

DOUBLE-VOICED DISCOURSE, HIDDEN POLEMIC, AND THE JOHANNINE COMMUNITY

Introduction

Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of *dialogism*, the way in which utterances¹ are already socially-embedded within existing and anticipated discourses, promises to help contextualize the Johannine community and its distinctive language and themes. By examining the predictions of martyrdom at the hands of those who purportedly think themselves to be offering faithful service to God (John 16:2), I will suggest that the Johannine community's adversaries are zealous heirs of Maccabean rhetoric and praxis. Employing Bakhtin's concepts of double-voiced discourse and hidden polemic, I will subsequently explore how the Gospel of John is an arena of conflict that engages and subverts Maccabean ideology in its struggle to articulate "true" Jewish faithfulness in the face of Roman imperialism. In addition to substantiating the shaping role of the discourse of martyrdom in the Johannine community, this Bakhtinian analysis of the Gospel highlights the sharp political and social thrust of this "spiritual" Gospel.

Bakhtin and Sociolinguistic Interpretation of John

Sociolinguistic analyses of John have made significant contributions to our understanding of the communal context of John.² A Bakhtinian perspective promises to extend the existing emphasis on

¹ On the significance of "utterance," see Barbara Green, *Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship: An Introduction* (SemeiaSt 38; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 52-55.

² I use the terms "John," "Gospel of John," and "the Fourth Gospel" interchangeably, intending no judgment on the identification of the historical author (or authors) of the Gospel. For a re-assessment and conclusion for John the Elder, see Martin Hengel, *The Johannine Question* (London: SCM, 1989); expanded German edition, *Die johanneische Frage: Ein Lösungsversuch mit einem Beitrag zur Apokalypse von Jörg Frey* (WUNT 67; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Siebeck], 1993). For a sustained argument for Thomas as the authenticating witness, see James H. Charlesworth, *The Beloved Disciple: Whose Witness Validates the Gospel of John?* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1995). A thorough overview of the issues and positions can be found in R. Alan Culpepper, *John the Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend* (Studies on Personalities of the New Testament; Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1994). I will be reading the Gospel as unified, historically embedded narrative, one independent of the Synoptics (cf. D. Moody Smith, *John among the Gospels* [2nd ed.; Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2001]).

the internal sociological effect of Johannine rhetoric to its broader social and political settings, as we shall see.

Wayne Meeks's landmark essay "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism" illustrates how the descent/ascent motif functions to reinforce the community's negative social identity and isolation from the world.³ Subsequent scholarship has further examined the socio-linguistic interrelations between Johannine language and its communal consciousness, plotted onto the social grid of the honor-shame culture of the first-century Greco-Roman world.⁴ In particular, Malina, Rohrbaugh and Petersen all utilize the categories of *anti-language* and *anti-societies* introduced by the sociolinguist M. A. K. Halliday,⁵ taking note of how John's *special language* (Petersen) distinctively *relexicalizes* existing terms and *overlexicalizes* basic concepts as a means of foregrounding the distinct social values, or *counter-reality*, of a marginalized group.⁶ This language serves to resocialize newcomers into a reality "experienced and set up in opposition to some established mode of conception and perception," as well as to maintain the inner solidarity of the pressured

³ Wayne A. Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *JBL* 91 (1972): 44-72; reprinted on pp. 55-90 in idem, *In Search of the Early Christians: Selected Essays* (ed. Allen R. Hilton and H. Gregory Snyder; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002). Meeks draws in part on the work of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966).

⁴ See Bruce J. Malina, "The Gospel of John in Sociolinguistic Perspective," in *Protocol of the 48th Colloquy of the Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture* (ed. H. C. Waetjen; Berkeley, Calif.: Graduate Theological Union and University of California-Berkeley, 1985), 1-23; Jerome H. Neyrey, *An Ideology of Revolt: John's Christology in Social-Science Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); idem, "The Sociology of Secrecy and the Fourth Gospel," in *What Is John? Volume II: Literary and Social Readings of the Fourth Gospel* (ed. Fernando Segovia; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 79-109; idem, *The Gospel of John* (New Cambridge Bible Commentary; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Norman R. Petersen, *The Gospel of John and the Sociology of Light: Language and Characterization in the Fourth Gospel* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1993); Richard L. Rohrbaugh, "The Gospel of John in the Twenty-first Century," in *"What Is John?"* 2:257-63; Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998).

⁵ M. A. K. Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning* (London: Edward Arnold, 1978).

⁶ See Malina, "The Gospel of John in Sociolinguistic Perspective," 11-17.

group.⁷ Despite its distinctiveness, this society and language can nonetheless only be understood in its larger historical context:

[W]hat is significant in antilanguage is not its distance from the language of strong group/low grid society, but the tension between the two. Both the society at large and the antisocial group share the same overarching system of meaning, just as both are part and parcel of the same overarching social system. Yet they stand in opposition to and in tension with each other. The reason for underscoring this point is that to appreciate the new values and perceptions generated by a weak group/low grid, antisocietal collectivity, one must understand the larger society to which it stands opposed.⁸

Under this conception, the struggles between groups spill over into the discourse itself, causing the subversion of the conventional usages of words as they are relexicalized and associated with radically different concepts and praxis. While the general trend has been to focus on the sectarian nature of the Johannine community, we can see that external engagement with broader societal issues is implicit in this sociolinguistic approach.

The sociolinguistic concepts advanced by the Bakhtin circle⁹ are well-suited to the task of analyzing the Fourth Gospel's¹⁰ ideological engagement with its community's adversaries.¹¹ In their

⁷ Malina, "The Gospel of John in Sociolinguistic Perspective," 14. I have corrected the typographical error in the original, substituting "established" for "established."

⁸ Ibid., 15. The terminology of "group" and "grid" is drawn from the sociological work of Mary Douglas (*Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* [New York: Vintage Books, 1973]).

⁹ There is a significant and perhaps irresolvable debate regarding Bakhtin's authorship of publications attributed to his colleagues Pavel Nikolaevich Medvedev and Valentin Nikolaevich Voloshinov. My focus in this paper is on the sociological nature of discourse, which is a perspective unifying the works of all three (cf. Pam Morris, introduction to *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov*, by M. M. Bakhtin et al. [ed. Pam Morris; London: Edward Arnold, 1994], 1-4). As such, I will interpret the works as the product of "like-minded intellectual circles" and include both names when referring to works of disputed authorship.

¹⁰ Several scholars have employed Bakhtin's perspectives in their analysis of John. See Paul N. Anderson, "Bakhtin's Dialogism and the Corrective Rhetoric of the Johannine Misunderstanding Dialogue: Exposing Seven Crises in the Johannine Situation," in *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies* (ed. Roland Boer; Semeia Studies 63; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 133-59; idem, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1996); David McCracken, *The Scandal of the Gospels: Jesus, Story and Offense* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 145-69; Tom Thatcher, *The Riddles of Jesus in John: A Study in Tradition and Folklore* (Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series 53; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000). Alexandar Mihailovic suggests that the "Johannine philosophy of the word" in conjunction with the Chalcedonian interrelation between the human and divine and Trinitarian conceptions of *perichoresis* have together provided the foundations of Bakhtin's theory of discourse ("Bakhtin's Dialogue with Russian Orthodoxy and Critique of Linguistic Universalism" in *Bakhtin and Religion: A Feeling*

critique of Saussurian Linguistics in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Voloshinov/Bakhtin decry the definitions of language that ignore the social nature of utterance. They reject both *individual subjectivism*, which locates the creativity of language solely in the historical author's individual psyche, and *abstract objectivism*, which perceives language as a self-contained system of signs, a monologue sealed off from any social context.¹² To the contrary, they insist that all discourse, spoken and written, takes into account the viewpoints of the various auditors; as such, discourse is framed within a specific ideological context, such that “*words are always filled with content and meaning drawn from behavior or ideology.*”¹³ Even the written text, the “ultimate realium” of the monological utterance and the fixed form cherished by philologists, is an “inseverable element of verbal communication.”¹⁴

Voloshinov/Bakhtin continue:

Any utterance—the finished, written utterance not excepted—makes response to something and is calculated to be responded to in turn. It is but one link in a continuous chain of speech performances. Each monument carries on the work of its predecessors, polemicizing with them, expecting active, responsive understanding, and anticipating such understanding in return. Each monument in actuality is an integral part of science, literature, or political life. The monument, as any other monological utterance, is set toward being perceived in the context of current scientific life or current literary affairs, i.e., it is perceived in the generative process of that particular ideological domain of which it is an integral part.¹⁵

This emphasis on the ideological and social character of discourse seems particularly well suited for the Fourth Gospel, given its conflict-ridden historical context.

for Faith [eds. Susan M. Felch and Paul J. Contino; Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2001], 121-49.

¹¹ As will be discussed below, J. Louis Martyn's hypothesis of a conflicted Jewish setting has dominated Johannine studies in the decades since its initial publication in 1968 (see now *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* [3rd ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003]), though Martyn's particular correlation of John to the *Birkat ha-Minim* has proven to be inadequate.

¹² Voloshinov and Bakhtin, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (trans. L. Matejka and I.R. Titunik; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973 [1929]), 45-63.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 70 (italics original). They state later, “The divorce of language from its ideological impletion is one of abstract objectivism's most serious errors” (71).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 72. The primacy of speech, governing even the printed text, is captured elsewhere by the description of a book as a “verbal performance in print” (95).

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 72.

Another crucial concept for the Bakhtin circle is the mutability of any given sign. The social context of discourse is key, “for the forms of signs are conditioned above all by the social organization of the participants involved and also by the immediate conditions of their interaction.”¹⁶ Discourse thus becomes an “arena of class struggle” where “differently oriented accents intersect in every ideological sign.”¹⁷ This multiaccentuality gives vitality and dynamism to a sign, but also contributes to its distorting refractability as the struggling groups strive “to impart a supra-class, eternal character to the ideological sign, to extinguish or drive inward the struggle between social value judgments which occurs in it, to make the sign uniaccentual.”¹⁸ This double-faced nature of a sign, its “inner dialectic quality,” only fully emerges in periods of social crisis or revolutionary change when the dominating ideologies of the ruling class lose their stabilizing monopoly. Voloshinov/Bakhtin state:

In the ordinary conditions of life, the contradiction embedded in every ideological sign cannot emerge fully because the ideological sign in an established, dominant ideology is always somewhat reactionary and tries, as it were, to stabilize the preceding factor in the dialectical flux of the social generative process, so accentuating yesterday’s truth as to make it appear today’s. And this is what is responsible for the refracting and distorting peculiarity of the ideological sign within the dominant ideology.¹⁹

With this perspective in mind we can be better prepared to discern and appreciate the strategies employed by the Johannine community in their efforts to articulate their distinctive vision of Jewish orthopraxy in the face of Roman imperialism, a vision contrary to its interlocutors.

Bakhtin’s concept of *hidden polemic* best captures the dialogical, ideological, and sociological insights into language articulated above. In discussing Dostoevsky’s poetics,²⁰ Bakhtin distinguishes

¹⁶ Voloshinov and Bakhtin, *Marxism*, 21.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

²⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (ed., trans. Caryl Emerson. *Theory and History of Literature* 8; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); translation of *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo* (2nd ed.; Moscow: n.p., 1963). The first edition was published under the title *Problemy tvorchestva Dostoevskogo* in 1929. See especially the schematic classification of these terms on page 199.

between *direct discourse*, which is referentially oriented and embodied by direct authorial prose, *objectified* or *represented discourse*, which most commonly takes the form of the direct speech of characters, and *double-voiced discourse*, in which the discourse of another coexists distinctly with the author's discourse. He further divides *double-voiced discourse* into three varieties. In the first variety (*unidirectional double-voiced discourse*), the author expresses agreement with the other voice and follows it in the same direction. The second variety (*vari-directional double-voiced discourse*) is exemplified by parody and irony²¹ in which the voice of another is preserved but subverted to serve aims hostile to its original intent (e.g., the ironic prophecy of the high priest in John 11:49-53). Finally, the third variety (*active double-voiced discourse*, reflecting discourse of another) utilizes the discourse of another for the author's own particular intentions, without directly introducing the external discourse into the author's speech. In this *hidden polemic*, "another's discourse...is not reproduced with a new intention, but it acts upon, influences, and in one way or another determines the author's discourse, while itself remaining outside it."²² The entire passage is instructive:

In a hidden polemic the author's discourse is directed toward its own referential object, as is any other discourse, but at the same time every statement about the object is constructed in such a way that, apart from its referential meaning, a polemical blow is struck at the other's discourse on the same theme, at the other's statement about the same object. A word, directed toward its referential object, clashes with another's word within the object itself. The other's discourse is not itself reproduced, it is merely implied, but the entire structure of speech would be completely different if there were not this reaction to another person's implied words...The other's words are treated antagonistically, and this antagonism, no less than the very topic being discussed, is what determines the author's discourse. This radically changes the semantics of the discourse involved: alongside its referential meaning there appears a second meaning—an intentional orientation toward someone else's words. *Such discourse cannot be fundamentally or fully understood if one takes into consideration only its direct referential meaning.*²³

²¹ Bakhtin views the Gospels as a variation of carnivalized, Menippean satire (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 135).

²² Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 195. These concepts also reshape conventional notions of conceptual origin and influence, replacing uni-directional, linear derivation with dynamic dialectism.

²³ *Ibid.*, 195-96 (italics added).

Rather than merely a *hidden dialogue* consisting of harmless exchange, hidden polemic emphasizes the “manifestly *power-inscribed* relationship between a word/utterance and its interlocutor.”²⁴ Here we see the importance of contextualizing Johannine rhetoric, for it is only then that we can begin to appreciate the polemical dimension of the Fourth Gospel’s lofty rhetoric.

I will argue that the Gospel of John exhibits double-voiced discourse, whereby the evangelist confronts his ideological opponents, using subversive hidden polemic that anticipates, appropriates and relexifies the utterances of his interlocutors for his own ideological purposes. It is to this “arena of conflict” that we now turn.

Locating John: The Ideological Context of the Fourth Gospel

In the beginning was the interpretation of the Word, and from the beginning interpreters have agreed that John’s “spiritual” narrative of Jesus soars, solitary and free, in a rarefied theological *Lebensraum*, hovering over the more “fleshly” Synoptic depictions below.²⁵ Why it does so is a matter of much debate, and contemporary scholarship has focused on the historical situation of the Johannine community as the major factor shaping John’s unique portrait of Jesus. J. Louis Martyn’s thesis correlating the Gospel’s ἀποσυνάγωγος passages (John 9:22, 12:42, and 16:2) to the formulation of the *Birkat ha-Minim* (“blessing of the heretics”) at Yavneh helpfully shifted scholarly focus to the Jewish context of the Fourth Gospel, but a steady accumulation of critiques about the

²⁴ Lynne Pearce, “Bakhtin and the dialogic principle,” in *Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 228.

