

GLORIOUS DEATH, IMPERIAL ROME
AND THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Jason J. Ripley*

St Olaf College, Northfield, MN, USA

Introduction

Since the seminal works of Raymond Brown,¹ J. Louis Martyn,² Wayne Meeks³ and others, study of the Gospel of John has been firmly anchored within the context of early Judaism. Though a fruitful turn from the Gnostic context posited by Rudolf Bultmann,⁴ this focus on Judaism has tended to be selectively applied. As a result, insufficient attention has been devoted to situating John's Jewishness amidst the diverse and contested Jewish

* I am grateful to the anonymous peer reviewer for the helpful critiques and suggestions; they have improved the paper greatly. The shortcomings that remain are solely my own.

1. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* (AB, 29–29A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966–1970); *idem*, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979); Raymond E. Brown and Francis J. Moloney, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John* (ABRL; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

2. J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979); *idem*, *The Gospel of John in Christian History: Essays for Interpreters* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

3. Wayne A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (NovTSup, 14; Leiden: Brill, 1967); cf. Jan-A. Bühner, *Die Gesandte und sein Weg im vierten Evangelium: Die kultur- und religionsgeschichtlichen Grundlagen der johanneischen Sendungschristologie sowie ihre traditionsgeschichtliche Entwicklung* (WUNT, 2; Tübingen: Mohr, 1977).

4. Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971).

responses to Roman imperial pressures.⁵ Though often overlooked until recently,⁶ the Gospel of John directly addresses Roman imperial concerns. John alone refers to the contested Roman occupation in his repeated references to the sea of Galilee as the sea of Tiberias, named after the Roman emperor (Jn 6.1, 23; 21.1). Anxiety regarding the potential of Roman military conquest is explicitly cited in Jn 11.46-53 as shaping the decision by the chief priests and Pharisees to plan to kill Jesus, and uniquely among the Gospels, Jesus himself is even depicted as facing down a large group of Roman soldiers at his arrest (Jn 18.1-12). The face of the Roman empire in Jerusalem, Pontius Pilate, plays a role in John's passion that is larger than and distinct from that found in the Synoptics.⁷ Indeed, John's trial before Pilate depicts a complex

5. For one example, see Wayne A. Meeks, "'Am I a Jew?'" Johannine Christianity and Judaism', in J. Neusner (ed.), *Christianity, Judaism and other Graeco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty*, I. *New Testament* (SJLA, 12; Leiden: Brill, 1975), pp. 163-86. While Meeks rightly concludes that John is 'indeed one of the most Jewish of the early Christian writings' (p. 185), the embedded titular assumption of a 'Christianity' separate from Judaism has been strongly challenged (see n. 13 below), and consideration of John vis-à-vis Rome is omitted entirely. This current paper focuses on the question, 'How Roman is John's Jewishness?'

6. On the 'scholarly bracketing of Rome' (p. 4) and the need for both a more 'nuanced sense of Romanness' (p. 7) and an attentiveness to ways Greeks, Jews and Christians 'appropriate[d] or reconfigure[d] ... cultural poetics and strategies of power' (p. 9), see Annette Yoshiko Reed and Natalie B. Dohrmann, 'Rethinking Roman-ness, Provincializing Christendom', in Natalie B. Dohrmann and Annette Yoshiko Reed (eds.), *Jews, Christians, and the Roman Empire: The Poetics of Power in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), pp. 1-21. For an overview of empire-critical studies, see Richard A. Horsley (ed.), *In the Shadow of Empire: Reclaiming the Bible as a History of Faithful Resistance* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008). For a critical response, see Scot McKnight and Joseph B. Modica (eds.), *Jesus is Lord and Caesar is Not: Evaluating Empire in New Testament Studies* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013).

7. See Arthur M. Wright, 'What is Truth? The Complicated Characterization of Pontius Pilate in the Fourth Gospel', *RevExp* 114 (2017), pp. 211-19; cf. Ronald A. Piper, who concludes that in the trial with Pilate there is 'an implicit critique of imperial power', one focused on the 'ideology of empire' ('The Characterisation of Pilate and the Death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel', in G. van Belle [ed.], *The Death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* [BETL, 200; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005], pp. 121-62 [162]). On Pilate more broadly, see Helen Bond, *Pontius Pilate in History*

negotiation of imperial interests: Jesus' opponents manipulate Pilate's actions by questioning whether or not he is a friend of the emperor in his attempts to release Jesus (Jn 19.12), and the chief priests pledge their allegiance to Rome in acclaiming 'We have no king but Caesar' (Jn 19.15). Concern for how the Roman world will treat Jesus' followers is also expressed, including anticipated hatred by the world (Jn 17.14) and the resurrected Jesus' prediction that Peter, like Jesus (Jn 12.27-33) would glorify God in death via crucifixion (Jn 21.18-19),⁸ a typically Roman mode of execution.

Moreover, the intra-Jewish conflict within John is itself a product of contested and competing visions for how Israel should faithfully respond to Roman rule, whether through accommodation (Jn 11.48), social separation via violent enforcement of distinctively Jewish practices and beliefs (e.g. Sabbath and monotheism [Jn 5.16-18]) or messianic revolution (Jn 6.15; cf. 8.33-37). The differing responses to Pilate in the passion narrative by Jewish groups seeking Jesus' death, where 'the Jews' clamor for the revolutionary (ἁγιστής) Barrabbas (Jn 18.39-40) but the chief priests affirm no king but Caesar (Jn 19.5), display diverging responses to imperial rule and set in relief the third path of response represented by Jesus in John. In light of these diverse positions referenced in a text composed in an era bracketed by repeated conflicts between Jews and Romans (the Great Revolt [66–70 CE], the diaspora revolt [115–117 CE, impacting Cyrenaica, Egypt, Cyprus, Mesopotamia and Judea] and the catastrophic Bar Kokhba revolt [132–136 CE]),⁹ a key question

and Interpretation (SNTSMS, 100; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Warren Carter, *Pontius Pilate: Portraits of a Roman Governor* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003).

8. On 'stretching out your hands' (Jn 21.18) as a reference to crucifixion, see Gilbert van Belle, 'Peter as Martyr in the Fourth Gospel', in J. Leemans (ed.), *Martyrdom and Persecution in Late Antique Christianity: Festschrift Boudewijn Dehandschutter* (BETL, 241; Leuven: Peeters, 2010), pp. 281-310 (303-306); cf. C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 2nd edn, 1978), p. 585.

9. While establishing a date for John is complex and disputed, most scholars date John in the mid-nineties, during Domitian's reign (cf. Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* [2 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003], I, pp. 140-42), though a date even several decades later still falls within the period of ongoing tensions between Jews (including followers of Jesus) and Romans.

persists: what posture toward Rome does John's vision of Jesus' faithfulness advocate?

The current state of research regarding John's relationship to Roman imperialism is largely binary, with some reading John as thoroughly rejecting Roman imperial claims¹⁰ and others insisting that John concedes and accepts Rome's imperial hegemony, paving the way for the joining of Christianity and the Roman empire under Constantine.¹¹ Warren Carter has argued for a more multi-faceted approach that identifies elements of hybridity and acculturation as well as opposition to Rome within the Gospel.¹² To this call I would also identify the need for a more nuanced analysis of the complexity on the Roman side of the equation. Romans too grappled with the question of Roman identity after the fall of the Republic, and we find imperial and anti-imperial sentiments within the discourse of the early Roman empire. Understanding John's posture toward Roman imperialism requires exploring the intra-Roman debates and struggles with the overwhelming concentration of (oft-abused) power in the emperor after centuries of republican rule where governance was distributed among the senate and legislative assemblies.

This paper attends to the multifaceted way in which John both embraces and subverts Roman imperial values in its presentation of Jesus' glorious death, and it situates the Fourth Gospel within the ideological complexity of the early imperial period as a means of more precisely discerning how the Gospel of John relates to Roman imperialism.¹³ To establish the broader

10. E.g. Lance Byron Richey, *Roman Imperial Ideology and the Gospel of John* (CBQMS, 43; Washington: Catholic Biblical Association, 2007).

11. E.g. Musa W. Dube, 'Reading for Decolonization (John 4:1-42)', *Semeia* 75 (1996), pp. 37-59; Stephen D. Moore, "'The Romans Will Come and Destroy Our Holy Place and Our Nation': Representing Empire in John", in *Empire and Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament* (The Bible in the Modern World, 12; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), pp. 45-74 (52, 74). While Moore does note some ambivalence in John's portrayal of Pilate's torture of Jesus (pp. 56-63), this feature is subsumed by the Gospel's rejection of a 'death sentence for Rome', rendering it the 'gospel of the imperial status-quo' (p. 74).

12. Warren Carter, *John and Empire: Initial Explorations* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2008), p. 13.

13. Though this paper explores the Roman imperial context of the Gospel of John, this approach does not displace or diminish John's engagement with its Jewish context (including the Greek translations of Hebrew Scripture), which remains its

context faced by the audience of the Gospel of John and other Jewish groups, I begin with an overview of contests for honor in imperial Rome, as well as the imperial standard of honor and virtue promulgated in word and image. The contested nature of ideologies of honor is explored by studying the anti-imperial rhetoric set forth in Plutarch's biography of the self-slaughter of the republican martyr Cato. The analysis of this literary contemporary of the Fourth Gospel provides the rhetorical framework for the subsequent study of Jesus' voluntary death in the Gospel of John, providing a comparison that contextualizes and throws in relief John's own relationship to various aspects of Roman imperialism. I conclude by setting forth how John's hybridized discourse, while affirming aspects of Roman values embedded in the rhetoric of noble death, simultaneously critiques imperial violence and offers an alternate, cruciform vision that resonates with but ultimately goes beyond anti-imperial ideologies of the early Roman empire. As we shall see, John constructs a figure of Christ crucified that unmasks imperial violence as evil and sets forth non-violent resistance as an expression of the God of Israel's love, power and freedom to both the oppressed and their oppressors. This study, by focusing on the rhetoric of noble death employed by John, contributes a richer understanding of how John negotiates the complexity of Roman imperial rule in ways that are both critical and constructive, moving us beyond the common binary of pro- or anti-Roman sentiments into a 'third space' of liberation where oppressed and oppressor come together to forge new identities.

primary frame of reference. Rather, discerning the Gospel's relationship to Roman imperialism serves to clarify and to highlight the distinctiveness of the Jewish response to Roman hegemony that the Gospel of John advocates. Moreover, this line of inquiry acknowledges that Jewish, 'Christian' and Greco-Roman identities, though complex, are not mutually exclusive categories (see e.g. Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004]; Tessa Rajak, *The Jewish Dialogue with Greece and Rome: Studies in Cultural and Social Interaction* [Boston: Brill, 2002]; Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001]; Martin Goodman [ed.], *Jews in a Graeco-Roman World* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1998]).

1. *Contests for Honor in Imperial Rome*

Honor and shame were ‘pivotal values’¹⁴ in Roman culture, forming the positive and negative poles on a core axis of Roman value. Honor in Roman culture, as in earlier Greek culture,¹⁵ was either *ascribed* (by virtue, say, of being born into a noble family) or *acquired* (via challenges and responses in the public forum, so as to acquire honor from others in the eyes of the world).¹⁶ Every social interaction thus became a contest for honor, an opportunity to acquire (or lose) honor in the eyes of the public.¹⁷ We find this pursuit of honor enshrined in the most significant monument of the Flavian dynasty, the Flavian Amphitheater (better known as the Colosseum). Here in the heart of Rome¹⁸ the Flavians erected a space for contests of supreme glory, life-or-

14. Bruce Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), p. 25.

15. See A.W. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility: A Study in Greek Values* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960).

16. Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, ‘Honor and Shame in Luke–Acts: Pivotal Values of the Mediterranean World’, in Jerome H. Neyrey (ed.), *The Social World of Luke–Acts: Models for Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), pp. 25-65 (27-34). On the differing social constructions of honor, see John Davis, ‘Family and State in the Mediterranean’, in David D. Gilmore (ed.), *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean* (Washington: American Anthropological Association, 1987), pp. 22-34.

17. Cicero captures this agonistic dimension of Roman culture: ‘With what earnestness they pursue their rivalries! How fierce their contests! What exultation they feel when they win, and what shame when they are beaten! How they dislike reproach! How they yearn for praise! What labors will they not undertake to stand first among their peers! How well they remember those who have shown them kindness and how eager to repay it!’ (*Fin.* 5.22.61; translation in Carlin A. Barton, *Roman Honor: The Fire in the Bones* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001], p. 11). Remarkably, Cicero is speaking of young boys!

18. While the Colosseum represents the centrality of these contests for Rome, the events themselves were widespread throughout the empire. In Judea, Herod built a great amphitheater and sponsored gladiatorial events and athletic contests, drawing many from all over the world who hoped for ‘the glory of victory to be there gained’ (Josephus, *Ant.* 15.8.1). Though opposed by some Jews, other Jews not only attended but also participated as gladiators (H.H. Ben-Sasson, ‘Gladiator’, *Encyclopaedia Judaica* [Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2007], VII, p. 624). The Colosseum’s construction itself is a monumental testament to Flavian imperial glory, built with funds

death tests of honor (including gladiatorial battles and public spectacles such as battle re-enactments and executions) in which spectators would clamor to see someone who is ‘glad to die’ (*libenter pereunt* [Seneca, *Ira* 1.2.4]). Here was a public place and imperial project where honor could be acquired as the limits of *virtus* were tested at the threshold of mortality.¹⁹

For Romans seeking to win glory, the approach to one’s death revealed the ultimate character of one’s honor.²⁰ As Seneca states,

I am making ready for the day when the tricks and disguises will be put away and I shall come to a verdict on myself, determining whether the courageous attitudes I adopt are really felt or just so many words, and whether or not the defiant challenges I’ve hurled at fortune have been mere pretence and pantomime. Away with the world’s opinion of you—it’s always unsettled and divided ... It’s only when you’re breathing your last that the way you’ve spent your time will become apparent (*Ep.* 26.5-7).²¹

Thus, the specific way in which one faced death—and whether it was glorious or shameful—was a topic of focus for historians and biographers seeking to illustrate the character of a notable individual. Broadly speaking, the ascribing of honor followed the general rhetorical guidelines for praise, which I will examine shortly. However, the manner of one’s death was so important and revealing that it was a prominent feature in many works (e.g., Tacitus,

from the victorious war over Judea (see Nathan T. Elkins, ‘The Procession and Placement of Roman Imperial Cult Images in the Colosseum’, *Papers of the British School at Rome* 82 [2014], pp. 73-107) and likely constructed in part by the toil of thousands of Jewish slaves captured and transported to Rome after that war.

