Christ and Caesar

A Political Interpretation of the Gospel of John, Critically Recounted.

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According to Lance Byron Richey, Jesus as the Son of God in John's Gospel is set against all political-theological claims of Roman Imperial Ideology. Unfortunately, Richey does not conceive of Jesus' Messianic kingship from the Jewish Torah as the process of liberating Israel and overcoming the Roman world order.

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0. Introduction

0.1 Political Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel by Lance Byron Richey and Ton Veerkamp

When, in the course of my intensive study of John’s Gospel since August 2020, I became aware of Lance Byron Richey through Esther Kobel[1] who, according to her, “considers the Gospel’s prologue as a counter-ideology that contrasts Christ with Caesar”, I decided to also include his book on **Roman Imperial Ideology and the Gospel of John**[2] in my studies, and I do so by contrasting it with Ton Veerkamp’s liberation-theological interpretation of John.

1 Esther Kobel, *Dining with John. Communal Meals and Identity Formation in the Fourth Gospel and its Historical and Cultural Context*, Leiden: Brill 2011, 357.

2 Lance Byron Richey, *Roman Imperial Ideology and the Gospel of John*, Washington 2007. **All page numbers given in the following text in round brackets (...) or references to notes without further reference refer to the corresponding following quotations from this book.** Greek or Hebrew words I reproduce with a simple English transliteration.

Ton Veerkamp[3]—theologically belonging to the so-called Amsterdam School—assumes that the so-called Johannine dualism neither refers to an otherworldly opposition between this world and the afterlife nor to the demarcation of the new religion of Christianity from Judaism. Instead, the evangelist, who is deeply rooted in the Jewish holy scriptures, is dealing as a Messianic Jew with Rabbinic Judaism, which emerged after the Jewish War and which he accuses of settling down in a niche of the Roman Empire with the privileges of a *religio licita*, a permitted religion, instead of actively expecting the overcoming of this ruling world order (*kosmos*) by trusting in the Messiah Jesus and by practicing the solidary love (*agapē*) he demands. Regrettably, theological scholarship so far does not even begin to consider Ton Veerkamp's interpretation.

Interesting in this context is a remark made by Richey about his doctoral adviser Julian V. Hills (vii):

> I had long been interested in how the political contexts of the gospels helped shape their content, but had previously thought the best way to conceive of this relationship was by using materialist categories, such as those employed by Fernando Belo in his treatment of Mark. While I was casting about for a way to connect the political context of the Fourth Gospel to its theology, my director gently suggested that the approach employed here, rather than the standard tools of materialist exegesis, might perhaps permit me to say something of interest to the scholarly community. While researching and writing, I came to see not only the practical wisdom of his advice but, even more importantly, the relevance of this subject for contemporary political theology (which, however, I have left undeveloped in the present work) and for understanding the unparalleled complexity of Johannine theology.

Perhaps in a synopsis of Richey's interpretation with that of Veerkamp's, it may be possible to bring out even more strongly the significance of the theme he raises for political theology.

In addition to a number of overlaps between the two interpretations, significant differences are apparent. Richey accurately describes Johannine Jesus as the great antagonist of the Roman emperor. Unlike Ton Veerkamp, however, he does only half justice to the portrait that the fourth evangelist paints of Jesus, for refers insufficiently to the rooting of Jesus the Messiah in the Jewish Bible. Suppose Jesus confronts the Roman emperor, who also claims divine dignity, with divine authority. In

3 Ton Veerkamp, Solidarity Against the World Order. A Political Reading of the Gospel of John about Jesus Messiah of all Israel, Gießen (Germany) 2021. Quotations from this work are cited with the abbreviation **Veerkamp** and the page number of its **PDF version** (URN: urn:nbn:de:101:1-2509010942173.046991639862). In addition, they are substantiated by a link to the respective section in the **online version** (with the indication of the relevant paragraph(s), counting the entire Bible text preceding the section as the 1st paragraph).

that case, it must be asked from what source he draws the right to be called *ho kyrios kai ho theos*, "Lord and God," and what it means in concrete terms that he is proclaimed not only as the *basileus tou Israēl*, "King of Israel," but also as the *sōtēr tou kosmou*, "Liberator of the World." In my opinion, Richey does not take seriously enough that

- Jesus must be understood first of all as the messenger of the God of Israel, as the embodiment of his will and work, that is, of his liberating NAME,[4]
- second, the content of Jesus' kingship is to be filled from the Jewish Bible,
- and third, Jesus primarily focuses on the gathering of all Israel, including the lost northern tribes of Samaria and the Jews driven into the Diaspora, and only then, very cautiously, on "some Greeks" (12:20) who want to see Jesus.

From these premises, I put Richey's and Veerkamp's interpretations into discussion with each other supposing mutual enrichment.

0.2 Adolf Hitler as the Self-Proclaimed Heir of the Roman Emperors

By prefacing the introductory words of his study with the second part of the second thesis of the Barmen Declaration,[5] Lance Richey (xi) makes clear the modern context in which he intends to interpret the confrontation between Jesus and the Roman emperor:

> "We reject the false doctrine that there could be areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ but to other lords, areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him."

With this thesis, parts of the Protestant Church in the German Reich of 1934 opposed the recognition of Adolf Hitler as God's providentially chosen Fuehrer of the German people on the road to world domination.

In the final conclusion of his book (187, note 2), Richey will recall,

> that Hitler in the twentieth century looked back to Augustus as a model and predecessor of the European empire that he hoped to fashion. Joachim C. Fest[6] writes: "It was necessary for Hitler to reject the past because there was

4 By the word "NAME" in capital letters I replace the four letters of the Hebrew name of God YHWH, which God (Exodus 3:14) uses to reveal Himself to Moses as the power that will lead Israel out of enslavement under the Egyptian Pharaonic empire and which is not uttered in Judaism because of the inaccessibility of God (analogous to the Hebrew term *ha-shem* = "the name"). Where John refers to God as the FATHER of the Messiah Jesus with the word *patēr,* I also point out by the emphasis in capital letters that he uses this paraphrase for the liberating NAME of God.

5 Richey quotes them according to Robert McAfee Brown, ed. *Kairos*: Three Prophetic Challenges to the Church (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 157.

6 Richey quotes Joachim C. Fest, *Hitler* [New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1971] 543.

> no era in German history which he admired. His ideal period was classical antiquity: Athens, Sparta ('the most pronounced racial state in history'), the Roman Empire. He always felt closer to Caesar or Augustus than to the German freedom fighter Arminius."

0.3 Richey's Definition of „Augustan Ideology"

Nowadays (xi-xiii) "it is largely forgotten" that the sovereign titles *sōtēr tou kosmou*, "Savior of the world," and *ho kyrios kai ho theos*, "Lord and God," which John's Gospel applies to Jesus (4:42 and 20:28), were originally claimed by Roman emperors. The "exclusive sense in which they are applied to Jesus" could, according to Richey, risk "persecution, especially during the reign of Domitian (81-96 C.E.), which overlapped with the period when the Fourth Gospel began to receive its final form."

In this context (xiii), Richey distinguishes "the Imperial Cult" in a narrow sense from "the Augustan Ideology" as "a wide variety of political, social and literary practices":

> The Augustan Ideology developed after Octavian's ascension to power in 31 B.C.E., which marked the end of the Roman Republic, and effectively reordered the conceptual landscape of the Roman world by establishing the person of the emperor at its new center.

This ideology (xiv)

> was a complex and considerably varied set of beliefs, practices and claims about the nature and source of temporal power in imperial Rome. It presented the emperor or *princeps* as the central figure of the empire on whom the continued peace and prosperity brought by the *Pax Romana* depended.

Although (note 10) "the Augustan Ideology was not a totalitarian one—at least in the modern sense—which dominated and defined every aspect of private and public life within the empire," it (xv)

> translated on a practical level into a large set of demands on the population of the empire that were both religio-ideological—involving the "mythic" or "imaginative" space claimed by the emperor from his subjects—and socio-legal—pertaining to his more mundane social and political powers.

In this regard, Richey clarifies (note 11):

> the *Weltanschauung* involved in proclaiming Augustus Caesar *sōtēr tou kosmou*, and the resulting hierarchical conception of both society and the universe, as well as of the place of believers within them, would be "religio-ideological." On the other hand, any social or political sanctions for the refusal to do so (e.g., execution, punishment, social ostracization) are "socio-legal."

Since (xv) "there is no plausible locale or timeline for the composition of the Fourth Gospel in which the author(s) would not have been confronted at every turn by the images, practices, and beliefs of the Augustan Ideology," the Gospel of John must

have been "preoccupied with the authority ... of the Roman emperor," and, in Richey's opinion, all the more so because (xv-xvi)

> by the 80s, when the final redaction of the Gospel had begun, the Johannine community had absorbed a large number of non-Jewish converts who presumably would have had personal knowledge of, and perhaps even had participated in, the Imperial Cult.

Of course, the latter assumption is controversial. In particular, it must be asked whether a Johannine community, still focused on the gathering of all Israel without being oriented toward a general mission to the nations, did not have every reason to see itself in sharpest opposition to the Augustan ideology.

0.4 Richey's Focus on the "Final Redaction" of John's Gospel

At the same time, Richey emphasizes (xix-xx) "that the influence of the Augustan Ideology on the Fourth Gospel" he is proposing

> is a relatively indirect one. There was no body of documents constituting the essence of the Augustan Ideology upon which the evangelist drew (though Virgil's texts perhaps approximate this description). Instead, I suggest that the Roman documents and inscriptions related to the Augustan Ideology express a fundamental way of conceiving the world in the first century that John felt compelled to challenge through his Gospel. No direct literary dependence of the Gospel of John upon particular texts was involved. The Augustan Ideology was less a set of texts confronting the evangelist than the intellectual atmosphere that he and his readers breathed in every day, identifiable through a careful study of relevant texts. The underlying conceptual structure of the Augustan Ideology is found in the Gospel especially when it is being denied or criticized by the author.

It is significant (xx) that Richey wants to limit "the existence of a polemic … against the Augustan Ideology and the grave theological and practical dangers that it posed for the Johannine community" to the "final redaction of John":

> In short, the final redactor(s) of the Gospel wanted to distinguish clearly the nature of Christ's divinity and power from the religious and political authority of the emperor.

But in Richey's eyes (note 20), this "last layer of the Fourth Gospel's literary and polemic sediment ... neither erases nor invalidates the literary vestiges of earlier models of Jesus' messiahship ... which may have survived in the text." He thinks indeed that the confrontation with the imperial cult and the "Augustan ideology" became significant for the Johannine community only when larger numbers of Gentile Christians joined it. In this situation, then, a new Christology would have overridden the older ideas of Jesus as the Messiah of Israel. Again, it must be critically asked whether John's Gospel was really revised in this way or whether his entire Christolo-

gy originally is to be understood as a Messianology[7] that proclaims—based on the Jewish holy scriptures—the Messiah Jesus to be the overcomer of the Roman world order. If so, the Gospel of John would have been reinterpreted only later by an increasingly Gentile-Christian-dominated church in the sense represented by Richey.

0.5 On the Structure of Lance Byron Richey's Study

In order to establish his thesis (xx), in the **first chapter** Richey wants

> to situate the Fourth Gospel temporally, geographically and demographically in order to show how the Augustan Ideology influenced its authors and their community and placed them at odds with the surrounding Roman society.

At the same time, he deals with "theories that link the development of the Gospel to increasing conflicts between the community and the synagogue" which "ultimately resulted in the Johannine community being pronounced *aposyagōgos* (John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2)."

The **second chapter** serves to examine more closely "the Roman context of the Gospel," in particular (xxi) "the legal and social demands and expectations" that Augustan Ideology placed on members of the Johannine community who, "once declared *aposyagōgos*, would have lost the exemption from participation in the Imperial Cult enjoyed by Judaism."

The **third chapter** „turns to the vocabulary employed by the Imperial Cult to express and defend the divinity and authority of the Roman emperor," in order to examine

> relevant "pools" of vocabulary associated with both political and divine authority in Roman society and explore how the Gospel of John also contains and critiques these notions of authority.

In the **fourth chapter**, "John's Prologue and the initial testimony of the Baptist are interpreted as attempts to contrast Christ with Caesar," thus making clear "from the very beginning of the Gospel that Christ is totally unlike the worshiped Caesar."

Three key verses of the Johannine Passion Narrative (18:36; 19:12; 19:15) serve as evidence in the **fifth chapter** that

> John attempts to differentiate clearly the authority claimed by Christ and the rule exercised by Pilate on behalf of the emperor. Rather than interpreting the Passion {xxii} Narrative as an anti-Semitic diatribe, I suggest that the main opponent is the Roman emperor.

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7 The word "Christology" is usually understood as the "doctrine of Christ" as advocated in the new religion of Christianity that had separated from Judaism. However, if the authors of New Testament writings, especially the Gospel of John, did not yet understand themselves as "Christians" at all, but as Jews who confessed Jesus as the Messiah of the God of Israel, the word "Messianology" would be more appropriate.

In his **Conclusion**, Richey suggests that John's Gospel "should be read as a challenge not only to the synagogue but also to the Augustan Ideology that posed a serious theological and political threat to the Johannine community's understanding both of Christ and of itself." Once again he emphasizes the assumption, which I questioned, that

> the Johannine community's encounter with large numbers of Gentile converts unavoidably brought it into contact with the Augustan Ideology. This encounter in turn demanded some clarification of the duties and proscriptions that membership in the community placed upon these converts. It also demanded that the Christology of the community be clearly distinguished from the portrait of Caesar that suffused everyday life in the empire.

1. Is the Johannine Community "Neither Jew nor Roman?"

In 2007, Richey (1) looks back on forty years of "a renewed interest in the Jewish roots of the Gospel of John, after a generation of studies preoccupied with its Hellenistic and philosophical background." He focuses his attention (2) on the "key insight" of the exegetes Raymond E. Brown and J. Louis Martyn,[8]

> that the text of the Fourth Gospel can and should be read as a multi-layered narrative that "tells us the story both of Jesus and of the community that believed in him."

1.1 Three Stages of a Johannine Community According to Martyn and Brown

While the attempt (3) is fraught with great "difficulties and uncertainties" to reconstruct "the community's history from a text that is largely theological in its intent," (4) "it is just this specifically historical context that is required to understand the Roman influence upon the Johannine community and its Gospel." In the first chapter of his book, therefore, he seeks "to situate the Johannine community within its historical context," focusing "in particular on the work of Brown and Martyn," and drawing out "the most secure results of their researches, especially those that might indicate potential sources of conflict between the community and the surrounding Roman society":

8 Richey mainly refers to the following works: J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel,* 3rd ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003; J. Louis Martyn, *The Gospel of John in Christian History: Essays for Interpreters,* New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1978: Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times,* New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist: 1979; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John,* 2 vols, AB 29-29A, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966-70. **From now on I refer to quotations from these books with the abbreviations "Martyn" or "Martyn, *John*" and "Brown" or "Brown, *John*" and with preceding page numbers in square brackets […].** Accordingly, Richey cites Brown [17] at this point.

> These scholars agree that the origin of the community that produced the Fourth Gospel was situated firmly within the synagogue. They also hold that the gospel's subsequent history (and to a large degree the development of its distinctive theology) was determined by the conflicts with and eventual separation from the synagogue. This insight has been one of the decisive factors in the shift from a Hellenistic to a Jewish framework for Johannine scholarship in the latter half of the last century.

What Brown and Martyn agree upon (5), Richey outlines by distinguishing "three main stages in the history of the life of the community."

1.1.1 Early Days: A Jewish Sect Turning to Samaritans and Gentiles

In an early phase (5), it represented "a sectarian Jesus-movement within first-century Judaism ..., possibly already in conflict with followers of John the Baptist over the identity of the Messiah" and "characterized theologically by a Mosaic understanding of Jesus as a divinely chosen prophet." This community, "settled in Syria, northern Palestine and eastern Jordan," (6) "was quickly joined by a group of Samaritans who interpreted Jesus against a Mosaic background as the Messiah sent from God." Although it still remained "wholly within the bosom of the synagogue," as Martyn [150] points out, Brown (6-7)

> posits an increasing missionary effort among Gentiles as an impetus behind both the heightening of the community's Christology and the deepening of its division with the synagogue.

Thus Brown seems to infer Gentile missionary efforts by the Johannine community primarily from their alleged consequences, for nowhere in John's Gospel itself is there mention of a call by Jesus to Gentile mission. I speak of alleged consequences, because what is here called the "heightening of Christology" does not have to be explained by pagan influences, rather the Jewish Messiah Jesus as the embodiment of the liberating NAME of God is to be understood completely from the Jewish biblical scriptures.

1.1.2 Middle Period: Exclusion from the Synagogue and Influx of Gentiles

In a middle phase, Martyn and Brown say (7), the "theological and possibly ethnic changes among Johannine Christians" led, "by the late 80s," to an "open schism with the synagogue," after "peaceful existence within the Synagogue became increasingly difficult" and exclusion "of some Johannine Christians from the synagogue" occurred (8):

> Their separation from the synagogue, Brown [56] suggests, became permanent after an influx of Gentile converts joined the community. In this scenario, their admission would have been a logical extension of the community's previous outreach to the non-Jewish Samaritans. The presence of these Gentiles, according to Brown [55-57], is reflected in the textual reference to a possible

> mission by Jesus to "the Greeks" (John 7:35) and by the appearance of Greeks (John 12:20-23) as a signal that Jesus' ministry to the Jews had come to an end. This break with the synagogue, Martyn [155] argues, was possibly accompanied by the subsequent martyrdom of members of the community for ditheism by synagogue Jews (e.g., Jesus' prediction of persecution in John 15:18-16:4). The result was an increase in the community's hostility towards "the Jews."

Against this argumentation, first of all, it must be objected that the turning of the Johannine community to the Samaritans in John 4 is by no means presented as the first station on the way to a Gentile mission, but as a step towards the gathering of all Israel. The woman at Jacob's Well clearly represents the lost tribes of northern Israel, which together with Judea and the Diaspora Jews constitute the people of Israel. Second, "Greeks" are mentioned only very reluctantly in John's Gospel and are nowhere explicitly recorded as disciples of Jesus. In this respect, it must also be critically asked whether the Johannine community may indeed already be called "Christian." The designation "Jewish-Messianic" would be more appropriate. Thus I do not deny the sharpness of the disputes between Messianic and Rabbinic Jews, but definitely a general Gentile missionary orientation of the Gospel of John.

Far from perceiving that the so-called high Christology in the Fourth Gospel has its roots in the God of Israel, uniquely embodied in Jesus, the Messiah and Liberator he sent into the *kosmos*, Martyn traces its further development back to the "trauma of excommunication and persecution" suffered by the community,

> portraying Jesus as a stranger from heaven (e.g., John 3:31) and a dualism between the world "below," which rejects Christ and the community, and the world "above," which is the spiritual home of Jesus and the community (e.g., John 15, 17).

Richey goes on to mention a theory put forward by Brown [56-57]

> that an influx of Gentiles was either the result or the cause—he is unclear on this point—of all or part of the community relocating to Asia Minor, probably in an urban setting (e.g., John 7:35).

As (8-9) "conflicts with Jews within the synagogue continued to plague the community," the latter was forced, on the one hand,

> to define its Christology in a defensive posture towards Judaism while at the same time it drew upon the religious traditions of the synagogue that it had inherited.

1.1.3 Late Period: Gentile Mission too encounters Rejection by the "World"

In its late phase (9), according to Martyn and Brown, the Johannine community,

> [h]aving been excluded from and persecuted by the synagogue Jews for their supposed ditheism, … redoubled its efforts at evangelization among the Gentile community, and in the process elevated its Christology.

If, in my view, this assumption alone can hardly be justified from the text of the Gospel, Brown's [64-65] additional suggestion seems to me all the more strange, that

> the hope of greater missionary success here was largely unfulfilled, as the Johannine community proved as objectionable to many Gentiles at it had to the Jews.

If Brown draws the latter conclusion from the absence of any mention of missionary success among the Gentiles in John's Gospel, then it would seem more obvious that a general mission to the nations was not yet the intention of this community at all.

Richey's following remarks bring out a little more clearly what Brown is concerned with in his account of the history of the Johannine community:

> This effort at evangelization, Brown [57] argues, was significant for the development of Johannine Christology despite its ultimate failure, since its demand that Jesus be presented "in a multitude of symbolic garbs" may also have helped break down the community's awareness of "worldly" distinctions. This, in turn [Brown 62-91], led to a greater emphasis on the universal significance of Jesus for all believers regardless of group or place of origin. Ultimately, though, continued persecution by the (now Diaspora?) Jews, paired with greater missionary contacts with and frequent rejection by Gentiles, caused the Johannine community to develop and heighten their Christology even further. As a result, they separated themselves more clearly from "the Jews" and "the World" of the Gentiles who had rejected Jesus.

The "multitude of symbolic garbs" that Jesus wears in John's Gospel may refer to the various titles of majesty he ascribes to himself or are attributed to him: Messiah, King, Prophet, Son of Man, Son of God, Only Begotten, Messenger of God, Logos, Savior, Lord and God. In my eyes, however, all these terms need not go back to Gentile missionary efforts but can be understood, appropriately interpreted, entirely from the Jewish Bible.

Not quite clear to me is what Brown means by the breakdown of "worldly" distinctions that might have been brought about by the transfer of some of these "garbs" to Jesus. Since the following sentence speaks of "a greater emphasis on the universal significance of Jesus for all believers, regardless of group or place of origin," he seems to have in mind, without wanting to address it explicitly, the overcoming of Jesus' bias within the ethnic limitations of Judaism. On the contrary, could the Johannine Jesus not have been concerned with the gathering of Israel and, on the other hand, with the overcoming of the Roman world order?

Different speculations are made by Brown and Martyn (10), as to whether "this reshaping and elevation of its Christology to appeal to Gentiles may have caused serious divisions and even schism within the Johannine community itself, as it could tend towards docetism" because through deifying Jesus too much, "the true humanity of Christ" was called into question.

> Whether or not an internal schism over Christology occurred within the Community ..., by the time the Gospel assumed its final form it reflected a community that had experienced a double alienation from both the synagogue that provided its initial matrix and the Gentile world that had largely rejected its efforts at evangelization.

In this regard, Richey writes in summary (11):

> A full appreciation of this sense of alienation from the surrounding world is essential for understanding the threats to the community's existence and its Christology.

In my opinion, on the other hand, the entire outline of the history of the Johannine community reconstructed by Martyn and Brown is built on questionable premises. It disregards the depth of the rootedness of John the Messianic Jew in the Jewish Bible and proceeds from the false assumption of a general mission to the nations in John's Gospel. Therefore, the Johannine "Christians" are allegedly confronted with both "Jews" and "Gentiles" as a hostile "world," and the *kosmos*, as Rome itself understands it, namely as the "world order" or well-ordered *Pax Romana*, cannot come into view, which in truth, however, in the eyes of the Jewish Messianist John, represents a worldwide order of violence or new Egyptian slavery, to be overcome by the Messiah of the God of Israel in a new Passover event of liberation: the death of Jesus on the Roman cross.

1.2 Are There Firm Conclusions about the Johannine Milieu?

Whatever view may be taken of Martyn's and Brown's attempts to reconstruct a history of the Johannine community, Richey considers it possible (12) to extract from them "some basic facts about the Johannine milieu that can serve as a secure foundation for further research":

> Of course, the search for a few secure points of reference within the history of the Johannine community is a considerably more modest goal than the reconstruction of its history, but as is often the case in studying the Fourth Gospel, the less presupposed, the better. Only a few of the details from these scholars' theories need be correct to support the thesis that the Augustan Ideology posed serious challenges to the community and that a response to it may be found within the text of the Gospel.

These "few 'points of reference'" do not, according to Richey (13), represent "arbitrary" assertions, but

> they constitute the bare-boned but most secure underpinnings of any coherent and comprehensive theory of Johannine origins that can both account for the Gentile and Jewish elements present within the Gospel and provide a comprehensible and plausible social setting for the expression of anti-Roman impulses.

1.2.1 Was Asia Minor the Place of Origin for John's Gospel?

Traditionally, Ephesus was thought to be the location where John's Gospel was written since it was assumed (14) "that the author of the Gospel also composed Revelation." Those (15) who rediscovered "the Jewish context of the Fourth Gospel in the mid-twentieth century" concluded (for example Brown [39])

> that the origin of the Johannine community within the synagogue, alongside probable connections to adherents of John the Baptist, "certainly points to the Palestine area as the *original* homeland of the Johannine movement" (emphasis added).

But despite acknowledging "some Palestinian influence on the Gospel," Richey considers it

> equally clear that the Gospel was not the product of an exclusively Palestinian environment. Even if the community originated there, it must have been dispersed geographically at later stages.

To this end, he firstly resorts to Smith's[9] argument (16) "that only after 70, and especially outside Palestine, would synagogue membership be the decisive mark of Jewish identity." That this is true "especially" does not exclude, however, that after the destruction of the Temple, the synagogue also gained greater importance within Palestine.

Secondly, Brown [98] assumes, according to Richey, that

> the existence of the Johannine epistles reveals the need for correspondence between different and presumably geographically separated Johannine churches, although the debate over inhospitality in 2 and 3 John suggests they might have been no more than different Johannine "house churches" within a common metropolitan (Ephesian?) area.

Both of these cannot be ruled out, but they do not allow any conclusions to be drawn about the time or the place of origin of the Gospel itself.

Thirdly (16, note 42), according to Brown [40-41], it is strange, for instance, in John 9,22 that John has

> Jesus and the Jews around him refer to other Jews simply as "the Jews" – for the gentile readers the Jews constitute a different ethnic group and another religion (and often they think of Jesus more as a Christian than as a Jew!). But to have the Jewish parents of the blind man in Jerusalem described as "being afraid of the Jews" (9:22) is just as awkward as having an American living in Washington, DC, described as being afraid of "the Americans"—only a non-American speaks thus of "the Americans."

9 Richey cites Dwight Moody Smith, „The Contribution of J. Louis Martyn to the Understanding of the Gospel of John", in Martyn [1-19], here 15.

This distancing way of speaking about "the Jews" in John's Gospel is indeed a major problem, but it need not necessarily be due to the fact that the Gospel was written from a non-Jewish perspective. Likewise, it is possible that the Johannine Messianic Jews, who trusted in Jesus as the Messiah, used this term to refer to the Rabbinic leadership of the synagogue that emerged after the Jewish War as opposed to them. Moreover, in John's Gospel, the Messianic community seems to be especially anchored in Transjordan, Samaria, and marginal Galilee, and also from there to be opposed to the Jewish elite from Jerusalem and surrounding Judea.

Antioch has also been considered as the place of origin of John's Gospel. Richey can imagine that

> the Johannine community, as it moved to Antioch and then to Ephesus, would have come into closer and closer proximity to—and greater and greater conflict with—the Imperial Cult, since its presence in Asia Minor was stronger than in any other region of the Roman Empire.

All in all, Richey comes to the ultimate conclusion (17-18):

> The Johannine community, at least in its later stages when the Gospel received its final form, was evidently located not in rural Palestine but in a major metropolitan center, probably in Asia Minor. Whether in Ephesus or Antioch (or both), the Johannine community was situated within the cultural sphere of Asia Minor where the Augustan Ideology and especially the Imperial Cult were most prominent in the empire. Close contact and conflict with it would have been unavoidable. Moreover, whatever particular geographical choice is made by exegetes, the Johannine community would still be found within a society controlled by Rome and infused with the symbols and practices of the Augustan Ideology.

Against Richey's considerations is what Monika Bernett[10] published about the "Imperial Cult in Judea under the Herodians and Romans" in the same year as Richey's book was published. According to her, the cult dedicated to Emperor Augustus was already omnipresent in Palestine since Herod the Great:

> King Herod was among the first who, after Actium, in C. Caesar (Augustus) exalted the new ruler in Rome and in the Imperium Romanum in cultic form and thus participated in the symbolic structuring of the new political form of rule in Rome. The prelude still took place in Jerusalem in the early summer of 28 B.C. with the foundation of a Penteterian Agon {competitions held every five years} (*Kaisareia*) in honor of C. Caesar. A year later Herod refounded ancient Samaria as the polis Sebaste, probably the first eponymous {named after the

10 Monika Bernett, *Der Kaiserkult in Judäa unter den Herodiern und Römern: Untersuchungen zur politischen und religiösen Geschichte Judäas von 30 v. bis 66 n. Chr.*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007, 205-206.

> emperor} city for C. Caesar Augustus in the Roman Empire, and also erected a temple to Augustus there. This was followed a few years later by Caesarea [Maritima], the second eponymous city foundation for the Roman princeps in Judea. The city received a monumental temple to Roma and Augustus and quadrennial cult games. Herod finally built a third temple in 20 B.C. in the north of his empire, expanded in the same year, near an ancient natural sanctuary of Pan, at the foot of Mount Hermon, and near one of the Jordan springs.
>
> In research, little attention has been paid to this process so far. There is no independent treatment of the Imperial Cult as established by Herod (40-4 B.C.) in his empire and as it then developed under the political heirs of his empire—the sons Archelaus, Antipas, Philippos, the grandson Agrippa I, the great-grandson Agrippa II, not to forget the Romans in direct rule over *Iudaea* (6-41 C.E., then again from 44 C.E.).

If we add that John is the only evangelist who uses the Roman name "Sea of Tiberias" for the Sea of Galilee, we can imagine that within Palestine, not only in the capital Jerusalem or in the imperial city Caesarea but also in Galilee, the presence of the emperor was not much less felt as a constant challenge than in Asia Minor.

1.2.2 Did the Number of Gentiles in the Johannine Community Actually Grow?

Richey suggests (18) that the question of the place of origin of John's Gospel cannot be answered without at the same time asking about "Gentile presence within the Johannine community and continuing Jewish hostility to it."

He first refers to Brown [56-57], who (19)

> argues that the reference to *Hellēnes* in 7:35 (as well as in 12:20—notably the only two places in all four Gospels where the word appears) is an attempt by the evangelist to justify the community's acceptance of a large and ever-increasing number of Gentiles by retrojecting the process to the ministry of Jesus.

I think it is problematic that many scholars are considering back and forth whether John 7:35 refers to a possible teaching activity or mission among Gentile Greeks or perhaps only among Diaspora Jews, although the corresponding sentence is put into the mouth of Jesus' Judean opponents, who misunderstand his announcement that he will withdraw into the hiddenness of the FATHER, where they cannot come. If the Gospel of John really presupposes a mission to the nations on a larger scale, wouldn't there have to be a confirmation of it also in the mouth of Jesus? Wouldn't there have to be at least a mention of the inclusion of one or the other of the Greeks, who want to see Jesus according to 12,20, into the ranks of Jesus' disciples?

That (20) "a mission to the Gentiles by Christians after Jesus' death is a matter of established fact," as Richey puts it, contains some inaccuracies. First, the name "Christians" for the followers of Jesus is formed only in the course of time, when the com-

munities trusting in Jesus become more and more alienated from Judaism as another religion. Second, although Paul's ministry from the beginning is directed toward a mission to the nations and toward the establishment of congregations in which Jews and Gentiles (*goyim*, "members of the nations") together form the Messianic community, the body of Christ, there continue to be congregations that see themselves as Jewish and trust in the Messiah Jesus without turning to the mission to the Gentiles on a larger scale.

That Martyn, for example, "pays almost no attention to the question of Gentile presence within the community" is unfortunate in Richey's eyes. He attributes this to paying too little attention "to the notion of 'the World' in the Fourth Gospel." Brown [63], on the other hand, "takes 'the World' to refer specifically to non-Christian Gentiles and not at all as virtually identical to 'the Jews'." From this, Brown [65] draws conclusions already mentioned in section 1.1.3 (21):

> "What I would deduce from the Johannine references to the world is that, by the time the Gospel was written, the Johannine community had had sufficient dealings with non-Jews to realize that many of them were no more disposed to accept Jesus than were 'the Jews,' so that a term like 'the world' was convenient to cover all such opposition."

This identification of the "world" mentioned in John's gospel with concrete non-Jewish people is, however, only a mere assumption. That the term *kosmos*, "world," in John's gospel can also be understood in a completely different way, namely in the sense of the Roman "world order" under which Israel is enslaved together with many other peoples, will be explained in more detail in section 4.2.3.1 in connection with my note 84 by a quotation from Ton Veerkamp.

Richey, on the other hand, cites another argument for an "early appearance of Gentiles within the Johannine community." In his eyes, this

> also makes sense on a sociological level. The impending or actual separation from the synagogue and continuing hostility of the Jews that the Gospel clearly reveals (see below) would have increasingly limited the availability of Jewish converts whom the community needed to grow and survive. This may have been realized relatively early in the history of the community, along with the fact that the only other possibility for new members would have been the Gentiles among the Diaspora. Even without any textual evidence for the inclusion of Gentiles within the community, such an assumption would make sense based on what we know of other Jewish-Christian churches of the period.

Significantly, Richey refers in this regard (note 59) to a study[11] of the Gospel of Matthew, in which Jesus actually urges his disciples to bring the Torah of the Jews,

11 Richey refers to Graham Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1992) 113-45.

as Jesus teaches it, among the nations (Matthew 28:19-20). Corresponding (21) "textual evidence," however, is entirely absent from John's Gospel, while there is clear evidence that the Johannine Jesus focuses on the goal of gathering and liberating all Israel, including the tribes of Samaria (John 4 and 10:16) and the Diaspora Jews (John 11:51-52).

The fact that the number of Jesus' followers shrinks more and more in the course of time is thematized in John's Gospel itself, but it is not compensated for by missionary efforts to the nations. Instead, even Jesus' mere contact with the Greeks who want to see him (12:20) is only possible by way of mediation through his Jewish disciples, without this itself being explicitly mentioned. After even the first two encounters of the disciples with the risen Jesus take place in the smallest circle behind closed doors (20:19, 26), it is only in the last chapter that we are told of the Johannine community breaking out of its "sectarian isolation" and of its "connection to the Synoptic Messianism" by recognizing Peter as the shepherd of the community.[12]

Richey, on the other hand (21), takes it as "likely"

> that the Johannine community began to attract Gentile members before any "official" break with the synagogue, and before the Gospel reached its final form...

Even as he tends (21-22) to question

> particular details of Brown's theory, one of its greatest strengths is the fact that it cuts the Gordian knot within the text itself: it explains the strongly Jewish elements at the heart of the Gospel and accounts for the setting of the final version of the Gospel and of the Epistles within a community that was increasingly, if not predominantly, Gentile. In sum, the presence of relatively large numbers of Gentiles in the community by the time the Gospel was produced can be assumed.

Richey's conclusion, however, stands on feet of clay in my view, judging from the few foundations on which he builds it.

1.2.3 The Ongoing Conflict of the Johannine Community with the Synagogue

Hardly anyone would deny (22),

> that throughout its history the community that produced the Fourth Gospel found itself in conflict with the synagogue, or that this conflict appears in the text itself (e.g., 9:22; 12:42; 16:2).

Moreover, as Richey puts it,

12 Thus Veerkamp 404-05 (note 567 on the interpretation of John 21:1).

> there is no doubt that before the end of the first century a final and irrevocable rupture had occurred between Jews and Christians.

That Richey refers to the parties involved in the conflict as “Jews” and “Christians” narrows down from the outset the possible causes of this rupture to the opposition of two religions separating from each other. What does not come into view is the possibility that two Jewish-rooted factions, namely Messianic Jews, trusting in the Messiah Jesus, and Rabbinic Jews, relying solely on the Torah of Moses, could be involved in an inner-Jewish dispute with each other.

After all, unlike many adherents of Martyn’s and Brown’s outlined history of the Johannine community (note 61), Richey emphasizes

> that the conflict was certainly a “two-way” affair, that is, Johannine Christians were not mere passive victims of “the Jews” but probably instigators as well, at least as “thorns in the side” of the Jewish leaders, with their anti-synagogue polemics. The numerous warnings among post-World War II scholars against anti-Semitic readings of the Fourth Gospel should not be forgotten in the account of Jewish-Christian relations underlying my reading of the Gospel.

In any case (23), this hostility preceded the break between the Johannine community and the synagogue:

> Conflict with the synagogue was hardly unique to the Johannine community during the first century, but could be found throughout the early history of Jewish Christianity.

In particular, Richey mentions “Paul’s claim that ‘five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one’ (2 Cor 11:14),” an he does not see any “reason to think the Johannine community was spared these experiences.“ Likewise, it is clear (24):

> No group unnecessarily creates a schism within its ranks. Rather, it was the last resort in a long and painful internal struggle.

But as to what exactly necessitated the schism, I find few concrete answers in Richey’s discourse, except that “two of the Synoptics ascribe the immediate cause of Jesus’ betrayal and execution to Jewish authorities.” He concludes this section as follows (25):

> In short, from its earliest stages until the time when the Gospel received its final form, the Johannine community found itself in conflict with the Jewish authorities in the synagogue and under the threat of various forms and degrees of persecution by them. This situation gave impetus to the tendency towards separatism, which the influx of Gentiles into the community had already set in motion and which probably manifested itself in the geographical relocation of the community from Palestine to the more cosmopolitan region of Asia Minor.

1.3 Was a Jewish Gospel Transplanted into a Roman Context?

Although after "the work of Martyn and Brown, no one seriously questions the deeply Jewish character of the Fourth Gospel," according to Richey, however (25-26),

> it is not *only* Jewish in its background or interests. Rather, it reflects a wider range of influences and concerns. The history of the community that has been sketched out here, with its trajectory from the synagogue to the Gentile communities of Asia Minor, suggests another context as well, specifically, a Roman one that would prove just as objectionable and inhospitable. In Chapter Two we consider the possibility that the Jewish authorities employed Roman law as a weapon in their fight against Johannine Christianity.

Thus, Richey's observations in his first chapter on the history of the Johannine community basically do not come to the conclusion he implies in the title, namely that this community is to be classified as "neither Jewish nor Roman," but rather that it has both Jewish roots and is exposed to Roman influences. The question of whether in the Gospel of John, there is already a "Christian" self-understanding in relation to the Jewish religion or whether a Jewish-Messianic self-understanding is still to be presupposed, will have to be thought about further.

2. Augustan Ideology and Its Many Faces of Power

What (27) "is now called the Augustan Ideology," was the key to "success" in a challenge Octavian faced after "his defeat of Antony at the Battle of Actium in 31. B.C.E." He "set about reordering the Roman political and social order to avoid the political unrest, assassinations, and civil war that had brought Rome to the brink of ruin." Since he was "declared Augustus in 27 B.C.E.," it has become common to refer to him by this title. The "Augustan Ideology" completely

> overturned the conceptual landscape of the Roman Republic and laid the foundation for a unified and dynamic imperial system by establishing the person of the emperor at the center of the new order.