²⁵ Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 6.14.7) attributes to Clement of Alexandria (d. ca. 216) this statement: “Finally John, perceiving that the external facts (τὰ σωματικὰ) had been shown in the (previously discussed) Gospels, having been urged on by reputable friends and being carried along by God in the Spirit ... composed a spiritual gospel (πνευματικὸν ... εὐαγγέλιον)” (all translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated). In a similar vein, Origen (d. ca. 254) comments on the “spirituality” of the Gospels, especially John: “(The Gospels) proposed to speak the truth when possible both materially and spiritually, and when this was not possible it was their intention to prefer the spiritual to the material. The spiritual truth was often preserved, as one might say, in the material falsehood (σωζομένου πολλάκις τοῦ ἀληθοῦς πνευματικοῦ ἐν τῷ σωματικῷ ὡς ἂν εἴποι τις ψεύδει)” (*Comm. Jo.* X.4). Of course, the “spiritual” exegesis of John by Gnostics predates both Origen and Clement. On this topic, see Elaine Pagels, *The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis: Heracleon’s Commentary on John* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973).

date and meaning of the *Birkat ha-Minim* has greatly curtailed the plausibility of that aspect of Martyn's thesis.²⁶

Martyrdom and the Johannine Community

Relatively unexplored in the quest for the historical context of the Johannine community is the prediction in John 16:2 that Jesus's followers will not only be made synagogue outcasts, but will also be killed by those who think they are offering worship, or cultic service (*λατρείαν προσφέρειν*), to God.²⁷ In terms of discourse, it potentially offers an accessible onramp to at least part of the community's ideological conflict, for in this passage we find a voice that explicitly acknowledges coming in a time when Jesus is no longer with them (16:4b), addressing a situation the later community will be facing (16:2a, 4a), providing the purported ideological justification of the action (16:2b), as well as the "correct" explanation of the adversaries' reasons for their actions (16:3). Also noteworthy are the "power-inscribed" nature of the utterances, including claims to true knowledge of the divine will and the killing of adversaries for religious reasons. While some have argued that

²⁶ For a brief overview, see Pieter van der Horst, "The Birkat Ha-Minim in Recent Research," *Expository Times* 105 (1994): 363-68. On difficulties with the dating of the *Birkat ha-Minim*, see Daniel Boyarin, "Justin Martyr Invents Judaism," *Church History* 70 (2001): 427-61; cf. Meeks, "Man from Heaven," 85 n. 40. Regarding the problem of identifying the referent of the *minim*, see Reuven Kimelman, "Birkat Ha-Minim and the Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer in Late Antiquity," in *Aspects of Judaism in the Greco-Roman Period* (ed. E. P. Sanders, A. I. Baumgarten, and Alan Mendelson; Jewish and Christian Self-Definition, vol. 2; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 226-44; Steven T. Katz, "Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 C.E.: A Reconsideration," *JBL* 103 (1984), 69-74. On questions about the scope and authority of Yavneh, see Wayne A. Meeks, "Breaking Away: Three New Testament Pictures of Christianity's Separation from the Jewish Communities," in *In Search of Early Christians*, 115-123 (originally printed on pages 93-115 of *To See Ourselves as Others See Us: Christians, Jews, "Others" in Late Antiquity* [ed. Jacob Neusner and Ernest S. Frerichs; Studies in Humanities 9; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985]); Stephen G. Wilson, *Related Strangers: Jews and Christians 70-170 C.E.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 181.

²⁷ Paul S. Minear points out the disproportionate emphasis on the excommunication aspect of this verse, to the neglect of the threat of martyrdom (*John: The Martyr's Gospel* [New York: Pilgrim Press, 1984], 28). Minear does not attempt to explain in detail who specifically the opponents are and how this putting to death can be construed as a religious act, instead focusing his argument on a pre-70 C.E. date for the Gospel (48-56). He is otherwise content to assert that "the giants whom they [the narrator and his community] challenged were not dead but very much alive; they were the same giants that Jesus had confronted" (56).

this passage more likely refers to Roman persecution,²⁸ the earlier mention of the synagogue (ἄποσυναγωγούς) suggests a Jewish frame of reference, and elsewhere λατρεία and προσφέρειν are often associated with Jewish religious, even sacrificial, rites.²⁹ Closer study of this intersection of religion and laying down of life, including the scriptural foundations and the contours of discourse on this topic early Judaism, will shed light on the ideological framework attributed to the would-be persecutors of the Johannine community.

There are a number of scriptural texts depicting capital punishment as a religious duty. Deuteronomy 13:1-5 and 18:20 give explicit instructions for killing a prophet whose words and signs led the people astray into the worship of other gods (cf. John 7:12-13). In Deuteronomy 13:6-11 we find the directive that even the closest relative (brother, son, daughter, wife) or friend should be put to death if he or she is enticing the people into idolatry, so that all Israel will learn and not repeat the error (for a narrative enactment, see Exod 32:25-29). The death penalty for those who profane the Sabbath, particularly through working on it, is commanded in Exodus 31:14-17 (cf. Exod 35:2; Num 15:32-36; John 5:17-18, 7:23). In Deuteronomy 17:12 (cf. Josh 1:18) is found a similar provision for the death penalty against those who show contempt to the judge or priest appointed to minister (λειτουργεῖν) to God, presumably because this is ultimately contempt for God. In Leviticus 24:16 the entire assembly (πᾶσα συναγωγή) is enjoined to stone to death anyone, alien or native-born, who blasphemes the name of the Lord (cf. John 5:18).

²⁸ While not outrightly denying the possibility of Jewish persecution, Richard J. Cassidy argues for the strong plausibility of persecution under Domitian, coupled with an “extreme caution” regarding the possibility of Jewish persecution (*John’s Gospel in New Perspective: Christology and the Realities of Roman Power* [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1992], 110-113). Keener suggests that the Jewish opponents are delivering them over to the sword of the Roman governor (Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* [2 vols.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2003], 2:1027).

²⁹ Λατρεία: Rom 9:4 (though cf. Rom 1:9, 25), Heb 9:1, 6; cf. LXX Exod 12:25-26, 13:5; Josh 22:27; 1 Chr 28:13; 1 Macc 2:19, 22 (where it is used to identify specifically the Jewish religion over against pagan idolatry). Προσφέρειν: Matt 5:23-24, 8:4 (par); Acts 7:42, 21:26; Heb 5:1, 3, 7; 8:3, 4; 9:7, 9, 14, 25, 28; 10:1, 2, 8, 11, 12; 11:4, 17 (Abraham’s near-sacrifice of Isaac); cf. LXX Exod 29:3, 32:6, 36:3; 69 times in Lev; 31 times in Num; Judith 4:14, 9:1; 1 Mac 4:56, 7:33, 12:11; 2 Mac 1:8.

The theme of capital punishment for religious offenses does arise in John's narrative, establishing a possible connection between the religious service of 16:2 with the rest of the Gospel. The scriptural directives mentioned in the paragraph above are likely assumed in John 5:18 (cf. 8:59), in which the desire to kill Jesus is connected to his "breaking the Sabbath" and "making himself equal to God"; likewise, Jesus' response that the Son does solely what he sees the Father doing, including the divine task of giving life and judging (John 5:19-23), only seems to confirm the charges and could easily be construed as contemptuous. The fact that Jesus appeals to the testimony of both Moses and Scripture later in this response (5:39, 45-47) identifies scripture as one of the elements of the dispute. That Jesus' opponents have a legal basis for their claim could also be inferred from John 7:47-48, where a contrast is drawn between the mob, which knows nothing of the law and as a consequence follows Jesus, and the rulers and Pharisees, who implicitly do know the law and therefore do not follow Jesus (cf. 15:24; 16:8-11).³⁰ Finally, the attempt in John 8:58-59 to stone Jesus after his proclamation of the divine name (ἐγὼ εἰμὶ [cf. LXX Exod 3:14]) seems a straightforward application of Leviticus 24:16 to one thought to be blaspheming the name of God. While the historicity of these episodes relative to the historical Jesus is dubious, particularly with respect to the Johannine Jesus' exalted claims, one can more confidently suppose that these are the types of charges (blasphemy, contempt, etc.) and situations that would be faced by the later Johannine community making such elevated claims for Jesus (cf. Acts 7:54-8:3; 2 Cor 11:25). This analysis suggests a two-storey discourse in which the conflicts of the community are implicated over the life of its founder (a la Martyn), yet without the historically problematic invocation of the *Birkat ha-Minim* and Yavneh as the proximate cause. As we shall see in the next section, there is some

³⁰ Martyn, *History and Theology*, 58. The subsequent reference to the particular ruler and Pharisee Nicodemus, who suggests an argument from the law to hear Jesus out (cf. Deut 1:17, 17:8-11, 19:15-19) is a good example of Johannine situational irony.

evidence of religiously and ideologically motivated violence in the early Roman period, and its discourse intersects with a number of themes found in the Gospel of John.

Ideological Discourse of Johannine Opponents: Righteous Works, Glory, Zeal

At first blush, these religiously-based capital punishments might still seem removed from the notion in John 16:2 that this putting to death purportedly constitutes an act of worship, or sacrificial offering, for the prosecutors of the act. One prominent scriptural model of this notion is Phinehas's zealous execution of the Midianite woman and the Israelite man engaged in idolatrous relations with the Moabite and Midianite women (Num 25:1-13), which is described as an act of atonement for Israel (לְיִשְׂרָאֵל עַל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל; ἐξιλάσατο περὶ τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ). As C.K. Barrett notes, the comment on this episode in *Num. Rab.* 21:4 queries “But did he offer a sacrifice to justify the expression ‘atonement’ in this connection? No, but it serves to teach you that if a man sheds the blood of the wicked it is as though he had offered a sacrifice.”³¹ While this tradition occurs in a text decidedly later than John, its scriptural paradigm dates from a period much earlier than the Fourth Gospel. In fact, the model of Phinehas, whose exemplary zealousness for God against idolatry was invoked already in Psalm 106:28-31,³² proved to endure over the centuries, gaining particular prominence in the Maccabean response to the Seleucid crisis.³³

³¹ Cited in C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (2nd ed. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 485; see also Martin Hengel, *The Zealots: Investigations Into the Jewish Freedom Movement in the Period from Herod I until 70 A.D.* (trans. David Smith; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 175 n. 150; translation of *Die Zeloten: Untersuchungen zur Jüdischen Freiheitsbewegung in der Zeit von Herodes I. bis 70 n. Chr.* (2nd ed.; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976); W.R. Farmer, *Maccabees, Zealots, and Josephus: An Inquiry into Jewish Nationalism in the Greco-Roman Period* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), 178 n. 6. Note also *b. Sanh.* 82b, which describes Phinehas's atonement as an “everlasting atonement” (most likely an extrapolation of the perpetual priesthood granted to Phinehas in Num 25:13). Barrett doubts that passages such as these were ever taken seriously, and he suggests that John uses it ironically to make the point that the death of persecuted Christians is truly an offering to God. While the latter may certainly be true, the text itself emphasizes that the person doing the act believes it to be an offering (πᾶς ὁ ἀποκτείνας ὑμᾶς δόξη λατρείαν προσφέρειν τῷ θεῷ).

³² One notable addition found in Psalm 106:31 is the reckoning of righteousness to Phinehas from generation to generation throughout the ages, on the basis of his act of atonement (ἐξιλάσατο). The phrase “reckoned as righteousness” occurs in the OT only here and in Gen 15:6, with Abram. As we shall see, 1 Macc 2:52 describes the reckoning of righteousness to Abraham on the basis of his faithfulness when tested to offer his son Isaac. Phinehas is elsewhere described in 1 Chron 9:20 as the model for the later Levitical

As Martin Hengel has shown, the Phinehas episode of Numbers 25 provides foundational scriptural warrant for later violence employed against non-Jews and in punishment of Torah-transgressing Jews.³⁴ Numbers 25:17-18 encourages the Israelites to “hate the Midianites and strike them down,” precisely because they have deceived the people and led them into idolatry, a concrete example of the fear that the people may be led astray as expressed in Deuteronomy 13:13 (cf. John 7:12). Phinehas’s zeal for God, directed inwardly in the putting to death of a fellow Israelite, not only saved Israel by averting the plague that was destroying it, but also was the basis for the covenant of peace and the promise of an eternal priesthood for his descendents (Num 25:13).

It does not take great historical imagination to see why this passage could be instructive to Jews who were aghast at certain leaders’ (perceived) desires to abandon the law and lead the people astray (1 Macc 1:11-15), eventually leading to Antiochus’s desecration of the temple (1 Macc 1:21-24), forced idolatry and Sabbath profanation upon the pain of death (1 Macc 1:41-50).³⁵ Mattathias’s Torah-zealous killing of the idolatrous Jew (1 Macc 2:24-26) is in fact directly compared to

guardians of the threshold of the Tent and for those who oversaw the works of the service (ἐπὶ τῶν ἔργων τῆς λειτουργίας).

³³ In an undeveloped footnote, Barnabas Lindars cites Martin Hengel’s survey (in *The Zealots*) of the Phinehas traditions and “zeal for the law” as the religious motivation behind the sacrificial offering mentioned in John 16:2 (“The Persecution of Christians in John 15:18-16:4a,” 65 n. 33).

³⁴ Hengel, *The Zealots*, 149-176. A helpful discussion of the Phinehas traditions, with a special emphasis on the Philonic material that Hengel left largely unexplored, can be found in Torrey Seland’s *Establishment Violence in Philo and Luke: A Study of Non-Conformity to the Torah and Jewish Vigilante Reactions* (Biblical Interpretation Series 15; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 42-74, 103-181. While Hengel’s thesis that the Zealots constituted a unified liberation front well before the Jewish war has been rightly shown as overly simplistic (see Richard A. Horsley and John S. Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs: Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus* [Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1999], xxvi-xxviii; 216-43), Hengel nonetheless shows the ways various Jewish groups drew upon the scriptural model of Phinehas in support of differing programs and outbursts of violent resistance to both Greeks and Romans. Given the ultimate destruction of Jerusalem in the Bar Kokhba revolt of 132-35 C.E., we need not assume that such violent tendencies or their scriptural backing died out completely after the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E. Doubtless for some the defeat in 70 C.E. merely deepened resentment and intensified desire for freedom from Rome, which we see foreshadowed in the uprisings under Hadrian scattered throughout the Jewish Diaspora (115-117 C.E.).

