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Portraits of Pilate According to the Christian Canonical Writings and Jewish Historical Works

Part Five: Pilate in the Narrative of John's Gospel

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1. Introduction

John's perspective on Pilate is extraordinarily interesting, due to a fact that his Gospel is "independent" (it does not belong to the Synoptic Gospel tradition), and he is more interested in interpretation of the facts than in simply recording them. This allow a reader to expect that the same pattern is used in the presentation of the narrative regarding the Jesus' trial, where the main hero of the narrative, surprisingly, is not Jesus but Pilate. It is attested by the structure of the narrative, which can be determine according to the location of each episode.

The most general pattern used here is "inside the praetorium" and "outside the praetorium" that determines the structure as A-B-A¹-B¹-A²-B²-A³. All parts marked with A (Jn 18, 28-32; Jn 18, 38b-40; Jn 19, 4-7; Jn 19, 12-16) are concerned Pilate's encounters with the Jews "outside the praetorium", and all parts marked with B (Jn 18, 33-38a; Jn 19, 1-3; Jn 19, 8-11) are concerned with Pilate's encounters with Jesus "inside the praetorium". In both locations, Pilate is the main agent and protagonist. If Pilate is the main agent of John's narrative concerning the trial, a reader can expect a specific Johannine perspective on the fifth prefect of Judea, which although in many details is similar to the narrative found in the Synoptic Gospels (especially in the Gospel of Mathew), however John's main approach to an interpretation of Pilate's deeds stays unique his. Before examining the specific perspective of John is presented, an analysis of the texts is in order¹.

2. The first encounter of Pilate with the Jews (Jn 18, 28-32)

²⁸ *Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters, so that*

¹ In this study we include also two other events that concern Pilate (the Jews' request – Jn 19, 31-37 and Joseph's request – Jn 19, 38-42), which although not part of the narrative of the trial, however, casts light on the Johannine Pilate.

they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover.²⁹ So Pilate went outside to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?"³⁰ They answered him, "If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you."³¹ Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." The Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death."³² This was to fulfil the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

Before John introduces into his narrative the person of the prefect, he writes little of Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin. All John records is that after Jesus was arrested, he was presented to Annas and Caiaphas (Jn 18, 13-14), and the next day he was sent to Pilate (Jn 18, 28)². Although there is no information about an interrogation or a trial, John mentions Caiaphas' counsel to the Jews (Jn 18, 14). It excludes the possibility of a trial with a sentence that has been passed on Jesus³. However, Caiaphas not only suggests a solution to the Jesus' problem, but also, he makes the first step to suggest an action, namely he records the handing over of Jesus into the hands of a Roman official (Jn 18, 28). Although, John writes almost nothing about a period between the arrest of Jesus and his handing-over to Pilate, he clearly points up the purpose of the actions taken against Jesus. This purpose is fully revealed in the narrative of the first encounter of Pilate with the Jews (Jn 18, 28-32)⁴. The narrative moves back and forth between the two locations, inside and outside the praetorium and two changeable agents (Jesus and Jews) who are separately related to the same protagonist Pilate⁵. Verse 28

² John's narration of Jesus' arrest suggests participation by Roman soldiers (use of strictly Roman military terminology in Jn 18, 12), but the fact that Jesus was taken to the Jewish authorities not directly to Pilate, and the fact that Pilate seems to know nothing about the reason for Jesus' arrest by the Jews fails to support the suggestion. (Jn 18, 29). Bond rightly points that John's narrative makes Jesus' arrest seem like a large-scale military operation. H. K. Bond, *Pontius Pilate in History and Interpretation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004, pp. 166-167. Our supposition regarding this problem is that John's literary description of Jesus' arrest is strongly influenced by his theological and narrative purpose. This supposition will be supported by arguments in following analysis.

³ The probable reason for omission of the narrative concerning the Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin is the fact that John already mentioned the sentence of the Sanhedrin upon Jesus in Jn 11, 45-53. It is suggested by Jn 18, 14 which is a partial repetition of Jn 11, 50.

⁴ In Jn 18, 28-40, John uses a general term "the Jews", which directly does not necessarily include the Sanhedrin, however Jn 19, 6 states that they take the part in the Jesus' trial before the Pilate from the very beginning.

⁵ W. Carter, *Pontius Pilate. Portraits of a Roman Governor*, Collegeville 2003, pp. 137-138.