According to Karl Christ,[13] this ideology

> did not simply secure the position of Augustus as the current ruler over the Roman Empire, but its "slogans also preached integration; they helped strengthen the system and make it fast; they gave prominence to the chosen successors of Augustus, and were a decisive factor in identifying the family of the *princeps* with the state." It was perhaps the decisive factor in the formation of the Roman world and thus for the growth of Christianity, including the Johannine community.

13 Richey cites Karl Christ, *The Romans: An Introduction to Their History and Civilization*, translated by Christopher Holme, Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985, 51.

2.1 Augustan Ideology in the First Century

In the first part of the second chapter (27-28), Richey intends to

> examine the three main areas of Roman life that were essential for the rise and consolidation of the Augustan Ideology: (1) Augustus' supreme political position and the structures that he and his successors used to exercise control over the empire of the first century; (2) the Imperial Cult, which arose during the reign of Augustus to justify and buttress the position of the emperor in Roman society by making him the object of popular religion; and (3) the aptly-named "Augustan poets," especially Virgil, whose works helped to connect the role of the emperor to the heroic past of the Roman people. As will be shown, the cumulative effect of these three manifestations of the Augustan Ideology was not merely to secure the political position of the Emperor within Roman society. Rather, it resulted in the creation of a new and distinctively Roman *Weltanschauung*, which situated the inhabitants of the empire not only in respect to the emperor but within the larger cosmos as well.

According to Richey, this prevailing ideology

> presented a serious threat to the Johannine community, since the community could neither accept nor participate in the Augustan Ideology, nor could it claim a legal exemption from doing so because of its excommunication from the synagogue.

2.1.1 Essential Distinction of Political Power: *potestas* and *auctoritas*

Formally (29), "the official and publicly recognized legal power" vested in Roman emperors since Augustus referred to the official power of a tribune of the people, as "his *tribunicia potestas*." With great political foresight, Augustus,

> [t]hrough the constitutional settlement of 27 B.C.E. Augustus officially surrendered the broader dictatorial powers previously granted him during and following his contest with Antony... Thereafter he intentionally limited his still enormous *potestas* to forms that were putatively continuous with the republican constitution and exercised it with a limited but still meaningful degree of consent and advice from the Senate...

It was not until (30) Caligula, Vespasian, and Titus "that these 'official powers' of the emperor began to shatter the molds imposed by the republican tradition." Remarkably, according to Richey (note 5)

> the reigns of Vespasian (69-79 C.E.) and Titus (79-81 C.E.) immediately preceded the period during which the composition of John occurred. They clearly constitute a period of aggressive expansion in imperial powers that would have further imposed the personality and figure of the emperor upon his subjects.

Since, according to Richey (30), the

> *potestas* of the emperor, however, was never sufficient by itself to rule the empire of the first century..., even when expanded quite beyond traditional republican boundaries..., Augustus made *auctoritas* a central component of his mode of governing.

Formally (note 7), even here

> we find Augustus working out of the republican tradition, at least nominally, since under the republic *auctoritas* had referred to "an informal decree of the senate" or "a proposal made by an individual senator."[14]

But in practice (31), *auctoritas*, according to Karl Galinsky,[15] is

> "part of a para- or supraconstitutional terminology (other such terms are *princeps, pater patriae*, and even *libertas*) by which Augustus bypassed or, on a different view, transcended the letter of the republican constitution." This *auctoritas,* in turn, was based—indeed, defined by—Augustus' "personal influence or ascendancy." [*Latin*, 12] John Buchan more generally describes it as "a status won by strong men in all ages despite the forms of a constitution."

In the background of Augustus' *auctoritas* as "an amorphous and informal influence based not on legal statute" were

> his personal client-relationships with numerous individuals inside and outside of the official governmental structure. There was precedent for this use of the clientele-structure by Julius Caesar, who administered Gaul solely through his *auctoritas,* and a major factor in Augustus' triumph over Antony was "his mobilisation of [Julius] Caesar's clientela" [so Christ 49]. It is not surprising that under Augustus the client-patron relationship became the decisive element of how his *auctoritas* functioned in Roman political culture, since its application to the state repeated a more basic pattern of human relationships which organized Roman society at every level.

This is how (note 13) Garnsey and Saller[16] "describe the centrality of Patronage to the Roman social order":

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14 Thus Richey cites Glare, P. G. W., ed. *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, combined ed., repr. with corrections, Oxford: Clarendon, 1966, s. v. *auctoritas*, 4. To further citations from this dictionary I refer with "***Latin***" plus a page number in square brackets.

15 In the following paragraph, Richey cites Karl Galinsky, *Augustan Culture: An Interpretative Introduction*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, 12, and John Buchan, *Augustus,* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1937, 151.

16 Richey cites Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller, „Patronal Power Relations", in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society,* ed. Richard A. Horsley; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997, 96.

> "The place of a Roman in society was a function of his position in the social hierarchy, membership of a family, and involvement in a web of personal relationships extending out from the household. Romans were obligated to and could expect support from their families, kinsmen, and dependents both inside and outside the household, and friends, patrons, protégés and clients."

Also (31-32) in "the case of the emperor, this client-patron relationship" was no one-way street; rather (32), it was a link of

> the emperor to his subjects not merely on a transactional basis but also, ideally, on a deeper level of loyalty and trust. In this respect, the emperor's *auctoritas* was part of what made him a leader as opposed to a mere official (however powerful).

As a vivid example (note 14) of "the informal yet powerful influence of *auctoritas,*" Sherwin-White[17] cites "Paul's appeal to Caesar in Acts 26:32":

> Equally when Agrippa remarked: "This man could have been released if he had not appealed to Caesar," this does not mean that in strict law the governor could not pronounce an acquittal after the act of appeal. It is not a question of law, but of the relations between the emperor and his subordinates, and of that element of non-constitutional power which the Romans called *auctoritas*, "prestige," on which the primacy of the Princeps so largely depended. No sensible man with hopes of promotion would dream of short-circuiting the appeal to Caesar unless he had specific authority to do so.

Brunt and Moore[18] (32) aptly explain the difference between *potestas* and *auctoritas*:

> "With *potestas* a man gives orders that must be obeyed, with *auctoritas* he makes suggestions that will be followed." Thus, publication—or, when necessary, invention—of those qualities in the personal character of the emperor that represent him as a reliable and trustworthy patron became one of the most important functions of the Augustan Ideology.

Augustus himself (33), in the account of his life's work, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, "The Deeds of the Divine Augustus,"[19]

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17 Richey cites A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1963, 65.

18 Richey cites P. A. Brunt and J. M. Moore, ed. *Res Gestae Divi Augusti: The Achievements of the Divine Augustus*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967, 84.

19 Richey cites Augustus Caesar, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* [hereafter abbreviated: ***Res Gestae***] after the translation by Brunt and Moore, 34.3: *Post id tempus auctoritate omnibus praestiti, potestatis autem nihilo amplius habui quam ceteri qui mihi quoque in magistratu conlegae fuerunt.* Both the Latin and Greek versions used in this study are drawn from *Documents illustrating the Reigns of Augustus and Tiberius* (2d ed.; ed. Victor Ehrenberg and A.

> writes of his sixth and seventh consulships: "After this time, I excelled all in influence (*auctoritate*), although I possessed no more official power (*potestatis*) than others who were my colleagues in the several magistracies."

2.1.2 The Imperial Cult in Its Political and Religious Dimensions

It is precisely this last-mentioned document, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* (34), written by Augustus himself, that was "was read to the Senate by Tiberius' son at Augustus' funeral in 14. C.E." in order to ground, as Gradel[20] says, "the old emperor's argument, his *apologia,* for receiving his crowning honour, state divinity, which he had modestly (or prudently) rejected throughout his lifetime":

> The Senate's decision to declare Augustus a god and to establish his cult had benefits for the empire that stretched far beyond the posthumous gratification of his vanity.

Rather, it was advantageous for the empire (34-35) that in this way "Augustus' *auctoritas,* upon which the Augustan Ideology had placed the burden of Roman stability and prosperity," did not die with him:

> In other words, establishing, honoring and promoting the cult of Augustus allowed subsequent emperors to preserve and draw upon his *auctoritas* in order to solidify the system of governance that he had built during his lifetime. The subsequent establishment of cults for Augustus' successors were modeled on his, and were properly perceived as building upon and continuous with his *auctoritas* rather than as challenges to it.

According to Richey (36), this "legitimating function was especially important in the newly conquered Eastern provinces of the Roman Empire." He cites Simon Price's[21] convincing account, "that the Imperial Cult helped to form a symbiotic relationship between Rome and the Asian Provinces." Yet (37) "the complexity of the Imperial Cult's function in Asia Minor as a set of practices" defies "categorization as either purely political or purely religious."

In this context, Richey takes a critical view of an interpretation of the Imperial Cult that "reflects a very Christian ... understanding of religion as essentially or even exclusively concerned with 'interiority' as the criterion of authenticity," as advocated, for example, by Helmut Koester:[22]

H. M. Jones [Oxford: Clarendon, 1976]) 1-31.

20 Richey cites Ittai Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion*, Oxford: Clarendon, 2002, 281.

21 Richey refers to Simon R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

22 Richey cites Helmut Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament: Volume 1. History, Culture and Religion of the Hellenistic Age*, 2nd ed. Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1995, 355.

> The cult of the emperor was part of the official Roman state religion, it never became a new religion as such, or a substitute for religion. ... Certainly, people were grateful for the establishment and preservation of peace by the emperor, and they hoped that the gods or the powers of fate would continue to enable the emperor to secure peace and prosperity. But this did not imply that this Roman empire could be the fulfillment of the religious longings and spiritual aspirations of mankind.

Richey, on the other hand, resists treating the Imperial Cult exclusively

> as a political, sociological, or cultural practice. However, with the exception of some educated and philosophically inclined elites, the contrast between "interior" and "exterior" religion was hardly a central one for the first-century mind, if it existed at all.

Quoting (38) Géza Alföldy,[23] Richey even emphasizes "that the success of the Imperial Cult ultimately depended upon its ability to meet the sincere religious needs of everyday people," centered around the concept of *salus*, meaning something like well-being, salvation, security, health:

> First, even if the worship of the emperor might upon occasion have amounted to nothing more than adulation or political calculation, or even if it was sometimes mere hypocrisy, there can be no doubt about the widespread conviction that the ruler was a god, or was at least something like a god. His insuperable and therefore divine power, at once a very real and present force for most of his subjects, was regarded by these people as the guarantee of their *salus*. Moreover, to secure the continual operation of this power, it was necessary to fulfill the demands of cult—with prayers, victims, and further rites—in the same way as one might acquire the help of other gods. The only difference was that the emperor was also a human being, liable to illness and death, i.e., he could guarantee the *salus* of his subjects only when his own *salus* was secured. Precisely this double nature of the ruler, however, magnified the importance of his cult. On the one hand, it was necessary to honor and adore him; but it was also essential to sacrifice for his safety. In other words, one sacrificed not only to him as a god, but also for him as a man.

Furthermore (39), "these prayers for the *salus* of the living emperor" can be seen as the client's "fulfillment of yet another duty … towards his patron as payment for the *salus* received from him." In this regard, Steven Friesen[24] writes:

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23 Richey cites Géza Alföldy, „Subject and ruler, subjects and methods: an attempt at a conclusion", in *Subject and Ruler: The Cult of the Ruling Power in Classical Antiquity: Papers presented at a conference held in The University of Alberta on April 13-15, 1994, to celebrate the 65th anniversary of Duncan Fishwick*, ed. Alistair Small, Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplement Series 17, Ann Arbor, MI: n. p., 1996, 255.

24 Richey cites Steven J. Friesen, *Twice Neokoros: Ephesus, Asia and the Cult of the Flavian Im-*

> Thus, the double prayer—to the emperor and to the gods on behalf of the emperor—does not reveal a deep-seated ambivalence at the heart of the imperial cult. Rather, the twofold prayer accurately reflected imperial theology: the gods looked after the emperors, who in turn looked after the concerns of the gods on earth to the benefit of humanity. Imperial authority ordered human society, and divine authority protected the emperors. That is why the prayer to the emperors was a petition regarding various personal affairs, and the prayer to the gods was simply for the continued well-being of the emperor.

The extent to which "devotion to and intercession on behalf of the emperor" was also widespread "outside of the public cult" is difficult to say for lack of evidence (39-40):

> Nevertheless, Ittai Gradel [198-212] argues for at least some standardized forms of private cult based on the presence of frescoes and murals in private residences. Similarly, Duncan Fishwick[25] has argued for an established set of private devotional practices associated with the Imperial Cult, involving the offering of wine and incense to the Emperor on a daily basis within the household.

But even (40) if there was no such "private devotion to the emperor," the Imperial Cult still posed a threat "to early Christians":

> Whether someone worshiped the emperor in the temple or in the home, the act involved the worshiper in a larger ideology that integrated secular power and divinity, as well as the individual's relationship to both. That was one of the most vexing problems confronting Christians in the first century, and the Johannine community may have felt it more keenly than any other Christian group of its day.

2.1.3 The Augustan Poets as Ideological Interpreters of Roman History

Finally, as a third element of Augustan Ideology (41), after the "Imperial Cult" that "situated the subjects of the Emperor 'vertically' in relation to the gods, and the emperor's *auctoritas*" that "situated them 'horizontally' within their society," Richey refers to "the work of the Augustan poets, especially Virgil," who "did so 'diachronically' through the representation of Roman history":

> [T]heir poetry presented Augustus not only as the inheritor of the republican traditions of Rome but also as the bearer of the historical destiny of the Ro-

perial Family, EPROER 116, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993, 152.

25 Richey cites Duncan Fishwick, *The Imperial Cult in the Latin West,* 4 vols. in 2. EPROER 108, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991, 2. 1. 531-32.

> man people. To that extent, their work was very important for both the Imperial Cult and the notion of Augustus' *auctoritas*, and it provided a central support for both. By means of the Augustan poets, the imperial system established by Augustus came to be understood not merely as a fortuitous resolution to the crises of the first century B.C.E. but as the fulfillment of an inevitable and divinely ordained historical process.

In our context (42) the "most important of these ideas ... is the glorification—indeed, the divinization—of Julius Caesar and Augustus by the Augustan poets":

> The clearest example of this "literary-mythic" aspect of the Augustan Ideology is found in work of Virgil. Virgil's *magnum opus*, the *Aeneid*, was begun at Augustus' request after his victory at Actium and famously saved from the flames by imperial order following the poet's premature death in 19 B.C.E. From the flight of Aeneas from fallen Troy in Book 1 to his slaying of Turnus at the mouth of the Tiber (Book 12), the *Aeneid* provides a mythical past for the Romans that is nothing less than a "theology of history" or, better yet, theodicean epic.[26] The weight of this task is reflected even in the somber tone of the poem, "a mood very different from the joyousness of Homer. For the burden the *Aeneid* carries is no less than the history and destiny of Rome and, in a sense, the world."

According to Richey, Virgil "lays the groundwork for the Imperial Cult" not only (42-43) "by emphasizing the divine origin of the Julio-Claudian house, specifically with the idea of presenting Aeneas as the offspring of Venus," but also (44) by portraying "Augustus as chosen by Jupiter to establish a universal Roman empire and to rule over a renewed golden age."[27]

Also (45) "in Virgil's *Fourth Eclogue*, often called the 'Messianic Eclogue,' because of its prophecy of a Golden Age that would be inaugurated by the birth of a child," is found the "motif of Augustus as divinely ordained leader." Its unique feature is (46) "to project the Golden Age into the future rather than in the distant past, as was the common practice in the Roman world," and to identify "its inauguration with the birth of a child." This later "resulted in centuries of christianizing interpretations of the poem," but in "its solemn and prophetic tone" it could be readily applied to the

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26 On this point of an epic questioning the justice of the gods, Richey (note 49) cites Hans-Peter Stahl, "The Death of Turnus: Augustan Vergil and the Political Rival," in *Between Republic and Empire: Interpretations of Augustus and His Principate*, ed. Kurt A. Raaflaub and Mark Toher, Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990, 177. - Immediately following, Richey cites F. J. H. Letters, *Virgil* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1946) 91.

27 Thus Richey cites J. Rufus Spears, *Princeps A Diis Electus: The Divine Election of the Emperor as a Political Concept at Rome,* Papers and Monographs of the American Academy in Rome 26, Rome: American Academy in Rome, 1977, 123.

person and reign of Augustus in the first century, especially "with an audience that considered prophecy an important and interesting part of life."[28]

In addition to Virgil (47), Richey discusses the poet Horace, who, among other things "places Augustus second only to Jove in power as lord of all the earth." Both poets (48) were so popular that they "played no small part in the propagation of the Augustan Ideology among the educated classes, at the very least."

The poet Propertius (49)

> on the other hand, reveals the darker side of the Augustan Ideology, with its unparalleled concentration of power in one person and its sweeping reorganization of traditional Roman society. ... While Augustus' military triumphs are duly praised ... and prayers are offered for his health in order to secure Rome's triumph ...[, r]ather, the underlying theme of Propertius' poem is the precarious position of the individual under Augustus and his ideology.

It is the work of Propertius that, according to Richey, expresses the problem that Augustan ideology must have posed for the Johannine community (50):

> Here we find expressed the essential problem of the Augustan Ideology for the first century. Augustus truly had saved Rome from destruction in the civil wars and had brought a real measure of peace and order to the empire; for these accomplishments the Augustan Ideology duly exalted him. Because of its ubiquity, hegemony within Roman Society, and its penetration into personal life, the Augustan Ideology typified the "Caesarism" that Oswald Spengler called a "kind of government which, irrespective of any constitutional formulation that it may have, is in its inward self a return to thorough formlessness."[29] The price paid for peace was, in the minds of many (if not on their tongues), perhaps too great. If even so educated and well-placed an artist as Propertius could only indirectly lament its influence, how much greater must have been the tensions and difficulties of a dissident group such as the Johannine community.

2.1.4 The Overcoming of the World by Jesus as the Basis for Johannine Criticism of Augustan Ideology

According to Richey (50), "the Roman context of the Fourth Gospel" can only be understood by grasping how through "Augustan Ideology"

> the most important strands of the individual's life (family, status, religion, a personal sense of security) all found a common point of reference and were

28 Thus Richey cites Wendel Claussen, *Virgil's Eclogues*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1995, 65.

29 Thus Richey cites Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West* (2 vols. Trans. Charles Frances Atkinson; New York: Knopf, 1926-28), 2. 431.

> able to be brought together under a larger and surprisingly comprehensive view of the world above and around them and their place in it.

Certainly, "very few people reflected in a systematic fashion—or at all—on how these different aspects of their lives were held together through the person of the emperor," as indeed the "hallmark of any successful ideology ... is its invisibility to those who live under it."

What is special about John's Gospel, now, according to Richey (50-51)?

> It is only when one steps outside of a meaning-system, when, like Jesus, one "overcomes the world" (John 16:33), that it can become an object of reflection and criticism. When the Johannine community stepped outside of this ideology (and outside the legally privileged realm of the synagogue as well), it unavoidably placed itself against the Roman world in which it lived. It is to the results of this conflict, namely, the danger of persecution by Roman authorities experienced by the Johannine community, that we now turn.

2.2 Exclusion from the Synagogue and Persecution as Challenges to the Johannine Community

Recalling (51) that the "synagogue was a 'legally privileged realm' within Roman society" and "Jews in Roman society were exempt from many of the practices of the Augustan Ideology," Richey again emphasizes how traumatic the loss of "this special status" must have been for the Johannine community, bringing them "at odds not only with the Jews but with Rome as well." He therefore outlines "the dilemma facing Johannine Christians when the Gospel was composed: while no longer Jews either legally or theologically, neither were they Romans."

Two points of view I consider questionable in this analysis:

First, it cannot be assumed that the Johannine community at the time of the writing of the Gospel already understood itself as Christian in contrast to the religion of Judaism. Ton Veerkamp assumes that it rather understood itself well Jewish as the true Israel trusting in the Messiah Jesus, while it reproached the Judean leadership at the time of Jesus for submitting to the Roman emperor as their only king (John 19:15), and also ultimately condemned Rabbinic Judaism as "children of *diabolos*" by coming to terms with the emperor as the "murderer of humans on principle"[30] and the Roman world order led by him.

Second, it can hardly be supposed that the Johannine community should have gained its critical insights into Augustan ideology, as mentioned by Richey, only after its exclusion from the synagogue. For every Jew, trust in the one God of Israel dia-

30 Thus Veerkamp 206 (The *Diabolos* is Not the Devil, par. 1), translates the words *anthrōpoktonos ap' archēs* in John 8:44.

metrically contradicted the deification of the Roman emperor, and even if Jews were exempt from the Imperial Cult, especially Messianic Jews, who expected from the Messiah Jesus the inception into a life of the coming world age of peace, had to perceive the presumption of the Roman world rulers to have established a *Pax Romana* in their militarily "pacifying" way as sheer mockery.

Unlike Richey, I would accordingly describe the Johannine community as Messianic Jews who are not Romans and at the same time have lost the legal protection of the synagogue led by Rabbinical Jews.

After all, even according to Richey himself (51-52),

> it is very difficult to determine the exact status of the Johannine Christians with respect both to the Roman government and to the synagogue: in both contexts, their position was "extra-legal." The Johannine community, in the eyes of the Romans, was not a legal entity but a vague association of people who could not be accurately numbered. Likewise, for those Johannine Christians who had been made *aposynagōgos*, the synagogue would no longer make official notice of them. Being neither Jew nor Roman, the Johannine community fell between the cracks in first-century society, leaving no records that would give us direct access to their legal and religious situation. Therefore, as with the reconstructed history of the Johannine community of J. Louis Martyn and Raymond E. Brown, our study here is necessarily inferential and our primary sources scanty.

2.2.1 „Socio-Legal" Effects of the Imperial Cult on the Johannine Community

To determine the impact of Augustan Ideology on the Johannine community (52), Richey leaves aside

> the *auctoritas* of the emperor and the "literary-mythic" aspects of the Augustan Ideology, not because they were unimportant—they were perhaps even more important than the Imperial Cult—but because they were by definition ideological and not obligatory in the strictest sense of the term. Only in the Imperial Cult do we find a legally constituted and manifestly public forum within which participation or non-participation could be easily recognized and punished.

At least for the first century, it is true that the "Imperial Cult relied far more upon social pressure rather than legal sanction for its success." Such festive events apparently often resembled fairs (53) that served to sell goods, and "[b]ecause of its entertainment value, as much as for any religious content the Imperial Cult might have, encouragement to attend was probably unnecessary for many people." Moreover, as Fishwick [2. 1. 529] writes,

> since “the different sections of the municipal populace would have been represented whenever or wherever the town paid cult to the emperor,” the absence of members of the Johannine community might have been noted by authorities.

Richey therefore suggests that “[c]omplete avoidance of these ceremonies would have been difficult anyway, if for no other reason than their scale and their place in the public calendar.”

As to the participation (54) of the individual “in the official rites performed by the high priest,” Richey writes, quoting Fishwick [2. 1. 529-530], that

> in principle everyone was expected to take part but all that was required was to wear festive attire, notably crowns, and to hang the doors of one’s home with laurels and lamps. ... Above all, formal participation did not, as a rule, impose any obligation to perform rites; individuals were free to pay cult or not as they chose. In practice it seems clear that everyone did join in, even the elite, to some of whom the emperor cult might appear laughable or offensive.

According to Alföldy [255],

> “[i]n the cult of the emperor, however, practically everybody was involved. This is true in a double sense. Spatially, the ruler-cult was carried out at Rome as well as in all the towns of Italy and the provinces, and even in private houses. Socially, it was spread through all classes and groups.”

According to Richey, this leads to the conclusion (55):

> Given the popularity of and broad demographic representation at the festivals, systematic avoidance of them would have been noticeable, to say the least.
>
> More serious still, the “official” character of these ceremonies made any public resistance to them appear as anti-social and a potential threat to the public order deserving the notice of the Roman authorities.

Karl Christ [161] hence speaks of a “systematic merger of politics and religion” that “was characteristic of the new religious system” and due to which the “cult worship of the *princeps* became an act of political loyalty.” However, “willingness to perform sacrifice came to be used as a key test of Christians” only later, namely “during the persecutions” of the second and third centuries.[31]

It was (56) Richard Cassidy,[32] who

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31 Thus Richey cites Mary Beard et al., ed. *Religions of Rome*, 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 2. 164.

32 Richey cites Richard J. Cassidy, *John‘s Gospel in New Perspective: Christology and the Realities of Roman Power*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992, 78.

> has argued that John 21 refers, in part at least, to public trials and political loyalty-tests similar to those imposed by Pliny a generation later. In John 21: 18-19 Jesus says to Peter: "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go. (This he said to show by what death he was to glorify God.)"

The "lesson of this passage," according to Cassidy, applies to "all those charged with pastoral responsibility for the community." From this Richey concludes

> that at least the leaders of the Johannine community may have had a certain prominence that could attract Roman attention, or even perhaps a duty to place themselves in harm's way for the good of the community.

It has been objected[33] that, "for Christians, then, sacrificing itself was at stake, not obeisance to the emperor." In response to this (56-57), Richey argues that possibly

> Christians "were happy to pray for the state but not to sacrifice for, let alone to, the emperor," [but] failure to perform such sacrifices was still considered a *de facto* defiance of the emperor subject to severe punishment, even death. The importance of the Imperial Cult for integrating the far-flung empire of the first century and reinforcing the position of the emperor within this empire made it a central element in the Augustan Ideology. Through it, the ideas of the *auctoritas* of the emperor and the destiny of Rome were able to be disseminated throughout every level of Roman society in a form both recognizable and powerfully persuasive. Given this context, it is not surprising that rejection of the Imperial Cult was seen not as a private decision but as a public and political act of rebellion against Rome, or that its punishment took place within the context of the cult.

In this regard (57) Fishwick [2. 1. 577] recalls

> "the martyrdom of Christians ... in the context of games linked with imperial festivals or put on by imperial priests. It was in the amphitheater that condemned prisoners were decapitated, burned alive or exposed to the beasts, so the setting was appropriate for the punishment of those who refused to pay cult to the gods of Rome, one aspect of which was the cult of the emperor." The most notorious persecutions took place, of course, in the second and third centuries. However, the Neronian persecution of Christians in Rome in 64 C.E. indicates what Christian communities potentially faced already in the first century.[34]

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33 Richey cites Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, 164.

34 To this end, Richey cites Michael Grant, *The World of Rome*, Cleveland/New York: World, 1960, 186-87.

2.2.2 Legal Status of Johannine Jesus Followers under Roman Rule after Their Exclusion from the Synagogue

Since (57) the Johannine community "originated within the synagogue and was in conflict with it during the latter half of the first century—and certainly during the time of the Gospel's composition," the first step in clarifying its position "vis-à-vis the Imperial Cult" is "to determine the status of the Jews under Roman rule":

> Jews within the empire enjoyed a *de facto*, if not a *de iure*, exemption from participation in the Imperial Cult. As a result, they were normally spared from the persecutions that Christians endured in the first three centuries.

Helmut Koester [215-216], however (58), "denies that the Jews had any special legal status whatsoever within the empire":

> "Members of the diaspora communities ... were never officially exempted from participation in the public cults of the city or state. The idea that Judaism was a *religio licita*, an officially licensed religion, is a modern construction meant to draw a comparison with unprivileged early Christianity; this concept did not exist in antiquity, either in the Hellenistic or Roman period. ... No one could possibly receive permission to scorn the deities of the city or the gods of the Roman people. It is no accident that no document is preserved that grants such a right; the claims of Jewish authors in this respect are purely apologetic. In actual practice, it was simply ignored when Jews (or Christians) failed to show up at official religious celebrations. Such nonobservance was only noticed when there were other reasons for a rise in anti-Jewish feelings among residents of the city."

According to Richey, though, "Koester is almost certainly mistaken in this claim." For example, Wayne Meeks[35] (58-59)

> points out that in "the famous letter of Claudius in A.D. 41, a papyrus copy of which was discovered in the first decade of this century, ... [he] reconfirmed the Jews' rights to continue their ancestral practices without molestation." These would presumably include, for instance, the Jewish law forbidding the display of pagan images within the Temple, which had always been respected by Roman governors; the exception was Pilate, who provoked a major riot recorded by Josephus (*J.W.* 2.169-74; *Ant.* 18.55-59). These privileges were not restricted to Palestine. Josephus also records "a series of edicts by Roman officials guaranteeing the rights of the Jews of Ephesus and exempting from military service those of them who were Roman citizens."

35 Richey cites Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1983, 38 and 44. The text referred to by Meeks is PLond. 1912 (= *CPJ* no. 153).

Such privileges (59) were naturally accompanied by "a Jewish substitution for the Imperial Cult." In this regard, E. Mary Smallwood[36] „in a discussion of the province of Judea in the early first century, writes":

> "It went without saying that the Jews of the new province enjoyed *the privileges of religious liberty guaranteed for the Diaspora by Julius Caesar and Augustus* [emphasis added]. The right to practice Judaism carried with it automatically the privilege of exemption from participation in the imperial cult. It was most probably at the time of the formation of the province, when the normal provincial oath of loyalty to the emperor will have been instituted, that a substitute for the direct worship of the emperor as a deity was devised for the Jews: in accordance with their Law, which countenanced prayer and sacrifice for temporal overlords, sacrifices of two lambs and a bull were to be offered daily in the Temple to God for the emperor's well-being, to replace the offering of sacrifices to the emperor himself normal in other provinces."

Richey does not presuppose "that first-century Judaism was monolithic," but (60) it "was hardly amorphous and the requirements for being considered Jewish could not have been completely subjective" (60-61):

> The self-understanding of what it meant to be Jewish was intimately connected to membership in the synagogue, "especially outside Palestine," D. M. Smith [15] argues, where "synagogue membership [would] be the decisive mark of Jewish identity." On a practical level, the continuation of the Jerusalem temple tax and its confiscation by the Emperor Vespasian after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. would have required administrative rules among the Romans which conformed more or less to the current Jewish self-understanding. At the very least, payment of the tax would be required for member of the synagogue by the synagogue authorities, which itself would be a criterion for membership. This is also important for determining when the Johannine community might have become recognizable to the Romans as a distinct group. Expulsion from the synagogue would remove someone from the tax-roll, which would simplify the task of a Roman inquisitor.

In this regard, Smallwood [345] draws attention to the fact (note 111), that Vespasian

> "[i]n 71-72 ... appropriated the half-shekle Temple-tax for the Roman exchequer by converting it into a tax ostensibly for the benefit of the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, the god who in the Roman victory had triumphed over the God of Israel, and at the same time extending its incidence to cover both sexes from the age of three to (probably) the sixty-second birthday in the case of

36 Richey cites E. Mary Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule from Pompey to Diocletian: A Study in Political Relations*, 2nd ed. Boston/Leiden: Brill, 2001, 147-48.

> women and perhaps for life in the case of men. The effect of this measure was that Judaism became a *religio licita* only for those people who declared their allegiance by paying the *didrachmon,* soon to be known as the 'Jewish Tax', to Rome, and thus purchasing the privilege of worshiping Yahweh and contracting out of the imperial cult by a subscription to Jupiter."

Those who belonged to the Johannine community (61) and "were declared *aposynagōgos* … would presumably have ceased payment of the 'Jewish tax', … would have lost their legal exemption from the Imperial Cult and may have presented a new set of problems to the Roman authorities." Richey does not rule out that

> these problems may have arisen even earlier, depending on the exact meaning of *aposynagōgos*: it may be a technical legal term which actually effected the expulsion of Johannine Christians from the synagogue, or only a descriptive term (possibly devised by Christians) referring to an expulsion that was accomplished separately.

On the question (62) as to whether the separation of the Johannine community from the synagogue also led to "the persecution of Christians by leaders of the synagogue," Brown [42]

> cites the deaths of Stephen (Acts 7:58-60), James son of Zebedee (Acts 12:2-3), and of James the brother of the Lord (Josephus, Ant. 20.9) as examples, and the theological justification given for such killings (*m. Sanh*. 9:6). Martyn [54 and 47] points to Acts 13:34-50, where "in Pisidian Antioch the Jews persuade the city authorities 'to drive Paul and Barnabas out of their district." This occurred at a time when Paul was still subject to direct punishment from the Jewish authorities themselves (2 Cor 11:24): "Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews forty lashes less one."

Brown [42-43], however, presupposes (62-63)

> "that in the second century the 'killing' of Christians by Jews was most often not a direct action but by way of denunciation to the Romans. Judaism was a tolerated religion, and in principle the Jews were not forced to take part in public worship. As long as Christians were considered Jews, there was no specific legal reason for the Romans to bother them. But once the synagogues expelled them and it was made clear that they were no longer Jews, their failure to adhere to pagan customs and to participate in emperor worship created legal problems. Second-century Christians accused Jews of betraying them to Roman inquisitors."

According (63) to Smallwood [218-219], already "the Neronian persecution—which predates the production of the Fourth Gospel by a generation—'was engineered by the Jews in an attempt to enlist the might of Rome as their ally in their conflict with the new sect which they feared and hated.'" Brown [43], on the other hand, as-

sumes that "indirect participation in executions carried out through expulsion from the synagogues may have been part of the background for John's charges against 'the Jews.'"

Now Richey supposes that the Johannine community consisted "not only of Jews but also of Gentiles who presumably had previously participated in the Imperial Cult" which caused further "problems with Roman authority." To this end, citing Goodman,[37] he highlights (64) that "the Johannine Christians" more strictly prohibited "their continued participation in pagan practices" than was done in the Jewish environment with regard to

> a Gentile "God-fearer," who could frequently meet the Jewish demand of monotheism "with singularly little action ... by the avowal that the divinities he worshiped were all aspects of the single divine nature."

What Price [222] "calls the Christian 'transvaluation of sacrifice' prevented any such laissez-faire attitude towards paganism, even if distinctions were made by the Romans between sacrifice for the emperor and sacrifice to him."

Thus, according to Richey, it is clear

> that any decision to recuse oneself from participation in the Imperial Cult, especially after previous involvement, carried potential dangers. … The persecution of Roman Christians by Nero in 64 was a constant reminder of the threat of Roman power to the Christians of the late first century. Assuming the correctness of these considerations, it may be expected that the Fourth Gospel contains a polemic aimed not only against the Jews who incited persecution of the Johannine community, but also against the Roman authorities and the Imperial Cult that served as their instruments.

2.3 How Did the Johannine Community Challenge Augustan Ideology?

A member (64) of the Johannine community in the first century lived "within a world whose focal point, religious, political, and historical, was the Emperor," and faced the challenge (64-65)

> to set oneself outside the world of the Roman world of the first century, ideologically if not politically. To recognize Christ as *Deus et dominus* was, by definition, not to recognize Domitian as such. And this, in turn, was to deny the ideological foundations of the political order established during the Augustan Principate, which had restored peace, stability and a relative prosperity to the Mediterranean after the disastrous civil wars of the first century B.C.E.

37 Richey refers to Martin Goodman, „Jewish Proselytizing in the First Century", in *The Jews Among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire*, ed. Judith Lieu et al., London/New York: Routledge, 1992, 73.

Richey's following formulations again presuppose that for John's Gospel he already perceives Christianity as a religion separate from Judaism (65):

> Christianity, like Judaism before it, made a special claim on the believer that took precedence over all previous commitments. Unlike the Jews, though, it was not until the fourth century that Christians found a place within Roman society that would shelter them from its power. Thus, conversion to Johannine Christianity meant that the Roman imperial *Weltanschauung* had to be rejected and replaced, however inchoately at first, by a new understanding of the world which was radically incommensurable with their previous beliefs and the beliefs of the Roman world about them. That persecution would have followed upon such a decision is hardly surprising, since by its refusal to accede to the Augustan Ideology the Johannine community effectively challenged the authority of the entire social order of the first century.

Paradoxically, it is the "crucifixion of Jesus at the hands of Roman authorities and the belief in his subsequent resurrection and ascension into heaven" in which "the main contestants vying for divine authority" are opposed to each other:

> To defend the divinity and authority of Jesus for believers, it was necessary to delimit the divinity and authority of the emperor. In order to do so, it was necessary to make their respective authorities in some way commensurable, and thus a common language of power was required to present this conflict. Since there was no well developed christological language already available, the only remaining option was to conceptualize and portray Jesus in the language of power familiar to Christians, namely that of the emperor. In Chapter Three we will examine the language of the Fourth Gospel and see how, in some of its key christological terms, it echoes the language of the Augustan Ideology in its attempt to express a distinctively Johannine Christology.

In dealing with this "language of power," however, it will have to be carefully examined in which way "the divinity and authority of Jesus" differs very essentially from that "of the emperor." And again it will have to be asked whether John's Gospel is already about a "Christology" in the sense of a Christian doctrine of Jesus or about a Jewish-Messianic doctrine of the Messiah Jesus who embodies the liberating NAME of the God of Israel.

3. Vocabulary of the Roman Language of Power in the Gospel of John

Introducing his third chapter (66), Richey discusses "the effects of Victorian literary culture on the experience of trench warfare in the First World War." For example,

> Paul Fussell discusses how John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* provided a template used by British soldiers to interpret both the experience of war and its role in their private spiritual histories.

In this way, according to E. D. Hirsch[38] "new meanings" emerge of already existing ideas and concepts (66-67):

> "No one would invent or understand a new type of meaning unless he were capable of perceiving analogies and making novel subsumptions under previously known types. ... By an imaginative leap the unknown is assimilated to the known, and something genuinely new is realized." The "new type of meaning" is that of the new industrialized mass trench warfare. The "previously known types" are the motifs and images of popular romance. The "something genuinely new" is the significant memories of the war we have been focusing on, where significant means, in fact, artistic. Because Dante has never really been domesticated in Protestant England, when an English sensibility looks for traditional images of waste and horror and loss and fear, it turns not to the *Inferno* but to *Pilgrim's Progress*."

In this way (67), according to Richey

> the traumatic events of the First World War, despite their incommensurability with all previous civilian life, became intelligible and capable of communication by being cast into existing literary models. A reader lacking familiarity with this precedent literature misses not only occasional literary echoes and allusions, but also the larger meaning-system that made possible the remembrance and description of the war.

A similar "interpretative process" is presupposed by Richey

> within the Johannine community during the first century in its attempts to formulate and express the belief in Jesus which defined it and separated it from both Judaism and the surrounding Roman world. In this case, the "new type of meaning" behind the Fourth Gospel is the belief that the human being Jesus was also the divine Christ who offered salvation to his believers. The "something genuinely new" was the distinctive high Christology of the Johannine community, which found its first and fullest expression in the Fourth Gospel. And, I will suggest in this chapter, at least some of the "previously known types" were drawn from the Augustan Ideology, which placed the Roman emperors at the center of religious and political life throughout the Mediterranean world and, in particular, Asia Minor during the first century. As such, the Augustan Ideology provided a universal currency for discussions of power and divinity.