³⁵ For a discussion that highlights cultic infringements and concerns for idolatry as decisive for the Maccabean revolt, see John J. Collins, “Cult and Culture: The Limits of Hellenization in Judea,” in *Hellenization in the Land of Israel* (ed. John J. Collins and Gregory E. Sterling; Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 38-61.

Phinehas's action in Numbers 25, and Phinehas's priestly line is also invoked as the forefathers of the Hasmonean's priesthood (1 Macc 2:54). Not insignificantly for later Hasmonean claims to the high priesthood, in Ben Sirach 45:23-24 we find Phinehas functioning as legitimation for this highest priestly office. Of equal importance is the belief in Ben Sirach that this everlasting priestly covenant is awarded to Phinehas on account of (διὰ τοῦτο) his atonement made for Israel (ἐξιλάσατο περὶ τοῦ Ἰσραηλ).

While 1 Maccabees does not use the specific word ἐξιλάσκομαι, several features of the text suggest that these actions are being presented as acts of religious sacrifice. Mattathias's slaughter of his fellow Israelite in 1 Maccabees 2:24 occurs directly upon an altar (ἐπὶ τὸν βωμόν), and it employs a term (ἔσφαξεν) often associated with cultic sacrifice.³⁶ The structure of the episode is an embodiment of the means by which Phinehas himself made his atonement (Num 25:11-13).³⁷ Finally, the hymn to Judas celebrating his destruction of the ungodly (ἐξωλέθρευσε ἀσεβεῖς) from the land (1 Macc 3:8) does note that by so doing Judas "turned away the wrath from Israel" (ἀπέστρεψε ὀργὴν ἀπὸ Ἰσραηλ), which is a clear fulfillment of LXX Numbers 25:4 (ἀποστραφήσεται ὀργὴ θυμοῦ κυρίου ἀπὸ Ἰσραηλ [cf. the ὀργὴ θυμοῦ of 1 Macc 2:49]).³⁸

³⁶ LXX Exod 12:6; 29:11, 16, 20; 34:25; Lev 1:5, 11; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:4, 15, 24, 29, 33; 6:18; 7:2; 8:15, 19, 23; 9:8, 12, 15, 18; 14:5, 6, 13, 19, 25, 50, 51; 16:11, 15; 17:3, 4, 5; 22:28; Num 19:3; 1 Sam 1:24; Ezr 6:20.

³⁷ Hengel, *The Zealots*, 153. Jonathan A. Goldstein delineates the parallels between Phinehas and Mattathias thusly: "Both narratives take place at a time of God's wrath against Israel (Num 25:3, 11; I 1:64). Just as Phinehas in Num 25:7 'saw' that nothing was being done about the mixed marriage that had angered God and 'rose and left the congregation,' so Mattathias 'saw' the apostasy in Judah and Jerusalem and 'rose and left' Jerusalem for Modein (In 2:1-6; the 'seeing' is placed last so that the lament in vss. 7-14 will not interrupt the flow of the narrative). Just as Phinehas showed 'zeal' and acted on behalf of the 'anger' of the Lord (Num 25:11), and stabbed the sinful couple in their illicit bed chamber, the place of their sin (Num 25:8; see the Greek versions), so Mattathias was 'filled with zeal and anger' and slew the idolater on the altar, the place of sin. With the reticence he displays throughout the book, the author lets his Jewish reader draw the inference: as Phinehas was rewarded by being made the founder of the high priestly line (Num 25:12-13), so will Mattathias be rewarded (*1 Maccabees: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 41; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976], 6).

³⁸ Van Henten cites this linguistic parallel in arguing that this event in 1 Maccabees is presented as an atoning sacrifice (Jan Willem van Henten, "The Song of Praise for Judas Maccabaeus: Some Remarks on 1 Maccabees 3:3-9," in *Give Ear to My Words: Psalms and Other Poetry in and around the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honour of Professor N. A. van Uchelen* (ed. Janet Dyk; Amsterdam: KOK Pharos Publishing House, 1996), 204-

This “zeal for the law” is also directed outwardly against non-Jews. In Numbers 31:1-12 we find a depiction of a “holy war” to execute the Lord’s vengeance against the Midianites, overseen by the priestly representative Phinehas: in this episode they kill every male, the five kings of Midian, and the prophet Balaam. Mattathias similarly is depicted killing the king’s officer who was forcing the Jews to offer sacrifice (1 Macc 2:25). In direct contrast to those Jews who were slaughtered on the Sabbath as a result of their non-violent resistance (1 Macc 2:34-38), Mattathias exhorts his friends to fight all who attack on the Sabbath.³⁹ This violent stance is not limited to self-defense when attacked, but also takes the form of proactive (presumably pre-emptive) violence against the lawless. A section of the hymn to Judas (1 Macc 3:5-6) again summarizes this posture well:

Seeking out the lawless (ἀνόμους), he persecuted them, and he set on fire those who agitated (τοὺς παράσσοντας) his people; the lawless cowered together from fear of him, and all the works of the lawless (οἱ ἔργαται τῆς ἀνομίας) were greatly confounded (συνεταράχθησαν); salvation (σωτηρία) was found in his hand.⁴⁰

The larger context of this verse further suggests that this posture is an expression of religious obedience, an idea already implicit in the contrast made between the “lawless ones” and (the law-adhering) Judas. This hymn immediately follows Mattathias’s testament where he urges his children to show zeal for the law, give their lives for the ancestral covenant, and remember the works of the fathers (μνήσθητε τὰ ἔργα τῶν πατέρων [1 Macc 2:50-51]); notably, Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22 is the first scriptural example cited in support of these exhortations. Also noteworthy, Mattathias specifies these actions as the means by which one obtains “great glory and an eternal name” (δόξαν μεγάλην καὶ ὄνομα αἰώνιον [1 Macc 2:51]); it is by becoming courageous and strong

5. The Fourth Gospel advances its own theories about how the “wrath of God” is turned away (John 3:36). Not insignificantly, this assertion is framed within a context of debate regarding purification (περὶ καθαρισμοῦ [John 3:25]), a term that is intimately connected to Israel’s sacrifices of atonement (Exod 29:36, 30:10) that are invoked in the Phinehas episodes.

³⁹ Note the direct reference in 1 Macc 3:56 to the holy war regulations specified in Deut 20:5-9.

⁴⁰ Cf. the claim in John 4:42 that Jesus is the “Savior” (ὁ σωτὴρ) of the world.

in the law that they are to be glorified (ἰσχύσατε ἐν τῷ νόμῳ ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ δοξασθήσεσθε [1 Macc 2:64]). As is to be expected, Judas's victories achieved these very things: he became the means of extending glory to his people (ἐπλάτυνεν δόξαν τῷ λαῷ αὐτοῦ), his name became known to the ends of the earth, even to the king (1 Macc 3:9, 26), and his memorial was a blessing into the age to come (ἕως τοῦ αἰῶνος τὸ μνημόσυνον αὐτοῦ εἰς εὐλογίαν [1 Macc 3:3]). The example lived on as well, for this militaristic posture against threatening non-Jews, complete with an invocation of the model of Phinehas, remained alive in various forms several centuries beyond the Maccabean revolution, as Josephus's references to "the Zealots" attest.⁴¹

The Levite traditions celebrating the harsh enforcement of communal and cultic purity (most notably in Genesis 34, where Levi and Simeon attack Shechem after the rape of Dinah) were likewise a foundational model for Torah zeal, being retold and expanded by several early Jewish groups (*Ar. Levi* 1-3, *Jub.* 30:1-6, 24-25; *T. Levi* 6:3-7:4).⁴² Though Levi and Simeon were condemned for their actions in Genesis 49:5-7, early Jewish interpreters took pains to transform Levi's rash fury into a model of righteous priestly zeal. As with the Maccabean figures, the authors of these texts frame their portraits of Levi with reference to the paradigm of Phinehas in Numbers 25 (*Ar. Levi* 4-7; *Jub.* 30:18-20, 31:12-17; *T. Levi* 8:3). The resulting vision of Levi is that of a "divinely ordained

⁴¹ See Hengel, *The Zealots*, 146-228; William R. Farmer, *Maccabees, Zealots, and Josephus*, 125-58 (chapter entitled "Were the Maccabees Remembered?"). In addition to the model of Phinehas and the rallying cry of "zeal for the law," the early raids by Judas the Galilean were modeled upon the Maccabean precedent (Hengel, *Zealots*, 282), including the acceptability of warfare on the Sabbath (Hengel, *Zealots*, 287-90). Farmer also notes the prominence of Maccabean names among Zealot leaders (William R. Farmer, "Judas, Simon and Athronges," *NTS* 4 [1958]: 147-55).

⁴² For a full discussion, see Robert A. Kugler, *From Patriarch to Priest: The Levi-Priestly Tradition from Aramaic Levi to Testament of Levi* (SBL Early Judaism and Its Literature 9; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996); see also Hengel, *The Zealots*, 178-79; Seland, *Establishment Violence*, 57.

priest whose chief characteristics were his violent zeal for communal and cultic purity and his possession of great wisdom and insight into the law.”⁴³

The zealous qualities of this priestly patriarch are also passed on to his descendents. The issue with the golden calf in Exodus 32:17-29 elevates the violent role of the Levites in halting idolatry within the community;⁴⁴ they are lauded for rallying behind Moses and the Lord and for killing their “brother and friend and neighbor” (Exod 32:27). It is the deadly opposition to sons and brothers that establishes both their priestly ordination and their blessing (32:29). Philo’s approving discussion of the event attests to the prominence of Exodus 32 as a narrative charter for the Levitical priesthood in the first century (*Spec.* 3.126-28):

Then [the Levites], sorely distressed at the sudden backsliding and *fired with zeal* (ζήλω πυρωθείσα) by their heart-felt hatred of evil, every man of them filled with rage, frenzied, possessed, took arms as if at one signal, and *despising all thoughts of danger* mowed down their foes drunk with the twofold intoxication of impiety and wine. They began with their nearest and dearest, for they acknowledged no love nor kinship but God’s love (φίλον καὶ συγγένειαν ἔν τὸ θεοφιλὲς εἶναι νομίζοντες), and in the space of a few hours 24,000 had fallen whose fate served as a warning through fear that they might suffer the like to those who were on the brink of sharing their delusion. This campaign, waged spontaneously and instinctively *on behalf of piety and holiness towards the truly existing God* (ὑπὲρ εὐσεβείας καὶ ὁσιότητος τῆς εἰς τὸν ὄντως ὄντα θεὸν) and fraught with much danger to those who undertook it, was *approved by none other than the Father of all* Who took it upon Himself to judge the cause of those who wrought the slaughter, declared them pure (καθαροὺς) from any curse of bloodguiltiness and gave them the priesthood as a reward for their gallantry... This shews that not every kind of homicide is culpable but only that which entails injustice (τὴν σὺν ἀδικίᾳ μόνην), and that as for the other kinds if it is caused by a *zeal for virtue* (ζῆλον ἀρετῆς) it is laudable (ἐπαινετὴν) and if unintentional it is free from blame.⁴⁵

⁴³ Kugler, *From Patriarch to Priest*, 9. Significantly for this present study, Isaac is the figure who passes on these priestly commandments, the “true judgment” (אמת קיטת [cf. John 7:24]) to Levi, just as he has received them from his father Abraham (*Ar. Lev.* 15, 22, 50, 57; cf. *T. Levi* 9:6-14). Implicit is the idea that Levi and his violent zeal are rooted in the paradigm of priesthood passed on by Isaac, which is a point that will be significant in the discussion of true Abrahamic sonship in John 8:31-59.

⁴⁴ This establishment of a Levitical priesthood on the basis of their violent zeal, occurring (narratively speaking) as it does in the midst of the failure of the Aaronic priesthood to halt idolatry (Exod 32:25), would have been particularly attractive to the priestly Hasmonians, who understand their current circumstances as resulting from the failure of the high priesthood vis-à-vis idolatry, requiring decisive action by priests outside of the order of Aaron.

⁴⁵ Translation by Colson, LCL [modified].

Of special note is the statement of God's direct approval, both through the declaration of the Levites' purity and the reward of the priesthood for their violent piety. This Levitical recompense parallels the gift of the priesthood to Phinehas as a result of his similar expression of faithfulness to God, revealing yet another aspect of the theological constellation informing Levitical ideology in the first century.

This violent expression of piety is not a mere anomaly in Philo's thought. In several places Philo strongly endorses such acts of religiosity,⁴⁶ demonstrating that the proponents of these intra-Jewish *ad hoc* killings were not simply militaristic religious extremists. In *Spec.* 1.54-57, Philo gives the following comments regarding the punishment of the idolater:

And it is well that all who have a zeal for virtue (ἅπασιν τοῖς ζήλον ἔχουσιν ἀρετῆς) should be permitted to exact the penalties offhand and with no delay, without bringing the offended before jury or council or any kind of magistrate at all, and give full scope to the feelings which possess them, that hatred of evil (μισοποιήρῳ) and love of God (φίλοθέῳ) which urges them to inflict punishment without mercy on the impious (τῶν ἀσεβῶν). They should think that the occasion has made them councilors, jurymen, high sheriffs, members of assembly, accusers, witnesses, laws, people, everything in fact, so that without fear or hindrance they may champion religion (ἰουδαϊσμοῦ) in full security.⁴⁷

The paradigm case that Philo cites as scriptural justification is that of Phinehas in Numbers 25. Philo elsewhere asserts that God commends this act of Phinehas where others would judge him to be a murderer (*Ebr.* 74):

Surely such a one must pass for a murderer in the judgment of the multitude, and be condemned by custom the woman-like, but in the judgment of God the all-ruling Father he will be held worthy of laud and praise beyond reckoning and of prizes that cannot be taken from him—two great and sister prizes, peace and priesthood.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ The foundational work for this argument is Erwin R. Goodenough's *The Jurisprudence of the Jewish Courts in Egypt: Legal Administration by the Jews under the Early Roman Empire as described by Philo Judaeus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929). His conclusions regarding the administration of the death penalty by Jews has been upheld (in a slightly narrower fashion) by Seland's *Establishment Violence in Philo and Luke* (1995).

⁴⁷ Translation by Colson, LCL (italics mine). In light of our broader discussion, special attention should be given to the shadings of law and holiness in the word ἰουδαϊσμοῦ, translated by Colson more generically as "religion."

⁴⁸ Translation by Colson, LCL.