19. See Paul Plass, *The Game of Death in Ancient Rome: Arena Sport and Political Suicide* (Wisconsin Studies in Classics; Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995) and Catharine Edwards, *Death in Ancient Rome* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 46-77.

20. Edwards, *Death in Ancient Rome*, p. 5. She states, ‘Almost all the writers we look at share a perception of death as a privileged moment which has the capacity to reveal the true character of the dying subject. In this respect, the death of Cato remains a key *exemplum*.’

21. Translation by Robin Campbell, in Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic* (New York: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 71.

Ann., books 15–16²²), and in fact a whole subgenre was devoted to it.²³ As Pliny notes (*Ep.* 5.5.3), the features of this popular type of writing were rhetorically blended, lying between the genres of oral discourse (*sermonem*) and narrative history (*historiam*). Student exercises in rhetoric also included the theme. Cicero indicates that the question ‘Is it honorable to die for one’s fatherland?’ (*Honestumne sit pro patria mori?*) was a part of rhetorical studies regarding honorable or shameful character (*Top.* 22). Seneca even quips that the topic of despising death was ‘droned to death’ in all the rhetorical schools (*Ep.* 24.6–8). More specific to the focus of this paper, the poet Persius Flaccus bemoans that schoolboys were required to recite Cato’s dying speech (*Sat.* 3.45).

Given this emphasis on death and honor exhibited in one’s approach to death, it is not surprising that ancients struggled with the shamefulness associated with Jesus’ death. One critic, Celsus (c. 175 CE), is recorded by Origen as focusing on the problematic character of Jesus’ lament and fear of death (*Cels.* 2.24).²⁴ Origen’s response draws attention to Jesus’ greatness of mind in willingly remaining obedient to the Father’s will. As we shall see, in

22. See E.E. Keitel, “‘Is dying so very terrible?’ The Neronian *Annals*”, in A.J. Woodman (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Tacitus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 127–43.

23. Pliny the Younger mentions an *exitus illustrium virorum* written by Titinius Capito (*Ep.* 8.12.4), as well as a work by Caius Fannius devoted to the fates of those executed or banished by Nero (*exitus occisorum aut relegatorum a Nerone* [*Ep.* 5.5.3]). See A. Ronconi, ‘Exitus Illustrium Virorum’, *RAC* 6 (1996), pp. 1258–68; Joseph Geiger, ‘Munatius Rufus and Thrasea Paetus on Cato the Younger’, *Athenaeum* 57 (1979), pp. 48–72 (61).

24. Conversely, the Greek physician and philosopher Galen (129–199? CE) admires early Christian courage in the face of death, comparable to that of genuine philosophers, despite his other misgivings about the movement (see Richard Walzer, *Galen on Jews and Christians* [London: Oxford University Press, 1949], pp. 15–16, 68). This readiness to die, however, was noted and decried by the emperor Marcus Aurelius (121–180 CE) as pure obstinacy (*Med.* 11.3), and the martyrdoms of Felicitas, Justin Martyr, Polycarp and others were approved during his reign. In the late second century Lucian of Samosata (c. 120–192 CE) mockingly characterizes contemporary Christians as despising death and willingly entering into custody (*Peregr.* 13). The attentiveness to how death was approached, regardless of its ultimate evaluation, reveals the importance of the category of noble death to readers and observers in the imperial period.

evaluating Jesus' death, Celsus is appealing to one characteristic (courage) of the noble death discourse that ancients used to classify a death as worthy of praise, and Origen to another (its voluntary nature). Notably, Jesus' suffering (as mentioned by Celsus), while prominent in the Gospel of Mark, is not an element highlighted by the Gospel of John, who stylizes Jesus' death much more triumphantly. Might there be other aspects of John's unique portrayal that address how ancient readers would have analyzed the death of Jesus? Answering this question requires an exploration of how honor was construed in the early imperial period of Rome.

2. *Content of Honor in Imperial Rome*

What constituted the imperial ideal of honor? The pursuit and maintenance of the imperial title by aspiring and existing emperors gives insight into the specific character of acquired honor. Military strength and victory played a crucial role in the acquisition of glory, as Sarolta Takacs notes: 'Military glory was at the core of the honors-remembrance-immortality system.'²⁵ In particular, the ceremonial triumph for conquering generals displayed imperial honor to all,²⁶ while concurrently shaming the conquered by including them in an imperial parade that involved the public execution of representative leaders of Rome's enemies.²⁷ Emperors and their families came to monopolize the honor of the triumph,²⁸ denying aristocrats access to this supreme glory²⁹ and thereby exercising decisive control in the economy of honor. The

25. Sarolta A. Takacs, *The Construction of Authority in Ancient Rome and Byzantium: The Rhetoric of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 1.

26. Mary Beard, *The Roman Triumph* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007).

27. Simon bar Giora, in the case of the triumph celebrating Roman victory in the first Jewish war (66–70 CE); cf. Josephus, *War* 7.153-155.

28. This monopoly of martial glory also extended to statuary; rarely was anyone other than the emperor shown wearing armor (Simon R.F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* [trans. Alan Shapiro; Jerome Lectures: Sixteenth Series; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990], p. 186).

29. Matthew B. Roller highlights the effect that imperial monopolization of martial glory had in curtailing aristocratic opportunities to enhance status by gaining honor through conquest, thereby motivating Seneca's critique of military valor and his expansion of the definition of virtue to include Stoic philosophical values such as

militaristic configuration of glory was crucial for the Flavians,³⁰ whose imperial legitimacy was rooted in their military conquest of Judea (66–70 CE) and the decisive support of their legions over against others contending for power.

Imperial iconography concretized these values, making use of monuments and coins³¹ to convey images of legitimacy to all,³² to which the Arch of Titus commemorating the Roman emperor Titus and his conquering of Jerusalem still testifies today. The statue of Augustus of Prima Porta inscribes imperial hegemony onto the body of the emperor, displaying him in military dress with a cuirass depicting imperial rule of heaven and earth.³³ In monuments and coinage, appeals to religious authority were prominent,³⁴ especially with respect to defining the imperial character of honor and virtue. The Roman gods *Honos* and *Virtus* (Honor and Valor) are depicted leading the horses in the triumphal procession in the Arch of Titus. Likewise, coins from Galba,

endurance and fortitude under trial (*Constructing Autocracy: Aristocrats and Emperors in Julio-Claudian Rome* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001], pp. 97–108). This conflict in values to be glorified suggests a social and ideological framework in which the Fourth Gospel's own critique of imperial glory could find at least partial resonance.

30. Myles McDonnell, *Roman Manliness: Virtus and the Roman Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 387–88.

31. See Jane M. Cody, 'Conquerors and Conquered on Flavian Coins', in A.J. Boyle and W.J. Dominik (eds.), *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 103–23.

32. J.P. Sullivan, *Literature and Politics in the Age of Nero* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 184. For detailed analysis, see Price, *Rituals and Power*; Karl Galinsky, *Augustan Culture: An Interpretive Introduction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). For application to Paul, see Jonathan L. Reed and John Dominic Crossan, *In Search of Paul: How Jesus' Apostles Opposed Rome's Empire with God's Kingdom* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004).

33. Price, *Rituals and Power*, pp. 185–86.

34. As Sullivan notes, 'All gods, goddesses, and lesser divinities had their provinces and powers ... Where a traditional deity did not clearly reign, abstract divinities such as *Salus*, *Fides*, and *Concordia* could be called upon. In the propaganda battles that raged during and long after the Civil War, it was important to enlist on one's side as many of these religious symbols as possible: in battle cries, inscriptions, regimental names; on coins or monuments; and naturally, in the partisan literature of the time' (*Literature and Politics*, p. 149). Sullivan subsequently notes the prominence of *Pax*, *Fortuna*, *Honos* and *Virtus* in the propaganda of Augustus (p. 150).

Vitellius, Vespasian, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius depict *Honos* and *Virtus*, attired in virtually the same manner as images of the *genius* of the Emperor and the *genius populi Romani*. In a similar vein, on a coin minted by Vespasian, the goddess *Roma*, the personification of the Roman state, is depicted in the same manner of *Virtus*, but with her foot on a globe and holding a small figure of a Victory.³⁵ In these imperial monuments and images we literally see the tight intersection of imperial conquest, honor and the person of the emperor.

The traditional values of Rome also played a shaping role in determining the constitution of honor in the imperial period. To maintain social legitimacy even the emperor had to demonstrate fidelity to the *mos maiorum*, or ancestral custom. In ways not dissimilar to the ideologically conflicting post-biblical interpretations within Second Temple Judaism, the significance and application of the *mores maiorum* were disputed and appealed to by imperialists and anti-imperialists alike in the struggle for power and legitimacy.³⁶ Rudich notes, '[T]he *mos maiorum* phraseology, as a subject of continuous assault, suffered a process of transformation in terms of great ambivalence, and double entendre could be exploited by both the regime and the dissidents for opposing purposes.'³⁷ The conflicting understandings and applications of the heroic deaths of earlier Romans demonstrate one aspect of the ambivalence of the *mos maiorum*.

Historiography, biography and epic were the literary arenas³⁸ in which the *mores maiorum*, these examples from the past necessary to guide the definition and pursuit of honor in the present, were conveyed,³⁹ especially in those life-or-death situations where Roman honor was most contested. Cassius

35. Margarete Bieber, 'Honos and Virtus', *AJA* 49 (1945), pp. 27-31.

36. Cf. Carter, *John and Empire*, pp. 93-122.

37. Vasily Rudich, *Dissidence and Literature under Nero: The Price of Rhetoricization* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 9.

38. The arena metaphor is drawn from Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of language as an 'arena of battle' wherein discourse is socially determined, engaging in hidden polemic and double-voiced discourse as it anticipates and responds to alternative ideological challenges; see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (ed. C. Emerson; trans. C. Emerson; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 193.

39. See Carter, *John and Empire*, pp. 129-43.

Dio's narration of the self-slaughter in 69 CE of the emperor Otho⁴⁰ illustrates the intersection of ancestral examples, imperial honor and noble death well. In response to the news that his adversary Vitellius had defeated Otho's forces, Otho rebuffs his soldiers' urgings to fight on and explains his decision to kill himself with the following:

Enough, quite enough, has already happened. I hate civil war, even though I conquer; and I love all Romans, even though they do not side with me. Let Vitellius be victor, since this has pleased the gods; and let the lives of his soldiers also be spared, since this pleases me. Surely it is far better and far more just that one should perish for all than many for one, and that I should refuse on account of one man alone to embroil the Roman people in civil war and cause so great a multitude of human beings to perish. For I certainly should prefer to be a Mucius, a Decius, a Curtius, a Regulus, rather than a Marius, a Cinna, or a Sulla—not to mention other names ... But as for you, be off to the victor and pay court to him; as for me, I shall free myself, that all men may learn from the event that you chose for our emperor one who would not give you up to save himself, but rather himself to save you (Cassius Dio 64.11.1–13.3).⁴¹

Even in the face of defeat and death, Otho is depicted as displaying Roman *virtus* and honor, invoking the examples of earlier Romans—Mucius, Decius, Curtius and Regulus—who had given their lives to save Rome, in contrast to other Romans associated with previous civil wars.

The ardently pro-Domitian⁴² poet Martial also commends Otho's death, likewise situating it amongst earlier historical figures:

Although the goddess of civil warfare was still in doubt,
 And soft Otho had perhaps still a chance of winning,
 He renounced fighting that would have cost much blood,
 And with sure hand pierced right through his breast.
 By all means let Cato in his life be greater than Julius Caesar himself;
 In his death was he greater than Otho? (*Epig.* 6.32).

40. Otho was the second emperor in the Year of the Four Emperors that marked the turbulent transition from the Julio-Claudian dynasty to the Flavian dynasty.

41. Cassius Dio, *Roman History* (trans. Earnest Cary; 9 vols.; LCL, 176; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925). See also Tacitus, *Hist.* 2.47.

42. Sullivan, *Literature and Politics*, pp. 184-85.

The elevation of Otho over Cato is significant, for Cato's death was a topic of intense debate throughout the early imperial period. Biographies praising and condemning Cato, the senatorial champion of the Roman Republic who killed himself instead of submitting to Julius Caesar's power, had been composed by the likes of Cicero, Brutus, Julius Caesar, Augustus and Plutarch, to name but a few. The task could be fraught with danger. Curiatius Maternus was likely put to death by Domitian for his public reading of his work on Cato (Tacitus, *Dial.* 2-3; Cassius Dio 67.12.5),⁴³ and Stoic authors notable for their lauding of Cato as a means of critiquing Nero—namely, Seneca the Younger, Lucan and Thræsea Paetus—were all compelled to kill themselves by said emperor⁴⁴ (with Seneca depicted as going so far as to emulate the details of Cato's death).⁴⁵ Inasmuch as Seneca and Lucan were Martial's fellow countrymates from Hispania and likely his first patrons in Rome, Martial likely learned firsthand the dangers of misplaced praise, and thus he takes care to heap praise upon Domitian—and to put praise of Cato's anti-imperial martyrdom in its proper place, beneath the emperor Otho's self-sacrificial preservation of the values of the *imperium*. Taken together, these examples show the centrality of imperial power in the economy of praise and honor, and the potentially life-or-death implications of the battle for glory on the field of literature.

