

A STUDY OF PONTIUS PILATE (JOHN 18:28-19:16A): POWER STRATEGIES AND THE ABUSE OF POWER

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Abstract: *In this essay, Marshall B. Rosenberg's concept of 'Non-Violent Communication' is applied to Jesus' questioning before Pontius Pilate in the Gospel of John. It is a masterpiece of violent communication. The following analysis intends to reveal strategies of communication and their consequences. It will become clear that violent language is a sign of human weakness, while non-violent communication points to human strength. Biblical texts are a mirror for one's behaviour since ancient dramas function as a mirror for the audience (mimesis). An interactive reading of the Bible can lead to an awareness and reflection of one own's communication.*

Key Words: Abuse of Power; Ancient Drama; John's Gospel; Non-Violent Communication; Passion Narrative; Power Strategies.

Introduction

The abuse scandal is shocking the Church worldwide. This has also brought the issues of power and abuse of power into focus. However, where does power end, and abuse of power begin? Does power only belong to church leaders? Is the issue of abuse of power limited to church leaders in their relationship with parishioners? Rather, is there not in every human being the ability to exercise power and the capacity to abuse it?¹

“Every spoken word and every body movement is an outward sign of an inner emotion.”² Evagrius Ponticus' psychologically insightful sentence raises the question of how power and the abuse of power are expressed in verbal and non-verbal communication. What are the

¹ Cf. Hans Zollner, “Macht und Machtmissbrauch. Erfahrungen und Kriterien,” *EuA* 97, no. 4 (2021): 466-478.

² Evagrius Ponticus, *Practicos*, 47: Τῶν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ παθημάτων σύμβολον γίνεται ἡ λόγος τις προερχομένη, ἢ κίνησις τοῦ σώματος γενομένη, δι' οὗ ἐπαισθάνονται οἱ ἐχθροὶ πότερον ἔνδον ἔχομεν τοὺς λογισμοὺς αὐτῶν καὶ ὀδίνομεν, ἢ ἀπορρίψαντες αὐτοὺς μεριμνῶμεν περὶ τῆς σωτηρίας ἡμῶν. Text edition: <https://evagriusponticus.net/> (English translation: B. Kowalski).

communicative signals that can be used to recognise the exercise of power and the abuse of power?

Marshall B. Rosenberg developed a concept called ‘Non-Violent Communication’ (NVC) with the aim of developing human relationships in which those concerned contribute to each other’s well-being. Following his theory, the abuse of power begins with communication that results in hurt or harm:

...judging others, bullying, having racial bias, blaming, finger pointing, discriminating, speaking without listening, criticizing others or ourselves, name-calling, reacting when angry, using political rhetoric, being defensive or judging who’s “good/bad” or what’s “right/wrong” with people.³

It is obvious that violent communication is not successful communication. Yet we unconsciously practice violent communication in every culture, at every time, in every social class. The root of violent communication can be discerned in disordered affection, e.g.: feeling of being pushed, hurried, or desperate; the ‘I-want-it-so-badly virus;’ ingratitude; comparing with others; power plays, etc. Furthermore, stress and an inferiority complex, tiredness, tunnel vision, dissatisfaction, the fear to get a raw deal, and desperation can lead to violent communication.

Is there a solution to the dilemma of abusing power and practising violent communication? The first step is to become aware of your own ways of communicating. For this reason, it is helpful to read biblical texts as a mirror for one’s own behaviour since ancient dramas function as a mirror for the audience (mimesis). This article is, to my knowledge, is the first scientific attempt to analyse a biblical text with the theory of non-violent communication.

A masterpiece of failed violent communication is the questioning of Jesus before Pontius Pilate in John 18:26-19:16a. In what follows, I present a close reading of the pericope from a communicative perspective.⁴ The analysis intends to reveal the violent communication

³ <https://www.nonviolentcommunication.com/>

⁴ Cf. also Carola Diebold-Scheuermann, *Jesus vor Pilatus. Eine exegetische Untersuchung zum Verhör durch Pilatus (Joh 18,28-19,16a)* (SBB 32, Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk 1996; Michael Theobald, “Gattungswandel in der johanneischen Passionserzählung. Die Verhöre Jesu durch Pilatus (Johannes 18,33-38; 19,8-12) im Licht der Acta Isidori und anderer

strategies and their consequences. It will become clear at the end that violent language is a sign of human weakness, while non-violent communication points to human strength.

The Context of John 18-19 - Climax of a Violent Drama

John's Gospel: A Drama

Jesus' passion according to John already begins with the prologue. The logos is rejected by his own (οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον - 1:11). Further motifs of this violent drama⁵ are widely spread in the entire Gospel narrative: e.g., the Christological title ἀμὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ αἴρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου (1:29, 36), the motif of the hour (2:4), the threefold mention of the Passover, and the temple cleansing (2:13-25) are anticipations of the 'real' passion which is told in chapters 18–19. As well as Mark's Gospel John can be called a passion narrative with a long introduction.

John's Gospel is composed as a drama in five⁶ or seven acts,⁷ framed with a prologue and an epilogue.⁸ The dramatic highlight is Jesus'

Prozessdialoge," in *Studies in the Gospel of John and its Christology*, ed. Joseph Verheyden/Geert van Oyen (BETHL 265, Leuven: Peeters 2014), 447-483.

⁵ The Gospel of John meets Aristotle's dramatic theory:

- Topical issues in the Johannine community: Creed – practicing of faith – community life – leadership – human weaknesses – social stigma.
- Process with role change: Jesus' role from victim to winner of life.
- Search for truth: "What is truth?" (18:38).
- Voluntary suffering: Jesus' sovereignty.
- Individual and general fate: Jesus, Jewish people, Gentiles, Johannine community.
- Death and immortality need to be addressed: Pascha theology, crucifixion and resurrection.