38 Richey refers to Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975, 139. In turn, the latter draws on E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1967, 105.

I consider these reflections a promising approach to understanding John's Gospel but again point to two open questions. First, it is necessary to ask what kind of "deliverance" Jesus offers to those who trust in him: Is it about personal salvation after death in heaven or about political liberation, justice, and peace on earth? Second, it is still open whether John indeed already represents a high Christology in the sense of an essential identity of Jesus with God or whether he proclaims the Jewish man Jesus as the Messiah and the embodiment of the liberating NAME of Israel's God.

Richey assumes that the Fourth Gospel, through its history outlined in the first chapter, may have come into contact and conflict with Augustan Ideology more than any other New Testament text (except Revelation). That is (68):

> As the community left its original home in the synagogue and turned to the surrounding world for converts, a new vocabulary to proclaim its belief in Christ would have been acutely needed.

Richey's assumption of a stronger influx of Gentiles already preceding the formulation of John's Gospel contradicts, in my opinion, its entire outline. However, I also do not consider it necessary to explain why John takes up vocabulary and ideas of Augustan ideology as a way to distinguish his proclamation of Jesus the Messiah from it. Especially a radical Messianic group in Palestine, which considers the worship of the Roman emperor as Deus ac dominus, "Lord and God," to be abominable, has, after all, every reason to clarify who in their eyes has actually been sent into the world by the one God of Israel as the Liberator.

Also, in fact, it is true that, as Brown [57] points out, "phrases like 'Son of God' and 'I AM' have a distinctive Old Testament and intertestamental background" and yet "could be appreciated by pagan Greeks." Precisely because of such similarities in vocabulary, however, it will be necessary to examine thoroughly whether a Gentile Greek understanding of such expressions really corresponds to their meaning in the Jewish Bible. The question, then, is whether John as a "Christian" wanted to adapt the meaning of Old Testament ideas to the interpretive horizon of Hellenistic-Roman church members or whether he was a Jewish Messianist who sought to fill Greco-Roman vocabulary from its Hebrew-Biblical equivalents.

So what is Richey concerned with in his third chapter? With its unique Christology and Jesus-centered doctrine of redemption, in his eyes "the Johannine community possessed the first two components of Hirsch's theory, the 'new type of meaning' and the 'something genuinely new.'" What remains to be demonstrated, however, is "that John's Gospel generated this new type of meaning via the ideology and language of imperial Rome." To this end, Richey looks "for lexical parallels between the Augustan Ideology and the Christology of the Fourth Gospel" and focuses on (69) "three of the most important concepts relating to the person of Christ in the gospel: *exousia* {power}; *ho sōtēr tou kosmou* {Savior of the world}; and *ho hyios tou theou* {Son of God}."

3.1 The Meaning of *exousia*, "Power"

The Greek word *exousia* (70) "appears in John only eight times (1:12; 5:27; twice in 10:18; 17:2; twice in 19:10; 19:11),"[39] yet

> these occurrences mark some key texts in the revelation and defense of Jesus' divinity and authority: the Prologue (1:12), confrontations with the Jewish authorities over Jesus' work and person (5:27; 10:18); the Farewell Discourse in which Jesus calls upon the Father to glorify him (17:2); and the confrontation with Pilate during the Passion Narrative (19:10-11). In each of these contexts, Jesus' supremacy is either being challenged by those outside the community (10:18; 19:10-11), or being affirmed by Jesus (17:2) or the text of the Gospel (1:12). If the purpose of the Gospel was indeed that the reader "may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (20:31), the evangelist could hardly have chosen more prominent places to employ this term.

Scholars and translators disagree on the "proper English translation of *exousia,*" usually alternating "between 'power,' 'authority' and 'right' as the best rendering." The Greek-English lexicon BDAG[40] offers "as possible translations 'right,' 'capability,' 'authority,' 'absolute power,' and 'ruling' or 'official power' for the different attestations of the word in John." In normal cases (71), "such a diverse rendering of a single term would not raise any great concern," but here Richey suspects "that the word choice of the evangelist was quite intentional and uniform in meaning." Since "Greek offers almost as many synonyms as does English for these words," it is "unlikely that the consistent usage of *exousia* was coincidental." In any case, he must have known "such common terms as *dynamis* or *ischys*" but dropped them in favor of *exousia*. What meaning did he intend to convey?

3.1.1 Does John by the Term *exousia* Hint at the Unmentioned *axiōma*?

The (72) different terms for the emperor's "power," *potestas* and *auctoritas*, mentioned in chapter 2, are rendered (note 10) in Greek by the words *exousia* and *axiōma* in an inscription on the "the temple of 'Rome and Augustus' at Ancyra, the ancient capital of Galatia, the modern Ankara" [so Brunt und Moore 1].

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39 All word counts by Richey, unless otherwise noted, are based on Alfred Schmoller, *Handkonkordanz zum griechischen Neuen Testament* (8th ed., 3d rev. printing; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1989).

40 By the abbreviation **BDAG** (containing the first letters of the names Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich) Richey refers to the *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature,* 3d ed. Based on Walter Bauer's *Griechisch-Deutsche Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen Literatur,* 6.th ed., ed. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, with Viktor Reichmann and on previous editions by W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker, Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

But whether *axiōma* actually had "a special technical sense that contrasted with *exousia*" is difficult to say, since

> *exousia* is mentioned countless times in connection with the Julio-Claudian and Flavian emperors, but *axiōma* (as well as *auctoritas* in the Latin West) is almost entirely absent from the literary and inscriptional evidence for the Imperial Cult.

This is easily explained, however, because "*axiōma* or *auctoritas* refers to a set of practices and arrangements that is not publicly expressed or documented." Today we would perhaps speak of good connections, the gaining of advantage through relationships, or of nepotism. Therefore, according to Richey (73), "the scarcity of *axiōma* in the evidence of the Imperial Cult is not particularly relevant for determining its technical meaning in the first century."

After all, in "Classical Greek the meaning of *axiōma* corresponded well with what the Romans would come to call *auctoritas*." The relevant lexicon LSJ[41] (73-74)

> defines it primarily as "that of which one is thought worthy, an honour," secondly as "honour, reputation," and only thirdly as "rank, position." Since the Greek translation of the *Res Gestae* was almost certainly a local product, its vocabulary likely reflects the accepted usage of these terms in Asia Minor and not a mistranslation by a non-native Greek- or Latin-speaking author [thus Brunt and Moore 2].

Richey's following argumentation, however, remains simply incomprehensible to me (74):

> This presumably technical usage of *axiōma* in conjunction with *exousia* in the *Res Gestae* might also explain John's predilection for the former[42] because of the importance of this document in the establishment and development of the Imperial Cult, especially in Asia Minor.

Richey thus refers to his assumption that the Johannine community did the final editing of its gospel as late as in Asia Minor. But first, a conclusion based on the non-mention of a word in John's Gospel that occurred in an inscription of such temples is hardly convincing, and second, Richey himself had just explained that this non-mention corresponded precisely to the usual practice throughout the Roman Empire of precisely not explicitly alluding to the *auctoritas* or *axiōma* of the emperor. That "the display of the *Res Gestae* at temples and altars" other than in Asia Minor "may not have been the practice" (75) cannot, therefore, serve as confirmation of the lo-

41 By the abbreviation **LSJ** Richey refers to Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, ed. *A Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. H. S. Jones and R. McKenzie, rev. supplement P. G. W. Glare, Oxford: Clarendon, 1996.

42 Is there possibly an oversight? Does he mean "the latter" instead of "the former"?

calization of the Johannine community in Asia Minor, especially since, according to Price [56], ”that during this period of imperial consolidation all cultic practice, including the Imperial Cult, tended towards uniformity.”

Another line of thought put forward by Richey (76) does not convince me either:

> As we have seen, the pairing and contrasting of *axiōma* and *exousia* in Roman political thought, if not always in texts, was commonplace in the first century. Thus the employment of one in a political context would have been evocative of the other, even for so common and multivalent a term as *exousia*.

But by avoiding the term *axiōma,* John at the same time demonstratively renounces

> to memorialize another Caesar. Assuming the evangelist was writing for a community alienated from and feeling threatened by the surrounding Roman society, there would be no better way to challenge the most pervasive form of secular power in Asia Minor, *axiōma*, than by constantly invoking its contrasting pair, *exousia*.

Unfortunately, this conclusion is drawn *e silentio*, that is, based only on John’s silence with regard to the *auctoritas* or *axiōma*. And the persuasiveness of this silence does not necessarily increase as we remember that even elsewhere there was hardly any explicit mention of this form of the emperor's power.

3.1.2 Jesus’ *exousia* in John Is Unmistakable with *auctoritas* or *axiōma*

Nevertheless (76), Richey wants to “examine the Fourth Gospel with the distinction between *exousia* and *axiōma* in mind” and thus clarify “why John would want to evoke this comparison in the minds of his readers.” In doing so, he first emphasizes that in John “*exousia* is a manifestly christocentric concept (76-77):

> All the references to *exousia* immediately involve the person of Jesus: to the power he gives (1:12); to the power he is given (5:27; 10:18; 17:2); and to the power which is wrongly claimed over and then denied by him (19:10-11).

Further, Richey (77) disputes that this *exousia* related to Jesus in John’s Gospel could be associated with a meaning that in the Roman context was denoted by the term *auctoritas*, though I find it a bit confusing that instead of using *auctoritas* here he constantly gives the English translation “authority” in place of just stating that John understands Jesus’ power simply not as *auctoritas* but as *exousia* conferred upon him:

> If *exousia* was intended by John to mean “authority” in the technical sense described above, major problems would immediately arise for his Christology and soteriology since in the first century, as has been shown above, “authority” was not a transferable possession. Jesus could not give his followers the “authority” to become children of God (1:12), nor could the Father give him “authority” to execute judgment (5:27), to lay down his life or take it up again

> (10:18), or "authority" over all flesh (173), nor could any "authority" be given to Pilate from above (19:11). All these appearances of *exousia* involve the handing of something to someone else, an action that is inconceivable if *exousia* means "authority," Likewise, Pilate could never release Jesus or crucify him on his own "authority" (19:10), since that ability was clearly given him by his office and not by his personal influence.
>
> Furthermore, John's Christology could not use *exousia* to mean "authority" in this strictly political sense for the simple reason that, as explained above, in the first century "authority" functioned as a "two-way street" or a "system of exchange" between patrons and clients. Thus, of necessity it involved the consent and active participation of both parties, and thereby constituted a *de facto* limitation on the exercise of power.

It is obvious that John did not understand the *exousia* of Jesus in the sense of such an *auctoritas*, which is why he did not use the latter but the former term. Richey, however, also mentions a context (78) in which John deliberately avoids the word *exousia,* namely,

> as "authority" in the associated but somewhat looser sense of "the merit or weight of an opinion or of a person holding that opinion." Nowhere in the gospel is there even a hint that Jesus' *exousia* rests on his virtues, wisdom or learning, as would be the case with Caesar (at least in the Augustan Ideology), the Jewish authorities, or, more distantly, some *theios anēr*.

To this end, Richey calls attention to a "contrast of John with the Synoptic gospels," for in Matthew 7:29; Mark 1:22; and Luke 4:32 Jesus' "authority" as a teacher is certainly rendered by the word *exousia*, while "the closest Johannine parallel omits the use of *exousia* entirely." Instead, in John 7:17 Jesus refers to his teaching as being "from God" and that he does not speak on his own.

All in all, according to Richey (78), this "specific and highly connotative use of *exousia* by John, though, would work, as it would evoke in the minds of the readers the contrasting term in the pair, *axiōma*." Only because "the members of the Johannine community" (79) were familiar with both the concept of *exousia* and the *axiōma* of the emperor, they could

> understand how the *exousia* of Jesus was essentially different from and superior to that of Caesar. ... When the evidence is taken as a whole, it may be reasonably concluded that for John *exousia* means "power" and does not refer to "authority," at least as those concepts were understood at the time. Thus, the absence of *axiōma* from John's Gospel is not an accident, as is possibly the case in the other NT writings. Rather, it is an important part of his christological strategy in the Gospel: *Jesus' exousia, unlike that of the emperor, does not depend at all upon, and differs entirely from, axiōma.*

In "the other NT texts," which also frequently use the word *exousia*, Richey says that "the absence of *axiōma* … does not appear to indicate a similar strategy."

To substantiate this, he first argues that the word *exousia* is used there less in a political sense. The relevant passages in Matthew's Gospel "center mainly around the 'authority' of Jesus (and by extension the church) as opposed to that of the Scribes and Pharisees, and do not evidence any special concern with secular authority." Mark and Luke, on the other hand, pursue what Richey calls a "more cosmological" concern; they associate "their evangelistic statements about out Lord's 'authority' with authority over devils, i.e., the power of casting out unclean spirits."[43] Thus (note 33) "the political aspects of *exousia*" are embedded "into a larger cosmological framework." Completely absent (80) in all the Synoptics is the word *exousia* "in the Passion Narrative (arguably the most obvious place to deploy *exousia* in a political sense)." In addition, Richey notes that

> [u]nlike the contrastive use in John, the Synoptic evangelists generally harmonize secular and divine *exousia*, as summed up in the logion: "Render therefore to Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matt 22:21 || Mark 12:17 || Luke 20:25; cf. *Gos. Thom.* 17). The same holds for Paul. Although *exousia* does occasionally refer to Roman or secular government power (e.g., Rom 13:1), Paul normally uses *exousia* to refer either to his "right" of respect and support by his churches or to spiritual powers and principalities that Christians must resist (e.g., Eph 6:12). In general, Paul was unconcerned about secular authorities; he even offers modest support.

Whether a Synoptic word like the one quoted by Richey actually indicates a peaceful coexistence of the God of Israel and the Roman emperor is doubtful. The fact that also (note 36) "Paul's attitude toward secular authority may be more complex and subversive" is hinted at by Richey himself. In his eyes, however (81), in the Johannine community alone, because of its "unique history," there is "an attempt to evoke a connotation of *axiōma* through its absence."

Nevertheless, Richey knows that "[a]rguments *e silentio*, of course, are always difficult and should be used with caution." He thinks that to this end, a rhetorician like John, who wants to persuade his addressees, follows the path "to sharpen contrasts and eliminate alternatives and possible compromise positions in their minds." In his eyes, the "subtext" not explicitly mentioned "is visible from within the larger social, cultural and political situation that initially produced and received the text."

43 Thus Richey cites Edwin A. Abbott, *Johannine Vocabulary: A Comparison of the Words of the Fourth Gospel with Those of the Three*, London: Adam and Charles Black, 1905, 90.

3.1.3 Jesus' *exousia* Is Incompatible with the *exousia* or *potestas* of the Emperor as well

All of this amounts, according to Richey (77), to John's not wanting to put Jesus' power in any context with *auctoritas* or *axiōma*, since

> [s]uch an understanding of Jesus' *exousia* stands radically at odds with a high Christology of Jesus as the pre-existent *logos* (1:1): he is the one through whom all things were made and without whom not anything was made that was made (1:3), one with the Father (10:30), and the one over whom the ruler of this world has nothing (14:30: *en emoi ouk echei ouden*). Note the absence of the term *exousia* in 14:30, which is entirely appropriate since *exousia* (= "power" in the Johannine sense) cannot be attributed at all to "the Ruler of this world."

The point Richey makes here is highly interesting. After he has rightly excluded that the power of Jesus is to be understood in the sense of Roman *auctoritas*, he cannot define the *exousia* of Jesus in the sense of the Roman *exousia* or *potestas*, as well, because this consists formally only in the official power of a tribune of the people transferred to the emperor within the framework of the republican constitution. According to John, on the other hand, *exousia* is to be determined from the omnipotence of the Creator God, for which he quotes the definition of *exousia* in the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, TDNT:[44]

> "*exousia* signifies the absolute possibility of action which is proper to God, who cannot be asked concerning the relationship of power and legality in this *exousia*, since he is the source of both."

Thus, Richey emphasizes a crucial difference between the *exousia* of God and the emperor, namely that the legitimacy of the former's power is not subject to doubt, while the exercise of the latter's power is subject to both lawful and factual limitations.

Understanding Jesus' answer to Pilate in John 19:10-11 in precisely this sense as a denial of the legitimacy or even the ultimate efficacy of the *exousia* from which Pilate thinks he can act, it is worth taking a closer look at John 14:30: If by the ruler of the world, *ho tou kosmou archōn*, no supernatural devil is meant, but the emperor of Rome as the adversary, *ßatan*, *diabolos*, of the God of Israel, then the lack of any *exousia* of this world ruler, as pointed out by Richey, is to be referred precisely to the *exousia* which, in John's eyes, the Roman emperor wrongfully arrogates to himself.

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44 Richey cites the entry *exousia* by Werner Foerster in: Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. G. W. Bromiley, 10 vols, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976, 2. 566-567.

In summary, Richey suggests (81-82) that

> the significance of *exousia* for John's Christology requires a careful reading of the Fourth Gospel not simply against its Jewish background, but within its immediate cultural and political context. In this context, *exousia* carried not only a specific political meaning in Roman Asia Minor, but also evoked the related concept of *axiōma* which could not be attributed to Christ within the framework of the Johannine Christology. In contrast to the emperor's conditional authority, John proclaims Christ's absolute power.

The latter is true, but—as said—not only to what was meant in good Roman terms by *axiōma* or *auctoritas* and what John clearly alludes to in the Passion Narrative when he has the Jerusalem priesthood challenge the Roman governor regarding the power based on relationships as Caesar's friend (19:12). In the eyes of the evangelist, the *exousia* or *potestas* of the emperor is also not only limited in relation to the power of the Creator, but in the light of his Torah, it is also profoundly illegitimate, namely oppressive and homicidal (8:44).

In this context, Richey's remark (81) that the term *exousia* should be considered "not simply against its Jewish background" is interesting. He himself, yet, almost completely omits just such a consideration. If he were to take into account a passage like Daniel 7:14, in which the word *exousia* three times is related to the power conferred on the Son of Man and to which John 17:2 certainly alludes, then he could even more adequately take into account the counterpart of the power of the liberating God of Israel, who snatches their limited *exousia* from the bestial rulers of this world (Daniel 7:12) and confers it on the ruler with the human face (7:13-14).

In my eyes, then, Jesus' exousia cannot be compared to the emperor's *auctoritas* (*axiōma*), nor to his *potestas* (*exousia*), and not only because John was hardly interested in the intricacies of the Roman constitution. He can only judge the power exercised by the emperor as an oppressive and exploitative tyranny that is completely opposed to the liberating will of the God of Israel and his Messiah Jesus.

3.2 How Is Jesus to Be unterstood as *ho sōtēr tou kosmou*, "the Savior of the World"?

In the case (82) of the phrase *ho sōtēr tou kosmou*, which appears "only once in the Fourth Gospel," John 4:42, the manner is disputed,

> exactly *how* John is being theologically creative here. In Hirsch's terms, what "previously known type" is John employing here to create "something genuinely new" in first-century Christianity? Since John is not theologizing *ex nihilo*, the tradition or cultural phenomenon used in portrayal of Jesus needs to be determined.

To be sure (83), Richey is aware that the Septuagint uses the word *sōtēr* to render the Hebrew word *mashiach* of the Jewish Bible, and he quotes Bernard[45] as saying that "the title has its roots in the OT and there is no need of the hypothesis that it is imported into the NT from the pagan mysteries or from the Emperor cults." But according to "most scholars," there isn't "any biblical or Jewish precedent for John's usage at all":

> it is very infrequent in the LXX: "*sōtēr* is not used as a term for the Messiah" (cf. Isa 62:11); and it is even rarer in later Judaism, where "*sōtēr* occurs in the Apocrypha only with reference to God as the One who keeps Israel past and present from many dangers."[46] Given the paucity of evidence for a Jewish source behind this occurrence of *sōtēr*, at most it can be said that "the OT passages probably provided a scriptural basis for using a title which could be understood in a wider context."[47]

Similarly, also Barrett[48] (note 46) opines:

> "It seems very probable that John's terminology is drawn from Greek sources, as is in part his doctrine of salvation, but he has behind him the Old Testament conception of, and hope for, salvation, and the primitive Christian conviction that the hope was fulfilled in Jesus. John does not hesitate, in this chapter (vv. 25f.), to represent Jesus as the Messiah of Judaism; but he insists that this term, and all others, must be understood in the widest sense."

However, the argument presented here is questionable in two respects.

First, although the word *sōtēr* in the Jewish Bible may not have actually referred to a messianic figure, it definitely served to designate God in his capacity as the liberator of Israel. And the liberating NAME of this God is in turn embodied by Jesus in John's Gospel not only by his repeated recourse to the name of God, *egō eimi*, "I AM," but even with his name *Iēsous*, which goes back to the Hebrew *yəschuʿah,* "liberation."

Second, the broader or widest context of *kosmos* to which John associates the concept of *sōtēr* seems to be understood by the cited exegetes in terms of an extension of the addressees of John's Gospel to the world of nations, which leads to a change in the meaning of the phrase from Hellenistic-Roman influences as well. However, if the *kosmos* here is to be understood not as Jesus' field of mission but as the Roman world order under which the entire human world, and Israel in particular, is en-

45 Richey cites J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John,* 2 vols., ICC, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928, 162.

46 Thus Richey cites Werner Foerster and Georg Fohrer, "*sōtēr*," TDNT, 7. 1012, 1015.

47 Thus Richey cites Pheme Perkins, *The Gospel According to John: A Theological Commentary*, Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1978, 59.

48 Richey cites C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek text*, 2. ed., Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978, 244.

slaved, then Jesus as the world's liberator from the world order that weighs upon it can be understood entirely within the framework of Jesus' Jewish-Messianic confrontation with the Roman emperor.

The fact that the word *sōtēr* (84) occurs very rarely elsewhere in the New Testament before the so-called "Pastoral and Catholic Epistles," written long after John's Gospel, in Richey's view, "perhaps sprang from the association of the term with Hellenistic religion in general and the Imperial Cult in particular." Although, according to Bousset[49] (85), "around the middle of the second century people begin extensively to characterize Jesus as the 'Savior'," in the first century the term *sōtēr*

> did not have a singularly religious, much less messianic, sense. Noting the widespread use of the term in the ancient world in reference not only to political and religious figures but "as a title of honor for deserving persons" of every sort, BDAG defines *sōtēr* quite broadly as "one who rescues, savior, deliverer, preserver." TDNT [7. 1004-10] recognizes an even wider range of meanings in the Hellenistic world, ranging from impersonal entities such as ships or rivers to human and divine persons. Thus, the gods are frequently called *sōtēres*, as are human physicians, philosophers, and statesmen of various importance. When we compare this broad and frequently non-religious Hellenistic usage with the scattered and dissimilar uses of *sōtēr* in the OT and NT, the direction that we should take to understand John 4:42 is clear.

3.2.1 The Phrase *ho sōtēr tou kosmou* in the Roman Imperial Cult

For Richey (85), the meaning of the phrase *ho sōtēr tou kosmou* must remain obscure unless considered in its context, attested only in the Johannine writings (John 4:42 and 1 John 4:14). This alone "would have resonated to the Augustan Ideology":

> While the exact expression used by John was attributed only to Hadrian in the second century, the term *sōtēr* (with various combinations) was applied to every emperor from Augustus to Vespasian with the exception of Caligula, and in the early second century to both Trajan and Hadrian.

Whether or not this term (86) "constituted an official title" and was reserved exclusively for the emperor is irrelevant in Richey's eyes, since, in any case, "it was associated with the emperor in the popular mind" and since "Augustan Ideology encouraged the popular belief in the emperor as *sōtēr*." As an example in this regard (87), Richey cites Dominique Cuss[50] about the emperors Caligula, Vespasian, and Titus:

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49 Richey cites Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus*, trans. John E. Steely; Nashville: Abingdon, 1970, 311.

50 Richey cites Dominique Cuss, *Imperial Cult and Honorary Terms in the New Testament,* Fribourg: Fribourg University Press, 1974, 68-69.

> Philo notes that Caligula had been looked upon by many as the "Saviour and Benefactor" of his people who would "pour fresh streams of blessing on Asia and Europe." ... During the Jewish campaigns, Vespasian and Titus received enthusiastic acclamations and the people hailed them as their Saviors. At Tiberias, Vespasian and his army were met by citizens, who opened up the gates of the city to them, and acclaimed them as their Saviour and Benefactor. ... On the return of Vespasian to Rome after the siege of Jerusalem, he was received with great enthusiasm by the people who had come out to meet him, and they called him their Benefactor and Saviour, the only person worthy to be the ruler of the Romans.

As Cuss also supports these statements about Vespasian and Titus with quotations from Josephus' "Jewish War" (*J. W.* 3.459; 4.112-13; 7,71), it is obvious that the designation of emperors as *sōtēr* must have been familiar to Jews of the first century.

But is it now possible to prove John's intention to establish a connection with the Roman Imperial Cult by naming Jesus as the *sōtēr tou kosmou*? Some authors (88) deny in principle a deliberate adoption of this phrase from such a context; others, "reluctant to associate it specifically with the Imperial Cult," point out, as for example Rudolf Schnackenburg,[51]

> that "the title 'Saviour of the world' also played a part in Hellenism, and the evangelist probably felt that it was well adapted for the public preaching of the Gospel," though he correctly warns that "clearly, he does not wish it to be understood in the sense in which it was used in his syncretistic environment."

Richey, however, objects to "such a minimalist interpretation of John's choice of titles" because, as Cuss [71] notes, "from the point of view of the Roman authorities," its mere use was enough to aggravate "the dispute between the authorities and the Christian community." According to Richey, then,

> the decision by John to use *ho sōtēr tou kosmou* must have been polemical for the very reason that only a polemical intent would justify the hazards of using it in the first place.

3.2.2 The Role of the Title *ho sōtēr tou kosmou* in the Samaritan Setting

Now what is the role of the "narrative context" in which the title *ho sōtēr tou kosmou* is used for Jesus in John, "namely, Jesus' public ministry in a *Samaritan* setting"? In this regard, Richey (89) refers to Newman and Nida,[52] who,

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51 Richey cites Rudolf Schnackenburg (by mistake he calls him Schackenberg here), *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 3 vols. Trans. Kevin Smyth et al., New York: Crossroad, 1980-1990, Band 1, 458.

52 Richey cites Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of John*, London/New York/Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1980, 133.

> while admitting Jewish parallels, … also suggest that, "in light of the fact that Samaria was largely under the influence of Greek culture, it may be better to look for the background of this term in the Greek world, where it was applied to gods, emperors, and various heroes."

This reference to the influence of Greek culture on Samaria, however, in no way does justice to the Johannine account of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritans, as it completely ignores the fact that John stylizes the woman at Jacob's well as a representative of the northern tribes of Israel and understands Jesus' conversation with her as a prelude to the reconciliation of the now for centuries hostile brother nations Israel and Judah (= Samaria and Judea) through the Messiah Jesus. If the story refers to a Greek influence on Samaria, then at most by Jesus' reference to the five men the Samaritan woman had, because one of these men most likely stands for the oppression of Samaria by the Greek conqueror Alexander and his successors.[53]

Richey further elaborates on Craig Koester,[54] who,

> recalling Josephus' accounts of the popular acclamations of Vespasian and Titus as saviors, argues that in 4:42 "the use of the full title 'Savior of the world,' rather than the more typical 'savior' or 'benefactor,' in a scene where Jesus was welcomed by the townspeople on the road and invited into the city, suggests that the passage was intended to evoke imperial connotations." That the following verses (4:43-45) tell of Jesus' being welcomed as well by the Galileans continues a pattern already established by Vespasian and Titus of a *sōtēr* being lauded and welcomed in each city that he visits.

To this (note 69) Richey adds Cassidy's conclusion [103, note 20] that Koester

> "rightly emphasizes that this title transcends the traditional meanings associated with Samaritan or Jewish messianic expectations and attributes a universal significance to Jesus like that of Caesar. Koester's marshalling of references from Josephus to show that the welcome and title accorded Jesus by the Samaritans contrasts effectively to the comparable welcomes and titles accorded to Vespasian and Titus at the time of the Jewish War is also an extremely useful contribution."

Unfortunately, Richey leaves open in what way, according to Koester and Cassidy, the proclamation of Jesus and the Roman emperors as the *sōtēr tou kosmou* should differ in such fundamental ways. Would he and his consultees mean that Jesus as *sōtēr* differs from Samaritan and Jewish as well as Roman imperial expectations in that he does not intend to be the liberator of a single nation, nor the political ruler

53 Cf. Veerkamp 113-16 ("The husband you have now is not your husband").

54 Richey cites Craig Koester, „The Savior of the World (John 4:42)", *JBL* 109 (1990), 667.

of the world like the emperor, but a savior or redeemer of the world in a religious-spiritual sense?

That Richey's reasoning is indeed heading in this direction soon becomes apparent (89-90):

> That John's choice of *sōtēr* in 4:42 was intended to convey to the reader the Imperial Cult and not a Jewish background also seems likely when one recalls that he also had available the noun *Messias*, which the same chapter applies earlier to Jesus (4:25). In the larger narrative context of 4:42 (especially after Jesus had identified himself with the *Messias* to the Samaritan woman in 4:25-26), the reiteration of this title by the Samaritan crowd would be appropriate *unless* John intended to draw upon Roman connotation of the imperial title, *ho sōtēr tou kosmou*. While Jesus is truly the *Messias* awaited by the Jewish people, he is *more* than that: he is savior of the entire world.

According to Richey (note 72),

> [s]uch a "universalist" reading of *sōtēr* becomes even more compelling—and more firmly planted in a specifically Roman context—when we focus on the modifier *tou kosmou* and how it was understood in Roman society: "The [Roman] State is summed up in 'The World.' As Bishop Westcott says, 'In the Emperor the World found a personal embodiment and claimed Divine honour'."[55]

Exactly this identification of the Roman state with the *kosmos* as a well-ordered world, *Pax Romana*, which was pacified by comprehensive military action, is presupposed by Ton Veerkamp[56] in a completely different sense as one of the basic meanings of *kosmos* in the Gospel of John. On this basis, Jesus is the liberator of a human world enslaved by Rome precisely from this alleged Roman world order that actually is a world disorder.

This view, however, differs fundamentally from Richey's (90), according to whom

> the appearance of the imperial title *ho sōtēr tou kosmou* in John 4:42 was the result of an effort by the evangelist to present Jesus as surpassing the nationalist messianic expectations of Samaritans and Jews. His mission, John tells his audience, is truly universal. To supply the language to express this category, John drew on Imperial Cult. While John's Christology comports with the Jewish background of the Johannine community, in the new context of the Augus-

55 Thus Richey cites William M. Ramsay, *The Church in the Roman Empire Before A.D. 170* [New York/London: Putnam's, 1893] 304), who in turn draws on B. F. Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John: the Greek Text, with Notes and Essays* (2d ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1886) 255.

56 Cf. Veerkamp 27-30 (The Light and the World Order), especially his note 36 on the translation of John 1:9.

> tan Ideology it also adopts the idioms of the Imperial Cult, which would have confronted members of the community.

The problem in Richey's remarks is above all the designation of the messianic expectations of Samaritans and Jews as "nationalist." In doing so, he thoroughly misunderstands the biblical promises for Israel and Judah in the prophetic writings and also the way John takes them up. Israel, after all, had been chosen by God from among all peoples, not because of its greatness and importance, but as the smallest among all peoples (Deut. 7:7-8), to lead it into freedom and to preserve that freedom in the observance of the Torah. Under the conditions of the enslavement of all peoples under the Roman world order, the establishment of this freedom can no longer be accomplished by way of an exodus to a Promised Land as was once the case with the liberation from Egypt, but only through the liberation of the entire human world from the world order that weighs upon it.

With the transposition of the hopes of liberation of Samaria and Judea into nationalist motives, further misinterpretations of John's Gospel go along unspoken: First, as already stated, Richey fails to recognize that Samaria is not simply a foreign nation from the world of the nations to be distinguished from Israel, but stands for the ten lost northern tribes of Israel. The Samaritans are primarily meant by the sheep from the other courtyard (John 10:16), whom Jesus, as the Shepherd of Israel, wants to gather into one flock with the sheep of Judea (cf. Ezekiel 37:15-24). Second, the defense against the allegedly nationalist hopes of the Jews often serves to deny Jesus any intention of this-worldly political liberation and to limit his goal to liberation from sin and eternal life in heaven for those who believe in him.

To be sure, Richey also thinks that John, by taking up the language of the Imperial Cult, nevertheless "challenges its presuppositions." A quotation from Deißmann,[57] in which he underscores this statement, however, does not indicate that this is intended to counter the dangers just described:

> The cult of Christ goes forth into the world of the Mediterranean and soon displays the endeavour to reserve for Christ words already in use for worship in that world, words that had been transferred to the deified emperors (or had perhaps even been newly invented in emperor worship). Thus there arises a polemical parallelism between the cult of the emperor and the cult of Christ, which makes itself felt where ancient words derived by Christianity from the treasury of the Septuagint and the Gospels happen to coincide with solemn concepts of the Imperial cult which sounded the same or similar.

57 Richey cites Adolf Deißmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World,* trans. Lionel R. M. Strachan, 1927, repr. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995, 342.

About this anti-Roman "polemic," Richey at this point says only (91) that it

> was presumably operating on a more complex theological and narrative level (as the Samaritan context of 4:42 makes clear). Nonetheless, John's use of *ho sōtēr tou kosmou* is clear at the lexical level. As is the case with *exousia*, attention to the Roman context of John's vocabulary does not merely nuance our understanding of his Christology, it deepens it considerably.

Such deepening, however, could be achieved in my eyes only if both the Roman counterpart of the Johannine polemic and also the Jewish-Messianic root ground of John's Gospel are taken seriously, based on which Jesus, as the embodiment of the liberating NAME of the God of Israel, sets the world free from the world order that weighs on it—due to his death on the Roman cross as *ho sōtēr tou kosmou*. The way in which this *kosmos*, the Roman world order, can be overcome and the life of the coming world age can be achieved is opened, according to John, by Jesus' handing over the inspiration of God's faithfulness to his discipleship on the cross so that they can actively expect a liberated world in justice and peace in the practice of solidary love, *agapē*.

3.3 Jesus as *ho hyios tou theou*, "the Son of God," and the Roman Emperor

Regarding the title (91) *ho hyios tou theou*, attached to Jesus, Richey first points out that its "centrality, if not the precise meaning, … in Johannine Christology is manifest in the stated purpose of the Gospel that the reader 'may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God' (20:31)." However, I think it is very bold to claim that the meaning of this designation is clear from this one passage.

Richey, though, finds it more difficult than with the other two terms discussed so far in this chapter to demonstrate "possible Roman influence on John's use of the christological title *ho hyios tou theou*" because it occurs "numerous times throughout the NT and occasionally in the OT as well" and "has at least some overlap in meaning with its other NT occurrences." His intention is not "an exhaustive study of the range of meanings that the OT and NT gives to this title" but a concise sketch of

> how John's use of *ho hyios tou theou* as a messianic title stands apart from other occurrences of the phrase in the Bible, and then to see how this distinctive Johannine usage would have evoked and challenged the meaning of this title within the Imperial Cult.

3.3.1 Who is a "Son of God" According to Jewish Thought?

On (91) "the Jewish background to John," Richey points out that there is "little evidence for use of the expression 'Son of God' as a special, messianic title." To avoid (92) misunderstandings with the use of the term "in Greco-Roman religion" and later Christianity,

> it is not surprising that "Judaism in pre-Christian times obviously avoided employing the title 'Son of God' in order to ward off misunderstanding of the term in the non-Jewish world."[58]

However, in the Bible, there is the "general notion of a king being called God's son" (2 Samuel 7:14; Psalms 2:7; 89:27), and the people of Israel is also referred to as the firstborn son of God in Exodus 4:22. From this, Sanders[59] thinks that "in a Jewish context, 'Son of God' does not mean 'more than human.' All Jews were 'sons of God' or even the (collective) 'Son of God.'"

But this equation of "son of God" with "human" is not quite correct in Jewish usage. According to Ton Veerkamp,[60] the term *ben ʾadam* or *bar ʾenosh* is common for "man" in Hebrew and Aramaic, "one who belongs to humanity, a single human." By contrast, when John the Baptist refers to Jesus as the "Son of God" (John 1:34), he views him "as one 'like (the) God (of Israel),' therefore the one who does only and nothing else but what the God Israel does for Israel." The Son, then, is the one "who gives persistence to the name of his father, he continues the father's life task. As the Son, he acts like the father. ... That has nothing to do here with 'equality in nature' between God and Jesus."

3.3.2 Jesus as the "Son of God" in Paul, in the Synoptics, and in John

Richey deals only briefly (93) with Paul's use of the title *ho hyios tou theou*, partly because compared to the nearly two hundred times use of *kyrios*, "Lord," it plays an unimportant role with allegedly only six occurrences,[61] and he is not aware of anyone (94) who associates "Paul's use of this title with the Imperial Cult." In the Synoptic Gospels (95), according to Richey, the title "Son of God" seems to "be associated positively with a Jewish Messianic (rather than a metaphysical) understanding of Jesus and negatively against a Greco-Roman concept of the *theios anēr*," that is, the idea of a God-man who proves his divinity through miracles. In contrast, the title *ho hyios tou theou* occurs so much more frequently in John's Gospel than in the Synoptics that, as Richey suggests (96), "it might fairly be described as primarily a 'Son of God' Christology." In this connection, Richey (note 92) refers to Tilborg,[62] according to whom

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58 Thus Richey cites Peter Wulfing von Martitz et al. "*hyios,*" TDNT, 8. 362.

59 Richey cites E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, London: Penguin, 1993, 161.

60 Veerkamp 51 (note 78 on the translation of John 1:34) and 57 (The Second Day. Someone Like God, par. 27).

61 Richey, however, overlooks the 10 highlighted among the following 15 passages from Paul's genuine epistles: **Romans 1**:3, **4, 9; 5:10; 8:3, 29, 32**; 1 Corinthians 1:9; 15:28; **2 Corinthians 1:19; Galatians 1:16;** 2:20; **4:4, 6;** 1 Thessalonians 1:10.

62 Richey cites Sjef van Tilborg, *Reading John in Ephesus*, NovTSup 83, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996, 27.

