

'BATTLE OF EVERMORE': A TREATISE ON THE THEATER OF TRANSCENDENCE

O. Jason Osai

Institute of Foundation Studies (IFS)
Rivers State University of
Science and Technology
Port Harcourt, NIGERIA

ABSTRACT

The paper studies the essence and doctrinaire interpretation of 'transcendence' from the religious perspective covering the creeds of Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism and Baha'i. The paper also reviews the philosophical roots of 'transcendence' discussing its original definition, the medieval usage, colloquial usage, transcendent theosophy and the Kantian and modern philosophy of transcendence within which the views of Socrates, Plato, David Hume, Mulla Sadra, Jean-Paul Sartre and Stephen Palmquist, were brought to bear on the discourse. Essentially, the paper contends that there is an eternal scuffle that is taking place between higher and lower forces and the main arena of this struggle is in the human mind as encased in the human body. The paper furthers that in every individual, there is the tri-unity of the senses, the soul and the spirit. The senses are as imbedded in the human body with the sense of touch, taste, sight, sound and smell; the soul is the essence of man's existence here on

earth while the spirit is a spark of God in human. In its journey on earth, the soul continually utilizes the mind in choosing between the essence of the soft whispers of the spirit and the compelling demands of the senses. The soul is, therefore, constantly caught between these two forces; and this is what is dubbed the Battle of Evermore. The author holds that this second-by-second non-violent eternal conflict takes place in all human beings irrespective of color or creed and station or location on earth. Ascendancy in the single super consciousness of the ethereal is a direct product of the cumulative of the degree to which the soul defeats the compulsions of the senses. That, the paper concludes, is the essence of transcendence.

Key Words:

•*Transcendence* •*Human mind* •*Senses* •*Soul* •*Spirit* •*Philosophical perspective* •*Religious perspective* •*Transcendent theosophy* •*The end of transcendence* •*Personal enterprise* •*Universal phenomenon*.

Introduction

Human's quest for his origin, place and destination in the universal context has been a source of curiosity from time immemorial. Various philosophical postulates have emerged over the centuries since man began to think and hand down his thoughts either through oral tradition or in writing. While some have been profoundly abstract, others have endeavored to draw inference from empiricism and existentialism. The conjectural nature of this eternal quest into the unknown calls for pervasive open mindedness in the thought process.

The above posture is a product of the realization that, in the endlessness of the universe, there are two distinct worlds—the ethereal and the corporeal. Plato had offered that “behind the mercurial world of the senses, there is a world...composed of the timeless real instead of the transitory apparent that is the sole yield of the senses.” (Nisbet, 1982:7) The “timeless real” (the ethereal), which is the single super-consciousness of the Divine Spirit God, controls the multiplicity of habitable and inhabited planets in the corporeal.

There is an eternal scuffle that is takes place between higher and lower forces and the main arena of this struggle is in the human mind. In every individual on earth, there is the tri-unity of the senses, the soul and the

spirit. The senses are as imbedded in the human body with the sense of touch, taste, sight, sound and smell; the soul is the essence of man's existence here on earth while the spirit is a spark of God in man. In its journey on earth, the soul utilizes the mind, that all conquering abstract instrument, and, continually makes choices between the essence of the soft whispers of the spirit and the compelling demands of the senses. What the soul requires for ascendancy in the divine realm, the senses (human body) abhor and what the spirit abhors is the core of the existential realities and needs of materialism; the soul is therefore constantly caught between these two forces in what has, for the purposes of this academic endeavor, been dubbed the *Battle of Evermore*.

The second-by-second non-violent eternal conflict takes place in all human beings irrespective of color or creed and station or location in the multiplicity of the corporeal world. Ascendancy in the single super consciousness of the ethereal is a direct product of the cumulative of the degree to which the soul, working in conjunction with the abstruse concept of the mind, defeats the compulsions of the senses during each and every sojourn within the multiplicity of the corporeal. (Osai, 2006) Krishnapada (1996:19) informs that: "Socrates stated before his execution that although his body might be destroyed, his soul would continue." Here, Socrates made reference to the invincibility and eternity of the soul with special reference to its capacity to assume another material encasement and continue its journey towards oneness with the Divine.

