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## INEXORABLE VICTORY: AN IDEOLOGICAL TEXTURE ANALYSIS OF THE TRIAL PERICOPE IN JOHN 18:28-19:17

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The Gospel of John is much loved, standing apart from the Synoptics in its language, theme, and content. It is also the product of a church leader attempting to frame the story of Jesus for the community he served. John lived during a time of dramatic change in the religious landscape and had a novel and compelling vision, which are hallmarks of charismatic leadership (Barnes, 1978; Conger, 1989). As such, this Gospel is a rich source for leadership studies to which the discipline of socio-rhetorical analysis may be applied (Robbins 1996a). In this paper, the ideological texture of John 18:28-19:16 will be analyzed to understand John's objectives in writing the Gospel to the Johannine community. This community, most likely in Ephesus, was undergoing significant trauma after being expelled from the synagogue and looked upon as deviants by Roman society in general (Ashton, 1985, Beasley-Murray, 1987). The pericope, which contains the trial of Jesus before Pilate, brings together the agents of power in the Judean context, namely Jesus, Pontius Pilate and the Jewish religious leadership. In addition to ideological texture, aspects of social and cultural textures will be considered, specifically manifestations of honor-shame and patron-client relationships. The interplay between these three forces provides much to consider as today's ecclesial leaders as they address their communities' own issues of alienation from their contemporary cultures and civil governments.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

The Gospel of John has been thoroughly studied by lay, clerical, and academic scholars who love its nature as "the spiritual Gospel" (Martyn, 2003) and are intrigued by its unique approach to the life of Jesus Christ. "No other book of the New Testament has attracted as much attention from commentators as the Fourth Gospel. It has stirred minds, hearts, and imaginations from Christianity's earliest days" (Maloney, 2008, abstract). The Gospel is also a rich arena in which to explore ecclesial leadership through the methodology of Robbins' (1996a) socio-rhetorical hermeneutics. This methodology allows us to utilize not only the best of the historical-grammatical method

but opens the text to the insights of other disciplines. Socio-rhetorical hermeneutics sees the text, not as a window to look through to ancient times, nor a mirror reflecting our own context, but a rich multi-dimensional tapestry (Robbins, 1996a). In this case, that tapestry helps to show us both the complexity of John's day as well as our own.

The Apostle John and his community lived in a complex, multi-ethnic environment (Morris, 1995). This community, as has been true for believers throughout history, were confronted with the realities of a hostile civic government, popular ideologies philosophically opposed to their faith, and weaknesses from within their own communities. As an ecclesial leader, John's responsibility was to shape the thinking of this community. Since leadership is fundamentally about influence (Yukl, 2013), John sets about to influence his community's thinking by framing the Gospel narrative in juxtaposition to their own experience. Through his writing, John shows characteristics of charismatic leadership. Charismatic leadership includes an appeal to a novel and compelling vision, self-sacrifice, an emotional appeal to values, and leadership during dramatic change (Barnes, 1978; Conger, 1989). This Gospel and its historical location both demonstrate these attributes. In this paper, I conduct an ideological texture analysis of Jesus's trial pericope in John 18:28-19:16 and discover many timeless lessons for Christian ecclesial leaders and communities wrestling with alienation from their contemporary cultures and civic authorities.

## II. UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT, CONTEXT, AND METHOD

Understanding the background of this Gospel is critical to understanding John's agenda as he considered the power dynamics of his day. As an ecclesial leader, he was shaping the way his community interpreted the world around them. This section unpacks the issues of that community before describing the socio-rhetorical method that is so suited to understanding the Apostle's aim as he led his community.

### *Background to the Text*

John writes to a community in complex circumstances to which the world's contemporary Christians can relate. Christians represented a minority sect, an offshoot of Judaism which was, in their day, considered legally sanctioned atheism (Heemstra, 2014). By understanding the fundamentals of purpose, date, and location, as well as something of the Johannine community, we can better appreciate John's intent as a leader. The authorship of the Gospel is a complex study of its own (Bealey-Murray, 1987, DeSilva, 2004). In this study, I assume the traditional position that John, the beloved disciple, penned the Gospel.