43. T.D. Barnes, 'Curiatius Maternus', *Hermes* 109 (1981), pp. 382-84.

44. Sullivan, *Literature and Politics*, pp. 115-52.

45. James Ker, *The Deaths of Seneca* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 55; Edwards, *Death in Ancient Rome*, pp. 156-58.

46. For another comparison of the Gospel of John to ancient biography, see Carter, *John and Empire*, pp. 123-43. Carter compares John with Tacitus's biography *Agricola*, focusing on the ancient biographical categories of origins, great deeds and death. Through this comparison Carter sees John's Jesus and his agenda (as well as his followers in Ephesus) as inhabiting a posture towards Rome that stands from 'a protected location of considerable though not complete societal distance' (p. 139). Carter's comparison to 'Agricola' is somewhat limiting, however. While Tacitus frankly acknowledges Flavian imperial abuses in *Agricola* (1-3), this particular work is critical of the Stoic martyrs (inspired by Cato) who opposed tyrannical rule, deeming their ostentatious deaths (*ambitiosa morte*) as disregarding authority and useless to the state (p. 42). As such, an alternative form of Roman imperial critique (embodied in Cato and his Stoic emulators) is omitted from Carter's study, and with it the possibility of closer affinities between the Johannine audience and this subset of critics of Roman imperialism. Utilizing Plutarch's biography of 'Cato' as a

3. Contesting Imperial Honor for Rome: Plutarch's 'Life of Cato the Younger'⁴⁶

As the aforementioned critics of Nero attest, not all inside or outside of Rome affirmed this tight association of honor with imperial power. Within Roman aristocracy of the late first century there remained a deep-seated longing for *libertas*, for freedom, meaning a return to the Roman Republic (and the heightened power of the Senate).⁴⁷ For them, the examples of resisters from the last days of the Republic were potent weapons against the perceived tyranny of the emperors.⁴⁸ Brutus, the killer of the tyrant Julius Caesar, was an inflammatory figure to invoke in the early imperial period. As already noted, the senator Cato also was a prominent persona, and various narrations of his death served as an *exemplum* of principled resistance to imperial tyranny, evidenced supremely in his taking of his own life.

Like these intra-Roman debates over frameworks of honor, the Gospel of John itself thematizes the question of the proper source of glory and praise. In the dialogue following the controversial healing on the Sabbath of a man unable to walk (Jn 5.1-18), receiving glory (*δόξαν*) from fellow humans is contrasted with receiving glory from the one and only God (5.41-44; cf. 12.43). Similarly, in Jn 7.18, those who speak on their own authority in seeking their own glory are contraposed with the one who seeks the glory of God.⁴⁹ More pointedly, Jesus' own death is associated with the glorification of God's name (Jn 12.27-33), and the restored Peter's anticipated crucifixion

comparison and adopting the rhetorical analysis advanced in this paper (rather than the categories of origins, great deeds and death) reveals this potential for shared concerns more clearly.

47. Sullivan clarifies the nature of this republican *libertas*: 'Republican *libertas* ... was not, of course, what a modern reader would mean by liberty. *Libertas* essentially meant the "freedom" of the exploiting classes to promote their own interests and evade the dictates of any central authority other than the senate and its carefully elected (or selected) officers. As a romantic and unrealistic slogan invoked by the senatorial or equestrian classes, the term had nothing to do with the *libertas* involved in the emancipation of a slave or the impregnable *libertas* of the Stoic *sapiens*' (*Literature and Politics*, pp. 115-16).

48. Roller, *Constructing Autocracy*, pp. 101-108.

49. For an in-depth study of challenges to honor in this chapter, see Jerome H. Neyrey, 'The Trials (Forensic) and Tribulations (Honor Challenges) of Jesus: John 7 in Social Science Perspective', *BTB* 26.3 (1996), pp. 107-24.

in following Jesus as the shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep (cf. Jn 10.11) is characterized as a semiotic act that glorifies God (σημαίνων ποίω θανάτω δοξάσει τὸν θεόν [Jn 21.15-19]). These passages alert the reader to the contested configurations of honor at play in the narrative, including the notion of glorious death. For ancient readers, including Greek-speaking Jews, Greeks and Romans, discerning these conflicts would require attending to the rhetoric of honor and praise as spelled out in the rhetorical handbooks.

In fact, the rhetorical criteria for speeches of praise present themselves as a relevant framework for analyzing noble death traditions as well.⁵⁰ Jerome Neyrey has established a rubric for rhetorical analysis of noble death discourse, synthesizing the canons of praise in Greek funeral orations and Aristotle's instructions about epideictic oratory employed for ceremonial praise and blame.⁵¹ Neyrey categorizes the literary presentation of a death as 'Noble' if it conforms to the following criteria:

50. 'Noble death' is a broad category that includes a diverse range of situations and discourses, ranging from the suicide of Socrates, heroized acts of self-slaughter in battle and even the violent deaths of prophets (see the pyramid diagram in Jan Willem van Henten and Friedrich Avemarie, *Martyrdom and Noble Death: Selected Texts from Graeco-Roman, Jewish and Christian Antiquity* [London: Routledge, 2002], p. 6). For surveys of relevant texts and related discussions, see also David Seeley, *The Noble Death: Graeco-Roman Martyrology and Paul's Concept of Salvation* (JSNTSup, 28; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), pp. 113-41; Arthur J. Droge and James D. Tabor, *A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom among Christians and Jews in Antiquity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), pp. 17-51; Sam K. Williams, *Jesus' Death as Saving Event* (HDR, 2; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975), pp. 137-63; 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), pp. 140-50, 157-59, 212-25; Martin Hengel, *The Atonement: The Origins of the Doctrine in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), pp. 6-32; H.S. Versnel, 'Quid Athenis et Hierosolymis? Bemerkungen über die Herkunft von Aspekten des "effective death"', in J.W. van Henten et al. (eds.), *Die Entstehung der jüdischen Martyrologie* (SPB, 38; Leiden: Brill, 1989), pp. 162-96.

51. Jerome H. Neyrey, 'The "Noble Shepherd" in John 10: Cultural and Rhetorical Background', *JBL* 120 (2001), pp. 267-91. Neyrey's rhetorical framework for noble death not only attends well to the literary features of this material, but also avoids the difficulty of defining martyrdom along ideological lines or problematic historical reconstructions that rigidly (ontologically?) separate Judaism and

(1) benefited others; (2) was either voluntarily accepted or chosen; (3) if the deceased died unvanquished or not as a victim; (4) if the manner of death manifested both courage and justice; (5) if there was something unique about the death; (6) if death produced posthumous honors; and (7) the fallen enjoy immortality in deathless praise and glory by the *polis*.⁵²

These categories provide a general framework appropriate to the types of texts being studied, with a focus on honor that allows for thick comparison and contrast.⁵³ As such, they constitute the rhetorical arena and weapons within which various configurations of glory compete in the early imperial period.⁵⁴ To appreciate the ideological conflicts beneath the rhetorical similarities, we will need to examine the specific constructs of glory advocated

Christianity from their Greco-Roman contexts (cf. Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999]). While Neyrey's study focuses on John 10, this current study shows the framework can be extended to the entire Gospel. Jörg Frey has affirmed Neyrey's rhetorical categories, their availability and their applicability to the Gospel of John ('The Death of Jesus in the Gospel of John', in *The Glory of the Crucified One: Christology and Theology in the Gospel of John* [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018], pp. 171-98 [177-81]), though Frey's narrowly configured theological interests unnecessarily bracket out the exploration of how John's theological portrayal of Jesus' noble death engages John's own historical context, in the ways I explore in this current article. More broadly, Peter J. Scaer has utilized Neyrey's same rhetorical categories to analyze Luke's passion as well (*The Lukan Passion and the Praiseworthy Death* [New Testament Monographs, 10; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005]).

52. Neyrey, 'Noble Shepherd', p. 278. For the purposes of this study, I will discuss items six and seven in a single category.

53. These rhetorical categories apply to both Greco-Roman and Jewish noble deaths. On the intersection of Greek and Jewish traditions in the development of the notions of martyrdom and atoning death in 2 Maccabees and 4 Maccabees, see van Henten, *Maccabean Martyrs*, pp. 156-63, 263-67.

54. For a brief rhetorical analysis of Vergil's pro-imperial lauding of the deaths of Roman warriors while fighting to establish Rome employing Neyrey's rhetorical framework, Jason J. Ripley, "'Behold the Man"? Subverting Imperial Masculinity in the Gospel of John', *JBR* 2 (2015), pp. 219-39.

by imperial Rome and her opponents.⁵⁵

To establish a point of comparison for John, I will focus on the death of Cato the Younger found in Plutarch's *Lives*,⁵⁶ a suicide that Catharine Edwards describes as 'the archetypal Roman death'.⁵⁷ Written sometime toward the end of the first century, *Lives* is a rough contemporary of the Gospel of John. Plutarch's work gives a good example of the rhetoric and images associated with noble death available to those who might encounter the Fourth Gospel, and in the same genre of biography.⁵⁸

55. Neyrey's rhetorical framework applies equally well to Jewish texts, even those praising Jewish resisters to pagan oppressors. For an application of this framework to the Maccabean literature, Jason J. Ripley, *'Behold the Lamb of God!' Johannine Christology and the Martyrdoms of Isaac* (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2005), pp. 191-94.

56. Plutarch writes during the reign of Trajan, likely to provide moral guidance to the new emperor so as to redefine the nature of imperial power (see the essays in Philip A. Stadter and Luc Van der Stockt [eds.], *Sage and Emperor: Plutarch, Greek Intellectuals, and Roman Power in the Time of Trajan [98–117 A.D.]* [Symbolae Facultatis Litterarum Lovaniensis, 29; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002]). Trajan notably reversed course from Domitian's practice of exiling and executing critical voices, ostensibly attempting to evoke a rebirth of the Republic and its freedom of speech (Gordon Willis Williams, *Change and Decline: Roman Literature in the Early Empire* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978], pp. 293-94), though given the hostility to the Jews promulgated by both Trajan and Hadrian (cf. Martin Goodman, 'Trajan and the Origins of Roman Hostility to the Jews', *Past and Present* 182 [2004], pp. 3-29), this 'freedom' likely did not extend to Jewish authors to the same extent as to Greek and Roman ones. As Gil Gambash notes, Rome's approach to the Jews from 67–135 CE was exceptionally harsh, in contrast to its approach to problems in other provinces (*Rome and Provincial Resistance* [New York: Routledge, 2015], pp. 144-79).

57. Edwards, *Death in Ancient Rome*, p. 1. For a discussion of Plutarch's sources, see Geiger, 'Munatius Rufus', pp. 48-72.

58. They even have nearly the same percentage of material devoted to narrating the death of the main character: 15.7 per cent of the Gospel of John, 17.3 per cent of Cato's *Life* (Richard A. Burridge, *What are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* [SNTSMS, 70; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], p. 224). The genre choice of biography (one not found in the Hebrew Bible) is significant as well, inasmuch as it was predominantly utilized to narrate the lives of esteemed Greek and Roman men.

While I can neither prove nor disprove that the author (or authors) of John knew Plutarch's *Cato* directly, the specific knowledge of the *exitus exempla* traditions utilized in the educational exercises, which (as we saw above) potentially included some version of Cato's dying speech, is eminently possible, as is familiarity with a general notion of Cato as a martyr, given the ongoing significance of Cato's death and the multiple writings devoted to it spanning numerous decades.⁵⁹ However, more important than possible knowledge of

59. Just as early Roman responses to Cato's life and death were positive (Cicero, Sallust, Brutus, Horace, Vergil, Velleius, Valerius Maximus, Seneca, Lucan, Curatius Maternus, Plutarch), negative (Augustus, Julius Caesar) and mixed (Quintilian, Martial, Tacitus, Pliny the Elder), so too are the subsequent literary traditions of the second and third centuries CE (for full discussion, see Robert J. Goar, *The Legend of Cato Uticensis from the First Century B.C. to the Fifth Century A.D.* [Bruxelles: Latomus, 1987]). The Roman historians Appian (*Bell. civ.* 2.99) and Cassius Dio (37.22, 57) recognize Cato's importance as a person of justice and morality, particularly concerned with freedom in opposition to imperial tyranny. As Goar notes, 'even in the altered circumstances of the third century A.D., when a strong central monarchy was the only conceivable form of government for the Roman world, the astute Cassius Dio was able to find words of praise for Cato, the man who hated autocracy and inspired tyrannicides' (Goar, *Legend of Cato*, p. 76). This ongoing significance provided a complicated challenge to Christian authors of the patristic period, and they too demonstrate mixed reactions to Cato. On the one hand, Tertullian proclaims (*Apol.* 11) that none of the Roman gods had gravity and wisdom comparable to Cato (cf. Lucan's deification of Cato in *Phars.* 9.596-604), yet on the other hand he criticizes Cato for sharing his wife with his friend Hortensius (*Apol.* 39.12-13), a critique shared by Lactantius (*Inst.* 3.18). Lactantius, perhaps picking up on Tacitus's characterization of Stoic self-slaughters as ostentatious, self-serving deaths (*ambitiosa morte* [*Agr.* 42]), also criticizes Cato's self-slaughter as a homicide motivated by desire to make a distinguished name for himself by his great action, despite acknowledging Cato as being foremost in Roman wisdom and an excellent citizen (*Inst.* 3.18). Similarly, Jerome concedes Cato's glory (*Comm. Os.* 2.5.53), yet condemns his sharing of his wife (*Jo. Hier.* 1.46; 2.5-7), his pride (*Pelag.* 1.28) and his self-slaughter (*Epist.* 39.3.5). Finally, Augustine too acknowledges Cato as a man of honor and virtue (*Civ.* 5.10). However, in an argument that counters the embrace of voluntary Christian martyrdom by Tertullian (*Mart.* 4.3-8), the examples of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas (cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 8.12, 14) and the voluntary martyrdoms of Augustine's Donatist opponents (e.g. *Passion of Maximian and Isaac, Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs* and *Passion of Saints Maxima, Donatilla and Secunda*; cf. Collin S. Garbarino, *Reclaiming Martyrdom: Augustine's Reconstruction of*

the material content of Cato's life is familiarity with its widely encountered rhetorical form.⁶⁰ I do think that the author(s) and especially the audience(s) of the Fourth Gospel shared a common rhetorical framework made available by the educational process in which the learning of Greek occurred,⁶¹ which

Martyrdom in Late Antique North Africa [MA thesis, Louisiana State University, 2007]); see nn. 60 and 76 below for further discussion), Augustine denounces Cato's self-slaughter as a suicide motivated by envy (or shame) of Caesar's glory in pardoning him (*Civ.* 1.23), indicative of Cato's lack of fortitude (*Civ.* 19.4). The fact that Augustine has to argue so vigorously against the example of Cato's self-slaughter is testimony to the prominence and authority it has among his Roman Christian audience (Goar, *Legend of Cato*, p. 93), and hence it is not surprising to see Cato later elevated by Dante in the *Divine Comedy* (*Purgatory*, 1.31-108, 2.118-123). Dante places Cato not among the suicides in the seventh ring of hell (following Vergil, *Aen.* 6.434-439) but as a guardian of the mount of purgatory who fully possesses the four cardinal virtues (Dante, *Purgatory* 1.37-39) and, akin to Lucan's view, is the human being best suited to represent God (Dante, *Convivio* 4.28.15; cf. Goar, *Legend of Cato*, pp. 103-110).

