "to purify their bodies". When reading the same text through the eyes of common people of the 1<sup>st</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> F. JOSEPHUS & Benedictus NIESE, *Flavii Iosephi Opera. Antiquitatum Iudaicarum*, Weidmannos, Berolini, 1885-1895.

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Palestinian century, the implications for this portrait of John the Baptist and of his message become much more serious, suggesting the king Antipas' fear is not entirely motiveless, as long as John the Baptist's activity could have led to "a radical change".

Then, we have examined the authenticity's issue of this particular text. The authenticity of JOSEPHUS' narration regarding John the Baptist was not accepted by some researchers as they stated it was a Christian interpolation, because (1) JOSEPHUS had preoccupations and events much more important to write about, rather than a simple Jewish person as John; (2) the nouns used for "baptism" in this text (βαπτισμός and βάπτισις -18,117) are no longer in JOSEPHUS' corpus, the foreign vocabulary being a proof for the interpolation; and (3) it is a description adjacent to the New Testament's traditions.

Our argument for the authenticity of this text states that (1) JOSEPHUS' history focused mostly on his own Jewish people, an old and honourable people, and John, a Jew himself, was a well known person that has been used by JOSEPHUS for his book's purpose; (2) although the singular usage of a word by an author does not mean that this word is not known for him, JOSEPHUS never uses the βάπτισμα- noun, - used both for John's baptism and for the Christian baptism described by the Gospels; and (3) there are significant differences between Josephus' account and those of the evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke and John: JOSEPHUS did not image John using eschatological and messianic elements as those used by the Gospels, the JOSEPHUS' text quietness regarding the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. Further more, the text is present in all existent manuscripts of the *Ἰουδαϊκὴ Ἀρχαιολογία* work, as Benedictus NIESE does not provide a critical apparatus for this reason. And Origen's testimony from the *Contra Celsum* 1.47 writing, consummates the arguments for the authenticity of the researched text.

We have evaluated the accuracy of this text as a source for the historical data about John the Baptist, arguing that the style of Flavius JOSEPHUS and his sources usage demonstrates his own inclusion in the Greco-Roman tradition of the historiography and we have established that the known traditions regarding John the Baptist (both the Slavonic version of JOSEPHUS' work and the Mandaean literature), within the old non-Christian literature, can not supplement our research with relevant data.

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Starting with the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter “**The prophetic dimension of John the Baptist’s activity in the Gospel according to Mark**”, we have pencilled the synoptic Gospels approach on John the Baptist’s personality. The purpose of this chapter related to the Gospel according to Mark, sight two aspects: (1) the identification within the *Gospel according to Mark* of those pericopes which speak about John the Baptist, and (2) the description of the way the evangelist Mark images John the Baptist in comparison with parallel pericopes within the other synoptic Gospels, respectively the way it is described John the Baptist’s prophetic dimension.

The *Gospel according to Mark* has nine pericopes referring to the person and activity of John the Baptist: 1: 2-6; 1: 7-8; 1: 9-11; 1: 14; 2: 18-22; 6: 14-29; 8: 27-30; 9: 9-13 and 11: 27-33. For their identification we have used the recent critical texts of the New Testament: N-A27<sup>3</sup> editions and GNTUBS4,<sup>4</sup> the critical edition of the Byzantine text – BYZ,<sup>5</sup> and the one of the latest critical edition from 2010, GNTSBL.<sup>6</sup>

By knowing the structure of Mark’s Gospel,<sup>7</sup> we notice that all the references to John the Baptist are reserved for the first eleven chapters of this Gospel, John’s appearances being sporadic within these chapters. John the Baptist isn’t a constant character for the narration’s unfolding and he neither represents a conjunction between the pericopes. Following the initial paragraphs about John the Baptist from Mark 1: 2-11, that are continued with a short reference about John’s apprentices fasting in Mark 2:18, John the Baptist appears no more except for the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of Mark’s Gospel. Here we have the narration of the two refusals – the refusal of Jesus in Nazareth and the refusal of John coming from Herod Antipas which leads to John’s death. It is remarkable the fact

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<sup>3</sup> *NOVUM TESTAMENTUM GRAECE*, 27 revidierte Auflage, ed. Barbara et Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> *THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT*, Fourth Revised Edition with Dictionary, ed. Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger in cooperation with the Institute for New Testament Textual Research, Munster/Wesphalia, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart, United Bible Societies, U.S.A., 1994.

<sup>5</sup> *THE NEW TESTAMENT IN THE ORIGINAL GREEK - BYZANTINE TEXTFORM*, Compiled and Arranged by Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont, Chilton Book Publishing Company, Southborough, Massachusetts, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> *THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT SBL EDITION*, ed. Michael W. Holmes, Society of Biblical Literature, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> See Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Stelian TOFANĂ, *Introducere în Studiul Noului Testament (vol. 2). Evangheliile după Matei și Marcu. Documentul Quelle*, Cluj-Napoca, 2002.