*Purpose, date, and location.* This Gospel was written with an explicit purpose given by the author in John 20:31: "these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (English Standard Version). The writer uses the verb *pisteuō* (believe, trust or commit) which is ambiguous in form and may carry an evangelistic or didactic intent (Morris, 1995). John was writing to both Jewish and Gentile Christians, both of whom came from societies that may have been exerting significant pressures upon the members of the church to return to their own Jewish or pagan traditions (Brown, 1979). John's purpose,

his ideological aim as a writer and more broadly as a leader, was to convince believers to resist false teaching (Brown, 1979, p. 23) and to strengthen the church, rather than evangelize the world (Morris, 1995). Morris suggested several possible issues that would undermine this Christ-centered identity: Gnosticism, Docetism, John the Baptist's hangers-on, unbelieving Jewish attendees, and overly Hellenized Christians (Morris, 1995). The period during which the book was written, however, dictates which issues were most pronounced.

The Gospel of John was almost certainly written in the late first, or early second, century (DeSilva, 2004, Beasley-Murray, 1987, Morris, 1995). While the date of the final version is imprecise so also is the date of its original creation; it was likely composed over time and in a series of editions (DeSilva, 2004). Throughout the process, John was writing to a very specific community, a group scholars refer to as the Johannine Community.

*Johannine community.* We can puzzle out a fair amount about this community from the Gospel, the Epistles, and the Revelation. Brown (1979) suggested four distinct phases in the development of the community: “the pre-Gospel era,” a context during which the Gospel was originally penned, the era of the epistles when the Jewish-Christian schism developed, and an era of final, formal separation from Judaism (p. 22). DeSilva (2004) suggests that during this second stage the group migrated from Palestine to Asia Minor, perhaps as refugees from the Jewish political revolt of the 60s. In Asia Minor, the community now had to confront, not just hostile non-Christian Jews but a pluralist pagan culture, neither of which tolerated well the exclusivist claims of the God-man, Jesus. The community “had to distinguish itself over against the sect of John the Baptist and even more passionately over against a rather strong Jewish community, with which highly ambivalent relationships had existed. It suffered defections, conflicts of leadership, and schisms” (Meeks, 1972, p. 49).

Of course, they did not go to an Asia Minor with no history of Christianity. Asia Minor, and especially the city of Ephesus from which John traditionally wrote the Gospel, already had experience with a host of Christian apostles and preachers. “[Paul’s] work at Ephesus must have directly influenced the circle within which the Fourth Gospel was written, if it did not influence the author” (Dodd, 1968, p. 5). Given the context in which the Gospel emerged, what system of thought or ideology was driving John to persuade people to continue to follow Christ when pressures of conformity were everywhere? Socio-rhetorical analysis of Scripture is particularly useful in answers these kinds of questions, including John’s *ideology* as a Christian leader.

### *Background to the Study*

Gowler (2000), in his overview of hermeneutic approaches, wrote that the historical-critical method is still important, though many scholars of the school believe that it has “screeched to a halt at methodological and philosophical cul-de-sacs” (p. 445). A new interdisciplinary method was developed, called the socio-rhetorical method that could incorporate the input from numerous social sciences (Robbins, 1996a).

*Socio-rhetorical criticism.* Socio-rhetorical interpretation is a “master plan” for exegesis developed by Vernon Robbins (DeSilva, 2004, p. 23). It incorporates various divergent approaches to interpretation which Watson and Culpepper (1998) say no one

else has interrelated as robustly. The socio-rhetorical method includes a range of strategies and techniques that are both similar to and broader than other interpretive approaches. Using the metaphor of a tapestry which has dimensionality, texture, depth, and can be apprehended from various angles, Robbins describes six textures: inner texture; inter-texture; social and cultural texture; ideological texture and sacred texture (Robbins, 1996a; Robbins 1996b).