> *ho hyios tou theou* and *ho hyios* are so closely connected in John's Gospel that "the traditional distinction between speaking about 'the son' and 'the son of God' does not exist anymore." Nor are these occurrences the only manifestations of John's "Son of God" Christology: "The impression of such omnipresence of the use of the title comes about, because Jesus (or the evangelist) constantly speaks about 'the father' and 'my father' implying that Jesus speaks about himself as the son of the father." The difference here between John and the Synoptics is remarkable: *patēr* (used in reference to God) occurs in the Synoptic Gospels only eight times (four in Matthew, once in Mark, and three times in Luke) but some eighty-two times in John (and another twelve in 1 John)!

In fact, according to John 5,19-20, Jesus can do nothing else than his FATHER, thus referring to the NAME of the God of Israel, whom he fully embodies in his liberating will and work as the Messiah and Son of God, but also as the Son of Man endowed by God with his *exousia*. In this respect, Jesus is the "Son" not only as the "Son of God" but also as the "Son of Man," and in being, following John 1:18, the *monogenēs para patros*, the "Only Begotten of the FATHER," he as well embodies, as the second Isaac, the firstborn Son of God, namely the people of Israel.

In Richey's view (96), "the most immediate difference" between the Fourth Gospel and the others is that "the Synoptic concern with correcting a *theios anēr* Christology does not appear to be a dominant theme in John." Only the two passages 11:4 and 11:27 are (97) "situated within the context of miracle stories," and

> even John 11 is not focused on the miraculous power of Jesus to raise the dead, though clearly he has such power. Unlike the standard pattern found in Synoptic miracle stories, in John 11, "Lazarus is thrust into the background, and the sisters have been made the chief persons."[63] Rather, as Rudolf Bultmann notes, this pericope effectively completes Jesus' public ministry, simultaneously precipitating the decision of the Sanhedrin to seek his death and setting the stage for Jesus' journey to the cross by prefiguring his own triumph over death in the raising of Lazarus. This triumph, truly the great and only work of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, bears a significance for all his believers that could never be ascribed to the works of a *theios anēr*: "The raising of Lazarus is no piece of black magic, or even the supreme achievement of a saint; it is an anticipation of what is to take place at the last day. It means that the believer has eternal life; that he has passed from life to death [Barrett 388]."

63 Thus Richey cites Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary,* Introduction by Walter Schmithals, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray et al., Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971, 395. In what follows, Richey refers to the same book, 394-409.

Further, according to Tilborg [28], in John's Gospel the compound expression *ho hyios tou theou* is distinguished by "'the fact that it is used as a real title' and not simply as a description of Jesus." In this regard, Richey states:

> While Jesus applies the title to himself three times (3:18; 10:36; 11:4), the remaining six occurrences are placed on the lips of the main symbolic witnesses to Jesus' divinity: John the Baptist (1:34), Nathanael (1:49), the Samaritan woman (5: 25), Martha (11:27), the leaders of the Synagogue (19:7), and the Evangelist himself (20:31).

These persons represent, in Richey's eyes (98), "the entire Johannine social world, including followers of John the Baptist, believing Jews, Gentiles, Johannine Christians under trial, the synagogue Jews, the leaders of the Johannine community (in the person of the evangelist), and even Jesus himself" who, "in the course of the Gospel," acclaim "Jesus as the Son of God." Again, it must be questioned that Richey summarily refers to the Messianic Jews of the Johannine community as "Christians" and the Samaritans of northern Israel as "Gentiles."

It is interesting to note here that, according to Craig Koester [669], the "evangelist portrays the Samaritan woman in a way that presents the Samaritan people as part of a world estranged from God," in addition to which he (note 100 [679])

> also points out the pronounced Roman presence in Samaria, including a capital city (Sebaste) "named for Caesar Augustus," which would have been common knowledge among readers of the Gospel.

Thus Koester would even hit the nail right on the head *if* he recognized the identity of Samaria with the northern kingdom of Israel, which for centuries had been subjected to five different conquering peoples along with their foreign gods and was also connected to the present tyrant Rome only as a *baʿal*, an oppressor god, and not as a loving husband, *ʾish*. In this way, Hosea 2:18 uses the image of the wedding to describe the overcoming of Israel's subjugation by conquering peoples and their foreign gods.[64]

It is now significant that Richey (98) solely on this identification of the Samaritans with any of the Gentile people bases the "perhaps most striking" conclusion he draws from "the list above," namely (98-99)

> the sheer *universality* of the confession of Jesus as *ho hyios tou theou*, a feature also in evidence in the use of *ho sōtēr tou kosmou*. Every conceivable reader of the Gospel could relate to it, making clear the significance of Jesus not only for Jews, or Gentiles, or believers, but for all humanity. Unlike the messianic connotations of *ho hyios tou theou* found in the OT and the Synoptic Gospels, in John this title is put on the lips of every group in the world. This

64 Cf. Veerkamp 113-16 ("The husband you have now is not your husband").

> universality in turn reveals implicitly to John's readers the identity of the true rival of Jesus, namely the putative "Ruler of this world" who "is cast out" (12:31), "judged" (16:11), and who now "has no power" over Jesus (14:30). Only one other person in the first century could claim any comparable dominion on the earth: the Roman emperor—who was also proclaimed *ho hyios tou theou*. When we examine the use of this title within the Augustan Ideology, it is evident why John contrasts Christ versus the emperor as *ho hyios tou theou*.

What is fascinating about this argumentation is again that Richey is almost one hundred percent right and yet he is wrong in one crucial respect. He rightly identifies Jesus' true rival, the ruler of this world, not with a supernatural devil, but with the Roman emperor, who, as an usurping tyrant and false idol, stands in opposition to the one true liberating God of Israel. Richey remains mistaken, however, about the identity of the Samaritans, whom the evangelist does not consider Gentiles at all, but part of all Israel that Jesus wants to gather in his Messianic community together with Judeans and Diaspora Jews. John is primarily concerned with the liberation of Israel in the midst of the nations from the oppression of the Roman world order; he is open in a very reserved way to a few Greeks (John 12:20) who want to join Israel in this, but there is no mention anywhere in his Gospel of a general mission to the nations as in Paul, Luke or Matthew. The world must be liberated from the Roman world order in the interest of Israel, there is no other way to achieve Israel's liberation under the conditions of worldwide enslavement.

3.3.3 The Imperial Titles *divi filius* and *hyios tou theou* as a Blasphemous Challenge to the Johannine Community

In what follows, Richey elaborates (99) that "title *ho hyios tou theou*—universally rendered *divi filius* in Latin—was a standard one for the emperors of the first century." However, the sonship of God of an emperor initially refers only to that of the deceased father of an emperor now reigning, as Cuss [73] points out (99-100):

> "As Augustus was the son of the god Julius, and Tiberius of Divus Augustus, so was Nero the son of Divus Claudius and Domitian the son of Divus Vespasian." Upon the assumption of this title by an emperor, it was immediately communicated throughout the empire by its inclusion on coins and public monuments. As Cuss notes, "the frequency of the abbreviation of this title on coins and inscriptions must have impressed this idea firmly on the minds of Christian and pagan alike." The title *divi filius* would have been associated in the public mind with the emperor.

Yet (100), according to Price,[65] it is problematic to translate the Latin term *divi filius* simply as *theou hyios* into Greek: "Calling the living emperor *theos* cannot be seen

65 Richey cites Simon R. F. Price, „Gods and Emperors: The Greek Language of the Roman Imperial Cult", *JHS* 104 (1984), 79 and 82 and 84.

as a translation of *divus*, a term which applies only to dead emperors." To be specific (101):

> Unlike in Rome, where "the emperor was not a *deus* ('god') in his lifetime, but after his death might be made a *divus,"* in the Greek-speaking provinces of the empire—especially Asia Minor—*theos* was used for both human persons such as the emperor (e.g., *theos* Nero), living or dead, and any one of the traditional deities. Thus, it is not possible to assume that when a citizen of Ephesus worshiped Augustus as *theos hyios* he understood the term in the same sense as a Roman senator who proclaimed Augustus *divi filius*. As Price observes, *theou hyios* "had a different range of meanings, forming part of a radically different conceptual system."

Thus, Richey finds it "necessary to consider the possibility that the emperor was in fact understood by Greek-speaking Christians as a 'true' god—or at least as true a god as any other." To be sure, Richey expresses himself somewhat misleadingly here, for neither Jews nor Christians would understand the emperor or other pagan gods to be "true" gods; but it may well be the case that they found the designation of the emperor as *theos* to be highly blasphemous for that very reason. Accordingly, Richey also suggests (102) that

> it may have been just this danger of confusion that led the primitive Church to avoid its use. ... However, in the Fourth Gospel the solution to this problem was not to avoid the title but to redefine it as one proper not to the emperor but to Jesus Christ, the true *hyios tou theou*.

Nevertheless (103), according to Richey, *ho hyios tou theou*, "Son of God,"

> is perhaps *the* central christological title in the Fourth Gospel, and it defies concise definition. The meaning of this title cannot simply be stated. Instead, the person who is *ho hyios tou theou* can only be pointed to—which is exactly what the Fourth Gospel does. Thus, only a more detailed exegesis of the Prologue and the Passion Narrative, offered in Chapters Four and Five, will clarify the broad outlines of the Johannine Christology and the challenge that it presented to the image of the emperor found in the Augustan Ideology.

4. Christology as Counter-Ideology in the Prologue to John's Gospel

Seeking ways (104) to further develop his approach of reading John's Gospel "as responding not solely, or even primarily, to the Jewish or philosophical-Gnostic background of the text but rather to its Roman religious and political context in general, and to the image of the emperor in the Augustan Ideology in particular," Richey considers (105) an examination of the Johannine Prologue "perhaps the most logical starting point for any such attempt." In doing so, in his eyes (106), "any plausible

reading of the Gospel must attend properly to the high Christology of John's Prologue and its ancient setting." Thus, in this chapter (107), Richey wants to

> offer a new reading of the Prologue as the evangelist's attempt to respond to the Augustan Ideology and the figure of the emperor that it presented to Roman society. When read in this specifically Roman context, the Prologue can be seen as an essential element in the larger anti-imperial polemic running throughout the final version of the Gospel.

4.1 Notes on Exegetical Method between Historical and Literal Criticism

Richey again prefaces his examination of the Prologue (107) with a methodological note in which he refers to the "two competing approaches" that dominated "[h]istorical-critical investigation of the Fourth Gospel during the twentieth century." In this regard (108), Bultmann, Walter Bauer, and C. H. Dodd "emphasized the supposed philosophical-Gnostic roots of the Gospel," while Martyn and Brown "focused on its Jewish background." Both approaches, depending on their presuppositions, thus "promoted a somewhat blinkered view of both its context and its possible opponents," that is, "pre-history, whether of underlying texts and traditions or of the Johannine community itself, displaced contemporary history as the key to understanding the Fourth Gospel."

Even more critically (109), Richey considers "insufficient concern for the immediate social and religious context of the Gospel" in the context "of the 'literary' criticism of John that has appeared in the past generation":

> Its focus on the Fourth Gospel as a literary rather than as a historical document has resulted in the evacuation of most—and occasionally all—historical controls for interpreting the text, and their replacement by methodologies drawn from contemporary literary theory. For instance, concern with the implied reader of the text, as opposed to the historical reader of the first century, seems fundamentally ahistorical, if not antihistorical, in its implications. Adele Reinhartz, in her study of the "cosmological" dimensions of the Johannine narrative, plainly states that "we shall consider this gospel to be a work of fiction, a 'self-consciously crafted narrative ... resulting from literary imagination.' Although the possibility that the Fourth Gospel may contain historical data should not be dismissed, this issue is not germane to the present study."[66]

In particular (110), Richey is critical of the fact that, according to Reinhartz [9], while "the gospel in general, and 20:30-31 in particular, do not specifically limit their in-

66 Thus Richey cites Adele Reinhartz, *The Word in the World: The Cosmological Tale in the Fourth Gospel,* SBLM5 45; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992, 6-7. Cf. My review of this book: Otherworldly Word or Overcoming the World Order?

tended audience to a specific community," it instead leaves completely open which "implied readers" are to be addressed. In contrast, he considers it "difficult to conceive how anyone could write at all (or at least write effectively) without *some* idea of who the actual audience would be." In Richey's eyes (note 16), Barrett [135] seems to take this notion to extremes,

> suggesting that John wrote purely for himself; "It is easy, when we read the gospel, to believe that John, though doubtless aware of the necessity of strengthening Christians and converting the heathen, wrote primarily to satisfy himself. His gospel must be written: it was no concern of his whether it was also read."

Richey is probably to be agreed when (112, note 20) he considers it "helpful here to distinguish between the 'original' meaning of the text and the 'actualized' meaning it has when received by subsequent readers."

Regarding his own exegetical approach (112) to "the Prologue and the Passion Narrative," Richey emphasizes that he chooses a "fundamentally historical-critical" one, but refrains from "identifying the exact extent and provenance of underlying documents or oral traditions that John employed in composing his text" (112-113):

> With the bracketing of source and form criticism in this study we also set aside redaction criticism in the classical sense since it rests immediately upon their results. Nor do I read the text as a literary critic in order to map out its narrative space in isolation from its cultural context. Rather, my reading is situated at the *intersection* of these approaches, where the Prologue and the Passion Narrative are read within the cultural context of the Johannine community that, in turn, would have found unique resonances and significations in the texts and traditions used by John.

Richey thus sets himself the task (113) "to investigate the text using the data developed in the first three chapters to see how well this reading of John as an anti-Roman polemic works." Thus, he does not intend "to exhaust its meaning or rule out other echoes and resonances within the text" but considers them to be "subordinate themes, lingering from earlier stages in the history of the text and its community." He himself subjects the value of his interpretation to the following standards:

> [D]oes it make sense of the Gospel *as a historical document*, or at least more sense than other readings? Does bringing the Roman context of the Gospel to bear on their interpretation illuminate the Prologue and Passion Narrative, or does it simply add historical data and literary parallels without advancing our understanding of the text? If the text makes more sense when read in this light, and if the historical situation of the community can be brought to bear more closely and intelligently on the interpretation of the text as a historical document, this approach will be justified.

4.2 Four Subsections of the Prologue in Their Contrast to Augustan Ideology

Richey perceives (113) the "uniqueness" of John's Prologue in the New Testament, which has been emphasized by many scholars, given "its very prominent Logos-terminology," but (114) on the light symbolism in verse 5, he points to "significant parallels both inside and outside the NT," such as in Luke 2:32 and Matthew 4:16, or in "Seneca's prayer for the Emperor Claudius," which is "[n]ot cited at all" in the exegetical literature:

> "May this sun, which has shed its light upon a world that had plunged into the abyss and was sunk in darkness, ever shine!"[67] This passage offers a similar pairing of light and darkness and the theme of light not being overcome, here in reference to a very different sort of "god," i.e., "Divus Augustus" (*Polyb*. 15.3). This text is at least as suggestive as the other parallels mentioned above, yet contemporary scholarship on the Prologue has shown almost no interest in it or in the Augustan Ideology that it expresses.

In the following, Richey wants to highlight further "parallels to and echoes of the Augustan Ideology" that "are numerous." According to him (115),

> it is helpful to divide up the Prologue into parts and to analyze them, in order to see how these all fit together in its portrait of Jesus, the Word, as the great and only alternative to Roman Emperor and to the *Weltanschauung* of the Augustan Ideology.
>
> In the Prologue, the narrative shifts from the Word to the Baptist, then from the Baptist to the world, and then from the world back to the Son. Accordingly, four basic divisions within the text appear: vv. 1-5 (the pre-existent Logos); vv. 6-8 (the witness of the Baptist); vv. 9-13 (the Logos' reception or rejection by the world); and vv. 14-18 (the glory of the Son).

In doing so, Richey refers to the first "decisive passage for interpreting the Prologue" as "cosmological," and the "following three sections ... are supplementary insofar as they presuppose and add 'prophetic,' 'political,' and 'doxological' nuances to the governing 'cosmological' elements found in vv. 1-5." Starting from this (116)

> each of these subsections of the Prologue can be seen to challenge the cosmological, prophetic, political, and doxological elements of the Augustan Ideology by contrasting the unique and superior character of Jesus' person and activity with features associated with the Emperor. These challenges, taken *in toto*, constitute nothing less than a "counter-ideology," which would have allowed members of the Johannine community to distinguish clearly between the attributes of Christ and the properties of Caesar.

67 Thus Richey cites Seneca, *Polyb.* 13.1 (Basore, LCL): *Sidus hoc, quod praecipitatio in profundum et demerso in tenebras orbi refulsit, semper luceat!*

4.2.1 Johannine Cosmology of "Pre-Existence," "Co-Equality with God," and "Divine Creativity" of the Word Identified with Jesus (John 1:1-5)

According to Richey (116), "the Logos-concept" of John's Prologue shows a "resonance with both Hellenistic philosophy and various strains of OT theology." Therefore, "modern research" focused primarily on the question to which sources it may actually be traced, "such as the *dabar* and *hochma* traditions of the Old Testament and Apocrypha, or wisdom speculations of later Jewish literature, or Greek philosophical strains, or Gnosticism, and the like."[68] Richey (117) does not deny "that a more primitive text underlying the Prologue might exist," but in "order to understand the Prologue, it is necessary to understand not where the concept of the Logos came from but what the Prologue says about it—and why."

This, however, will be precisely the question: Is it possible to grasp what the Prologue says without presupposing that here a Jewish Messianist understands the *logos* ("word") identified with Jesus precisely from the aforementioned Hebrew *davar* as the embodiment of the liberating and creative activity of the God of Israel?

4.2.1.1 Does the Prologue Draw on Familiar Notions of *logos* or Does It Reveal Jesus' Cosmological Identity in a Completely New Way?

Now Richey does not even consider a Jewish-Messianic interpretation of John's Gospel. By judging (119) all "source-critical approaches to the background and currency of the Logos-concept" as inadequate, he criticizes, for instance, William Temple's[69] view that John, using the keyword of *logos*, has

> "established common ground with all his readers. If they are Jews they will recognise and assent to the familiar doctrine of the Old Testament concerning the Word of God. If they are Greeks they will recognise and assent to the declaration that the ultimate reality is Mind expressing itself. To both alike he has announced in language easily received that the subject for which he is claiming their attention is the ultimate and supreme principle of the universe."

George R. Beasley-Murray[70] still claims in 1987, too:

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68 Thus Richey cites Ed. L. Miller, *Salvation-History in the Prologue of John: The Significance of John* 1:3/4 (NovTSup 60; Leiden: Brill, 1989) 1, who judges such attempts as "utterly misplaced" since they "in the end serve only to dilute and confuse the original meaning and power of John's Logos."

69 Richey quotes the Archbishop of Canterbury (1942-44), William Temple, *Readings in St. John's Gospel: First and Second Series* (London: Macmillan, 1945), 5.

70 Richey cites George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary 36, Waco, TX: Word, 1987, 10.

> "The employment of the Logos concept in the prologue to the Fourth Gospel is the supreme example within Christian history of the communication of the gospel in terms understood and appreciated by the nations."

This is contradicted in Richey's eyes (117) by the explicit theological statements about the *logos* in John 1:1-3:

> "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (1:1-3b). ... Clearly, the first verses of the Prologue are concerned with not the Logos' implications but its explication. Any implicit philosophical or religious resonances the term might possess are subordinated to its explicit affirmation that it is divine and in what that divinity consists.

From this, according to Richey (118), the following three characteristics of Jesus' divinity as the Logos emerge: "pre-existence, co-equality with God, and—their natural consequence—divine creativity." And this (120) new "theological content" of the Prologue was hardly as "uncontroversial and self-evident to a first-century audience" as Temple and Beasley-Murray assume;

> neither scholar explains why, if its meaning would have been "understood" and "easily received" by both his Gentile and Jewish readers, the pre-existence, co-equality with God, divine creativity, etc., of *ho logos* would need to be spelled out by the evangelist. In fact, the decision of the evangelist to emphasize the creativity and pre-existence of the Word and its equality with God in such a strong and unambiguous statement may suggest that the audience would not have understood the Logos-concept necessarily to possess any of these attributes.

Thus, in Richey's eyes, John does not offer "a résumé of common knowledge about Jesus" but "a bold revelation of his identity." It must now be explained further to what purpose he speaks of Jesus in this new way.

4.2.1.2 Is John Developing a Cosmological Christology to Politically Confront Augustan Ideology?

Richey presupposes as a matter of course (117-118) that the first three verses of the prologue, with the three theological features of "pre-existence, co-equality with God, and … divine creativity" of the Logos just mentioned "contain *in nuce* what might be called the 'cosmological' (or, perhaps, 'ontological') elements of what would become in the fourth and fifth centuries the orthodox Christology of the Church." However, he cautiously opines (118) that "these later christological decisions about the Prologue's proper interpretation cannot explain why John decided to include it in the text." The evangelist could not, after all, have "intended several centuries in advance to head off the heresies of the third and fourth centuries with a

clear statement that Jesus' divinity entailed pre-existence and co-equality with God," although (note 33) such views were certainly held by later church fathers. But if this could not be the case, the question remains to be answered (119): "[W]hy did John, unlike the Synoptic authors, feel it appropriate to open the Gospel with a Prologue that clearly ascribes these qualities to Jesus?"

To clarify this question, Richey (118, note 32) defines more precisely the term "cosmological" as "those elements of Johannine Christology which place the person of Jesus in a relation of equality to the Father and of superiority to the created order." He agrees with Adele Reinhartz that it is not enough, as Martyn and Brown do, to single out in John's Gospel the two levels of "the historical tale of Jesus and the ecclesiological tale of the history of the Johannine community"; rather, these must be seen as embedded in a "cosmological tale." Unlike Reinhartz [5], however, to whom "the cosmological tale is the meta-tale which provides the overarching temporal, geographical, theological, and narrative framework of the other two tales," Richey argues

> that the "meta-tale" of the gospel is essentially a *political* one—albeit one which contains strong elements of cosmology. As we have seen, the Evangelist had every reason to be and in fact was pre-occupied with the threat the Augustan Ideology posed to the Johannine community in the late-first century. Thus, while Reinhartz is correct in seeing a cosmological concern in the Gospel, and especially in the Prologue, she overlooks the "political" context of this concern, namely, the "cosmological" elements of the Augustan Ideology. If John is forced to introduce a Christ-centered cosmology into his gospel, it is because the community found itself confronted by a Roman worldview in which political, religious and cosmological concepts were all employed to secure the position of the emperor within first-century society.

Precisely because of the Imperial Cult, however (120), according to Richey,

> the very concept of divinity was contested when the Fourth Gospel was composed. The Augustan Ideology presented the Johannine community with an understanding of what it meant to call a person a god. Yet because it lacked the features of pre-existence, divine co-equality or divine creativity, it was considerably different from what the Fourth Gospel expresses about Jesus' divinity.

Surprising for me at this point is that Richey does not want to point out at all, as I first thought, that just the Roman Imperial Cult contains presumptions of a divine pre-existence and creative power as well as of an equality with God, which John wants to oppose with Jesus as their true equivalent. But if such elements are completely missing in Augustan ideology, it is still not explained why John should have invented them anew in order to express Jesus' superiority over the emperor. Should it not at least be presupposed that he was inspired to do so from some source?

4.2.1.3 A Jewish-Messianic "Cosmology" of the Johannine Prologue

My answer to both questions just posed is: Very likely John did not yet develop these concepts at all in the way Richey assumes from later Christian dogmatics. And almost certainly he drew on the Jewish Bible in formulating the Prologue.

Right from the first two words of the Prologue, *en archē*, "in the beginning," the evangelist recalls the beginning of the first book of the Bible so that in any case the God mentioned here is none other than the God of Israel, who through his creatively acting *davar,* "deed word, word deed," brings forth the heavens and the earth just as he brings about Israel's liberation from Egyptian slavery.[71] Already in the book of Proverbs (especially 8:30), this divine word was presented personified in the figure of *chokhmah*, *sophia*, "wisdom," who plays before God during creation. This word of God, which is inseparable from God "from the beginning," in principle, is embodied in a unique way in the Jewish man Jesus of Nazareth.

This has, I agree with Richey, very far-reaching political consequences because the will and work of the God of Israel is completely directed to the liberation of Israel, which can only be achieved by overcoming the Roman world order as a whole. By embodying the Word and the liberating NAME of this God, the Messiah Jesus can rightly be called *theos* and is irreconcilably opposed to the Roman emperor in his usurped divinity as the *diabolos*, *ßatan*, "adversary," of Israel's God. If this confrontation is to be regarded as a cosmology, then it is a doctrine of the Roman *kosmos* as a so-called "world order," which in reality, however, has transformed the earth created by God under heaven into a worldwide slave house. Jesus comes to the human world as the Messiah sent by God to liberate it from the world order that weighs upon it.

Those who instead, like Richey, ascribe to Jesus a "pre-existence," an existence before all time with God in heaven, run the risk of misunderstanding the entire incarnation of the Word of God as the flying visit of a God-man on earth who, after his resurrection from death, returns to heaven to provide a place in the afterlife for those who believe in him. But if John as a Jewish Messianist was convinced by Psalm 115:16 that "heaven belongs to the NAME, but the earth he has given to humankind," then such speculations cannot have entered his mind.

Likewise, John 1:1 does not speak of Jesus' co-equality or even equality with God. The verse contains two clarifications about the *logos*:

First, it is literally described as *pros ton theon*. The definite article before the word *theos,* "God," unmistakably indicates that the God of Israel is meant here. The preposition *pros* does not mean "with" but "towards" or "onto," so that the sense

71 My interpretation of John 1:1-5 draws on Veerkamp 18-25 (The Word and the Life and The Life and the Light).

arises: "the Word is directed towards God," and exactly "onto the God" who revealed himself to Israel with his liberating NAME.

The second definition of *logos* by the word *theos* without an article confirms this sense: "divine" or "in accord with God is the Word." Only an increasingly Gentile-Christian-dominated church will reinterpret the statement of John more and more in the sense of Jesus' ontological equality with God, so that today, it is translated usually and also by Richey: "the Word was God."

However, it is interesting (118) that Richey does not use the word "equality" in this context, but "co-equality." I assume that he means to imply some limitation or gradation of Jesus' equality with God. This would come close to my assessment that John does not yet mean an equality of essence with God, but the perfect agreement of Jesus' work with the liberating and creative work of the FATHER, which will be spoken of in John 5:17 ff.

Finally, the creative power of Jesus does not mean that Jesus was present at the creation of the world before all time, but that he continues the creative work of the God of Israel in his works of Israel's liberation from paralysis, hunger, blindness, and decay[72] and brings it to completion in his death on the Roman cross. In this way, John takes up an understanding of creation that already underlies the biblical account of creation in Genesis 1. There, in the second verse with the keyword *thohu wabohu*, the description of the man-made destruction of life on earth from Jeremiah 4:34 is transferred to the state before creation, which is overcome by the divine work of creation. The fact that with Jesus' resurrection, Day One of the new creation is dawning confirms this interpretation.[73]

Let us now consider the way in which, according to Richey, the three elements of Jesus' divinity are said to contrast with the divinity of the Roman emperors as defined in Augustan Ideology.

4.2.1.4 Does John Claim a Pre-Existence of Jesus, while Roman Emperors Claim Only This-Wordly Historical Significance?

According to Richey (120) "even the most obsequious and flattering of the Augustan Poets" never mention an emperor (120-121),

> as pre-existing his earthly career. Indeed, the very category of pre-existence, being non-historical, made no sense within an Augustan Ideology which, through the *Aeneid* and *Eclogues* of Virgil and the *Carmen seculare* of Horace, portrayed the emperor not as existing *outside* of history but rather as being a central actor *within* the larger historical drama of the entire Roman people.

72 Thus, Veerkamp 131 ff. (PART II: THE HIDDEN MESSIAH) interprets the four signs of Jesus in chapters 5, 6, 9, and 11 of John's Gospel.

73 Cf. Veerkamp 386-87 (Preliminary Remark: The Time Specification "Day One").

> The proper reference to the emperor is not to a god who *sarx egeneto* (John 1:14) but is rather to a *nascens puer* (*Ecl*. 4.8).

With this sentence Richey already refers to the interpretation of John 1:14. The emperor (121) is not understood as God made flesh (*sarx egeneto*) but as the newborn boy (*nascens puer*) mentioned by Virgil (4th Eclogue 8-9) with whom a golden age dawns and to whom John possibly contrasts Jesus as the *monogenēs tou patros*, the "Only Begotten of the Father." According to Richey, Virgil (Aeneid 6, 788-795) describes even more the

> divine origin of Augustus … as a historical event with a historical purpose and meaning that transcends him as an individual: "... And this in truth is he whom you so often hear promised you, Augustus Caesar, son of a god, who will again establish a golden age in Latium amid fields once ruled by Saturn."

Not convincing for me is the conclusion Richey draws from this:

> As the Prologue makes clear, especially in 1:10-11, Jesus' historical mission by contrast involves rejection by the world, not the establishment of a golden age. The distance between this fundamentally historical understanding of Caesar's divinity and the high Christology of the Fourth Gospel is unbridgeable.

The contrast between Jesus and the Roman emperor is indeed irreconcilable, but in a very different way than Richey presents it. Three features that he attributes to the position held by John are to be questioned:

First, while the Johannine Jesus has nothing in common with a golden age of the *Pax Romana*, which Rome seeks to bring about and secure through military raids and conquests, as a Messianic Jew who takes the prophetic promises seriously, he may well have in mind the life of the coming world age in freedom, justice, and peace for Israel in the midst of the peoples on this earth under the heaven of God.

Second, although Jesus is rejected and persecuted with hatred by both the Roman *kosmos* and the leadership of his own people, it is precisely his death on the Roman cross that leads to the exposure and overcoming of Rome's oppressive world order. The coming world age cannot be forced by violent means of a Zealot revolt, but the Messianic community can actively await it through its practice of solidary love, *agapē.*

Third, on this premise, as already said, no "high Christology" of Jesus' pre-existence and co-equality with God must be presupposed for the Prologue, but it is sufficient to understand Jesus as the consummate embodiment of the creative Word of the God of Israel.

4.2.1.5 Is Jesus Co-Equal with God, while Emperors Remain a Human Creature despite Their Divinity?

According to Richey (121), the poets of Rome not only deny "Caesar's pre-existence" but also "his co-equality with the standard gods of the Roman pantheon." Thus

(122), in Ovid's words (Metamorphoses 15, 859-861 and 760-761), Augustus has achieved only "on earth a relative equality with Jupiter in heaven":

> "Jupiter controls the heights of heaven and the kingdoms of the triformed universe; but the earth is under Augustus' sway. Each is both sire and ruler." Even this praise, though, is mitigated by the earlier admission that Julius Caesar's apotheosis was necessary to avoid Augustus being nothing more than a mere mortal: "So, then, that his son might not be born of mortal seed, [Iulus] Caesar must needs be made a god."

According to Richey, this "[i]nsistence on the divine birth of Caesar" at the same time "ruled out the possibility of ascribing creative power to the person of the emperor, as he too is a creature sprung from the gods." From the Ovid quote cited earlier, Richey can thus only mean that Caesar's elevation to the status of god does not nullify his created nature, while (note 43)

> [t]his same debate over the status of Christ (with all the associated questions of pre-existence and co-equality) was played out in the Arian controversy several centuries later, which, notably, was resolved in large part through appeal to the Johannine Prologue: "Yet when Arius forced upon the church the question, 'Who or what was incarnate?', the answer could only be 'God.' The Logos who became incarnate can be no other than, and no less than, God; Logos and Father are of one and the same essence."[74]

Here it becomes obvious to what extent Richey interprets the Johannine Prologue completely under the spell of the later Christian dogmatics, which asserted itself against Arius. But the fact alone that Arius contradicted exactly this consubstantiality of Jesus with God shows that the answer to the question, "Who or what was incarnate?", was still disputed even at that time.

In my eyes, it is very probable that John as a Jewish Messianist in the first century would not even have considered such an essential equality, but that, according to him, in the Messiah Jesus the powerful, liberating, and—in this sense—creative Word of the God of Israel took on Jewish flesh.

4.2.1.6 How Does the Prologue Contrast Jesus as the "Light" to the Anti-Creation Darkness of the World?

In the following verses (123) John 1:3c-5, according to Richey,

> [t]he same dissimilarity in language between the Imperial Cult and John is … found in the references to Jesus as "life" and "light" ...: "That which has been made in him was life, and the life was the light of the men. The light shines in

74 Thus Richey cites G. W. H. Lampe, „The Holy Spirit and the Person of Christ", in *Christ, Faith and History: Cambridge Studies in Christology* [ed. S. W. Sykes und J. P. Clayton; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972] 111-30, here 122).

> the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." While, as noted above, there are some parallels in the Augustan Ideology, it never employs the language with the same theological depth and majesty in reference to the emperor as John's Prologue. The emperor's role as preserver of life (or, more properly, a "happy life" or *eudaimonios bios*) is well documented and arose from the patron-client relationship (see Chapter Two), but carried no "theological" or "ontological" force.

The frequent references in the Imperial Cult to the "light" that the emperors let shine into the world are, according to Richey, "clearly metaphorical rather than ontological in intent" and "doubtless due to the association of the emperor with Apollo, the Sun god."

It is to be asked, however, whether, in contrast to this, it is sufficient to take the Johannine mention of light in the Prologue as "ontological," that is, in the sense of a statement of essence about Jesus' divinity. Again I point to Ton Veerkamp's[75] interpretation of John 1:4-5, already mentioned, in which he understands light, in contrast to darkness, as the politically effective creative power capable of overcoming the *thohu wabohu* "of a land ravaged by war" (Jeremiah 4:23-26 and Genesis 1:2-3):

> Here the condition of a land ravaged by war is described as the condition of earth before every creating word: crazy and mazy, no light, no mankind, no birds, everything devastated, what came about because of the foolish policies of the elites of Jerusalem, their refusal to preserve the reform policy of the good king Josiah and to consider the regional power relations. The result of this policy is nothingness and darkness, in the eyes of the prophet the result of the wrathful reaction of Israel's God. If the order of the Torah—being "God" for Israel—is destroyed by the politics of its elites, this order reacts by the wrath of its being destroyed. It isn't about a mythic primal state, it is a matter of all that people around John and we now were or are seeing every day: darkness, chaos, destruction of life.
>
> Jeremiah exactly describes the condition of the people of Judea after the year 70. The city is devastated, the population massacred, the land uninhabitable. An absolute new beginning is necessary. From the catastrophe of the year 70, there's no going back, nothing will be as it was before. Because of the present state, somebody who interprets the year 70 as the end must begin with the words *in the beginning*. The work of the Messiah is a new earth under a new heaven, life and light. Darkness did not win: the verb turning up here, *katalambanein*, "to overcome", in the Greek version of the Scriptures is always connoted in a violent sense. Against the nothingness and the darkness that prevailed since the disastrous outcome of the First Judean-Roman War 66-70, John brings out "light" and "life": darkness did not overcome light and life.

75 Veerkamp 25 (The life and the light, par. 8-9).

John, then, need not have equated Jesus with God in terms of the essence in order to counter the Roman emperor's usurped claims to be divine or God. He may also have done so as a Jewish Messianist who sees the Roman well-ordered *kosmos* itself, as he calls it, as the embodiment of darkness hostile to creation, which can be overcome only by the liberating work of the God of Israel and his Messiah Jesus.

4.2.1.7 Is Jesus Distinct from the God-Emperor by Pre-Existence and Co-Equality with God Rather than by Being Born Accompanied by Miracolous Signs?

In retrospect, Richey summarizes his previous remarks and adds several further arguments. According to him (124),

> the emperor's claim to be a god, without either claiming pre-existence, divine co-equality and divine creativity or appearing patently insane, by itself reveals the flexibility that the concept of *theos* enjoyed in the first century.

That is, "at least in the Greek-speaking provinces of the empire," according to Richey, "the conceptual distinction made in Latin between a "divine man" (*divus*) and a "god" (*deus*) was collapsed into the single Greek word *theos*." He again makes this case primarily for Asia Minor because he locates John's Gospel there, but Greek was also the common language in Palestine, so even if it were located near the Sea of Tiberias, it would apply that "*theos* could be and in fact was used for both human persons such as the emperor (e.g., *theos* Nero), living or dead, or to one of the traditional deities."

Richey thus presupposes that John's use of the title *hyios tou theou* for Jesus was intended to counter any risk of confusion with the use of that title for the Roman emperor. If he were simply to call Jesus the "Son of God" without further definition, as Mark does in the first verse of his Gospel and John does nine times as well, "beginning with the witness of John the Baptist in 1:34," then "the understanding of *theos* found in the Imperial Cult" would not be in question. However, according to Richey, this occurs in "the opening verses of the Prologue" in that they "indicate Jesus' preexistence and co-equality with God."

In this context, Richey repeats yet another of his assumptions (125, note 49),

> that the Prologue, along with the numerous "Son of God" references, was added to the Gospel precisely when an unidentified group (which, however, in light of Brown's researches, must be identified as predominantly Gentile) entered the community. A Gentile-dominated group, unlike the Jewish members of the most primitive community, would perhaps have needed a clear differentiation of Christ's divinity from that claimed by the emperor.[76]

76 In this regard, Richey refers to Georg Richter, „Präsentische und futurische Eschatologie im 4. Evangelium", in *Studien zum Johannesevangelium*, ed. J. Hainz, Biblische Untersuchungen 13, Regensburg: Pustet, 1977, 127.

As has been pointed out many times, however, this would no less concern a Jewish-Messianic community that proclaims Jesus as the liberator of Israel from the Roman world order that weighs upon it.

But why (125) did John not simply clarify Jesus' sonship of God with an "infancy narrative" as Matthew and Luke did? According to Richey this

> arguably would have been ill-fitting for at least two reasons. First, neither infancy narrative contains an unambiguous expression of Jesus' pre-existence or co-equality with the God. Indeed, the logic of an infancy narrative militates against the inclusion of such information. Yet such a clear ascription of these qualities to Jesus and to Jesus *alone* was needed by the Johannine community. Second, the birth narratives in these two gospels (Matt 1:1-2:23; Luke 1:5-2:40) both rely on miraculous events and signs accompanying the birth of Jesus (e.g., the star guiding the wise men in Matt 2:1-5; the annunciation by the angel in Luke 1:26-31). In the ancient world "signs and wonders" were commonplace devices for justifying claims of divinity, and were especially prominent in the Imperial Cult.

This point is hardly convincing, however, inasmuch as in other contexts John is not at all shy about referring to "signs and wonders" performed by Jesus to highlight his honor or glory. And Richey's opinion (125-126) that "an inclusion of an infancy narrative at the beginning of the Gospel would have evoked a comparison of Jesus with Julius or Augustus Caesar in the minds of John's readers rather than a clear contrast," is contradicted precisely by the practice of the Gospel writers Matthew and Luke, who very deliberately present the birth of Jesus in clear political contrast to the Emperor Augustus or to King Herod, stylized as a second Egyptian Pharaoh. Richey himself also considers exactly in this sense (126, note 52), citing Schmithals,[77]

> that the Lukan infancy narrative, which explains Jesus' birth in the city of David by appeal to the census ordered by Augustus Caesar, may intend a "subtle irony" about who really is the "savior of the world."

