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REPETITIONS AND VARIATIONS IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL

STYLE, TEXT, INTERPRETATION

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SEEKING JESUS

OBSERVATIONS ON JOHN'S VOCABULARY OF DEATH

INTRODUCTION

Jesus' death in John's Gospel has been studied from a number of angles and there remains no clear consensus as to how it should be understood. R. Bultmann and E. Käsemann approached the issue from a source and redactional stand point and concluded that Jesus' death in John had little if anything to do with traditional atonement theology but rather was simply the completion of Jesus' mission and his return to the Father¹. Most studies on the death of Jesus in John since Bultmann and Käsemann have been responses to them in one way or another²: some went the way of moving Bultmann and Käsemann's *non-atonement* interpretation in a different direction³ while others sought to challenge it in favor of a more traditional atonement view⁴. There have been of course other proposals, such as attempting to understand Jesus' death against the background of the "noble death" motif⁵ and the "cosmic battle" motif⁶.

1. See R. BULTMANN, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. K. Grobel, vol. 2, New York, Scribner's, 1955, pp. 52-53, 55; Id., *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G.R. BEASLEY-MURRAY, et al., Philadelphia, PA, Westminster, 1971; E. KÄSEMANN, *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17*, trans. G. Krodel, Philadelphia, PA, Fortress, 1968, p. 18.

2. See further J. DENNIS, *Jesus' Death in John's Gospel: A Survey of Research from Bultmann to the Present with Special Reference to the Hyper-Texts*, in *CBR* 4 (2006) 331-363.

3. U.B. MÜLLER, *Die Bedeutung des Kreuzestodes Jesu im Johannesevangelium: Erwägungen zur Kreuzestheologie im Neuen Testament*, in *Kerygma und Dogma* 21 (1974) 49-71; J.T. FORESTELL, *The Word of the Cross: Salvation as Revelation in the Fourth Gospel* (AnBib, 57), Rome, Biblical Institute, 1974; G.C. NICHOLSON, *Death as Departure: The Johannine Descent-Ascent Schema* (SBL DS, 63), Chico, CA, Scholars, 1983; M.C. DE BOER, *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus* (CBET, 17), Kampen, Kok, 1996.

4. T. MÜLLER, *Das Heilsgeschehen im Johannesevangelium: Eine exegetische Studie, zugleich der Versuch einer Antwort an Rudolf Bultmann*, Zürich, Gotthelf, 1961; B.H. GRIGSBY, *The Cross as an Expiatory Sacrifice in the Fourth Gospel*, in *JSNT* 15 (1982) 51-80; T. KNÖPLER, *Die theologia crucis des Johannesevangeliums: Das Verständnis des Todes Jesu im Rahmen der johanneischen Inkarnations- und Erhöhungschristologie* (WMANT, 69), Neukirchen, Neukirchener Verlag, 1994; J. FREY, *Die "theologia crucifixi" des Johannesevangeliums*, in A. DETTWILER – J. ZUMSTEIN (eds.), *Kreuzestheologie im Neuen Testament* (WUNT, 151), Tübingen, Mohr-Siebeck, 2002, 169-238.

5. J.H. NEYREY, *The "Noble Shepherd" in John 10: Cultural and Rhetorical Background*, in *JBL* (2001) 267-291.

6. J. KOVACS, *Now Shall the Ruler of This World be Driven Out: Jesus' Death as Cosmic Battle in John 12.20-36*, in *JBL* 114 (1995) 227-247.

The present study has the most affinities with H.C. Orchard's 1998 work entitled *Courting Betrayal: Jesus as Victim in the Gospel of John*. Orchard argues that the Fourth Gospel presents Jesus as a victim in various ways and that there is a distinct "motif of violence" present in this presentation⁷. Our study confirms Orchard's basis thesis that John presents the pursuit of Jesus in quite violent terms. However, we limit our focus to an analysis of the Johannine terminology used for the pursuit of Jesus' death in the Fourth Gospel and to making some observations along the way as to what the findings may tell us about John's portrayal of this death pursuit. John and the Synoptics obviously share vocabulary associated in some way with Jesus' death (e.g., ἀποθνῆσκει, ἀποκτείνω, δίδωμι, δεῖ, σταυρόω). But what is quite striking is the vocabulary that *only* John employs (e.g., βουλεύω, δοξάζω, δόξα, ἐκκεντέω, κατεσθίω, λιθάζω, λίθος, λύω, πιάζω, τίθημι, ὑψώω, ὥρα). Space will allow only a brief discussion of a selected number of this Johannine terminology⁸.