*Ideological texture.* Of these many textures, the ideological texture will be used in this analysis. "Ideological texture concerns the biases, opinion, preferences, and stereotypes of a particular writer and a particular reader" (Robbins, 1996b, p. 95). Examining ideological texture reveals the author's system of thought that works on and through the text to impact the reader (DeSilva, 2004, p. 464). Ideological texture also considers at the beliefs surrounding power dynamics in a setting (West, 2008). In the trial pericope, each of the characters in the exercise power: the Jews, Pilate, even Jesus. John, the author of the text and leader of the community, is also exercising power towards a goal. He wrote this Gospel to persuade the reader to think something: that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ. DeSilva explains that ideological analysis involves "the awareness that the New Testament texts are rhetorical texts, that is, they seek to persuade, affirm, and limit and constrain readers to respond to situations and other ideas in certain ways, and not in other ways" (DeSilva 2004, p. 464).

In the trial pericope, therefore, John is attempting to convince the reader of something. This pericope in John 18:28-19:16 is made up of four scenes, the first three each contain a pair of dialogues between Pilate, the Jews, and Jesus followed by a seventh, climactic scene involving all three parties. These seven dialogues are written to demonstrate the conflict between the power of Rome, the power of Jewish religious leadership, and the power of King Jesus.

### III. FIRST SCENE: JOHN 18:28-38A

The first scene in this pericope is John 18:28-38a and consists of two dialogues. The first is between the Pilate and Jewish religious leadership. The second is between Pilate and Jesus. In this first scene, we are also introduced to the pericope's main characters and the themes along which the story travels.

#### *Dialogue 1: 18:28-32*

In this first dialogue the Jewish religious leadership, whom John consistently refers to as "the Jews," brings Jesus before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. The accusers have already decided on what must happen to Jesus and they come before Pilate for official sentencing. Pilate, however, is not as cooperative as they may have expected, and a conflict between the two parties emerges. In this dialogue, the tension between the accusers, the Jews, and Pilate, becomes clear, as does John's ideological agenda: Rome, despite herself, will shame the Jewish accusers of King Jesus. By incorporating two aspects of the passage's social and cultural texture, the roles of the Jews and Pilate becomes clear thus explaining the ideological power dynamic. Social and cultural texture uses the theories of anthropology and sociology to unpack social environment of the text (Robbins, 1996a, p. 144).

*John's issues with "The Jews" as a collective identity.* First, the characters here are important and inform the rest of the pericope. The term, *the Jews*, has a particular meaning in John's gospel and is implied in 18:28. Beasley-Murray (1987) believed they were important members of the Sanhedrin. Witherington (1995) said that a key feature of John's Gospel is the "polemic" against the Jerusalem-based Jewish leadership referred to generally as "the Jews" (p. 12). John is openly hostile throughout the Gospel to this class of people (Ashton, 1985). The reason, Brown (1979) said, may lie in the late first-century expulsion of the Johannine community from the synagogue which resulted in "deep scars in the Johannine psyche regarding 'the Jews'" (p. 23).

John wants to portray the Jews as shamed before the unbelieving Romans, not just in the historical trial context, but now in the late first-century context. He does this first by demonstrating the Jewish failure to win the contest of challenge-riposte in their dialogue with Pilate. Second, John amplifies the client-patron reality between the Jewish leadership and their patron, Pontius Pilate.

*Shaming in social and cultural texture.* First, the text provides an example of honor-shame dynamics at work. There is an indication that the Jews and Pilate had some previous discussion regarding their plans for Jesus Christ. The possible presence of Roman soldiers in John 18:3 and Pilate's apparent knowledge of the charges against Jesus in 18:33 indicate that Pilate was aware of the Jewish designs. However, Pilate provides no indication of this background in his interaction with the Jewish leaders in verses 18:31. Quite the opposite, he publicly behaves as though he has no knowledge of any previous conversations. Feigning ignorance, he asks about the charges against Jesus, charges that the Jews fail to specify adequately. "When they refuse to answer his question, Pilate humiliates them by suggesting they try their prisoner in their own courts" which they were not empowered to do (Stanley, 1959, p. 221). This kind of exchange between the Jews and Pilate is an example of "challenge-riposte." "Challenges to one's status claims (honor) are frequent and must be met with the appropriate ripostes. The ensuing public verdict determines the outcome, and whether honor is won or lost" (Chance, 1994, p. 142). Pilate wins this round, gaining honor, as the Jews are shamed and left beholding to Pilate. They have lost honor and now publicly appear less as partners with Pilate in the maintenance of law and order and more as supplicants to Roman power.