⁶ Cf. Winfried Verburg, *Passion als Tragödie? Die literarische Gattung der antiken Tragödie als Gestaltungsprinzip der Johannespassion* (SBS 182, Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk 1999), 91-100; Uta Poplutz, "Das Drama der Passion. Eine Analyse der Prozesserschätzung Joh 18,28-19,16a unter Berücksichtigung dramentheoretischer Gesichtspunkte," in *The Death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Gilbert van Belle (BETHL 200; Leuven: University Press 2007), 769-782.

⁷ Cf. Ludger Schenke, *Das Johannesevangelium. Einführung, Text, dramatische Gestalt* (Urban-Taschenbücher 446; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 1992); Beate Kowalski, *Die Hirtenrede im Kontext des Johannesevangeliums* (SBB 31; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk 1996).

⁸ Cf. F.R.M. Hitchcock, "Is the Fourth Gospel a Drama?," in *The Gospel of John as Literature. An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Perspectives*, ed. Mark W. G. Stibbe (New Testament Tools and Studies 17; Leiden: Brill 1993), 15-24 (original: 1923); Neal Flanagan, "The Gospel of John as Drama," *Bible Today* 19 (1981): 264-270; Tobias Hägerland, "John's Gospel: A Two-Level Drama," *JSNT* 25, no. 3 (2003): 309-322; Christos Karakolis, "The Logos-Concept and Dramatic Irony in the Johannine Prologue and Narrative," in *The Prologue of the Gospel of John. Its Literary, Theological, and Philosophical Contexts*, ed. Jan Gabriël van der Watt and Richard Alan Culpepper (WUNT 359; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2016), 139-156; Clayton R.

revelation in John 10:30: “I and the Father are one.”⁹ The compositional structure of John’s Gospel is disputed among scholars.¹⁰ The following structure is my modification of Ludger Schenke’s convincing structure of John’s Gospel:

John 1:1-18	Prologue
I John 1:19-2:12	Exposition <i>John 2:1-12: Wedding at Cana</i>
II John 2:13-4:54	Jesus’ encounters with Jews and Samaritans <i>John 4:46-54: Healing of an official’s son</i>
III John 5:1-6:71	Powerful Signs and Words of Jesus <i>John 5:1-9: Healing of a paralysed man</i> <i>John 6:1-15: Multiplication of the bread</i> <i>John 6:16-21: Walking on the sea</i> <i>John 6:35, 41, 48, 51: I am the bread</i>
IV John 7:1-10:42	Escalation of the Conflict between Jesus and Jews about his origin and destination <i>John 8:12: I am the light</i> <i>John 9:1-7: Healing of the blind man</i> <i>John 10:7, 9: I am the door</i> <i>John 10:11, 14: I am the shepherd</i>
V John 11:1-12:50	Symbolic Acts – Anticipations of Jesus’ Passion and Resurrection <i>John 11:1-44: Resurrection of Lazarus</i> <i>John 11:25: I am the resurrection and life</i>
VI John 13:1-17:26	Jesus’ Hour – Farewell from his Disciples and Instructions for the Future <i>John 14:6: I am the way, and the truth, and the life.</i> <i>John 15:1, 5: I am the true vine</i>
VII John 18:1-20:29(30f)	Passion and Resurrection
John 21:1-23(24f)	Ecclesial Summary

Table 1: Composition of John’s Drama

It is commonly held by the majority of Johannine scholars that John applies dramatic features of an ancient tragedy to his Jesus narrative. The fourth Gospel is composed according to the rules described by Aristotle: prologue with the introduction of the drama, parados with the introduction of the characters, episodes developing the play, and an exodus with a conclusion. The topic has to be relevant, and the change of roles has to be part of the tragedy. Furthermore, searching for the truth, voluntary suffering, individual and common fates, and

Bowen, “The Fourth Gospel as Dramatic Material,” *JBL* 49 (1930): 292-305; C. Milo Connick, “The Dramatic Character of the Fourth Gospel,” *JBL* 67 (1948): 159-169; William R. Domeris, “The Johannine Drama,” *JTSA* 42 (1983): 29-35; E. Kenneth Lee, “The Drama of the Fourth Gospel,” *ET* 65 (2008): 173-175; Jo-Ann A. Brant, “The Fourth Gospel as Narrative and Drama,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Johannine Studies*, ed. Judith M. Lieu and Martinus C. de Boer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 186-202; Gérard Rochais, “Jean 7: Une construction littéraire dramatique, à la manière d’un scénario,” *NTS* 39 (1993): 355-378.

⁹ Cf. Ludger Schenke, “Joh 7-10: Eine dramatische Szene,” *ZNW* 80 (1989): 172-192.

¹⁰ Cf. George Mlakuzhyil, *The Christocentric Literary Structure of the Fourth Gospel* (AnBib 117; Roma: Biblical Institute Press 1987).

death and immortality are addressed. Choral interludes and the fading out of figures are characteristics of the story.