I. JESUS WILL BE "CONSUMED" (ΚΑΤΕΣΘΙΩ) AND "DESTROYED" (ΛΥΩ)

The first explicit reference to Jesus' death in John's Gospel is found in the Temple pericope (2,13-22). This programmatic passage for John's view of Jesus' death⁹ employs two quite vivid verbs to refer to Jesus' death: κατεσθίω (2,17) and λύω (2,19). Following immediately upon Jesus' actions in the Temple (2,14-16), it is said that Jesus' disciples "remembered that it was written, 'zeal for your house will consume (καταφάγεται) me'" (2,17). This assertion "was written" in LXX Ps 68,10a and functions to equate the Psalmist's zeal (ζῆλος) with Jesus' zeal (ζῆλος). As the Psalmist's zeal (ζῆλος) for God's house results in reproach, estrangement, alienation and his being "devoured" (κατεσθίω) (Ps 68,9-10), so also Jesus' zeal (ζῆλος) for God's house will lead to his being "devoured" (κατεσθίω). With the addition of

7. H.C. ORCHARD, *Courting Betrayal: Jesus as Victim in the Gospel of John* (JSNT SS, 161), Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1998, pp. 17, 20.

8. On the last page of this contribution I have provided a reference scheme for John's vocabulary relating to Jesus' death pursuit and death in the Fourth Gospel. I have included terms and syntactical information.

9. See further J.A. DENNIS, *Jesus' Death and the Gathering of True Israel* (WUNT, 217), Tübingen, Mohr – Siebeck, 2007, p. 165. See also H. LEROY, *Rätsel und Missverständnis* (BBB, 30), Bonn, Peter Hanstein, 1968, pp. 145-147 and J. ASHTON, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1991, pp. 414-416.

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κατά the verb κατεσθίω becomes an emphatic intensification of the figurative sense of ἐσθίω, indicating not simply "to eat or devour", but "to eat up", "to destroy completely"¹⁰ or utterly¹¹. As is often pointed out, John has replaced the Psalm's aorist tense (κατέφαγεν, "zeal for your house has consumed me") with the future tense (καταφάγεται, "zeal for your house will consume me"). This tense change, coupled with the comment in 2,22 that the disciples, after the resurrection, "believed the Scripture" (namely, Ps 68,10), indicates that the note of Jesus' future "consumption" (2,17) amounts to a prophetic/proleptic statement of Jesus' fate in John's story. From the outset then Jesus' death is described by means of violent vocabulary: zeal for God's house will "utterly consume" (κατέφαγεν) Jesus.

The second verb (λύω) used in the Temple pericope for our consideration similarly refers to Jesus' violent death. In 2,18 the *Ioudaioi* demand that Jesus provides a "sign" that would authenticate his outrageous actions in the Temple (cf. 2,14-16). But the only "sign" that Jesus is willing to give is his cryptic, prophetic statement: λύσατε τὸν ναὸν τοῦτον καὶ ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις ἐγερῶ αὐτόν (2,19). The "prophetic imperative"¹² λύσατε has the force of calling the *Ioudaioi* to carry out their opposition to Jesus to its bitter end¹³. The fact that the prophetic response in 2,19 functions as a "sign" pointing to Jesus' death and resurrection suggests early on that Jesus (and the Father) will be in full control of his own death¹⁴. The verb λύω, which here means to destroy something "by violence into its components"¹⁵, is an appropriate one to refer to the violent destruction of the Temple. But the reader soon discovers that Jesus "was speaking of the temple of his body" (2,21). In

10. J.P. LOUW – E.A. NIDA (eds.), *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*, vol. 2, New York, United Bible Societies, 1988, p. 231.

11. W. BAUER, et al. (eds.), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Christian Literature*, rev. & ed. F.W. DANKER, Chicago, IL – London, University of Chicago Press, 2000, p. 532 [BDAG].