60. Given the complicated legacy of Cato described in n. 59 above, it is not surprising that direct comparisons between Jesus and Cato are absent in the documents that survive from subsequent Christian authors of the patristic period, though comparisons to Cato's model, Socrates, are found (for texts and analysis, see Juraj Franek, 'Omnibus Omnia: The Reception of Socrates in Ante-Nicene Christian Literature', *Graeco-Latina Brunensia* 21 [2016], pp. 31-58). However, the presence of the rhetorical categories of noble death in the discussions and debates regarding Jesus' death (e.g., Origen, *Cels.* 2.17; 7.56; Tertullian, *Apol.* 40-41; *An.* 1.2-6; cf. n. 24 above) affirms the preeminence of the rhetorical level of engagement involving the categories of noble death utilized here (see further discussion in n. 62 below).

61. On the nature of a Graeco-Roman education in this period, see Teresa Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). We have several examples in Josephus's works of Jews receiving such an education (e.g. Josephus [*Ant.* 20.12.1]; Justus of Tiberias [*Life* 9, 40]; members of the Jewish aristocracy [and Herod's family in particular; *Apion* 1.9, 51; *War* 1.31.1]). For an overview of Jewish participation in Graeco-Roman education, see Catherine Hezser, 'Private and Public Education', in Catherine Hezser (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 465-81 (474-76). The 'educational process' posited above is broadly construed. Though the author of John may have received direct instruction in rhetoric (or perhaps less formal, indirect instruction from ones who had themselves received formal rhetorical training), it is also possible that

makes Neyrey's rhetorical schemata particularly helpful both for understanding the unique dimensions of Jesus' death in John and situating John's social posture with respect to other Roman and Jewish ideological positions conveyed through these shared rhetorical forms.⁶²

familiarity with these rhetorical frameworks was 'caught' through experience rather than formally 'taught', either through encountering public orations of speeches constructed according to rhetorical guidelines for praise or via Jewish works such as the Maccabean literature, which likewise praise the pious who lay down their lives in faithfulness through these same rhetorical categories (cf. nn. 53 and 55 above).

62. Comparison with post-Johannine treatments of noble death in the early church highlights the importance of this historically contextualized examination of John, precisely for its distinctiveness vis-à-vis later Christian concerns. Significantly, early church fathers did draw connections between Greek and Roman examples of noble death and Christian martyrdom but due to ethical concerns, changing definitions of martyrdom, and differing social contexts their engagement diverges somewhat from the particular aspects highlighted in this article. For example, Tertullian draws from *exempla* of Roman deaths that achieved fame and glory (*Mart.* 4), chiefly those associated with self-slaughter (e.g. Lucretia, protecting her chastity, and Dido, to avoid forced remarriage), as a means of exhorting Christians to even greater deeds. Cato is not included in Tertullian's catalogue, likely due to Cato's sharing of his wife with his friend (cf. *Apol.* 39.12-13), though Goar suggests that perhaps Cato's example 'was so powerful and so affecting for persecuted Christians (especially men) that Tertullian thought it unwise to include him in this list', finding Regulus to be a safer option (*The Legend of Cato*, p. 79). Tertullian's inclusion of the examples of self-slaughters are noteworthy, for later Christian redefinitions of martyrdom (see n. 59 above) signal a developing discomfort with voluntary martyrdoms of the sort of Cato and John's Jesus. Whereas Tertullian accepts a broad range of martyrs (elevating martyrdom over flight from persecution), Clement of Alexandria (followed by Augustine) creates (and subsequently critiques) a new category of over-eager 'voluntary martyrdom' (including acts of self-slaughter) so as to justify the priority of flight and the endurance under persecution as long as possible, defining 'genuine' martyrdom as something one accepts but never precipitates, occurring only when one is forced to confess or deny Christ (see Candida R. Moss, 'The Discourse of Voluntary Martyrdom: Ancient and Modern', *CH* 81 [2012], pp. 531-51). Notably, this redefinition effectively downplays the model of Jesus' own precipitating acts in John, beginning with his prophetic demonstration in the Temple (Jn 2.13-25) and culminating in his raising of Lazarus (Jn 11.1-53), which provokes fears of Roman retribution (Jn 11.48). Obviously, for Christian authors after Constantine, the alignment with Roman imperial rule even more dramatically shifts the perspectives on martyrdom, further

With respect to content, Plutarch's narration of Cato's demise depicts it as the culmination of Cato's lifelong opposition to tyranny. Pursued by Julius Caesar after Caesar crossed the Rubicon and took power from the senate, Cato retreated to the city of Utica. When news of Caesar's defeat of the other resisters reached Utica, Cato led the community there in deliberating how the three hundred Roman citizens constituting the Utican senate and other Romans of the senatorial rank in Utica would respond. While the three hundred eventually opted to appeal to Caesar for clemency, Cato refused, instead working to ensure the safety of those remaining with him. Ultimately, Cato resolved to take his own life, rather than to continue to live in a world ruled by Caesar. Plutarch's characterization of Cato's self-killing embodies the qualities of a glorious death, and as he does in all of the *Lives*, Plutarch uses this narrative to praise and blame the character of the central figure.⁶³ I will analyze the honor Plutarch ascribes to Cato using the rhetorical categories delineated above, which will establish a helpful point of comparison for John.

a. *Cato's Beneficial Death*

The entire episode of Cato's death is marked by his beneficial provision for others. When news of Caesar's impending arrival reaches Utica, on behalf of the city Cato calms the frantic crowd and leads the deliberations regarding whether to flee out of necessity or to pursue a life of happiness (and perhaps a most glorious death [τὸν εὐκλέεστατον θάνατον]) in fighting Caesar for freedom (59.1-11). He likewise urges the cavalry that had arrived in Utica after escaping from the battle against Caesar to save themselves and others by coming into the well-provisioned city (62.1-5). Cato even protects Scipio and Juba, rival leaders of the opposition against Caesar, by warning them of the danger of capture if they were to come to Utica (62.1). Despite the senators'

removing them from the perspectives and concerns of the first and second centuries CE. Given these developments, we should not be surprised that later Christian utilization of Greek and Roman noble deaths move in slightly different directions. More broadly, on the ways that early Christian interpreters read John allegorically with their own (often intra-Christian) theological and hermeneutical priorities in mind (rather than focusing on John's historical context), see Michael G. Azar, *Exegeting the Jews: The Early Reception of the Johannine Jews* (Bible in Ancient Christianity, 10; Leiden: Brill, 2016).

63. Scaer provides a broad analysis of the rhetoric of noble death employed throughout Plutarch's lives (*Lukan Passion and Praiseworthy Death*, pp. 32-41).

ultimate decision to flee and Cato's own decision to kill himself, Cato vicariously suffers strain and anxiety on behalf of others (ὕπερ ἄλλων) to insure their safety before putting an end to his life (64.4). Cato works out a speech appealing to Caesar's grace (χάριν) on behalf of the vacillating three hundred, even though Cato refuses it himself (64.1-9). Thereupon Cato takes charge of the city, imposing order, providing supplies, stopping the departing cavalry from plundering the people of Utica, and escorting all that he could to the sea for their escape (65.1-12). Even at the point of death his thoughts are for others, pitying those who had fled by sea and been caught in a powerful storm, and sending his agent Butas to the shore to see if anyone there was in need (70.6). In fact, it is only when Butas returns with news that the harbor is quiet that Cato proceeds to take his own life (70.7). In response, the three hundred Utican senators and entire population of Utica gather to praise Cato and his benefits, with one voice proclaiming Cato their benefactor (εὐεργέτην) and savior (σωτήρα [72.1]).⁶⁴

Moreover, Cato's principled stand against tyranny is presented as an attempt to save and benefit Rome herself. Cato's speech to those in Utica positions them as the righteous remnant of Rome, both as a nation that had recovered many times from worse disasters, and one which had not yet fully submitted to control of Caesar (59.5-6). Caesar is cast as an illegal tyrant (66.2) whose regime made engagement in political affairs 'in a manner worthy of Cato' (ἀξίως Κάτωνος) impossible, thereby establishing Cato—and not Caesar—as preserving the 'true' Roman norm. Moreover, Caesar is set forth as the conquered one, vanquished by Cato in nobility and righteousness (καλοῖς καὶ δίκαιοις [64.4]), intimating that in Cato's example true Roman virtue lives on. Finally, Plutarch includes information displaying how Cato's children embody Cato's enduring benefit to Rome. His son gives his life on behalf of freedom (ὕπερ τῆς ἐλευθερίας) in battle against Caesar and Antony, providing a spectacle of virtue (θαῦμα τῆς ἀρετῆς) that amazes his enemies and overcomes earlier periods of shame in his life (73.1-3). Likewise, his daughter, the wife of Caesar-slaying Brutus, dies a noble death filled with courage and wisdom (73.4; cf. *Brut.* 51.4). Cato and his example are thus shown to have enduring benefit to Rome, one that persists beyond him.

64. Earlier (64.2), Cato's friends also laud him as their guardian (κηδεμόνα) and savior (σωτήρα).

b. *Cato's Voluntary Death*

At numerous points, Plutarch emphasizes Cato's Stoic freedom⁶⁵ in refusing to avail himself of opportunities to avoid death, as well as his choice to take his own life. Moreover, Cato exhorts Utica to choose the danger of losing their lives on behalf of freedom (ὑπερ τῆς ἐλευθερίας [59.6-11]), just as he himself did in eschewing the offers to escape Caesar by joining Juba hiding in the mountains or Scipio stationed with his fleet nearby (60.5). He similarly rejects the entreaty to save himself by joining the departing cavalry, eventually persuading them to return to Utica for a day to ensure a safe escape for the senators (63.10-11). He chooses to risk meeting with the three hundred senators (64.5) and offers to plead with Caesar on their behalf, despite the desire of many to capture him as a bargaining chip with Caesar (61.7; 63.8). Nonetheless, he himself spurns begging to be saved by the grace of Caesar (σώζεσθαι χάριτι Καίσαρος), preferring the likelihood of death over appearing to endorse the legitimacy of Caesar to grant clemency (66.1-2).

In addition to refusing to avoid death, Cato actively chooses to end his life as an act of freedom. The text itself foreshadows this decision (64.5), and Cato's argument with a Peripatetic philosopher at his last supper over the Stoic proposition that 'the good man alone is free' makes it obvious to all that Cato had determined to end his life (67.2-4). Cato then retires to his room to read Plato's *Phaedo*, a dialogue depicting Socrates in his last days arguing for his belief in the immortality of the soul.⁶⁶ Upon finishing, Cato requests his sword that had been removed by his concerned family and friends, even injuring his hand while striking a servant who refuses to bring it to him. After receiving it, testing the sharpness of its edge, and proclaiming, 'Now I am my own master' (Νῦν ἐμός εἰμι), Cato rereads Plato's dialogue to steel himself for the task ahead. After a night's sleep, Cato has a doctor bandage his injured hand, and with it Cato proceeds to stab himself in the stomach. Because of the weakened hand, Cato initially fails to kill himself, and a doctor comes to replace his entrails and sew up his wound. Determined, Cato pushes the

65. On the topic of Cato and Stoic suicide, see the series of articles by Miriam Griffin: 'Philosophy, Cato, and Roman Suicide: I', *Greece & Rome* 33 (1986), pp. 64-77; *idem*, 'Philosophy, Cato, and Roman Suicide: II', *Greece & Rome* 33 (1986), pp. 192-202.