shows that Jesus was inside the praetorium but the Jews due to restrictions placed on them by the Law stayed outside. The narrative (Jn 18, 29-32) begins outside the praetorium and it includes Pilate and Jewish leaders⁶. John's Pilate knows and respect Jewish customs and the regulations of the Law, which is attested by his going outside the building to meet the Jews. As the protagonist, he poses a question concerning the accusation against Jesus (v. 29), which indicates Pilate's legal approach to the case. Instead of outlining the accusation, Jews simply declare that Jesus is a criminal, and for this reason they handed him over to the prefect (v. 30). The reason for Jews' action seems to be an unconvincing attempt to excuse themselves from responsibility, since usually Jews did not bring controversies raised in their community, before Roman officials. The lack of a clear accusation could be count as unwise (on side of Jews) and insulting (on side of Pilate), however the following narrative suggests that both sides already know the accusation against Jesus, since both sides were involved (cooperated) in Jesus' arrest⁷. For this reason, Pilate's refusal to continue the legal trial against Jesus comes as a surprise (v. 31). Did Pilate find the Jewish answer offensive or answer given irrelevant to what they expected from the prefect? It is difficult to say with considerable confidence, however, the fact that Pilate attempts return the trial to Jews jurisdiction, shows that on the one hand he did not find sufficient argument for proceeding to trial according to Roman law, and on other hand he recognized that Jews had already passed sentence upon Jesus. This supposition is attested by the Jews' answer to Pilate, where their true aim is exposed (v. 31)⁸. They seek Jesus' execution, and this can only be done with Roman's authority⁹.

Summing up, this presentation of the first encounter of Pilate with the Jewish leaders shows that Pilate is treated instrumentally by the Temple authorities, who at least psychologically get the better of him.

3. The first encounter of Pilate with Jesus (Jn 18, 33-38a) and the second encounter of Pilate with the Jews (Jn 18, 38b-40)

³⁴ *Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?"* ³⁵ *Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have*

⁶ F.J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville 1998, p. 493.

⁷ R.E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, Doubleday & Company, New York 1979, p. 866.

⁸ W. Carter, *Pontius Pilate*, p. 141.

⁹ E. W. Klink III, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. John*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids 2016, pp. 761-762.

delivered you over to me. What have you done?" ³⁶ Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." ³⁷ Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose, I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world--to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." ³⁸ Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, "I find no guilt in him. ³⁹ But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover. So, do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" ⁴⁰ They cried out again, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a robber.

After hearing the Jewish side, Pilate presides with hearing of Jesus, which takes place inside the Praetorium, without the presence of accusers. John presents the interrogation as a private meeting between Pilate and Jesus. However, this meeting has the character of a legal trial, where the judge asks the accused Jesus to respond to the charge against him. Surprisingly, Pilate's question focuses on the political issue, namely whether Jesus is King of Jews. Since the narrative Jn 18, 28-32 does not contain any detailed accusation, except to offer a general description of Jesus as "man doing evil", someone who can be described as a "criminal" (Jn 18, 30) the sudden appearance of a strictly political accusation seems to lack grounds in the preceding narrative. However, considering the fact that Roman soldiers took part together with the soldiers of the Temple in arresting Jesus, we can suppose that significant reasons had been presented to Pilate. Also, the general term "criminal" without doubt contains reference to the accused claiming to be King of Jews. For these reasons Pilate's question should be taken as an official accusation against Jesus during the Roman trial. To this question Jesus answers with a counter question (v. 34), which shows on the one hand lack of respect toward Pilate and gives Jesus the upper hand vis-à-vis the Prefect. Jesus asks Pilate if the opinion concerning Him as the king of Jews is his own opinion (based on convincing arguments) or is it a Jewish accusation recognized by him as probably true? Even if Pilate has not received an answer to his question (v. 33), he gives an answer to Jesus' question (v. 35), which in the narrative structure of the section shows Jesus has the better hand compared to Pilate. Pilate uses a rhetorical question to accent his non-Jewishness, and goes outside to declare to the assembled Jews, that he bears no responsibility for Jesus' fate, rather they do as the accusers.

However, John's Pilate still wants to know, what Jesus says of Himself. In verse 36, Jesus gives an affirmative answer to Pilate's question presented in verse 33, which is followed by an extensive explanation regarding the nature of the Jesus'

kingdom arguing that His kingdom is no threat to the Empire¹⁰. Verse 37 shows that Pilate accepted Jesus' explanation and understood Jesus' confession in an allegorical sense, opening the door to a philosophical question regarding the nature of "truth" (v. 38)¹¹. John does not focus on this conversation but rather on its result, directly expressed by Pilate in his public announcement that he found Jesus guilty of no crime. He also offers a solution to Jesus' case, which can be easily finished if the crowd request the release of Jesus according to the custom related to the feast of Passover (v. 39). John's Pilate puts this solution in the form of a direct question concerning the crowd's wish to free Jesus, the king of Jews (v. 39)¹². To this question the crowd gives a negative answer.

According to John's narrative (Jn 18, 28-40), Pilate during the interrogation of Jesus, properly understood Jesus' identity, and contrary to his accusers, did not find it either offense under Roman law, nor offer sufficient to open a formal legal trial¹³.

However, neither the Jewish leadership – the accusers nor Jews in general are open to Pilate's conclusion nor his proposed solution. On the contrary they did not recognize Jesus as King of the Jews. John in his narrative of the interrogation makes clear who is to be blamed for Jesus' fate.

¹⁰ By saying "*my kingdom does not belong to this world*" Jesus reveals the origin of His kingdom, which came from God, and not from any earthly authorities. This explanation sets Pilate at ease. F. Martin, W.M. Wright IV, *The Gospel of John*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids 2015, pp. 303-304.