12. The imperative λύσατε here has been rightly termed a "prophetic imperative" by A.R. KERR, *The Temple of Jesus' Body: The Temple Theme in the Gospel of John* (JSNT 88, 220), London, Sheffield Academic Press, 2002, pp. 87-88. See also U. WILCKENS, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (NTD, 4), Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998, p. 62.

13. Similarly L. GASTON, *No Stone on Another: Studies in the Significance of the Fall of Jerusalem in the Synoptic Gospels* (SupplNT, 23), Leiden, Brill, 1970, p. 207.

14. M. APPOLD, *The Oneness Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (WUNT, 2/1), Tübingen, Mohr – Siebeck, 1976, p. 119, argues in this regard that "if the salient feature of the Johannine sign is its demonstrative character emphasizing the sovereign action of a divine Jesus, then clearly this is the accent decisive for understanding the meaning of his passion and death".

15. BDAG, p. 607.

this way the fate of the Jerusalem Temple and Jesus' own fate are correlated: as the Temple was violently destroyed in 70 CE, so also Jesus' "body" (σῶμα) will be violently torn down by his enemies¹⁶. Not only does this unmistakably violent connotation of λύω correspond to the violent imagery of κατέφαγεν in 2,17, but both terms also point to the physical (in the sense of "bodily" or "fleshly") nature of the violence: κατέφαγεν by means of the metaphorical extension and intensification of the literal meaning of ἐσθίω ("to eat, devour" food)¹⁷ and λύω by means of the evangelist's interpretation that focuses upon the devouring of Jesus' body (v. 21)¹⁸. Obviously Jesus' body was not literally torn into pieces or devoured; not even one of his bones was broken (19,36). Nevertheless, having read John's Temple pericope which contains the first explicit mention of Jesus' death, the ideal reader will expect the conflict between Jesus and the *Ioudaioi* and their pursuit of him to end in a violent way. Why the Fourth Evangelist portrayed Jesus' death in such a violent way will be briefly addressed at the end.

II. THROWING STONES (ΛΙΘΑΖΩ / ΛΙΘΟΣ) AT JESUS

John's Gospel is unique in its portrayal of Jesus' attempted murder by stoning and this obviously adds to John's violent portrayal of the pursuit of Jesus in the Gospel. The only mention of stoning in another Gospel is found in Lk 20,6 where the chief priests and the scribes are fearful that their false witness of John the Baptist would lead to the people stoning (καταλιθάζω) them. But there is no mention in the Synoptics of anyone attempting to stone Jesus. This then brings the Fourth Gospel's narration of the attempted stoning of Jesus in stark relief. There are four such instances in John. Consistent with the Temple pericope's proleptic insight into the violent nature of the conflict between Jesus and the authorities, the reader is informed by Jesus (10,32), the *Ioudaioi* (10,33), the disciples (11,8) and the narrator (8,59) that the *Ioudaioi* are intent on stoning Jesus.

16. It is perhaps worth noting that αἶρω, used of the Temple's destruction in 11,48, and κατεσθίω share the same "semantic domain" characterized by LOUW – NIDA as "destroy" (*Lexicon* [n. 10], vol. 1, p. 232).

17. The first meaning given to ἐσθίω in BDAG is: "to take something in through the mouth, usually solids, but also liquids, eat" (p. 396). Thus, κατεσθίω intensifies this as follows: "to eat up ravenously, eat up, consume, devour, swallow" (p. 532).

18. See also ORCHARD, *Courting Betrayal* (n. 7), pp. 67-68, on the violent nature of Jesus' proleptic death in John's Temple pericope.

This visceral and violent act of stoning is clearly centered upon Jesus' implicit and explicit Christological claims. The first occurrence of attempted stoning is found at 8,59: "They [*Ioudaioi*] picked up stones to throw at him". This act is the *Ioudaioi*'s response to Jesus' claim that "before Abraham was born, *I am*" (8,58). But this should not be a surprise since Jesus has made clear that the *Ioudaioi* are not the true "children of Abraham" because they do not do his "works" but rather they do the works and "desires" (*ἐπιθυμία*) of their true father, the devil (8,39-44); "murder" (*ἀνθρωποκτόνος*) is one of these works (8,44). Therefore, the concrete plan of the Sanhedrin, lead by the high priest, to kill Jesus in 11,47-53 is the narrative fulfillment of the devil's "desire" to destroy Jesus. John 8,33-47 then makes clear that the opposition which the *Ioudaioi* level against Jesus reflects the cosmic conflict and opposition between God's Son and the devil: the devil seeks to destroy Jesus through the *Ioudaioi*.