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that the narration from Mark 6 is introduced by the opinion that Jesus might have been John *redivivus* (Mk. 6: 14), opinion that is close to the way that John is introduced in the discussion from Caesarea Philippi described in Mark 8: 27-28, occasion when the Saviour asks “Who do people say that I am?” and the first answer is: “John the Baptist”. In the next chapter, Jesus goes further on separating Himself from John through the opinion that this was Elijah *incognito* (Mk. 9: 11-12), the one about He stated he came to restore all the things. Yet, in Mark 11: 27-33, with the occasion of the latest explicit reference about John, Jesus affiliates His authority with John the Baptist and his baptism.

Thus, in Mark’s Gospel, we have noticed pencilling the following pattern: (1) John the Baptist is closely affiliated with Jesus and the Gospel (Mk. 1); (2) John the Baptist distinguishes from Jesus Christ through his practices, fact that was noticed by the outside viewers (Mk. 2); (3) the outside viewers seek to identify Jesus with John, considering Him even as John returned from the dead (Mk. 6: 8); (4) Jesus distinguishes from John, but He confers John with a significant role for God’s new redemptive activity: John is Elijah *redivivus*, the one who restores all the things (Mk. 9); (5) confronted with the priests, the scribes and the elders in Jerusalem, Jesus states publicly a partial identification between John and Himself regarding the divine empowerment (Mk. 11).

Mark’s intention on the related to John the Baptist material’s usage was not to reveal that John was a witness of Jesus, firstly, but rather to provide a reference term wherewith to designate who Jesus Christ was not. This aspect is achieved, on one hand, by distinguishing between Jesus’ activities and the ones of John’s, by correcting the outside viewers’ false impression regarding their identities and, on the other hand, by Jesus’ testimony, in two key moments at Mark 9 and Mark 11, about John’s true identity, that is a testimony that compensates the one of John the Baptist about Jesus at Mark 1. This suggests that, for Mark, John *is* the beginning of the Gospel, not only because he was perceived as the Forerunner of Jesus, as Elijah was, but for Jesus Christ was the witness of John the Baptist, too.

In the third chapter, “**The prophetic dimension of John the Baptist’s activity in the Gospel according to Matthew**”, I observed the same approaching pattern as the one I used in the second chapter. The purpose of my research for the chapter referring to the

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Gospel according to Matthew was (1) to identify within the *Gospel according to Matthew* those pericopes that narrate about John the Baptist, and (2) to describe the way how Matthew the evangelist portrays John the Baptist compared with the parallel pericopes within the other synoptic Gospels.

The *Gospel according to Matthew* contains sixteen pericopes that refer to St. John the Baptist's person and activity: 3: 1-6; 3: 7-10; 3: 11-12; 3: 13-17; 4: 12; 9: 14-17; 11: 2-6; 11: 7-11; 11: 12-13; 11: 14-15; 11: 16-19; 14: 1-12; 16: 13-16; 17: 9-13; 21: 23-27 and 21: 28-32.

In the presentment of the items referring to John the Baptist's prophetic dimension within the *Gospel according to Matthew*, I emphasized only the Matthean specific accents. Though the presentation does not differ to the one I have noticed within the *Gospel according to Mark*, in the *Gospel according to Matthew* a new aspect settles into shape: not only that John the Baptist sensitizes the mocks through his preaching, but the marginalized members of society, following their positive answer, take part to God's Kingdom. In the Matthean interpretation about John it is given more explicitly salience to John the Baptist's identity as *Elijah-redivivus*, identification already implicit within the *Gospel according to Mark*. The Gospel according to Matthew reinterprets John's role towards Jesus. Although John is characterized much more clearer as being subordinated to Jesus with the purpose of emphasizing Jesus Christ's uniqueness, yet he is identified with The Saviour having to face both religious and political opposition, hostile for theirs' activities and also for his death prefigures the Saviour's death.

Furthermore, we lent a special interest in this chapter to the question whether John the Baptist doubted Jesus' messianity. Our conclusion was that the question that John addressed Jesus, over his disciples, was not the expression of his incertitude, but rather a *challenge* that Jesus accepts: to confess Himself about Himself in front of some future disciples of His own, forasmuch as He would have chosen, later, among John's disciples some future Apostles of His own.

The 4<sup>th</sup> chapter, "**The prophetic dimension of John the Baptist's activity in the *Gospel according to Luke***" replenished the approach dedicated to John the Baptist's personality in the synoptic Gospels that we started in the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter. In this chapter, we

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have also established the following goals (1) to identify within the *Gospel according to Luke* those pericopes which relate the person and the activity of John the Baptist and (2) to intercept the way Luke the evangelist describes John the Baptist by comparison with the parallel pericopes within the other synoptic Gospels.

The *Gospel according to Luke* integrates twenty-one pericopes referring to St. John the Baptist's person and activity: 1: 5-25; 1: 36; 1: 39-45; 1: 57-79; 1: 80; 3: 1-6; 3: 7-9; 3: 10-14; 3: 15-18; 3: 19-20; 3: 21-22; 7: 18-23; 7: 24-28; 7: 29-30; 7: 31-35; 9: 7-9; 9: 18-21; 11: 1; 16: 16, and 20: 1-8.

