

The soteriology of the Johannine Jesus depends largely on the mission of Jesus to the world he has created. The motifs of coming, going, and sending are central to this in that they are used by the author to attempt to define the relationship between God and the world. His endeavour is an exploration of who Jesus is and where he is from, and by what authority he speaks. The sending of the Baptist as a witness and of Jesus as Messiah, and the coming of the Paraclete delineate the circumstances in which the members of the Johannine community can then be sent to continue the work of salvation. In addition, “going” suggests following and so the discipleship which is such a feature of the Gospel.

I shall take the persons who are sent or who are going individually and examine how the action impacts on the soteriology of the Johannine Jesus. While the bulk of the material will necessarily be based on the Gospel of John and IJohn, where relevant, I shall use comparisons with other Jewish and Christian writings to examine possible sources and highlight particularly Johannine emphases. All quotations from canonical sources are from the Jerusalem Bible.

A Man came, sent by God.

His name was John.

He came as a witness,

as a witness to speak for the light,

so that everyone might believe through him. (John 1:6-7)

The function of John the Baptist in John's Gospel is reduced to nothing more than to be a witness to Jesus. This Baptist has no doubt who Jesus is or of his pre-existence (John1:15) and has no need to send his disciples to ask Jesus who he is while in prison (cf.Luke7:18, Matt11:2). The Baptist's last speech in John's Gospel (3:27-33), delivered before his imprisonment, emphasizes that his only role is to point to Jesus. There is no really independent teaching and no call to repentance, as in the Synoptics, but merely: "He must grow greater, I must grow smaller" (John 3:30).

Such findings have been used to paint this Gospel as anti-Baptist. ¹ It can alternatively be seen in the context of this Gospel's preoccupation with the sending motif as a preparation in a literary as well as literal sense for the sending of Christ. John the Baptist is sent as a witness for Jesus in the sense of providing a model for one who is sent, as well as a witness to whom Jesus can and does appeal to give a testimony (John 5:33). From such a viewpoint, the message of John the Baptist apart from his heralding of Christ is of no consequence to the evangelist and so is absent from this Gospel. Even where the Baptist is given a speech by the author as in 3:27-33, it slides into typical Johannine discourse from v.31. Unless a transposition,

this suggests that John the Baptist has been so wholly stripped of an individual significance, that the author can ignore his story and context, and wander off into another Johannine turn of phrase.

A comparison with the Synoptics shows that this sending motif applied to the Baptist is one of very few appearances of such an idea in a non-Johannine Gospel. While Jesus' sending is of vastly greater significance, the idea may depend in part for its origin on the motif of John the Baptist's sending, which in turn relies on the messenger-prophet found in Isaiah 6:8 and 40:3.

God's love for us was revealed when God sent into the world his only Son so that we could have life through him. (1 John 4:9)

The greater significance of Jesus' coming is of course in who Jesus is and where he came from. The repetition to the point of monotony of the "sent by the Father" motif speaks volumes for its centrality to the soteriology of the Johannine community. There are over thirty references to this in the Gospel alone in similar language. Perrin calls the Son "a stranger from another world" based on John 8:23. 2. Being sent by the Father implies a pre-existent Christology in harmony with the Logos hymn which acts as a prologue to the Gospel. It also implies a cosmology which has the Son close to the Father in a sphere of influence separate in some way from the world.

John's Gospel has a debt to other Jewish literature, with echoes from the Psalms and Wisdom literature appearing using the sending motif.

With you is Wisdom, she who knows your works,
she who was present when you made the world...
Despatch her from your holy heavens,
send her forth from your throne of glory
to help me and toil with me. (Wisdom 9:9a,10a)

Like the Johannine Jesus, Wisdom is pre-existent and sent to the world in a saving sense. Wisdom was also associated with creation (Prov 8:30) and light (Wisdom 7:26) 3. The discourse on Wisdom contained in Ecclesiastes 24, has her declaring "I am like a vine" (v.17) and "they who eat me will hunger for more/they who drink me will thirst for more" (v.21). The numerous parallels suggest that the author of, John has taken the language used to describe Wisdom and applied it to Jesus. He therefore had a ready-made sending myth to use. Another Jewish parallel: "send out your life and your truth," (Psalms 43:39) also parallels the Johannine sending of Jesus as described in metaphorical terms. While the Father-Son formula dominates in John, Jesus is also sent as "the true light" (1:9), "the bread of life" (6:35) and "the good shepherd" (10:14). Use of these analogies within in the context of his being sent aims to give a deeper understanding of salvation, so the believer is recognized by the shepherd, eats the bread and walks in the light. Further Jewish background to these motifs have been traced to an ascending and descending redeemer myth. Kummel suggests this originated in heterodox Judaism of a gnostic flavour, and influenced early Hellenist Christians as well as becoming central to the message of the Johannine community. 4

