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JESUS AND THE CONTOURS OF OPPRESSION: LABELLING AND DEVIANCE IN THE JOHANNINE PASSION

Mark Finney

*Introduction*¹

John's Gospel has long been seen as a conflict-driven narrative in which Jesus appears to be in constant tension with various groups: 'the Jews'; the socio-religious elite; and even at times, some of those closest to him.² Chapter 7 in particular is regularly expressed in terms of a vociferous anti-Judaism or even anti-Semitism.³ The rising antagonism of the Gospel concludes in the passion narrative, where the enemies of Jesus finally arrest and convict him and have him put to death. Yet, the Gospel begins with a short account of Jesus' beginnings: he is the *logos*, the en-fleshed word of God come to earth to bring divine revelation and truth. Describing the movement of Jesus' beginning to his passion is the primary focus of John's plot and is narrated through the lens of where the locus of 'truth' lies. This is John's battleground. In the ensuing conflict, language and labels are of particular importance to John, especially those ascribed to Jesus, and how this divinely appointed figure becomes the blasphemer and political subversive who must be crucified.

The aim of this study is to evaluate approaches to the Johannine passion narrative using the contemporary sociological model of labelling and devi-

1. For purposes of this study, the author and final redactor of the Fourth Gospel will simply be labelled 'John', with no presumptions about the historical figure(s) behind the name.

2. John uses the term 'Jews' for both the Jewish populace in general and for certain elements of the Jerusalem hierarchy (cf. Jn 2.19; 5.10, 16; 6.41, 52; 7.1, 15; 8.22; 9.18, 22; 10.24; 18.28; 19.7). When describing the latter he does not indicate the precise nature of the group although at other points he makes reference to the Pharisees (1.24; 4.1; 7.32, 45, 47; 8.13; 9.13, 40; 11.46, 47, 57; 12.19; 18.3), Levites (1.19), and priests (1.19; 11.47, 57; 12.10; 18.3; 19.6). Unlike the Synoptists he never refers to the Herodians (cf. Mt. 22.16; Mk 3.6) or the Sadducees (cf. Mt. 16.6; Mk 12.18; Lk. 20.27).

3. See Paula Fredriksen and Adele Reinhartz (eds.), *Jesus, Judaism and Christian Anti-Judaism: Reading the New Testament after the Holocaust* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

ance theory.⁴ As John Barclay notes, ‘Sociologists have long been concerned with the processes by which societies define and maintain their boundaries, and special attention has been accorded to those individuals or groups that deviate from social norms’.⁵ This is especially true of the ancient world, which was less individualistic than contemporary society and existed within a framework of the importance of concepts such as honour–shame, agonistic environment, dyadic personality and limited good.⁶ The use of labelling is also employed critically within ancient societies for purposes of demarcating the ‘in-group’ (insiders) from the ‘out-group’ (outsiders). Of additional import for the purposes of this study are the different perceptions of Jesus within his social context, the actors who perceived him to be bringing profound revelation to Israel and others who considered him both an imposter and blasphemer and so sought his death. The following study begins with an outline of the labelling and deviance model, which will then be applied to the Johannine passion narrative.⁷

Labelling and Deviance Theory

Labelling

Labelling is the technical word for the social interpersonal behaviour of name-calling. In all cultures, names, as social labels, are means by which individuals and groups are evaluated and categorized and which can carry either positive or negative connotations. As such, labels are powerful social symbols, and the use of negative labelling, especially by the socially powerful, can be used as significant and effective weapons in stigmatizing a person as radically out of place. In this way, and from an etic perspective, conflict can be expressed and monitored in the way that derogatory names and epithets are used against others.

4. On the use of models, particularly in respect to understanding ancient texts, see M.T. Finney, *Honour and Conflict in the Ancient World: 1 Corinthians in its Greco-Roman Setting* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2012), pp. 5-12, and the literature cited there.

5. J.M.G. Barclay, ‘Deviance and Apostasy: Some Applications of Deviance Theory to First-Century Judaism and Christianity’, in *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-Scientific Studies of the New Testament in its Context* (ed. Philip F. Esler; London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 114-27 (114).

6. See B.J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993). For a critique of Malina’s project see L.J. Lawrence, *An Ethnography of the Gospel of Matthew: A Critical Assessment of the Use of the Honour Shame Model in New Testament Studies* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

7. For the model applied to the social context of Luke–Acts see B.J. Malina and J.H. Neyrey, ‘Conflict in Luke–Acts: Labelling and Deviance Theory’, in *The Social World of Luke–Acts: Models for Interpretation* (ed. J.H. Neyrey; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), pp. 97-122.

Labelling theory is also termed an 'interactionist' or 'societal reaction' perspective and received its programmatic expression in Howard Becker's monograph *Outsiders*.⁸ There Becker claims, 'In its simplest form, the [interactionist] theory insists that we look at all the people involved in any episode of alleged deviance. When we do, we discover that these activities require the overt or tacit co-operation of many people and groups to occur as they do'.⁹ Ken Plummer gives a detailed account of differing perspectives and nomenclature to labelling theory and broadly assesses, and defends, its usefulness. He notes,

Labelling, then, should not be equated with a theory or a proposition but should be seen as a perspective in deviancy research. And because of this it can harbour several diverse theoretical positions. There is thus a great potential for the perspective to contain theoretical contradictions, and to be eligible for criticisms from all theoretical sides.¹⁰

Deviance

Behaviour is classified as deviant when it disturbs the sense of order that people perceive to structure their world and so stands as a violation of the symbolic universe of socio-cultural norms.¹¹ Persons are considered deviant if their behaviour exists, and remains, outside of such norms, and they are frequently designated by negative labels, which, themselves, become accusations of deviance (contemporary labels may include 'racist', 'paedophile', 'terrorist' or 'prostitute'). Deviance is frequently an issue of *moral* meanings, for the deviant is seen to stand as a threat to the values and structures of a community's sense of morality, and, in some cases, ultimately to threaten the moral universe of those involved in the labelling.¹²

A key element in the cognizance of labelling is the understanding of the labellers themselves. Becker claims,

8. H.S. Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: Macmillan, 1963).

9. Becker, *Outsiders*, p. 183.

10. K. Plummer, 'Misunderstanding Labelling Perspectives', in *Deviant Interpretations: Problems in Criminological Theory* (ed. D. Downes and P. Rock; Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1979), pp. 85-121 (90).