In this effort we shall discuss transcendence from two perspectives viz the philosophical perspective and the religious perspective. Thereafter, we shall conduct a cursory review of major world religions within the context of their position on transcendence; this will take us through Baha'i Faith, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism. Within these two categories, there are numerous shades of opinion on transcendence. Under the philosophical perspective there are various schools of thought while the religious perspective takes us to the belief systems of various religions across the world.

Transcendence

Essentially, this effort focuses on man's capacity to transcend his everyday existence and work towards a higher state of consciousness or realization. In philosophy, the adjective transcendental and the noun transcendence convey three divergent but invariably connected principal

senses, all of them originate from Latin where its literal meaning is “climbing or going beyond;” sprouting from that Latin origin, one meaning originated in Ancient philosophy, the other in Medieval philosophy, while the third evolved in modern philosophy.

Original Definition

The first meaning, as part of the concept pair transcendence/immanence, is used primarily with reference to God's relation to the world and is particularly important in theology. Here *transcendent* means that God is completely outside of and beyond the world, as contrasted with the notion that God is manifested in the world. This meaning originates both in the Aristotelian view of God as the prime mover, a non-material self-consciousness that is outside of the world. Conversely, philosophies of immanence such as stoicism, Spinoza, Deleuze or pantheism maintain that God is manifested in and completely present in the world and the things in the world.

Medieval Usage

In the second meaning, which originated in Medieval philosophy, concepts are *transcendental* if they are broader than what falls within the Aristotelian categories that were used to organize reality conceptually. Primary examples of the transcendental are the existent (*ens*) and the characteristics, designated *transcendentals*, of unity, truth, and goodness.

Transcendent Theosophy

In Islamic philosophy, transcendent theosophy is one of two major disciplines, which is very alive and active even today. *Al-hikmat al-muta'liyah*, as it is known, was developed and perfected by Mulla Sadra, the Persian Islamic philosopher. The term *al-hikmat al-muta'liyah* comprises two expressions *al-hikmat* (theosophia) and *muta'liyah* (acclaimed or Transcendent). This school of Mulla Sadra in Islamic philosophy is usually called *al-hikmat al-muta'liyah*. It is a most suitable name for this school of thought, not only for historical reasons, but also because the doctrines of Mulla Sadra are veritably both *hikmah* (theosophy) in its original sense and an intellectual vision of the transcendent, which leads to the Transcendent Itself. So Mulla Sadra's school of thought is transcendent for both historical and metaphysical reasons.

At the core of Mulla Sadra's philosophy lies the metaphysical

hypothesis of "existence precedes essence," a key fundamental theory of existentialism. Conversely, there was the proposition of the idea of "essence precedes existence," which was earlier propagated by Avicenna and his school of Avicennism; Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi and his school of Illuminationism also lent their intellectual weight to this opposing philosophical postulate.

Kant and Modern Philosophy

In modern philosophy, Kant introduced a new term - *transcendental*, thus instituting a new, third meaning. In his theory of knowledge, this concept is concerned with the conditions of possibility of knowledge itself. He also opposed the term *transcendental* to the term *transcendent*, the latter meaning "that, which goes beyond" (transcends) any possible knowledge of a human being. For him *transcendental* meant knowledge about our cognitive faculty with regard to how objects are possible a priori. "I call all knowledge *transcendental* if it is occupied, not with objects, but with the way that we can possibly know objects even before we experience them." He also equated *transcendental* with that which is "...in respect of the subject's faculty of cognition." Something is transcendental if it plays a role in the way in which the mind "constitutes" objects and makes it possible for us to experience them as objects in the first place. Ordinary knowledge is knowledge of objects; transcendental knowledge is knowledge of how it is possible for us to experience those objects as objects. This is based on Kant's acceptance of David Hume's argument that certain general features of objects (e.g. persistence, causal relationships) cannot derive from the sense impressions we have of them. Kant argues that the mind must contribute those features and make it possible for us to experience objects as objects. In the central part of his Critique of Pure Reason, the "Transcendental Deduction of the Categories," Kant argues for a deep interconnection between the ability to have self-consciousness and the ability to experience a world of objects. Through a process of synthesis, the mind generates both the structure of objects and its own unity.