66. Plutarch develops an extensive series of parallels between the death of Cato and the death of Socrates. For discussion, see Tim Duff, *Plutarch's Lives: Exploring Virtue and Vice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), pp. 141-45.

doctor away, rips open the wound, and pulls out his intestines with his own hand, finally achieving his own death after this second attempt. Recognizing Cato's sovereign self-determination, the crowd that gathers immediately after his death proclaims that Cato was 'the only man who was free' (τὸν ... μόνον ἐλεύθερον). Despite numerous opportunities for weakness or wavering, Cato remains faithful to his principles, freely living and freely dying—twice!—on his own terms.

c. *Cato's Conquering Death*

Though the view that Cato is a coward who abandoned Italy is mentioned by the three hundred as they debate whether to join with Cato in a fight against Caesar (61.5), the ultimate sense given by Plutarch is that Cato's flight and self-killing is a victory, rather than a defeat. As noted above, Cato freely chooses his fate, so in no way could he be identified as a passive victim. Plutarch's narration of Cato's refusal to pray for Caesar's saving grace states this directly:

Prayer belonged to the conquered, and the craving of grace to those who had done wrong; but for his (Cato's) part he had not only been unvanquished all his life, but was actually a conqueror of Caesar in all that was honorable and just; Caesar was the one who was vanquished and taken; for the hostile acts against his country which he had long denied, were now detected and proven (64.5).⁶⁷

The people of Utica reaffirm this view upon learning of his self-slaughter, proclaiming that Cato was the only one undefeated (μόνον ἀήττητον). For Plutarch's Cato, then, death was the proof of his victory over imperialism, rather than of his defeat.

d. *Cato's Death as the Embodiment of Courage and Righteousness*

The previous section on Cato's refusal to avoid death and his free choice to kill himself also testifies to Cato's courage, for himself and on behalf of others. The calmness with which Cato quiets the panicked crowd (59.1) and fortifies them to risk danger for the sake of freedom (59.2) is emphasized. So powerful is this example of fearlessness (τὸ ἀδέεξ [60.1]) that the people initially respond by saying that it is better to die following him than to save themselves

67. Translation by Bernadotte Perrin, *Plutarch's Lives* (11 vols.; LCL; New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1919), VIII, p. 393.

by betraying courage such as his (ἀρετὴν τσσαύτην [60.1]). Their subsequent fear likewise foregrounds the bravery of Cato in opposing Caesar. They decry, ‘Who are we ... and who is it whose orders we are refusing to obey? Is he not Caesar, into whose hands all the power of Rome has been concentrated? None of us is a Scipio, or a Pompeius, or a Cato’ (61.3). News of Cato’s fearlessness even reaches Caesar, who in response makes haste with his army to Utica (72.1). Finally, Plutarch’s ending discussion of the courage of Cato’s son and daughter (73.3-4) gives witness to the enduring example of Cato’s mettle.

Plutarch also lauds the righteousness and integrity for which Cato was famous in antiquity. Plutarch makes this point by contrasting Cato’s virtue with Caesar’s exceeding unrighteousness (ταῖς μεγίσταις ἀδικίαις [59.6]), with Cato conquering Caesar in goodness (καλοῖς) and righteousness (δικαίοις [64.4]). Cato’s scrupulous refusal to seek Caesar’s pardon is rooted in Cato’s belief that Caesar is transgressing the law (παρανομεῖ) and thus cannot legitimately offer salvation to Cato (66.2). In fact, Cato’s voluntary death unmasks Caesar’s true hostility against fellow Romans (64.5), simultaneously revealing Cato’s righteousness and the illegitimacy of Caesar’s *imperium*. Cato’s model of righteousness is set forth as the standard of political participation, such that to do anything less would be disgraceful (66.3). The fruits of this personal integrity are public knowledge, and Plutarch writes that all the inhabitants perceived and admired Cato’s virtue (τῆς τοῦ Κάτωνος ἀρετῆς) and lack of dishonesty (64.1). As such Cato’s death is the ultimate expression of his unyielding uprightness in his fight against tyranny.

e. The Uniqueness of Cato’s Death

Plutarch grounds the uniqueness of Cato’s death in the singularity of Cato’s character, witnessed via comparison with a disciple and acclamation from the public. Similar to Peter in the Gospel of John (Jn 13.37), Statyllius pledges to imitate Cato in demeanor and deed (65.4-5; 66.4), yet is ultimately unable to do so at the same high level of Cato (73.4). After hearing Cato’s initial exhortation, the nobles of Utica conclude that Cato alone was an invincible leader superior to any fortune (60.1). Conversely, when the 300 senators despair of having the courage (64.5) or power (61.3) of a Cato to face death fearlessly, they nonetheless draw attention to Cato’s extraordinary virtue. It is not surprising, then, that upon Cato’s self-slaughter they laud his singularity as the only free person, the only undefeated one (71.1-2). This uniqueness emerges

from Cato's character, which finds its ultimate expression in his resolve to kill himself not just once, but twice.

f. *Cato's Posthumous Honors and Immortal Glory*

The recognition of the glory in Cato's life and death begins immediately, as the 'whole population' of Utica praises him 'with one voice'. Unlike previously, when the fear of Caesar expelled their regard for honor and for Cato (61.2), the city is now transformed by Cato's death. Their enthusiasm for praising Cato is unchecked by both the fear of the approaching Caesar and the community's domestic strife (72.2), revealing the spirit of Cato at work posthumously in the honorable courage of the community. They express their praise by richly adorning Cato's body and providing a resplendent funeral procession, later even erecting a statue of Cato with his sword drawn at his burial site near the sea (72.2). The city itself then becomes a living monument to the work of Cato, making his concern about the safety of the city its own (72.2). Implicit in Cato's reading of Plato is the immortality of Cato's own soul, which—like the transformation of Utica into the character of Cato—lives on beyond the grave.

g. *Summary of Plutarch's Cato*

Thus, in Plutarch's rendering of Cato's glorious death we find the embodiment of anti-imperial resistance. Cato's self-slaughter affirms his sovereignty, freedom and righteousness while refuting Caesar's power to either save or slay. In his glorious death, Cato functions as the savior of Utica and of republican Rome, free from the threat of Caesar's conquest. He also incarnates the virtue of the senatorial class, and in so doing reveals the true nature of imperial tyranny.

4. *Anti-Imperial Configurations of Glory: Gospel of John*

In ways that show profound rhetorical similarities to Plutarch's *Cato*, the narrative⁶⁸ of the Gospel of John portrays Jesus' death as equally glorious, exhibiting courage, righteousness, benefit to others and even victory despite threats

68. The narrative form, focused as it is on 'showing' in addition to simply 'telling', requires that we look not only at vocabulary and discourses but also at significant events and actions in our rhetorical analysis.

of violence and ultimately Jesus' crucifixion. As such, John's rhetoric imitates and embraces core Roman values, rendering Jesus in a way the broader Roman world could recognize as a type of hybridized Cato-figure. For those readers familiar with the Stoic resisters to imperial tyranny⁶⁹ who may also have been attracted to Judaism,⁷⁰ the Gospel of John's portrayal of Jesus' death may have been particularly compelling. However, the Fourth Gospel also advances a vision of glory that in key areas runs counter to imperial configurations of *virtus*, as well as the anti-imperial forms embodied in Cato. By configuring glory around Jesus' crucifixion, John displaces the sword as the central component of the *Romana mors* and unconventionally replaces it with the cross, an instrument of torture and death used by Rome to shame its adversaries and warn would-be revolutionaries, but used by God to honor those marginalized and persecuted by imperial power.

69. As Goar notes regarding Seneca's use of the legend of Cato to draw strength and resolution in the face of death, 'There must have been many Roman men and women of the upper classes who used the Cato legend in this way, especially in the first century A.D.' (Goar, *Legend of Cato*, p. 41). Ramsey MacMullen connects Jews, Christians and Roman Stoics as employing the same rhetorical tactics in seeking to tear down the 'Roman Establishment' (*Enemies of the Roman Order: Treason, Unrest, and Alienation in the Empire* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966], p. 93). Nicola Denzy's comment that 'The death of the Christian martyr mirrors or refracts the death of the Stoic philosopher, reduplicating its image' ('Facing the Beast: Justin, Christian Martyrdom, and Freedom of the Will', in Tuomas Rasimus, Troels Engberg-Pedersen and Ismo Dunderberg [eds.], *Stoicism in Early Christianity* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010], pp. 176-98 [183]) is relevant to the author and readers of the Gospel of John as well, for whom these Stoic traditions were also available.

70. Martin Goodman, in discussing Domitian's execution of the consul Flavius Clemens and many others on the charge of atheism and drifting into Jewish ways (Cassius Dio 67.14.1-3), suggests that 'some aristocrats saw public adoption of Judaism, like ostentatious Stoic republicanism, as a means to symbolic opposition to imperial rule' ('Trajan and the Origins', p. 18; cf. Martin Goodman, 'The *Fiscus Judaicus* and Attitudes to Judaism', in Jonathan Edmondson, Steve Mason and James Rives [eds.], *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005], pp. 167-78 [175]).

a. *Jesus' Beneficial Death*

Just as Cato's death saves both Utica and the ideal of the Roman Republic, the numerous 'on behalf of' (ὑπέρ) sayings scattered throughout the Gospel amply illustrate the notion that Jesus' death is *beneficial to others*, including both Israel and the cosmos. In John 10, Jesus declares that he is the noble shepherd who lays down his life on behalf of the sheep (ὑπὲρ τῶν προβάτων [10.11; cf. 17.19]).⁷¹ In Jn 11.51, the narrator transforms the high priest's insistence that it is better for one person to die instead of the whole nation (Jn 11.50)⁷² into an ironic prophecy regarding Jesus' beneficial death: 'He prophesied that Jesus was about to die on behalf of the nation' (ἀποθνήσκειν ὑπὲρ τοῦ ἔθνους).⁷³ The next verse specifies that the beneficiaries include not only the Jewish nation, but also the 'dispersed children of God', in order that they may be gathered into one (οὐχ ὑπὲρ τοῦ ἔθνους μόνον ἀλλ' ἵνα καὶ τὰ τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ τὰ διεσκορπισμένα συναγάγῃ εἰς ἓν).⁷⁴ John 6.51 has Jesus stating

71. See Neyrey, 'Noble Shepherd', pp. 267-91. John's distinct reconfiguration of Ezekiel's shepherd discourses (Ezek. 34) especially highlights Jesus' noble death (as the shepherd who lays his life down for the sheep) on behalf of those inside and outside of Israel, which are points not found in Ezekiel (Gary T. Manning, Jr, 'Shepherd, Vine and Bones: The Use of Ezekiel in the Gospel of John', in Andrew Mein and Paul M. Joyce [eds.], *After Ezekiel: Essays on the Reception of a Difficult Prophet* [LHBOTS, 535; New York: T. & T. Clark, 2011], pp. 25-44 [25-36]). This reconfiguration highlights that the author of John not only engages earlier Scripture, but does so in a way to address his contemporary situation, albeit differently from the interpretations of Ezekiel by some of his other Jewish contemporaries (cf. n. 115 below).

72. Note the similar sentiment (discussed above) attributed to Otho. The idea resonates with Jewish concepts as well; Roger David Aus draws intriguing parallels between Jn 11.46-53 and the midrash describing the surrender of Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin, including the notion of one life for others ('The Death of One for All in John 11:45-54 in Light of Judaic Traditions', in *Barabbas and Esther and Other Studies in the Judaic Illumination of Early Christianity* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992], pp. 29-63).

73. The significance of this prophecy is emphasized by the narrator's reference to it in Jn 18.14, where he draws the readers' attention to the prophecy's fulfillment in Jesus' passion.

74. Aristotle declares that an act increases in nobility as its numbers of beneficiaries increase (*Rhet.* 1.9.17). The cosmic benefit of Jesus' act thus argues for its supreme nobility (Neyrey, 'Noble Shepherd', p. 288), as well as its uniqueness.

that his death will benefit the entire world: ‘The bread that I myself shall give is my own flesh, for the life of the world’ (ὕπὲρ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου ζωῆς). Notably, for those attuned to Roman imperial propaganda, this view of Jesus as Savior of the world (cf. 4.42)⁷⁵ critically transforms the imperial vision that Jupiter has promised to Rome that they will be ‘rulers to hold the sea and all the lands beneath their sway’ (Vergil, *Aen.* 1.236), “lords of the world” destined to an “empire without end” (*Aen.* 1.278-83), preserving its scope but rejecting its schemes.

b. *Jesus’ Voluntary*⁷⁶ *Death*

The *voluntary acceptance* or deliberate *choice* for death, so prominent in Cato’s two-fold attack on his ‘too too solid flesh’, also dominates the depiction of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel. In light of the seemingly involuntary nature of crucifixion, John’s insistence on Jesus’ sovereign agency in his approach to death is remarkable, highlighting the influence of the rhetorical categories of noble death. The voluntary character of Jesus’ death is conveyed directly through Jesus’ speech and indirectly through his actions in the narrative. John 10.17-18 states Jesus’ deliberate course of action plainly: ‘For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order that I may receive (λάβω) it back again. No one takes it away from me, but I lay it down by myself (ἀπ’ ἑμαυτοῦ). I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to receive (λαβεῖν) it again. I have received (ἔλαβον) this command from my Father.’ Both aspects of the voluntary character of noble death are present in this statement. Not only does Jesus *accept* the command from his Father, he voluntarily *chooses* to lay down his life according to his own will. The statement ‘No one takes it away from me’ underscores this precise point. Jesus is very much the master of his own destiny in John, to the extent that nothing

75. For discussion of this title (an atypical designation in first-century Jewish or Samaritan nomenclature) and its possible reference to Samaritan colonial experience, see Craig R. Koester, “‘The Savior of the World’ (John 4:42)”, *JBL* 109 (1990), pp. 665-80.

76. Notably, this expression of voluntary death differs from the later definition of voluntary martyrdom in the early church; on the latter topic and its prevalence, see G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, ‘Voluntary Martyrdom in the Early Church’, in *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 153-200.

external to Jesus' choice to obey the Father can claim even partial responsibility for Jesus' death.