Amplifying this patron-client relationship is the second way John brings shame on the Jews. They, he argues, are dependent on Roman good will for their position. John makes this claim earlier in John 11:48 where the religious leadership despairs of countering Jesus's influence saying, "If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation" (John 11:48).

Patron-client relationships have always played a major role in much of the world, and this is particularly true in the context of the New Testament (DeSilva, 2000). By the time of Christ, the office of high priest had become one of patronage, not religious service. Herod the Great and later, the Roman governors appointed high priests (DeSilva, 2004, p. 68). Josephus said that an earlier governor, Valerius Gratus, removed Annas as high priest and installed a series of others, none of whom served longer than a year, before appointing Caiaphas (Complete Works, 2:2). Thus "Caiaphas [was] not only on reasonably good terms with Rome but [was] faithfully playing [his]

mediating role in the imperial system” (Horsely, 1986, p. 32). Witherington (1995) made a similar point remarking on John’s repeated explanation that Caiaphas was high priest “that year” (11:49, 51; 18:13). “This reflects the tenuousness of Jewish power under Roman rule . . . who saw themselves as powerful people but, in fact, were also under someone else’s thumb” (Worthington, 1995, p. 287). Thus, Caiaphas, and by extension, the Jewish religious leadership, was clearly the client of Pilate. By pointing out the patron-client relationship of Pilate and his Jewish clients, John emphasizes that unlike the Jews, who sought friendship with Caesar, the Johannine community followed the true King, the ultimate patron.

### *Dialogue 2: 18:33-38a*

The second dialogue in the first scene is between Jesus and Pilate in John 18:33-38a. Pilate leaves the Jews outside the Praetorium to meet Jesus for the first time. This dialogue is about the kingship of Jesus and the nature of truth. John wants his community to know something about the power relationship between the Roman Empire’s governor and Israel’s true King: Rome itself is helpless before the Truth. This is the first dialogue where Jesus’s identity as king is emphasized. Six times in seven verses John mentions either king or kingdom and uses the word king twice as often as the other Gospel writers (Morris, 1995). John develops this idea quite early in the Gospel. “The crowd’s recognition of Jesus as prophet and king is unique to John’s account. Jesus was given these titles at the beginning of his ministry (John 1:41, 45, 49). “His royal and prophetic status is suggested throughout the narrative” (Little, 2009, p. 28). While the other Evangelists, of course, mention the kingship of Jesus, John takes it to another level. In John’s Gospel, Christ’s origins are from another alien realm, and his kingship belongs to a domain far beyond simple Jewish messianic expectation (Brown, 1975). John will not simply affirm that Jesus is the Son of David, “if He is a king, His kingship is of an entirely different order” (Dodd, 1968, p. 92). Whereas the synoptic writers play up Jesus’s fulfillment of messianic expectation, John sets his sights higher. Jesus came from an alien dimension and calls his followers to join him in that dimension (Brown, 1975).

In this scene, Jesus describes the nature of his kingship. It is not of this world; it was for this purpose that he came into the world and those who are of the truth accept his kingship. Morris (1995) pointed out how unexpected this kind of language is in the context. It is not enough to see the Kingdom as simply *spiritual*. This just creates a dualism that helps people cope with a Christ crucified by physical people. Instead, Christ is a king from an alien realm whose kingship encompasses everything included in the created and eternal orders. The knowledge of this kingdom is hidden, and his community has access to this knowledge. John’s gnostic manipulationist leanings come into play here as well. Robbins (1996a) says this kind of typology of sects helps people reinterpret their experience by incorporating hidden realities that only they can see. John uses this idea of hidden truth to point out the reality of kingship of Christ, his utter monopoly on truth and the community’s membership in the Kingdom. Having left Pilate sputtering about the nature of this truth, hidden or plain, John now turns to look at the failure of Jewish Messianic expectation to achieve the types of national liberation for which the people longed.

## IV. SECOND SCENE: JOHN 18:38B-19:3

The second scene in this pericope is found in John 18:38b-19:3 and includes dialogues three and four. Here Pilate is back with the Jews in the third dialogue, making a show of acquitting Jesus before having him flogged and mocked in the fourth dialogue. John is concerned with the power dynamics between glorious Rome and the sovereign God of the universe. For during this period, the Eternal City seemed omnipresent and omnipotent. John wants the Johannine community, however, to see the Empire as temporary, if not temporarily powerful. These next two dialogues carry that idea forward.