11. Cf. Becker, *Outsiders*, pp. 30, 37. E.M. Schur uses the following useful definition: 'Human behavior is deviant to the extent that it comes to be viewed as involving a *personally discreditable* departure from a group's normative expectations and it *elicits* interpersonal or collective reactions that serve to "isolate," "treat," "correct," or "punish" individuals engaged in such behavior' [italics his] (*Labelling Deviant Behavior: Its Sociological Implications* [New York: Harper and Row, 1971], p. 24).

12. See P. Berger and T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday, 1966); P. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1967).

Social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders. From this point of view, deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an 'offender'. The deviant is one to whom that label has been successfully applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label.¹³

This perspective focuses not just on the act itself but on what is made of the act socially, insisting that this social reaction radically affects the nature, social meaning and implications of the act. Thus, deviance cannot be predicated of acts as such, only of acts as they receive a negative social response or reaction, and, as societies apply their own norms differentially, selecting and stereotyping those they choose to mark as deviant. In this way deviancy may vary from culture to culture¹⁴ and is, in this sense, a product of social interaction: it has a functional not an ontological reality.¹⁵

However, it is of some import to recognize that labelling is a heuristic device and does not (and is not intended to) explain the motivations of the deviant act but focuses only on the reaction to the act, not its originating cause. Hence, it does not provide an 'aetiology' of deviant acts,¹⁶ nor does it explain why societies react as they do to acts they consider deviant. Becker points to factors of political and economic power that enable certain individuals or groups to enforce their definitions of deviancy.¹⁷ Others have gone further in exploring the power struggles in which a threatened element in society seeks to identify and label deviants in accordance with its own interests.¹⁸

When deviants are labelled as such, an assertion is made about their status in society (i.e. their position within a social system), and so about their worth or value. And because status has a cultural value it has a necessary public dimension that rests on the perception and appraisal of others. This social value is based on two considerations: ascribed characteristics and personal achievements. Ascribed characteristics include age, sex, birth, physical features and genealogy, and so ascribed deviant status is therefore rooted in

13. *Outsiders*, p. 9. Likewise, Malina and Neyrey, 'Conflict', p. 100, note, 'Deviance, therefore, refers to those behaviours and conditions judged to jeopardize the interests and social standing of persons who negatively label the behaviour of condition'. Cf. Barclay, 'Deviance', p. 116; Schur, *Labelling*, pp. 3-4. For a critique of Becker's understanding (and definition) of deviance, see Plummer, 'Misunderstanding', pp. 95-96. For a critical overview of deviance theory, see Schur, *Labelling*, pp. 7-36.

14. Cf. Becker, *Outsiders*, pp. 4, 161.

15. Cf. Schur, *Labelling*, p. 16; Barclay, 'Deviance', pp. 115-16.

16. Becker, *Outsiders*, pp. 178-79.

17. *Outsiders*, pp. 17-18.

18. E.M. Schur, *The Politics of Deviance: Stigma, Contests and the Uses of Power* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1980). Cf. Barclay, 'Deviance', p. 117.

some quality that befalls a person outside of their control. Examples within a biblical context would include being born blind (Jn 9.1) or being born a Nazarene (Jn 1.46).

Conversely, personal achievements are derived from one's personal efforts, such as acquisitions, marriage, or work status. Acquired deviant status is thus based on a person's performance of some publicly perceived deviant action such as, in the case of Jesus, the self-appropriation of both kingship (Jn 12.13; 18.36) and divinity (Jn 5.18; 20.28) or the clearing of the Jerusalem Temple, the holy sanctuary of the nation's God (Jn 2.13ff.). If the labelling process succeeds, the new label will come to define the person and engulf all other roles and labels (this is termed the *master status*).¹⁹ Hence, the master status of Judas Iscariot, for example, was 'the traitor', and that of the Pharisees, 'hypocrites'.

The Deviance Process

In general there are three steps in a typical deviance process:

- a group, community or society interprets some behaviour as deviant
- it defines the alleged person who so behaves as deviant
- it accords the treatment considered appropriate to such deviants

These points indicate the influence and relative importance of the social groups involved in the actual defining of deviancy. They are known as the *agents of censure* and include differing categories of people who, together, begin to define the social framework outside of which exists deviancy.²⁰ Such a group must disseminate its opinions, raising such values in the consciousness of the community in order to achieve broader respectability and so a social consensus for its views (this is achieved by actively seeking to inculcate and convert others to the same way of thinking). The group must strive to have the community think pessimistically about any action outside of its designated moral framework and in so doing will generate a cultural stigmatism against the deviant action (e.g. that it is an intolerable evil), so that those engaged in such action are labelled 'outcasts'.²¹ The agents of censure and

19. Becker, *Outsiders*, pp. 32-34; Schur, *Labelling*, pp. 30, 52, 70.

20. These are distinguished as 'rule creators', 'moral entrepreneurs' and 'rule enhancers'. See Malina and Neyrey, 'Conflict', pp. 102-104. Becker's preferred terminology for the third group is 'rule enforcers' (*Outsiders*, pp. 147-63). Interestingly, and with respect to the conflict between Jesus and the Jews, he claims, 'a rule enforcer is likely to believe that it is necessary for the people he deals with to respect him. If they do not, it will be very difficult to do his job; his feeling of security in his work will be lost. Therefore, a good deal of enforcement activity is devoted not to the actual enforcement of rules, but to coercing respect from the people the enforcer deals with. This means that one may be labelled as deviant not because he has actually broken a rule, but because he has shown disrespect to the enforcer of the rule' (p. 158). See also, Schur, *Labelling*, pp. 100-114.

21. Becker (*Outsiders*, pp. 1-18) employs the term 'outsider'.

their converts will thus be bound together, enjoying mutual support, within their fundamental ideology.²²

The deviance-processing agents of first-century Palestine were the Jerusalem elites. These ‘agents’ registered deviance by defining, classifying and labelling types of behaviour or conditions deemed to be outside the norm and, on the basis of the stereotypes thus created, subjected deviants to a ritual of degradation and de-personalization—successfully labelling them as ‘outsiders’. The political dimension of labelling and deviancy is highlighted by Becker:

The function of the group or organization, then, is decided in political conflict . . . if this is true, then it is likewise true that the questions of what rules are to be enforced, what behavior regarded as deviant, and which people labeled as outsiders must also be regarded as political.²³

In respect of the model, the activity of the agents in labelling a deviant consists of three elements: *denunciation*, *retrospective interpretation*,²⁴ and *status degradation ritual*.