Jesus' sending can also be seen as the culmination of the work of the prophets in Jewish history, exemplified in the sending of Moses (Exodus 3:14) and

Joseph (Genesis 45:5). Fuller, while refuting an origin Jewish sophiology for the sending motif sees Jesus as the final prophet "Gods unique and final act of sending."⁵ In this sense John's Gospel shares a form of salvation history with the Synoptics, with the emphasis shifted from the passion to simply the fact of being sent to save the world (John 3:17,17:3). Brown says, "such statements center salvation in the sending by God rather than any actions of the Son on earth."⁶ He further sees this trend as requiring qualification in 1 John to forestall a gnostic interpretation. There is some qualification of such a view within John itself as the glorification of the sent Christ emphasized in 17:1-11 is clearly linked to his death in 12:23-28, but there is explicitly in this Gospel a sense that salvation is as much related to Jesus being sent as to his death.

His status as sent by the Father is an important element in Jesus' attempt to establish his authority. He repeatedly resorts to such special pleading as:

and in your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is valid I may be testifying on my own behalf, but the Father who sent me is my witness too. (John 8:17-18)

One of the central thrusts of the discourse after the sign at the pool of Bethesda (5:19-47) is verifying his authority through works, with which the Father will astonish, through testimony of the Baptist and through scripture. In the Egerton papyrus where we find a similar pericope in which in the context of legal argument over a miracle there is discussion of whether Jesus should be punished for doing a good deed, and as an outcome of this plans to kill him, the Jews respond to Jesus' words with: "we know well that God spake unto Moses, but as for thee, we know not whence thou art." ⁷

The Jews do not recognize where Jesus is from and so do not recognize his authority. For this "now is your unbelief accused." 8 If the suggestion that Egerton is earlier than John on form critical grounds is correct, then the evangelist uses the material or its common source in a second pericope of a related nature, the healing of the man, blind from birth (9:1-41). In this story there is a similar reaction by the Jews to a miracle. The parallel in Egerton is amplified in John's Gospel by the response of the blind man to the Jews:

We are disciples of Moses: we know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this Man, we don't know where he comes from.

The man replied, "Now here is an astonishing thing! He has opened my eyes, and you don't know where he comes from! ... if this man were not from God, he couldn't do a thing." (John 9:28b-30,33)

The sign therefore is used to back Christ's origin, and so his authority, and ultimately to surpass the miracle in performing a salvific act. The blind man's sight is restored and then he believes, but of more significance is that Jesus comes: "so that those without sight may see," (9:39) in contrast to the Pharisees who do not even know that they are blind.

The missionary aspect of the sending of Jesus and his apostles is exemplified by the meeting with the Samaritan woman at the well (4:1-42). Okure argues that the whole pericope is unified by the theme of mission, rather than just the obvious didactic discourse of v.31-39 with its Matthean parallel (9:37-39) 9 The saving mission of Jesus from the Father is linked to the subsequent apostolic mission by the use of the same verb "apostellein" for send in both situations 10

I sent you to reap... (4:38)

As the Father sent me, so I am sending you... (20:21)

As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.(17:18)

The missionary aspect is underlined by the Samaritan setting, suggesting a target audience beyond the Jews, especially as it leads directly to a sign requiring faith from a gentile (4:46-54). 11 It is even possible that the entire gospel has a more outward looking aim, if the usual reading of 20:31 which suggests an orientation to those already within the Johannine community, is alternatively rendered "so that you may come to faith." 12

Jesus' going suggests a destination, and in a soteriological sense he acts as the forerunner of the believer going to God. In John salvation is understood both as something that has already occurred (5:24), and as a future event (14:2-3). Jesus' going is to prepare for this future event. Going also suggests a way and certainly did to Thomas: "Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way" (14:5). This allows the response of great salvific import from Christ that "I am the way..." (4:6a). In the motif of going to the Father we have in Christ both the

example and the means.