A meta-philosophical question discussed by many Kantian scholars is how transcendental reflection is itself possible. Stephen Palmquist interprets Kant's appeal to faith as his most effective solution to this problem. For Kant, the "transcendent," as opposed to the "transcendental," is that which lies beyond what our faculty of knowledge can legitimately know. Hegel's counter-argument to Kant was that to know a boundary is

also to be aware of what it bounds and as such what lies beyond it; in other words, to have already transcended it. In phenomenology, the "transcendent" is that which transcends our own consciousness—that which is objective rather than only a phenomenon of consciousness. Noema is employed in phenomenology to refer to the terminus of an intention as given for consciousness.

Jean-Paul Sartre also speaks of transcendence in his works. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre utilizes transcendence to describe the relation of the self to the object oriented world, as well as our concrete relations with others. For Sartre, the for-itself is sometimes called a transcendence. Additionally if the other is viewed strictly as an object, much like any other object, then the other is, for the for-itself, a transcendence-transcended. When the for-itself grasps the other in the other's world, and grasps the subjectivity that the other has, it is referred to as transcending-transcendence. Thus, Sartre defines relations with others in terms of transcendence.

Colloquial Usage

In everyday language, "transcendence" means "going beyond," and "self-transcendence" means going beyond a prior form or state of oneself. Mystical experience is thought of as a particularly advanced state of self-transcendence, in which the sense of a separate self is abandoned. "Self transcendence" is believed to be psychometrically measurable, and (at least partially) inherited. The discovery of this is described in the book "The God Gene" by Dean Hamer, although this has been criticized by commentators such as Carl Zimmer.

Transcendence

In religion, transcendence is a condition or state of being that surpasses physical existence and in one form is also independent of it. It is affirmed in the concept of the divine in the major religious traditions, and contrasts with the notion of God, or the Absolute, existing exclusively in the physical order (immanentism), or indistinguishable from it (pantheism). Transcendence can be attributed to the divine not only in its being, but also in its knowledge. Thus, God transcends the universe; He also transcends knowledge within the context of the capacity of the human mind. Granted that transcendence is defined as the opposite of immanence, the two concepts are not essentially mutually exclusive. Several theologians and

metaphysicians of the great religious traditions avow that God, or Brahman, is inside and outside the universe (panentheism); in it, but not of it.

Transcendence in the View of World Religious Traditions

In this section, we shall conduct a cursory view of what the creed of various world religious traditions perceive as the essence of transcendence. In alphabetical order, we shall discuss transcendence from the perspectives of: Baha'i Faith, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Sikhism.

Baha'i Faith

Bahá'ís believe in a sole, eternal God, the creator of all things, including all the creatures and forces in the universe. In the Baha'i Faith, God is depicted as "a personal God, unknowable, inaccessible, the source of all Revelation, eternal, omniscient, omnipresent and almighty." Though inaccessible directly, God is nonetheless perceived as conscious and mindful of his creation, with a mind, will and objective. Adherents of the faith believe that God communicates this will constantly and consistently in numerous ways, including using a string and succession of divine messengers who are generally known as Manifestations of God or, occasionally, *divine educators*. In articulating the will and intent of God, these messengers either establish a religion or a religion is established based on their teachings after their death; through the instrumentality of proselytization by his followers, these religions, eventually, grow beyond the boundaries of the region which the messenger conducted his ministry; the religion thereby becomes a world religion. The teaching of Bahá'í Faith further holds that enormity God and His creation within the universal context are too great for humans to completely comprehend, nor to create an absolute and precise image of Him.

Buddhism

Buddhism confines transcendence to the life forms of the formless realms of existence. While such beings, the religion holds, are at 'the peak' of Samsara, Buddhism adjudges the achievement of transcendence to be a spiritual cul-de-sac, which does not translate to or guarantee a permanent

cessation of Samsara. This contention is a principal differentiator from the other Sramana gurus (religious teachers) that held sway during the training, development and religious scholarship of Gautama Buddha and under whose tutelage he grew and, eventually, found the face of God.

Alternatively, in the various forms of Buddhism – Theravada, Mahayana (especially Pure Land and Zen) and Vajrayana – the notion of transcendence is of more difficult application. Except for Pure Land and Vajrayana (where a certain return to Hindu-like personifications of the spiritual world is countenanced), the role played by transcendent beings is minimal and at most a temporary expedient. However, Buddhists do believe that Nirvana is an eternal, transcendental state beyond name and form, so Nirvana is the main concept of transcendence in Buddhism.