Here we see an insistence on God’s endorsement of the act, despite any “conventional wisdom” that may exist to the contrary.⁴⁹

Philo also points to the religious motivations of his fellow Jews when discussing the death penalty for perjurers (*Spec.* 2.253):

For these [perjurers] will never escape: for there are thousands who have their eyes upon him full of zeal for the laws (ζηλωταὶ νόμων), strictest guardians of the ancestral traditions (φύλακες τῶν πατρίων ἀκριβέστατοι), merciless to those who do anything to subvert them.⁵⁰

In *Spec.* 2.28, Philo further observes that of the various punishments available against perjurers, those prosecutors who are more excellent and strict in their piety (τῶν ἀμεινόνων καὶ περιττῶν εἰς εὐσέβειαν) choose the death penalty, while men of milder dispositions favor public scourging. Equally noteworthy is the religious dimension attributed to the execution of sorcerers and poisoners (*Spec.* 3.96b):

And therefore it is right that even the most reasonable and mild-tempered should seek the blood of such as these, that they should lose hardly a moment in becoming their executioners, and *should hold it a religious duty* (εὐαγές) to keep their punishment in their own hands and not commit it to others.⁵¹

As Seland points out, this posture toward sorcerers is intimately connected with issues of divination and blasphemy, and all three reflect situations where monotheism is endangered.⁵² A similar concern for the lawful protection of monotheism can be found in Philo’s comments on Deut 13:10 (*Spec.* 1.316b), which enjoin the murder of fellow Jews enticing the people to worship other gods:

We must punish him [the one enticing others] as a public and general enemy, *taking little thought for the ties that bind us to him*; and we must send round a report of his proposals to all lovers of piety (πᾶσι τοῖς εὐσεβείας ἐρασταῖς), who will rush with a speed which brooks

⁴⁹ Especially important is the priority given to God’s judgment, over against the judgment of other humans (including even the presumed objection of the Jew being executed).

⁵⁰ Translation by Colson, LCL (italics mine).

⁵¹ Translation by Colson, LCL (italics mine).

⁵² Seland, *Establishment Violence*, 41.

no delay to take vengeance on the unholy man (ἀνδρὸς ἀνοσίου), and deem it a religious duty (εὐαγέζ) to seek his death.⁵³

We once again see lauded the zealous, holy enforcement of the law, particularly in matters that endanger monotheism, such that the killing of those perceived to be transgressing the law and defiling Israel is deemed a religious duty.⁵⁴

Philo's emphasis on "taking little thought for the ties that bind us to him" connects us to yet another pair of scriptural figures associated with Phinehas and Levi: Abraham and Isaac.⁵⁵

Mattathias includes both Abraham and Phinehas in his catalog of biblical heroes, stating the reward for Abraham's obedience when tested ("reckoned as righteousness") in the same terms the Psalmist employs in praising Phinehas for the killing of the idolater (Ps 106:31).⁵⁶ The idea that the laying down of human life is an act of religious service is also put forth in Genesis 22: Abraham asserts that he and the boy are going off to worship (προσκυήσαντες [Gen 22:5]). Abraham's binding of Isaac in obedience to God's command ironically embodies a similar disregard for the binding ties of kinship exhibited by Phinehas in his zealous execution of the apostate out of faithfulness to God; Isaac's blamelessness (vis-à-vis Zimri) makes Abraham's all-surpassing obedience to God even more remarkable than Phinehas's behavior.

In addition to Phinehas, efforts are also made to link Abraham and Isaac directly to Levi.

The treatment of Genesis 22 at Qumran (4Q225) contains a genealogy tracing the Abrahamic line

⁵³ Translation by Colson, LCL (italics mine).

⁵⁴ For other examples of rhetoric expressing religiously-motivated violence against fellow Jews perceived to be transgressors of God and Torah, see *3 Macc* 7:10-15; cf. 11QT, 4QMMT.

⁵⁵ While there are obvious differences between episodes involving Phinehas/Levites and Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, all share an emphasis on the priority of obedience to God's command over against fellow Israelites, friends, and even immediate family. This prioritization of God above all else is a key component of the inner logic of Torah zealotry that serves to draw all of these texts together. Abraham is particularly well suited to this construct, having left his own country, people, and household in Ur to obey the call of the Lord (Gen 12:1; cf. Gen 22:2). In *Jub.* 12:12-14 Abraham is imagined to have risked his life (cf. 12:7) in setting fire to his father's house of idols, an event which also kills Abraham's idol-loving brother Haran.

⁵⁶ See William R. Farmer, "The Patriarch Phineas: A Note on 'It was Reckoned to Him as Righteousness,'" *ATbR* 34 (1953): 26-30.

through Isaac and Jacob, and then directly to Levi (4Q225 2 ii 10-11). Though the overall text is too fragmentary for certain conclusions, the association of the genealogy with Genesis 22 (which is itself configured as a contest between God and Mastemah) suggests a desire to link the zealousness of Abraham and Isaac with that of Levi. Abraham and Isaac elsewhere play prominent roles in passing on special priestly tradition within the Levitical-Priestly literature (*Ar. Lev.* 13-61; *Jub.* 31:11-17; *T. Levi* 9:6-14),⁵⁷ and the genealogy preserved in 4Q225 brings to mind the broader constellation of violent patriarchal zeal adumbrated above.

It is possible that the putting to death of a fellow Jew, including the Johannine martyrs, could have been understood as the application of the *ḥērem* (חֶרֶם, ἀνάθεμα); this is perhaps another means by which the act could be construed as an expression of religious piety. While rabbinic usage shows that the term *ḥērem* does not mean the stricter “ban” (i.e., complete excommunication) until the middle of the third century C.E.,⁵⁸ John J. Collins points to the Maccabean episode in 1 Macc

⁵⁷ Shortly after the narration of the Shechem incident in *Jubilees*, Isaac directly (and under divine inspiration) blesses Levi (*Jub.* 31:11-17), declaring him a glorious and holy priest, whose descendents will become judges and rulers who speak and execute judgment righteously, while proclaiming the Lord’s ways to Israel. In *T. Levi* 9:6-8, Isaac is envisioned as calling continually to Levi, day by day bringing to Levi’s remembrance the law of the Lord and teaching him the law of the priesthood. This exhortation by Isaac confirms the angelic vision (*T. Levi* 8:1, presumably Jacob’s in Gen 28:10-17 [so Kee, *OTP*, 1:790 n. 8a]) in which Levi is elevated to the priesthood as a reward for his actions at Shechem. Also noteworthy in *Jubilees* is the effective negation of Isaac’s covenant of peace with the Philistine Abimelech (Gen 26:26-31) through the insertion of a speech in which Isaac curses the Philistines to complete destruction at the hands of the righteous (*Jub.* 24:27-33), foreshadowing Levi’s zealous actions at Shechem.

⁵⁸ Göran Forkman, *The Limits of the Religious Community: Expulsion from the Religious Community within the Qumran Sect, within Rabbinic Judaism, and within Primitive Christianity* (trans. Pearl Sjölander; Coniectanea biblica: New Testament Series 5. Lund, Sweden: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1972), 92. After the “little ban” (נִדְוִי), a 30 day expulsion from the community, had been applied twice and there was still no sign of positive change, the excommunicating ban (חֶרֶם) was applied. Also in the third century a “warning” ban (נִיּוּבָר) was implemented, which simply required the one warned to avoid the company of the one giving the warning for a period of one (in Babylon) or seven (in Palestine) days. Before the third century, up until about 90 C.E., the examples given in the rabbinic literature all show only the “little ban” (נִדְוִי) being applied for those who held “deviating” rules of purity; the consequence was not excommunication, but a social isolation that still permitted participation (at a distance) in Israel’s public and religious life (Forkman, *The Limits of Religious Community*, 92-104). Forkman also notes the strong dissimilarity between the biblical *ḥērem* and the rabbinic *ḥērem*. “When it comes to throwing light on later expulsion procedures the OT חֶרֶם has very little relevance. On the one hand it is used in connection with holy war and is then directed against people and things which have been belaid with a taboo because of contact with gods other than Yahweh. On the other hand it applies

2:24 as a key witness to another understanding of the *ḥērem*, namely the wholesale devotion, or sanctification (setting-apart [Lev 27:29]), of an object to God, often via its destruction.⁵⁹ Susan Niditch has highlighted the sacrificial dimension of the *ḥērem*, which includes not only animals and property (Lev 27:28), but also humans, who specifically may not be redeemed: “he will surely die” (Lev 27:29).⁶⁰ This sacrificial component is also operative in the rhetoric of holy war, illustrated by the promise in Num 21:2-3 to devote the enemy to destruction (אֲנָחְמָתִי; ἀναθεματιῶ) in response to God’s deliverance of them into the hands of Israel. Numerous passages depict precisely this response,⁶¹ frequently mentioning that all the humans (men, women, and children) are killed, even though their livestock and booty are not (Deut 2:34-35; Deut 3:6-7; Josh 6:17-21; Josh 8:2-28; 10:28-40; Josh 11:11, 14).⁶² Israelites could even be included in the destructive *ḥērem* as a result of their sin and rebellion (Isa 43:28; Jer 25:9), and in Exodus 22:19 [Eng. 22:20] is the specification that the idolater who worships any God but the Lord is to be devoted to destruction (אֲנָחְמָתִי; θανάτω ὀλεθρευθήσεται).⁶³ As noted above, the figure of Phinehas is likewise associated with both of these

to objects which have been handed over to Yahweh, to the temple, or the priest, and which are thus withdrawn from profane use” (*The Limits of Religious Community*, 22).

⁵⁹ John J. Collins, “The Zeal of Phinehas: The Bible and the Legitimation of Violence,” *JBL* 122 (2003): 12-13.

⁶⁰ Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 29-30.

⁶¹ The Hebrew verb אָנַחְמָתִי is translated with numerous Greek verbs (listed in order of frequency): ἐξολοθρεύω (“utterly destroy” [Deut 2:34, 3:6; Josh 2:10; 10:1, 28, 37, 39, 40; 11:11, 12, 20, 21; Judg 1:17; 1 Sam 15:3, 9, 15, 18, 20, 21; 1 Kgs 10:22; 2 Chr 20:23; 32:14; LXX Jer 27:26 (Eng. 50:26)]; ἀναθεματίζω [ἀναθέματι] (“curse (to destruction) [with a curse]” [Num 18:14; 21:2,3; Deut 13:16; 20:17; Josh 6:21; Judg 21:11; 2 Kgs 19:11; 1 Chr 4:41; Ezr 10:8]); ἀπόλλυμι (“destroy” [Isa 34:2, 5; 37:11; 43:28]); ἀνατίθεμαι (“lay before, present” [Lev 27:28, 29; Mic 4:13]); ἀφανίζω [ἀφανισμῶ] (“annihilate [to annihilation]” [Deut 7:2; LXX Jer 27:20 (Eng. 50:21); 28:3 (Eng. 51:3)]); ὀλεθρεύω θανάτω (“destroy to death” [LXX Exod 22:19 (Eng. 22:20)]); ἀφορίζω (“set apart” [Lev 27:21]); φονεύω (“murder, put to death” [Josh 10:35]); ἐρημόομαι (“be made waste or desolate” [Isa 11:15]); ἐξερημόω (“be made utterly desolate” [Jer 25:9]); ἀποκτείνω (“kill” [Dan 11:44]).

⁶² Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible*, 31-40.

⁶³ Niditch also points out that the human-offering *ḥērem* is united with self-sacrificing martyrdom in that they both “partake of the same essential world-view that regards the deity as appreciative of human sacrifices” (*War in the Hebrew Bible*, 44). Niditch points in particular to Genesis 22 and its later interpretations that insist that Isaac did shed blood and notes the “shocking neutrality” of the author when it comes to

issues, killing the idolater (Num 25) and engaging in holy war (Num 31:6),⁶⁴ and as such provided a model that was influential throughout the early Roman period.

We thus see a widespread reference in many strands of early Judaism to violent actions against fellow Jews, particularly those suspected of leading the people into idolatry and abandoning the law, occasionally combined with a violent invocation of holy war directed against ruling Gentiles.⁶⁵ Though the two actions are certainly distinct, such that the endorsement of the death penalty for Jewish idolaters does not require concomitant support for pro-active violent resistance against the Gentiles (e.g., Philo, Rabbinic traditions⁶⁶), these actions nonetheless share the common theme of protecting God's holiness, through violent enforcement of Torah piety and the rejection of Gentile impurity and idolatry. The scriptural paradigm of Phinehas displays this thematic

critical statements against child sacrifice. She observes: "Rather, life is God's to give and take. He may on occasion demand the most valuable sacrifice a person can offer, a human who is his own child. Abraham's son is redeemed, a ram substituted, as the Israelites; firstborn are spared in the tale of Exodus, the blood on the doorposts being an adequate token substitute (or were the Egyptian children adequate to satiate the Destroyer's appetite?). Redemption and sacrifice are the two options, but the deity is imagined not always to redeem. Even when he redeems, something else is offered instead. The banned person is a sort of human sacrifice that cannot be redeemed, but if someone should dare to withhold God's *ḥērem*, he himself may become the unwilling substitute as in the prophet's interpretation of the Syrian king Ben-Hadad's escape from death (1 Kings 20) (*War in the Hebrew Bible*, 46).

⁶⁴ As Niditch points out, despite the absence of an explicit reference to the *ḥērem*, the killing term (גִּרְוּ; ἀποκτείνω) associated with the *ḥērem* in Josh 8:24-26 is employed in Numbers 31:7-8, as well as the "typical ban language" of killing with the sword that is also found in Josh 8:24-26 (see also Josh 6:21; Judg 1:17-28; 1 Sam 15:8). She also notes that the most remarkable aspect of Numbers 31 in comparison to the other ban texts is the central role of the priests in battle, leading the armed forces with the cultic symbols (temple vessels and special trumpets) and receiving 1/50th of the spoils (*War in the Hebrew Bible*, 78-83). Given this prominent military role of the cultic leaders, it is not surprising that the priestly Maccabean warriors invoked precisely this model (1 Macc 2:26, 54).

⁶⁵ Hengel states, "This 'zeal for God,' then, was not an aspect that was exclusively confined to the Zealots as a clearly defined party. It was something that concerned the whole of Palestinian Judaism at that time. In its most acute form, as revealed in the figures of Phinehas and Elijah, it could be understood as an attitude that led Jews to be zealous for God in the place of God 'with God's zeal'... In a more general sense, zeal meant a passionate giving of oneself to God's cause that was associated with a readiness to avenge every form of sacrilege" (*The Zealots*, 177).