1. *Denunciation* is the first step in the labelling process and to be successful must not appear to be in response to any antagonism or misconstrued as a vendetta, but must be posited as the upholding of the moral order of the universe. The denouncer(s) must be seen to underscore the core values of society and be invested with the authority necessary to do so (e.g. chief priests and elders, the official representatives of divine authority upholding the Torah and Temple).
2. *Retrospective interpretation* is introduced when a person is successfully declared a deviant, for the status is then retrojected into the deviant’s past (even to the point of infancy; cf. the ‘sinner’ born blind in Jn 9.1). If this is difficult there may be psycho-physiological scrutiny that looks for evidence of duress, brainwashing, evil spirits, etc.²⁵ The aim of such

22. Barclay, ‘Deviance’, p. 121, claims, ‘the identification of deviants helps to clarify and enforce the boundaries of an insecure community’. Becker (*Outsiders*, p. 3) notes that some deviants (he uses the examples of homosexuals and drug addicts) ‘develop full-blown ideologies explaining why they are right and why those who disapprove of and punish them are wrong’ (cf. Becker, *Outsiders*, pp. 38-39; Schur, *Labelling*, p. 31).

23. *Outsiders*, pp. 7, 17. He claims further, ‘Enforcers, then, responding to the pressures of their own work situation, enforce rules and create outsiders in a selective way. Whether a person who commits a deviant act is in fact labeled a deviant depends on many things extraneous to his actual behavior’ (p. 161).

24. See Schur, *Labelling*, pp. 52-56.

25. Becker, *Outsiders*, pp. 5-6, 26.

behaviour is the shaping of a master status for the deviant.²⁶ The outcome of retrospective interpretation is fivefold:

- Responsibility affirmed. The person or group's responsibility for the deviant action is affirmed.
 - Injury affirmed. Injury or harm resulted from the deviant's action is affirmed, thus labelling it immoral or evil.
 - Victim(s) affirmed. The deviant cannot be forgiven: he is morally vicious; his victims, morally innocent.
 - Condemnation. The deviant is condemned by all concerned and this restores the honour of the condemners and brands the deviant morally reprehensible (the deviant is thus shamed).
 - Appeal to authority. Condemnation and labelling are justified by appeal to some higher order (e.g. God's will, the good of the people, the honour of the nation).
3. However, the alleged deviant is not yet completely labelled, for a clear ritual process must occur that formally identifies the alleged person as deserving the status of deviant. This is the *status degradation ritual*, which publicly categorizes, recasts and assigns a negative moral character to the person, resulting in a total change of their identity and engulfing them within the master status of 'deviant'.²⁷ Normally this takes place in social settings such as trials or hearings in which the ritual is expressive of the moral indignation of the community. The ritual marks the resolution of the conflict: the deviant is successfully labelled, the old identity is destroyed and the old status degraded.

The arrest and trial of Jesus should be understood as a status degradation ritual appropriate to his alleged career as a deviant. The ritual culminates in his public humiliation and crucifixion, and the entombment marks the successful completion of the ritual of status degradation.

Interrupting the Labelling Process

Not all attempts at labelling someone as a deviant are successful, for they can be usurped by techniques such as *neutralization* and *alternative retrospective interpretation*. In the process of *neutralization*, the persons being labelled as deviants are not helpless in the process and may attempt to interrupt it and so upset the clarity of meaning that the accusers must establish. In Matthew's Gospel, for example, the evangelist attempts to obfuscate the clarity of moral

26. Cf. the trial scene in Luke (23.5) and the retrospective interpretation of Jesus' career in Galilee.

27. Cf. Schur's 'status degradation ceremonies' (*Labelling*, pp. 15, 52-53, 70-71).

meaning of the Jewish hierarchy with his report on the bribing of the guards at the tomb to tell lies (27.62-66; 28.11-15).

Within the process of *alternative retrospective interpretation*, there are five points that counteract the five elements of successful retrospective interpretation outlined above:

1. Denial of responsibility. Claims that one is driven by external forces (God, poverty, ignorance).
2. Denial of injury. If unsettling activity caused no harm it cannot be deviant (Jesus' action proved helpful to people).
3. Denial of the victim. The 'victim' is not deserving of sympathy or recompense but someone who deserved what had happened. The action of the deviant is presumed to be fully justified and warranted.
4. Condemnation of condemners. The deviant rejects the moral condemnation of the labellers. For example, Jesus' behaviour throughout his trial and execution was considered honourable while the action of his condemners was shameful and insidious.
5. Appeal to higher loyalties. Deviant behaviour is somehow justified in a numinous sense (for example, Jesus' association with sinners facilitates their turning to God).

Summary

The Johannine narrative is replete with reports and examples of conflict between Jesus and his antagonists. The model outlined above can now be employed to provide a framework for understanding the social processes at work in dealing with the conflict. It will also provide insights into the conflict as a negative honour challenge and allow an in-depth perspective into the complex dynamics of the conflict in terms of the deviance-labelling of Jesus by the Jerusalem hierarchy.

Labelling and Deviance in the Johannine Passion

Status Degradation Ritual

An application of status degradation ritual to the Johannine passion narrative also intertwines with the honour–shame model, which has been extensively investigated in relation to biblical literature in recent years.²⁸

Throughout the Gospel, John presents Jesus as a person whose words and deeds are out of all proportion to the honour status of the village artisan

28. See, e.g., B.J. Malina and J.H. Neyrey (eds.), *The Social World of Luke–Acts: Models for Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991); Philip F. Esler (ed.), *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in its Social Context* (London: SCM, 2005).

known by the 'Jews'. The reader knows that he comes from God and is returning to God (13.1-3; 17.1-5), where he will be glorified with the glory he had before the creation of the world. John asserts clearly that the honour of Jesus comes through the roles and status ascribed to him by God, which constitute consummate honour from the most honourable being known (5.20-27, 36-38; 12.27-28; 13.31; 17.5, 24). It is also ascribed by others (Son of God, 1.49; Christ, 1.41; 10.24; king, 1.49; 6.16; 12.13; saviour, 4.42; and prophet, 4.19; 6.14), and the declaration of the Baptist (acclaiming him 'Son of God', 1.34) is on the basis of God's own prompting.