The *Ioudaioi*'s attempted stoning continues in 10,31-33 and again the controversy concerns Christology. The *Ioudaioi* state plainly that "it is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God". Regardless of exactly how we are to understand Jesus' statement *ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ πατήρ ἓν ἐσμεν* in 10,30¹⁹, the attempted stoning here is surely motivated by what the *Ioudaioi* believe is Jesus' blasphemously placing of himself on the same level as *YHWH* in some way, as they clearly believe he did when he claimed: *πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμι* (8,58). Therefore, the attempted stoning of Jesus, which is another violent action directed against him in the Fourth Gospel, is aimed quite literally at the one who lays claim to unique revelatory and relational status with God.

III. SEEKING (ΖΗΤΕΩ) AND SEIZING (ΠΙΑΖΩ) JESUS

1. Seeking Jesus

The verbs *ζητέω* and *πιάζω* are used often in the Fourth Gospel to describe the death pursuit of Jesus. *Πιάζω*, a verb not found in the

19. Namely, whether it should be interpreted along primarily metaphysical lines (R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel of St John*, vol. 2, New York, Crossroads, 1987, p. 308), functional lines (BULTMANN, *The Gospel of John* [n. 1], pp. 386-387) or both (G.R. BEASLEY-MURRAY, *John* [WBC, 36], Waco, TX, Word, 1986, p. 174; D.A. CARSON, *The Gospel According to John*, Leicester, IVP, 1991, pp. 394-395).

Synoptics, is used as a complementary infinitive with the finite verb ζητέω²⁰ as well as by itself²¹. Ζητέω, appearing 11 times in John for the action of seeking / pursuing Jesus to do him harm, is used 6 times as a finite verb along with the infinitive of ἀποκτείνω ("to seek to kill")²² and 5 times by itself to describe simply the malicious pursuit after Jesus²³. Although the former usage of ζητέω is not entirely unknown to the Synoptic tradition²⁴, the later use of the verb is found only in John.

There are a number of stock Johannine clauses that utilize ζητέω: the one most often used is "seeking to kill" (e.g., 8,37: ζητεῖτέ με ἀποκτεῖναι)²⁵. But we also find the following: "seeking to arrest/seize" (e.g., 7,30: ἐζήτουν οὖν αὐτὸν πιάσαι)²⁶ and "seeking to stone" (11,8: ἐζήτουν σε λιθάσαι). I would argue that these instances of ζητέω that describe the pursuit of Jesus for violent purposes so taint the verb that many of the other instances of "seeking Jesus", with the obvious exception of 13,33; 20,15²⁷, mean "seeking Jesus to kill him".

The first instance of the verb ζητέω with Jesus as the object comes in 5,18 and here the ominous tone of this verb is set in the minds of the readers: because Jesus, in the view of the *Ioudaioi*, was breaking the Sabbath and "calling God his own Father", they "were seeking (ἐζήτουν) all the more (μᾶλλον) to kill (ἀποκτεῖναι) him"²⁸. It is important to note that the death threat here happens in the confines of the Jerusalem Temple. Jesus has moved from Galilee in chapter 4 to Judea/Jerusalem in chapter 5, that is, from success and acceptance to mounting conflict and death threats. In fact, the only hint in the story up to chapter 4 that Judea will be the place of conflict and danger for Jesus comes at 4,44 where he states that a prophet has no honor in his own homeland (πατρίς), namely, Judea²⁹. But it is not until 5,18 that the

20. Note the virtually identical phrases: 7,30: ἐζήτουν οὖν αὐτὸν πιάσαι; 10,39: ἐζήτουν (οὖν) αὐτὸν πάλιν πιάσαι.

21. 8,20; 11,57.

22. 5,18; 7,1.19.20.25; 8,37.

23. 7,11; 11,56; 18,4.7.8.