⁶⁶ Seland states: "At least one additional feature of the Qannaim of the rabbinic traditions should be clarified. In no texts are these associated with violent actions against the Romans. The actions of the Qannaim are... directed against transgressors of the Torah from their own people. It is Jews taking intra-group actions against fellow-Jews... This observation points us thus not so much to the 'zealots' of the years 66-70 CE as to the presence of zealous vigilantes who took actions against transgressors among their fellow-Jews over a much wider span of time" (*Establishment Violence*, 71-72).

conjunction in vivid narrative specificity. The intra-Jewish actions seem to have been *ad hoc* measures taken on the spot, rather than a systematic program designed for identifying and killing non-conformists;⁶⁷ even so, the vigilante action seems to have been based on scriptural models (note the paradigm of Phinehas rising to the occasion to stop the idolatry in process), and to have enjoyed the tolerance, if not support, of some priestly elites (e.g., the Levi-Priestly traditions) and high-status leaders such as Philo. Both the Maccabean characterization of this intra-Jewish killing as zealous Torah obedience and the Philonic description of it as religious piety inform and support the statement given in John 16:2, that “those who kill you will think it to be offering religious duty to God.” The idea that Phinehas’s zealous killing made atonement for Israel and was reckoned a righteous work of the law (Ps 106:31; cf. 1 Macc 2:51-54) gives concrete shape to the theological framework of the Johannine reference, and the repeated adoption of “zeal for the law” by various groups up to and including the Zealots of the first Jewish war shows that these were living traditions, certainly available to those Jews behind the Diaspora revolts of 115-17 C.E.⁶⁸ and the Bar Kokhba rebellion of 132-35 C.E.

If violent resistance to Gentiles is understood as an even more extreme point on the continuum than that of intra-Jewish execution of idolaters (cf. Philo), the reality of these uprisings perhaps suggests that both actions were permissible and occasionally employed well through the time-period surrounding the composition and dissemination of the Fourth Gospel. At the very least,

⁶⁷ This highlights another significant difference with Martyn’s hypothesis of how the *Birkat ha-minim* was employed to identify and excommunicate followers of Jesus.

⁶⁸ John M. G. Barclay’s observations regarding these Diaspora revolts speaks directly to the ongoing psychological and social tensions for Jews in the time period quite near to that of the Fourth Gospel: “It is only on the assumption of prolonged and profound social alienation between Jews and non-Jews that we can explain the ferocity of the Jewish uprising in 116-117 CE and its equally ferocious suppression. During these years the Diaspora communities in Egypt, Cyrenaica, Cyprus and Mesopotamia were involved in the most serious disturbances of their history, a chain of revolutions which left hundreds of thousands dead” (*Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE – 117 CE)* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996], 78). The question of revolt likely pressed on every Diaspora community, not just those which opted for revolution.

the presence of rabbinic texts such as *Num. Rab.* 21:4 affirms that the memory and ideal of the idolater's execution was significant enough to be retained and transmitted to later generations, and perhaps the practice as well.⁶⁹ There is some evidence of persecution of Christians by Jews outside of the NT,⁷⁰ but the evidence cited above coupled with the significant amount of intra-Jewish killing described by Josephus up to and including the first Jewish War show that intra-Jewish taking of life informed by religious concerns (such as is alluded to in John 16:2) was a living ideology in the early Roman period. Furthermore, we now have some strong possibilities to aid in the potential identification of the those associated with the Johannine community's conflicts. If we can discern elements of *hidden polemic* in the broader narrative of the Fourth Gospel that intersect with the themes and rhetoric adumbrated above, we can provide further substantiation for the hypothesis that John's opponents are the ideological heirs of the Maccabees. From this context we can then gain a valuable perspective on John's own ideological stance.

Maccabean Rhetoric and Hidden Polemic in John

Beyond this understanding of the execution as a religious offering (John 16:2), the Fourth Gospel shows additional points of intersection with images and themes prominent in Maccabean rhetoric. Debates over the proper course of action to secure Israel's freedom, fought on the grounds of establishing the correct "works" of Torah-faithfulness by the true sons of Abraham—all issues

⁶⁹ See also *m. Sanh.* 9:6, which authorizes that zealous ones (זֵאֵלִים) fall upon the following: 1) who steal a sacred vessel, 2) who are cursed by Kosem, and 3) who make an Aramean woman his lover. *Y. Sanh.* 27b:29-34 (cf. 28d:57-29a:2) and *b. Sanh.* 81b both relate this action to that of Phinehas in Num. 25. Significantly, *b. Sanh.* 82a dates the prohibition against intercourse with non-Israelites to the "Beth Din of the Hasmoneans," which suggests both the earliness of the practice and its enduring memory. For a full discussion of these texts, with references to relevant scholarship, see Seland, *Establishment Violence*, 67-71. For examples of ongoing zealous brigandage from 70-132 C.E. preserved in Talmudic literature, see Benjamin Isaac, "Banditry," in *ABD* 1:578-79.

⁷⁰ J. Louis Martyn explores this dimension in the Pseudo-Clementine literature and *The Ascents of James* (J. Louis Martyn, "Persecution and Martyrdom," in *The Gospel of John in Christian History: Essays for Interpreters* [New York: Paulist Press, 1979], 55-89). The anachronistic construct of "Christians" obscures the issue. The notion of a post-70 C.E. "parting of the ways" obfuscates the issue by problematically focusing on violence against "Christians," for which there is scattered evidence, rather than violence against fellow Jews (often perceived as apostates), for which there is ample support, as we have seen above.

central to Maccabean ideology—are explicit in John 8:31-59. Furthermore, John’s own polemical understanding of the sin-removing sacrifice of atonement is put-forth as well (cf. John 1:29), bringing the issue raised in John 16:2 full circle.

Debates over Freedom, Works, and Abrahamic Sonship in John 8:31-59

The address of this passage to “those Jews who had believed in him” (πρὸς τοὺς πεπιστευκότας αὐτῷ Ἰουδαίους) is a source of much confusion.⁷¹ Scholars tend to take one of two basic approaches, placing the primary emphasis on one or the other of the terms “believing Jews.” On the one hand, many insist that the identification of the Jews as “believing” is a secondary redaction or gloss,⁷² thereby interpreting the passage as a continuation of the hostile debate with the “Jews”; as a result, notions of “faithfulness” (πεπιστευκότας), particularly in the public arena, are relegated to the background. On the other hand, others accept the designation of “believing,” but downplay its counterpart “the Jews,” thereby interpreting the passage in an entirely Christian (or Johannine) milieu,⁷³ one solely concerned with issues of “Christian faith” (often construed in cognitive and individualistic terms), but with little reference to the broader historical currents facing Christian and non-Christian Jews in the late first century C.E.

⁷¹ For an overview of the various scholarly positions, see Motyer, *Your Father the Devil?* 162.

⁷² Brown states that “almost certainly the words of Jesus in this section were addressed to the same type of disbelievers that we have been encountering all along,” namely the disbelieving Jews of 8:22. He proposes that the designation of them as “believing” is secondary, the work of a later redactor (*The Gospel According to John* [2 vols; Anchor Bible 29, 29A; New York: Doubleday, 1966, 1970] 1:354; idem, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* [New York: Paulist Press, 1979], 77 n. 141). See also Barnabas Lindars, *Behind the Fourth Gospel* (London: S.P.C.K., 1971), 80.

⁷³ Martyn understands the passage as being addressed to believers (Christian Jews), but he places it in the late stage of the community’s development, an example of sharp intra-Christian conflict whereby fellow believers who are still members of the synagogue are drummed out of the Johannine fellowship (“Glimpses,” 159-163). Thomas B. Dozeman follows Martyn in advocating a purely intra-Johannine audience for this passage, arguing that the “believing Jews” represent “Christian Jews” who promulgate a law-observing mission, in contradistinction to the law-free Johannine Christians (“*Sperma Abraam* in John 8 and Related Literature,” *CBQ* 42 [1980]: 342-43). Given the appeal to Moses as supporting Jesus (John 5:46), “law-observant” versus “law-free” seems reductionistic: the more fundamental question relates to how Torah is to be construed.

I intend to hold the two terms together, with particular reference to the debates current in early Judaism. An appreciation of the breadth of meaning within the term *πεπιστευκότηας* is essential. Instead of interpreting *πεπιστευκότηας* and the debate that follows in purely religious terms, we can avoid much of the difficulty by recognizing the broader, “secular” or “political”⁷⁴ nuances of *πιστεύω*.⁷⁵ In this statement we thus have a provisional religio-politico affirmation of Jesus’ identity as a prophetic leader (cf. John 6:15)⁷⁶—contingent, of course, on his political course of action and its theological justification.⁷⁷ The profession of faith by those in 8:30-31 can thus be interpreted as an initial endorsement of Jesus as the authoritative prophet sent by God,⁷⁸ and not primarily a

⁷⁴ The quotation marks are my recognition that there was no such distinction between sacred and secular in the ancient world, at least anywhere near what we find in modern Western democracies (see Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome: A History* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998], 1:42-54; E.P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice & Belief 63 BCE-66 CE* [Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992], 4). The terms are not used to create a distinction between “political” faith and “religious” faith, but to broaden the notion of “religious” faith to include its expected “political” implications.

⁷⁵ See Josephus’s usage in *Vita* 110, in which he is addressing a brigand chief named Jesus who had made an attempt on Josephus’s life. Josephus relates that he told Jesus “that I was not ignorant of the plot which he had contrived against me...; I would, nevertheless, condone his actions if he would show repentance and *become faithful* to me (εἰ μέλλοι μετανοήσειν καὶ πιστὸς ἔμοι γενήσεσθαι)” (trans. Thackeray [LCL], [modified]). Here especially we see the political implications of this “faith” commitment, for in the broader context of the passage Josephus is exhorting people to abandon revolutionary zeal and follow Josephus’s particular political course of action (cf. *Vita* 17; 167; 262; 370ff.; cf. N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996], 250-51; 258-64). For a discussion of *πίστις* and *πιστεύω* in Josephus and other early Jewish authors, see Dennis R. Lindsay, *Josephus and Faith: Πίστις and Πιστεύειν as Faith Terminology in the Writings of Flavius Josephus and in the New Testament* (AGAJU 19; Leiden: Brill, 1993).

⁷⁶ Motyer, *Your Father the Devil?*, 166-68.

⁷⁷ Again, there was no monolithic expectation for eschatological prophets in early Judaism, so simply recognizing a prophet’s authority still left unstated the possible courses of action that this could entail. Richard A. Horsley surveys the figures stylized as prophets in the first-century literature and divides them roughly into two categories: “action” prophets, who “led movements of peasants in active anticipation of divine acts of deliverance,” and “oracular” prophets who variously proclaimed judgment and preached of repentance and deliverance (*Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs*, 160-87). While the terminology is somewhat problematic (e.g., the “oracular” prophets certainly insist on the importance of taking action [cf. John the Baptist’s exhortation to “*Bear fruit* worthy of repentance” in Mat 3:8]), the typology is instructive, inasmuch as it points to the diversity of prophetic expectation and conflicting construals of the prophetic office.

⁷⁸ In John 2:23-24 we see a similar usage of this notion of “believing.” On the one hand, as a result of seeing the signs, “many believed in his name” (πολλοὶ ἐπίστευσαν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ [cf. 6:30; 12:42-43]). Jesus, however, “did not entrust himself to them” (Ἰησοῦς οὐκ ἐπίστευεν αὐτὸν αὐτοῖς). The usage with reference to Jesus not only highlights a non-spiritual usage of *πιστεύω*, but also points out the inadequacy in some way of the “belief” expressed in 2:23. It is the purely spiritual reading of *πιστεύω* that causes much of the confusion regarding the various “degrees” of faith expressed in John, all of which are associated with *πιστεύω* (variously used all by itself, or with *εἰς*, *δίᾳ*, and the dative). Barrett, comparing the

confession of theological doctrine regarding Jesus' ontological status vis-à-vis absolute divinity.⁷⁹

When, however, Jesus begins to adumbrate what precisely this course of action is (and its theological justification), this preliminary endorsement is met with sharp disagreement.

This clarification of Jesus' prophetic path occurs straightaway in the passage, in which Jesus defines who his true disciples are: "You who remain in the word which is mine, truly you are my disciples, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free" (ἡ ἀλήθεια ἐλευθερώσει ὑμᾶς). The reference to Jesus' word (τῷ λόγῳ)⁸⁰ accords well with the prophetic identification advanced above, and the notion of freedom (from slavery—v.33-34) is an Exodus idea very much in line with this stylization as the Mosaic Prophet.⁸¹ As such, this declaration is also an ideological polemic establishing itself over against the positions of the interlocutors in this passage.

Equally noteworthy is the prominence of "freedom" in this section (8:32, 33, 36), a term found nowhere else in the Johannine literature, introduced here on the lips of Jesus as he teaches in

contrast between faith in 8:31 and the attempt to kill in 8:40, is representative: "Either John is writing very carelessly or he means that the faith of these Jews was very deficient" (*St. John*, 346). If one of the points of the debate in John 8:31-59 is over the proper expression of faithfulness (especially vis-à-vis the "righteous" execution of the perceived apostate), this tension largely falls away. For an overview of the uses of πιστεύω in John, see Brown, *John*, 1:512-513.

⁷⁹ Wright's comments on the synoptic usage are apposite here: "The call to 'believe in the gospel', or to 'believe in me', does not suggest that Jesus was inviting Galilean villagers to embrace a body of doctrine—not even a basic 'theory' about 'salvation' and how they might attain it, nor, again, very much of a Christology (though presumably it involved recognizing Jesus as a god-sent prophet like John)" (*Jesus and Victory of God*, 263).

⁸⁰ In context, τῷ λόγῳ is probably best termed "commandment," to capture the nuance of a prophet calling people to Torah fidelity. For a discussion of the association of λόγος with nomistic terminology in John, see Severino Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel: The Torah and the Gospel, Moses and Jesus, Judaism and Christianity according to John* (NovTSup 42; Leiden: Brill, 1975), 403-430. Given the diversity of interpretations of "true" Torah fidelity that flourished in the absence of an established orthodoxy in early Judaism, Jesus' commandment should not be understood as a replacement of the Torah, but rather the Johannine Jesus' articulation of proper Torah fidelity (contra Motyer, *Your Father the Devil?* 170, who states "'My word,' rather than Torah, becomes the focus of discipleship and the yardstick of 'truth'" [italics original]). The evangelist later makes explicit that Jesus' commandment is to love one another as Jesus has loved them, and that the consummation of love is the laying down of life for friends (John 13:34-35; 15:12-13).