*Dialogue 3: 18:38b-40*

Dialogue three begins with Pilate returning to the Jews to inform them of the outcome of his interview with Jesus. “Not guilty,” is the judge’s pronouncement. Yet, beyond Pilate’s brief acquittal there lies a deeper thread in the presentation of Barabbas as a substitute target. The community must know that Jewish political, Messianic, substitute-salvation would fail. John presents this by introducing the character of Barabbas.

Pilate’s pronouncement of Jesus’s innocence should have brought the matter to a close. He should have dismissed both Jesus and the Jews and concluded the affair (Beasley-Murray, 1987). However, Pilate already knew what the Jews wanted; they had made it clear in John 18:31. One might ask why bother with a show trial at all? John wants the total failure of the human system to be clearly presented. The Jewish person on the street was looking for a political, revolutionary solution; the Jewish leadership was looking for their place to be protected. Rome was simply trying to keep a troubled province calm through pragmatic expediency—but all three approaches would fail. There can be no substitute salvation, not through a political messiah, not through political appeasement, and not through political manipulation.

The introduction of Barabbas makes an interesting foil to the kingship of Jesus. In Barabbas, we find an alternative Messiah for the Jewish people and a useful scapegoat for the Jewish leadership and Roman system. Each of the Gospels describes Barabbas differently. Matthew simply calls him a “notorious prisoner” (Matt. 26:16) while Mark and Luke both say that he was an insurrectionist and a murderer (Mark 15:7, Luke 23:19). John uses the word *lēstēs* which is often translated mundanely as “robber” (so ESV, NASB, KJV, and RSV). However, Bermejo-Rubio (2014) pointed out that it is precisely this word that Josephus uses for Jewish insurgents. Likewise, Rensberger (1984) preferred to translate the word as “freedom fighter” (p. 410). Others confirm this meaning as part of the semantic field of the word in the New Testament era particularly of the Zealots (Kittel, Friedrich & Bromiley, 1985). There is even some evidence that this word was used throughout Greek antiquity to refer to pirates (Beek, 2006). One might ask what difference it makes if Barabbas was a mere thief or an insurrectionist?

If Barabbas was simply a robber, there are no particular implications for his role other than as an exchange for Christ. John tells us, according to most translations that he was a robber and little else. “Incidentally this is all he does tell us, and it is a mark of his capacity for concentrating on what matters for his story that he does not even tell us

that Barabbas was released” (Morris, 1995, comment 18:40, para. 1). The historical-grammatical evidence is likewise on the side of Barabbas simply being a robber. The word only appears fifteen times in the New Testament, mostly in the Gospels. The Synoptics are fairly uniform in their use. Each recounts Christ’s condemning the temple being turned into a “den of robbers” (*lēstēon*) (Matt. 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46). Luke additionally uses this word in the parable of the Good Samaritan. However, there is evidence for a broader use of this word that also includes revolutionary political figures.

First, the Synoptics also record Jesus’s word in the arrest, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me?” (Matt. 26:55 ESV). Nothing in the context prevents this word from being translated as insurrectionist, revolutionary or freedom fighter. Second, all the Gospel writers refer to Jesus being crucified between two robbers, two *lēstēs*. However, the Romans rarely executed mere *lēstēs* (Kinman, 1991). They did aggressively execute political rebels (Bermejo-Rubio, 2014). Therefore, it is quite likely that the two robbers on Jesus left and right were, in fact, political revolutionaries. Kinman (1991) suggests that all three, the two unnamed revolutionaries and Barrabas were convicted of capital crimes earlier in the week. Thus, Barabbas as their likely leader, was available for this traditional Passover release. It is difficult to point to any Roman precedent for releasing a prisoner which all four Gospels mention (Bromiley, 1986; Kinman, 1991, Bermejo-Rubio 2014). However, some like Rensberger speculate that John was “making his own way among ambivalent political tendencies in the Jewish community between the two [Jewish] revolts” (Rensberger, 1984). The Jewish people see, perhaps in Barabbas, a kind of substitute savior according to the model with which they are familiar. They thus prefer the release of the revolutionary Barabbas, to their rightful king.