All in all, according to Richey (126),

> [t]he first five verses of the Prologue ... express the cosmological concepts that clarify Jesus as the "Son of God" proclaimed later in the Gospel: it means he is pre-existent, co-equal with God, divinely creative, and the *true* light of the world. None of this is involved necessarily, though, in the term *ho logos*, but rather is spelled out by the evangelist through the inclusion of the entire Logos-hymn.

77 Richey cites Walter Schmithals, „Die Weihnachtsgeschichte Lk. 2,1-20", in *Festschrift für Ernst Fuchs* [ed. Gerhard Ebeling et al.; Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1973] 290.

Since these contents are attached to the *logos* in distinction to the "contemporary religious terminology surrounding the Imperial Cult," in Richey's view, it is not possible "to explain John's decision to employ this hymn based on its philosophical or OT resonances" (126-127):

> John used the Logos-hymn *not* because it contained the word "Logos" but because it helped to express the qualities that John ascribed to the Son of God. It is not the use of the term "Logos" alone that is the key here (a possibility supported by its notable absence in the Gospel outside the Prologue); it is the meaning given it in the Prologue that is central. Once this cosmological dimension of Jesus' person, specifically the difference between his divinity and that claimed by the emperors, has been established, other elements of the Augustan Ideology can be addressed in light of it.

Thus Richey states (127-128) that "the first five verses of the Prologue inform the reader of the Gospel about the pre-eminent cosmological significance of Jesus in contrast to the more mundane figure of the Roman emperor."

4.2.2 Johannine Prophecy in the Testimony of the Baptist (John 1:6-8)

As a first addition (128) to the "cosmologic elements" in comparing and contrasting "Johannine Christology and the Augustan Ideology," John, according to Richey, refers to the "witness of the Baptist" in opposition to a "prophecy" that "was used to represent the person of the emperor as a divinely-ordained and world-historical figure intimately connected with the destiny of the entire Roman Empire."

In the words (John 1:6-8): "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the Light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light," now, after Richey,

> the content of these verses clearly shifts the focus away from the pre-existent Logos and into history. ... Through the witness of the Baptist, the evangelist is able for the first time to present the person of Christ not only as superior to the emperor in an ontological sense but also as his rival on the plane of human events.

The fact (129) that the "significance" of John the Baptist in John's Gospel "is reduced to a single function" vis-à-vis the Synoptics, namely that of prophetic witness for the Messiah Jesus, indicates a concern "to echo the legitimating role of prophecy in the Augustan Ideology. This possibility, though, is rarely if ever entertained by most scholars," probably because John himself "neglects the Roman context in favor of an OT background for several reasons" (129-130):

> Perhaps most obviously, the Gospel narrative (1:19-23) mentions both the prophet Elijah and *hē prophētēs* (presumably the prophet promised by Moses

> in Deut 18:15-18) as possible (but rejected) identities of the Baptist, while he himself quotes Isa 40:3 in response to his questioners. In addition to this factor was the common, if not universal, belief among Jews and Christians in the late first-century that prophecy had ceased before or with John the Baptist, respectively. This view has reinforced the tendency throughout Christian history to interpret the Baptist against an OT background rather than within the broader cultural matrix of the first-century empire.

What surprises me about this argumentation from the outset is the strict either/or presupposed in it. That John outlines the role of John the Baptist as a witness for the Messiah with recourse to the Jewish Bible and explicitly does not identify him with the promised prophet is beyond question. But this does not exclude the fact that the testimony given by him for the Messiah is precisely for this reason opposed to all "omens and oracles" that were put forward by false prophets "in legitimizing political and social authority" of the emperors.

According to Ton Veerkamp,[78] John the Baptist in the interrogation by the Pharisaic emissaries from Jerusalem (John 1:23) indeed rejects to be a second Moses or Elijah (this role will rather be played by Jesus himself, among others), but he calls himself instead "*A voice of one calling: In the wilderness make straight the way of the NAME*, as said Isaiah, the prophet," because he

> is like the prophet Isaiah; like this one then in Babel announced something unheard new, so today—during the period of the Romans—John is the one who announces something new. The parallel is between the liberation from Babel and the liberation from Rome.

Messianic Jews who knew their Bible could presuppose and infer this connection; the Rabbinic Jews, however, to whom the evangelist frequently alludes with the mention of Jesus' Jewish opponents and especially the Pharisees, and who had taken the lead of Judaism's majority at the time of the writing of John's Gospel, miss this point just as it generally escapes the Christian interpretation of John since the second century.

Richey exemplarily (131) discusses "the Sibylline oracles" that "were invoked constantly to justify in world-historic terms the rule of individual men and nations" and to which (132) also "Augustan Ideology" extensively resorted. The fact that the "powerful effect of these prophesies on the general population hardly went unnoticed by early Christians" is shown (132-133)

> by the portrait of the first beast in Revelation 13 with "a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words" (13:5: *stoma laloun megala kai blas-*

78 Veerkamp 45 and 48 (The First Day. The Interrogation, par. 1 and 14).

> *phēmias*). Likewise, the image of the second beast "even speaks" (13:15: *lalēsē*).[79] An awareness of the Sibylline Oracles among first-century Christians is also suggested by the term for "inspiration" in 2 Tim 3:16 (*theopneustos*). This word appears not in the LXX but in pagan literature, most notably in the Sibylline Oracles.[80]

With all this, however, Richey does not claim (133)

> that John understood or presented the Baptist as an oracle or prophet drawn from pagan models. The Jewish background of the Johannine community and the traditions associated with the Baptist clearly presuppose a primarily OT context for his ministry, and the portrait of him in the Fourth Gospel bears this out. However, this does not explain why John detached some of these traditions from their original source and inserted them into the Prologue, thereby disrupting the poetic structure, when they could have remained with the materials in 1:19-37. The decision to interpolate them into the Prologue is to be explained by their function there. And that function, I suggest, is to provide, within the christological portrait of the Prologue, an explicit parallel to the prophetic and oracular language of the Imperial Cult that shows Caesar's place in world history not as an unexpected or happenstance event but as the culmination of a long, divinely-ordered and pre-ordained historical process. It is unimportant here whether or not this historical process is to be understood as "sacred" or "salvific history"—or whether these categories drawn from biblical theology are really applicable at all to the Johannine attempt to re-present history.

In summary, Richey thinks he can conclude (134)

> that the defining text for Johannine Christology attributes to Jesus the same sort of credentials that the emperor claimed, namely, the *martyria* of someone *apestalmenos para theou* (1:6). John represents the character of John the Baptist only as a herald or prophet because it is the function that resonates most clearly with the Augustan Ideology that he intended, at least in part, to use as a contrast to his portrait of Christ. The provision of this "witness" (*martyrein, martyria*), in turn, was the sole purpose of the Baptist's place: he sets before his listeners (and the readers of the Fourth Gospel) the fundamental choice between Christ and Caesar.

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79 This point is made by Georgi ("Who is the True Prophet?", in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society,* ed. Richard A. Horsley, Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997, 36), who refers to Steven Scherrer, "Revelation 13 as an Historical Source for the Imperial Cult under Domitian" (Th.D. diss.; Harvard University, 1979).

80 To this end, Richey refers to Bruce Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972) 8-11.

4.2.3 Overcoming the World's Rejection in the Johannine Community (John 1:9-13)

The following verses of the Prologue (135) address "the difference between the world's responses to Christ and to Caesar," which was so "manifest" that the evangelist could not conceal it (134-135):

> If Augustus' use of prophecy secured the assent and worship of the Roman world, this world gave Jesus a different reception. In fact, Jesus' rejection by his own people and the resulting ignominious death proved a serious stumbling block to belief for many in the generations following his death. ... Almost any Roman subject of the first century would see an extremely great contrast between Jesus, a crucified criminal abandoned by his closest followers, and Augustus, elevated by the full Senate of the Roman people with "heavenly honors" and an official cult of worship after his death. Indeed, were the Baptist an ordinary Sibyl his prophecy would have been one of catastrophe, not of triumph.

It is interesting what Richey does not deal with in the description of this contrast, namely that certainly not all subjects of the emperor paid him tribute and reverence only because prophecies legitimized his rule. The basis of his rule was military-secured political power, only additionally supported by flanking measures of an Augustan Ideology. Be that as it may (135),

> in 1:9-13 the evangelist first acknowledges the world's rejection of Jesus, then explains how it reveals not the failure of God in history but rather a divine victory.

4.2.3.1 Is *ta idia*, "His Own Home," All Mankind or the People of Israel?

Richey renders verses 9 to 11 as follows (135), assuming that the "cosmological importance bestowed upon Christ in the first five verses of the Prologue recurs" here:

> "The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. He came into his own home, and his own people received him not" (1:9-11). John reaffirms Jesus as the true light of the world (1:5), the creative divinity through whom the world was made (1:3) and the one who, as announced by the Baptist (1:7-8), has entered into world history (1:9). John then informs the reader that "the world knew him not" (*ho kosmos auton ouk egnō*). According to the next verse, the world's incomprehension resulted in the rejection of Christ, a theme that in many respects characterizes the remainder of the Gospel: "He came to his own home (*ta idia*), and his own people (*hoi idioi*) received him not."

So how is the "new element" to be interpreted here, which appears in the text with the adjective *idios*?

While (136) most commentators see "an exclusively Jewish reference here," namely, as Westcott[81] thinks, to "the land and the people of Israel," according to Richey,

> [t]he choice of the neuter plural *ta idia*, though, is neither accidental nor unimportant, since it undermines the supposed identification of "his own home" with "his own people." While the latter usage (*hoi idioi*) may refer to the Jewish people and recall the earlier conflicts between the synagogue leaders and the Johannine community, the former expression (*ta idia*), especially in light of the anti-imperial elements of the preceding verses and the contrasting use of the masculine later[82] in the same verse, suggests a broader understanding of what in this world was Jesus' "own."

Exegetes like Bultmann [56], however, according to whom not only "*ta idia* refers … to the world of men, which belongs to the Logos as its Creator," but also "the *idioi* equally are men," are criticized by Richey (note 80):

> This interpretation ... goes too far: while correctly applying the broadest possible application to *ta idia*, it inadequately appreciates the Jewish background of the Johannine community which *hoi idioi* would have evoked for John's readers. Brown [*John*, 1. 10] notes that Bultmann's "interpretation flows from his presupposition that the Prologue was originally a Gnostic hymn."

But is it reasonable to assume, as Richey does, that the same word *idios* in the same sentence first in the neuter form *ta idia* means the whole human world, and then in the masculine form *hoi idioi* refers to the Israelites only? In his opinion, it is necessary to take into account (136-137)

> that, in the first century, "the world" was widely understood as having another owner, the emperor, who claimed possession and absolute authority over the sphere of earthly existence: "Jupiter controls the heights of heaven and the kingdoms of the triformed universe; but the earth is under Augustus' sway. Each is both sire and ruler [Ovid, Metamorphoses 15, 859-861]." All the lands and wealth of the empire ultimately were at his disposal, whether by legal appropriation (e.g., criminal proceedings against rebels or political enemies), military exigency (e.g., the confiscation of the Jewish temple-tax by Vespasian), or imperial fiat.

Some rulers (137) even claimed an extent of "authority over all the earth … that far transcended any merely political claim to power." Sececa (Clementia 1.1.2), for example, "could write a soliloquy for Nero, which rivals any OT psalm" (137-138):

81 Richey cites B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 1880, Repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951, 8.

82 Richey writes instead—apparently by mistake—"earlier."

> "Have I of all mortals found favour with Heaven and been chosen to serve on earth as vicar of the gods? I am the arbiter of life and death for the nations; it rests in my power what each man's lot and state shall be; by my lips Fortune proclaims what gift she would bestow on each human being: from my utterance peoples and cities gather reasons for rejoicing; without my favour and grace no part of the whole world can prosper; all those many thousands of swords which my peace restrains will be drawn at my nod; what nations shall be destroyed, which banished, which shall receive the gift of liberty, which have it taken from them, what kings shall become slave and whose heads shall be crowned with royal honour, what cities shall fall and which shall rise —this is mine to decree."

Here, after all, Richey exposes the character of the Roman Empire as an oppressive tyranny, in the context of which Nero's self-glory can at best appear as a ridiculous caricature of the sovereign manner in which the God of Israel reveals Himself in the Psalms as the liberating NAME.

According to Richey (138),

> [i]n light of such claims to absolute power, the empire itself would have appeared to most people as the extension of an emperor who presented himself not only as a political leader and as an instrument of historical destiny but as a god as well. If, as Westcott [*Epistles*, 255] claims, "in the Emperor the world found a personal embodiment and claimed Divine honour," by the same logic the emperor could rightly claim the whole world as an extension of himself. For the emperor *ho kosmos* and *ta idia* were identical.

In contrast, the Prologue reveals, as Richey assumes

> that the true sire and ruler of the world is not Caesar but rather the Logos or Christ, since "The world came to be through him" (1:10: *ho kosmos di' autou egeneto*). Furthermore, 1:7 states plainly that the Baptist's mission was not to any one people or nation; rather he came "for testimony ... that all might believe through him (*eis martyrian … hina pantes pisteusōsin di' autou*). The entire world, not just the people of Israel, is "his own" (*ta idia*): "There is, however, no final distinction between Israel and the world, between Jew and Greek. As the creation of God, all men are His property."[83]

Two points of view are problematic in this comparison, as Richey carries it out:

First, nowhere does he define exactly what, according to him, is meant by the word *kosmos* in John's Gospel. Here he seems to assume that *kosmos* is simply the human

83 Thus Richey cites Edwyn Clement Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, ed. Francis Noel Davy, London: Faber and Faber, 1947, 146.

world created by God or Christ, in regard to which is only disputed who is its legitimate owner and ruler.

Ton Veerkamp,[84] on the other hand, suggests to view the word *kosmos* in a very differentiated way:

> *Kosmos* is both "world" and "world order." In John, *kosmos* is primarily *ho kosmos houtos*, "this world order." The word denotes what the rabbis call *ʿolam ha-ze*, "this age." It is a political category: the ruling world order, precisely the Roman Empire. Where John speaks of the *kosmos* being liberated, it is not the world in its present order that is meant, but the human living space, the world that is liberated from the order that weighs upon it, 4:42! The Greek *kosmos*—it has no actual equivalent in the Hebrew Scriptures—means "(harmonious) order, ornament (cosmetics)." Here it means both living space and that order which threatens the order of the individual peoples and just above all the orders of Israel. To John, the bad thing about the world is not the world itself, it is the object of God's solidarity, 3:16. What is bad is the order under which it suffers. Therefore, there is no "Gnostic," rather a "political" cosmology in John, which we try to account for by the alternating translation "world" and "world order."

Veerkamp agrees with Richey insofar as both take seriously how much the Roman Empire identified itself with the entire *kosmos* as a well-ordered world. In this respect, also according to Richey, too (139),

> the claim that Jesus "came to his own" (1:11: *eis ta idia ēlthen*) was not simply a theological statement about the Logos but implicitly a political one as well. Jesus is both the ultimate source of all secular authority (cf. 19:11: "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above") and the secular leader claimed to be *ho sōtēr tou kosmou*. It is Christ rather than Caesar who is *Dominus et deus noster*. (Sueteonius, *Domitian.* 13.4).[85] To worship Christ as Lord and God (John 20:28) is to deny the title to the emperor.

Not in view—at least not explicitly—is for Richey the possibility that Jesus as the Messiah of Israel with his death on the cross wants to finally overcome exactly this Roman world order, under which Israel is enslaved together with all other peoples, so that the coming world age of freedom, justice and peace expected by Israel can dawn.

This brings up a second problematic point that is difficult to recognize as such. If the witness of the Baptist, and thus of the entire Gospel, is directed to "all" people, thus

84 Veerkamp 28 (note 36 on the translation of John 1:9). Cf. also his more detailed presentation 27-30 (The Light and the World Order).

85 In the English sources of the Roman poets Virgil and Suetonius that I linked, the line references often do not exactly match those given by Richey (here, 13.2 would be correct).

eliminating the distinction "between Jew and Greek," then this presupposes a general mission to the nations, in the context of which Paul developed the vision of the reconciliation of Jews and Greeks in the one "body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 2:16). John's Gospel, however, speaks only with extreme reluctance of "some Greeks" (12:20) who want to see Jesus and are not even explicitly accepted as his disciples, while all emphasis is placed on wooing all Israel, including the lost tribes of northern Israel in the shape of the Samaritans. The fact that a majority of the Jews of "his own people", in contrast to the Samaritans, reject Jesus does not prevent him from working in numerous signs and wonders to overcome the paralysis, hunger, blindness, and decay of the people of Israel. If instead it is assumed that in John's Gospel from the outset "all" people of all nations without distinction are to be addressed, then this "all" is very quickly limited again in a fateful way, namely to "all" potential Christians, but completely without the Jews, because they in their majority reject the faith in Jesus as the Messiah and soon are faced by the emerging Gentile-Christian-dominated new religion of Christianity as the representatives of an old, overcome, even disinherited religion.

The extent of this danger is shown by Richey's following interpretation of John 1:12-13, which is devoid of any reference to the people of Israel, and in which I have highlighted two significant passages:

> Since this world has rejected Christ, though, and acclaimed Caesar as a god, the evangelist challenges and redraws the boundaries of the world by presenting a new order of things in Christ: "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (1:12-13). The challenge presented here to the established order of the Roman world is twofold. It establishes a new society within, and opposed to, the secular order established by the *Pax Romana*, composed **not of all people** but only "those who received him" (*hosoi elabon auton*), that is, "those believing in his name" (*hoi pisteuontes eis to onoma autou*). Its membership is composed of those "born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (*ouk ex haimatōn oude ek thelēmatos sarkos oude ek thelēmatos andros all' ek theou egennēthēsan*), in other words, **Johannine Christians**.

Only quite marginally (note 87) Richey mentions the synagogue, to which the "Johannine Christians" stand in "opposition" as well as "to the Imperial Cult." On such a basis, there is no way to consider that the Johannine community is not yet to be understood as Christian in contrast to Jew, but as Jewish-Messianic in contrast to a Rabbinic leadership that is misguided in their eyes and opposes the overcoming of the Roman world order by the Messiah Jesus.

4.2.3.2 New Society of "God-Born," *tekna tou theou*, in Contrast to a Clientele of the Emperor—Who Have the *diabolos* as Their Father

Also, Richey (139-140) interprets the expression *tekna tou theou*, "children of God," exclusively in relation to the Roman imperial cult:

> In addition, the Prologue offers to all believers "power to become children of God" (*exousian tekna theou genesthai*), thereby reversing the logic of the Imperial Cult, which placed the emperor at the head of society by virtue of his divinity. Within the context of the first-century empire, where all power was centered in and all well-being flowed from the person of the god-emperor, the challenge contained in these verses to the established order of things could hardly have been missed.

In this context, Richey explicitly objects (140) to understanding the "new society of the Johannine Community … in traditional political terms," since "John entirely lacks the language of the 'Kingdom of God' or 'Kingdom of Heaven' (*hē basileia tou theou*; *hē basileia tōn ouranōn*) which is so common to the Synoptic Gospels." This is not entirely true, as Richey immediately acknowledges, for there are nevertheless

> two attestations of the expression *hē basileia tou theou* in the Fourth Gospel (3:3, 5) ... when Jesus requires that one be "born anew" (*gennēthē anōthen*) or "born of water and the Spirit" (*gennēthē ex hydatos kai pneumatos*). These cases almost certainly echo the claim in 1:13 that only those people "born of God" (*ek theou egennēthēsan*) can become "children of God" (*tekna theou*).

From this Richey concludes that "the new society of believers" is not to be understood politically in relation to the political power of the emperor, but it is "eschatological" in the way Richter [127] defines the doctrine of the last things in John as a present eschatology, "with Christ's promises being fulfilled in the present moment within the Johannine community." According to Schnackenburg [1. 263]

> this new society formed by the appearance of the Logos in history is not the result of any human action: "It is a strictly supernatural event, wrought by God alone" and not "of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man" (1:13: *ouk ex haimatōn oude ek thelēmatos sarkos oude ek thelēmatos andros*). Schnackenburg also makes the pertinent observation: "The three negatives excluding all natural factors are, however, so striking that one may well suspect 'vehement polemics' behind the verse."

Because such a polemic (140-141) is "not directed" against a "single target," that is, not "only the Jews or only the Imperial Cult or only Gnostic dualism," according to Richey, "the logical opponent is arguably the entire Roman world that had rejected Christ. Or, in John's expression, *ta idia.*"

In this context, Richey (note 92), commenting on the background "of the threefold negation *ouk ex haimatōn oude ek thelēmatos sarkos oude ek thelēmatos andros* in 1:13," says that in his view this cannot be clearly determined:

> It may refer to Jewish ethnicity requirements, ancient theories of procreation, a dualistic rejection of the body, or even initiation by sacrifice into Gnostic religions, or any combination of these. The use of the plural "bloods" (*haimatōn*) is especially obscure. It is possible here that the evangelist is disavowing the matrilineal ethnicity requirements of Judaism. However, if this is the case the singular would be most natural. ... If "spilt blood" is intended, the reference may be to the Sacrificial rites involved in both Jewish and Pagan religion, including the Imperial Cult. Wes Howard-Brook offers a liberationist interpretation wherein "the nonchild of God is the one born out of bloodshed, violence, and, ultimately, in the Genesis thematic, fratricide".[86] Considering the demographic complexity of the Johannine community, it is probably not necessary to choose between these various possibilities.

It is interesting that Richey is not concerned at all with the background of the second and third negation ("nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man") and that he even disregards essential backgrounds in the Jewish Bible as to the background of the first negation ("not of blood").

According to Ton Veerkamp,[87] the phrase "not of bloods" with the "the plural *damim* which in the Scriptures is to be found 73 times, most of all related to sacrificial rites," and especially in Exodus 4:24-26, where Zipporah, in connection with the circumcision of her son, says of her husband Moses: "You've become a bridegroom of blood (*damim,* plural) for me." Commenting on this, Veerkamp says:

> Not circumcision, distinguishing mark between Israel and the other peoples, decides about who belongs to "the own" of the Messiah. "*Not of bloods*" thus means: not to be begotten from and for circumcision. Here is no difference of opinion between John and Paul.

The phrase *ʾish damim,* "man of blood" (2 Samuel 16:8; Psalm 5:7; 26:9; 55:24; 59:3; 139:19; Proverbs 29:10) or *ʿijr damim*, "city of blood" (Nahum 3:1), as well as the use of the plural *damim* for "blood debt" and "bloodshed" (Exodus 22,1-2; Deuteronomy 19:10; 22:8; 1 Chronicles 22:8; Psalm 9:13; Isaiah 1:15; 33:15; Ezekiel 7:23; 9:9), gives me the idea to also take a closer look at Wes Howard-Brook's reflections cited by Richey sometime.

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86 Richey cites Wes Howard-Brook, *Becoming Children of God: John's Gospel and Radical Discipleship*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994, 56.

87 All Veerkamp citations in this section are from Veerkamp 30-34 (Birth, par. 1, 5-7, 8-9, 12, 18, and 4).

What does John mean by the "will of the flesh"? According to Veerkamp, the word *sarx*, "'[f]lesh' is no negative notion. It means the vulnerable, perishable human existence," but of course "no refusal of human existence" as in the escapist Gnosis. Instead, a contrast exists here

> between "fading" and "abiding." "Not of the will of the flesh" means: not to be begotten of an existence that remains bound to *this age*, to the *ʿolam haze*, i.e. to the ruling world order. John does not want a human (fleshly) existence, that remains bound to the perishability of its historical conditions, but a Messianically inspired (not: *spiritual*!) existence that embodies the *age to come*. To John, the opposite to a perishable, vulnerable, physical life is not the eternal, spiritual life in the afterworld, but a life of the age to come in *this* world, *zōē aiōnios*. The adjective *aiōnios* means "the coming *aiōn*, the *ʿolam ha-baʾ* (Buber: *Weltzeit* = "world age"), concerning the coming era." The expression originates from Daniel. We'll get back to it when discussing the passage 5:29. This era will remain, an era when human life no longer is threatened by inhuman circumstances. Hence we translate *zōē aiōnios* consequently as "life of the age to come" and not as "eternal life."

Finally, according to Veerkamp, the expression "not of the will of a man" brings to mind Abraham:

> At no point, there is talk of Abraham having begotten this son, the only-begotten, with Sarah. There only is talk about Sarah and her son. Nowhere we hear the classical sentence: "Such and such (Abraham) knew her and she (Sarah) became pregnant and bore a son . . .." The son, wanted by both of them, for whom they had begged God, is born *not of the will of a man*!" To be sure, we hear: "These are the begettings of Isaac, the son of Abraham. Abraham begat Isaac", Genesis 25:19. But the begetting by Abraham is an element of the chapter "begettings of Isaac."

In this context must also be understood what John will say in 1:14, 18 of Jesus as the "only son" (*yachid, monogenēs*):

> The only one, *monogenēs*, is the new Isaac, the only one begotten divinely. Whoever trusts in him will be "born of God" as well in this sense: He really sees light, is enlightened, remains alive amidst an order of death.

Richey does not adress all these possible Jewish backgrounds in verse 13. Although in his view (141) the Johannine community is set "against these varied opponents, who collectively encompass the world of the first-century" and to whom John contrasts "'those believing in his name,' whom John then describes alternatively as 'children of God' and 'born of God'," he goes on to compare these phrases mainly "to the claim made by the emperor to be *ho hyios tou theou.*" In this respect, he considers these expressions "striking, and particularly political in its connotations."

Not quite in line with this argument, however, is the fact that the phrase *teknon tou theou*, child of God, as mentioned only somewhat hiddenly (142) in note 94, did not occur in "the Imperial Cult" at all:

> The absence of *teknon theou* from the Imperial Cult is probably due to its diminutive sense ("child" rather than "son"), which would be an inappropriate title for the emperor.

Also in connection (141) with the use of the phrase *tekna theou* in the various writings of the New Testament, Richey does not argue very convincingly. He identifies five passages "in Paul's letters (e.g. Rom 8:16, 21; 9:8, 26; Phil 2:15)" against a total of six passages in "the Johannine tradition," but the phrase occurs four times just in John's epistles and, apart from John 1:12, only once more in John 11:52. This result (142), that is, a mere twofold "use of *tekna theou* as a description of Christ's followers" in John's Gospel, hardly allows the conclusion Richey thinks he can draw (141):

> For an audience sensitive to the Roman context and especially to the claim made by the emperor to be *ho hyios tou theou*, these expressions would have carried connotations beyond what they conveyed in the context of the original Logos-hymn.

To my eyes, also from this point of view (142), the use of "*tekna theou* as a description of Christ's followers" is much more likely to go back to Jewish-biblical backgrounds than to allow him

> to challenge the key tenet of the Augustan Ideology, namely, that the emperor held a unique status as *hyios theou*, with authority over the world and all its inhabitants. So closely connected were divine descent and political power in the first century that Dio Chrysostom could use the expression *tou Dios einai hyios* ("to be a son of Zeus") as synonymous with "to be a ruler."[88] Likewise, Deissmann observes that "the adjective *theios*, 'divine,' ... is, like the Latin *divinus,* very common in the sense of 'Imperial' throughout the whole Imperial period." But sharing in the emperor's divinity was never a possibility, even if a greater or lesser share of the benefits that accrued to humanity through his rule could be expected for loyal service and servility.

Again, I consider two clarifications necessary in this regard: First, the phrase *tekna tou theou* in John's Gospel certainly does not mean "sharing in the … divinity" of Jesus or even of the God of Israel. "God-born" or "begotten divinely," as Veerkamp says, rather, means people who live according to God's liberating will. Second, it is striking that John's Gospel in particular reserves the expression *hyios tou theou*, Son of God, exclusively for Jesus and does not refer it to other people who belong to

88 Thus Richey cites Dio Chrysostom, *Or*. 4.21, who in turn is quoted in TDNT 8. 337 n. 12 by Martitz et al. on the keyword „*hyios.*"

God, as happens in Paul (Romans 8:14; 9:26; Galatians 3:26) and in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:9).[89] From this we can conclude that John presumably wants to contrast only Jesus as the *hyios tou theou* with the emperor as the usurped Son of God and that the phrase *tekna theou* does not allude to the Imperial Cult at all.

With the opposition of Jesus to the emperor in John's Gospel, Richey compares the attitude of "Paul, who certainly rejected the Imperial Cult," but who nevertheless, in his eyes, recognized the benefits that accrued to mankind through the rule of the emperor, and who therefore "occasionally slips into the language of the Augustan Ideology":

> Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of him who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. (Rom 13:1-4a)

In contrast (143), "Jesus' response to Pilate in John 19:11 is entirely different, signaling quiet defiance rather than prudent submission."[90] Richey attributes these "two very different responses to the emperor" to the "equally different circumstances" in which they were written:

> Paul to a community still unnoticed by Nero, John to a community living after the Neronian persecution, after the fall of Jerusalem, and under the rule of Domitian *Dominus et deus noster*. Accordingly, John offers his readers not an accommodation to but a decision about Roman power: were they to become the *clientela* of *Imperator Caesar divi filius Augustus* or *tekna theou*?

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89 Richey (141), by the way, erroneously lists Matthew 5:9 as the only Synoptic passage for the use of the phrase *tekna theou.* Later (147, note 112), he cites Büchsel on the keyword *monogenēs* in the lexicon TDNT [4. 739-40], "that in the Fourth Gospel 'believers who as children of God are called *hyioi theou* ... in Matthew, Paul, etc., are always called *tekna theou* in John 1:12, 11:52; 1John 3:1, 2, 10; 5:2, while *hyios* is reserved for Jesus'." His point there is to emphasize the uniqueness of Jesus' sonship with God over the Roman emperorship.

90 This is not the place to discuss Paul in detail; nevertheless, it should be noted that Paul does not take up the formulations of Augustan ideology quite as uncritically as Richey assumes. According to Gerhard Jankowski, *Die große Hoffnung: Paulus an die Römer. Eine Auslegung*, Berlin 1998, 275 ff, in Romans 13:1 the preposition *hypo* must not be translated as "from," as is usually done; rather, according to Paul, there is no power that is not "**under** God," and every power that exists is "**ordered under** God." Moreover, it should not be overlooked that the words *hypotassein* and *hypo theou tassein* represent a subtly ironic play on words by which Paul fundamentally questions the divine power of the emperor: Everyone is to be **subordinate** to the superior powers, which in turn are **subordinate** to God alone. Jankowski's further comments on Romans 12:21 to 13:7 are also extremely worth reading.

With this juxtaposition, namely a relationship between clients and their patron on the one hand and a relationship of the God-born to the God of Israel on the other, Richey now clarifies in which way the formulation *tekna theou* may possibly be understood in distinction to the Augustan Ideology after all.

Unfortunately, in his book Richey does not deal at all with one possible reference of this suggested interpretation, namely with the question of who may be meant by *diabolos* in John 8:44. Usually *diabolos* is translated simply as "devil," which, from the later use of this word, is thought of as a demonic, otherworldly opponent of God as the embodiment of abysmal evil. When Jesus addresses the Jews, who reject him and want to kill him, as children of this *diabolos,* does he not thus design an exact counter-image to the *tekna theou* born of God?

If so, it would not be necessary to presuppose a greater influx of Gentile members into the Johannine community to explain the stark antithesis of Jesus and the Roman emperors in the Gospel. The Gospel itself states (which was misunderstood later, unfortunately) that it is the leading ranks of Israel's own people who do not, as *tekna theou*, want to follow the Messiah Jesus, who from the beginning embodies the Word of the God of Israel and is totally directed toward him (John 1:1), but instead prefer to submit to the Roman emperor, who "is a murderer of humans on principle" and, in contrast to the faithfulness of the God of Israel, is a "father of deceit" (John 8:44).[91]

How, according to Richey, does the "process of becoming *tekna theou*, as John relates in 1:12," take place? It "does not demand the sort of submission or sacrifice found in the Imperial Cult. Rather, it is necessary *pisteuein eis to onoma autou*." And how is this *pisteuein* which is directed to his name, the name of Jesus, to be understood? Usually, *pisteuein* is translated as "believe." According to Dodd,[92]

> that is, "not simply to accept His claim, by intellectual assent, but to acknowledge that claim by yielding allegiance. … *Pisteuein eis to onoma* means to acknowledge Christ and to accept him as the revelation of God." This claim, in turn, requires not just belief in the Logos in its cosmological importance but also in its historical activity and its decisive socio-political significance for the believer.

According to Schnackenburg [1. 262-263], this leads to further conclusions:

> Faith is the basic prerequisite for salvation, and in Johannine theology the one condition which contains all others. The expression "believe in his name" is typically and exclusively Johannine (cf. 2:23; 3:18; 1Jn 3:23; 5:13), and implies

91 Cf. Veerkamp 204-09 (The *Diabolos* is Not the Devil).

92 Richey cites C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953, 184-185.

> the acceptance of Jesus to the full extent of his self-revelation. Such an act of faith is possible only in the encounter with a historical bringer of salvation, a person who is the mediator of salvation.

In adopting these positions of Dodd and Schnackenburg, Richey contrasts religious salvation, in the sense of redemption from sin and eternal life after death that can be achieved through faith in the name of Jesus, with the purely secular benefits that a client might expect from the emperor or other patrons.

However, another juxtaposition is also conceivable and even more likely from the evangelist's Jewish roots. According to Ton Veerkamp, who translates the word *pisteuein* as "to trust,"

> [t]he NAME of the Messiah is the liberation of the world from the order that is bearing down on it, John 4:42. To trust in the NAME (or *toward the NAME*) means to expect that the Name keeps what he promises.

Understood in this way, it is not about a confrontation of Jesus with the emperor, which Richey calls "political," but which, in his eyes, is nevertheless fought out by John the Evangelist primarily on the playing field of religion and on which Jesus, as the superior supernatural savior figure, wins the day. Rather, John actually challenges the Roman empire itself politically by branding "this world," *ton kosmon touton*, Hebrew *ʿolam ha-ze*, as the present world age marked by violence and injustice, which the Messiah Jesus will overcome by his death on the cross so that the life of the coming world age of peace (*ʿolam ha-ba, zōē aiōnios*) can dawn.

4.2.4 Is the *doxa* of Jesus His "Glory" in the Sense of a General Supreme "Divinity"? (John 1:14-18)

In the first sentence of this section (144), Richey refers to the untranslated Greek word *doxa* by saying:

> The entire Prologue is concerned with the *doxa* of the Logos: detailing its pre-existence, divine creativity and co-equality (vv. 1-3); calling it the true light of all people (vv. 4-5, 9), which the Baptist announced (vv. 6-8) and which has come into its home and been made flesh (vv. 10-12); and spelling out its effects on those who believe (v. 13).

Thus he practically equates what is meant by *doxa* with what he had described in section 4.2.1 as the cosmological identity of Jesus. In the following sentence, he translates *doxa* as "glory":

> However, in the last five verses of the Prologue, John refocuses the audience's attention on the object of their faith, Jesus Christ, seen now for the first time in all his glory *and* humanity.

In this juxtaposition of "glory and humanity," it is clear that *doxa*, in Richey's eyes, is intended to mean virtually the same thing as "divinity," namely, of a kind that took visible form by way of the incarnation (becoming flesh) "among the children of Israel" as "an event in human history" (John 1:14-15):

> "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. (John bore witness to him, and cried, 'This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, for he was before me'" (1:14-15).

Unlike what he translates here, Richey then points out that the testimony of John the Baptist is spoken of in the "present tense: *martyrei*": he thus testifies to those addressed "the incarnation" as "not just a dead fact from the past but a present reality in their contemporary lives."

What is problematic about these remarks of Richey so far is that although he speaks of the incarnation of the Word "among the children of Israel," he does not deal in any way with the associated biblical background of the word *doxa.* This should be said for the time being only to keep it in mind; first I will discuss the way Richey interprets verses 14 to 18.

4.2.4.1 Jesus as the Only-Begotten God in Opposition to the Roman Emperor

With John 1:14, according to Richey (145), "the climax to the Gospel's overture" is reached, that is

> the theological center of John's Christology: Jesus Christ, the human being in whom "the Word became flesh" has glory "as of the only Son from the Father" (1:14), indeed, is *monogenēs theos* (1:18).

As distinct from other words used here, Richey inquires into the biblical background of the word *monogenēs*, which is only taken by John in the New Testament "to refer to Christ." But he concludes (146)

> that he is not attempting to evoke scripture in this description of Christ, but something else. That something else is arguably the "other" god-man who was constantly present to Johannine Christians, namely, the Roman emperor.

In support of this, Richey argues that

> [b]y using the term *monogenēs*, the evangelist can attack the image of the emperor in the Augustan Ideology from at least two directions. It captures not only the uniqueness of Jesus' genealogy but also his absolute pre-eminence in the *kosmos* as well. ... Most immediately, the term's appearance in 1:14 makes clear that Jesus is *monogenēs* in the sense of "only (begotten) Son from the Father" (*monogenēs para patros*), a sharp challenge to claims of divine ancestry made by Julius Caesar and subsequent emperors. The prefix *mono*- rules out the possibility of there being any other person who is begotten by the Fa-

> ther, and by itself constitutes a unique claim to divinity never made by any of the emperors who represented themselves as "the seed of Julius [Caesar]."[93]

Richey also considers the second part of the word *monogenēs* to be significant (146-147), for

> [a]ccording to John 1:1-3, *genēs* indicates that Jesus was not "born" of the Father in any human sense, but rather "begotten"[94] from him, since "in compounds like *dio-genēs, gē-genēs, eu-genēs, syn-genēs* the *-genēs* suggests derivation (*genos*) rather than birth."[95] In contrast, Julius Caesar, following the pattern of the divine kings of the Hellenistic East had based his claim to divinity explicitly upon a supposed *biological* lineage traceable to Venus through Aeneas and occasionally to Mars as well, through the Alban kings. Using *monogenēs* in the sense of "only-begotten" constituted a direct challenge to the notion of divinity, found in the Imperial Cult: Jesus and Jesus alone is the Son of God, and even then in a unique, non-natural manner.

According (148) to the lexikon TDNT [4. 739],

> [i]n addition to expressing the belief that Jesus is the only and only-begotten Son of God, *monogenēs* can also carry the derivative meaning of "'unique,' 'unparalleled,' [or] 'incomparable,'" probably the intended sense in the context of the Prologue.