⁸¹ Motyer, *Your Father the Devil?* 170. Moses may not be the only prophetic model in mind; as early as *Jubilees* (31:12), Isaac is depicted as a prophet, having received the spirit of prophecy upon his mouth (cf. Philo, *QG* 4.196). Since the overall force of the prophetic theme in John seems predominantly Mosaic, however, any overtones of Isaac here complement the association with the prophetic Moses, rather than displace it.

the temple treasury (John 8:20; 8:59). Here we find an excellent example of Bakhtin's double-voiced discourse, in which the utterances of the evangelist's adversaries impinge upon and shape the author's presentation. The fact that Jesus' interlocutors pick up on this aspect of Jesus' saying and connect it to slavery gives us important insight into the ideological nature of the conflict that is unfolding. Most importantly, it can help clarify the puzzling insistence at precisely this point that these Jews are the seed of Abraham: "We are descendant of Abraham (σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ), and we have been enslaved to no one, at any time. How can you say, 'You shall become free?'"

"Freedom" (ἐλευθερία) and "slavery" (δουλεία) constituted a major leitmotif in the militaristic rhetoric associated with the Jewish uprisings the Hellenistic and the early Roman period, including the Hasmoneans (e.g., 1 Macc 2:11), Josephus's violent Fourth Philosophy (*A.J.* 18.23; see also 18.4; *B.J.* 2.259; 2.264; 2.345-49, 355-57; 3.356-57, 367-68; 4.92-96; 5.389-90, 395), and the Sicarii (*B.J.* 7.253-57), to say nothing of the Zealots themselves in the first Jewish war.⁸² The coins minted in the Bar-Kokhba rebellion (e.g., "For Freedom of Jerusalem" [לְחֵרֶת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם])⁸³ testify firsthand that these ideological utterances were not destroyed with the temple in 70 C.E., but rather for some were hardened in the crucible of the Roman fires that burned the fortress at Masada (on a Passover, according to Josephus).⁸⁴

⁸² See Hengel, *The Zealots*, 110-21.

⁸³ See Leo Miltenberg, *Vestigia Leonis: Studien zur antiken Numismatik Israels, Palästinas und der östlichen Mittelmeerwelt* (ed. Ulrich Hübner and Ernst A. Knauf; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998); brief overviews can be found in Wise, "Bar Kokhba Letters," 1:601-606, and Hengel, *The Zealots*, 116-18.

⁸⁴ In this context, Jesus' declaration of freedom by dwelling in his commandment actually is much closer in structure and praxis to those who advocated the study of Torah as the means of true freedom, rather than Messianic revolt (2 *Bar.* 85:1-7; *m. Ḳabot* 3:7; 6:2; see Motyer, *Your Father the Devil?* 173-74; cf. Daniel Boyarin, "Masada or Yavneh? Gender and the Arts of Jewish Resistance," in *Jews and Other Differences: The New Jewish Cultural Studies* [eds. Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997], 306-329; Günter Stemberger, "The Maccabees in Rabbinic Tradition," in *The Scriptures and the Scrolls: Studies in Honour of A. S. van der Woude on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*. [eds. F. García Martínez, et al.; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992], 193-203). Given the forthcoming debate over Abrahamic sonship in the passage under discussion, the non-violent philosophical conquering set forth in 4 *Maccabees*' recasting of the Maccabean martyrs is also noteworthy (e.g., 4 *Macc* 1:11). Here as well the vision of Torah-fidelity is rooted in the example of Isaac in Gen 22 (4 *Macc* 13:12; 16:20, 18:1-5, 11).

The rejection of Jesus' offer of freedom (seemingly heard as an implicit attribution of slavery) thus seems very much associated with debates over the proper response to Roman imperialism. As we have already seen, the figure of Abraham's and Isaac's testing was paradigmatic in this revolutionary posture of being willing to lay down your life for God and Torah, a stance that for some involved the avowed rejection of non-violent resistance,⁸⁵ and thus it is no surprise that the issue of Abrahamic sonship should also arise in this passage. The figure of Isaac, the paradigmatic son of Abraham, is itself the locus of ideological engagement in the interpretive activity of early Judaism.⁸⁶ Josephus's interpretation of the blessing in Gen 22:17 (*A.J.* 1.234-35) points explicitly to an expectation of *military* dominance and political power for Abraham's seed. Josephus's Isaac is likewise free and unbound, bearing no resemblance to the image of the bound, subjugated Jew stamped by the Romans on their coins proclaiming their victory ("*IUDEA CAPTA*") in the first Jewish War. Located within this broader ideological polemic, then, Jesus' declaration in 8:31-32 not only lays claim to the authoritative, "true" religious interpretation of Torah ("my word"), but in binding "freedom" to his pattern of fidelity he also advances a political course of action, whereby freedom from Rome is to be achieved only through abiding in Jesus' command, *and nothing else*. Implicit to the proclamation that they will be made free is the understanding that Jesus' interlocutors are currently in slavery, a polemical barb that becomes a point of contention in the ensuing debate.

The utterance by Jesus' interlocutors is at first glance surprising. As commentators quickly point out, the claim that they have never been slaves to anyone is simply wrong, as the numerous

⁸⁵ 1 Macc 2:41-42, 52; Jdt 8:11-17, 26. Like the Maccabees, the Zealots endorsed both defensive and offensive (pre-emptive?) fighting on the Sabbath (*B.J.* 2.456, 515, 517, 521). As we saw above, this same scriptural constellation can be applied internally to violent enforcement of Torah obedience, even to the point of executing those deemed to be leading the people into idolatry—as both Jesus and the Johannine martyrs were accused of. The fact that this current passage ends with the attempted stoning of Jesus (John 8:59) confirms the overlap as well.

⁸⁶ See Jason J. Ripley, "Isaac (in early Jewish tradition)" and "Aqedah (in early Jewish tradition)" in *The Dictionary of Early Judaism* (eds. John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming).

references in Scripture to Israelite slavery in Egypt testify (Exod 2:23; 6:6, 9; 13:3, etc.), to say nothing of the more recent existence under various Greek and Roman rulers. Brown insightfully suggests that “Perhaps they mean that, being the privileged heirs to the promise to Abraham, they cannot be truly enslaved, although occasionally God has allowed them to be chastised through temporary subjection.”⁸⁷ This suggestion has good historical plausibility, for it is actually quite similar to the argument that Judith makes in rejection of submitting to slavery and allowing the desecration of the temple, for which the Lord will punish and dishonor them (Judith 8:21-23). Judith insists that they should “give thanks to the Lord our God, who is testing us just as he did our fathers (εὐχαριστήσωμεν κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν ὃς πειράζει ἡμᾶς καθὰ καὶ τοὺς πατέρας ἡμῶν [8:25]). After invoking the testing of the patriarchs, she asserts that “The Lord scourges those who draw near to him as an admonition” (εἰς νουθέτησιν μαστιγοῖ κύριος τοὺς ἐγγίζοντας αὐτῷ). In short, despite all appearances, Judith insists that slavery is not their proper or eternal destiny; instead, they are being tested,⁸⁸ and the correct response is thus to risk their lives in faithfulness to the one God (8:18-20), thereby being the hand by which God delivers his heritage Israel (8:33; 13:5) and takes vengeance on her enemies (8:35). Again, we also see the connection made with the testings of Abraham and Isaac, suggesting an additional aspect of overlap with the debate in John 8:31-59.

Given this line of argumentation, it is conceivable that some would equate accepting the designation of “slaves” (John 8:33) with capitulation to the Roman status quo. This acceptance would also be in contradiction to their understanding of the faithfulness and blessing appropriate to Abraham’s seed under “testing.” We find strong historical plausibility for this ideological trajectory in Josephus’s depiction of the final stand at Masada, again involving rhetoric of freedom and slavery,

⁸⁷ Brown, *John*, 1:355.

⁸⁸ Judith also argues that promising to surrender in a set number of days in hopes that God will turn and help them is a wrongful and idolatrous testing of God. The implication seems to be that the “quietist” option is derided as theologically presumptive, and hence to be rejected.

and images of bound and slaughtered sons. Josephus's construction of Eleazar's "speech" exhorting the Sicarii at Masada to self-slaughter (*B.J.* 7.385-88) is particularly instructive:

A man will see his wife violently carried off; he will hear the voice of his son imploring the help of his father, when his hands are bound.⁸⁹ But certainly our hands are still free (ἐλευθέροι), and can hold a sword; let them then be subservient to us in a noble service; let us die unenslaved (ἀδούλωτοι) by our enemies, and let us leave this world free men (ἐλεύθεροι), together with our children and our wives. This is what the Law ordains, that is what our wives and children demand of us; the necessity God has laid on us, the opposite of what the Romans wish—they are anxious that none of us should die before the town is captured. So let us deny the enemy their hoped-for pleasure at our expense, and make haste to leave them to be dumbfounded by our death and awed by our courage.⁹⁰

Even to the most bitter of endings, Eleazar insists that they are free, and the only way left to exercise that freedom is in the self-slaughter that will prevent the humiliation of slavery under the Romans.⁹¹

If this sketch of the assumptions implicitly shaping the discourse of John 8:33 is correct,⁹² it begins to explain why the tone of the remainder of the pericope eventually reaches a critical mass,

⁸⁹ Both this passage and Judith 7:27 reference the impact of the situation on their wives and children. Judith 7:27, however, is part of an argument for submitting to slavery, inasmuch as that would spare them from seeing their families slaughtered. Here, the thought of having families carried off into slavery is more unbearable than slaughter, even a slaughter carried out by the fathers themselves.

⁹⁰ Translated by G. A. Williamson (modified) (*The Jewish War* [New York: Penguin Books, 1981], 403); see also *B.J.* 7.325-26; 7.334-36. In the broader context, Josephus has the rebels confess that their rebellion was wrong; taking their own lives pays the penalty for those wrongs to God, and not to the Romans (Of course, this is a free composition by Josephus, but it nonetheless gives us a keen insight into the rhetoric "in the air" in the late first century C.E.) Despite Josephus's declaration of the rebellion's impropriety, doubtless there were those who could use the rhetoric of voluntary death in a manner supportive of violent resistance, a reality that likely shapes Josephus's own presentation here. Given the issue of Abrahamic sonship being debated in John 8:31-59, the similarity in posture between the manacles binding the slave and the cords binding Isaac (Gen 22:9) is striking, especially in light of our discussion of John 8:33.

⁹¹ See also *B.J.* 7.334, 336: "Let our wives die unabused, our children without knowledge of slavery: after that, let us do each other an ungrudging kindness, preserving our freedom as a glorious funeral monument...One thing only let us spare—our store of food: it will bear witness when we are dead that...we chose death over slavery" (translation by Williamson [modified]). See the similar sentiment attributed to the rebel leader Joshua ben Gamala, who declares that he would choose a noble death before Roman captivity (*B.J.* 4.49-50). For similar embraces of death over captivity or abandonment of the Torah in Josephus, see *A.J.* 13.364; 14.368; 17.263; *B.J.* 1.311-13; 3.425; 4.78-80; 4.435-36; 4.519-20; 6.187-88; 6.280. Interestingly, one of the "Jews" in the immediately preceding passage of John (8:22) speculates as to whether Jesus intends to kill himself. Given the conceivability of this potential self-slaughter in the way depicted by Eleazar et al., it does become possible to connect "the Jews who believed" in 8:33 with the "Jews" of 8:22, thereby establishing a connection between the two episodes from within the logic of the narrative.

⁹² The affinity with Zealot rhetoric is affirmed by Motyer, who notes: "Change the perfect tense to the future, and [8:]33a becomes a Zealot war-cry: 'We are the seed of Abraham, and we will never be slaves to

creating a chain reaction that fissions into toxic allegations of demonic possession and Satanic paternity, eventually culminating in an attempted stoning of Jesus. This argument is fueled by sharply divergent, mutually exclusive articulations of Torah fidelity, in which the very survival of God's covenant people is thought to be at stake.

Jesus' response in v. 34 introduces the concept of sin and connects it to slavery, highlighting the contested construals of righteous behavior (cf. "your law" in 8:17) that constitute the ideological fault lines of the conflict. As with the idea of "faith" in 8:30-31, we again should not take the "theological" language of "sin" and "slavery" in purely spiritual terms, but should connect it to its use in Jewish political rhetoric of the late first century. Just as Josephus can express his argument to abandon revolutionary zeal in favor of his course of action with the terms "repent and believe" (*Vita* 110), so also should we here not overlook the political implications associated with the terms "sin" and "slavery."⁹³

The ideological underpinnings of the charge of slavery are engaged in 8:37, in which Jesus sets up a contrast between being the σπέρμα Ἰσραήλ and trying to kill him.⁹⁴ To those invoking the model of Abrahamic zeal for the law expressed in 1 Maccabees, however, there would be no contrast between the two. A central pillar of this articulation of Torah piety is the elimination of all idolatry within Israel, including the execution of any fellow Jews who are perceived to be leading the

anyone!" (*Your Father the Devil?* 174). The notion that Jews were created for servitude is found in Roman and Jewish texts (Cicero, *De provinciis consularibus* 5.10; Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.125; *B.J.* 6.42). Josephus counters this belief by stressing that the Jews had always been free (Hengel, *Zealots*, 119; cf. 113 n. 200).

⁹³ This emphasis on the political implications of the rhetoric is not intended to replace the connection between "slavery" and "sin," but rather to locate the discourse of "sin" in a broader sphere beyond individualistic, abstractly "moral" understandings. The presentation of Jesus' death as an atoning sacrifice (discussed below) similarly combines the "political" aspects of Torah fidelity with "religious" notions of sin.

⁹⁴ Note the strongly contrastive ἀλλά (cf. John 5:19; 7:19, 20, 25). There is a surface irony to this contrast, inasmuch as in Genesis 22 Abraham did set out to kill Isaac at the command of God; counterbalancing this is the fact that God stopped the sacrifice before its consummation. The more fundamental issue debated in this Johannine passage is the heavenly command: in what circumstances does obedience to God's command require (or forbid) life to be laid down—and whose (the righteous or the "sinful")? The diverse answers to this question are the basis of the contrasting positions in this Johannine passage (and early Jewish debates about martyrdom).

people astray into idolatry (e.g., John 5:18;7:12; 16:2).⁹⁵ In this model, the reasoning would seem to go as follows: since Abraham was willing to sacrifice his innocent, beloved son, how much more should one be willing to make an atoning sacrifice of the wicked (like Phinehas). This construal of Abraham and his works was not universal, however, and in *4 Maccabees* we see them being rejected and redefined in a nonviolent fashion not dissimilar to what we find in the Fourth Gospel (e.g., *4 Macc* 13:12; 16:20, 18:1-5, 11). Thus, in contrasting the “true” works of Abrahamic offspring with the violent zeal characterizing the adversaries in this passage, the evangelist subverts their key ideological justification and reconfigures it around John’s “one and only” Son (τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ [John 3:16]).⁹⁶

The corollary of this contrast, whereby “works” are understood as a reflection of origin, is that Jesus’ opponents have a different father, since they do what they have heard from their father (John 8:39, 41). This charge does not pass uncontested. Jesus’ interlocutors first deny that they are born of fornication (ἐκ πορνείας), thereby maintaining the purity of their descent from Abraham (v. 41). As Brown points out, we also have an *ad hominem* argument about Jesus’ own questionable paternity, essentially stating “*We* were not born illegitimate [but you were].”⁹⁷ Jesus’ accusers also adduce even stronger supporting claims for their praxis, insisting that “We have one Father, God” (ἓνα πατέρα ἔχομεν τὸν θεόν).⁹⁸ This declaration of monotheism in the temple (note the article *par*

⁹⁵ Cf. 1 Macc 2:19-64.