Christianity

Christians pick up on the historical dynamism of the future-oriented plan of the Old Testament and follow the immanent workings of the transcendent God in the word of Christ. The Holy Spirit lives through them and through him they fear nothing except for Him. For if He be for me, who can be against me? They, too, believe that God's existence is ontologically distinct and fully independent of the material universe, and yet that He interacts directly with it. As with the Jews, this distinction is articulated in the notion which some believe to be unique to the Semitic religions: creation. Therefore, the onus of demonstrating how God can still be considered finite, although, by way of creation, there exists creation something that He is not, but which does not limit Him, rests on the shoulders of the Theologians.

In contrast to the above statement, the Bible teaches that all things in existence came forth from God and continue to exist for Him and by the exercise of His power. This does not mean that creation exists as God or in equality with God, because creation does not possess either the fullness of God's nature or the ability to exist outside of God. For example, Thomas Aquinas argued that although after creation there are more beings (plural) than before, there is still no more being (singular), because all that exists other than God shares in the one being of God, although in a particularized way. Jesus Christ is believed to be the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, but incarnate in the humanity received corporally from the Virgin Mary and a divinely-created human soul. Thus, transcendence and immanence interpenetrate in an exceptional manner in the Christian faith, practice and

theology. The mysterious and paradoxical nature of Christ provides a bridge between the infinite Deity and finite man.

Hinduism

Transcendence is described and viewed from a number of diverse perspectives within Hinduism and its multi-faceted scriptural metaphysics. Some traditions, such as Advaita Vedanta, view transcendence in the form of 'God' as the Nirguna Brahman (God without attribute—indeed even without "god-ness"), transcendence being absolute. Other traditions, such as Bhakti yoga, view transcendence as God with attributes—Saguna Brahman, the Absolute being a personal deity (Ishvara), such as Vishnu or Shiva.

Within the Bhagavad Gita, transcendence is described as a level of spiritual attainment, or state of being which is open to all spiritual aspirants (the goal of yoga practice) - the state at which one is no longer under the control of animalistic, base desires and is aware of a higher spiritual reality. "When the yogī, by practice of yoga, disciplines his mental activities and becomes situated in transcendence—devoid of all material desires—he is said to be well established in yoga." (BG 6:18) The exact nature of this transcendence is given as being "above the modes of material nature," which are known as gunas (ropes) that bind the living entity to the world of samsara (repeated rebirth) within Hindu philosophy. (BG 14:22-25)

Islam

Oneness of God is the act of believing and affirming that God (Arabic: Allah) is one and unique. The Qur'an asserts the existence of a single and absolute truth that transcends the world; a unique and indivisible being who is independent of the entire creation. According to the Qur'an:

He is God, the One and Only; God, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; and there is none like unto Him." (Sura 112:1-4, *Yusuf Ali*)

Thy Lord is self-sufficient, full of Mercy: if it were God's will, God could destroy you, and in your place appoint whom God will as your successors, even as God raised you up from the posterity of other people." (Sura 6:133, *Yusuf Ali*)

According to Vincent J. Cornell, the Qur'an also provides a monist image of God by describing the reality as a unified whole, with God being a

single concept that would describe or ascribe all existing things: "God is the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward; God is the Knower of everything (Sura 57:3)" Some Muslims have however vigorously criticized interpretations that would lead to a monist view of God for what they see as blurring the distinction between the creator and the creature, and its incompatibility with the radical monotheism of Islam.

In order to explain the complexity of unity of God and of the divine nature, the Qur'an uses 99 terms referred to as "Most Beautiful Names of Allah." (Sura 77:180) Aside from the supreme name "Allah" and the neologism al-Rahman (referring to the divine beneficence that constantly (re)creates, maintains and destroys the universe), other names may be shared by both God and human beings. According to the Islamic teachings, the latter is meant to serve as a reminder of God's immanence rather than being a sign of one's divinity or alternatively forcing a restriction on God's transcendent nature.

Tawhid or Oneness of God comprises the principal object of the Muslim profession. To ascribe divinity to a created entity is the only unpardonable sin mentioned in the Qur'an. Muslims believe that the entirety of the Islamic teaching lies on the theory of Tawhid.