John's Passion Narrative (John 18-19)

In the following, central aspects of the composition and theology of the Johannine passion narrative are presented. Which textual signals structure the text? Only a very few time references can be found in the passion of John. Implicitly, the arrest of Jesus is dated on the eve of the preparation day of the Passover (18:3), the interrogation before Annas on the same evening or at night (18:18, 25). Explicit time indications are given for the interrogation before Pilate on the morning of the preparation day of the Passover (18:28; 19:14), and Jesus' condemnation at the 6th hour (19:14). The hour of death, which is precisely mentioned in the Synoptics, is omitted in John's Gospel. Instead, the hour is distinguished in which the disciple whom Jesus loves takes Jesus' mother into his own home (19:27). Time references only play a role insofar as they underline the haste of the Roman proceedings against Jesus. Therefore, the preparation day of the Passover and the Paschal amnesty are explicitly mentioned. In summary, it can be said that places, actors and speeches are more important for the plot.

It is therefore advisable to structure the passion narrative according to changes of location and actors. A clear five-part concentric structure can be recognised. The two interrogations (18:12-27; 18:28–19:16a) of Jesus with the subsequent crucifixion are framed by two scenes that John locates in a garden: Jesus' arrest¹¹ and his burial. The motif of the garden alludes to the narratives of creation and sin in Gen 2:4b-25; 3:1-24,¹² while the focus of John 18-19 is on the long interrogation of Jesus before Pilate, which reveals dramatic elements of design.

Thus, a well-organised structure of text segments becomes evident throughout the Gospel, as well as in John 18-19. Jesus' questioning before Pilate is the central part of John's passion narrative:

¹¹ References to the vocation narrative in 1:35-41 (18:4, 7: τίνα ζητεῖτε;) and to the ἐγώ εἰμι sayings are given here.

¹² Cf. Igna Marion Kramp, *Die Gärten und der Gärtner im Johannesevangelium. Eine raumsemantische Untersuchung* (FThSt 76; Münster: Aschendorff Verlag 2017); Id., "Habe ich dich nicht mit ihm im Garten gesehen?" (Joh 18,26). Jesu Jünger in Joh 18,1f. und die antiken Philosophenschulen im Garten," in *Colloquium Iohanneum. Erzählung und Briefe im johanneischen Kreis*, ed. Uta Popluth and Jörg Frey (WUNT II/420; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2016), 43-56.

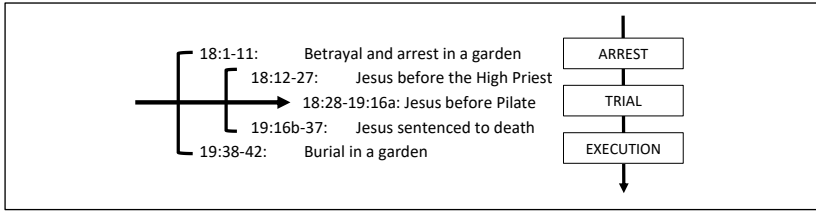


Table 2: Composition of John's Passion Narrative

Ancient dramas were performed onstage; contrasts between interior and exterior space underline the contrast of characters. The spectator can only watch the events taking place outside. The interrogation of Jesus in the interior spaces could only be heard by the audience but he remains invisible. Jesus' truth¹³ remains hidden in the interior space. This hiddenness contrasts his open speech in public spaces. Simultaneously, Peter, servants, an officer and a maid in the courtyard are visible. Thus, Peter's denial is accessible to all.

John creates a sharp contrast between the narrative figures: on the one hand, the truth of Jesus, the protagonist, in the interior space remains a mystery for the audience. At the same time, the performances of Pilate (partly), the groups of Roman soldiers and Jews are visible to all. Thus, the actors in the outer areas are presented as negative identification figures whilst the positive example (Jesus) is invisible. The plot is driven forward through the dialogues between the actors.

'Dialogue' between Jesus, Pontius Pilate, and the Crowd

Composition of Jesus' Questioning by Pontius Pilate

Jesus' questioning by Pontius Pilate is the centrepiece of John's passion narrative. It is disputed among scholars whether the questioning of Jesus has a concentric or linear-parallel structure with two external frames that take place in a garden (18:1; 19:41: κήπος).¹⁴

¹³ Cf. Thomas Söding, "Die Macht der Wahrheit und das Reich der Freiheit: Zur johanneischen Deutung des Pilatus-Prozesses (Joh 18,28–19,16)," *ZThK* 93, no. 1 (1996): 35-58.

¹⁴ Cf. Jean Zumstein, *Der Prozess Jesu vor Pilatus. Ein Beispiel johanneischer Eschatologie, in: Kreative Erinnerung. Relecture und Auslegung im Johannesevangelium* (ATANT 84; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag 2004), 241-252 argues a concentric structure.

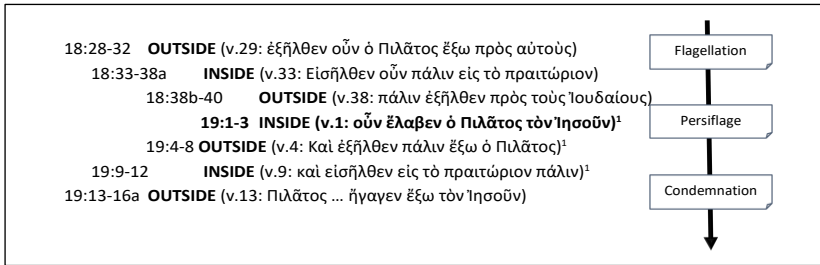


Table 3: Composition of Jesus' Questioning by Pontius Pilate

Analysis of Space and Time

John 18:28–19:16a begins with a transition. Jesus is brought from Caiaphas to the Praetorium of Pontius Pilate (ἄγουσιν ... εἰς τὸ πραιτώριον). The soldiers do not enter the building (καὶ αὐτοὶ οὐκ εἰσῆλθον εἰς τὸ πραιτώριον).¹⁵ It seems that they wait outside as they took Jesus after his conviction (19:16b: παρέλαβον οὖν τὸν Ἰησοῦν). The cooperation between the Roman governor and the Jewish soldiers is seamless, silent, and works hand-in-hand: In 19:16 John uses παρέδωκεν for Pontius Pilate and παρέλαβον for the soldiers.