#### *Dialogue 4: 19:1-3*

In dialogue four in John 19:1-3, Jesus is now flogged and mistreated by both Pilate and his soldiers. There can be little doubt that these actions were intended to humiliate and shame Jesus (Neyrey, 1994). Yet, John frames the event for his community to show that Rome’s attempts to shame King Jesus only increase his honor. There is some variation in the way the four Gospels treat this trial sequence. Matthew, Mark, and John record the events in fundamentally the same order. However, Luke and John together see the scourging of Jesus as an alternative to crucifixion, not a prelude to it (Beasley-Murray, 1987).

The scourging and mockery (19:1-3) are made the central scene of John’s seven scenes and “underscore its essential meaning” (Stanley, 1959, p. 221). Only in this Gospel do they explicitly occur before Pilate has actually given Jesus over to be crucified. John does this to set the stage for the final dialogues in which the relations among Pilate, the Jews, and Jesus are brought to a climax (Rensberger, 1984, p. 403).

As the leader of the community, John carefully shaped the order of these scenes and even possibly utilized another stream of tradition about the order of the events (Dodd, 1968). At this point, it is helpful once more to consider the concept of honor and shame. Honor and shame are part of the social and cultural texture and contribute to understanding the story. DeSilva (2004) explained that “honor and dishonor were

foundational to first-century culture, whether Roman, Greek, Egyptian or Jewish” (p. 125). The flogging and mistreatment of Jesus at the hands of the soldiers is clearly an attempt to shame Jesus. Flogging was one way that a person in authority could ascribe shame to another. During a flogging, the victims were often nude, often lost continence and thus were exposed to public humiliation (Neyrey, 1994). It is this Roman attempt to shame Jesus that will rebound to the shaming of Rome in the dialogues that follow. Already Pilate has been portrayed as feckless and irresolute while Jesus has turned the tables on him, won the challenge-riposte exchange in the second dialogue, and made Pilate question the perspicuity of truth. “Despite all the shameful treatment of Jesus, he is portrayed, not only as maintaining his honor, but even gaining glory and prestige. . . . Far from being a status degradation ritual, his passion is seen as a status elevation ritual” (Neyrey, 1994, p. 114). Rome’s attempt to shame and humiliate Jesus will rebound all the more as scenes five and six unfold.

#### V. THIRD SCENE: JOHN 19:4-11

In this third scene, dialogues five and six unfold in John 19:4-11. Here, once again, Pilate stands before the Jews, presenting the flogged Jesus. John’s focus here for his community is God’s subtle, sometimes hidden, yet pronounced victories over the forces of faithlessness, whether religious or civil. In dialogue six, Jesus stands again before Pilate, bleeding and abused. Here John’s focus is that all authority ultimately comes from God. God’s sovereign plan is inexorable in dialogue five and in dialogue six his authority is shown to be ultimate.

##### *Dialogue 5: 19:4-8*

When the fifth dialogue opens in verse 4, Pilate again stands before the Jews outside the Praetorium. He says, “See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him” (John 19:4). However, this is a set up by Pilate. Jesus is now arrayed in a manner that would enrage the Jewish leadership. Pilate, perhaps completely oblivious, is carrying out not a crucifixion, but a coronation (Beasley-Murray, 1987). John’s message is simple: the Jews and Rome are helpless participants in God’s inexorable salvation plan. Jesus appears from off stage, looking bleak, wearing a crown of thorns and a purple robe. Roman soldiers, in a “spontaneous desire for some crude and cruel horseplay” have dressed him in the caricature of a king (Beasley-Murray, 1986, comment 19:2-3, para. 1). This type of kingly caricature was not unknown in the ancient world. Meggitt (2007) provided abundant evidence about the connection between perceived or real insanity and pretensions of royalty. The Roman soldiers, in line with this traditional mockery, dressed Jesus in a purple robe and crown of thorns. The thorns chosen for this caricature were probably not the thorns of popular artistry. The most likely type used for Jesus’s crown were those of the date palm tree, which had thorns up to 12 inches in length (Beasley-Murray, 1987). “Its form will have been an imitation of the radiate crown of the divine rulers, such as had figured on coins in the east for centuries prior to the episode in the Gospels” (Beasley-Murray, 1987, comment 19:2-3, para. 1). Jesus emerges onto center stage, therefore, not in the form of the battered pretender, but every inch the suffering servant-king. Then Pilate commands,