Thus, Jesus does not seek honour within the prescribed agonistic environment of his social world but is regularly ascribed superlative honour by others.²⁹ In order to persecute and crucify Jesus, his opponents have to undermine his standing in the eyes of the people. This is done through the ritual of status degradation—the process of publicly recasting, re-labelling, humiliating and thus re-categorizing someone as a social deviant. The former identity of the subject is mocked or denounced in order to invalidate it completely.

The passion narrative begins with a comment on Judas and the arrest of Jesus. Judas's betrayal is an act of shame; loyalty to one's group, family or patron was one of the highest virtues of an honour/shame society and betrayal one of the lowest sins. The eating of the Passover meal with the disciples (13.2) is recognition of the group as a surrogate family, and the ensuing sorrow the disciples feel when Jesus intimates that one of them would betray him derives from feelings of dishonour at such an action (13.8-30). Further loss of honour for Jesus ensues with his arrest, for it was inherently humiliating to be seized and bound by others. In the first-century Mediterranean world the binding, tying or nailing of the right arm (the symbol of male power and strength) denoted powerlessness, and so shame.³⁰ Both the betrayal by Judas and the arrest of Jesus would be a claim of honour by the chief priests.

As the passion narrative proceeds, Jesus undergoes further humiliating treatment, which ritually serves to degrade his status. At the Jewish trial he is struck in the face and sent to Caiaphas 'still bound' (18.24). Before Pilate, Jesus' status as an honoured member of Jewish society is totally undermined when his fellow countrymen and leaders, those who should defend him

29. See further B.J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), pp. 33-34; K.C. Hanson and D.E. Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), p. 55; D.C. Duling and N. Perrin, *The New Testament: Proclamation and Parenthesis, Myth and History* (London: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 3rd edn, 1994), p. 114.

30. J.H. Neyrey, "Despising the Shame of the Cross": Honor and Shame in the Johannine Passion Narrative', in *Honor and Shame in the World of the Bible* (ed. V.H. Matthews and D.C. Benjamin; Semeia, 68; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1994), pp. 113-37 (118).

against foreign Gentile oppressors, unanimously reject him and demand that the *paschal privilege* be extended instead to Barabbas, a convicted insurrectionist.³¹ The status degradation ritual intensifies as Jesus, though neither convicted nor sentenced, is handed over to a group of Roman guards who induce severe physical and psychological abuse: flogging, a crown of thorns, mockery and a physical beating around the head (19.1-3).

Within such a procedure, victims are progressively humiliated and stripped of public respect. The flogging entails the dispossession of one's clothing, effectively eliminating all marks of honour and status and indicating the loss of power to cover and defend one's 'shameful parts'. Jesus' head, considered the most honourable part of the body, is then brutalized with a crown of thorns, while the adorning of Jesus in a purple robe, the royal colour, mocks him within the normal trappings of honour. Many of the soldiers proceed to strike him on the face or head, and sarcastically acclaim his honour, 'Hail, King of the Jews' (19.3). Generally, if the honourable parts of the body, the head and face, are struck, spat upon, slapped, blindfolded, or otherwise maltreated, loss of honour ensues.³²

The rituals of crowning, robing and genuflection have each been shown to be a characteristic element in the honouring of Persian and Roman rulers, indicating here that a mock coronation ritual occurs, whose primary function is to ridicule Jesus, the alleged King of the Jews.³³ The pivotal issue, however, lay not so much in the brutal pain endured but the disgrace of loss of honour; to be mocked is by far more painful than the physical beating because it produces the most dreaded of all experiences, social shame.³⁴ Throughout the sequence, the stakes of honour-shame represent a challenge to the public identity and reputation of Jesus.

The action of the Roman soldiers is an attempt by Pilate to appease the Jews, but the presentation of a beaten and humiliated Jesus does nothing to satiate the crowd. Rather, the Jews demanded nothing less than the ultimate penalty for Jesus' deviant and subversive ministry—his death. For the first time, the crucifixion is demanded (19.6), and the Johannine drama then undergoes a number of vivid interrupted cadences, each successively increasing the tension between Pilate and the Jews over the fate of Jesus:

31. John highlights the irony of the choice of Barabbas (Bar-Abba, son of the father) above Jesus, the true Son of the Father.

32. The Synoptics all focus on the various attempts to dishonour Jesus by noting that others spit on him, strike him in the face and head, and ridicule him (Mk 14.65; 15.15; Mt. 26.67-68; 27.27-31; Lk. 22.63-65; 23.11).

33. Neyrey, 'Despising', pp. 125-26.

34. Neyrey, 'Despising', p. 125.

- Pilate protests Jesus' innocence (in doing so shaming himself, for the flogging is then shown to be illegal), but the Jews counter with the charge of Jesus' blasphemy: the claim to be the Son of God.
- Pilate attempts to release Jesus (19.3), but the Jews counter with the nuance of a political charge entailing the question of kingship and loyalty to Caesar. Pilate, of course, owes Caesar a debt of loyalty for his ascribed honour as procurator, but his status as 'Caesar's friend' (and client) is directly challenged by the crowd who accuse him of shaming Caesar by supporting a rival king.³⁵ The tension rises as Pilate takes his place on the judgment seat.
- Pilate's final attempt, 'here is your king . . . shall I crucify your king?' (19.14b-15), is countered by the insistence of the Jews that their allegiance is to Caesar alone. In doing so, the priestly elite, those claiming ultimate responsibility for mediating the socio-religious will of the one true God (who shall have no other before him) to the Jewish nation are reduced to apostasy and idolatry in securing their aims.

The degradation of Jesus is nearly complete. He has been reduced to a level of ridicule and contempt: stripped, flogged, crowned with thorns, mocked as 'King of the Jews' (which was a public insult to the Jewish populace and the leaders), and finally beaten. John portrays these events as a public ritual of humiliation aimed at destroying the status that, until now, had given Jesus credibility in the eyes of the public. The status degradation ritual moves to its climax as Jesus suffers irreparable loss of honour and status in being 'handed over . . . to be crucified' (19.16). He is treated as nothing more than a common criminal and is crucified between two others.

The crucifixion constitutes a very open scene of public humiliation (Jn 19.20), for spectators would give public witness to, and so legitimation for, the final act of the degradation ritual which is the public disgrace of Jesus' death.³⁶ To the onlookers he dies a brutal end, apparently a victim whose life was taken from him in violent fashion; his body is mutilated and his blood spilled, without hope of vengeance or satisfaction. This is what outsiders see and count as contemptuous and utterly shameful. The distribution of the garments serves to remind of his nakedness: a further act of shaming. Jesus had been publicly degraded to the limits of cultural imagination.