Pilate's constant change of place is characteristic of the following questioning of Jesus. Four times Pontius Pilate goes outside (ἔξω πρὸς αὐτούς (18:29); ἐξῆλθεν πρὸς τοὺς Ἰουδαίους (18:38), ἐξῆλθεν πάλιν ἔξω (19:4); ἤγαγεν ἔξω (19:13), three times he returns into the Praetorium: εἰσῆλθεν οὖν πάλιν εἰς τὸ πραιτώριον (18:33), implicit change (19:1), εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὸ πραιτώριον (19:9).

A piercing scream of Jews is audible in the Praetorium (John 19:12) “If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend; everyone who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar.” This is the turning point where the natural spatial boundaries are broken. The hitherto protected interior space in which Jesus is interrogated by Pilate turns into an exterior setting due to the call of the mob.

¹⁵ Cf. Steven A. Hunt, “The Roman Soldiers at Jesus' Arrest: ‘You are Dust, and to Dust You Shall Return,’” in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel. Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures*, ed. John Steven A. Hunt and Donald Francois Tolmie (WUNT 314; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2013), 554-567.

Apart from the change of place (18:28: ἀπὸ τοῦ Καϊάφα εἰς τὸ πραιτώριον), the time of day is given (v. 28: ἦν δὲ πρωΐ) at the beginning of the interrogation. Within the long text, only indefinite time specifications are used. Precise time details are only given at the very end of v. 14: ἦν δὲ παρασκευὴ τοῦ πάσχα, ὥρα ἦν ὡς ἕκτη. It is the only exact time in the entire Passion narrative. It is of particular importance as it indicates the (negative) climax of the drama, Jesus’ sentencing. Furthermore, it has a deeper theological meaning: Jesus’ crucifixion simultaneously takes place with the slaughter of the Paschal lambs in the temple. This means that Jesus is presented as the new Paschal lamb by John.

Analysis of the Characters

A long list of actors is involved in Jesus’ Passion according to John.¹⁶ We can discern individuals and groups which are listed below. The majority of the characters act against Jesus or behave neutrally:

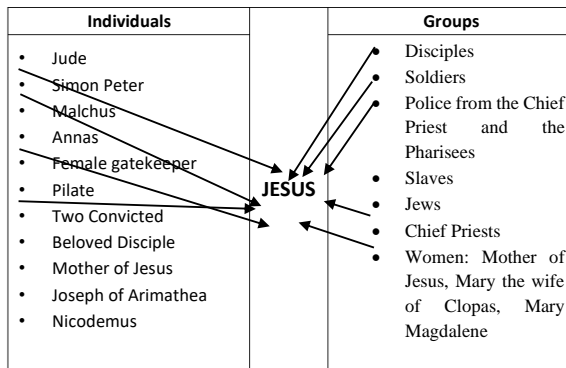


Table 4: Actors in John’s Passion Narrative

According to René Girard’s and Raymund Schwager’s mimetic theory, this can be called a universal gathering of all against one.¹⁷ Almost all characters are caught in the maelstrom of conflict. There is a

¹⁶ Sönke Finnern developed a distinguished method for analysing narrative characters: Sönke Finnern, *Narratologie und biblische Exegese. Eine integrative Methode der Erzählanalyse und ihr Ertrag am Beispiel von Matthäus 28* (WUNT II/285; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2010); Sönke Finnern and Jan Rüggeheimer, *Methoden der neutestamentlichen Exegese. Ein Lehr- und Arbeitsbuch* (UTB 4212; Tübingen: A. Francke Verlag 2016).

¹⁷ Cf. Raymund Schwager, *Brauchen wir einen Sündenbock? Gewalt und Erlösung in den biblischen Schriften* (Gesammelte Schriften 2; Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder Verlag 2016), 259-266, 266: “According to Girard’s analyses, the scapegoat mechanism has a universal dimension

mimetic pressure of rejection which finds its expression in unfounded allegations and irrational violence which are contagious. Desire is the central element of human behaviour. Actually, hostile parties unite in their designs against an innocent victim. Actors who do not act against Jesus do not intervene in the events. They only appear at Jesus' death and burial (Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea). Others are more like extras on the stage (a female gatekeeper, and two convicted, slaves). These are typical phenomena of the mechanism of expulsion. From the very beginning, the accused Jesus has no chance of a fair trial. Everyone conspires against him.

Why do these actors act this way? What are their motives? Ignatius of Loyola gives a sophisticated answer to these questions. In his 'Spiritual exercises'¹⁸ he distinguishes three different types of people regarding their behaviour in following Jesus: the postpone, the compromiser, and the free person. The postpone has a vague interest in a life committed to loving service in imitation of Christ but feels that there are many more pressing needs to attend to. The compromiser is making moves toward such a life, and proffers various conditions to God: "I will follow you as long as I get to..." The truly free person ('indifference') does highly unusual things. God will lead the person to exciting new horizons of love, service, of creative works of justice.¹⁹

Applying this classification to the actors in the passion of Jesus, Jude, Simon Peter, Annas, and Pilate are postponers. The compromisers are Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. Only five figures are truly free: Jesus, the Beloved Disciple, and the group of the three women.