The embrace of impending death expressed in the noble shepherd discourse (Jn 10.1-18) plays itself out on a grand scale in the passion narrative. Jesus' authority predominates throughout this final section, giving narrative confirmation to the notion that 'No one takes my life away from me'. Quite unlike Jesus' deep distress and prayer for God to remove his cup of suffering in Mk 14.32-36, John's Jesus rejects this posture out of hand, proclaiming 'And what should I say, "Father, save me from this hour"? No, it is for this reason I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name!' (Jn 12.27-28). Jesus subsequently orchestrates his own betrayal, identifying Judas and commanding the quick completion of his evil task (Jn 13.21-28). Though Judas ostensibly serves as the informant (*delator*) who betrays Jesus to Rome,⁷⁷ John makes clear that it is Jesus who controls the arrest. Rather than cowering in fear, attempting to avoid capture or even waiting passively to be identified,⁷⁸ Jesus boldly identifies himself at his arrest (Jn 18.1-4), even playing the role of interrogator vis-à-vis his captors: 'Jesus, knowing everything that was coming upon him, went out and said to them, "Whom are you seeking?"',⁷⁹ The statement that Jesus acts in full knowledge of what is to come removes any possibility for the reader to believe that Jesus has inadvertently stumbled into these circumstances. The Johannine Jesus additionally rejects attempts to keep him from laying down his life, again appealing to its divine sanction, saying to Peter, 'Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given to me?' (Jn 18.11). Moreover, when Pilate tries to proclaim his power to crucify Jesus (Jn 19.11), Jesus denies Pilate any autonomous authority over him to compel his death, insisting that it ultimately derives from God above (Jn 19.12), thereby rendering Jesus' crucifixion a voluntarily obedient act of self-devotion.⁸⁰ Finally, even at the point of his

77. Steven H. Rutledge, *Imperial Inquisitions: Prosecutors and Informants from Tiberius to Domitian* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 1.

78. Judas's kiss of identification (Mt. 26.48-49; Mk 14.44-45; Lk. 22.47-48) is omitted in John.

79. Droge and Tabor, *Noble Death*, p. 118.

80. As Keener notes, 'Jesus thus surrendered himself willingly, not so much to Pilate as to his own Father's plan (10:18; 18:11),' connecting this willingness to face death with courage and virtue expressed in Greek and Roman texts (Keener, *Gospel of John*, II, p. 1127).

death Jesus remains the agent in control, proclaiming ‘It is finished’, bowing his head and handing over his spirit (Jn 19.30). The phrase ‘handed over the/his spirit’ (παρέδωκεν τὸ πνεῦμα) in Jn 19.30 is a virtually unparalleled way to speak of dying,⁸¹ one that highlights Jesus’ active and voluntary agency in a way quite distinct from other possible words and phrases (e.g. ‘he was killed’, ‘he died’, ‘he passed away’).⁸² John’s grammar reinforces this agency, for Jesus remains the subject of the active verbs in this verse: rather than being a helpless victim, ‘Jesus pulls death upon himself’.⁸³

Against the militaristic configuration of honor lauded by Roman culture, Jesus’ dismissal of Peter’s retaliatory sword and embrace of the divinely-authorized way of the cross is striking. As we saw above, Roman imperialism lauded military bravery, and as Plutarch’s narration of Cato’s death illustrates, the sword was the most honorable mode of self-slaughter and an essential component in the *Romana mors*. Other modes of self-slaughter such as hanging—and especially crucifixion—were conventionally viewed as shameful, rather than glorious.⁸⁴ In condemning Peter’s martial response and glorifying Jesus’ crucifixion, the Gospel of John uses the rhetoric of glorious death to invert the violent, militaristic orientation of Roman honor (shared by emperor and republican alike) and replace it with the anti-violent power of sacrificial devotion.

c. *Jesus’ Conquering Death*

This depiction of Jesus’ sovereign control of every aspect of his arrest, trial and death illustrates yet another component of noble death rhetoric; namely, *dying unvanquished* and *conquering in death*. By insisting that no one takes his life away from him (Jn 10.18), Jesus also shows that he is completely unvanquished, either in death or in the events leading up to death. John 1.5

81. Droge and Tabor assert that this is the first time in Greek literature that *παρέδωκεν τὸ πνεῦμα* is used to indicate an individual’s death (*Noble Death*, p. 119).

82. As Droge and Tabor state, ‘What did the author of the Fourth Gospel intend by this unusual expression? Above all, he wished to stress the voluntary nature of Jesus’ death’ (*Noble Death*, p. 119).

83. Gary Burge, *The Anointed Community: The Holy Spirit in the Johannine Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 134 n. 75.

84. For a catalogue and discussion of various modes of self-killing, see Anton J.L. van Hooff, *From Autothanasia to Suicide: Self-Killing in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 40-78.

foreshadows this theme, stating ‘The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it’ (καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν).⁸⁵ This assertion becomes manifest in Jesus’ triumph over Rome’s military power in Jn 18.3, where an entire cohort⁸⁶ of Roman soldiers falls to the ground at Jesus’ self-identification evoking the divine name ‘I am’ (Jn 18.5; cf. Exod. 3.14 LXX).⁸⁷ The inability of Roman political power to overcome Jesus is revealed in the dialogue with Pilate. When Pilate tells Jesus, ‘Don’t you realize I have the authority either to free you or to crucify you?’ (19.10), Jesus responds, ‘You would have no power over me, if it were not given to you from above’ (19.11), underscoring the idea that Jesus’ death does not prove the supremacy of Roman power, human or divine.⁸⁸ Ultimately, even Satan⁸⁹ has no power over John’s Jesus. Jesus states in Jn 14.30-31,

85. The *double entendre* of καταλαμβάνω (‘overcome, comprehend’) is especially *à propos* in light of the paradoxical association of Jesus’ conquering over Satan with his death on the cross (see below).

86. A cohort typically consisted of 6 ‘centuries’ of roughly 80–100 men, each led by a centurion. Some 480–600 Roman soldiers are thus imagined, in addition to the officers with the chief priests and Pharisees. Alternatively, *σπεῖραν* here could refer to the Roman *manipulus* (*LSJ*, s.v.), which consisted of 2 centuries (160–200 men). In either scenario Jesus is overwhelmingly confronted by Roman military force.

87. See Charles A. Gieschen, ‘The Divine Name that the Son Shares with the Father in the Gospel of John’, in Benjamin E. Reynolds and Gabriele Boccaccini (eds.), *Reading the Gospel of John’s Christology as Jewish Messianism* (Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity, 106; Leiden: Brill, 2018), pp. 387-410 (405-407); Hellen Mardaga, ‘The Meaning and Function of the Threefold Repetition in Jn 18:5-6, 8: The Fulfillment of Jesus’ Protecting Love on the Eve of His Death’, in G. van Belle (ed.), *The Death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (BETL, 200; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005), pp. 761-68 (767). Though not every statement of the absolute ‘I am’ (without predicate) in John is a statement of the divine name (e.g. Jn 9.9), a similar example is found in Jn 8.58, where Jesus’ ‘I am’ statement is treated as blasphemy (with an attempted stoning) by his interlocutors.

88. Tom Thatcher, *Greater than Caesar: Christology and Empire in the Fourth Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), pp. 80-81.

89. Thatcher argues that ‘ruler of this world’ refers to the Roman emperor (*Greater than Caesar*, pp. 116-22), whereas Graham Twelftree reads it as referring to Satan (‘Exorcisms in the Fourth Gospel and the Synoptics’, in Robert T. Fortna and Tom Thatcher [eds.], *Jesus in Johannine Tradition* [Louisville: Westminster

‘The ruler of the world is coming, and he has no hold on me (ἐν ἐμοὶ οὐκ ἔχει οὐδέν), but rather just as the Father has commanded to me, in the same manner I act,’⁹⁰ making clear that Jesus’ march to his death is testimony to Jesus following the course of action prescribed by God,⁹¹ rather than evidence of the sovereignty of Satan or Rome over Jesus.

Beyond remaining unvanquished, Jesus’ death is also described as the means by which the ruler of this world is driven out,⁹² an example of *conquering in death*. Jesus declares in Jn 12.31-32, ‘Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the ruler of the world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted from the earth, I will draw all to myself.’ The narrator in Jn 12.32 specifically associates this judgment with Jesus’ death, despite the use of the phrase ‘when I am lifted from the earth’ (ἐὰν ὑψωθῶ ἐκ τῆς γῆς), which would otherwise seem to be a reference to resurrection and glorification (cf. Jn 12.28). Rather, in Jn 12.33 being ‘lifted up’ indicates ‘by what sort of death Jesus was destined to die’ (ποιῶ θανάτῳ ἡμελλεν ἀποθνήσκειν): the lifting up on the cross (cf. Jn 3.14; 8.28). Cato’s victory over Caesar by means of self-slaughter provides a similar example of this notion of conquering the ruler of the world by means of one’s death, and yet it also reveals the subversive peculiarity of John’s insistence that it is Jesus’ crucifixion that conquers (and not a glorious death in battle or the Roman death of a Cato).

Chapter 16 concludes with another instance of Jesus proclaiming his sovereignty over Satan’s—and Rome’s—realm, declaring ‘I have conquered the world!’ (ἐγὼ νενίκηκα τὸν κόσμον [Jn 16.33]).⁹³ Like other conquering

John Knox Press, 2001], pp. 135-43). I take the ambiguity as reference to both, with ultimate power attributed to Satan; see my discussion below.

90. The NRSV emphasizes this dimension of power: ‘He has no power over me’.

91. The role of Satan in prompting Jesus’ death (Jn 13.2, 27) clarifies that while Jesus’ non-violent resistance unto death accords with God’s will (cf. 18.11), the act of killing Jesus—while allowed by God to occur—is nonetheless an act of evil (as the condemnation of Pilate and Judas in Jn 19.11 indicates).

92. On this theme, see Judith L. Kovacs, “‘Now Shall the Ruler of This World Be Driven Out’: Jesus’ Death as Cosmic Battle in John 12:20-36”, *JBL* 114 (1995), pp. 227-47.

93. The idea of conquering the evil one (νενικήκατε τὸν πονηρόν) and conquering the world (ὁ νικῶν τὸν κόσμον) through faith in the Son of God is also prominent in 1

leaders, Jesus also offers his troubled disciples peace, but one unlike the competing visions of peace and freedom offered by imperial Rome or Jewish revolutionaries (cf. 14.27). This distinctive offer is made possible by how John defines the enemy who is conquered. The overlapping realms of Satan and Rome in Johannine thought offer a subtle but important difference between Jesus' conquering and Cato's conquering. The true and ultimate adversary from the Johannine perspective is neither Rome nor antagonistic fellow Jews (all of whom despite their current hostility remain under the purview of divine love [cf. Jn 3.16-17]), but rather Satan. Despite initial appearances, this overlapping spiritual framework does not consign these human antagonists to a state of ontological evil,⁹⁴ but rather politically and ideologically redefines the conflict in a way that ultimately sublimates the binomial 'us' vs. 'them' dimension among the humans in the drama, revealing them to be victims of a deeper power of evil. This reframing creates a 'third space' of unity (10.16) grounded in the cruciform sovereignty of God over the evil power of violence that enslaves zealous Jews (cf. Jn 8.39-44), Romans (19.1-3), and even disciples (Judas [13.2]; Peter [18.10-11]). Additionally, this spiritual conquering of Satan by means of Jesus' life and death (16.33) emphasizes a realized eschatology that displaces any 'revenge fantasy'⁹⁵ of God's future apocalyptic wrath (such as found in Revelation), effectively arguing against visions of a coercive, hegemonic Christian imperialism undergirded by appeals to divine sanction.⁹⁶ Here the near-total omission of 'Kingdom of God' language in John gains its full ideological significance: divine rule contains none of the violent imperialism associated with the term 'kingdom' (cf. Jn 18.36).

John (2.13, 14; 4.4; 5.4, 5), again highlighting the paradigmatic nature of Jesus' faithfulness throughout the Johannine corpus.

94. The Johannine conception of human renewal (being 'born from above' [Jn 3.3-8]) insists that one's human history or paternity does not determine one's identity, for the Spirit offers a new identity that transforms the individual into a child of God (1.12-13). Hence, being characterized as the 'offspring of the Devil' functions to condemn the acts of deceit and violence (8.44) rather than to consign the actors to embodying an immutable evil 'nature'. The restoration of Peter (21.15-19) despite his evil act of violence (18.10-11) and ultimate faithlessness (18.15-27) underscores this transformative thrust.

95. This phrase is from Thatcher, *Greater than Caesar*, p. 134.

96. Including the 'death sentence for Rome', the omission of which is lamented by Moore, 'Representing Empire', p. 74.

d. *Jesus' Death as the Embodiment of Righteousness and Courage*

Just as Cato's death faithfully expresses his uncompromising *righteousness* and unflinching *courage*, so too does Jesus' death in John. While ancient definitions of justice and righteousness were not uniform in content or emphasis, common characteristics often included notions of piety toward the gods, as well as dutiful service to the city and to parents.⁹⁷ Jesus displays these traits as well, although in the case of the Fourth Gospel, Jesus' filial piety is an expression both of duty to parents and of duty to God.⁹⁸ The sending formulas (*πέμπω, ἀποστέλλω*) associated with Jesus' coming,⁹⁹ especially when combined with a denial that Jesus is doing his own will,¹⁰⁰ not only stylize Jesus as a prophet, but also emphasize his pious obedience to God and Father.

Jesus' virtuous duty to his *ethnos* becomes apparent in several ways, especially when considered from the perspective of a non-Jew. The benefit that Jesus' death has for his country (Jn 10.11, 15; 11.51 [cf. 4.22]) exemplifies Jesus' *devotio*-esque¹⁰¹ devotion to his ἔθνος. Though strongly contested by Jesus' opponents, Jesus is also represented as embodying the *mos maiorum*, or ancestral custom, of the Jews. Moses is claimed as one who testifies to

97. One definition in the progymnastic tradition (Menander, *Rhet.* 1.361.17-25) reads thusly: 'The parts of justice (*δικαιοσύνη*) are piety, fair dealing, and reverence: piety toward the gods, fair dealing towards men, reverence toward the departed.' See also Ps. Aristotle, *Virt. vit.* 5.2-3; Cicero, *Inv.* 2.160-61 (cited in Neyrey, 'Noble Shepherd', p. 282).

98. At least in the case of Jesus' Father. In terms of Jesus' mother, the 'adoption' scene at the cross (Jn 19.26-27) exemplifies Jesus' dutiful provision for his mother's care and honor, among other things (see Jerome H. Neyrey, 'Despising the Shame of the Cross: Honor and Shame in the Johannine Passion Narrative', *Semeia* 68 [1994], pp. 113-37 [131]).