Although the downward spiral of shame culminates in Jesus' death and bodily mutilation, throughout the Gospel John has provided adumbration of both the ontological nature of Jesus and the soteriological significance of his death. He was the 'the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'

35. Cf. Duling and Perrin, *New Testament*, p. 511.

36. Cf. Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 3.160; Finney, 'Servile Supplicium, Shame and the Deuteronomic Curse: Crucifixion in its Cultural Context', in *BTB* 43.4 (2013), pp. 88-102.

(1.29) and who would be 'raised from the dead' (2.22). It was God's will and purpose that Jesus should undergo death (12.27), for he commanded that Jesus 'lay down his life in order to take it up again' (10.17-18). Even throughout the passion narrative, John allows the reader insights into how Jesus maintains his personal honour with respect to the Father; his integrity and sincerity are demonstrated even within the matrix of shame and humiliation.

So, too, on his arrest, the full 'divine' authority of Jesus is pronounced in his declaration, 'I am he', whereupon the arresting party 'drew back and fell to the ground' (18.5). Subsequently, John demonstrates the total control exhibited by Jesus at each stage of the confrontation with his antagonists: the call that his disciples be released (18.8), his testimony before both the Jews and Pilate to the truth of his word and integrity of his ministry (18.19-23, 36-37; 19.11), and, even while hanging on the cross, the securing of future provision and honour for his mother (19.26-27).³⁷ John also details the fulfilling of Old Testament prophecy as applicable to aspects of Jesus' crucifixion: the division of his clothes (19.24), the absence of *crurifragium* (19.32-3, 36), and the piercing of his side (19.37).

Two prophecies from the Hebrew Bible at this point procure the turning point of the passion narrative and from this juncture begin the upward spiral, even in death, of the ascription of honour to Jesus. Although John explicates the lack of *crurifragium* by comparing Jesus' body to the paschal lamb, none of whose bones were broken (Exod. 12.46; cf. 1.29, 36), the allusion to the *righteous man* of Psalm 34 may be more pertinent. Here the Psalmist writes,

A righteous man may have many troubles,
but the Lord delivers him from them all;
he protects all his bones,
not one of them will be broken.
Evil will slay the wicked;
the foes of the righteous will be condemned.
The Lord redeems his servants;
no-one will be condemned who takes refuge in him (34.19-22).

This may certainly be as relevant to the Johannine narrative as the allusion to the paschal lamb,³⁸ but it also coheres with the wider context of the prophecy of Zechariah that speaks of the honour to be accorded to the houses of Judah and David (Zech. 12.7).

The upward spiral of honour continues with the treatment of Jesus' body by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (a Pharisee, a member of the Jewish

37. Neyrey, 'Despising', p. 131.

38. So R.E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* (Anchor Bible; New York: Doubleday, 1970), II, p. 953; C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), p. 234.

ruling council, and one of 'Israel's teachers', 3.1, 10). The vast quantity of spices suggests a 'royal' burial, as attested in a variety of secondary literature,³⁹ and the reference to a 'new tomb' in a garden may point in the same direction, for the Old Testament references to burial in a garden concern the entombment of the kings of Judah (2 Kgs 21.18, 26).⁴⁰ The restoration of Jesus' honour is then detailed in the progressive resurrection appearances to Mary and the disciples and reaches a climactic exaltation through the declaration of Thomas, 'My Lord and my God!' (20.28). Thus, Jesus, an utterly shamed and disgraced crucified man, is ascribed honour by God through resurrection, exaltation and glorification, indicating the Father's good pleasure in the obedient Son.

Conflict and Labelling

Throughout the Fourth Gospel, John details the rising tension and conflict between Jesus and the Jews. The ancient Mediterranean world existed as an agonistic environment, and, hence, the conflict should come as no surprise. But what John is keen to explicate are the reasons why Jesus found such antagonism among the Jewish powerbrokers that they should actively seek his arrest and attempt to procure his death at the hands of the Romans.⁴¹

The conflict in the Johannine narrative arises at a point early in Jesus' ministry and is found throughout the Johannine 'Book of Signs': the clearing of the Temple and talk of its destruction (2.12-22); Sabbath controversies (5.9, 16-18; 9.16); Jesus' accusation that his antagonists are of the devil (8.44); the Jewish counter-accusation that Jesus' behaviour would provoke a military response from the Roman authorities (11.47-48); the raising of Lazarus, prompting many to put their faith in Jesus, much to the chagrin of the Jews (12.10); and the Triumphal Entry (12.19). As early as the fifth chapter of the Gospel (vv. 16, 18), John presents the Jews as actively persecuting Jesus and having a determination to secure his death.⁴² The crowds surrounding Jesus are often divided into two groups, some responsive and favourable to his teaching (7.12, 25, 31, 40-41, 49; 8.31; 10.21; 11.45; 12.9-18, 42), while others

39. Josephus, *Ant.* 17.8.3 (on the burial of Herod the Great); *b. Semahot* 8.6; cf. Neyrey, 'Despising', p. 132.

40. Brown, *Gospel according to John*, p. 960. In addition, the LXX translation of Neh. 3.16 notes that the tomb of King David was to be found within a garden.

41. However, it is significant that such conflict was always over the practical means to some end, not over the ends themselves. Jesus and his group were in conflict with other groups over how best to obey God, not over whether God should be obeyed at all. Cf. Malina and Neyrey, 'Conflict', p. 98.

42. At numerous other points John intimates the desire of both the elite and crowds to kill Jesus (7.1, 19, 25, 32, 44; 8.59; 10.31, 39; 11.47-48, 57).

AQ *b.* correct? *Semahot* not a Talmudic tractate?

remain obdurate and openly hostile (6.41, 66; 7.12, 20, 30, 44; 8.40, 48, 52, 59; 10.20, 31, 39; 12.37-40).