Confronted with actors who can be classified as postponers and compromisers in a court case is a conceivably bad starting position. Both groups are predisposed to violent communication. For instance, the office of the High Priest is reacting out of anger: "Is that how you answer the high priest?" (18:22). His verbal expression is accompanied by a violent act by one of his servants who slaps Jesus in the face (ἔδωκεν ῥάπισμα). Simon Peter is defensive when denying Jesus: "I am not" (18:17, 25, 27). Jesus proves to be a model of non-violent

in that it is repeated at all times and among all peoples in overt and covert ways." (translation: B. Kowalsky)

¹⁸ Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, ed. Louis J. Puhl (Chicago: Loyola Press 2021).

¹⁹ Cf. Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises: Second Week – Three Classes of Men*.

communication. He always spoke openly to the world in synagogues and the temple (18:20), and he is hearing even in disagreement (18:23). Let us now move to the analysis of verbal communication in John 18:26–19:16a.

Analysis of the Communication

The focus of the analysis will be on verbal communication, the dynamics of which can be seen in the following table. Evaluations of the communication are indicated in the table and will be explained further.

Sceneries	Jewish Mob	Pontius Pilate	Jesus
18:28-32 OUTSIDE		“What accusation (κατηγορία) do you bring against this man?” (v. 29)	
	“If this man were not an evildoer (κακὸν ποιῶν) , we would not have handed him over.” (v. 30)		
	ASSUMING		
		“Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.” (v. 31)	
	AVOIDING CONFLICTS		
	“It is not lawful for us to put any man to death.” (v. 31)		
REJECTING A PROPOSAL, “INNOCENT”			

Sceneries	Jewish Mob	Pontius Pilate	Jesus
<p>18:33-38a</p> <p>INSIDE</p>		<p>“Are you the king of the Jews?” (v. 33)</p>	
			<p>“Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?” (v. 34)</p>
		<p>“Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me; what have you done (τί ἐποίησας)?” (v. 35)</p>	
		<p>AVOIDING CONFLICTS</p>	
			<p>“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 the world.” (v.36)</p>
		<p>“So you are a king?” (v.37)</p>	

Sceneries	Jewish Mob	Pontius Pilate	Jesus
		LEADING QUESTION	<p>“You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice.” (v.37)</p>
		<p>“What is truth?” (v.38)</p>	
		LEADING QUESTION	
		18:38b-40 OUTSIDE	
<p>“Not this man, but Barab'bas!” (v.40)</p>			
ACCUSING			

Sceneries	Jewish Mob	Pontius Pilate	Jesus
<p>19:1-3 INSIDE</p>	<p>Soldiers: “Hail, king of the Jews!” (v.3)</p>		
	<p>MOCKING</p>		
<p>19:4-8 OUTSIDE</p>		<p>“See, I am bringing him out to you, that you may know that I find no crime in him.” (v.4)</p>	
		<p>“Behold the man!” (v.5)</p>	
		<p>EXPOSING JESUS</p>	
	<p>“Crucify him, crucify him!” (v.6)</p>		
	<p>CONDEMN-ING</p>		
		<p>“Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no crime in him.“ (v.6)</p>	
	<p>AVOIDING CONFLICTS</p>		
<p>“We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he has made himself the Son of God.” (v.7)</p>			

Sceneries	Jewish Mob	Pontius Pilate	Jesus
	ACCUSING		
19:9-12 INSIDE		“Where are you from?” (v.9)	
		“You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?” (v.10)	
		ARGUMENT BY AUTHOR- ITY	
			“You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore he who delivered me to you has the greater sin.” (v.11)
	“If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend; every one who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar (Καῖσαρ). ” (v.12)		REAL AU- THORITY

Sceneries	Jewish Mob	Pontius Pilate	Jesus
	MANIPULATING WITH “LOYALTY”		
19:13-16a OUTSIDE		“Behold your king (βασιλεύς!)” (v.14)	
		EXPOSING JESUS	
	“Away with him, away with him, crucify him!” (v.15)		
	CONDEMNING		
		“Shall I crucify your king (βασιλεύς)?” (v.15)	
		LEADING QUESTION	
	“We have no king (βασιλεύς) but Caesar (Καῖσαρ).” (v.15)		
	“LOYAL”, “CORRECT”		

Table 5: “Dialogue” between Jesus, Pontius Pilate, and the Crowd

The entire questioning is characterised by passing each other, contradictions, and propaganda.

The contrast between the interior and exterior space as well as the moment of breaking the spatial boundaries is illustrated in the table below.

INTERIOR SPACE: Pilatus and Jesus	EXTERIOR SPACE: Crowd
Invisible for the audience: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilate questions Jesus about the truth • Flagellation of Jesus 	Visible for the audience: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persiflage with a crown of thorns • Sentencing to death

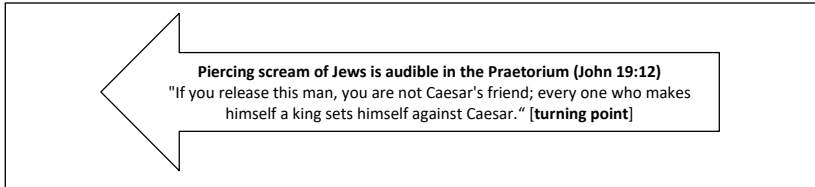


Table 6: Interior versus Exterior

In the first scene, Pontius Pilate opens the investigation against Jesus with an inquiry about his alleged guilt (Τίνα κατηγορίαν φέρετε [κατὰ] τοῦ ἀνθρώπου τούτου;). The accusers are the Jews who remain outside the Praetorium. Already in this first exchange of words, the dynamic of the groundless condemnation becomes visible. There is no convincing reason for the accusation.²⁰ Instead, the Jews argue with a manipulating insinuation. Pilate remains entirely in his role as Roman prefect. However, he already shows his true face here as someone who avoids conflict and wants to push the problem of Jesus away. The accusing Jews present themselves as innocent, who in principle do not pronounce a death sentence on people. In doing so, they too push the problem away. Jesus remains silent in this scene; both parties, Romans and Jews, negotiate over him. The first charge against Jesus is evildoer (κακὸν ποιῶν). Even though the charges remain vague, the death sentence has already been determined (v. 31). The accused Jesus has no chance.