“Behold, the man!” It is possible that Pilate may be using the words in a somewhat contemptuous manner. It is possible that the governor was simply indicating the presence of the accused man. However, John both as a disciple and the ecclesial leader was shaping the thinking of the community for to him, Jesus is *the* man (Morris, 1995, comment 19:5, para. 1). It is unlikely that anyone present would have appreciated this on a conscious level. However, the implications for the Johannine community are clear.

Pilate shows Jesus to the crowd wearing the insignia of royalty, the crown of thorns and the purple cloak. The gesture permits Pilate to show his contempt of the Jews: it permits John to imply that the governor admits Jesus' claims to kingship. (Stanley, 1959, p. 223)

The community's opponents and the omnipresent Roman government will cooperate and participate in God's sovereign plan. Despite themselves, they cooperate in the divine blueprint as God's servants. Pilate has heard throughout the Jewish accusations that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. He now presents Jesus arrayed as an ancient divine king and becomes more afraid. Pilate, perhaps superstitious, is unnerved by something about Jesus.

Every Roman knew of stories of the gods or their offspring appearing in human guise. "Divine men" were part of the first-century understanding of life. Pilate had plainly been impressed by Jesus as he talked with him. Now that he hears of the possibility of the supernatural he is profoundly affected. Was he being confronted by a "divine man"? (Morris, 1995, comment 8-9, para. 1)

In John 19:6, Pilate both refuses to accept responsibility for the trial and nearly acquits Jesus before bending to the pressure of the Jews, even more fearful. Pilate must once more talk with Jesus before concluding the trial.

### *Dialogue 6: 19:9-11*

As John continues into the sixth dialogue, Jesus is once again before Pilate, or rather, Pilate stands before Jesus. The tide has changed. Whereas Pilate gained honor at the expense of the Jews in the first dialogue, now Pilate will lose honor to Jesus who gains it. John makes clear to his community that the true source of authority lies with God, not a transitory Roman puppet. So Pilate reenters the Praetorium with Jesus, scourged, beaten, and wearing a robe and crown of thorns, and in this state talks with Jesus about the authority. Van der Watt (200) said, “The power to crucify Jesus does not lie with Pilate but with Jesus. He is the one who decides what happens” (p. 386). However, Van der Watt goes too far when he says that, on a *figurative level*, it is the Jews and Pilate that stand accused. This is not John's insubstantial, figurative implication. This is precisely John's message. Paresnios (2010) rightly sees this, not as figurative versus ordinary, but in categories of appearance and reality. “In appearance, for example, the place and time of the trial is during the Passover in Jerusalem, but in reality, the setting of the trial is on the cosmic stage” (p. 38).

## VI. FOURTH SCENE: JOHN 19:12-16

The climactic last scene and seventh dialogue appears in John 19:12-16. The tension between Pilate and the Jews reaches its peak. Pilate continues to try to release Jesus while the Jews continue to oppose him. In this last picture, John wants the community to understand that even the Eternal City bends its knee to the eternal King. Now, all three players come together at the judgment-seat where Pilate finally proclaims Christ the King.

Here again, the honor-shame cultural texture is at play; again Pilate loses the challenge-riposte exchange. Pilate had previously lost honor when the crowds rejected his offer to crucify Barabbas and release Jesus (Faulhaber, 2010) now the situation deteriorates even further. The Jews now escalate, invoking a threat to Pilate's position, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar" (John 19:12). The charge is more substantial than appears at first glance. Pilate was politically vulnerable on several counts.