John also details the concomitant responses of different groups in terms of the labels ascribed to Jesus. On the one hand, there are positive labels: rabbi/teacher (1.38, 49; 3.2), Messiah/Christ (1.49; 7.26, 41), Son of God (1.49), King of Israel (1.49; 6.15; 12.13), prophet (4.19; 6.14; 7.40), saviour of the world (4.42), Holy One of God (6.69), shepherd (10.1-21), Lord (20.13, 28) and God (20.28). Conversely, there are negative labels: 'Nazarene' (1.45-46), demon-possessed (7.20; 8.48; 10.20), deceiver (7.12), Samaritan (8.48), mad (10.20), blasphemer (10.33) and evildoer (18.30). The vast majority of the former ascriptions are made by individuals who are primarily disciples, whereas the latter ascriptions are conferred by a group or antagonistic crowd. In this way John demarcates the insiders whose percipience prompts them to confer honorific titles upon Jesus from the hostile outsiders whose conferring of titles of deviance will lead to charges of blasphemy and sedition and so ultimately to Jesus' death. The number of positive labels that John predicates as self-ascriptions by Jesus ('light of the world', 'bread of life', 'sheep gate', 'good shepherd', 'vine') could enhance honour and status if recognized by a community, but the refusal of such recognition leads to the creation of dishonour (6.41-42; 8.39).

In a Gospel that has no exorcisms, it is curious to note that the most serious negative labels of all were accusations of sorcery or demon possession (7.20; 8.48; 10.20; cf. Mark 3; Matthew 12; Luke 11). Such labels not only marked one as deviant (outside accepted norms or states), but once acquired could be nearly impossible to counter and remove. If the labels could be shown to be plausible, implying as they did that Jesus was an evil deceiver in the guise of an apparently virtuous Jew, his credibility with his audience would be irreparably damaged. In 8.49-59, Jesus seeks to repudiate the charge of demon possession by suggesting that the power behind what he does is God.⁴³

Labels and counter-labels are thus a potent social weapon. Negative labels, as accusation of deviance, which could destroy a reputation overnight, are typical of ancient Mediterranean social conflict and are found frequently in John's Gospel and other biblical texts.⁴⁴

43. B.J. Malina and J.H. Neyrey, *Calling Jesus Names: The Social Value of Labels in Matthew* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1988), pp. 150-51.

44. For example, the Pharisees are 'hypocrites' in Matthew 23; John the Baptist labels some a 'brood of vipers' in Lk. 3.7; Paul labels his antagonists 'false apostles' and 'deceitful workmen' in 2 Corinthians 13 or 'dogs' in Phil. 3.2; in the Apocalypse there are those who are part of the synagogue of Satan (Rev. 2.9).

The Deviance Process against Jesus

The 'agents of censure', the socio-religious power brokers of first-century Israel, are the Johannine Jews: the chief priests and their officials, the high priest and the Pharisees.⁴⁵ Pilate stands as the socio-political role administrator in Judea (the ultimate role creator of the land as a whole is Rome itself). The conflict in John is primarily between Jesus and these Jews, who are able to manipulate the divisions of the populace and exert their authority on the people so that Jesus is castigated further. The authority of the priests in this context also has the potential to produce anxiety in others, for the people are fearful that if they become disciples of Jesus they will be excluded from the synagogue (9.22; 12.42; 16.2). In John, the priests appear to exert considerable psychological control over the crowds and are able to exert their authority as moral entrepreneurs.

This Jewish political hierarchy conspired to arrest and kill Jesus because, at numerous times during his ministry, he spoke or acted in ways that were considered blasphemous or subversive by the putative leaders and that were therefore considered to undermine the socio-religious stability of the people and the nation. This enabled his antagonists to label him as a deviant. The charges levelled against Jesus that are found *outside* of John's passion narrative consist of:

- Blasphemy—breaking the Sabbath (5.16, 18; cf. 9.14, 16)
- Blasphemy—claiming to be the Son of God (1.34; 3.16, 35-36; 5.17-18; 6.40; 10.36; 11.4; 17.1)
- Blasphemy—claiming to be God (10.33; cf. the 'I am', 8.58-59; 'I am he', 18.5-6)⁴⁶
- Political subversion (11.48)
- Ascription of kingship (Jn 1.49; 12.13, 15; cf. 6.15; 18.33)
- Criticism of the Temple customs (with the indication that rejection of him imperilled Temple survival) and claims to be able to destroy the Temple, the sanctuary of God⁴⁷

45. Malina and Neyrey, 'Conflict', pp. 72-81.

46. Cf. the Johannine accounts of the attempted stonings because of the 'I am' claims or his claim that he and the Father were one (5.18; 8.59; 10.31-39). J.C. O'Neill claims that only God (or the high priest as God's representative) could announce the enthronement of the Messiah, and if no one knew the Son but the Father, no one should presume to say he was the Son until God had anointed him and given him his appointed throne. Thus, the blasphemy was in the presumption of Jesus to say he was the Son of God; O'Neill, 'The Charge of Blasphemy at Jesus' Trial before the Sanhedrin', in *The Trial of Jesus: Cambridge Studies in Honour of C.F.D. Moule* (ed. E. Bammel; London: SCM, 1970), pp. 72-77 (75-77).

47. Though the threat to the Temple was a serious one (cf. the action of the woe-sayer Jesus ben Ananias [Josephus, *War* 6.6.3]), prophecies against the Temple would probably not be regarded as blasphemous since many Old Testament prophets had been given the

However, those articulated within the passion narrative are quite different. While there is no charge detailed during the Jewish trial, two charges are announced to Pilate as Jesus is transferred to his jurisdiction:

- As one ‘doing evil’ (18.30 [RSV]; the exact nature of the charge is unspecified)
- King of the Jews (18.33, 37, 39; 19.12, 14); and one charge is disclosed during the trial sequence:
- Blasphemy—the claim to be the Son of God (Jn 19.7).

In terms of Jewish sensitivities the most obvious area of deviance, and so the most warranted master status applicable to Jesus, would have been that of blasphemer. But the Jewish hierarchy was determined to secure the death of Jesus, and blasphemy was not a capital crime in the eyes of Rome. Thus, this religious charge is *never* presented to Pilate (it is alluded to in Jn 19.7, though never expanded upon); instead, all four evangelists concur that the charge presented is one bearing the nuance of political danger. It is summed up in the epithet ‘King of the Jews’ (Jn 18.33; cf. Mk 15.2; Mt. 27.11; Lk. 23.3).⁴⁸ The primary question of concern is the reason for such judicial manoeuvring: why the change from a religious to an overtly political charge?