Judaism

Over the centuries, Jewish theologians, particularly since the Middle Ages, have portrayed the transcendence of God in terms of divine simplicity, explaining the traditional uniqueness of God as omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. intercessions of divine transcendence take place in the type of occurrences outside the sphere of natural incidences such as miracles and the revelation of the Ten Commandments to Moses at Mt. Sinai. Conversely, divine immanence depicts the Godliness steeped in every creation, celebrated and recognized through the strict adherence to the celebration of the Sabbath.

In Jewish medieval cosmology, God is described as the "Ein Sof" (literally, without end) as reference to God's divine simplicity and essential unknowability. The emanation of creation from the Ein Sof is explained through a process of filtering. In the Kabbalistic creation myth referred to as the "breaking of the vessels," filtering was necessary because otherwise this intense, simple essence would have overwhelmed and made impossible the emergence of any distinct creations. Each filter, described as a vessel, captured the emanation of this creative force until it was overwhelmed and

broken by the intensity of God's simple essence. Once broken, the vessel's shards, full of absorbed "divine sparks," fell into a vessel below. This process ultimately continued until the "light" of Godliness was sufficiently reduced to allow the world we inhabit to be sustained without breaking. The creation of this world, however, comes with the consequence that Godly transcendence is hidden, or "exiled" (from the immanent world). Only through the revelation of sparks hidden within the shards embedded in our material world can this transcendence be recognized again. In Hasidic thought, divine sparks are revealed through the performance of commandments or "mitzvot," (literally, the obligations and prohibitions described in the Torah). One Jewish explanation for the existence of malevolence in the world is that such terrible things are possible with the divine sparks being hidden. Thus there is some urgency to performing mitzvot in order to liberate the hidden sparks and perform a "tikkun olam" (literally, healing of the world). Until then, the world is presided over by the immanent aspect of God, often referred to as the Shekhinah or divine spirit, and in feminine terms.

Sikhism

God, called Waheguru, is the central idea of Sikhism. In this faith, Guru Nanak — the founder of Sikhism — described God as being transcendent, and is known as the creator. God can create any geographical feature with no effort. God is also known as an eternal being living outside this universe where the good can only travel. Ik Onkar, meaning "One God" is the phrase Sikhs take upon themselves to pray upon. According to the Guru Granth Sahib, which is the holy scripture of Sikhism, God is considered a transcendent and omnipresent being, without fear and hate. In some societies God is also known as an eternal being living outside this universe where the good can only travel. Ik Onkar, meaning "One God" is the phrase Sikhs take upon themselves to pray upon.

The Death of God and the End of Transcendence

The rabbi Richard Rubenstein and Christian theologians Gabriel Vahanian, Paul van Buren, William Hamilton and Thomas J. J. Altizer, wrote on this subject. In 1961, Vahanian's book *The Death of God* was published. Vahanian argued that modern secular culture had lost all sense

of the sacred, lacking any sacramental meaning, no transcendental purpose or sense of providence. He concluded that for the modern mind "God is dead," but he did not mean that God did not exist. In Vahanian's vision a transformed post-Christian and post-modern culture was needed to create a renewed experience of deity.

Both Van Buren and Hamilton agreed that the concept of transcendence had lost any meaningful place in modern thought. According to the norms of contemporary modern thought, God is dead. In responding to this collapse in transcendence Van Buren and Hamilton offered secular people the option of Jesus as the model human who acted in love. The encounter with the Christ of faith would be open in a church-community.

Altizer offered a radical theology of the death of God that drew upon William Blake, Hegelian thought and Nietzschean ideas. He conceived of theology as a form of poetry in which the immanence (presence) of God could be encountered in faith communities. However, he no longer accepted the possibility of affirming belief in a transcendent God. Altizer concluded that God had incarnated in Christ and imparted his immanent spirit which remained in the world even though Jesus was dead.