24. That is, ζητέω used with another term (some kind of verbal or a noun) indicating death: Mt 2,13: μέλλει γὰρ Ἡρώδης ζητεῖν τὸ παιδίον τοῦ ἀπολέσαι αὐτό; 2,20: γὰρ οἱ ζητοῦντες τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ παιδίου; Mk 11,18 (//Lk 19,47): ἐζήτουν πῶς αὐτὸν ἀπολέσωσιν; Mk 14,1: καὶ ἐζήτουν οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ γραμματεῖς πῶς αὐτὸν ἐν δόλῳ κρατήσαντες ἀποκτείνωσιν.

25. See also 7,1.19.20.25; 8,40.

26. See also 10,39.

27. Only two instances of "seeking Jesus" can be said to be a positive or neutral act (6,64.26: the crowd "seeks Jesus" on account of his miracles).

28. Although 5,18 is the first explicit reference to the *Ioudaioi*'s desire to kill Jesus, the comparative μᾶλλον here implies that this is not the first time they have attempted to do so.

29. W. MEEKS, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (SupplNT, 14), Leiden, Brill, 1967, p. 40; ID., *Galilee and Judea in the Fourth Gospel*,

chapter portrays Jesus caught up in courtroom like questioning³⁴, conflict and death pursuits. As is always the case in the Fourth Gospel, the questioning and conflict revolve around issues of Jesus' Messianic identity: is Jesus a good man or does he lead Israel astray (7,12); does his teaching and knowledge come from demons or God (7,14-20); is he the Messiah and if so surely our rulers (ἄρχοντες) would know this, would they not? How can Jesus be the Messiah when we know his origins (7,27)? After all, he is from Galilee (7,41). Are the signs that he does sufficient to authenticate his Messianic identity (7,31)? In essence, the questioning in chapter 7 and the questioning at the Temple incident (2,18) both aim at the same issue: *how can Jesus authenticate his claims to us?*

The evangelist's notice in 7,11 ("The *Ioudaioi* therefore were seeking him at the feast") need only mean that they were simply looking / searching for Jesus; the clause in itself is not negative. However, the statement in 7,11 must be understood in light of the other references to "seeking Jesus" in this chapter. The chapter begins (7,1) with the same subjects of 7,11, the *Ioudaioi*. And, 7,1 makes clear that *Ioudaioi*'s "seeking" of Jesus is for the express purpose of killing him. The implied plural subjects of 7,19 (τί με ζητεῖτε ἀποκτεῖναι;) and 7,25 (οὐχ οὗτός ἐστιν ὃν ζητοῦσιν ἀποκτεῖναι;) surely point back to the *Ioudaioi* of 7,1.11. Thus, "seeking Jesus" in John 7 is ultimately equivalent to "seeking to kill" him.

The next set of references to "seeking to kill Jesus" comes in 8,37.40. As mentioned above, the context concerns the question, "who are the true children of Abraham / God?". Jesus makes clear that even though his interlocutors are Abraham offspring in a physical sense, they prove not to be the *true* children of Abraham because they reject Jesus and do the deeds of their true father the devil, deeds such as murder (8,44). Jesus' characterization of the *Ioudaioi* as those who "seek to kill me" (ζητεῖτέ με ἀποκτεῖναι, vv. 37.40) refers back to the death pursuits of chapter 7 and points forward to the references to their attempted stoning of Jesus in 8,59; 10,31; 11,8 and ultimately to the official death plan of 11,47-50. Perhaps even more explicit than John 7,11, the *Ioudaioi*'s seeking for Jesus in 11,56 has as its goal his death. There are in fact parallels between the two notices. In both 7,1 and 11,56 the *Ioudaioi* "seek Jesus" at a feast (7,10-11; 11,55-56), question whether they will be able to find him at the feast (7,11; 11,56), and give official orders to "seize" Jesus if he is found (7,32; 11,57). In addition, seeking Jesus in 11,56 clearly relates to

34. See A. LINCOLN, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel*, Peabody, MA, Hendrickson, 2000, pp. 232-238, for the lawsuit motif running through John 7.

the legally ratified death plot of 11,47-50 and the notice of the *Ioudaioi*'s "planning" to carry out the plot in 11,53 ("They planned together to kill him"). There is little doubt in this context that the *Ioudaioi*'s "seeking for Jesus" in 11,56 means "seeking to kill him".