Just as sending suggests mission, going implies following and discipleship. In this Gospel there is a special emphasis on a disciple being one "who follows Jesus and stays with him." 13. To continue to follow after Jesus goes is recognized as a problem and the coming of the Paraclete could be seen as a response to this. Indeed, Jesus gives as one of his reasons for going that if he did not, the Paraclete would not come. (16:7)

The coming of the Spirit presents itself in John's Gospel in the baptism of Christ and in the person of the Paraclete who is to come after Jesus. "The spirit coming down on him from heaven" (1:32), is part of the testimony of John the Baptist reinforcing the authority of Christ. The testimony also links with the coming of the Paraclete as it identifies Jesus as "the one who is going to baptise with the Holy Spirit"(1:33). This baptism is implicit in salvation for the Johannine community. The Paraclete is the continuing source of salvation for, the believer because it "will teach you everything and remind you of all I said,"(14:26) and "to hear the teaching of the Father, and learn from it, is to come to me."(6:45b) According to Brown "the Paraclete's special function is to take what belongs to Jesus and proclaim it anew to each generation." 14

For the young church based on the Johannine tradition the motifs of sending, coming and going provide a theoretical base for their continued existence. From its origin in Wisdom and prophet motifs, the formula "sent by the Father" is transformed into a saving force. It provides a separate and subtly different form of salvation history to that based principally upon the passion narrative, which gives the community a cosmology supportive of Christ's authority. There is support for a community based on discipleship and missionary activity in these motifs and of the continuation of the saving presence of Jesus in the person of the Paraclete.

ENDNOTES

1. Brown,R.E *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, Paulist: New York, 1979. p.70.
2. Perrin,N. and Duling,D.C. *The New Testament: An Introduction*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch: New York, 1982. p.324.
3. Crossan,J.D. *Four Other Gospels*, Harper and Row: San Francisco, 1985. p.31.
4. Kummel,W.G. *Theology of the New Testament*, SCM:London, 1973. p.273.
5. Fuller,R.T. "New Testament Roots to 'the Theotokos'", *Marian Studies*, 29, 1978. p.49.
6. Brown,R.E. op.cit. p.117.
7. Crossan,J.D. op.cit. p.70.
8. Ibid.
9. Okure,T. *The Johannine Approach to Mission*, J.C.B.Mohr: Tubingen, 1988. p.⁷⁷.
10. Brown,R.E. op.cit. p.188.
11. Marsh,J. *The Gospel of Saint John*, Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1968. p.236.
12. Brown,R.E. "The Kerygma of the Gospel According to John", *Interpretation*, 21. p.387.
13. Fortna,R.T. "From Christology to Soteriology", *Interpretation*, 21. p.33.
14. Brown,R.E. "The Kerygma of the Gospel According to

John", p.392.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Brown, R.E. "The Kerygma of the Gospel according to John", *Interpretation*, 21 387-400, 1967.
- Brown, R.E. *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, Paulist: New York, 1979.
- Conzelmann, H. *An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament*, SCM: London, 1969.
- Crossan, J.D. *Four Other Gospels*, Harper and Row: San Francisco, 1985.
- Cullman, O. *The Johannine Circle*, SCM :London, 1976.
- Dodd, C.H. *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge University Press: London, 1953.
- Fortna, R.T. "From Christology to Soteriology", *Interpretation*, 27:31-47, 1973.
- Fuller, R.M. "New Testament Roots to the Theotokos", *Marian Studies*, 29:46-64, 1978.
- Jones, A.(ed.) *The Jerusalem Bible*, Darton, Longman and Todd: London, 1974.
- Koester, H. *Introduction to the New Testament Vo1 2*, Fortress: Philadelphia, 1982.
- Kummel, W.G. *Theology of the New Testament*, SCM: London, 1973.
- Marsh, J. *The Gospel of Saint John*, Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1968.
- Perrin, N. and Duling, D.C. *The New Testament: An Introduction*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch: New York, 1982.

Sanders, J.N. and Mastin, B.A. *The Gospel According to Saint John*. Black: London, 1968.

Robinson, J.M. and Koester, H. *Trajectories Through Early Christianity*, Fortress: Philadelphia, 1971.

Smith, D. Moody "Johannine Christianity", *New Testament Studies*, 21:222-248, 1974.

Whitacre, R.A. *Johannine Polemic*, Scholars Press: Chicago, 1982.