The second scene is completely different. A dialogue between Jesus and Pontius Pilate takes place in the protected interior of the Praetorium. The big theme of this first interrogation question relates to the authority and power of Jesus. The scene opens with Pilate asking if

²⁰ Cf. Pinchas Lapide, *Wer war schuld an Jesu Tod?* (GTS 1419; Gütersloh: G. Mohn 1987); Géza Vermes, *Die Passion. Die wahre Geschichte der letzten Tage im Leben Jesu* (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag 2006).

Jesus is the king of the Jews. It can be assumed that he is thinking in political categories here. Both parties avoid direct confrontation by asking counter-questions (vv. 34, 35, 38). Pontius Pilate continues with an enquiry question, which can be found in this form literally in biblical narratives of the Fall of Man (τί ἐποίησας; see Gen 3:13; 4:10 etc.). At the same time, he dismisses responsibility for the interrogation and refers to the Jewish accusers. Once again, he presents himself as innocent and supposedly neutral. In Jesus' answer in v. 36, the narrator John uses the stylistic device of misunderstanding by introducing another level of meaning for the theme of kingship. Pilate's reply in v. 37 remains open-ended; how he defines the term 'king' is not clear. Jesus' answer is very wise. By making it clear to Pilate that it is not he who has presented himself as (political) king, he shows sovereignty. I.e.: Jesus (again) switches to another level of meaning. Both dialogue partners are talking past each other. The final word in this scene remains with Pilate, who asks the famous question, "What is truth?" (v. 38). It is especially addressed to the spectators of the drama. In the presence of Jesus, it should be clear to them that it is wrong. The correct question should be: "Who is the truth?" because Jesus has revealed himself as truth (14:6).²¹ The second scene is untypical of a due process of law; the cause of the accusation against Jesus again remains vague.

The third scene is very short and takes place outside again. Pilate presents himself as inconsistent, unreliable, and cowardly. While his opening sentence "I find no crime in him" (Ἐγὼ οὐδεμίαν εὐρίσκω ἐν αὐτῷ αἰτίαν) should automatically lead to an orderly end to the trial, he leaves it up to the Jews to decide whether the paschal amnesty can be applied to Jesus. In the case of proven innocence and lack of charges, no amnesty is required. Here at the latest, it becomes clear that Pilate is pulling the strings and handing over all power to the mob. He thus makes himself an accomplice of the false accusers and becomes the guilty party. The Jews take on the role of accusers, which actually belongs to the governor. A double role reversal takes place, which (only) the audience can perceive. The role reversal leads to not exercising responsibility and not exercising authority where it is due.

²¹ Cf. Beate Kowalski, "'Was ist Wahrheit?'" (Joh 18,38a). Zur literarischen und theologischen Funktion der Pilatusfrage in der Johannespassion," in *Im Geist und in der Wahrheit. Studien zum Johannesevangelium und zur Offenbarung des Johannes sowie andere Beiträge* (FS Martin Hasitschka, NTA 52; Münster: Aschendorff Verlag 2008), 201-227.

At this point, it becomes dangerous for the accused, because a fair trial cannot be expected. The violent language quickly leads to further bullying strategies that threaten to destroy the innocent accused. There is no need for a charge anymore.

This is exactly what happens from **the fourth scene** onwards. The fourth scene is again very short. It consists solely of the soldiers' humiliating mockery of Jesus. One of the worst verbal psychological weapons, which deprives a person of dignity, isolates him from the community, and permanently brands him, is used against Jesus. From here on, one can no longer speak of a trial. The spiral of violence turns faster and faster, condemnation has taken place, and arguments are no longer used. Where dialogue stops, violence dominates.

The **fifth scene** takes place outside again. For the first time, Jesus is also visible to the audience, but not audible. He is silent and thus remains sovereign. No word, no argument, no self-defence, no matter how well chosen, could have tipped the situation. Pontius Pilate parades Jesus to present himself as innocent. He hands him over to the mob, which applauds with cries of crucifixion.

Pontius allows Jesus' condemnation to death on the cross. Pilate cedes his authority to the crowd, who contradicts itself: while in v. 31 they argued that "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death" (v. 31), they now demand and decide Jesus' crucifixion. Pontius Pilate hands Jesus' fate over to the mobbing crowd in order to present himself as innocent. The mob applauds with cries of crucifixion. At the centre of this 'dialogue' is the condemnation of Jesus to death on the cross which is pronounced by the crowd. Pilate cedes his authority to the crowd. To achieve their goal, the crowd adds a new argument against Jesus that has not been put forward so far: that he made himself the Son of God (v. 7). It seems that new reasons are always being sought and put forward to achieve the common goal. The violent language that the accusers are getting more and more into is facilitated by the fact that they act as a group. The individual does not have to take responsibility.