99. Jn 4.34; 5.23, 24, 30, 36, 37, 38; 6.29, 38, 39, 44, 57; 7.16, 18, 28, 29, 33; 8.16, 18, 26, 29, 42; 9.4; 10.36; 11.3, 42; 12.44, 45, 49; 13.16, 20; 14.24; 15.21; 16.5; 17.3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25; 20.21.

100. Jn 5.30; 6.38; 7.16; 8.42; 12.49; 13.16; 14.24.

101. For the Roman practice of *devotio*, see H.S. Versnel, 'Two Types of Roman Devotio', *Mnemosyne* 29 (1976), pp. 365-410; *idem*, 'Polycrates and his Ring: Two Neglected Aspects', *Studi Storico-Religiosi* 1 (1977), pp. 25-37; *idem*, 'Self-Sacrifice, Compensation and the Anonymous Gods', in O. Reverdin and B. Grange (eds.), *Le sacrifice dans l'antiquité* (Entretiens sur l'Antiquité Classique, 27; Geneva: Hardt, 1981), pp. 135-85; Mary Beard, John North and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome*. Volume 1. *A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 35-36.

Jesus (Jn 8.45-46), as does Abraham (Jn 8.56) and Isaiah (12.37-41). The everlasting authority of Scripture is also affirmed (Jn 10.35), and it is repeatedly cited in support of Jesus.¹⁰² Jesus is also presented as guiltless with respect to his obedience to the law, both Jewish (Jn 8.46; 18.23) and Roman (Jn 18.38; 19.4, 6).¹⁰³ Jesus' pious duty toward God¹⁰⁴ is further exemplified by his faithful observance of various Jewish festivals (Passover, Booths and Hanukkah),¹⁰⁵ representing in his person the interpretive key and social thrust of their symbolic significance.¹⁰⁶ Though strongly protested by his

102. Jn 2.17, 22; 6.32-35, 45; 10.34; 12.13-15, 38, 40; 13.18; 15.25; 17.12; 19.24, 28, 36, 37. On the social function of Scripture in John, see Jaime Clark-Soles, *Scripture Cannot be Broken: The Social Function of the Use of Scripture in the Fourth Gospel* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

103. This point is emphasized ironically through the disobedience to the law exhibited by Jesus' opponents (e.g. Jn 18.31, which has Jesus' opponents asserting that they are not permitted to put anyone to death [cf. 7.19], despite the repeated attempts in the narrative to do just that [Jn 5.18; 7.1, 25; 8.59; 10.31-33; 11.8, 53; 12.10]).

104. While the object of this piety is the one God of Israel (cf. Jn 5.44; 17.3), its form (duty to *ethnos*, ancestral customs, festival celebrations) takes shape in many ways comparable to the piety affirmed by Rome. While some Jewish practices were singled out for critique (e.g. Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.2-5), imperial Rome's earlier period of tolerance for Jews before the first Jewish War suggests that Rome was not universally anti-Jewish (see Martin Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations* [New York: Vintage, 2007], pp. 366-76), and even after the war Josephus's encomium for his people celebrates values he perceives to be shared by Jews and Romans (inviolable piety, obedience to laws, harmony with one another, despising death [*Apion* 2.42]), despite hostilities under the Flavians. The example of Josephus illustrates the plausibility of John's approach, regardless of its ultimate receptivity by Romans.

105. Passover: Jn 2.13, 23; 4.45; 6.4; 11.55; 12.1, 12, 20; 13.1, 29; 18.28, 39; 19.14; Sukkoth: Jn 7.1-4, 37; Hanukkah: Jn 10.22. There is also an unnamed festival mentioned in Jn 5.1.

106. See Gale A. Yee, *Jewish Feasts and the Gospel of John* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1989). I understand Jesus' participation as the interpretive key that points to the symbolic significance and proper observance of the festivals, rather than their 'replacement', as Yee argues. Given the role that the major festivals, especially Passover, played in providing a climate conducive to fomenting violent rebellion (e.g. Josephus, *War* 2.10-13 [Passover], 2.42-54 [Pentecost]), John's portrayal of Jesus' non-violent vision of righteous faithfulness constitutes a significant component of Jesus' 'fulfillment' of these festivals. We see a similar attempt to define the proper

interlocutors (Jn 5.9-18), the Evangelist presents Jesus as honoring the Sabbath, though in a way that reveals a distinctive understanding of God and Torah (7.21-24). Even Jesus' burial is in accordance with Jewish burial customs (Jn 19.40), showing that Jesus' fidelity to the national ethos extends beyond his life, even including his burial.

Jesus' devotion to and care for his disciples (Jn 10.3-6, 14-16, 27-28; chs. 14-17; 18.9), dramatically presented in his raising of Lazarus (Jn 11.43-44),¹⁰⁷ illustrates his 'just duty' toward them, and thus similarly falls into this category of Jesus' acts of justice.¹⁰⁸ Jesus' devotion, however, goes beyond his own disciples and nation, extending to the 'other sheep' mentioned in Jn 10.16 and the 'dispersed children of God' mentioned in Jn 11.52, all of whom Jesus will draw to himself when he is 'lifted up' on the cross (Jn 12.32-33). This expression of justice that benefits the whole world goes beyond the highest norms of virtue, making it 'unspeakably honorable', in the words of Neyrey.¹⁰⁹

Unlike Cato's death, the Gospel of John emphasizes that Jesus' death goes beyond 'just duty', but rather embodies the depth of his love.¹¹⁰ Whereas Cato's principles motivate and bring about his self-slaughter, Jesus' love motivates and brings about his laying down of his life. Jesus risks his life in returning to Judea to raise Lazarus (such that Thomas remarks that the disciples should also go 'to die with him' [Jn 11.16]), explicitly out of love for Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha (11.5, 36). Contrary to the Synoptics, it is this daring act of love for Lazarus (and not the Temple demonstration) that ultimately precipitates the chief priests' plot against Jesus' life, for they fear the popular power this display of love garners for Jesus (12.9-11)—and

observance of Torah and the Jewish festivals, especially Hanukkah, in *4 Maccabees* (see David A. DeSilva, *4 Maccabees* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998], pp. 24-25).

107. Neyrey, 'Noble Shepherd', p. 287.

108. Neyrey, 'Noble Shepherd', p. 282.

109. Neyrey, 'Noble Shepherd', p. 288.

110. For a study of the theme throughout the Johannine literature, see Allen Dwight Callahan, *A Love Supreme: The History of the Johannine Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005). More broadly, on the distinctiveness of love for the early Jesus movement as a whole, see Larry W. Hurtado, *Destroyer of the Gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), pp. 62-66.

indeed it culminates in the crowd's messianic acclaim for Jesus (12.12-15). The opening of the passion narrative continues this theme, stating that Jesus loved his own to the end (13.1). Jesus' commandment at his last meal with his disciples is that they should love another just as (*καθὼς*) he has loved them, with love being the hallmark of following Jesus (13.34-35). John 15.13 connects this love specifically with laying down one's life: 'Greater love has no one than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.'¹¹¹ Even God's love is connected to Jesus' love and his laying down of his life. John 10.17 states that Jesus' laying down of his life is the reason that his Father loves him. John 15.9 insists that Jesus has loved his disciples in the same manner as God's love for him, and this model of love undergirds the command for the disciples to love one another to the point of laying down their lives for each other. Rather than a propitiation of the wrath of God or a ransom to Satan, Jesus' death embodies divine love, and it is intended to bring in his followers the fullness of joy (15.11) and life (10.10).

Overall, Jesus' righteousness and love gain prominence against the backdrop of the unrighteousness of the Roman world. John 16.11 highlights this comparison in asserting that the Paraclete will prove the world wrong (*ἐλέγξει*) 'concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned' (*περὶ δὲ κρίσεως, ὅτι ὁ ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου τούτου κέκριται*).¹¹² The verse parallels the idea of the judgment of the ruler of the world by means of

111. While some emphasize the difference between this statement and the synoptic teaching of love for enemies (Mt. 5.24; Lk. 6.27), we have already seen in the analysis of the beneficial qualities of Jesus' death that the whole world (enemies included) is the beneficiary of Jesus' death and the object of God's love (3.16); even Judas has his feet washed by Jesus (13.10-11). For an overview and analysis of the debate, see David Rensberger, 'Love for One Another and Love for Enemies in the Gospel of John', in Willard M. Swartley (ed.), *The Love of Enemy and Nonretaliation in the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), pp. 297-313.

112. The opponents of Jesus attempt to 'convict' (*ἐλέγχει*) Jesus of sin in Jn 8.46, which this latter passage effectively turns on its head (Kovacs, 'Jesus' Death as Cosmic Battle', p. 231). This connection can be extended. The judgment mentioned in Jn 16.11 has not occurred by means of violence, such as that attempted by Jesus' adversaries in Jn 8.59 and Jesus' disciple Peter in Jn 18.10-11, but rather by non-retaliatory prophetic condemnation of murderous violence rooted in evil (cf. Jn 8.44; 18.11b). The symbolic importance of the Roman military cohort falling to the ground at Jesus' self-identification (18.3-6) also should not be dismissed.

Jesus' death in Jn 12.31-33 (as discussed above), but in 16.11 the action specified is condemnation, rather than conquering. Similarly, Jesus condemns Pilate's actions as sinful (Jn 19.11b), and unlike the chief priests who proclaim Caesar as their king (Jn 19.15), Jesus shows himself to be no friend of the emperor (cf. Jn 19.12) by undermining Rome's authority (Jn 19.11a) and refusing Pilate's offer of grace in releasing him (Jn 19.10-11), not unlike Cato's refusal to recognize Caesar's legitimacy by accepting his offer of clemency. These passages highlight the ethical issues that emerge from Jesus' crucifixion. Just as Cato's noble death in support of his republican vision of Rome condemns the imperial lawlessness of Caesar by unmasking and revealing Caesar's hostility to all, so too does Jesus' innocent death condemn the hegemonic imperialism of Rome by revealing to the world the brutality, immorality and injustice of imperial power.¹¹³

In addition to just duty, texts honoring the noble deaths of national soldiers made much of the virtue of *courage* in the face of danger, often through the comparison between heroes and cowards.¹¹⁴ Jesus' courage is illustrated narratively in several passages. As Neyrey has shown, the comparison between the 'noble' shepherd who lays down his life and the hireling who flees from the wolf (Jn 10.11-14) employs rhetoric that honors the shepherd's courage while shaming the self-saving cowardice of the hireling.¹¹⁵ Again, this ideal courage is later seen fulfilled in Jesus' passion. John's depiction of Jesus carrying the cross completely unassisted (contra Mk 15.21) testifies in part to Jesus' physical and mental strength in the midst of extreme duress, which are key components to any definition of bravery. The betrayal (Jn 13.2, 11, 21-27) and abandonment (Jn 13.33-38; 18.15-18, 25-27) by Jesus' own disciples, when combined with the murderous plots of the ruling council (Jn 11.47-53) and the violent crowd (Jn 19.6, 15), reveal the full extent of Jesus' undaunted courage in his march to the cross. Unlike some of the priests and leaders who

113. See Jennifer A. Glancy, 'Torture: Flesh, Truth and the Fourth Gospel', *BibInt* 13.2 (2005), pp. 107-36.

114. E.g. Thucydides, *Hist.* 2.43.2; see Neyrey, 'Noble Shepherd', pp. 272-73, 281.

115. Neyrey, 'Noble Shepherd', p. 281. On John's use of shepherd imagery from Ezek. 34 and how it differs ideologically from similar discourse employed in the 'Animal Apocalypse' in *1 En.* 85-90 and *Pss. Sol.* 17, see Manning, 'Shepherd, Vine and Bones', pp. 25-36. Whereas John expands the sheepfold to include Jews and Gentiles, the latter two promote enmity and exclusion.

fled Jerusalem as soon as the war with Rome was certain (cf. Josephus, *War* 2.556), as we have already noted Jesus in John faces down the cohort of armed Roman soldiers (Jn 18.3, 6), all the while rejecting reliance upon military force (Jn 18.10-11, 36). The fact that Jesus' opponent is ultimately Satan 'serves as grounds for even greater praise of Jesus because he dies fighting the ultimate foe'.¹¹⁶ The supremacy of Jesus' courage thus becomes part of the grounds for exhorting the disciples themselves to be courageous (Jn 14.1, 27; 16.33).

e. The Uniqueness of Jesus' Death

The *uniqueness* of Jesus' death is expressed in a couple of ways. Within the narrative, Jesus alone is arrested and put to death; in contrast, the violent Peter remains free, despite his aggression, for where Jesus is going, Peter cannot follow now (Jn 13.36).¹¹⁷ The almost total omission of John the Baptist's martyrdom also serves to keep the spotlight focused on Jesus' death. More broadly, both the trans-worldly stature of Jesus' foe and the cosmic scope of Jesus' beneficial death also make it incomparable to other claimants. Ultimately, Jesus' singular status as the unique Son (τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ [Jn 3.16; cf. 1.14, 18; 3.18]) sets his death apart from all others in John. The singularity of Jesus' death becomes even more apparent within the framework of glorious death traditions,¹¹⁸ none of which exalt a figure who kills himself

116. Neyrey, 'Noble Shepherd', p. 282.

117. John Paul Heil notes, 'That Peter, despite his violent assault of the high priest's servant (18:10), has not been arrested along with Jesus underlines the uniqueness of Jesus as the one and only sacrificial victim. Only the "one man," Jesus, not Peter also, will die for the people' ('Jesus as the Unique High Priest in the Gospel of John', *CBQ* 57 [1995], pp. 729-45 [737]). Though Peter's predicted crucifixion is mentioned in Jn 21.18-19, it follows the model of Jesus as the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep (Jn 10.11) in accordance with Jesus' earlier commands that his followers should lay down their lives in love for one another (Jn 15.12-14; cf. 13.31-38, as noted by van Belle, 'Peter as Martyr', p. 307).