The most credible solution may be that the Sanhedrin was *not* empowered to prosecute the charge, and the only course open to the ruling elite was to present Jesus before the court of the governor on a serious political charge in the hope that the more flexible jurisdiction that he exercised would enable him to find Jesus guilty and execute him. The Johannine narrative, like that of the Synoptics, assumes that Pilate alone was able to authorize the execution demanded by the Jewish authorities (18.31). The issue of kingship would raise the alarm of sedition—an act deserving crucifixion (Justinian, *Digest* 48.8.3.4; 48.19.38.2), which came under the treasonable crimes known as *laesa maiestas* (‘offences against majesty’), regularly applied to a variety of misconduct. In

same message by God. Jesus may have been condemned because he *assumed* an authority equal to that of God (so O’Neill, ‘Charge’, p. 73). In general, Jesus may be accused of arrogantly claiming for himself what belonged to God alone and so insulting God. R.E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave* (2 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1994), claims, ‘If in his lifetime Jesus did or said most of these things there is little doubt that his opponents would have considered him blasphemous (i.e. arrogantly claiming prerogatives or status more properly associated with God) as the Gospels report at the trial’ (p. 547). Rabbinic tradition (*b. Sanh.* 43a; cf. *t. Sanh.* 14.13) maintains that Jesus was identified as a blasphemous false prophet who attempted to lead the people into idolatry.

48. This may have derived from the Triumphal Entry (Jn 12.13; cf. Lk. 19.38). Luke gives additional details of the charges: those of perverting the nation, questioning the giving of tribute to Caesar (23.2), and claiming to be the Messiah, a king (23.2). The wider Lucan narrative includes the charges of stirring up the Jewish populace (23.5) and inciting the people to rebel (23.14).

this way the charges presented to Pilate contain the implication that Jesus was urging the Jewish people to rebel against Rome, which, as such, constituted a capital crime that the governor was unable to ignore.⁴⁹

As noted above, there are three elements in the labelling of a deviant:

1. *Denunciation.* The priests are charged with establishing an official interpretation of Jesus for they are the 'imputational specialists' who function in the labelling process to assemble information about selected aspects of a person's life. Here, the preferred nomenclature of the Jewish elite for the master status of Jesus is 'royal claimant', which they assert to be the political subversive action of a 'criminal' (literally, 'evildoer'). Everything known about Jesus' past would be engulfed by behaviour emanating from this concept.
2. *Retrospective interpretation.* The charge of the claim to kingship, which from the Johannine narrative can be retrojected back to the beginning of Jesus' ministry, allows the priests to claim that he had *always* acted in a politically subversive way (and hence, in terms of Jewish law and tradition, had always spoken in a way that was considered blasphemous). This is retrospectively applied to Jesus' life and ministry to demonstrate that this master status had always been present. The outcome of retrospective interpretation is fivefold:
 - Responsibility affirmed. When confronted, Jesus accepts the claim of king (18.33-37).
 - Injury affirmed. Jesus transgressed the established values and system of the Jerusalem hierarchy and so of Judaism. This is clear by the Temple action. He was thus a threat to the divine will embodied in the Temple.
 - Victims affirmed. All suffer because of Jesus' behaviour, and the nation would be adversely affected if his actions were not stopped by the upholders of Judaism (Jn 11.47-53).
 - Condemnation. The condemnation of the Jews (11.53) manifested itself when Jesus was handed over to Pilate (Jn 18.30, 'If he were not a criminal . . . we would not have handed him over to you').
 - Appeal to higher loyalties. The Jews appeal to several higher loyalties. As a blasphemer, Jesus was perverting the nation, and so God's sovereign will was being corrupted. Through the charge of kingship, Jesus is cited as a threat to the nation (11.48) and to the stability of Pilate's rule (19.12, 'If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar'). Ultimately Jesus stood as a potential threat both to the sta-

49. Cf. G. Schneider, 'The Political Charge against Jesus (Lk. 23:2)', in *Jesus and the Politics of his Day* (ed. E. Bammel and C.F.D. Moule; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 403-14 (404).

bility of the empire and to Caesar (19.12, 'Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar').

3. *Status degradation ritual*. The trial of Jesus functions as status degradation ritual whereby the Sanhedrin (here, the moral entrepreneurs) urge Pilate (the rule creator) to declare Jesus a deviant and to process him in an appropriate way. The Jews are unanimous in their verdict that Jesus should suffer the ultimate penalty of death and should be crucified. In terms of the three stages of ritual process, Jesus has first been *separated* from his peers and his original status. By his arrest, he was put in a liminal state where he experienced a stripping of his former identity. Gone are the favourable acclamations of him; gone too are the elements of power and honour; gone also are his acclaimers. In this liminal stage, he enters the role of a deviant, evident by the rejection he experiences, the physical dishonour he endures, and by the company he is forced to keep. He is treated as a deviant among other deviants. Finally, he is re-aggregated into his social world, but now with a new status: he is a criminal who is to be condemned, mocked and executed.

Interrupting the Labelling Process

As noted above, the most serious accusation levelled at Jesus was one of demon possession, for this would subsume within it all other accusations of deviance and negative labelling ascribed to him (i.e. deceiver, mad, blasphemer, evildoer). In 8.49-51, Jesus seeks to repudiate the charge of demon possession by suggesting that the power behind what he does is God. This is the process of *neutralization*. As Malina and Rohrbaugh note, in his refutation of the attempted deviance label of the crowd in 7.20 ('You are demon-possessed'), Jesus makes a number of counter-claims:

1. Repudiation of the charge (v. 21: 'I performed one work, and all of you are astonished')
2. Denial of injury (v. 23: A man has been healed)
3. Denial of a victim (v. 23: A man's whole body is healed)
4. Appeal to higher authority (v. 23: The model of the Law of Moses allows Jesus to perform the miracle)
5. Condemn the condemners (v. 24: 'Do not judge by appearances')⁵⁰

In this way Jesus rejects the deviance label his opponents are trying to ascribe to him, and the crowd (or hearer/reader of the Gospel) must judge if the label has been undermined to the extent of being rejected.