Analysis

A rather fascinating phenomenon in the discourse of *Battle of Evermore* and the fact that it is the individual, prompted by the inclination of the soul (either to the spirit or the senses), that is responsible for his words, actions, and inactions, is the name of Satan in Igbo (Nigerian) language; this name amply lends itself to critical analysis within the context its etymology and the essence of this discourse. According to Webster's (2006:437) the etymology of a word involves two elements: 1) "A history of the word as indicated by breaking it down to the basic elements, and 2) tracing it back to the earliest known form or root, with all its changes in form and meaning." In Igbo, Satan is called known as "Ekwensu;" in this segment of this effort, we shall subject that name to etymological enquiry towards a greater understanding of the import and meaning intended by the originators. Subjected to psycholinguistic scrutiny, Ekwensu is a combination of three words ("ekwe" "nmu" and "su") that, as the following analysis would show, fairly well sum up the essence of self-transcendence, which has been

captured under the caption *Battle of Evermore*. In Igbo language, many words have dual or multiple meaning depending on the placement of accent in the spelling and this determines the tonal inflection, which reveals and establishes the contextual relevance; this polysemic phenomenon is common in many indigenous languages of Africa. Ekwe as a word has multiple meaning with one being relevant to the phenomenon of Ekwensu: (1) the first meaning of ekwe is gung—a metal or wooden instrument used by the town crier to draw the attention of the community before delivering a message as directed by the Chief; gung is also used as a musical instrument in which case it is, generally, called *agogo*, (2) secondly, ekwe is the name of small chair, which is generally used in the kitchen, (3) thirdly, ekwe is also a conditional statement that literary means “if it is agreed” and (4) fourthly, ekwe refers to a type of rope made from cane. The second word, nmu, simply means “I.” The third word “su,” means “commencement of troubles.” Therefore, when the third meaning of ekwe (“if it is agreed”) is taken alongside the second and third words (nmu and su), then ekwensu translates to: “if you agree with me then I commence my dastardly actions.” This clearly means that Satan has no powers but only goes into action when the individual permits him (if we permit a dose of anthropomorphism here); otherwise, he is literarily not there; he is, therefore, incapacitated, naturally.

We note that in the Garden of Eden Satan did not force Eve into the act of eating of the tree in the middle of the garden; rather he persuaded her into the act. (Gen. 3:1-6) This means therefore that Satan succeeded only because Eve yielded to his persuasive capabilities. Subsequently, Eve also persuaded her husband, Adam, to eat of the fruit; again, she did not force Adam. Conversely, Jesus resisted every temptation of Satan and even when Satan spoke through Simon Peter, Jesus rebuked him (“get thee behind me Satan”) knowing that he was the one speaking through Peter. In other words, the power in Satan is limited to the enablement given to him by the individual through yielding to the compelling demands of the senses; the capacity to resist the temptation from the senses incapacitates Satan and renders him powerless and that capacity is acquired by listening and adhering to the soft whispers of the spirit of God that is in every human being in God's creation.

The etymology of the word ekwensu, from the perspective of its origin, is, unfortunately, not known by this writer and therefore requires investigation; however, its import, within the context of the interpretation

and analysis made here, leaves the impression of an advanced understanding of the deeper meaning of life and the concept of cause and effect for anyone or group of people to have evolved that combination of words that arrived at the name, *ekwensu*. What informed the perception that produced such apt naming can only be ascertained by *linguistic archeologists*, if there is any such academic discipline or subfield.

Conclusion

Every major world religion reviewed and analyzed within the thematic context of this exercise, invariably, views self-transcendence as what it simply is: a personal enterprise; consequently, it is argued that the enterprise is devoid of religious affiliation, color, creed, station and location; in other words, it is a universal phenomenon that applies to every individual in God's creation in equal measure. Osai (2010) contends that in his lyrical musico-spiritual ministrations and mission, Carlos Santana unswervingly harped on the fact that the onus of transcendence is on the individual thereby repudiating the concept of vicarious atonement of sins. This point of view is a reflection of the Mayan religious tradition of Santana's origin. The promotion-demotion reality of the ladder of life is captured in the anecdote of Jesus' reaction to the doubt expressed by John the Baptist regarding His being the one to come. The book of Matthew (11:2-15) presents as follows:

And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to him "Are you the Coming One, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said to them Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: the blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of me. As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in Kings' houses. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes. I say to you and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it was written 'behold, I send my messenger before your face who will prepare your way before you.' Assuredly, I say to you, among

those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear let him hear.

We note that it was John's doubt that earned him a base position, a demotion in the Kingdom of Heaven whereas hitherto "among those born of women there has not risen one greater than he."

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