That John thus intends to ascribe "supreme" divinity to Jesus is, according to Richey, also presupposed in verses John 1:16-17,

> which place Jesus above the greatest figure of the OT, Moses, and present him as the mediator of all grace and truth: "And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."

While Richey acknowledges

> that the mention of Moses here could only remind the readers of the past (and present) conflicts with the synagogue leaders leading to the painful separation from the parent Judaism. However, multiple references are not only possible but likely here given the complex history of the text and the community. The christological language employed ("from his fullness we have all received ...; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ") would probably bring to the reader's mind other figures as well.

93 Thus Richey cites Virgil, *Aen.* 6.789-90 (Fairclough and Gould, LCL): „*omnis Iuli* | *progenies*."

94 Richey points to the fact that the "translation of *monogenēs as* 'only-begotten' is almost universally accepted, at least as one sense of the word."

95 Thus Richey cites Büchsel in the lexikon TDNT "*monogenēs,"* 4. 737-738.

Specifically, Richey (149) thinks, for example, of "Seneca's soliloquy for Nero" [Clementia 1.1.2], in which the latter expresses the claim: "Without my favour and grace no part of the whole world can prosper," or of Philo's report [Legatio ad Gaium IV,22, cited by Richey after Cuss [67],

> that Caligula was at first welcomed by the peoples of the empire as "the Saviour and Benefactor ... [who would] pour fresh streams of blessings on Asia and Europe." Leaving aside here the very important title *sōtēr* (see Chapter Three), its normal companion title, "benefactor" (*euergetēs*), carried the plain sense of a person who bestows benefits and blessings upon another. For John to say of Christ that "from his fullness we have all received" (*ek tou plērōmatos autou hēmeis pantes elabomen*) may have evoked in broad terms the model of a *euergetēs* in the minds of his audience. This would have been true especially in the first century, when not only one's well-being but one's very survival often depended on the generosity of rulers and other powerful individuals.

It is from such benefactors that Christ, according to John, differs in a decisive way as the *only-begotten God in the bosom of the Father*:

> By virtue of being *monogenēs theos eis ton kolpon tou patros*, Christ can accomplish for his believers what no one else—prophet, lawgiver, miracle-worker, or emperor—can do: "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (1:18).[96]

It is true that, in Richey's view (150), Virgil also makes a "similar but somewhat lesser claim … for Augustus" [4th Eclogue 15-16]:

> "He shall have the gift of divine life, shall see heroes mingled with gods, and shall himself be seen by them." However, nothing is said here or elsewhere about Augustus "making known" these gods. Indeed, the very logic of apotheosis presupposes that the gods whom the emperor is joining are already known and worshiped. Moreover, as argued in Chapter Two, the Augustan Ideology's portrait of the divine Caesar was not of a "revealer" of the gods, but their divine instrument. The emperor may have functioned as a mediator of public prayers to the traditional gods but was always understood within a client-patron model rather than a Father-Son paradigm.

96 That Richey quotes the Greek text *monogenēs theos*, "only-begotten God," at the beginning of this quotation, but speaks of the "only Son" in his translation, has to do with the fact that in the biblical manuscripts, there is also the reading *monogenēs hyios*, "only-begotten Son." He had previously noted (145, note 105) that the former reading was more difficult and thus probably the original one, but this made practically no difference to the meaning of the text.

Finally, Richey emphasizes that by the "presentation of Jesus as one with the Father and as his sole revealer" in verse 18, John manages to bring the entire discussion back to its starting point" in verse 1 (150-151):

> The intervening discussion, with its many layers of reference suggesting not only an OT or philosophical-Gnostic background but also, as I have argued, a Roman one, makes John's Christology absolutely clear to his audience. Jesus is not simply a *theios anēr*, nor a *prophētēs*, nor even a new *Mōyseōs*. He certainly is not a *hyios theou* or *euergetēs* in the "imperial" sense. Instead, he is *monogenēs theos eis ton kolpon tou patros* (1:18).

That Jesus according to John was neither a divine man with miraculous powers nor simply a prophet or a new Moses and certainly not a "Son of God" or Benefactor in the sense of Augustan Ideology cannot be denied. In Richey's eyes (note 126), this is confirmed by C. K. Barrett[97] for the entire Gospel of John:

> "This is indeed the message of the Gospel. The whole truth (*hapanta*) about the invisible and unknown God is declared in the historical figure to which John points in his not literally historical narrative. The figure of Jesus does not (so John in effect declares) make sense when viewed as a national leader, a rabbi, or a *theios anēr*; he makes sense when in hearing him you hear the Father, when in looking at him you see the Father, and worship him."

However, one crucial question remains unanswered here: Who exactly is this Father who is "heard" and "seen" in Jesus? In what way is the last word of John's Prologue *exēgēsato* to be interpreted, which Richey translates as "to make known" and which literally appears in our modern word "exegesis"? He answers this question (150, note 122) with a quotation from Leon Morris:[98]

> The verb "declared" (here only in John) is used of setting forth a narrative. ... It indicates that Jesus has now given a full account of the Father. This does not mean that there is nothing more to be learned of him. The term is not precise enough for that. But it does point to the adequacy of the revelation in Christ. We may have confidence that God is as Christ revealed him. The word is used in the mystery religions and elsewhere as a technical term for the revelation of divine secrets. Often it is used of the gods themselves making a disclosure. Such associations fitted the word to be used of a full and authoritative revelation of the divine Being. Such a revelation could, of course, be made only by

97 Here Richey is not quoting his interpretation of John, but C. K. Barrett, „Christocentric or Theocentric? Observations on the Theological Method of the Fourth Gospel," in idem, *Essays on John*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982, 16.

98 Richey cites Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John,* NICNT, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971, 114-115.

> One uniquely qualified in a manner made clear by the references to him in the earlier part of the verse.

These remarks sound like much else in this passage as if Jesus wants to "make known" to his readership a hitherto unknown God in a completely new way. But Richey must know that the God who is mentioned in the whole Gospel of John is none other than the God of Israel. Does Richey mean that from Jesus this God is to be interpreted completely anew, or even that he wants to put himself in the place of this God who has done his duty? But then there is the danger that Jesus, who is supposed to be diametrically opposed to the Roman emperor in his usurped divinity, is attributed only such predicates of divinity, which originate from the ruling Hellenistic-Roman philosophy and which will appear in their religiously spiritualized or escapist form a few centuries later to be suitable to become the state ideology of the Roman empire.

4.2.4.2 Jesus as the Second Isaac, Who—as the Only-Begotten—Embodies Both the People of Israel and—as its Messiah—the Liberating NAME of the God of Israel

It is not only the theologian Ton Veerkamp, whom I mainly quote and who vehemently contradicts the view that Jesus revealed a hitherto unknown God. Klaus Wengst,[99] for example, sees in John 1:14 "the phrase 'full of grace and faithfulness' as an exact correspondence" to the Hebrew "*rav chésed ve-emét*" and understands it "as one of the epithets of God":

> God's rich grace and faithfulness are spoken of, which is demonstrated in the incarnation of the Word, in the appearance of Jesus from Nazareth. Here, God graciously pledges himself and demonstrates his faithfulness. So, if John ties in with the tradition in this way, with the Bible and its interpretation, it is also completely clear from here that according to him Jesus does not "reveal" a hitherto unknown God. He rather wants to emphasize that in Jesus no other than the God already known in Israel as merciful and faithful comes to the fore.

Elsewhere, Wengst refers to Karl Barth to confirm this insight, who

> in discussing this text, points out that "strangely enough, there is no passage in the whole Gospel of John" where Jesus bears witness about the Father, but always conversely the Father about Jesus and Jesus about himself. "Jesus, the unknown Son of God, becomes known through the known Father." A little further on he writes: "Everything depends on hearing the testimony of the Father sounding together with his testimony of himself. But the Father is known. Jesus appeals to this actor as to a well-known actor."

99 Klaus Wengst, Das Johannesevangelium, Stuttgart 2019, 62 und 265. An der letzteren Stelle zitiert er Karl Barth, *Erklärung des Johannes-Evangeliums* (*Kapitel 1-8*), hg. v. W. Fürst, Zürich 1976, 365f.

But from where can the God of Israel be known if not from the Jewish Bible? That the evangelist quotes it quite often explicitly is obvious, that he alludes to it many more times is more than likely. The word *exēgēsato* should therefore be understood as meaning that Jesus "interpreted" or "performed" a God, who is quite familiar to the addressees, in a new situation with new challenges in a new way, and not only in the form of a theoretical biblical exegesis, but through the whole practice of his activity, including his suffering and death.

With this premise in mind, let us now consider the reasons that led Richey not to attribute the usage of the word *monogenēs* in John's Gospel to the biblical writings. To this end, he writes (145):

> John is alone among NT writers in using *monogenēs* to refer to Christ, with four occurrences in the Gospel (1:14, 18; 3:16, 18). The remaining occurrences of the word in the NT and the LXX shed little light on his meaning. Elsewhere in the NT, the term occurs three times in Luke (7:12; 8:42; 9:38) and once in Hebrews (11:17), but never with christological significance. There it always refers to an "only child" in the everyday sense of a young person without siblings. The LXX often uses *monogenēs* to translate *yāḥîd* (Jdt 11:34; Tob 3:15; 6:11; 8:17; but cf. Ps 24:16, where it means "lonely"). It "is therefore parallel to *agapētos*, 'beloved,' an alternative rendering of *yāḥîd* in the LXX."

The last sentence is from Beasley-Murray [14], whom F. Büchsel in the lexicon TDNT [4. 739] on the keyword *monogenēs*, however, contradicts (145-146, note 106):

> "But there is a distinction between *agapētos* and *monogenēs*. It is a mistake to subsume the meaning of the latter under that of the former. *Monogenēs* is not just a predicate of value. If the LXX has different terms for *yāḥîd,* this is perhaps because different translators were at work." Büchsel also criticizes the decision to use *monogenēs* in Ps 24:16 as "an unfortunate translation" which should have been rendered as *prōtogonous*, "living by oneself."

Again (145-146) referring to Beasley-Murray [14] among others, Richey observes that

> [t]he Synoptic Gospels frequently present the Father using *ho hyios mou ho agapētos* in reference to Christ (e.g., Matt 3:17; 12:38; 17:5; Mark 1:11; 9:17; Luke 3:22; 20:13), which betrays the common Northwest Semitic basis for both expressions. John's use of the less common *monogenēs* as well as the absence of *agapētos* from the Fourth Gospel or 1 John (cf. 1 John 2:7; 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11) suggests that he is not attempting to evoke scripture in this description of Christ, but something else. That something else is arguably the "other" god-man who was constantly present to Johannine Christians, namely, the Roman emperor.

The fact that in the New Testament, however, the word *monogenēs* could well be taken as an allusion to a crucial Old Testament passage overlooked by Richey is shown by the Letter to the Hebrews (11:17), which refers *monogenēs* to Isaac as the only son of Abraham, whom Abraham offers to God for sacrifice according to Genesis 22. Already in view of those not born of the will of a man according to John 1:13, Abraham's son Isaac had to be thought of in section 4.2.3.2.

Ton Veerkamp[100] says:

> The word *monogenēs* is missing in Genesis 22:2, where the Greek version is: "Take your son, the beloved, whom you love." But in the Hebrew version, we read: "Take your son, your only son, whom you love." Why the LXX replaces the word "your only one," *yechidkha,* with "your beloved" (*ʾohavkha*) may have been because the old translators in Alexandria of the 3rd century BCE had a different source. But the Vulgate has not *dilectum tuum*, *ʾohavkha*, but *unigenitum*, *yachid*. John most likely thought of Genesis 22 when he heard the word *monogenēs.*

Insofar, according to Veerkamp,

> John transfers the theological usage of "only" (*yachid*) in the narrative of Isaac as "only son" and thus as the only future of Abraham to the Messiah Jesus. He is the new Isaac, he opens the future of the new Israel.

From the context of the prologue itself, this assertion cannot be proven beyond doubt. But John does not use the word *monogenēs* here for the last time. Later, in the context of Jesus' nightly conversation with Nicodemus, he makes it unmistakably clear that the reference to Jesus as the *hyion ton monogenē* is clearly to be understood against the background of Genesis 22. For there,

> John again offers a midrash in the second sentence, which is about the "binding of Isaac, the only one," Genesis 22. There Abraham is demanded to raise his son, "his only one," as a sacrifice. Then the messenger of the NAME said to Abraham, Genesis 22:11 ff.,
>
> ". . . you have not kept your son, your only one, from me." . . .
>
> With the word *monogenēs*, *yachid*, John invokes this passage of the Scriptures. . . . [H]ere the Son is not the figure of Daniel 7, but the representation of Isaac. Abraham had waited a lifetime for this son; he is his future. The God of Abraham must make it clear to Abraham in a wickedly drastic way that this Isaac is not the son of Abraham, but the son of his God, the FATHER of Israel, the people destined to be the firstborn one among the nations. If Isaac does

100 Veerkamp 89 (note 133 on the interpretation of John 2:23-3:21). Further, I cite Veerkamp 37 (The Word and Human Reality, par. 11) and 89-90 ("You are the teacher of Israel, and you do not understand this?", par. 37-41).

not stay alive, Abraham has no future. He must remain alive, but only as the son of God.

John here introduces Jesus as the representation of Isaac. Like Isaac then, Jesus is now the future. In the Hebrew text, it says that Abraham must "exalt" his son as a "sacrifice of exalting" (*haʿala le-ʿola*). It did not come that far; the binding of Isaac is dissolved, the slaughter of Isaac is prevented, because Abraham demonstrably no longer sees his son as his own particular future, but recognizes him as the future of "God." God's solidarity with Abraham was evident at that time in the prevention of Isaac's sacrifice. In John, the God of Israel must do something that was never demanded of Abraham. Here Jesus/ Isaac is exalted, bloodily. Here the God of Israel goes all the bloody way with the world of humans because there is no other way to solidarize with them.

John alienates the narrative of Isaac's binding. Abraham's future is accomplished by the release of the binding of Isaac, but here the future requires the slaughter of the Messiah, thus brutally you have to interpret the word *edōken*, "gave, surrendered." "God" goes all the bloody way down, because the world order forces the God, so to speak, to have "his only one" killed.

From this background, Jesus' contrast to the usurped sonship of God of Roman emperors need not be that he was brought forth by God, as Richey thinks (147), "in a unique, non-natural manner." Nothing speaks against the fact that the Jewish man Jesus, naturally conceived and born of Joseph and Mary from Nazareth in Galilee, was as well sent into this world by the God of Israel as a second Isaac, that is, as the embodiment of his firstborn son Israel (Genesis 4:22), for the liberation of the world from the ruling world order that weighs upon it.

If the Prologue is understood in this Jewish-Messianic way, that is, as the proclamation of Jesus, who, as the Messiah of Israel, represents uniquely the liberating Word or the NAME of the God of Israel, then Jesus exceeds the significance of Moses as the conveyor of God's Torah, but he does not replace the liberating message of the Torah and the prophets, which is directed to Israel's future, by an internalized and escapist religion of redemption.

Above all, however (148), his "supreme" divinity in no way exceeds the divinity of the God of Israel, because, according to Wengst [62], it is explicitly his "grace and faithfulness," Hebrew "*rav chésed ve-emét*," that becomes visible in the glory of the Word of God made flesh.

4.2.4.3 Jesus' *doxa* as the "Honor," *kavod,* of the God of Israel, Which is Only Established with Israel's Liberation

The fact that Richey does not deal in one single word with the unique divinity of the God of Israel, which in the Jewish Bible is circumscribed by the four letters of his NAME, the tetragram YHWH, becomes clear once again in the summary of his re-

marks on John's Prologue, detailing Jesus' divinity in a way that abstracts from everything else (151):

> The Johannine Prologue, adopted and adapted by the evangelist as a summary of his Christology, constitutes one of the crowning achievements of early Christian thought. Whatever the background of the hymn that John employed here (Jewish, Gnostic, or otherwise), in the Fourth Gospel it primarily functions for contrastive purposes: Jesus Christ, the Logos, is not like any other being, since he alone is God.

Is it necessary to conclude from this that Jesus is neither like a gnostic heavenly being or a Roman state theologically understood deified man nor like the Jewish God?

But Jesus, according to John, understands himself clearly and explicitly as the messenger and son of exactly this God and no other. In many places he emphasizes by the use of the words *egō eimi*, "I AM," that through his work he embodies nothing else than the liberating NAME of God, the meaning of which Ton Veerkamp[101] sums up as follows:

> The God of Israel *is* his NAME, that and only that, by which he wants to make himself known to the people. His essence is and remains inaccessible to us. The NAME by which alone we can know God is "He who leads out of the slave house." This NAME is remaining.

If it is taken seriously that God's divinity is to be understood in this and no other way, then Jesus' "supreme" divinity must not be abstracted from the NAME of Israel's God either. And in speaking of God's *doxa,* usually translated as "glory," it must be borne in mind that in the background is the Hebrew word *kavod*, which "literally means 'weight, brunt' (from *kaved*, 'to be heavy'). Veerkamp translates it

> as "honor," not "glory." The Word is not to be "glorified," but *honor* is due to it based on what it does for Israel.

The "honor of the NAME" is thus inseparable from the life of Israel, indeed, the "honor of God is the living Israel." That is why, in Psalm 115:1-2, the people of Israel can appeal with confidence to the honor of God:

> Not to us, YOU, not to us, no, give honor to Your name,
> because of your solidarity, because of your fidelity.
> Why should the nations speak,
> "Where is their God?"

101 The first and last Veerkamp quotations are from his interpretation of the Messiah's prayer, Veerkamp 339 and 337 (The prayer of the Messiah, par. 16 and 7), the second, Veerkamp 34, from his note 51 on the translation of John 1:14, and the third, Veerkamp 272, from his interpretation of John 12:28 ("Now my soul is shaken", par. 5-6).

Not an abstract supreme divinity with absolute omnipotence, no lordship in the manner of human conquerors and tyrants, no superlative of any radiant power at all is therefore meant by the word *kavod* or *doxa*, but this word must always be understood in the context of Israel's destiny:

> It is for the honor of God, which is the honor of the Messiah, as the honor of the Messiah is the honor of God. And the honor of God and the Messiah is Israel, namely Israel freed from the worldwide slave house of Rome.

Richey, on the other hand, apparently sees Jesus and his community as being completely detached from Israel and its liberating God and as being forced into a general position of confrontation with the whole world. In doing so, he does not differentiate between the Judean leadership of God's people, which makes common cause with Rome, and God's abiding faithfulness to his people. In his eyes (151-152),

> Jesus Christ, the Logos, is not like any other being, since he alone is God. Accepting his divinity, though, has consequences far beyond the boundaries of the synagogue or the Johannine community. It results in setting believers against the world that rejected Christ. … As Norman R. Petersen[102] observes, John's
>
> "usage [of language] stands in fundamental contrast to everyday usage. John and his people speak and think in ways that are in contrast with the speech and thought of others in their social environment. The others, moreover, are as it were the lords of the everyday, of the conventional and of the traditional. They are the maintainers of norms to which John and his people oppose themselves, linguistically, conceptually, and, not least of all, socially. We cannot appreciate John's special use of language without acknowledging its social function as an affirmation of difference over against the sameness of the world around him and his people, a world that has also rejected what they affirm. Indeed, we will find that the fact of social rejection is the motivating force behind the affirmation of a difference that has been imposed upon John and his people."

Richey indeed seems to agree with Petersen that the Johannine community faces the world hostile to it in a way in which all cats, so to speak, are not only gray but dead black: both Jews and Romans are seen in their hostility as ultimately the same kind of threat to their dissenting faith. That Jesus' honor being the honor of the NAME of God is directed to the overcoming of the Roman world order and the dawn of life of the coming world age for Israel in the midst of the nations, he completely overlooks.

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102 Richey cites Norman R. Petersen, *The Gospel of John and the Sociology of Light: Language and Characterization in the Fourth Gospel* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995) 21.

It is characteristic of Richey's way of thinking (152) that he does not consider the "language of John, including especially his christological language," as a "*creatio ex nihilo*," that is, as a creation out of nothing. But he thinks that he does not have to locate the origin of this language in the Jewish Bible, but only in "the Roman world," from which, in his eyes, "the Johannine vocabulary … of contrast and difference" distinguishes itself.

Richey does not give any further thought to the presuppositions from which John carries out this demarcation. What is important to him, however, is that although John "upsets and inverts the language of power and divinity used by the Roman world," he nevertheless "does not and could not destroy it":

> To understand how the Christ of the Prologue is unique, it is first necessary to know how John uses the existing conceptual categories and the same vocabulary of power and divinity. These, I have argued, were drawn from the Augustan Ideology, that shadowy darkness within which the Light shines, and brilliantly, thanks to John's christological genius.

But is not the Messiahship of Jesus, whose honor consists in the liberation of Israel from enslavement under the ruling world order, thus virtually reversed, in that John is supposed to be a Christ whose power is adequately described by the indestructible language of Augustan ideology? According to Richey, the reversal of this language does not refer to the overcoming of the Roman world order, but to the shifting of its meaning to a kingdom of God understood inwardly or otherworldly—or, as will be shown in chapter 6, to a political supremacy of Jesus over all political systems of this world, misunderstood as autocracy.

5. Anti-Roman Themes in the Johannine Passion Narrative

At the beginning of his fifth chapter (153), Richey constructs a contrast between a preoccupation with the Johannine Passion Narrative that focuses on its "anti-Jewish polemic" and (154) a consequent eclipsing of "attention" to "the prominent role played by the Roman authorities in John's Passion Narrative." What if, however, John's polemic does not refer to the Jews or Israel in general at all, but to what he sees as a corrupt Judean leadership that submits to the Roman emperor as its only king instead of acknowledging the Messiah of the God of Israel? Then the two themes must be seen in close connection with each other.

It had already been stated in the first chapter (153) that "the rediscovery of the Jewish background of the Johannine community by scholars such as Raymond E. Brown and J. Louis Martyn" unfortunately completely ignores the main thrust of the Johannine community against the Roman world order. This is what their sharp criticism of Rabbinic Judaism is embedded in which alone makes it understandable. The fact that Rabbinical Jews, on the other hand, could have good reasons to exclude mes-

sianic troublemakers from their ranks, insofar as they endangered their precarious status of tolerated non-participation in the Imperial Cult, does not come into view for Richey.

Thus, Brown and Martyn can only interpret the "anti-Jewish polemic" of the Johannine group as an understandable reaction to their prior exclusion from the synagogue. But if John had indeed written his Gospel in this polemical way simply from a victimhood perspective to cope with the traumatic experiences of his community, it would be little else than a document of petty vindictiveness. Opposed to such an interpretation of the Gospel, the counterposition advocated by Adele Reinhartz[103] may seem plausible that the Johannine polemic from the outset seeks to dispossess Judaism of its ancestral goods of salvation and to regard it as "Cast Out of the Covenant" by various rhetorical means, such as "Desire and Fulfillment" and "Expropriation" or "Vituperation."

In any case (154, note 3), a quotation from Brown [69] cited by Richey shows that where the claims to the validity of two religions are opposed to each other, it is difficult to escape the trap of mutual reproaches, even with good efforts at interreligious understanding:

> We can only be grateful that in the mid-twentieth century, partly out of revulsion for the holocaust, the situation has changed; and a sincere effort at understanding is being made on both sides. However, I have an uneasy feeling that the basic Johannine difficulty still faces us. To Jews disturbed by Christian attempts to convert them, the Christian question comes back, which may be phrased in the words of John 9:22: Why have they agreed that anyone who acknowledges Jesus as Messiah can no longer be part of the synagogue? Christians have ceded to that decision by converting Jews *away from* the synagogue. Both parties, today as then, need to wrestle with the question of believing in Jesus and remaining a practicing Jew—a decision that ultimately reflects upon the compatibility of Christianity and Judaism.

The question is, however, as already mentioned, whether already in the Gospel of John two religions are facing each other or rather two Jewish groups struggling about how to deal with the overpowering Roman world order: Do they agree, like Rabbinic Judaism, to be exempted from the emperor's cult as a tolerated religion, to obey the Torah and to wait patiently for the dawn of the coming world age? Or do they proclaim Jesus as the liberator of the world from the Roman world order that weighs on it, like the Messianic Jews of the Johannine type, and thus run the risk of being considered troublemakers and excluded from the synagogal community?

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103 Adele Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant: Jews and Anti-Judaism in the Gospel of John* (Lanham: Lexington Books-Fortress Academic, 2018). Cf. my review of her book: Jesus the Messiah: Liberation for All Israel.

Back to Richey, who focuses in the sixth chapter of his book (155) on the fact that John in his Passion Narrative

> places an importance on the Roman characters that they enjoy nowhere else in the gospels. For instance, in John 18:3 Judas brings with him not a crowd (*ochlos*: Matt 26:47 || Mark 14:43 || Luke 22:47) but a "band of soldiers" (*speira*), which John Dominic Crossan[104] correctly points out "is the technical terminology for a cohort, for a unit of six hundred troops. It is, in other words, the complete body of Roman troops permanently garrisoned in Jerusalem." Likewise, while the Synoptic Gospels all recount Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin prior to being handed over to Pilate (Matt 26:57-68 II Mark 14:53-65 II Luke 22:54-71), John (18:13-24) limits this episode to a simple interrogation by the high priest Annas: "He has the twin trials from Mark but has changed them so that the Jewish one is much less emphasized and, correspondingly, the Roman one is much more important." And only in John (19:31-37) does the Roman soldier pierce Jesus' side "that scripture might be fulfilled."

Thus (156), since "the account of Jesus' trial and death the Fourth Gospel places a special importance on Pilate and the Roman authorities," Richey wants to examine a number of its passages "that suggest not only or even primarily an anti-Jewish polemic, but also an anti-Roman one." In doing so, he focuses (156-157)

> on three key passages that show John's fundamental oppositions between Christ and Caesar, and between the Johannine Christians and their Roman persecutors: (1) Jesus' claim to Pilate, "My kingship is not of this world" (18:36); (2) the threat made to Pilate by the crowd,[105] "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend" (19:12); and (3) the response of the chief priests to Pilate, "We have no king but Caesar" (19:15). These verses challenge the Augustan Ideology by posing a choice between God and Caesar. Taken together, these passages serve as a climax to the polemic against the Augustan Ideology, which develops in Fourth Gospel from the Prologue onwards.

5.1 "My kingship is not of this world" (18:36)

According to Richey (157), the context of John 18:36 "is manifestly political," for "Jesus has been brought by the chief priests before Pilate, the Roman Prefect of Judea, on the charge of making himself a king (*basileus*)." When asked by Pilate what he

104 Richey cites John Dominic Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus*, San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995, 80-81 and 114.

105 The use of the word "crowd," by which the Greek word *ochlos* would be translated, is out of place at this point, however, since this word does not occur in John's entire Passion Narrative. Instead, apart from the Judean leadership in the persons of the chief priests and their henchmen, no one is mentioned as being present, not even the Pharisees mentioned last at Jesus' capture.

has done, "Jesus answered, 'My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from this world'."

5.1.1 Are the Power Spheres of Jesus and the Emperor Dualistically Side by Side?

A common interpretation of this answer of Jesus, combined with the following verse in which Jesus calls it his task to testify to the truth in the world, amounts, in Richey's view (158), to

> a "dualist" understanding of Jesus' and Caesar's kingships, each one with his own proper sphere of authority (in heaven and on earth, respectively). Neither overlaps with the other nor—theoretically, at least—should it come into conflict with the other.
>
> This interpretation of Jesus' kingship fits nicely with the emphasis accepted by many scholars on what has been called the "cosmic dualism" unique to the Fourth Gospel, characterized by the contrasts between "light and darkness (1:5), above and below (8:23), spirit and flesh (3:6), life and death (3:36), truth and falsehood (8:44-45), heaven and earth (3:31), God and Satan (13:27)."[106] These two realms, supposedly locked in conflict with one another, are divided by what Luke calls "a great chasm" (Luke 16:26) that only the incarnate Logos can span. In this interpretation, the chasm is not filled but only bridged so that those who believe in Christ can cross over it. Accordingly, Jesus becomes incarnate not to assume power in "the world" but to allow his followers to escape from it, leaving the power structure proper to it untouched.

Such a "dualistic reading of John's Gospel" would also be called "apologetic" (159), Richey says, "since it would allow Johannine Christians to present themselves not as rivals to or enemies of Roman power but rather as citizens of both worlds." This, however, according to David Hill,[107] would avoid "any theological basis for conflict with the secular authorities":

> The trial before Pilate also contains a two-fold apologetic interest. The charges against Jesus were not genuinely political: they were calumnies used to manipulate Pilate. John wants his reader to know (a) that Jesus was put to death not because he was a political revolutionary, but because, being sent by the Father, he witnessed to the truth that "the world" cannot bear; and (b) that the Roman empire consequently has no good ground for persecuting Christians.

106 Thus Richey cites Francis J. Moloney, „Johannine Theology", in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown et al., Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990, 1421.

107 Richey cites David Hill, „‚My Kingdom is not of this World' (John 18:36): Conflict and Christian Existence in the world according to the Fourth Gospel", *IBS* 9 (1987), 57.

Whether and to what extent such "dualistic understandings of Jesus' kingship can be found elsewhere in the NT, especially in Paul and Luke," can be left open. In this context (note 16), Richey cites Barnabas Lindars,[108] who notes a tendency

> [e]ven before Mark's narrative was written … of shifting the blame for the crucifixion away from Pilate and on to the Jews. John's highly dramatic handling of the trial before Pilate shows a definite advance in this direction in comparison with Mark. The reason for this is not anti-Semitism, but the practical need for Christians to be on good terms with the Romans, in order to be allowed to practise their religion unhindered. It must be shown that Jesus was not really held to be guilty of sedition by Pilate, even though he condemned him to death.

However (159), Richey does not follow this line of reasoning; in his view, "attribution of these attitudes to John is untenable." He presupposes (160) with Hill [54] for the New Testament "doctrinal pluralism" that applies not only to "such fundamental issues as Christology" but "*a fortiori*, for the question of the Christian's attitude to the state and political involvement in general."

Some recent exegetical attempts, according to Richey, try to translate the "cosmic" dualism of John's Gospel "into more explicitly moral or political terms."

> As a result, they read John as a first-century political theorist of non-violence, and the Fourth Gospel as a manifesto for passive resistance in the face of the powers of the world. For example, Richard J. Cassidy[109] offers a liberationist account of 18:36-37 that distinguishes the rule of force by Rome and the peaceable kingdom of Jesus: "Jesus, then, does not seek to supplant Roman rule in Judea through force of arms. ... Jesus' kingdom is a kingdom that has to do with truth and his kingly role has to do with bearing witness to the truth." Rensberger[110] adopts a similar reading: "Jesus' kingship will necessarily come into conflict with the kingdoms of this world, but precisely because it is 'not of this world,' the conflict is not carried out on the world's terms. Jesus' followers do not fight, and his enthronement is on the cross. The sovereignty that Jesus asserts against Caesar is that of Israel's God, but precisely as God's sovereignty and not the world's it is not won by violence."

Although, as Richey notes (160-161), Sjef van Tilborg [169]

> shows little interest in liberationist readings of John, likewise interprets 18:36 in this manner: "Jesus defends a point of view which is pacifist in the extreme.

108 Richey cites Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, NCB, London: Oliphants, 1972, 536.

109 Richey cites Richard J. Cassidy, *John's Gospel in New Perspective: Christology and the Realities of Roman Power*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987, 49.

110 Richey cites David Rensberger, *Johannine Faith and Liberating Community,* Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988, 116.

> The absence of any means of power, the absence of fighting servants as demonstrated by the story of his capture, his open surrender, the protection of his followers, the rejection of Peter's sword, they are all proof of the origin of his kingdom and of its content: resist the powers of the cosmos in powerlessness."

Nevertheless, according to Richey (161), "this pacifist reading of John is implausible given the community's history. Thus it seems more a projection of contemporary ethical and political concerns onto the text than a persuasive account of the evangelist's vision." In his view (note 23), Cassidy [48] also concedes this, pointing out

> that Jesus' order during his arrest that his disciples not resist "emphasized that he himself was consciously choosing to drink from the cup which the Father had given him (18:11)." No ethic of non-violence is expressed or implied here. At the same time, of course, John does not promote violent resistence to Rome. Rather, the violent/non-violent issue is not raised by him at all.

5.1.2 Is Jesus, Ruling Heaven and Earth, the Superior Overlord of the Roman Emperor?

In Richey{s eyes (161), "both the more traditional 'dualist' interpretation of Jesus' kingdom and the liberationist concerns of Rensberger and Cassidy" is based on the false assumption

> that the sovereignty possessed by Caesar differs from the sovereignty claimed by Jesus altogether, each existing in different ontological (heavenly versus earthly) or moral (violent versus nonviolent) spheres and ultimately disconnected from one another. While attractive on a theological level, these attempts to collapse the political challenges to the Johannine community into a broader set of binary oppositions at work in the Fourth Gospel are misplaced. Indeed, the category "dualism" is far too broad to capture all these oppositions. Some of them are to be conceived in "either-or" terms: truth *or* falsehood, life *or* death, God *or* Satan. These polar opposites do require choice and allegiance of believers.

But just "John's use of the terms *kosmos* and *ouranos* cannot be divided so readily," to which he refers to John Ashton[111] (161-162):

> "We must conclude that without further specification the contrast between heaven and earth or above and below is not, properly speaking, dualistic at all. The gap between heaven and earth is constantly being bridged, sometimes by theophanies, sometimes by angelic or human messengers, prophets, conceived as sent directly from the heavenly court." Rather than an "either-or" proposition, heaven and earth formed a "both-and" category for the Johan-

111 Richey cites John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1991, 207.

> nine Christians, since both had their origin in the creative activity of the Logos. Accordingly, the "either-or" decision demanded is not heaven and earth or violence and non-violence, but between Christ and Caesar.

Furthermore, according to Richey (162), "any 'dualistic' interpretation of 18:36, ontological, liberationist, or otherwise, does not address the fact that Jesus nowhere in the Gospel denies being a king." This kingship, however, says Ignace de La Potterie,[112] "does not depend on the powers of this world and is not inspired by them. It is sovereignty in this world, but it is established in a different way from earthly power and draws its inspiration from another source." To clarify this, Richey points to "Jesus' response to Pilate in 19:11: 'You would have no power over me unless it was given you from above.'" The very different interpretations of this phrase (163) are summarized by Richey with Hill [54-55] as follows:

> "[Rudolf] Bultmann and Heinrich Schlier find here the truth that all civil power ultimately derives from God and have built thereon a finished theory of the rights and duties of citizens and state. Others like H. von Campenhausen and Ernst Haenchen believe that the text tells us little about the nature of the political order." It is doubtful that the evangelist had a fully developed theory of what moderns call church-state relations, or that a satisfactory theory could be built on the basis of the Fourth Gospel alone, or even the entire NT. John was certainly not a theocrat in either the medieval or the modern sense. However, seen in light of the Roman context of the Gospel and the physical and theological threats the Augustan Ideology posed to the Johannine community, the political importance of these verses is quite evident.

Again, in this context, Richey repeats both "Jesus' response to Pilate in 18:36" and his assessment (163-164) that these words

> are not to be taken as implying an ontological or moral dualism between the reigns of Caesar and Jesus. Rather, in light of the Logos-theology of the Prologue and the reactions against the Augustan Ideology found in the language of the Gospel, Jesus should be understood as making a very different claim: the authority or power claimed by Caesar and his representatives is imperfect and derivative, a pale shadow of the true and supreme power of the Father and the Son. The power claimed by Pilate does not belong to a different type from God's: if it were, it could not have been given him from above (19:11). Instead, it is a derived power, limited to the earthly sphere just as surely as Pilate's power from Caesar is limited to Judea, and a power ultimately in service to God [Tilborg 172]: "Pilate's power over Jesus comes 'from above.' Jesus is not subject to Pilate. The reverse is true. If he allows Jesus to be crucified he

112 Richey cites Ignace de la Potterie, *The Hour of Jesus: The Passion and Resurrection of Jesus According to John,* trans. Dom Gregory Murray, New York: Alba House, 1989, 68.

> does what is in God's plan. Through Jesus, Pilate is subject to this 'power from above.'"

Richey thus seems to assume that "the power claimed by Pilate" is ultimately of the same kind as the power of God, only that the former is "imperfect" and derived from the latter.

But how does this square with the fact (164) that nevertheless, according to Richey, "Jesus confronts his hearers with a decision, and in doing so he passes judgment upon the world"? Although it "contains a residuum of the dualistic interpretation ('world of sin') of Jesus' kingdom that is criticized above," Richey thinks he can draw on Bultmann's [657] "very astute analysis of the dynamic at work in Jesus' response to Pilate in 18:36" to understand this decision:

> "If [Jesus'] *basileia* does not enter into rivalry with political organisations of this world, his claim nevertheless does not allow the world to rest in peace, for it concerns every man, and so stirs up the sphere within which the state establishes its order. For the *basileia* is not an isolated sphere of pure inwardness over against the world, it is not a private area for the cultivation of religious needs, which could not come into conflict with the world. The word of Jesus unmasks the world as a world of sin, and challenges it. In order to defend itself against the word it flees to the state, and demands the latter put itself at its disposal. But then the state is torn out of its neutrality precisely in so far as its firm hold on neutrality signifies a decision against the world."

Richey ignores in the context of this quotation that this "decision against the world," according to Bultmann, is not at all about a decision between Jesus and the Roman emperor. The state is neutral in Bultmann's eyes; the "world of sin," on the other hand, is to be equated in his eyes with the "Jews, whose father is the devil, and who are therefore bent on murder and lies (8:44)."

Thus, while it is true, as Bultmann says, that indeed "the *basileia* is not an isolated sphere of pure inwardness over against the world, it is not a private area for the cultivation of religious needs, which could not come into conflict with the world the basileia is not a sphere of pure inwardness isolated against the world, not a private district of the cultivation of religious needs that could not come into conflict with the world," this statement comes close to what Richey means only if the keyword "world" designates precisely the Roman *kosmos* as the representative of which Pilate is opposed to Jesus.

It is strange, however, that Richey does not seem to regard the governor Pilate as a representative of the Roman empire at all, but as an individual addressed by Jesus, who has to decide between Jesus and the emperor:

> Jesus' claim that his kingship is not of this world, far from absolving his believers from making a decision between Christ and Caesar, instead universalizes the decision to include all humans, Jew, Roman, and Christian. Confronted by

> Jesus, there is no middle ground for Pilate to take. For, as Hill states of Jesus, "when he is king, enthroned on a Cross, he will draw all people to himself (12:32; 3:14f.; 8:28). As truth incarnate, no one can remain indifferent to him: depending on whether or not they give ear to his voice, people will decide one way or another. Jesus' kingdom, though not *of* this 'world' is nevertheless *in it*, for here is where the choice must and will be made."