118. This insight also holds within a more narrowly Jewish framework, especially when Jesus' crucifixion is contextualized within the debates about the proper type of atoning martyrdom for God and the law, exemplified in the various recastings of the Maccabean heritage found in 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees and 4 Maccabees. The Evangelist's assertion that Jesus is the resurrection (11.25), that is, the embodiment of the fidelity-unto-death that God endorses and vindicates (over against the various Maccabean pieties anticipating vindication via resurrection), likewise participates in

by crucifixion. Despite the many similarities between John's Jesus and Plutarch's Cato, in the manner of their deaths they differ profoundly, and the Johannine version is sharply divergent from the many other noble death traditions.

f. *The Posthumous Honor and Immortal Glory of Jesus' Death*

Like Cato, Jesus' death also receives *posthumous honors* and *glory*. For Jesus, the resurrection is the consummate posthumous honor and vindication by God, and Jesus himself proclaims 'I am the resurrection' (Jn 11.25). However, even before the resurrection, Jesus' march to death is his glory.¹¹⁹ As we see in John 12, Jesus' glorification is associated with the type of death (ποίη θανάτω) Jesus was to die, his being 'lifted up' on a cross (Jn 12.28, 32-33; cf. 18.32). Despite the profound worldly shame and humiliation inherent in crucifixion—an act described by one in antiquity as the most vile form of death¹²⁰—in the Johannine passion account Jesus not only maintains his honor, but also actually gains in honor through his noble, voluntary death.¹²¹ The fact that Jesus' resurrection body preserves the marks of the crucifixion (Jn 20.25-28) demonstrates that the resurrection ratifies the crucifixion and retains its peculiar cruciform 'glory', rather than leaving it behind.

Within its historical context, John's presentation employs the rhetoric of noble death but inverts its traditional content, for while even Cato has the honor of a Roman death by sword, Jesus' mode of execution—crucifixion—was typically reserved for criminals and insurrectionists.¹²² Like Cato's double-edged sword, John's transformation of the rhetoric of glory works in two directions. To Rome, John turns the brutal torture inflicted by Rome against the perpetrators, redeploying the very rhetoric of praise used to laud imperial hegemony to honor one who refused to submit (and to shame those who

these debates over the proper type of martyrdom (cf. nn. 53 and 55 above). Here especially the singularity of Jesus' martyrdom comes to the fore, as does its religio-political edge.

119. See Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), pp. 58-61.

120. In Origen's commentary on Mt. 27.22, crucifixion is characterized as *mors turpissima crucis*, the 'most vile death of the cross'; cf. Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), pp. 22-32.

121. See Neyrey, 'Despising the Shame of the Cross', pp. 113-37.

122. See Hengel, *Crucifixion*, pp. 46-63.

crucified Jesus). Moreover, to the Johannine auditors this redefinition of glory also functions as a paradigm of faithfulness and source of comfort for a community facing threats of martyrdom as a result of its confession of Christ (Jn 16.2), in ways not dissimilar to the role that Cato's example played for Stoic martyrs under Nero.

Conclusion

In light of this analysis of the glorious deaths of Plutarch's Cato and John's Jesus, what can be said about the Fourth Gospel's relationship to Roman imperialism? Between the binary of acceptance or rejection,¹²³ the portrayal of Jesus' glorious death in John is an excellent example of hybridity, an ideological negotiation that is at once enmeshed in and critical of the values embedded within the rhetoric of honor and shame. It offers a contextualization of Jesus that situates itself within the ideological polyphony of imperial and anti-imperial noble deaths, yet remains distinct from them via its cruciform vision of glory. The rhetorical casting of Jesus' noble death in John would have found resonance with other configurations of anti-imperial rhetoric,¹²⁴

123. Roman perspectives often viewed non-Latin/Greek speakers with peculiar customs as barbarians who were fundamentally different from them (see P.S. Wells, 'The Barbarians Speak: How the Conquered Peoples Shaped Roman Europe', in Craig B. Champion [ed.], *Roman Imperialism: Readings and Sources* [Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004], pp. 243-58 [244]), and Jews especially faced slander for their unique practices (e.g. Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.2-5). To counter this possibility, John's Gospel uses the language and rhetoric of the conqueror to elevate the conquered to an equal level.

124. Though the focus of this paper is Rome, the rhetorical framework employed could likewise appeal to Hellenes (cf. Jn 12.20-32), inasmuch as it is rooted in the guidelines set forth by Aristotle. As Harker notes, the Second Sophistic (emerging after Nero and continuing through 230 CE) is characterized by 'Greek hostility, alienation and ambivalence towards Rome', including authors such as Plutarch and Dio Chrysostom, as well as the anti-Roman Alexandrian martyr narratives (Andrew Harker, *Loyalty and Dissidence in Roman Egypt: The Case of the Acta Alexandrinorum* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008], pp. 165, 167-72). On the similarities between the Gospels and the *Acta Alexandrinorum*, see Harker, *Loyalty and Dissidence*, pp. 157-58. These similarities would have been particularly salient for the Egyptian context of the earliest known readers of John for which we

especially its portrayal of Jesus' death as an act of willful freedom, a laying down of life for others and in defiance of the violent power wielded by Roman and Jewish officials.¹²⁵ By utilizing rhetorical patterns for ascribing glory, John's Gospel enunciates a hybridized cultural identity. Steve Weitzman's analysis of Josephus's portrayals of Jewish 'noble deaths' provides a relevant corollary equally applicable to John:

Within the world that Josephus describes in his narratives, many Jews, like the Romans, opt for death as a way to resist imperial rule, turning to it as a last resort when there was no other way to preserve their freedom or traditions ... Voluntary death was not a site of contestation or struggle between Jews and Romans; to the contrary, it reflected a shared ethos—an uncompromising love of freedom and tradition, and a noble contempt for death that transcended the differences between Jews and Romans and could even reconcile one to the other.¹²⁶

Mutatis mutandis, much of the same could be said of John, as this rhetorical analysis has suggested.

have material evidence (i.e., P⁵², discovered in Egypt). On the Fourth Gospel in Egypt, see Juan Chapa, 'The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Gospel of John in Egypt', *VC* 64 (2010), pp. 327-52).

125. To be sure, other critics of imperial tyranny would nonetheless likely not have been favorable to John's portrayal of Jesus' noble death. The Roman historian Tacitus, for example, while critical of the excesses of Flavian imperial power as expressed in the execution of Stoic critics (cf. *Agr.* 1-2), was nonetheless not wholly satisfied with the 'useless' and 'ostentatious' self-slaughter promoted by the same Stoics (*Agr.* 42.3-4), preferring a path of obedience-with-activity embodied by his father-in-law Agricola (see Dylan Sailor, *Writing and Empire in Tacitus* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008], pp. 6-33, 115-18). Of course, the reigns of Nerva, Trajan and Hadrian improved conditions significantly from the terror of the Flavian era, so for many elite Romans the need for Stoic-type resistance was much dissipated; however, ongoing hostility to the Jews under these reigns (cf. Goodman, 'Trajan and the Origins', pp. 3-29) would have made the model of Jesus in John still relevant to Jews (including Jewish citizens of Rome) well into the second century CE. Roman imperial pressures on Hellenes (during the Second Sophistic) and other subject people groups would have also made them potentially receptive to perspectives critical of Roman imperialism.

126. Steve Weitzman, 'Josephus on How to Survive Martyrdom', *JJS* 55 (2004), pp. 230-45.

As we have seen, John's rhetorical subversion of Roman imperialism does not inherently make him anti-Roman, any more than Cato's critique did, and though John uses the master's rhetorical tools to deconstruct the master's house, the rhetorical structure John re-builds is architecturally 'Romanesque', as well as Jewish. As a Cato-esque figure, John's Jesus is in some sense quintessentially Roman, and like Cato arguably even more Roman than the emperor. Thus, despite John's harsh critique of 'the world', the rhetorical shape of the Gospel reveals that it does not imagine or endorse a wholesale cultural annihilation of either opponents or of those entering into the Johannine vision of faithfulness.¹²⁷

Nonetheless, the cruciform foundation of John's rhetorical structure undergirds an ideological program that differs as sharply from Cato's anti-imperial vision as it does from the imperial propaganda. The rejection of violence entailed by Jesus' noble crucifixion in John (and the concomitant rejection of a violent, apocalyptic 'revenge fantasy') stands in stark contrast to the militarism embraced by Caesar and Cato alike (as well as the Jewish leaders and revolutionaries who operated on both sides of the imperial binary). Whereas the Prima Porta statue of Augustus maps imperial rule on the illustrations decorating the impenetrable cuirass on the emperor's torso, the Gospel of John displays its conquering hero through the wounded body raised up on a cross and the gaping hole in Jesus' side, as a testimony to sacrificial love.

It is precisely in this critical difference, this wounded womb,¹²⁸ that the Gospel gives birth to a 'third space of enunciation',¹²⁹ an interstitial place of negotiation and translation where the dominant discourse is resituated from

127. Unlike, say, the destruction of Native American cultures by many Christian missionaries in the period of westward expansion in the United States (cf. Robert Allen Warrior, 'A Native American Perspective: Canaanites, Cowboys and Indians', in R.S. Sugitharajah [ed.], *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991], pp. 235-41). Notably, John writes in Greek (rather than the Aramaic and Hebrew of the rabbinic tradition) and employs the genre of biography (not found in the Hebrew Bible/Septuagint, though used by the Jewish philosopher and exegete Philo in his *Life of Moses*).

128. On the birth imagery of Jn 19.34, see Dorothy A. Lee, *Flesh and Glory: Symbolism, Gender and Theology in the Gospel of John* (New York: Crossroad, 2002), p. 158.

129. See Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 53-56.

the perspective of the crucified. John's anti-imperial empire, won by the conquering crucifixion of Jesus, creates a new ideological realm beyond the imperial violence of the *Pax Romana* and the revolutionary violence of anti-imperial Jews and Romans. In proclaiming the noble crucifixion of Jesus as the glory of God, John's rhetoric of counter-authority rereads and rehistoricizes the story of Jesus in a way that engages, destabilizes and reconfigures the values promulgated by narrative *exempla* of glorious deaths. The Gospel furthermore creates new space for alternative social relationships to be born anew, above the revolutionary's horizontal binary of Jew versus Roman. It upholds hybridized social visions freed from the fear of violent coercion (cf. Jn 11.48-50; 20.19) and rooted in sacrificial love and service (15.12-13) rather than subjugating retaliation. John's glorious crucifixion is both an ideological critique that 'casts out' (12.31) any hegemonic totalization that violently excludes, coerces or destroys others, and the foundation for the formation of hybrid social identities that 'draws in' (12.32) the marginalized others (be they Roman, Jewish or beyond).¹³⁰

Unlike Cato's death, which glorifies the senatorial rank over against imperial tyranny, John's cruciform glory stands with, honors and elevates all those shamed, excluded, bound and crucified by imperialism.¹³¹ Its liberating truth (cf. 8.32) frees the subjugated from the violent, retaliatory impulse that would make them imperial persecutors of the imperialists (cf. 18.10-11), and from the debilitation of passive victimization by sending them to declare this truth

130. As Ann W. Astell notes in her study of John 4, 'If ... the Samaritans do receive Jesus, and the "astonished" disciples allow Jesus to be so received (Jn 4:27), that very reception by outcasts only proves the point that the Jesus of John's Gospel is always already an outsider to a world of sectarian division that defines itself by excluding others' ("Exilic" Identities, the Samaritans, and the "Satan" of John', in Ann W. Astell and Sandor Goodhart [eds.], *Sacrifice, Scripture and Substitution: Readings in Ancient Judaism and Christianity* [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011], pp. 397-408 [407]).

131. Christ's presence and strengthening is a theme in numerous early Christian martyr texts: *Letter of the Churches of Vienne and Lyons* (Santus [1.22], unnamed martyrs [1.28], Blandina [1.41]); *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (2.2-3); *Martyrdom of Montanus and Lucius* (4.4-6); *Martyrdom of Marculus* (8.761-762); *Martyrdom of Bishop Fructuosus and His Deacons, Augurius and Eulogius* (4.2); for analysis, see L. Stephanie Cobb, *Divine Deliverance: Pain and Painlessness in Early Christian Martyr Texts* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), pp. 74-80.

to the world in imitation of Jesus (cf. 17.13-18). Likewise, this cruciform glory liberates the powerful imperialists from the illusion of hegemonic authority by subverting the configurations of glory and divine authority that undergird abuse and persecution (cf. 16.1-3). As Rensberger concludes,

The Fourth Gospel thus confronts the issue of Israel's freedom in the late first-century Roman Empire with an alternative to both Zealotry and collaboration, by calling for adherence to the king who is not of this world, whose servants do not fight, but remain in the world bearing witness to the truth before the rulers of both synagogue and Empire.¹³²

This study illuminates the particular ways that John's alternative witness rhetorically engages its complex Roman world. By rejecting destruction of opponents, John lays a cruciform foundation to allow for the possibility of dialogue and difference. The hybridized use of the rhetoric of noble death suggests that despite John's sharp critique of the world's violence, one need not destroy one's cultural identity to be a follower of Jesus (at least to the extent that one's cultural identity does not entail subjugation of others). Though not developed in a rich, detailed way capable of addressing all ancient and modern concerns, the foundation and building blocks of the Gospel are nonetheless suggestive of such a possibility.

To be sure, the rhetorical power and totalizing claims of John deployed on behalf of the persecuted against imperial oppression also lend themselves to the type of ideological and physical violence for which the imperial rhetoric was originally employed, if they are unmoored from their cruciform foundation.¹³³ Sadly, the later imperial church's zeal for worldly power and conquest blinded many to John's subversive glory, and when shorn of the cross's scandalous presence among the rhetoric of noble death, the Fourth Gospel proved to be a powerful tool in the hands of Christian imperialists (as Moore and Dube attest). Hence, close attention to the early Roman imperial context of John is essential lest its peculiar light be overcome through incomprehension (cf. Jn 1.6).

132. David Rensberger, 'The Politics of John: The Trial of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel', *JBL* 103 (1984), pp. 395-411 (411).

133. On the role of rhetoric in early Christianity, see Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).