The last three references to "seeking Jesus" are found in 18,4.7.8. Judas has led the Roman cohort and the officers of the chief priests and Pharisees to Jesus. The pursuit to seize Jesus has now come to fruition; the one for whom they have been "seeking" has now been found. In this context Jesus asks two times, τίνα ζητεῖτε; (18,4.7), even though he "knows all things that were coming upon him" (18,4). "Seeking Jesus" then in this context is again a negative act that refers to the official seeking for Jesus' death. At the end of this Gospel the reader is left with a negative view as to what "seeking Jesus" entails.

However, there are two references to "seeking Jesus" that may be exceptions to this largely negative picture that has emerged. In two quite similar passages (7,32-34; 8,20-21) and with identical phrases, Jesus responds to threats of seizure by saying that he will "go away" (ὑπάγω) and that, apparently after he has departed, "you will seek me" (ζητήσατέ με); but where Jesus is going they cannot come (ὅπου ἐγὼ ὑπάγω ὑμεῖς οὐ δύνασθε ἐλθεῖν). A much more judgmental tone is struck in 8,21 with the addition of "you shall die in your sins". Many commentators take these passages to mean that one day the *Ioudaioi* will seek Jesus in a positive sense, but in that day their seeking will be too late. B. Lindars is representative when he writes,

In verse 11 the Jews were "looking for" Jesus in the hope of being able to arrest him; in 18 it meant "desire, or strive for", and this again was applied to evil intentions in 19f., 25 and 30. Here [7,34] it could mean seek in order to arrest, as in 11, but the general tenor of the verse is that they will seek him because, too late, they want to have what he came to give³⁵.

Thus we likely have in these two instances highly ironic uses of ζητέω: the *Ioudaioi*, who have been "seeking Jesus" in order to kill him, will one day "seek Jesus" in the sense of coming to him in order to "drink" (7,37) and believe (8,24) but they will only find death because of their sins (8,21). It is important to point out that the positive sense of ζητέω here gains its ironic power from the dominant negative connotation of the concept "seeking Jesus" in chapters 7 and 8 but also throughout the Gospel.

35. B. LINDARS, *The Gospel of John* (New Century Bible), London, Oliphants, 1972, pp. 295-296. See also SCHNACKENBURG, *Gospel* (n. 19), p. 197; C.K. BARRETT, *The Gospel According to St John*, London, SPCK, 1965, p. 325; BROWN, *John I* (n. 32), p. 318.

2. *Seizing Jesus*

John uniquely employs the verb *πιάζω* for the official "arrest" (7,32; 11,57)³⁶ of Jesus and for the non-official "seizing" or "taking hold" of him (7,30.44; 8,20; 10,39), whereas the Synoptics use *κρατέω*. The verb *πιάζω* refers to an obvious physical action and adds to the violent nature of the pursuit for Jesus discussed above³⁷. In most of the instances in John the attempted seizure of Jesus, as we saw with instances of "seeking" for Jesus, has as its goal Jesus' death. Bultmann has noticed this with regard to 7,32 when he writes: "This refers directly to the authorities' intention to arrest him (v. 32). Their real intention, of course, is to remove Jesus altogether (according to 5,18)"³⁸. I would add that not only does the official order for Jesus' seizure in 7,32 point back to 5,18 ("the *Ioudaioi* were seeking all the more to kill him") but more immediately to 7,1 ("the *Ioudaioi* were seeking to kill him") and 7,11 ("the *Ioudaioi* therefore were seeking him"). In 10,39 we are told that the *Ioudaioi* "were seeking again to seize him", an attempted action that follows closely upon the notice that they wanted to stone Jesus (10,31) as a result of his claim that he and his Father "are one" (10,30). Thus, the attempted seizure in 10,31 should be interpreted in light of the desire to stone Jesus to death. And lastly, the official "orders" (*ἐντολαί*) given for Jesus' seizure in 11,57 clearly relates directly to the Sanhedrin's decision to put Jesus to death (11,47-50) and the concrete "plan" devised by the council to do so (11,53: "And from that day on they planned together to kill him").