Treating Pilate as an individual person who has to choose between Jesus and the emperor in response to the accusation of Jesus by the Jewish leadership results, in my view, in exactly what Richey explicitly wanted to avoid, namely a depoliticization of Jesus' kingship. In what way, after all, could Pilate acknowledge Jesus' political claim? Simply by not condemning him? But precisely by carrying out the condemnation, as we have heard from Tilborg [172], "he does what is in God's plan." Ultimately, Richey does not clarify how the decision between Jesus and Caesar should go beyond a purely religious level.

In this regard (165), he recalls

> that the Johannine community, while strongly sectarian in its outlook, lived within an urban setting in Asia Minor and likely continued to evangelize and seek out new members. It was no Qumran community living in the desert to await the final judgment, and thus avoiding most of the compromises with secular authorities demanded by daily interaction. Nor does John gloss over these conflicts by focusing on the concept of the "Kingdom of God," which could be interpreted eschatologically (either in the present or the future), or spiritually in order to avoid confrontation with Rome. Rather, Hill [55] argues, "the theme of the 'Kingdom of God,' so prominent in the Synoptics, has, in John, given way to the theme of 'Christ's Kingship.' Indeed, Christ's kingship—culminating in his exaltation and enthronement on the Cross—is a thread that binds together the entire Passion story."

Not only from the community of Qumran, but also from the Synoptic gospels Richey distinguishes the "Johannine Christians," because unlike in Matthew 22:21, Mark 12:17, and Luke 20:25 "John nowhere has Jesus tell his followers to 'render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's.'"[113] In

113 Like Paul's position (cf. my note 90), however, also the position of the Synoptics must not be regarded as all that Rome-friendly as Richey assumes. Andreas Bedenbender, *Frohe Botschaft am Abgrund. Das Markusevangelium und der Jüdische Krieg*, Leipzig 2013, 97-98, for example, interprets the half-sentence "So give to Caesar what is Caesar's" in an extraordinarily Rome-critical manner:
The first half of the sentence is mostly understood to mean that Jesus encourages paying taxes. But this interpretation is questionable. For what exactly belongs to the emperor? Is it sufficient for the emperor to demand something, so that it then belongs to him right away? The answer of Jesus, so clear at first sight, has something floating; and if we compare the

this, he sees an attempt at "an easy 'separation of powers' that would allow Johannine Christians to make their peace with Caesar while still following Christ" (165-166):

> The decision confronting Jesus' listeners and John's readers cannot be avoided by a theological sleight-of-hand. The choice between Christ and Caesar remains the fundamental one for John, and it is not surprising that the Jewish leaders, as represented in their attack upon Jesus, forced Pilate to make it as well.
>
> At the same time, Jesus challenges Rome not as a rival to Caesar on the earth, nor as a ruler in heaven instead of on earth, but instead as his superior, ruling both heaven and earth. That is the one claim never made for the emperor by the Augustan Ideology. The Imperial Cult guaranteed him a place in the heavens after his death but no supreme authority there.

The problem with Richey's statements is not that he wants to locate the rivalry between Jesus and the Roman emperor on a political level, but that he does not answer the question of what Jesus has to oppose to the emperor on this level. The claim to be the emperor's superior, endowed with divine power and ruling over heaven and earth, is in the end no more than a religious statement that does not change anything about the Roman empire's earthly exercise of power; moreover, it gives the impression that the only difference between the two types of power is the immeasurable greatness by which Jesus' power as the power of God exceeds the emperor's human power. In which way both are different substantively, Richey still fails to answer here.

5.1.3 Is Jesus Refusing to Be a Messiah with Earthly Goals and Thus Not to Be Made King by Force?

Ultimately (166), Richey attributes the inclination toward a dualistic interpretation of John 18:36 to the tendency of denying Jesus the intention of an "earthly messian-

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wording of question and answer, then even a completely different understanding is possible.

Three times we hear in the question about "giving" (*didōmi*) the tax, but Jesus speaks in his answer about "giving back" (*apodidōmi*) the imperial coins. This can be understood in this way: Give the emperor back his money—get rid of the coins with the emperor's image and blasphemous inscription, withdraw from the Roman market and Roman taxes. Such a thing sounds like escapism and romanticism, but it fits the economic radicalism of Mark, who also has his Jesus once give the advice: "Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor" (10:21) and who forbids his disciples to take money with them when they are sent out (cf. 6:8). When in 12:15 Jesus asks the questioners to bring him a *denarion,* the impression is given that he himself does not have such a coin in his pocket. All this adds up to a coherent picture, a picture that could hardly please the Roman state. It is therefore well to understand that Mark's Gospel wants to be read here between the lines.

ism" [de la Potterie 67], which the Jewish leadership charged him with before Pilate. Yet this is precisely what he does himself (note 34), discovering "parallels" here, like de la Potterie, "to the temptation of Jesus by Satan in Luke 4:5-6, where the offer of earthly power is explicitly declined." Indeed, Richey seems to regard any form of messianism aiming at the change of social conditions on this earth as a threat insofar as it might prevent people from seeking the unlimited heavenly goods of salvation (166):

> However, as the discussion of the title *ho sōtēr tou kosmou* in Chapter Three makes clear, the real threat of earthly messianism came not from Jesus but from the emperor, who offered peace and prosperity to the entire Roman world in exchange for obedience and worship. Precisely because Jesus does not offer such a limited and earthly reward to his followers, he cannot be guilty of sedition. Pilate implicitly acknowledges as much in 19:6 when he says mockingly to the Jews, "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no crime in him."

But if every "earthly messianism" is a danger compared to a belief in Jesus as the ruler over heaven and earth, how does Richey's view differ from a dualism according to which Jesus does not care about earthly-political concerns of people but is only interested in their eternal life in heaven? The fact that the statements of Augustan ideology about "peace and prosperity" established by the emperor were countered by the reality of numerous oppressed and exploited subjects is not addressed by Richey in a single word, although precisely at this point he could have distinguished Jesus' kingship from the kingship of the emperor in terms of content.

A similar opportunity to take a closer look at the specific nature of Jesus' kingship could have been seized by Richey (162) in his sideways glance at John 6:15. Why does Jesus not want to be made king there, if he really is a king?

> It is true that in 6:15, Jesus, "perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him a king (*hina poiēsōsin basileia*)," withdraws from the crowd of five thousand that he has fed, but this seems to represent a different matter. The issue in this case involves Jesus being made a king *then* and *by the people*, an ill-fitting notion in light of the divine qualities ascribed to him in the Prologue.

Quoting Wayne Meeks,[114] Richey points out a close connection between John 6:15 and 18:36:

> The phrase *ouk … ek tou kosmou toutou* must be understood first of all as a genitive of origin. Jesus' kingship does not derive from the world, but from God. ... The origin of Jesus' kingship corresponds to his own origin. Since it

114 Richey cites Wayne A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology*, NovTSup 14, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967, 63-64.

> does not originate in the world, it is not established by worldly power (18:36b), but only by the power of God. From those who seek to make Jesus king by force (*harpazein*) he flees (6:15).

According to Richey, then, Jesus does not reject all kingship, but only one "bestowed by human beings or secular authorities." He leaves out of account, as already in many other contexts, that the God who alone entrusts Jesus with his kingship is the God of Israel.

Following Ton Veerkamp,[115] from John 6:15 not every messianism directed to earthly goals has to be rejected, rather

> John here gets even with a kind of messianism that is guided by the political goal of a monarchy independent of Rome. There has been an independent monarchy under the kings from the house of Judah Maccabee. It could become nothing else but a kingdom like all the others. As long as nothing really changed in the condition of the world order as such, you could expect nothing else but royal business as usual. The catastrophic century 63 BCE (capture of Jerusalem by the Romans under Pompeius) to 70 CE (destruction of the city by the Romans under Titus) had to be the necessary consequence of a policy which the people of John 6:14 expect from the Messiah: a king and all will be well. Nothing became well, even with a king Jesus nothing would have become well.

But what kind of messianism does Jesus actually stand for, when John repeatedly and radically rejects militant Zealot efforts to place Jesus on the Jerusalem royal throne in his Gospel?

5.1.4 Instead of "from This World Order" Jesus' Kingship is Determined by the Torah

In contrast to Richey, Ton Veerkamp[116] takes seriously that the God who sent Jesus into the world as the Messianic King of Israel is none other than the God of Israel and whose NAME is indissolubly linked to the goal of Israel's liberation. In the background of John 18:36, he therefore sees

> the royal history of recent times among his people and . . . the discussion about kingship that had been going on in Israel since the return from Babylon and especially in the Maccabean period. Pilate is unaware of this discussion. He, therefore, has no idea what to make of Jesus' answer.

Since in Veerkamp's eyes "Pilate and not a few of us do not know the Scriptures," he points out "some important passages of the Tanakh":[117]

115 Veerkamp 155 (The Sign of the Nourishment of Israel. A Misunderstanding, par. 15).
116 Veerkamp 354-56 ("What is fidelity, anyhow?", par.14, 16-24, 28).

In the Torah, the king of Israel occurs only in one place, Deuteronomy 17:14-20. A king not necessarily has to be, all the more so a king "as among all peoples" (*ke-khol ha-goyim*). But if the people of Israel absolutely want a king, then they are to take a "king from the midst of the brothers" by all means.

The further restriction of a possible kingship is first: not too many horses = armor, cavalry; second: not too many wives = alliances with foreign powers (see 1 Kings 11:1 ff.); third: not too much silver and gold = exploitation of the subjects.

According to the Torah, a king's duty is to obtain a copy of the Torah—the constitution of liberty and justice—and, sitting on the throne, to "read in it all the days of his life." There has never been such a king.

This brings us back to Psalm 72,

> God, give your right to the king, your truth to the king's son,
> that he may judge your people by truth, your oppressed by justice.
> The mountains carry peace to the people, the hills justice.
> He establishes justice for the oppressed of the people,
> he frees the needy,
> he crushes the exploiter.

According to this text, the core task of every king, that is, of every state, every government, is truth and justice. And that is justice for the humiliated and needy (*ʿanaw, evyon*). The measure by which one measures the king, the state, the government, is what is called in the Scriptures *tzedaqa*, "truth, probation, reliability." Truth in the Scriptures has justice as its true content. The *tzaddik* is a truthful one and so a just one. Justice is proven only by what happens to the humiliated and poor of a people.

This is *kingship*, and Jesus means this kingship. He, the Messiah, is the Son of the King for whom the psalmist prays here. Jesus as the Messianic King is different all along the line and in its essence from kingship according to this world order, *basileia tou kosmou toutou*. Jesus' kingship is a radical alternative, but it is not something otherworldly, purely spiritual or inward. It is a radically this-worldly, earthly kingship.

According to Veerkamp,

> Jesus does not want an unheard-of new thing; he wants a kingship according to the Torah. Since, as I said, there has never been such a kingship, Jesus wants unheard-of novelty. It is precisely the traditional that is the novelty!

117 The term "Tanakh" means the Jewish Bible in its connection of T = Torah, N = Neviim (Prophets), and K = Khetuvim (Writings).

The emperor of Rome, on the other hand, whom the Jewish leadership will recognize as their only king in John 19:15, is a "king of this world order." Thus John takes up the Hebrew phrase *melekh ke-khol ha-gojim*, "king as among all nations," from 1 Samuel 8:4 ff. According to 1 Samuel 8:11-14, 17, "the king's legal order (*mishpat ha-melekh*)" is exactly how John and his group must have experienced the reality of life under the overall rule of the Roman Empire:

> This is the legal order of the king who will be king over you:
> He will take your sons and make them his charioteers and soldiers,
> that they may go before him and his chariots.
> He will make them captains over a thousand and captains over fifty.
> He will make them plow his land and reap his crops.
> He will have them make implements of war and chariots.
> He will take your daughters as beauticians, cooks, bakers.
> Your fields he will take, your vineyards, oil groves, the good ones;
> he will give them to his ministers . . .
> . . . and you will be his slaves.

It is this enslavement under the Roman world order that, in the eyes of John the Evangelist, represents a second, now worldwide ruling Egyptian slave house. As a king according to the Torah of God, as the embodiment of his liberating NAME, Jesus faces the Roman emperor as a worldwide slave master. The God of Israel cannot overcome this enslavement by leading his people out of one country and into another. Nor can a Messianist rooted in the Jewish Bible be expected to believe that God could have commissioned Jesus to lead the people who trust in Jesus out of the world that is hostile to him and into heaven, which would at the same time mean the disinheritance of Judaism by Christianity. Jesus overcomes the worldwide house of slavery by exposing it in its homicidal nature through his death on the Roman cross (cf. John 8:44) and by setting an example to lead a life of voluntary self-enslavement for others (cf. John 13:14-17).

5.2 "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend" (19:12)

Richey attributes Pilate's intention (166-167) to release Jesus "whom he has judged to be innocent" to the fact that "Pilate does not recognize Christ's kingship in the preceding verses" and therefore "does not condemn him on that charge." Against this, the Jewish leadership revolts (166):

> "'If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend; everyone who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar'" (19:12). A touch of irony underlies this protest, since it puts on the lips of "the Jews" the true nature of Christ's kingship revealed in 18:36: he has "made himself a king" insofar as his kingship could not have come from this world, and this kingship does indeed set him against the emperor and the claims of the Augustan Ideology.

The accusation (167) against Pilate of being "not Caesar's friend" is, as Schnackenburg [3. 262] calls it, "a scarcely veiled threat":

> Any first-century reader of the Gospel would have recognized the seriousness of this accusation, and its ability to force Pilate's hand. Thus, a closer examination of its meaning can help to illuminate the anti-Roman polemic running through the Passion Narrative.

5.2.1 The Roman Background of the Expression "Friend of Caesar"

Quite rightly, Richey (167) emphasizes that

> [d]espite the Jewish background of the Johannine community and its Gospel, the expression 'friend of Caesar' clearly connotes a Roman context rather than an Old Testament background. The formula "friend of 'x'" (*philos tou 'x'*) used as a title has little currency in the LXX.

Only in Daniel 3:27, the expression "the king's friends" could possibly be a title for his counselors. But "the precise Johannine expression *philos tou Kaisaros* has no parallel in Scripture."

Clearly defined and significant, however, is the term "within Roman society," as Richey details, following Dominique Cuss [44-49]. Already the "title *hoi basileōs philoi* {the king's friends} was strongly rooted in the political culture of Asia Minor prior to the Roman conquest," in the form *amicus Augusti* this title of friend was transferred to the Roman emperor (168):

> The title was probably honorific rather than official, although the difference here is less sharp than is commonly supposed. Cuss [46-47] writes: "Suetonius makes reference to the 'friends' of the emperors, and together with those references of Tacitus and Dio each emperor had his following of friends. This practice was adapted to suit the special needs of the empire, and various changes crept in to the position of 'friends,' which were not part of the Hellenistic practice, such as the receiving of official or semi-official functions."

On the importance this "honorific title" gained "throughout the first century," Cuss [49] summarizes that "the friends of the emperors enjoyed a particular intimacy with them, and that the title of 'friend' was conferred on a man for reasons of imperial gratitude, such as the reward for loyalty."

In Judea, this title, from the beginning of an emperor's sole rule over the Roman Empire after the Battle of Actium, served "to secure the position of the Herodian dynasty." Mary Smallwood [70-71] writes about Herod the Great (73-4 B.C.), whose kingship was confirmed in 30 B.C. by Octavian, later Emperor Augustus:

> "With the return of peace and stability to the empire after Actium, Herod was at last externally secure: the threat from Cleopatra had been removed, the problem of a choice of loyalty between rival Roman warlords had been re-

> solved, and his position had been confirmed by the undisputed master of the Roman world. The two things now required of him by Rome were efficiency in his internal administration and loyalty to Octavian, who trusted him politically and liked him personally. The next two decades were years of material prosperity and imperial favour for the king who styled himself 'Friend of Rome' and 'Friend of Caesar.'"

Herod's successors also remained openly allied with the emperor; thus (169) Gaius Caligula honored his grandson, Agrippa, according to Smallwood [192], "with a formal treaty of alliance" and who "until his death in 44 ... ruled a kingdom larger than his grandfather's as 'Great King, Friend of Caesar and Friend of Rome.'" Since, according to Helen K. Bond,[118] "coins of Herod Agrippa I frequently read 'Philokaisar,'" according to Richey, it can be assumed without doubt "that the title would have been common in the imperial provinces during the first century."

While there is "no firm evidence outside the Fourth Gospel" that "Pilate himself may have been called 'friend of Caesar,'" according to Bond [190] this may well have been the case. At any rate (169-170), "a Roman governor could scarcely tolerate being called 'no friend of Caesar,' since it struck at the very heart of his loyalty to and trust by the emperor."

5.2.2 The Choice between Christ and Caesar as Pilate's Theological Conflict of Loyalty

What Richey is ultimately getting at in his interpretation of John 19:12 is made clear by his following formulation (170):

> With their response in 19:12, the Jews demand that Pilate make a decision between his loyalty to Caesar and his stated belief in 19:6 that Jesus is innocent. The essential conflict between these competing loyalties, which a dualist interpretation of Christ's kingship would try to deny, cannot be glossed over here.

Correct in this argument is, as has already been explained in the last section, that Jesus' kingship cannot simply be assessed as non-political and otherworldly. But that Richey interprets the demand of the Jewish leadership as if Pilate had to choose between two loyalties, namely between Caesar and Jesus, misses the political realities of which John as a Jewish Messianist was certainly aware. The question of whether Jesus is possibly a king endowed by God with greater power and authority than the emperor does not arise at all for Pilate; in his eyes, Jesus can at most be a crazy religious do-gooder whom he initially regards as not to be taken seriously. The fact that he considers him innocent, after all, says nothing more than that he does not count

118 Richey cites Helen K. Bond, *Pontius Pilate in History and Interpretation*, SNTSMS 100, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 190.

him among the Zealot terrorists as the representative of whom Barabbas is contrasted with Jesus, and it did not stop Pilate from subjecting him to the inhuman punishment of scourging. “The punishment is almost a death sentence,” writes Ton Veerkamp[119] on the subject. “Many did not survive the ordeal.”

Richey thinks (170) that Cuss [44] proves his own position with the following words, but in fact, she rather underlines that Pilate did not have to be challenged in any way to a decision for Jesus and thus against the emperor, but that nevertheless Jesus might be more dangerous for his political position than he had thought:

> Already Christ had shown that he had no intention of introducing some kind of revolutionary kingship which would set him up as the direct rival to Caesar: “Mine is not a kingdom of this world,” but Pilate realized well enough that there was an element of truth in what they were saying, all the same; to shut his eyes to the fact that Jesus did have a following and had made certain definite, though somewhat vague, references to his kingdom, would show a lack of interest in the concerns of Caesar.

Richey’s erroneous assessment that Pilate must choose between two loyalties, instead of realistically assuming that John clearly marks him as the representative of the Roman world order, hostile to the God of Israel, leads him to find regretful words for Pilate, who in his eyes has so far tried to maintain a position of neutrality:

> Until now, Pilate has tried to remain uncommitted, to avoid the decision which until now was placed only before the Jews and Jesus’ other listeners. It is hardly an enviable situation. In Tilborg’s [172] words: “Pilate faces a dilemma because of what the *Iudaioi* say to him: if he condemns Jesus he acts unjustly; if he sets him free he is guilty of lese-majesty. He must choose between Jesus and the emperor. He opts for the emperor and thus for injustice.”

At least Richey is aware of the problem that Pilate, from such a perspective, can be seen as “an almost sympathetic figure, standing not for Rome but for all of humanity in the dilemma posed by this situation,” and (note 54), according to Rensberger [92], by almost all exegetes

> “is seen in John as a more or less sympathetic figure, a man who wants to be fair, who would gladly acquit Jesus, but who through lack of resolve and susceptibility to political pressure all too easily becomes the tool of ‘the Jews’ and their malevolence.” He cites in support of this claim the commentaries of Barrett, Brown, Dodd, Haenchen, and Schnackenburg.

Thus (170-171) Brown [John, 2. 864] regards

> “the Johannine Pilate not as a personification of the State but as another representative of a reaction to Jesus that is neither faith nor rejection. Pilate is

119 Veerkamp 360 (“There, the Human,” par. 6).

> typical, not of the State that would remain neutral, but of the many honest, well-disposed men who would try to adopt a middle position in a struggle that is total."

Since, according to Richey (171), "Pilate is a tragic figure in many ways" and portrayed by John in an "exceedingly human" way, "Brown's sympathetic interpretation of Pilate is neither foolish nor entirely false. But for the Gospel's audience he certainly is more than a conflicted and weak man."

As for Bultmann's argument, Richey seems to misunderstand him on the crucial point. In his eyes, "the impossibility of indecision faced by Pilate the man extends to the state as well," which [657] "is torn out of its neutrality precisely in so far as its firm hold on neutrality signifies a decision against the world." Richey overlooks the fact that, according to Bultmann, the state would not have to make a decision for or against Jesus at all, but would have to remain neutral in religious matters. Instead, Pilate allows himself to be torn from this neutrality by the "Jews who represent the world, whose father is the devil, and who are therefore bent on murder and lies (8:44)," contrary to his actual responsibility. This assessment obviously breathes the anti-Semitic *zeitgeist* in Germany during the writing of his commentary on John in 1941. Moreover, David Hill [60] is certainly right in reproaching Bultmann and Schlier,

> that "the introduction of the abstraction 'the State' seems anachronistic" and perhaps "a reinterpretation or re-application of John in light of a modern theological problem, rather than an exposition of the evangelist's own viewpoint."

When Richey objects that such a "negative judgment, however, ignores the all-pervasive character of the Augustan Ideology, and the emperor as a pole star for the social, cultural, religious and political life of the first-century empire," then he in turn completely disregards the fact that for this very reason, Pilate is not portrayed at all as an individual who could have made a choice between Jesus and the emperor, but quite clearly as a representative of the empire and its supreme ruler.

Nevertheless, Richey unswervingly pursues the idea that this choice would have been open to Pilate (172), referring to arguments of Lindars [569] and Evans:[120]

> By raising the issue of what it means to be Caesar's friend, the Jews effectively shift the debate "from the question of Jesus' guilt to the issue of Pilate's position." C. F. Evans captures the irony and the power of John 19:12 well: "The roles are now reversed. In place of the Roman governor offering the Jewish people the choice, 'Which will you have, Jesus or Barabbas?' the Jewish people offer the governor the choice, 'Which will you have, Christ or Caesar?'" For John the issue is predetermined: Pilate will fail the test, and Jesus will freely

120 Richey cites C. F. Evans, „The Passion of John". In C. F. Evans, *Explorations in Theology 2* (London: SCM, 1977), 61.

> accept death on the cross, all so that God's will may be accomplished. Accordingly, Jesus says, he is less culpable than the Jews (19:11).

According to Richey, however, Paul D. Duke[121]

> is mistaken to claim that this verse diminishes the importance of Pilate: "No matter what Pilate claims about a power to release, he is now destined to play a part in killing Jesus; and for all his blustering about his importance in this affair, the little governor will not even rate a larger share of guilt. His 'power to release' is now non-existent; his 'power to crucify' shrinks to the dubious role of minor accomplice." Rather, it emphasizes Pilate's central role: "Since the divine economy required that Jesus' 'lifting up' be realized on the Cross, Pilate's concrete role was therefore necessary."

In addition, according to Richey (172-173), "Pilate's 'concrete role' was situated within the context of Roman power, since only the Romans could order that specific manner of death." At this point, Richey now contradicts his previously pursued line of viewing Pilate as an individual with a choice between Jesus and the emperor (173):

> Far from separating the person of Pilate from the position of governor, John here forces and extends their identification: as Pilate decides, so does Caesar through him.

In his subsequent reasoning, however, he distances himself again from this insight and in the end again pretends that John regards the governor as an independent individual who could have decided against the emperor. The question "What does it mean to be Caesar's friend?" is, after Richey, often answered, "not completely mistaken",

> that, for Pilate at least, it means executing an innocent man in order to preserve the peace that Augustus had brought to the world, that is, to choose injustice over justice, to choose the peace of this world over the peace that comes from above. As Josef Blinzler[122] suggests, Pilate's "fear of the sinister and suspicious emperor was even greater than his awe of the mysterious personality of the Accused; his own safety appeared to him more important than a passing triumph over the accusers who were unsympathetic to him." This answer is common among those who find Pilate typical of all humanity in his fearful and partially involuntary rejection of Christ.

Things go too far for Richey, however, if such a response amounts to the usual exegesis of John, which dualistically distinguishes between Jesus' kingdom in heaven and the emperor's kingdom on earth and ultimately (174), as Rensberger [92] does, apologetically excuses Rome's representative and judges his behavior as "tragic":

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121 Richey cites Paul D. Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel*. Atlanta: John Knox, 1985, 134.

122 Richey cites Josef Blinzler, *Der Prozess Jesu* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1969) 338 (quoted and translated in Beasley-Murray, *John,* 341).

> Pilate is portrayed as Rome's representative, convinced of Jesus' political innocence and sincerely trying to let him go. At the very worst he is seen as representing a divinely legitimated state, which, through a misplaced effort at neutrality, forgoes its chance to stand for God and so inevitably loses control of events to the world, the forces of darkness."

In contrast, Richey sees neither dualism nor apologetics nor tragedy as appropriate categories for interpreting Pilate's role in John's Gospel:

> None of these approaches to the Fourth Gospel, though, adequately captures the political significance of Pilate's failure, nor does any of them appreciate the anti-Roman polemic found in its Passion Narrative. The rule of Caesar is not entirely separate from the kingship of Christ, but a part of it. Pilate is not an isolated individual representative of all people: he is the representative of Rome. His decision between Christ and Caesar is not a tragic dilemma but a false one.

While the "first two features of the portrait of Pilate have been discussed already," the third, as Richey says, "needs further clarification." And thus, although on the basis of the second characteristic Pilate is and remains "the representative of Rome," he nevertheless returns to his original assumption that an individual "choice … between Christ and Caesar" is open to Pilate, which presents itself as

> the choice between the man who has "made himself the Son of God (*hyios theou*)" (19:7) and the man who has claimed to be *divi filius* (son of a god). Christ's claim to be Son of God was necessarily interpreted by Pilate in political terms to mean "King of the Jews," an identification never made by the Jewish leaders themselves. However, for Pilate, the emperor's claim to be *Imperator* also entailed the claim to be the "son of a god." Given the confusion that follows from these two beliefs, it is hardly surprising that Pilate would have seen a conflict between the two and thus a need to choose one or the other.

The reason why Richey insists on this choice on Pilate's part (175) is that he wants to take Augustan Ideology more seriously in its theological claims than those who in a dualistic way consider "Jesus' kingship … as belonging to a different world." He thinks that John is not only willing

> to solve the community's *political* problem with Rome by saying that Jesus is not a rival to Caesar: it is also necessary to solve the *theological* problem posed by the emperor's claim to divinity. Because of the symbiotic relationship between the Imperial Cult and the Roman system of governance, this is precisely what Pilate could never do. To be Caesar's friend requires not only looking after his *political* interests, but also defending the *ideological* foundations of his *imperium.* It demands not only loyalty to the *person* of the emperor, but also to his *image* as well, which in the Augustan Ideology was a manifestly and exclusively divine one.

Pilate, therefore, as a "friend of Caesar," according to Richey, must make a "fundamental decision ... not simply between justice and injustice, or even between Jesus and the Jews: it is between Christ and Caesar." Richey thinks he can conclude this consideration with Tilborg's [172] dry remark that "Pilate did not solve his dilemma well." Instead of recognizing "Christ as the true *hyios theou* and *basileus*," Son of God and King, he was forced, as a "friend of Caesar," to reject him and "to affirm and embrace the Augustan Ideology" that identifies the emperor as *divi filius*, the divine Son.

5.2.3 Pilate's Superior Position in the Scheme of Intrigue with Jewish Leadership

Ultimately, Richey's assessment of Pilate is not so different from his exegetical opponents, who, in his eyes, do not take seriously enough the political contrast between Christ and Caesar. While he does not develop sympathy for Pilate and does not see his dilemma as inescapably tragic, by attempting to understand the theological claims of Jesus and the emperor in purely ideological terms, without taking into account how they are rooted in their respective political backgrounds, he arrives at a clear misjudgment of the political intrigue game in which the Jewish leadership entangles the Roman governor. That Pilate (175), contrary to what Richey means with Tilborg, has solved his dilemma quite well from the point of view of the Roman empire will become apparent when Pilate pronounces his sentence in the judge's seat.

Significant in my opinion is how Richey describes what he considers to be primarily the "ideological dimension" of the contrast between Jesus and the emperor in the words of Dodd [426] "in his comment on 19:12 and 15":

> "In the other gospels we learn that Jesus was condemned by Pilate as King of the Jews, but here everything turns upon the claim of Jesus to kingship, over against the exclusive claim of Caesar."

Based on this sentence alone, it would be reasonable to assume that John would have avoided the expression "King of the Jews" in his Gospel. The opposite is the case. Pilate, according to John, even enforces against the will of the Jewish leadership to publish the grounds for judgment with the title "King of the Jews" on Jesus' cross.

According to Ton Veerkamp,[123] the political conflict between Jesus and the emperor must not be reduced to a purely religious-theological level, as if it were about the question of whether Pilate worships his political overlord as God or could convert to Jesus as the Son of the only almighty God. In fact, Pilate's previous intention to release Jesus has nothing whatsoever to do with Pilate even considering to acknowledge him in his claim to be a king whose kingdom is not of this *kosmos*. Instead, he takes him for a religious crank who poses no threat to the Roman Empire. At this point, however,

123 Veerkamp 366 (Friend of Caesar, par. 3-4).

> [t]he leading priests now play their best card, they blackmail Pilate exactly where he can be blackmailed, his relationship with the Roman center, with the emperor. Their argument is strikingly simple and logical. Whoever makes himself king—apparently against the will of Rome—puts himself in a contradiction (*antilegei*) with Rome, is an enemy of Caesar. Whoever bears the almost official title of "friend of Caesar" can hope for lucrative posts in the provinces. Whoever supports someone who is at odds with Rome puts his friendship with the emperor and thus his function at risk. The one who releases someone who opposes Rome is not a friend of Caesar, say his opponents in front of the Praetorium. If the self-government insists on a death sentence, he, Pilate, must act accordingly; otherwise, they will file a complaint against him with the central office.

But anyone who now thinks that Pilate will lose out in this scheme of intrigue of the Jewish leadership is mistaken:

> He will make his opponents pay a high price for trying to corner him. They want a court judgment? . . . Pilate will act as Caesar's friend, even more as Caesar's representative, he will not disappoint the trust that Emperor Tiberius had put in him.

Veerkamp's view thus presupposes, in contrast to Richey, that Pilate does not have to make a religious decision between two individuals who claim to be worshiped as God, but he sees Jesus as the Messiah King of Israel in fundamental political opposition to Pilate as the representative of the Roman world order, which he will paradoxically overcome with his death on the Roman cross—in the direction of a life of *agapē,* "solidarity," in the coming world age, as promised by the prophets of Israel. Not being a Jew, Pilate naturally cannot do anything with Jesus' Messianic claims and his testimony to the faithfulness of his God. At the same time, however, the attempted extortion of Pilate by the Jewish leadership, as we shall see in a moment, amounts to coercing the extortionists into stating their collaboration with the adversary of the God of Israel, the Roman emperor, as their official confession, even though they ought to know better because of their knowledge of the Torah and the prophets. According to John, this is the greater guilt of the Jewish leadership regarding Jesus' death.

5.3 "We have no king but Caesar" (19:15)

After Richey (175-176) has interpreted the condemnation of Jesus by Pilate as a wrong decision of Pilate for Caesar in the interpretation of John 19:12, his interpretation of 19:15 amounts in a very similar way to interpret now also the rejection of Jesus by "the Jews" or the Jewish leadership as a wrong decision for the emperor. It is difficult to deal with his line of thought since it is only in the course of this section that he addresses how the Old Testament understands a kingship ordained by God.

Therefore, the question of how Jesus' kingship according to John 18:36 is not *ek tou kosmou toutou*, not of this world, must first be revisited.

5.3.1 Is Jesus' Messianic Kingship Only in Religious and Not Also in Political Opposition to Roman Imperial Rule?

In ancient Israel, according to Richey (177), any kingship had long been regarded with great reservations. At first, "only God had been Israel's ruler":

> Gideon had declined the kingship of Israel, saying, "I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the Lord will rule over you" (Judg 8:23). When the people rejected Samuel as king, the Lord told him, "They have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them" (1 Sam 8:7), and instructed him to make Saul king instead (1 Sam 8:22).

A linguistic inaccuracy is significant here, because Richey's formulation that the people rejected "Samuel as king" does not correspond to the biblical text. The people do not reject Samuel as king, which he never was and never wanted to be, but they do not want to continue to depend on his divinely ordained leadership as judge and prophet. Instead, they demand that Samuel appoint a king "as among all nations." What this meant politically, I have already discussed in detail above in section 5.1.4.

To be sure, Richey rightly notes that even "the Davidic monarchy was established not by Saul or David but by God, and the king was invested with the divine spirit (2 Sam 7:13; Ps 2:6-7)." But by reducing this endowment "with the divine spirit" to a "religious expression" that "set the Israelite kingship apart from the representation of kingship among most other ancient Near Eastern societies," he overlooks the political implications of this leadership by the liberating God of Israel and his Torah as a discipline for preserving freedom and justice among God's people.

Richey's following formulation expresses only a partial truth, too:

> Because of this intimate association of the office of the king with Yhwh, its destruction by the Babylonian Empire was psychologically catastrophic. It precipitated not simply a political crisis but even more a theological one.

Richey does not mention that the prophets of Israel interpreted this political-theological crisis literally (because *krisis* means "judgment" in Greek) as God's judgment on his people, whose leadership had massively violated God's Torah of liberation and justice in a massive way. Nor does he mention that under the supremacy of the Persians after "the return from exile in 538 B.C.E." in the "territory of Yehud" a semi-autonomous polity led by priests was established through Ezra and Nehemiah, whose people gave themselves the Torah as a constitution of state.[124]

124 Ton Veerkamp, *Die Welt anders. Politische Geschichte der Großen Erzählung* © Institut für Kritische Theologie Berlin e. V. after the edition published in Berlin © Argument Verlag

Instead, Richey merely names the ever-changing overlordships over the Yehudic or Judean territory in the course of the centuries, from "the Persians" to the "Seleucid and Ptolemaic dynasties" and the Romans who conquered the Ptolemaic-Egyptian empire in the year 63 BCE (177-178):

> While numerous rulers assumed the title of king during these centuries, these rulers generally did not claim the divine authority that had belonged to the Davidic monarchy. Rather, they all relied on external support to secure their local rule, understanding themselves (and being understood by the people) as agents of foreign powers and ultimately responsible to them. The one exception to this pattern, the Hasmonaean dynasty established under the Maccabees, failed to secure lasting independence for the region and was eventually overturned by the Romans after the conquest.

As (178) an "important result of this long history of foreign rule," Richey cites "the gradual development of ... messianic expectations," which, however, "never took a unified theological form." That is, as McKenzie[125] explains (note 81), although "the Davidic line no longer ruled after the exile (or at least after the governorship of Zerubbabel, to the best of our knowledge)," the people of Judea nevertheless held on to the hope of an "ideal king" according to God's will:

> Thus the expectations began to move toward the indefinite future; and rather than centering on one monarch in a continuing line of rulers, these expectations came to center on one supreme king who would represent Yahweh's definitive intervention to save his people. It is in this period that we may begin to speak of *the Messiah* in the strict sense. Earlier Scripture (Royal Psalms; Isaiah) was now reread with this new messianic understanding in mind.

According to Richey (178-179),

> this inchoate messianism was capable of being adopted by very different religious and political movements. On the one hand, the Qumran community awaited the coming of the Messiah from their desert retreat. On the other hand, the Zealots in the first century considered the occupation of Palestine by foreigners an intolerable situation and therefore demanded violent resistance to Roman rule to establish a new Israel. Their militancy contributed to the Jewish uprising in 66 C.E., which ended in the Roman victory at the mountain fortress at Masada in 73 C.E.

The fact that Jesus is indeed not understood by the evangelist John as the leader of such a Zealot resistance movement now leads Richey to the self-evident conclusion

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2013, 113 ff., refers to this polity as a "Torah republic." Cf. My summary 12: Ezra and Nehemiah: Establishing of the Torah Republic.

125 Richey cites John L. McKenzie, „Aspects of Old Testament Thought", in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown et al., Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1990, 1311.

that Jesus' messiahship is in no way to be interpreted politically, but exclusively religiously.

This begins with the formulation that "the first-century concept of 'messiah' could readily be understood as '(anti-Roman) political messiah'," by which Richey implies that he understands Jesus' Messianic kingship, as portrayed by John, apparently not in a political but merely a theological-religious opposition to Roman imperial rule.

Richey (note 84) explicitly opposes the "numerous attempts … to link Jesus with the Zealots," and for even "less compelling" he considers

> to present Jesus as providing a non-violent alternative to the Zealot's resistance, e.g., Rensberger's [116] definition of "John's political stance as allegiance to the kingship of Jesus, which [John] presents as a third alternative to the claims of both Caesar and the Zealots."

On the other hand, however (179), John does portray "Jesus as alarming the Jewish leaders" because (179-180) according to John 11

> it was precisely the prospect of Jesus inciting national destruction at the hands of Rome that led the Jewish leaders to begin plotting his death: "If we let him go on thus, every one will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation, ... So from that day on they took counsel how to put him to death" (11:48, 53). Such fears may echo the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E, and anticipate the subsequent, final dispersion of the Jews from Palestine following the revolt of Bar Kochba in 117 C.E.

According to Richey's own view (180), Jesus, "as the evangelist presents him in 18:36, … is not a political revolutionary at all." To this, Ton Veerkamp,[126] as we have seen in section 5.1.4, could agree insofar as Jesus by no means wants "an unheard-of new thing." His kingship, which is not as among all nations, thus certainly not like the world order of the *Pax Romana* as a *kosmos* enslaving the whole world, corresponds rather completely to the liberating provisions of the Torah:

> With the Torah, Israel has taken leave of the normality of ancient Near Eastern oppression and exploitation, of the "production" of *ʿanawim we-evyonim*, of the oppressed and needy, "there shall be no needy among you," Deuteronomy 15:4. Jesus' response only ties in with the hallowed tradition of the Torah republic of the ancient Judeans. Jesus does not want an unheard-of new thing; he wants a kingship according to the Torah. Since, as I said, there has never been such a kingship, Jesus wants unheard-of novelty. It is precisely the traditional that is the novelty!