The **sixth scene** is again set in the Praetorium. It begins with a question about the origin and identity of Jesus. As Jesus remains silent, Pilate adds an argument of authority. Jesus then addresses the issue of authority: it is always derived from God, even Pilate's authority. This argument makes clear that real authority can be neither worldly nor political

if not given by God. At this point, a rupture of the two spaces occurs: from outside, the cry of the mob penetrates into the inner rooms of the Praetorium and manipulates Pilate with the argument that Jesus' claim of kingship is against the Roman emperor. Once more the argument of the claim of kingship is made, but now not by Pilate.

The **last and seventh scene** is a bitter satire of a court case. Pilate presents Jesus as the king to the Jewish crowd, who again chant condemnatory cries of crucifixion. Pilate's direct question "Shall I crucify your king (βασιλεύς)?" (v. 15), however, they evade by making a confession to the Roman emperor: "We have no king (βασιλεύς) but Caesar (Καῖσαρ)" (v. 15). It is obviously no longer about the accused Jesus. The real conflict is between Pilate and the Jewish people. Any just judge should have had the courage to stop the proceedings here at the latest. However, the conflict has gone too far and can hardly be resolved by dialogue. Conflict theories make it clear that at a certain point a conflict can no longer be resolved through dialogue and diplomacy. In the end, the reason for the accusation is beside the point; the only goal is the destruction of the hated person.

Verbal communication is underlined by non-verbal communication: The setting does not correspond to the customs of a proper interrogation. It is unusual for a crowd outside the interrogation room to influence the proceedings. A correct judge should have rejected this setting.

The Jews never enter the Praetorium in order to remain pure for the celebration of the Passover (18:28). They present themselves as innocent, obedient to the law, and correct. Most striking is Pilate's constant back and forth, which underlines inner turmoil and ambivalence. He orders the scourging of Jesus (19:1) and assumes the seated role of a judge at a place called "The Stone Pavement" (19:13). Finally, Pilate delivers Jesus to be crucified (19:16: παρέδωκεν αὐτὸν αὐτοῖς ἵνα σταυρωθῆ). In doing so, he fulfils the wish of the Jews against his own conviction. Three times he underlines Jesus' innocence (18:38; 19:4, 6), and twice he shifts his responsibility and leaves the decision to the mob (18:31, 39). The motives that lead him to judgement are general fear (19:8), and fear for his career (19:13).

How could he have come to this? On the one hand, there are contradictions in the charges (evildoer [κακὸν ποιῶν], v. 30; king of the Jews [v.12], v.33; Son of God, v.7) that are not revealed by the judge, Pontius Pilate. On the other hand, people fall out of character: Pontius Pilate is an

ambivalent, weak prefect who does not perform his role as such and renounces his authority in favour of his career. The crowd takes on the role of accusers. Manipulative language, arguments of authority, insinuations, questions of suggestion, condemnations, mocking, conflict avoidance strategies, and evading responsibility are characteristics of violent language. Self-interest, personal weakness and power interests, fear of encountering the truth, and the dynamic of violent language, which increases more and more, ultimately lead to the crucifixion of Jesus.

Jesus' attitude is admirable. Although he is isolated, he remains sovereign, silent in the face of arguments against him that have no substance or truth. He is the only one who uses non-violent language during the interrogation. Courage and boundless trust in God, inner strength, and firmness are part of it.

The strategies of violent and non-violent communication as revealed by the interrogation can be summarised as follows:

Violent communication	Non-Violent Communication
Judging/accusing others	Consciousness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A set of principles that support living a life of compassion, collaboration, courage, and authenticity.
Bullying	Language <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding how words contribute to connection or distance.
Scapegoating	Authentic communication
Gossiping	
Gossiping	
Badmouthing	
Having racial bias	
Blaming	
Finger pointing	
Discriminating	
Speaking without listening	
Criticizing others or ourselves	

Table 7: Communication Techniques

Pilate's Communication

Pilate's violent communication can be found throughout the interrogation. His communication technique is characterised by the entire range of violent language. He is judging and accusing Jesus (18:39; 19:6), and he is finger-pointing (19:5, 19:14). Furthermore, he uses political rhetoric (18:35), and leading questions that are highly manipulative (18:37, 38). It is particularly reprehensible that he acts against his own reason and conscience (18:38; 19:4, 6, 12) and puts the decision-making process into the hands of the Jewish mob (18:31, 35, 39; 19:6, 15, 16). Thus, he avoids any confrontation. The deeper reason for his behaviour is fear (19:8).

Pilate has blind spots when he listens to the mob (the majority) and to Jesus without deciding anything. The frequent changes of position underline his indecisiveness. Through his attitude of avoiding conflict, he provokes conflict. Instead of responding to questions, he asks leading questions and argues with authority. He exposes Jesus instead of protecting him against injustice. His self-image can be characterised as innocent.

Pilate is neither a free nor a balanced person. Consequently, he is been manipulated by the Jews and he manipulates an ambivalent, unreliable character who causes hurt and harm. Nevertheless, he is part of God's history of salvation and thus is mentioned in the apostolic creed.²²

The Crowd's Communication Techniques

The crowd²³ in front of the Praetorium is also characterised by violent communication. They suspect, accuse, and reject an amnesty without justification; they condemn and manipulate Pilate with the argument of lack of loyalty. Further, they mock, whilst presenting themselves

²² Cf. Further, Josef Pichler, *Pontius Pilatus – eine Charakterstudie*, in: *Josef Pichler, Jesus, der Lebensspender. Vom spirituellen Reichtum des Johannesevangeliums* (Schriften der Philosophisch-Theologischen Hochschule St. Pölten 8; Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet 2015), 74-115; Donald Francois Tolmie, "Pontius Pilate. Failing in More Ways Than One," in *Character Studies*, ed. Hunt and Tolmie, 578-597.