There is an interesting pattern in John's usage of the *πιάζω* that emerges in every case: when the *Ioudaioi* attempt to seize Jesus (whether officially or not), they are not able to do so for some reason. The reasons given are as follows. In two passages, the reason that no one could "put a hand on him" (7,30) or "seize" him (8,20) is that Jesus' "hour" had not yet come. In two other places the reasons are simply that "no one laid hands on him" (7,44) and that "he escaped from their hands" (10,39). The only possible exception is 7,32-33 where after the official orders are given to seize Jesus (v. 32), he says, "for a little while I am with you, and then I go to him who sent me" (v. 33). But, the fact that Jesus knows that he only has "a little while", a phrase referring to his

36. By "official arrest" I mean those instances where it is explicitly stated that the authorities gave orders to seize Jesus.

37. The verb *πιάζω* in these instances connotes "to seize with intent to overpower or gain control" (BDAG, p. 812).

38. BULTMANN, *The Gospel of John* (n. 1), pp. 306-307.

death and departure to the Father³⁹, reveals his foreknowledge⁴⁰ concerning the "hour" of his death and departure and thus 7,33 communicates essentially the same idea as 7,30 and 8,20: the plans of the *Ioudaioi* to "seize" Jesus would happen on his terms, that is, when his "hour" had come. Our interpretation of Jesus' escapes from the hands of the *Ioudaioi* in these instances (particularly 7,30.32-33.44) corresponds to most commentators who understand these escapes as miraculous deliverances which point to the divine control over the moment of Jesus' death⁴¹. However, Orchard believes this interpretation threatens to "minimize the violence of the situation by focusing on the 'miraculous' nature of the escape rather than the jeopardy that Jesus is in the first place"⁴². Orchard is correct that the violence in these scenes should not be passed over. But she goes too far when she states:

It is not acceptable to claim that the crowd *could* not seize him, but rather to note that they *did* not. The evangelist has retrospectively provided a theological interpretation as to why Jesus managed to escape a situation of extreme personal danger⁴³.

It is of course speculative at best to make the claim that the evangelist has created such a theological interpretation and added it to the sources available to him. But more to the point: Orchard's self-conscious literary approach⁴⁴ seems to have missed some of the narrative's own indication concerning the point of Jesus' "escapes". In two of the instances, the assertion that Jesus' "hour had not yet come" is introduced with the causal conjunction *ὅτι*: Jesus was not "seized" *because* his hour had not yet come" (*ὅτι οὐπω ἐληλύθει ἡ ὥρα αὐτοῦ*, 7,30; 8,20). If the logic here is reversed, we would have: "Because Jesus' hour had not yet come, [therefore] no one seized him". Clearly then, the arrival of Jesus' hour is the determined moment when he will be "seized" by the authorities. This is implied in chapter 17 where Jesus states, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son, that the Son may glorify you" (17,1) and then in chapter 18 he is arrested by the authorities. The implication here

39. On the phrase *ἐτι χρόνον μικρόν* and its variations, see 12,35; 13,33; 14,19.

40. So LINDARS, *John* (n. 35), p. 295. See also BEASLEY-MURRAY, *John* (n. 19), p. 112.

41. BULTMANN, *The Gospel of John* (n. 1), p. 302; BARRETT, *St John* (n. 35), p. 323; R. KYSAR, *John* (Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament), Minneapolis, MN, Augsburg, 1986, p. 125.

42. ORCHARD, *Courting Betrayal* (n. 7), p. 83.

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Ibid.*, p. 17, describes her method as follows: "The approach employed to discuss Jesus as a victim is primarily literary, not theological. The exegesis is therefore focused upon Jesus as a character within the narrative world of the Fourth Gospel".