We need to look very closely at Richey's following paragraph from this insight (180):

126 Veerkamp 355-56 ("What is fidelity, anyhow?", par. 24).

> The event that precipitates the chief priests planning his death is not a plot by Jesus to overthrow Roman rule but rather his giving of life to Lazarus, and the resultant spread of Lazarus' sister Mary's belief that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world" (11:27). As with his treatment of Pilate, John represents the chief priests' refusal to accept Jesus as based on an apparent confusion between what an earthly king is and what the Son of God is. Favoring the former, the Jewish leaders are represented as rejecting the latter.

Richey seems to start from a simple alternative: Either Jesus has political goals and pursues the overthrow of Roman rule as a Zealot revolutionary, or he proves to be the Son of God endowed with supernatural powers who can even raise the dead to life and is therefore superior to all earthly political powers. If one takes seriously, however, that Jesus as the Son of God, as he is to be understood from the Jewish Bible, completely embodies the liberating NAME of the God of Israel, then it is necessary, as Ton Veerkamp[127] does, to refer the raising of Lazarus figuratively to the people of Israel, to understand the figure of "Lazarus as the exemplary concentration of the people of Israʿel in the state of death."

That means: Jesus is not an advocate of a Zealot-militant revolt against the Romans; in figures like Judas and Barabbas John shows how much plundering and bloody violence accompanied the Judean War, which ultimately led to the fall of Jerusalem and the Second Temple. Nevertheless, the goal of the Johannine Jesus is to offer himself as the decisive Passover lamb by dying on the Roman cross in order to overcome and unhinge the Roman order of violence itself once and for all. By handing over in death the Spirit of God's faithfulness (19:30) so that his discipleship can receive it (20:22), he enables them to actively await the dawn of the life of the coming world age for Israel in the midst of the nations under God's heaven through the practice of *agapē*, living together in solidarity. Such a perspective may seem naïve in view of the apparently unshakable power of the Roman Empire, but it can certainly be trusted by an evangelist whose thinking was firmly rooted in the Torah and in the hopes of the prophets.

5.3.2 Are "the Jews" No Longer God's People Because of Their Decision for Caesar?

How does Richey see the attitude of Jesus' Jewish opponents? In his interpretation of John 19:15, he too comes to the conclusion (175) that Pilate, in the scheme of intrigue with the Jewish leadership, now "turns the tables once again" (175-176):

> In v. 13 the Jews demand Jesus' death, shouting "Crucify him!" The evangelist could have passed on immediately to the crucifixion, but does not. Pilate refuses to let the matter drop. The decision that he confronted and which Cae-

127 Veerkamp 243 (Lazarus, par. 9).

> sar confronted through him must be faced by them as well. Duke [135] comments: "They have utterly rejected Jesus; but in the author's view this is not enough. They must be made to confess the full implication of their choice. Pilate with wicked irony invites them into the final noose."

Problematic about Richey's rendering of what happens now (176) is his inaccurate view of the Jews actually acting here. Only once does he correctly refer to them as the "chief priests," else he speaks of the "crowd," although in the entire Passion Narrative, there is not a single mention of the *ochlos,* and generally of "the Jews," although after Jesus' capture only the high priestly leadership of Judea and their servants appear before Pilate's official residence:

> He brings out Jesus one final time and mockingly asks the crowd, asking, "Shall I crucify your king?" Duke [135] draws out the irony in the passage: "While 'the Jews' have just urged Pilate to be true to his king, this pagan now invites them to consider their own. Will they forfeit the Messiah, and so cease to be the messianic people of God?" He immediately receives his answer from the chief priests: "We have no king but Caesar" (19:15). Their response completes the cycle of rejection that began in 1:11 when we were told that Jesus' "own people knew him not."

Is Duke right to claim, as the very soon Gentile-Christian-dominated church did, that by rejecting Jesus the Jews "cease to be the messianic people of God"? In my opinion, John, as an evangelist with a Jewish-Messianic mindset, could hardly think the God of Israel is capable of fully withdrawing his covenant loyalty to his people, even if Israel's leadership rejected the Messiah. Never before had this happened, neither after the worship of the Golden Calf nor after the destruction of the first temple.

After all (180), Richey also considers it notable that "it is the Jewish *leaders*, not the crowd, that are represented as speaking" in John 19:15. However, he holds to the error of, apart from that, imagining a Jewish crowd as present before Pilate's office. But the last occurrence of the word *ochlos* in John's Gospel is in 12:18; after Jesus' capture, only the chief priests and their henchmen are named as actors in the conversation with Pilate. To Richey's credit, other exegetes are subject to the same error, such as Tilborg [173], who notes "a remarkable change of person" here: "only the high priests say that they do not know any other king but the emperor." Brown[128] even suggests that the chief priests are merely acting "as spokesmen for 'the Jews'" in general, although, according to Richey, "the shift in person … may indicate that, at least for John, the chief priests saw in Pilate's question a threat to their own political position."

128 Richey cites Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah from Gethsemane to the Grave: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives of the Four Gospels*, 2 vols. ABRL, New York: Doubleday, 1994, 1. 849 (I refer to this book hereafter as Brown*, Death*).

That this is indeed about the Judean leadership and not about all Jews in general or Judaism as a religion is confirmed by Mary Smallwood [148] with her following observation (180-181):

> "Josephus says that after the end of Herodian rule, 'the constitution was an aristocracy and the High Priests were entrusted with the leadership of the nation' [Josephus, *A.J*. 20.251]; that is, he sees the presidency of the high Priest as the real ruler under the aegis of the Roman resident governor, which was virtually what the Jews had asked for. But the political power of the High Priesthood now became unmistakable, when the right of appointment passed from Archelaus to the Roman authorities, normally the governor of Judaea."

Since due to this, as Smallwood [149] further notes (181), "the supreme Jewish authority, the Sanhedrin, came under indirect Roman control," Richey can call the "portrait of the Jewish leaders … especially cutting."

In passing (note 89), Richey notes that this fact

> causes considerable difficulties for Rensberger [96], who claims that the Jews' preference for Barabbas "the revolutionary" over Jesus suggests "that their coerced submission to Caesar is not entirely wholehearted." On the one hand, no one would suggest Roman occupation was popular; on the other hand, the high priests in service to Pilate could not allow much sympathy to be shown for any politically suspect criminal.

Now it may seem contradictory that the chief priests collaborating with the Roman occupying power at the same time sympathize with an anti-Roman terrorist. With such contradictions, the evangelist refers, again and again, to actually existing contradictory political currents in the population of Judea, to which Ton Veerkamp[129] draws attention as follows:

> Rome confronts the Judeans with the choice of demanding a harmless, non-Zealot, in Rome's eyes "non-violent" do-gooder, the so-called "Prince (*Nazorean*), King of the Judeans," or a violent freedom fighter who poses a far greater danger to them. But they demand Barabbas. The devout Christians are outraged here: the Jews want a merciless murderer instead of a gentle Son of God. But the text is not moral; it is political. These Judeans have actually engaged in the armed struggle; they have actually chosen Barabbas.
>
> The Messianists who referred to Jesus disagreed, John says. You may doubt this, you even have to, as long as you stay on the level of the narrative. Simon Peter drew the sword, he wanted the fight, the armed fight. Only after the catastrophic outcome of the *Judean War*, that is, only in the present time of the narrator, the spokesmen of these Messianists, that is, Matthew, Mark,

129 Veerkamp 360 (There, the Human, par. 4-5).

> etc., have been finally cured of their sympathies for the Zealots. Therefore, they weave into their narrative the incident surrounding the release of Barabbas in order to make it impossible for their communities to have any flirtation with the Zealots, who were politically active even after the war.

It is characteristic of the evangelist John, however, that he mentions the Barabbas scene only very briefly within the two verses 18,39-40, while Mark and Matthew deal with it in much more detail. His main concern is obviously to put on record the collaboration of the high priestly leadership with the Romans.

The submission of the Jewish leadership to the emperor as their only king now raises, says Richey (181), "the question of the numerous Passover motifs in John":

> Much has been made of the prominence of Passover themes in the Gospel, especially the Passion Narrative. For example, Jesus is "enthroned" (crucified) at the hour when preparation for Passover would begin (19:17). He is taken down from the cross early to prevent the defilement of the Passover (19:31). His bones are left unbroken, just like those of the Passover lamb (19:37). Meeks [77] notes an additional parallel that may help to explain John's anti-Roman polemic:
>
> "But anyone familiar with the Passover Haggadah cannot fail to be reminded by the cry of the high priests, 'We have no king but Caesar,' of the *Nišmat*, the hymn sung at the conclusion of the Greater Hallel [i.e., that very evening]:
>
> '*From everlasting to everlasting thou art God;*
> *Beside thee we have no king, redeemer or savior,*
> *No liberator, deliverer, provider,*
> *None who takes pity in every time of distress and trouble.*
> *We have no king but thee.*'"

Here, after all, Richey (182) considers it "notable ... that John and the Jewish tradition agree about the opposition of the Roman Imperium and submission to God." The Jewish leaders, however, with their commitment to the emperor, betray "their sole allegiance to God" they will declare in a few hours at the Passover meal.

However, although Richey explicitly addresses "the opposition of the Roman Imperium" that John shares with the Jewish tradition and that only the Jewish leadership abandons in favor of collaboration with Rome, he goes on to speak again of "the Jews" who are caught in a purely "ideological dilemma in the narrative":

> Just as Pilate was presented with the decision between Christ and Caesar by the Jews in 19:12, so too here the Jews are represented as facing the same choice. To remain in Pilate's favor, they must admit "We have no king but Caesar." In Brown's [*Death* 1. 849] words, "by rejecting [Jesus] the chief priests have given up their hope for the Messiah king to be sent by God and have settled for Roman civil kingship. ... By their own choice and words 'the

> Jews' have become like other nations, subject to Rome: they are no longer God's special people."

Here Richey, citing Brown, draws a fatally wrong conclusion: from the betrayal of the chief priests against the liberating God of Israel and his Messiah, he concludes the automatically resulting end of God's covenant loyalty to the entire people of Israel. If Brown and Richey were right, Israel's history as the people of God would have ended already after the dance around the Golden Calf or at the latest with the destruction of the First Temple.

In my opinion, Richey drifts into this problematic direction primarily because he does not take seriously enough the political contrast between oppressed Israel and the enslaving Roman world order, whose overcoming John is aiming at. As a result, though he repeatedly speaks of the political contrast between Jesus and Caesar, in the end, he is only interested in showing the most accurate parallels possible between the respective ideological-religious attitudes of Pilate and the Jews toward Jesus (182-183):

> The words that they directed at Pilate in v. 12 now come back to apply to them as well: "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend." And, as was implied with Pilate as well, if they do not release him by proclaiming him their king, they are not God's friends either. The words of {183} 1 John 2:23, probably directed at schismatics within the Johannine community, apply equally here: "No one who denies the Son has the Father."
>
> Seen in this light, John's anti-Jewish polemic looks like a variation of his anti-Roman critique that had played itself out in the trial before Pilate. Tilborg [173] points out the dilemma faced by the chief priests in 19:15, which parallels Pilate's situation in 19:12: "Saying this, the high priests not only renounce their political independence but they also no longer profess that God is the only king of Israel. In this way the dilemma 'Jesus or the emperor' is not only Pilate's dilemma; it is just as much the dilemma for the leaders of Israel. And they too did not solve it well."

Ton Veerkamp[130] takes much more seriously that it is "the political processes between the occupying power and the collaborating local elites" that are "illuminated … mercilessly" by John. According to him, Pilate does not make a fool of himself in the scheme of intrigue with the Jewish leadership, but he shows, in the end,

> that he was the more savvy politician after all. He faces a popular assembly that was not one. The Perushim, the official opposition, are absent. Only the priestly elites and their staff are present. The whole thing is a democratically dressed-up farce.

130 Veerkamp 368-70 (King of the Judeans, 19:14-22, par. 9, 2-5, 7-8, 11).

> Now he doesn't say, "Look at the man," now he says, "There, your king." They roar, "Upwards, upwards, crucify him." Pilate demands the "democratic" legitimacy of the death sentence, "Your king shall I crucify?" He has them where he wants them. The leading priests—not the people of the Judeans—say, "We have no king except Caesar." What they probably don't realize is that they are solemnly declaring that they want a *melekh ke-khol-ha-goyim, basileia tou kosmou toutou*, a king according to this world order. This is the political price that Pilate demands from them. So they do.

In this way, "Pilate does his 'job' on behalf of Rome not badly. True, he has a man executed to whom he attaches no weight and whom he would actually like to let go, but he forces a political commitment to Rome by the Judean self-government." Two things John wants to make clear according to Veerkamp:

> First, the Messiah was executed or murdered by Rome, that is, by what he calls *kosmos*, "world order." Second, the representative of this world order was pushed by the political leadership in Jerusalem to kill an internal opponent of that leadership. The leadership does this because they are part of this world order: The emperor is their king, and they are now an element of the imperial world order. . . .
>
> The actual winner of this evil game is the Roman authority. The priests have gambled away their legitimacy with their confession of a goy as their king—in the flagrant desecration of the Torah. By deciding against the Messiah, they necessarily decided for Caesar as their king and for Rome as their god. Necessarily: a third was excluded. This is how John interprets the behavior of priestly leadership. They have finally said farewell to the Israel that John wants.

However, it does not automatically follow that God's covenant with Israel becomes invalid. On the contrary, the whole outline of John's Gospel is based on the fact that Jesus' exaltation to the cross overcomes the Roman world order and that with his resurrection on Day One of the new creation the life of the coming world age has already begun for all Israel including Samaria and God-fearing people from the nations.

According to Veerkamp, John does not even mean

> that everyone who decides against the Messiah, decides *ipso facto* for the world order (*kosmos*). It would have been a trifle to have the Perushim [Pharisees] also appear in his narrative of the death sentence as companions of the priests. The Perushim also vehemently reject Jesus as Messiah. They, too, want the elimination of a political opponent, but not at the price of having to share the political confession, "We have no king unless Caesar." That is why John does not have them appear here. This blank space in his narrative is telling: the Perushim are and remain political opponents in the struggle for Israel, but they are not the enemy, they do not belong to the *kosmos*, to Rome,

> without ifs and buts. That is why John leaves them out of the game. After the arrest, they appear nowhere.

But to what extent can Jesus' death on the Roman cross be interpreted as overcoming the Roman world order? Following John,

> [p]recisely at this point, the Messiah asserts himself against Rome and against his Judean opponents. The reason Rome had Yeshua executed is that he is the King of the Judeans. This officially seals the Kingship of Yeshua, the absolute contradiction to the Kingship of Rome, in three languages, Aramaic, Latin, Greek.

5.3.3 Does the Contrast between Christ and Caesar in Fact Imply No Concrete Political Theology?

Richey prefaces (183) his summary of the fifth chapter of his book with "a provocative paragraph" from "Meeks's book on the Moses traditions in the Fourth Gospel" [64]:

> "Jesus' kingship is not 'unworldly.' Instead one of the characteristics of the Johannine treatment of the trial is that its political implications are emphasized. In 11:48 a specifically political motivation is injected into the plotting of the Jewish authorities. John alone mentions the presence of Roman soldiers (*hē ... speira kai ho chiliarchos*) at the arrest of Jesus. In the trial itself, the political-realistic element is introduced by the Jews at 19:12: 'If you release this man you are not Caesar's friend; anyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.' The climactic rejection of Jesus by the Jews is the statement 'We have no king but Caesar,' in which the 'religious' and 'political' questions are shown to be inextricably merged. Hence, while the Christian community's precarious relation to the Empire at the end of the first century has doubtless influenced the Johannine form of the trial, it is not quite accurate to call the narrative apologetic. It is certainly not true that the trial scene provides a model by which Christians can readily show 'that they are not seditious' [Hoskyns]. On the contrary, what the trial suggests is that the disciple will always have to decide *vis-à-vis* the Empire whether Jesus is his king or whether Caesar is."

For Richey (184), what is "most remarkable" about this apt quotation is "how little attention it has received among scholars." He himself quite rightly adds to Meek's observations on the "opposition between Christ and Caesar" that the verses John 18:36; 19:11; 19:12; and 19:15 in which he expresses himself cannot be adequately understood "within a framework governed by a cosmological or moral dualism or a primarily anti-Jewish polemic in the Passion Narrative."

However, as noted above in section 5.1.3, the framework of understanding these verses that he considers appropriate is still dualistic in that, first, he fundamentally

distinguishes the power of Christ as heavenly and that of the emperor as earthly, and, second, he describes the danger posed by the emperor as merely "theological":

> Rather, they all belong to a conceptually well-developed understanding of what sort of power is proper to Christ, what sort is proper to Caesar, and the theological danger the latter posed to every person, whether Jew or Christian or Roman.

In that such a "theological danger" is supposed to affect Jews, Christians, or Romans indiscriminately, it remains completely out of consideration whether John as a Jewish Messianist does not rather regard the Roman emperor as the leader of a politically and theologically reprehensible world order, the overcoming of which the Messiah Jesus has set as his goal in the interest of life for Israel in the coming world age.

Very cautiously, however, Richey suggests that the Johannine contradiction between Christ and Caesar has political implications beyond a theological-religious decision:

> While this understanding is hardly a complete political theology, it does express the basic principles of the Johannine attitude towards politics. Even if, as Hill [61] claims, "such principles, with their potential for inspiring political options, remain quite general and do not furnish us with concrete blue-prints for political programs," they delineate the boundaries that John's Gospel conceives, not only for the absolute limits of state power but also for the relative limits of divine influence within the world as well.

That Richey with David Hill finds no evidence of concrete political options or programs in the Fourth Gospel may be due to not taking seriously enough its Jewish Messianic roots in the Torah's or the prophets' ideas about kingship according to God's will and about the life of the coming world age for Israel.

6. What Kind of Political Theology is at Stake in the Gospel of John?

In the concluding summary of his book (187), Richey finds it "surprising how many exegetes pass over" the "aspect of the Gospel" highlighted by him, in which way

> the Fourth Gospel, a historically particular document, challenges a historically particular political system. Given the temptation over the centuries to read it as a timeless and placeless document about Christ, it is perhaps justification enough for my research if it helps to illuminate those elements of time that gave rise to John's timeless meditations. In other words, that John challenges all political systems should surprise no one. However, the way in which he challenged this particular structure might surprise many, and recognizing it will at the very least expand our understanding of the Gospel.

I stumbled in this paragraph over a statement that Richey quite casually takes for granted: Is it really the case "that John challenges all political systems"? In my eyes, John assumes that only a king "as among all nations" (1 Samuel 8:5) is to be radically

questioned, but not a kingship according to the Torah, which is not "of this world order" (John 18:36).

6.1 Is Jesus' Power to Be Understood Autocratically and Implemented by the Church?

I was somewhat appalled (185) by Richey's unmediated placement of the results of his interpretation of John in recent political history:

> Modern Catholics are often surprised to learn that the feast of Christ the King, which is now celebrated on the last Sunday of Ordinary Time, does not date back to the Middle Ages but rather was instituted less than eighty-five years ago by Pope Pius XI in response to the rise of secular political movements that he believed threatened the traditional privileges of the Church across Europe. But a necessary condition for protecting the political prerogatives of the Church, he realized, was reasserting the political significance of Jesus Christ that had been pushed aside since the French Revolution...

Does Richey thus only at the very end of his theological treatise metaphorically let a political cat out of the bag, which I had not expected? Does he really mourn the reign of the Catholic Papal Church, which was pushed back in the course of the civil revolutions of modern times, and does he identify it with the goals of the kingship of Christ? This seems to be true, because to confirm the above he quotes Pope Pius XI, of whom it says on Wikipedia:

> One author [David Kertzer] claims that Pius expressed support for the [Nazi] regime soon after Hitler's rise to power, with the author asserting that he said, "I have changed my mind about Hitler, it is for the first time that such a government voice has been raised to denounce Bolshevism in such categorical terms, joining with the voice of the pope."[131]

Literally, according to Richey, Pius XI wrote in his 1925 encyclical *Quas Primas*:

> "It has long been a common custom to give to Christ the metaphorical title of 'King,' because of the high degree of perfection whereby he excels all creatures. ... But if we ponder this matter more deeply, we cannot but see that the title and the power of King belongs to Christ as man in the strict and proper sense too. For it is only as man that he may be said to have received from the Father 'power and glory and a kingdom,' since the Word of God, as consubstantial with the Father, has all things in common with him, and therefore has necessarily supreme and absolute dominion over all things created."

131 Thus Wikipedia cites David I. Kertzer, *The Pope and Mussolini: The Secret History of Pius XI and the Rise of Fascism in Europe*, Oxford University Press 2004, 3359. The following quotation is taken by Richey from Pope Pius XI, *Quas Primas* [December 11, 1925], in *The Papal Encyclicals, 1740-1981* (5 vols.; ed. Claudia Carlen; n.p.: McGrath, 1981) 3. 272.

This quote is initially commented on by Richey with what at first glance appears to be a rather cryptic remark:

> Taken in isolation, this quote could be mistaken for a gloss on John 19:11: "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above."

Looking at his further explanations, this sentence seems to be directed against the view that Pope Pius XI would have advocated a differentiated peaceful coexistence of the royal-divine power of Jesus and the respective state power (186):

> The Johannine understanding of Christ's kingship offends modern political sensibilities—even those of many conservative Catholics. Certainly, the practical appeal of many "dualist" readings of the Fourth Gospel is that they enable one to avoid the conclusions of Pius XI, and instead permit a metaphorical rather than a literal interpretation of those passages in John where the autonomous power of the State is called into question and where Christ is placed neither beside nor apart from Caesar but above him. Moreover, given the last seventeen hundred years of Church history, a strong argument can be made that a dualist interpretation of the Fourth Gospel is the only viable one for a church that, in Augustine's phrase, is still "in the world as a pilgrim."

Is every worldly power, then, ultimately to be subject to the royal power of Christ in such a way that the church acting in the name of Christ is to strive for political supremacy over state powers? And does Richey's last sentence state restrictively that, at least according to Augustine, the divine state in the form of a church on pilgrimage in the world remains subject to the respective forms of government after all? All this still remains strangely in abeyance in Richey's formulations here.

However, when Richey later (188) tries to look at John's Gospel from the point of view of "modern political theology," it unfortunately turns out how blatantly Richey misunderstands Jesus' exercise of power. He considers it difficult in view of this question to sort "the particular from the universal," that is, to distinguish historically conditioned power relations from the trans-temporal omnipotence of God, and describes in the following way the central concern of "[m]odern liberationist theologians such as Leonardo Boff and Gustavo Gutierrez" who

> have attempted to reconceive the tasks of Christian theology in the socio-political spheres, and to reshape their Catholic societies away from what is often seen as a medieval emphasis on hierarchy and towards a modern emphasis on egalitarianism and democracy. Leaving aside the question of the value or disvalue of these efforts for the church, the recognition that John's autocratic understanding of Christ's authority (John 18:36) was formed within and against an autocratic and decidedly non-democratic society certainly adds a new layer of complexity to the problems confronting any political theology.

To ascribe to the evangelist John an "autocratic understanding" of the power of the Messiah Jesus could hardly more blatantly miss the Jewish-Messianic roots of his political-theological way of thinking in the Torah and the prophets. Here it becomes abundantly clear that Richey does not interpret the power of Jesus from the God of Israel, whose liberating NAME he embodies, but on the contrary from the autocratic ruling Roman emperor, whom Jesus is supposed to surpass in his autocratic power. Thus, Richey does not understand John 18:36 in terms of a political contrast of a kingship according to the Torah and a kingship as among all nations, but simply as a subordination of the earthly autocratic power of the emperor to the even more autocratic power of Christ bestowed from heaven.

Very reservedly Richey expresses his own ideas about political theology. When he places "John's autocratic understanding of Christ's authority (John 18:36)," as he outlines it, in a series with political ideologies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and asks whether and in what way they all represent "historical relics" that must either be "abandoned" or shifted and sorted out, he seems at least to suggest that he is more inclined to give priority to an autocratically understood authority of Jesus over social systems such as liberalism or socialism, even in our time:

> Are these ancient paradigms of political authority that John incorporated into his Christology to be abandoned as historical relics? Are they no longer able to help Christians think usefully about the theology of the state, or are they normative elements of authentic Christian theology that challenge the political beliefs of the twenty-first century just as radically as John challenged those of the first century? Likewise, Pope John Paul II's quite laudable search for a "third way" between capitalism and communism announced in his *Centisimus Annus* presupposes the same task of shifting and sorting out not only the relics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries but also those of the first in the search for a workable Christian social order. I have no ready answers for these larger theological questions, but even to pose them is sufficient to show the relevance of this study for contemporary theology.

Characteristic of Richey's position is the aim of searching for "a workable Christian social order." Basically, it presupposes a long-gone time in which there is approximately worldwide, or at least in certain countries, a uniform or majority Christian population that can give itself an order according to Christian principles. Or, in any case, a papacy that tries to assert the political influence of the church worldwide, even in countries that do not have a majority of Christian Catholics.

6.2 Do Christians Have to Choose between Christ and Caesar, or Does Jesus as the Messiah of Israel Stand against Rome?

In the last section, I anticipated Richey's later considerations in order to tick off the subject of political theology to be understood in clerical terms as quickly as possible. One page earlier (187), Richey had outlined his objectives as follows, that

> the political understanding of the text offered in this study may serve to chart a new path for contextualizing the Fourth Gospel. It holds the potential to move beyond the traditional historical-critical paradigms (Jewish vs. Philosophical-Gnostic) or theological approaches (Sacramentalist vs. Docetist vs. Christological vs. etc.). By looking to the first-century political context of the Gospel, we can come to understand how Johannine Christians would have understood themselves as men and women with divided hearts, torn between Christ and Caesar. How clear their self-understanding may have been or how normative it should be for Christians in the twenty-first century is another question, but one that can only be answered once we know what the self-understanding of Johannine Christians was. And my project, I hope, contributes towards that goal.

In Richey's eyes, the Johannine community has already distanced itself so far from Judaism that he speaks of "Johannine Christians" who, so to speak, have a choice on the market of religious possibilities between the divine worship of Jesus Christ or the Roman emperor. If, however, one takes seriously the evangelist's roots in Judaism, then there can be no tug-of-war at all among Messianic Jews between the Messiah Jesus and the emperor; rather, the Roman emperor, as the "ruler of this world order," from the outset is opposed to the God of Israel as his absolute adversary, *ßatan*, *diabolos,* whom Jesus as the "liberator of the world," has set out to overcome.

Although Richey (186) again distinguishes John's position, as defined by him, from what he sees as Paul's "obeisant attitude towards the State,"[132] he still interprets the political opposition between Christ and Caesar as operating solely on an ideological-religious-theological level. For, as he has put it in his study,

> it was precisely the Roman exaltation of the State in the person of the emperor over that of God in the person of Christ that inspired John to introduce into the Gospel a polemic against the Augustan Ideology and its explicit claim to absolute sovereignty in the world. It was, at its core, this political belief—albeit often wrapped in religious and literary garb—that lay at the root of the cycle of rejection that Christ experiences throughout the Gospel, from his rejection by his own people (1:11) to his execution as a criminal at the hands of the authorities in John 19. And, as Raymond E. Brown and J. Louis Martyn have suggested, the story of Christ's rejection is also the secret history of the rejection of his followers, both by "the Jews" and the Roman authorities who aided them.

The fact that the rejection of Jesus is practically seen only as a religious problem is all the more problematic because "the Jews" are the first to reject Jesus in his divinity and, in this, are merely supported by the Roman authorities. Israel as the people

132 However, this is in fact out of the question, as I explained in note 90.

of God, who knows itself to be enslaved by the Roman world order as by a new worldwide Egypt and longs for liberation, does not even occur marginally in such a view. Thus, Richey at the same time avoids dealing with the political question oh how a kingship according to the Torah and according to the ideas of the Jewish prophets differs from the kingship as among all nations, which the Roman emperor embodies as "a murderer of humans on principle" (John 8:44).

Moreover, with the remark that the evangelist refrains from "promoting a suicidal rebellion against Caesar's power," Richey's examination of the Johannine rejection of Zealotry and its terrorist machinations is exhausted. At the same time, this apparently renders superfluous for him any preoccupation with the question of whether John, as a Jewish messianist, might have considered conceivable another perspective of overcoming the Roman empire, as I have pondered in section 5.1.4 following Ton Veerkamp.

Instead, according to Richey,

> the evangelist attempts a systematic reversal of the political logic of the Augustan Ideology. For example, the unparalleled portrait of the "only-begotten Son" in the Prologue, the reservation of true "power" to Christ alone, the bestowal of the title "Savior of the World" on Jesus, and the confrontation with Pilate in the Passion Narrative all suggest that John wished to strike at the true heart of Roman power. This target was not the troops and governors that could put down local uprisings, but the *Weltanschauung* that secured the overwhelming consent of the Mediterranean world by presenting the Roman triumph as the inevitable result of a divinely ordained historical process guided by divine men.

Correct in this view is that the evangelist indeed has in mind a "reversal of the political logic of the Augustan ideology." The problem is that Richey takes too little seriously the roots of the Gospel in the Jewish scriptures. The Messiah Jesus as the *monogenēs,* the "only begotten," who as the second Isaac embodies the people of Israel and as the Son of the FATHER at the same time the liberating NAME of the God of Israel, turns detached from Israel into a Christ endowed with supreme divine power, who on the field of ideology deals with the divine claim of the Roman Empire.

According to Richey, in this ideological confrontation with Rome (186-187),

> John's theology foreshadows the Barmen Declaration (to which Rudolf Bultmann was a signatory), that lonely protest of 1934 against the Nazi regime and its National Socialist church, which proclaimed: "We reject the false doctrine that there could be areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ but to other lords, areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him."[133]

133 Richey cites the text from Robert McAfee Brown, ed. *Kairos, Three Prophetic Challenges to*

Again, Richey may rightly point out (187, note 2) "that Hitler in the twentieth century looked back to Augustus as a model and predecessor of the European empire that he hoped to fashion." But this very parallel between the National Socialist Fuehrer state and the "ruler of this world order," as Ton Veerkamp[134] in John 12:31 and 16:11 translates the phrase *ho archōn tou kosmou toutou* and which he refers to the Roman emperor, ought now, after all, cause people who have been made sensitive to the problem of anti-Semitism by the Holocaust to look more closely at whether John's resistance to Rome is also comparable to the church's resistance to National Socialism in the Third Reich.

As high as the significance of the Barmen Declaration is to be assessed, it should nevertheless be borne in mind that it does not contain a word against the incipient persecution of the Jews and that its signing did not prevent Rudolf Bultmann from outlining "the Jews" in his 1941 commentary on John as representatives of the anti-Christ "world" who would persuade Pilate, as the representative of the state ideologically committed to neutrality, to execute an innocent man. It should also be remembered that Pope Pius XI, quoted above by Richey, in his concern for the Christian faith and the rights of the Catholic Church, was initially quite willing to derive benefits from cooperation with Mussolini's fascist movement and to conclude a concordat with the Nazi German state.

So what about the first centuries after Christ? A church persecuted by Rome from the 2nd to the 4th century did not feel prevented by its opposition to the divine worship of the emperor to look down on the Jews with contempt and regard them as disinherited of all divine goods of salvation.

If it were taken seriously that John wrote his gospel as a Jewish Messianist, then he could not have regarded the confrontation of the Messiah Jesus with the Roman world order as a mere ideological-religious-theological side-by-side or overlapping of two divine claims. He had to regard it from the Torah and the prophets as a political contrast between the kingship of Rome as a new worldwide Egyptian slave house and a kingship of the liberation of Israel by the Messiah of Israel's God. Unfortunately, Richey completely closes his mind to this insight in his book.

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the Church, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990, 157.

134 Veerkamp 271 ("Now my soul is shaken," par. 1) and 320 ("That one comes and accuses," par. 1). In his note 391 on the translation of John 12:31 (271), he writes:
Archōn, "political leader, ruler" like Nicodemos (3:1). *Archontes* are the leading forces of Judea, 7:26, 48; 12:42. The LXX translates more than 30 Hebrew words as *archōn*. Among them, the following three words are the most common: *nasi'*, "exalted," *rosh*, "head," and *sar*, "leading personality," from the overseer of forced labor to the commander-in-chief, emperor (Caesar). There can hardly be any doubt that this emperor is meant here.

6.3 Open Questions of the Historical-critical Exegesis of the Gospel of John

A number of the following questions raised by Richey (189), which have been left open in his study at the "level of historical-critical exegesis," would, if he were less oblivious to the Jewish background of the Gospel, be either unnecessary or easier to answer:

> What was the exact status of Gentile members of the community *vis-à-vis* the Imperial Cult?

Since Richey presupposes a large number of Gentile members of the Johannine community only because he cannot imagine a politically hostile attitude toward Augustan ideology from a purely Jewish grouping, this question arises only marginally for "some Greeks" who, according to John 12:20, may be added to the gathering of all Israel, including Samaria.

> How does John's understanding of Christ's kingship inform his portrait of Jesus' Galilean ministry?

To understand this question, it would be necessary to know what Richey means by "Jesus' Galilean ministry." If he alludes to the signs performed in Galilee of the Messianic wedding, the bringing to life of the son of a royal official, the feeding of the five thousand, and finally, at the end of the Gospel, the wondrous catch of fish, there would be a lot to say about this from Ton Veerkamp's[135] interpretation, which relates to the liberation, revival, and feeding of Israel.

> What are the implications of this anti-Roman polemic for the interpretation of the Farewell Discourses?

This question must also be asked and answered quite differently if John's anti-Roman polemic has Jewish-Messianic roots. According to Ton Veerkamp,[136] it is precisely in the farewell discourses that the evangelist illuminates in a special way the hatred in which the world order fights the Messianic community (15:18-25) and, conversely, the condemnation of the "ruler of the world order" by the God of Israel (16:8-11).

> Does the movement towards a universal Church reflected in John 21 challenge or at least nuance this polemic?

This question is highly interesting from Richey's mouth insofar as it presupposes that John's Gospel opens up to a more universal orientation only in the last chapter. This should actually be accompanied by the insight that there is no mention of a general mission to the nations beforehand and that the liberation of the world from the

135 Cf. especially Veerkamp 67 ff. (Messianic Wedding), 126 ff. (The Other Sign in Cana, Galilee: "Your son lives"), 151 ff. (The Sign of the Nourishment of Israel. A Misunderstanding), and 404 ff. ("We also come with you").

136 Cf. especially Veerkamp 311 ff. (The Fight) and 319 ("That one comes and accuses").

world order that weighs on it should primarily fulfill the prophetic promises for Israel in the midst of the nations. However, Ton Veerkamp[137] also assumes that it was not until John 21 that the Johannine community, still gathered behind closed doors after Jesus' resurrection (20:18, 26), joined "a particular type of Messianism" represented by "Simon Peter," but "distinct from the Pauline type." This Peter type of a Messianic community, however, would still less be considered a "universal church" than the Paul type explicitly seeking the reconciliation of Jews and nations.

> Most importantly, can a more positive and systematic theory of the State be drawn from the Fourth Gospel that may have guided the hand of John when he redacted earlier traditions and documents into the final version of the Gospel?

This question presupposes that John would have more or less carefully pieced together two or three written sources into a Gospel supplemented by lots of Jesus' speeches. In recent times, however, more and more exegetes are moving toward interpreting John's Gospel in its final form as it is presented to us, including Hartwig Thyen, Klaus Wengst, and Ton Veerkamp.[138]

> To answer these questions would require a full commentary on the Gospel from a "Roman" perspective, an intellectual project that lies beyond the scope of this study.

To be sure, a comprehensive commentary on John from Richey's pen could be quite exciting to read. In my view, however, it would be far more important to supplement his "Roman" perspective with consideration from a Jewish-Messianic point of view so that crucial political-theological misconceptions of the evangelist's purpose are avoided.

Richey, however, formulates as his more "modest" goals only,

> to draw together the results of modern scholarship on the Augustan Ideology and to see how John can be read fruitfully in light of it. The history of the Johannine community is one of conflict with several enemies outside and inside itself, the Roman Empire being only one. Yet at the stage when the Gospel was put into its final form, it may well have been the most threatening. To recognize the Roman *imperium* as such, and for a moment to look past other opponents, allows a new and valuable light to be shed on the text. By this standard, I hope that my efforts to re-read the Fourth Gospel can command some scholarly attention—and perhaps promote allegiance to him "through whom all things were made" (John 1:2).

137 Veerkamp 404-05 (note 567 on his translation of John 21:1).

138 Cf. the comparison of the John interpretations of these three authors in my Johannes-Blog, which, however, is not available in English translation.

Again, the mention of "other opponents" of the Johannine community, which Richey wants "to look past" for the moment, is treacherous, since he is, of course, referring unspokenly to "the Jews" who did not receive Jesus even though they were "his own" (John 1:11). But if Jews have their only place in John's Gospel as opponents of Jesus apart from the Roman emperor, it is very difficult to even consider a Jewish-Messianic point of view from which the evangelist might have looked at the opposition to the Roman Empire.

6.4 Rome-Based Christ or Jewish-Rooted Messiah Jesus?

Finally, I address the significant way (187) in which Richey assesses the yield of his study for "contemporary … Christology." Namely (188), if the Johannine "portrait of Christ was formed in part as a reply to historically particular forms of political power (i.e., the Roman emperor)," then, in his view, "the systematic theologian" should be better able to grasp,

> what John's high Christology was supposed to accomplish for his community and what it can (and cannot) accomplish in the contemporary context. At the very least, a greater appreciation and understanding of how Johannine Christology was shaped in part by a polemic against a historically specific form of political power must affect how theologians go about transferring Johannine texts to the contemporary world when doing Christology. In short, the Johannine Christ may have come down from heaven in the text, but John's portrait of him arose from the soil of first-century Roman Asia Minor. Any modern Christology must capture both places of origin if it is to be true to both history and faith.

It is obvious here that Richey completely disregards the possibility that John, instead of a "high Christology" in the framework of which Jesus was identified more and more with God Himself in terms of essence, could have represented a well-Jewish Messianology according to which the Jewish man Jesus as the second Isaac or the embodiment of Israel embodies at the same time the liberating Word and the NAME of the God of Israel.

If a "high Christology" is formulated in opposition to Augustan Ideology, there is a danger, to which Richey seems to have succumbed to some extent, that the image of Christ will be endowed with traits of an autocratic understanding of power that derive from that very rejected ideology. This happens, for example, by describing the relationship of Christ and Caesar only in the formal sense of superiority, without addressing the mutually incompatible political implications of a kingdom according to the Torah and the Roman empire as a kingship as among all nations.