⁹⁶ Cf. John 1:14, 18; 3:18; 1 John 4:9. See also *A.J.* 1.222; Heb 11:17, and Aquila’s translation of Gen 22:2 (all describing Isaac).

⁹⁷ *John*, 1:357. Similar charges of Jesus’ illegitimacy are found in other early works, including *Contra Celsus* 1.28, *Acts of Pilate* 2.3, and *Yebamot* 4.13 (Barrett, *St. John*, 348).

⁹⁸ George Beasley-Murray notes, in this phrase the Shema (Deut 6:4) is combined with scriptural statements identifying Israel as the son of God (*John* [WBC 36; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987], 142). The Shema served as a rallying cry for zealous monotheists vigorously resisting Gentile encroachment, and hence is quite appropriate to the character of the opponents in this section, and indeed the larger Gospel. N. T. Wright summarizes the conjunction of monotheism and the Shema thusly: “This is a fighting doctrine, a cause of celebration for the beleaguered little nation that went on singing these psalms and praying the Shema through thick and thin. The nations must know that Israel’s god is the true and only god, and that the beings they mistakenly worship are non-gods, mere human inventions” (*The New Testament and the People of God* [Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 1; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992], 248). The association

excellence: τὸν θεόν) is again characteristic of Maccabean zeal, one that violently protects the sanctity of the temple and the Jewish nation from Gentile idolatry (1 Macc 2:1-3:9). However consistent, it is ironic that the counterclaim by the adversaries (“we have one Father, God”) is the nearly identical declaration attributed to Jesus in 5:18 (“he was calling God his own Father”), which at that point was said to justify and increase the desire of the “Jews” to kill Jesus. Thus, the evangelist portrays the adversaries in 8:41 as essentially inviting similar punishment upon themselves for this “orthodox” blasphemy; to do otherwise would require them to allow similar claims for Jesus, which they do not. The implication throughout 8:38-47 is that Jesus’ opponents are the ones who are demonically leading the nation astray, and not Jesus. Given the ideological context of this debate, the absence of any (presumably justifiable) claim by Jesus that these “false prophets” should themselves be executed for their blasphemy is telling. This refusal to advocate for the destruction of “sinners” who are ostensibly leading the people astray highlights all the more the contrast in praxis (and the subversion of its corresponding ideological basis) between John’s Jesus and his adversaries all the more.

The utterances in John 8:39 regarding “the works of Abraham” (τὰ ἔργα τοῦ Ἀβραάμ) give specificity to another aspect of John’s hidden polemic. These terms are prominent in Mattathias’s exhortation to violent revolt in 1 Macc 2:51 (“Remember the works of the fathers [μνήσθητε τὰ ἔργα τῶν πατέρων] that they did in their generations”). The internal description of these “works” is found the narration of Mattathias’s forced circumcision of non-observant Jews in 1 Macc 2:47 (“they persecuted the sons of arrogance, and the work prospered in their hands” [κατευοδώθη τὸ ἔργον ἐν χειρὶ αὐτῶν]), both of which are purportedly modeled on the zeal of the patriarchs (1 Macc 2:52).

of the Shema with martyrdom is also legendary, and Rabbi Akiba is portrayed as reciting it at he is put to death (*y. Ber.* 9.7; *Sotah* 5.7; cf. *b. Ber.* 61b). One talmudic tradition depicts Akiba as an enthusiastic supporter of the Bar Kokhba rebellion (*y. Ta’an.* 4:7 68d), though the tradition’s authenticity has been questioned (see Peter Schäfer, “Rabbi Aqiva and Bar Kokhba,” in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism* [vol. 2; ed. W. S. Green; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1980], 113-30). Regardless of their historical accuracy, these passages certainly show the connection in some ancient minds between martyrdom and the recitation of the Shema.

The evangelist thus depicts Jesus turning their very slogans against them by denying their connection to Abraham; their justification for their violent praxis is thereby removed from Abraham and reattributed to evil itself (John 8:44). Much more than simply the observation that Abraham did not kill a divine messenger,⁹⁹ John 8:40-44 is a negation of their entire configuration of Torah fidelity, rooted in murderous violence against fellow-Jews and Gentiles as a means of liberation and an expression of zealous faithfulness.¹⁰⁰ Implicit within Jesus' rejection of this interpretation of Torah are his corresponding claims to represent Abraham's line and to hold the prophetic authority required to negate the claims of the opponents and set forth the "true" works of God. As the narrative bears out, Jesus' "works" (cf. 6:28-9) include outreach to Samaritans (John 4:34) and Gentiles (7:35-36; 12:19-20, 32), engaging in works of healing and restoration even on the Sabbath (5:9-10; 7:21-24), as well as a non-violent posture against adversaries, both Jews (John 18:10-11) and non-Jewish oppressors (John 12:31, 33; 18:3-6).

The transition to the honor/shame discourse of John 8:49 again draws us into an ideological arena of conflict involving the contested configurations of Torah-fidelity and martyrdom. The rhetoric of honor and glory is strongly associated with Hasmonean praxis in 1 Maccabees. 1 Maccabees 2:64 is emblematic: "Be courageous and grow strong in the law, because by it you will be glorified" (ἀνδρίζεσθε καὶ ἰσχύσατε ἐν τῷ νόμῳ ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ δοξασθήσεσθε). Judas's military exploits are characterized by the phrases "He enlarged the glory for his people" (ἐπλάτυνεν δόξαν

⁹⁹ Proposed by Brown, *John*, 1:357.

¹⁰⁰ This negation seems to be a radical application and expansion of the ideas that faithfulness to Torah is meant to bring life (cf. Deut 30)—to the point of rejecting as evil and demonic all that advances death and destruction; cf. John 10:10: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came in order that they may have life, and have it to the full." "Thief" (κλέπτης) is conjoined with "brigand" (ληστής) in 10:1; this latter term is the one Josephus uses when referring to the zealous revolutionaries in the period surrounding the first revolt (see Hengel, *Zealots*, 41-45). As should be obvious by now, the configuration of violent Torah fidelity rejected in this passage bears little resemblance to the forms of Judaism that ultimately formed into rabbinic Judaism (cf. Boyarin, "Masada or Yavneh"; Stemberger, "Maccabees in Rabbinic Tradition"), and thus cannot be construed in any way as justification for Christian anti-Judaism. Conversely, those Christians over the centuries who employed these texts as justification for murderous persecution of Jews embody the diabolical evil condemned in this passage.

τῷ λαῷ αὐτοῦ [1 Macc 3:3]) and “He was renowned unto the ends of the earth” (ὠνομάσθη ἕως ἐσχάτου γῆς [1 Macc 3:9; cf. Simon’s accolades in 14:4, 10]). The idea of gaining glory through the giving of your life for your kindred in battle is expressed in 1 Maccabees 9:10: “Let us die with courage for the sake of our kindred, and let us not leave a question with respect to our glory” (ἀποθάνωμεν ἐν ἀνδρείᾳ χάριν τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἡμῶν καὶ μὴ καταλίπωμεν αἰτίαν τῇ δόξῃ ἡμῶν). The context of this statement is crucial, for it directly counters those who would suspend fighting in order to save their own lives (1 Macc 9:9).

The honor/shame discourse is thus connected to the ideological conflicts running throughout this section, focused especially on the Torah zeal that expresses itself in violence and murder, here directed toward Jesus. Jesus denies the worldly framework of glory and honor predicated upon military might (cf. 1 Macc 3:9), substituting instead a trans-worldly viewpoint in which God’s judgment of glory is determinative (John 8:54). Narratively speaking, in John 12:27-33 the evangelist depicts God speaking directly to this issue, asserting that the Father’s glorification of his name (12:28) and Jesus’ “lifting up” (12:32) are to be identified with his appointed hour on the cross (12:33), the emblem of worldly defeat and the antithesis of Maccabean glory. However, the Gospel subverts and relexicalizes this ostensible defeat as the glorious conquering of the ruler of this world (12:31-33; cf. 16:33).

Given the diametrically opposed ideological perspectives warring in this section, it is no surprise that the passage culminates in an attempted stoning of Jesus for the perceived blasphemy of invoking the divine name (John 8:58-59). The attempted execution ending this episode thus brings us back to theme of 16:2, confirming the viability of this passage as an entry point into the Johannine community’s ideological arena of conflict. It also points us to another central point of debate: what is the sacrifice acceptable to God for the problem of sin?

The Sin-conquering Lamb

The symbol ὁ ἄμνός τοῦ θεοῦ also participates in this ideological arena of conflict, giving us yet another example of Johannine hidden polemic, or the resignification in Johannine terms of an image prominent in Maccabean rhetoric. Both the title ὁ ἄμνός τοῦ θεοῦ and its function of taking away the sin of the world (John 1:29) together have some intriguing connections to imagery associated with the Maccabean leaders. In the Animal Apocalypse of *1 Enoch* 90 we encounter the figure of a mighty horned sheep, which symbolizes Judas Maccabeus and his military conquests. Given this possibility, the question as to the referent of ὁ ἄμνός comes to fore: is it proclaiming a powerful sheep, or a lamb? The ambiguity of the symbol itself becomes enmeshed in the unfolding of John's ideological perspective through the course of the narrative.

The equivocality of ἄμνός perhaps becomes distinct when compared to Revelation's ἄρνιον. Whereas ἄρνιον, especially when used symbolically, is predominantly associated with innocence, vulnerability, and even victimization in scriptural and early Jewish thought,¹⁰¹ ἄμνός is less easily reduced to such a narrow range of meaning. As C. H. Dodd has noted,

While the author of the Apocalypse of John chose the term ἄρνιον, other Greek-speaking Christians who thought of the Messiah in apocalyptic terms may well have selected ἄμνός, which is in fact better suited than ἄρνιον to describe a young horned ram, since ἄρνιον, to Greeks for whom the diminutive form still had force, might suggest an infant sheep, while ἄμνός is the regular equivalent of אֲמִנִּי, which denotes the young adult animal.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ See the thorough overview in Loren L. Johns, *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John: An Investigation into its Origins and Rhetorical Force* (WUNT 2, 167; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003). He summarizes, "Sometimes [ἄρνιον] implies innocence, but in each of the cases, it symbolizes defenseless vulnerability in the face of violent power" (148). Johns uses the vulnerability of this metaphor to reshape the military imagery of Revelation: "The Seer does not represent Christ as lamb in order to suggest his 'ability to control others based on an implied sanction of force'; rather, he represents Christ as lamb in order to represent the vulnerability that inevitably accompanies faithful witness" (204). Johns' quotation is from Bruce J. Malina, *On the Genre and Message of Revelation: Star Visions and Sky Journeys* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 263. For further reflections on the political and ethical implications of Revelation's "Lamb," see John Howard Yoder, "The War of the Lamb," in *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 228-247. The first edition was published in 1972.

¹⁰² C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 236. For a comprehensive table of Hebrew and Greek terms for lambs, see Johns, *Lamb Christology*, 207-15.

The ambiguity of ἀμνός here is particularly potent, for it could be construed as either a lamb, or a more powerful beast, the horned bellwether of the flock.¹⁰³ The unspecified presence or absence of horns vis-à-vis ἀμνός highlights symbolically one aspect of the debate within early Judaism regarding how sin is to be conquered and freedom is to be achieved, either through violent or non-violent means of Torah-fidelity.¹⁰⁴ For the reader well-acquainted with the Fourth Gospel's narrative and initiated into the Johannine community, the image would be that of the sacrificial lamb whose willing, non-violent obedience to the Father conquers sin. However, for the characters within the narrative (or those auditors outside of the Johannine community), the figure of Jesus and his "way" is still very much a point of ambiguity at this early point in the narrative (John 1:29). Remarkably, the martial option (made possible by interpreting ἀμνός as a young adult ram) remains a prominent one for the disciples even until Jesus' arrest, where Peter attacks the high priest's servant with a sword (John 18:10). Thus, the testimony of John the Baptizer here points us to a primary area of contention, but without defining unequivocally the manner by which Jesus conquers sin.¹⁰⁵

The characters within the narrative are thus left with the task of abiding with Jesus, in order to discover whether Jesus as ἀμνός is a non-violent "lamb" or militaristic "ram."¹⁰⁶ This issue is revisited in John 8:31-38 in the debate over Israel's slavery and the means by which freedom is to be

¹⁰³ Dodd, *Interpretation*, 236.

¹⁰⁴ Note especially the importance attributed to the growth of horns on the sheep in the Animal Apocalypse of *1 Enoch* 90:9-12, 37-38.

¹⁰⁵ To paraphrase and reconfigure Bultmann (*Theology of the New Testament* [2 vols.; trans. Kendrick Grobel; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955]), John the Baptizer at this point reveals simply that Jesus is the revealer (of proper Torah-fidelity). The Baptizer leaves it to Jesus, especially through his death and resurrection, to reveal the precise content of that revelation. Thus, reconfiguring Käsemann, the Johannine Jesus is thoroughly "dogmatic," though in a way quite different than that supposed by Käsemann (*The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17* [trans. Gerhard Krodel; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968]).

¹⁰⁶ This symbolic ambiguity parallels the debates found in the secondary literature, found especially in the contrast between the conquering apocalyptic "ram" (e.g., Dodd, *Interpretation*, 230-38; George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* [WBC 36; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987], 24-25) and the sacrificial "lamb" (e.g., Brown, *John*, 1.63). My contention is that this ambiguity should be understood within the dynamics of narrative, from the perspectives of the characters therein.

achieved. The resolution of this question is finally achieved in Jesus' passion, particularly through John's application of cultic imagery to Jesus' death as a type of sacrificial martyrdom.

Sacrificial Martyrdom in John's Passion

The Johannine passion narrative is distinctively crafted to depict Jesus as a sacrificial martyr.