is that now that Jesus' hour "has come", he can now be arrested, but not one moment sooner. In fact, as the authorities approach Jesus in the garden, the evangelist states plainly in 18,4, "therefore Jesus, because⁴⁵ he knew all the things coming upon him, came out and said to them, 'whom are you seeking'?" (Ἰησοῦς οὖν εἰδὼς πάντα τὰ ἐρχόμενα ἐπ' αὐτὸν ἐξῆλθεν καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς: τίνα ζητεῖτε). Jesus "came out" (ἐξῆλθεν) and faced the authorities here, rather than escaping, precisely *because he knew* that his hour had now arrived. But what is even more important to point out is that the *Ioudaioi* are portrayed as "seeking" Jesus' seizure (7,30; 10,39) and "wanting (θέλω) to seize him" (7,44), but, until his hour had arrive, their desire had every time been thwarted. This interpretation not only best accounts for the actual language in these instances but it is also surely demanded by Jesus' statement in 10,18: "No takes it [my life] away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative". This does not mean that we have to downplay the violence in these scenes; it just means that the violent nature of the pursuit of Jesus *and* Jesus' sovereignty over the timing of his death should be held together.

IV. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

M.C. de Boer rightly pointed out that the "history [of Johannine Christianity] is in fact imbedded, or encoded, within the text itself..."⁴⁶ to some degree. This does not mean that we can simply read off the narrative a concrete history of the Johannine community however. At a minimum it only suggests that the Fourth Gospel's narrative content was meant to address the needs and concerns of its readers in their concrete social setting. Although there will always be debates about what in John's narrative reflects these concrete social concerns of the first readers, as a starting point it seems that focus should be placed on what is unique (vis-à-vis the Synoptics) to John's presentation of Jesus. Orchard has correctly shown that the victimization of Jesus is more pronounced in John than the Synoptics and as such suggests a correlation between Jesus' victimization and the victimization of John's first readers. Given the consensus that the readers of John's Gospel were engaged in an intense and apparently violent (cf. 16,2; 17,14) conflict with their parent Israelite synagogue community, Orchard's correlation has warrant. The vocabulary used for the intense and violent pursuit of Jesus in the Fourth

45. I understand the adverbial participle εἰδὼς in a causal sense.

46. M.C. DE BOER, *Narrative Criticism, Historical Criticism, and the Gospel of John*, in *JSNT* 47 (1992) 35-48, here p. 43.

Gospel (ζητέω and πιάζω), sometimes in order to stone him to death (λιθάζω / λίθος) and always in order to "utterly consume" (κατεσθίω) and destroy (λύω) him, surely reflects something of the experiences of the first readers. We are all but forced to this conclusion by the correlation between Jesus' and the readers' experiences of violence in John's narrative itself.

In the farewell discourse and thus as part of Jesus' preparing the disciples to live faithful after he goes to the Father, Jesus relates his victimization by the *Ioudaioi* with what his disciples should expect to experience. First, Jesus correlates the hatred he experienced with the hatred the disciples will experience (15,18-19). Second, Jesus equates his persecution, and implicitly his death, with what the disciples will face. In 15,20 Jesus argues that since a servant is not greater than the master and since "they" persecuted him, "they" will also persecute the disciples (15,20). The only other instance of the verb "to persecute" (διώκω) in the Fourth Gospel is 5,16 where it is said that the *Ioudaioi* "were persecuting Jesus". In 16,2, Jesus warns his disciples that "they" will not only "put you out of the synagogues", but they will also kill you (16,2). This is again analogous to what Jesus experienced in John 5 in that the *Ioudaioi* there not only "persecuting Jesus" (5,16) but they were also seeking to kill him (5,18). These texts encourage the readers to see in Jesus' experiences with the *Ioudaioi* of his day a sort of template for their own hostile treatment by the synagogue leaders of their day. John's vocabulary used to describe the pursuit of Jesus, his violent death, along with the Johannine emphasis on Jesus' sovereignty over the "hour" of his death, combine to form part of the "cluster of sacred symbols" that make up John's symbolic universe just as much as the more explicit Christological statements in the Gospel. I would therefore suggest that John's portrayal of the pursuit of Jesus' death functioned in essentially the same way as the Prologue was shown to function by W. Carter's 1990 study. He concluded that "the Prologue is part of the great energy expended to assert the communities identity, to reinforce its internal cohesion, to legitimate its claims, and to provide interpretation of its experiences"⁴⁷. Precisely how the death pursuit of Jesus functioned in these ways will have to await another study.

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47. W. CARTER, *The Prologue and John's Gospel: Function, Symbol and the Definitive Word*, in *JSNT* 39 (1990) 35-58, here p. 50.