The presentation of John the Baptist in the *Gospel according to Luke* is the most extended narration from all the Gospels. It includes most of the items found in the other synoptic Gospels and the narration of some new pericopes, too, especially the ones about John the Baptist's birth and childhood. In contrast with the Gospel according to Matthew which images John as a kingdom's preacher whose activity is like and forespeaks Jesus' activity, Luke portrays John as a *reformer*-preacher whose activity prepares the way for Jesus to come. Although Luke the evangelist apprehends John the Baptist as a part of the messianic era, yet he attentively disjoins the activity of John the Baptist from the one of Jesus. Interpreting John as being Elijah-*redivivus* is not that emphasized as it is in the Gospel according to Matthew, nor it is presented the way Mark 9: 9-13 emphasizes it, where this identification is implicitly carried out (in contrast, in Matthew 17: 9-13 this tradition, Elijah-*redivivus*, is explicitly identified). However, in both pericopes from 1: 16-17 and 7: 26-27, Luke identifies John the Baptist with role of Elijah-*redivivus*.

The third evangelist places John the Baptist into a larger schema of the redemption history, as a notable figure within the historical enchainment of the events initiated by God's intervention in the history of Israel. Furthermore, in comparison with Mark and Matthew, Luke the evangelist emphasizes clearer the activity of John the Baptist which includes “ἐὐαγγελίζω” (Lk. 1: 19; 3: 18). Thus, Luke the evangelist asserts more than the other evangelists the continuity between Jesus and John the Baptist, accent we encounter both in the item whom he shares with Matthew and Mark and, as well as the item specific for Luke from the *childhood Gospel*.

In the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter, “**The prophetic and theological dimension of John the Baptist's activity as described in the *Fourth Gospel***”, we broadened our research, from

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the synoptic Gospel to the Gospel according to John. As a purpose of this chapter, we have added to the identification of those pericopes which narrate about St. John the Baptist within the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel, the theological dimension's delineation of John the Baptist's message, predominant over this Gospel.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel, the presence and the role of St. John the Baptist are focused on emphasizing his role of Jesus Christ's confessor. This confessor role is asserted in all ten pericopes that contain references to John the Baptist, within the *Gospel according to John*: 1: 6-8; 1: 15; 1: 19-23; 1: 24-28; 1: 29-34; 1: 35-42; 3: 22-36; 4: 1-3; 5: 33-36; 10: 40-42.

In the first subchapter, we defined the locus and the role of John the Baptist's testimony the way it is shown in the chiasmic structure of John's prologue (1: 1-18). We have noticed, on one hand, that John the Baptist's mission was to testify the Incarnate divine Logos (1: 6-8) so that "everyone might believe through" his testimony, and on the other hand, his testimony was focused on the divinity and the eternity of the Incarnate Logos (1: 15).

The 2<sup>nd</sup> subchapter shaped on the structure of the first week that inaugurated the beginning of Jesus Christ's public activity (1: 19 – 2: 11), having as a focal point the content of John the Baptist's testimony about Christ. The identification of Jesus with the awaited Christ, first through *via negativa*: "I am not the Christ" (1: 19-28), then through the Christological-theological expression "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (1: 19-34), determined an effect of his testimony inside his disciples: they "have found the Messiah - which is translated Christ", their answers culminating in the reaction in front of His glory's revelation, on the 7<sup>th</sup> day, the miraculous sign's one in Cana of Galilee: "they believed in Him" (2: 11). Thus, John the evangelist presents the completion of John the Baptist's sending purpose emphasized in the Gospel's prologue: "everyone might believe through him" (1: 8).

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> subchapter, we contoured a particular accent on the Christological-theological dimension of John the Baptist's expression about Jesus Christ: "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (1: 29). At the moment when he recorded this episode of John the Baptist's testimony, John the evangelist bore in mind both the "Lamb of God" expression two meanings: the "Servant of God" meaning, the



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one who suffers, and the “sacrificed Lamb” meaning, the one who accomplished the entire world’s redemption from sin by means of suffering and death.

In the last subchapter we have approached the testimony of John the Baptist regarding Jesus’ Baptism (3: 22 – 4: 3). John confesses that God has sent by the meaning of the baptism the Spirit’s fullness above Jesus  $\xi\mu\epsilon\iota\nu\epsilon\nu$ . Thus, Jesus is the only one who might bring to the humans the baptism in Spirit. John the Baptist knows and confesses that he was not, but Jesus was  $\acute{\alpha}\nu\theta\epsilon\nu\ \acute{\epsilon}\rho\chi\acute{o}\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\varsigma$ .

The 4<sup>th</sup> evangelist images John the Baptist as the ideal and almost Christian witness of Jesus (*cf.* John 1: 8) as the Messiah and the Lamb of God, emphasizing this way John the Baptist’s subservience to Jesus.

In case that this subservience element and the idea of John being preparatory for the One who shall come after him belong to the Baptist, then the evangelists did not credit John with a locus he wouldn’t had it for real, but they have only emphasized and carried up on the role John the Baptist himself confessed about himself.

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