²³ Cf. Cornelis Bennema, "The Crowd. A Faceless, Divided Mass," in *Character Studies*, ed. Hunt and Tolmie, 347-355; also Ruben Zimmermann, "'The Jews': Unreliable Figures or Unreliable Narration?," in *Character Studies*, ed. Hunt and Tolmie, 71-109; Tobias Nicklas, "Creating the Other. The 'Jews,'" in *The Gospel of John. Past and Future Lines of Scholarship*, Perceiving the Other in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity, ed. Mikhal Bar Asher Sigal and Wolfgang Grünstäudl (WUNT 394; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2017), 49-66.

throughout as innocent, loyal to the state authority of the foreign rulers and politically correct.

The communication behaviour of the crowd reveals blind spots. In their efforts to have Jesus crucified, they do not perceive the tensions and conflicts with the Roman foreign rulers. Soldiers, Jews, chief priests, and officers are groups who gain strength because of group dynamics. The individual can hide behind the group. The group dynamics cause hurt and harm. Hostile parties are temporarily united in their designs against an innocent victim. Mob violence emerges as a factor.

Jesus' Non-Violent Communication

The Jesus figure stands out from all the other actors in the narrative. In contrast to the individuals and groups who engage in violent communication, his verbal and non-verbal communication is non-violent. His speech was always transparent and took place in public places; he did not hide anything (18:20f). Even in conflict and disagreement, he checks back, and strives to hear in order to understand (18:23). In terms of his self-consciousness, he lives a life of courage and authenticity. He shares his power with others rather than using power over others. His language and style reveal that he understands how words contribute to connection or distance.

Jesus' non-violent communication also includes his silence in the right place as well as his upright posture that does not strike back. His behaviour and communication are consistent and authentic. In this way, he reveals himself as a personality who draws his strength from his deep trust in God. He can refrain from playing power games because he draws his natural authority from his relationship with God. Non-violent communication only characterises his attitude in John's passion narrative. The Jesus figure thus becomes a protagonist and role model for the audience/readers.

Dynamics of Violence: Escalation of the Conflict

The dynamic of violent communication leads to the condemnation of Jesus. Conflicting, generalising and vague (18:30: "If this man were not an evildoer, we would not have handed him over.") accusations contribute to the development of the conflict. Another reason for the escalation of the conflict is rivalry and competition. More concretely, it is about the question of the claim to rule: Who is the king (18:33,

37; → 19:3, 14, 15) of the Jews? What is the relationship of this king to the Roman emperor (18:31; 19:6, 7)?

Besides the political level, the conflict also has a religious component. Jesus is accused of blasphemy: “He has made himself the **Son of God**” (19:7). Since this is irrelevant to the Roman foreign rulers, a reason must be found to move the Romans to action.

The custom of a paschal amnesty is Pilate's attempt to acquit Jesus. The fact that he considers such an amnesty, however, implicitly makes Jesus a condemned man. By doing so, Pilate contributes to the further escalation of the conflict.

Conflicts are rarely dealt with objectively, which is also evident in Jesus' interrogation. The Jewish crowd purposefully uses manipulation. They instigate hatred and violence: “You are not Caesar's friend; everyone who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar.” (19:12). In addition, the crowd operates with unfounded and contradicting (19:6, 15) allegations: “It is not lawful for us to put any man to death” (18:31).

The majority of scholars describe John 18:28–19:16a as a dialogue although it is another example (e.g.: 3:1-21) of poor communication which includes the Johannine misunderstandings. At the end of the mishandled and unfair dialogue, it remains open to why Jesus is condemned. Is he an evildoer? Does he claim to be a political king of the Jews and the Son of God? Due to a quantitative power imbalance, the failed and unfair dialogue of all involved develops one-sidedly and to Jesus' disadvantage. Genuine, non-violent communication is condemned to failure from the very beginning. In this case, dialogue cannot even take place because of prejudice and the complete isolation of Jesus from any form of support or defence. Considering all characters makes clear that the power imbalance is massively promoted by Pilate's weak, ambivalent personality. By wanting to avoid conflict and speaking in a seemingly non-violent language, he provokes the progression of the conflict.

Summary

1. Biblical texts, especially the trial of Jesus according to the Gospel of John, are well suited for examining and correcting one's own modes of communication. The passion account of John vividly demonstrates how quickly the spiral of violence

turns and an innocent person is condemned. Violent and non-violent communication reveal one's role within group dynamics as well as one's personality structure. Personalities that are ambivalent, neutral, and indecisive also contribute to the fact that abuse of power can arise and grow unhindered.

2. The ambivalence of Pontius Pilate is the core condition for the abuse of power. If such a psychologically and emotionally weak character is connected with an inferiority complex and a careerist, abusive behaviour can suggest itself.
3. The cause of the abuse of power lies in the weakness of man and his desire to rule over others. The desire for recognition and other expressions of egocentric behaviour compensate for a lack of self-esteem and lead to violent communication.
4. Abuse of power is an expression of violence against a fellow human being or a group of people. It very quickly leads to an escalation of conflicts and a point of no return.
5. Since abuse of power is inextricably linked to human weaknesses, techniques and training in non-violent communication are not enough to protect people, especially the vulnerable, appropriately in the broad spectrum of social contexts. Systemic control instances and juridical measures are needed to make living together possible.
6. Violent and non-violent communication reveal one's role within group dynamics and one's personality structure.
7. Non-violent communication presupposes the goodwill of all those involved. Therefore, the communication techniques of NVC remain fragile.

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