Pilate's ten-year career (AD 16-26) in Judea saw at least four violent conflicts with the Jews (Overstreet, 1978; Messner, 2008). First, shortly after being appointed governor in the year 16, he arrived in Jerusalem with a military escort who carried the emperor's image on covered standards triggering demonstrations (Messner, 2008). Second, there was an unknown violent episode mentioned in Luke 13:1 that resulted in the deaths of a group of Galileans (Overstreet, 1978). Third, he used temple funds to build an aqueduct, which created such a riot that Pilate had the demonstrators beaten (Messner, 2008). Fourth, he hung golden shields, presumably with the name or image of the emperor, in Herod's palace. This last offense was so great that the Jews appealed to Emperor Tiberius who forced Pilate to remove the shields around the year 32 (Messner, 2008; Overstreet 1978). This last event happened roughly one year before the trial of Christ. It would not do to have his name brought too frequently to the emperor's attention.

His second vulnerability had to do with the tumultuous state of the Empire in the mid-30s. Emperor Tiberius had withdrawn from public life around the year 26 or 27 leaving a certain Sejanus substantial imperial power (Messner, 2008). Sejanus had become the patron of several figures throughout the empire, possibly including Pontius Pilate himself (Beasley-Murray, 1987, comment 19:12, para. 2). In the year 31, two years before the trial of Jesus, Sejanus was discredited and executed, along with an unknown number of family members and political appointees (Messner, 2008). One Roman senator and historian (Tacitus) said, "Whoever was close to Sejanus had a claim on the friendship of Caesar" (as cited in Beasley-Murray, 1987, comment 19:12, para. 2). Pilate was likewise exposed, if not to the consequences of his patron's fall, then at least to the reshuffling of patron-client relationships through the empire. On another practical level, Pilate may not have had additional troops available to him should things become dire. Faulhaber (2010) writes that as the Syrian legate, to whom Pilate reported, was in Rome and thus, could not have made the Syrian legion available.

At the beginning of the pericope, it was Pilate who humbled the Jews in challenge-riposte, likely reminding them who their patron was. Now they remind Pilate about his own patronage and political vulnerability to Caesar himself in John 19:12. By

necessity, Pilate is, of course, Caesar's friend and has no choice but to act accordingly, quieting the Jews and calming the riot that was beginning (Matt. 27:24).

However, Pilate does not surrender without a rhetorical counter-punch. Beasley-Murray (1987) argued that Pilate, rather than placing Jesus in the position of the accused, sat Jesus himself on the judgment seat, or one of the seats set aside for clerks and administrators before the assembled mob; Jesus is now placed in judgment over them. "He is their Judge because they will not have him as their King" (Beasley-Murray, 1987, comment 19:13-14, para. 3). After thus arranging things at the judgment seat, Pilate proclaims to all assembled, "Behold your king!" (John 19:14). This informal coronation is certainly consistent with John's ideological intent. Those that thought they might judge the King found themselves judged by him. "For John the kingship was real. He wants us to see Jesus as King in the very act in which he went to death for the salvation of sinners" (Morris, 1995, comment 19:14, para. 2).

## VII. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I conducted a socio-rhetorical analysis on the ideological texture of Jesus's trial pericope in John 18:28-19:16. Both non-believing Jews and pagan neighbors held the Johannine community under siege. Jerusalem and the temple had been destroyed, the relocated community had been expelled from the synagogue. Thus, unmoored from their cultural and religious foundation, they felt at the mercy of both the social power dynamics of the Jewish community as well as the civil power dynamics of the broader Roman culture. John, as the principal leader of the community, shapes the group thinking with a novel and compelling vision (Barnes, 1978; Conger, 1989)

This ideological texture analysis uncovers John's ideological agenda as he faithfully communicated the tradition of the Passion to the community. He was concerned that the community understand their actual power position versus their perceived power position relative to the contemporary Jewish community and the Roman government. Their actual position was one of victory and honor whereas their enemies had suffered defeat and shame.

Like any good storyteller, John is working on several levels as he attempts to safeguard a community that has transitioned from life in Palestine to life in Asia Minor. It was also a community which had seen Jewish political aspirations crumble when Rome crushed Jerusalem in the year 70. Moreover, he had watched as they moved through the psychological drama of their expulsion from the synagogue. Now, both new dangers of schism and heterodox theology, as well as an increasingly hostile Rome, confront the community. Whatever else, he wants the community to know that Christ is indisputably, inexorably, the sovereign King and that they are citizens of an eternal, all-encompassing, ultimately victorious kingdom.

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### About the Author

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