Whereas Mark and Matthew have Jesus bound and turned over to Pilate (Mar 15:1; Matt 27:2), John has Jesus turned over to the Jewish priesthood. Here the divergence from the Synoptic portrait is revealing, for the high priest is one designated to offer sacrifices in the temple, whereas Pilate is not.¹⁰⁷ Even the ritual purity of the priests is ironically asserted (18:28), insuring that Jesus' death cannot be disqualified due to the impurity of the priests. In terms of the death itself, details are provided to suggest it meets sacrificial requirements as well. In line with contemporary notions of animal sacrifice,¹⁰⁸ Jesus' willing participation is affirmed, displayed in his carrying of the cross by himself (contra Mark 15:21; cf. John 10:18). The blamelessness of Jesus' actions and testimony is expressed by the lack of response to Jesus' challenge to the high priest to specify what evil he has done (John 18:23), and it is reasserted publicly by Pilate in his declaration to the people that Jesus was not guilty of any crime (18:38). The anticipated beneficial effects of the death are also mentioned. The evangelist characterizes it as beneficial to the nation by reminding the reader of the high priest Caiaphas's advice in John 11:50 that it was better to have one person die for the people (John 18:14); as Hengel notes, dying for one's native city, friends, or family is a central aspect of the

¹⁰⁷ Malina and Rohrbaugh note: "Throughout John's account it is the high priest and other chief priests who orchestrate Jesus' death; it is the priest's paramount function to serve God in God's special place, the temple, by offering sacrifices (vv. 18:3, 13, 15, 16, 19, 22, 24, 35; 19:6, 15, 21)" (*Social-Science Commentary*, 274). John also seems to suggest that Jesus is handed over to the priests for crucifixion, again subtly reinforcing John's cultic framing of Jesus' death. The pronoun "them" in John 19:16a is ambiguous; the fact that the statement immediately follows Pilate's dialogue with the chief priests makes these Jewish leaders the most immediate initial referent to whom Jesus is being handed over, despite the fact that crucifixion is patently a Roman form of execution.

¹⁰⁸ Beard et al., *Religions of Rome*, 2:148; cf. Jason J. Ripley, "Laying Down Life for God: Johannine Christology and Martyrdom in an Imperial Context" (paper presented to the *Jesus Traditions, Gospels and Negotiating the Roman Imperial World* section at the annual meeting of the SBL, Washington, D.C., 18 November, 2006).

noble death tradition undergirding concepts of sacrificial martyrdom.¹⁰⁹ These events provide narrative certification of Jesus' status as an innocent and willing sacrifice given over to qualified priests for slaughter, with the same anticipated benefit for the nation as the temple sacrifices.¹¹⁰

The sacrificial presentation of Jesus' death continues with the Passover framework of John's passion narrative. Not only does Jesus' march to his death in John begin with him girding his loins at the footwashing meal (John 13:4) in the manner specified for eating the Passover meal (Exod 12:11), but also the Fourth Gospel uniquely times Jesus' crucifixion to correlate with the slaughter of the Passover lambs (John 19:14), providing a direct connection between Jesus and the Passover. As Brown notes,

The hour of noon on the Preparation Day for the Passover was the hour for beginning the slaughter of the paschal lambs. The ancient law of Exod xii 6 required that the paschal lamb be kept alive until the 14th of Nisan and then slaughtered in the evening (literally, "between the two evenings," a phrase sometimes interpreted as meaning between sunset and darkness). By Jesus' time the slaughtering was no longer done at home by the heads of the families but in the temple precincts by the priests. A great number of lambs had to be slaughtered for the more than 100,000 Passover participants in Jerusalem..., and so the slaughtering could no longer be done in the evening, in the technical sense of after sunset. By casuistry "evening" was interpreted to begin at noon when the sun began to decline, and thus the priests had the whole afternoon of the 14th to accomplish their task.¹¹¹

The Passover connections in the passion are not limited to this correlation of Jesus' death with the slaughter of the Passover lambs. Both the references to hyssop (John 19:29) and to Jesus' unbroken bones (John 19:31, 36) likewise evoke echoes of the Passover sacrifice and its effects. Hyssop was used to smear the blood of the paschal lamb on the doorposts (Exod 12:22), and the requirement

¹⁰⁹ Martin Hengel, *The Atonement: The Origins of the Doctrine in the New Testament* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 6-15. The notion is prominent in the sacrificial martyrdoms of the Maccabean martyrs (2 Macc 7:33-39; 4 Macc 1:11; 6:28-29; 17:21-22); cf. Jan Willem van Henten, *The Maccabean Martyrs as Saviours of the Jewish People: A Study of 2 and 4 Maccabees* [Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 57; Leiden: Brill, 1997], 140-56.

¹¹⁰ Jesus' self-sanctification in John 17:19 also establishes him as the first-born set apart for slaughter (Exod 13:2). John 18:11 contains another statement of Jesus' willing acceptance of the "cup" the Father has given him (in contrast to reluctance expressed toward the "cup" in Mark 14:36). Recall that ancient sacrifice also contained as part of its ritual a demonstration of the sacrifice's "willingness" (

¹¹¹ Brown, *John*, 2:883; see also idem, *The Death of the Messiah* (2 vols.; ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1994), 1:847.

that the bones of the Passover lamb remain unbroken is found in Exod 12:46 (cf. Num 9:12).¹¹²

Again, the cumulative effect of these details reinforces the portrait of Jesus as a martyr whose death “counts” as if it were a cultic sacrifice.

The evocation of sacrifice in Jesus’ death is confirmed by John’s unique post-mortem episode (John 19:31-34). The reference to the blood and water that came out immediately (εὐθύς) when the soldier pierced Jesus’ side with a spear (John 19:34) provides confirmation after the fact that Jesus’ death qualified as a suitable sacrifice. Though a longstanding *crux interpretum*, several commentators have noted that the idea that sacrificial blood must “spurt forth” (צִדָּר) is a well-known rabbinic dictum regarding the designation of fit, or “kosher,” sacrificial animals (*m. Hul.* 2:6; *m. Tamid* 4:2), as is the notion that the blood of the Passover Lamb must be mixed so as to not congeal (*m. Pesah.* 5:5, 8).¹¹³ The observation that crucifixion in and of itself did not typically involve the deliberate or prominent shedding of blood¹¹⁴ lends further credence to the notion that the evangelist is portraying Jesus’ death as a metaphoric embodiment of sacrifice, a cultic act in which blood plays an important role.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Another possible reference is Ps 34:20, which mentions the unbroken bones of the suffering righteous one. For a full discussion, see Bruce H. Grigsby, “The Cross as an Expiatory Sacrifice in the Fourth Gospel.” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 15 (1982): 58; Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 2:1184-88.

¹¹³ J. Massingberd Ford, “‘Mingled Blood’ from the Side of Christ,” *NTS* 15 (1969): 337-38; Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 274; Grigsby, “Cross as an Expiatory Sacrifice,” 89-93.

¹¹⁴ Carroll and Green state, “Bound or nailed to a stake, tree, or cross, the victim faced death with all organs intact and with relatively little blood loss” (John Carroll and Joel B. Green, *The Death of Jesus in Early Christianity* [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995], 168). For an overview of various crucifixion techniques, see Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 22-32. Most bloodshed took place in the flogging that often preceded the crucifixion itself, although abuse and torture, including burning, of the body while upon the cross was not unheard of. The Roman practice of nailing the hands and feet would also produce the flow of blood, but again this is not the emphasis of the Johannine depiction, which goes out of its way to associate the flow of blood with the thrust of the spear, after the death itself. In light of John’s double-voiced discourse vis-à-vis Hasmonean rhetoric, it is interesting to note that perhaps the closest parallel to the depiction of Jesus’ crucifixion in John is the humiliating death of the last Hasmonean king Antigonus in 38 B.C.E., whom the Romans bound to a cross and flogged—in a manner “which no other king had suffered from the Romans” (ὁ μηδεὶς βασιλεὺς ἄλλος ὑπὸ τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἐπεπόνθει)—and after this they slaughtered him, presumably with a sword or spear (Dio Cassius 49.22.6).

¹¹⁵ 2 Maccabees 14:45 has a similar emphasis on the gushing (κρουνηδόν) blood of the martyr connected to non-cultic sacrificial atonement; see van Henten, *The Maccabean Martyrs*, 149-50. The idea is

The opening discussion regarding killing as religious act (John 16:2) has thus come full circle, whereby the discourse exalting the execution of perceived apostates and Gentile sinners as an atoning sacrifice (as in Numbers 25 and 1 Maccabees 1:1-3:12) is subversively redeployed in the depiction of Jesus as the true sacrificial martyr. Within its ideological context, this portrait of Jesus exhibits hidden polemic and ironic double-voiced discourse to engage and overthrow the power-inscribed utterances of the Johannine community's interlocutors. The evangelist has claimed and subversively applied this ideological discourse on sacrificial martyrdom to the person of Jesus, with a similar reconception of Torah-fidelity and praxis found in the debates over freedom and the "works" of the true offspring of Abraham (John 8:31-59). In this way the Fourth Gospel substitutes its own understanding of how the "wrath of God" is turned away (John 3:36) and how sin is taken away (1:29), displacing the "community-purifying" violence foundational to the Maccabean sacrifice of atonement (1 Macc 3:8). Externally, Maccabean visions of militaristic glory are sublimated by the Johannine portrait of Jesus, who gloriously conquers the ruler of this world by his death (John 12:31-33; cf. 14:30), eschewing the violent means characteristic of this-worldly kingship (John 18:11, 36). The theological foundations of Maccabean ideology are similarly undercut and polemically inverted. In contrast to the vision of a divinely authorized sword given by God to Judas Maccabeus to strike down Israel's adversaries (2 Macc 15:6-16), Jesus reveals divine power precisely at the point of his cohort-defeating submission to his Judas-orchestrated arrest (18:2-8),¹¹⁶ and embodies divine kingship in his coronation and reign on the cross (John 18:37; 19:14-22). This "lamb of God" is thus ultimately revealed to be the complete inverse of the Maccabean "ram," depicting conquest via the

widespread and prominent in the *devotio* traditions (Livius 8.9.9-10; 10.28.18; Statius, *Thebais* 10.799). For a discussion of the atoning effects of this blood "sacrifice," see H.S. Versnel, "Two Types of Roman Devotio," *Mnemosyne* 29 (1976): 365-410; idem, "Polycrates and his Ring: Two neglected Aspects," *Studi Storico-Religiosi* 1 (1977): 17-46.

¹¹⁶ Celsus (ca. 178 C.E.) reveals just how unconventional John's understanding of divinity is when he wonders why Jesus did not manifest his divinity by freeing himself and taking vengeance upon those who insulted him and his Father (in Origen, *Contra Celsum* 2.35).

renunciation of a militant posture vis-à-vis the non-Jewish world.¹¹⁷ Rather than Judas Maccabeus (cf. 1 Macc 2:50-52; 3:1-9) or the revolutionary Passover “sacrifices” at Masada (*B.J.* 7.385-88), the Fourth Gospel presents Jesus as both the proper atoning sacrifice and the true Priest-King.¹¹⁸

Conclusion¹¹⁹

As we have seen, Bakhtin’s dialogical conception of discourse provides categories of analysis helpful for discerning ideological fault lines in the Fourth Gospel. A Bakhtinian analysis of John 16:1-4 suggests its viability as an ideological entry-point into the conflicted setting of the Johannine community. Historical study confirms and clarifies some key components of the ideology of John’s interlocutors, suggesting they are in some important ways the heirs of Maccabean zeal and praxis. Further analysis John 8:31-59 and the theme of sacrificial martyrdom of the Gospel suggests the presence of double-voiced discourse and hidden polemic with these ideological interlocutors.

¹¹⁷ While this portrait bears some similarity to the “militant” lamb of Revelation who conquers by the sword of his mouth (Rev 5:5-6; 12:11; cf. 1:16; 19:16), the Fourth Gospel is even more radical in its critique of militancy, eschewing the rhetoric of eschatological violence characteristic of Revelation in favor of a “realizing eschatology” that sees the triumph of the cross as the primary expression of eschatological judgment, without recourse to a future cosmic battle. This reveals the stark political edge of this profoundly “spiritual Gospel,” especially when compared to the “realizing” eschatology of the praxis in 1 Maccabees.

¹¹⁸ See also *T. Levi* 18, where the ideal (Maccabean?) priest-king likewise abolishes sin (v. 9; cf. John 1:29) and is favorably compared to Isaac (*T. Levi* 18:6). The entire passage resonates with Johannine terminology (light, darkness [18:3], knowledge [18:5], true judgment [18:2]) and perhaps points to the broader ideological “arena of conflict” in which the Fourth Gospel is embroiled.

¹¹⁹ On the basis of this analysis of John 16:1-4, 8:31-59, 1:29 and the passion, we perhaps now have a stable vantage point from which to shed light on similar points of ideological intersection and hidden polemic in the rest of the Gospel, suggesting fruitful areas for further research. The reference in John 1:48 to Nathanael sitting under the fig tree, an image associated with peace (Mic 4:4) and messianic, eschatological cleansing (Zech 3:10), is one appropriated by the Maccabees to describe the tremendous success of Simon (1 Macc 14:12), who is further lauded for crushing foreign kings (1 Macc 14:13), seeking out the law (1 Macc 14:14) and driving out all the lawless (πάντα ἄνομον [1 Macc 14:14])—all of which bring glory to the sanctuary (1 Macc 14:15). The quotation of Psalm 69:9 (“Zeal for your house will consume me,”) conspicuously inserted into the narrative in John 2:17, invokes the Maccabean ideal of zeal, which was frequently associated with concerns to defend the temple (1 Macc 3:43, 58-60; 13:3; 14:29, 32, 36, 42; *B.J.* 6.71-80; 6.143; 6.234; 6.239; 6. 253). Strikingly, the Fourth Gospel is the only one to portray Jesus celebrating Hanukkah, the festival that celebrates the Maccabean rededication of the temple. The image of the vine, so prominent in John 15, was also an important one for the Zealots, who placed it on the coins they minted to celebrate their initial successes over the Romans. More broadly, the overall portrait of Jesus appears to have been shaped in significant ways by John’s dialogical engagement with early Jewish ideological interpretations of Abraham and Isaac, figures who play a foundational role in the justification of the zealous praxis discussed in this paper; I explore this Christological dimension in my dissertation “Behold the Lamb of God! Johannine Christology and the Martyrdoms of Isaac” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2005).

Beyond helping to clarify the arena of conflict shaping the discursive battles of the Johannine community, Bakhtin's sociolinguistic perspectives shed light on the Fourth Gospel's own ideological posture in the contested areas of sacrificial martyrdom, freedom, and the works to be exhibited by the "true" offspring of Abraham.