Within the wider purview of the Fourth Gospel, John contests the overall deviant labelling of Jesus. The prologue allows the hearer/reader privileged

50. B.J. Malina and R.L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), p. 150.

access to vital information on the true master status of Jesus: ‘He was with God in the beginning’. Through him all things were made but, at the same time, the light that shone forth from him would encounter the ‘darkness’ of men who would neither recognize nor accept him. Jesus as the incarnate Word is full of glory, grace and *truth* for those with eyes to see. Hence, the prologue provides the framework of Jesus’ master status through which the rest of the Gospel is to be expounded, and, thus, from the outset John has pre-empted the deviant labelling process—the *neutralization* and *alternative interpretation* of the process do not follow it but have already anticipated it. As the tension of the Johannine drama builds throughout the Gospel the reader/hearer (even if having no prior knowledge of Jesus) is granted insights into the soteriological significance that his death would have:

- The Baptist’s exclamation, ‘Look, the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world’ (1.29; cf. 1.35);
- The approaching hour/time of Jesus (2.4; 7.6, 8, 30; 8.20; 12.23, 27, 30; 13.1; 17.1);
- The lifting up of the Son of Man so ‘that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life’ (3.14; cf. 5.24-27);
- Jesus the bread of life (‘This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world’, 6.51);
- Jesus the good shepherd (‘The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep’, 10.11; cf. 17-18);
- The anointing of Jesus for his burial (12.7-8);
- The imagery of the ‘dying’ grain of wheat to produce many seeds (12.24);
- Jesus’ words, “I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die’ (12.32-33);
- The imminence of Jesus’ death (‘I am with you for only a short time’, 7.33; ‘I will be with you only a little longer’, 13.33).

All of the above affirm Jesus’ role as incarnate Word, God’s prophet, the only Son of the Father. As such, John’s Gospel never accepts the allegations that he was a pretender to the title of King of Israel or a blasphemer. The Gospel also redefines the facts of his crucifixion which is normally a shameful death generally accorded a sinful, dishonourable person. From the very beginning of the Gospel, John has aimed to *neutralize* the attempt by the Jews to label Jesus a deviant.

Alternative Retrospective Interpretation

As noted above this procedure is initiated from the prologue of the Gospel and continues throughout the work.

1. Denial of responsibility. Jesus implied many times that it was God's will that he should be rejected and killed. In the passion narrative John is also concerned to explicate the fulfilment of Old Testament scripture, which functions apologetically to illustrate that Jesus' arrest, trial and execution were the will of God.⁵¹ In their fulfilment, Jesus was not humiliated or dishonoured by the Father because Jesus was acting in obedience to him. By his response, Jesus assumed the most virtuous posture possible in Israel, that of the obedient son.
2. Denial of injury. Jesus' behaviour caused no harm and was conversely beneficial to many. He came to grant the right to become children of God to those who believed in him (1.12) and to bring divine blessing (1.16). He was a constant source of healing, forgiveness, mercy and liberation. Even on his arrest he asked for the release of his disciples (18.8).
3. Denial of victims. The reaction of Pilate to the charge against Jesus points to his innocence of the charges brought.
4. Condemning the condemners. John makes quite clear that the proceedings on many counts were illegal (and that both the Jews and Pilate are themselves judged by the standards of integrity and sincerity). This is evidenced in that,
 - (a) Pilate dismissed the charges against Jesus four times (18.38; 19.4, 6, 12, 15b), so in the final act of condemnation to be crucified, Jesus stood as an innocent man.
 - (b) During the Barabbas episode, injustice was formally dramatized, for the Jews demanded the release of a known insurrectionist who was truly guilty. Justice was clearly perverted—the guilty man was set free and the innocent man condemned.
 - (c) The truth and integrity of Jesus are contrasted with the surreptitious motives of the Jews (11.48) and the evil of Judas (13.27). Judas was possessed by Satan and so acting under the direct influence of evil. The Jews were part of the same evil conspiracy. The condemners are therefore condemned.
5. Appeal to higher loyalty. Jesus constantly appealed to God for the validation of his testimony. He was God's incarnate Word, full of grace and truth (1.14), the Son of God (1.34; 3.18), the Messiah (1.41), the King of Israel (1.49). He did only what the Father did (5.19). Jesus' testimony is from the Father himself (5.36; 8.16) while his antagonists, who desire to kill him, are of the devil (8.44).

According to John's narrative, the labelling process has been successfully interrupted. The evangelist has been able to construct an alternative and

51. Cf. H.R. Weber, *The Cross: Tradition and Interpretation* (London: SPCK, 1979), pp. 125-26.

correct *retrospective interpretation* of Jesus that negates the negative labelling process and even exonerates and elevates him.

Conclusion

The Johannine passion narrative is a text that is open to be perceived and articulated according to the model of labelling and deviance theory. The value of the application of a contemporary model has been observed in its ability to provide a number of pertinent and rich scenarios: the social processes at work in the conflict between Jesus and his adversaries; the elucidation of the arrest, trial and death of Jesus within a framework of honour–shame; insights into the deviant labels formed against Jesus and the forensic trials, or status degradation rituals, to which he was subjected; and the degree to which John is able to subvert the concepts of honour–shame and labelling deviance in his presentation of Jesus as the obedient son, willingly undergoing the shame of the cross for ‘the sin of the world’.

Traditional exegetical approaches often demonstrate a dramatic lacuna in their methodological flexibility to gain vital perspectives on the broad multifaceted cultural matrix of the first-century Mediterranean world. The New Testament documents themselves present scenarios embedded in their social world that demonstrate all the values, customs, attitudes and perspectives relevant to it. Works that claim to explicate such documents must be adept to demonstrate their knowledge and sensitivity to this cultural environment, for failure to do so can only result in works that are purblind at best and anachronistic at worst.

In sum, models of labelling and deviance and honour–shame are not foreign categories imposed by an individualistic, Westernized, twenty-first century culture, but stem from ideas and social values rooted in the first-century Mediterranean world. As such, they are relevant to the ‘psychological’ matrix of all involved: Jesus, his family, his disciples and followers, his antagonists (whether Jewish or Roman) and his biographers. This study has sought to articulate what these ancient people valued, how they strove either to gain or maintain their reputation, and how they sought to undermine, discredit or utterly destroy that of another. Thus, an appreciation of the ancient ‘psychology’ of labelling and deviance offers an authentic cultural and historical reading of these social dynamics and can be seen as a necessary and welcome addition to the traditional tools of historical criticism.

The judicious use of such tools greatly aids in the fundamental task of interpreting documents from cultures quite different from contemporary ones, and an appreciation of these cultural phenomena can only aid in a sympathetic understanding of other biblical and ancient documents that share the same cultural values. Using the above model as a lens, it is hoped that some of the social dynamics operative in the Johannine passion narrative

have been brought to light and that the study of confrontation and conflict in John has been fruitfully elucidated.

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