¹¹ Moloney thinks that Pilate's question "*what is truth?*" is "*a dismissive rejection of the word of Jesus*". F.J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, p. 498. However, if Pilate rejected the Jesus' explanation, why he did not find Him guilty of crime against Rome? Rejection of Jesus' words concerning "truth" would be a rejection of whole of Jesus' argumentation.

¹² Use by Pilate of the title "the king of Jews" in this context is to be noted. Questionable that he uses it in political sense, since if he recognized Jesus as the king it would become a political case and Jesus should be found guilty. More likely he uses it in order to force the Jews to recognize the title, since he knows that they never will do that. Impossible is also that he wanted to humiliate Jews, by using the title in sarcastic way, since they do not accepted Jesus. Based on the narrative Jn 18, 36-38 we suggest that Pilate uses this title as sign of affirming Jesus' self-presentation as the king. This opinion is contrary to Brown's interpretation, cf. R.E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 869.

¹³ W. Carter, *Pontius Pilate*, p. 134.

4. The second encounter of Pilate with Jesus (Jn 19, 1-3) and the third encounter of Pilate with the Jews (Jn 19, 4-7)

¹Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him. ² And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. ³ They came up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and struck him with their hands. ⁴ Pilate went out again and said to them, "See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him." ⁵ So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!" ⁵ So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!" ⁶ When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him." ⁷ The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God."

Following John's narrative to this point we learn three things about the case against Jesus, first there is the negative attitude of the Sanhedrin toward Jesus, the second the Jewish crowd rejects Jesus, and third Pilate's personal conviction that Jesus is innocent. Contrary to his own conviction however, Pilate sent Jesus to be flogged and humiliated by soldiers. His decision seems to be routine in cases where the subjects are categorized as criminals¹⁴. The flogging of Jesus (who was not criminal according to Pilate) is in drastic contrast to the freeing of Barabbas, who is described by John as a criminal (Jn 18, 40). By ordering the flogging of Jesus, does Pilate acts against his own convictions? The following narrative (Jn 19, 4-16) gives a negative answer to this question, however at the same time, John clearly indicates that Pilate's attitude is rooted in his convictions rather than in an emotional or affirmative relationship with Jesus. In verse 4 Pilate directly indicates a reason for bringing Jesus again to the crowd, namely to manifests his disagreement with their choice, which is based on his conviction regarding Jesus' innocence. Pilate is definitely making another attempt to act in favour of Jesus, when he presents the humiliated Jesus by simply saying "behold, the man" which in our opinion is heading for earning of Jews' attention rather than for introducing another title, which is not used again, nor even explained by John's Pilate¹⁵. If Pilate counted on the crowd showing mercy for a severely punished man, he must have been highly annoyed by the answer of the Temple

¹⁴ Flavius in his writings mentions even the flogging of an innocent man (JW 6. 304).

¹⁵ For various interpretation of the phrase "behold, the man" cf. E. W. Klink III, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. John*, pp. 777-779.

elite, who demand an even more severe treatment for Jesus (v. 6)¹⁶. They demand the death penalty, which seems to deeply shock Pilate, as can be deduced from his reaction¹⁷. He says “*you take him and crucify him yourselves*” which is a direct ceding of his prerogative to the Sanhedrin¹⁸. Again, Pilate thinks of his conviction and real circumstances, rather than of Jesus, since he was ready to allow the Sanhedrin to execute Him¹⁹. This supposition is attested by his argumentation “*for I myself do not find in him a basis for a charge*”, which in fact is the third time then Pilate confesses his conviction regarding Jesus’ case²⁰. Pilate wants the case to return to Jewish jurisdiction, with the probable hope that crucifixion could be no option, since he does not want to crucify Jesus, and the Sanhedrin has no such power to order crucifixion²¹. In this instance the Jews directly oppose Pilate’s conviction concerning Jesus’ innocence by directly declaring that according to the Jewish Law, Jesus is guilty (as in verse 30) and worthy of the death penalty (as in verse 31) because of His claim of divine origin (the son of God). This is the very first time the religious reason for Jesus’ trial is mention directly to Pilate.

Summing up this part of the narrative, is possible to conclude that Pilate stands firmly on his conviction regarding Jesus’ innocence, and because of that his action may be evaluated by the reader as a pro-Jesus option, even if his real motivation is uncertain. In subsection Jn 19, 4-7, John presents Pilate as the man

¹⁶ W. Carter, *Pontius Pilate*, p. 146.

¹⁷ This is the first time the Jewish authority directly express their demand of the death penalty for Jesus. In this context, it is possible that Pilate in ordering the flogging of Jesus in Jn 19, 1 hoped that would be a sufficient penalty and finally solve the problem.

¹⁸ This is the second time that Pilate proposes this solution (Jn 18, 31). In the context of Jn 18, 31 Pilate’s statement in Jn 19, 6 should be understood as permitting the Jews to judge the case of Jesus’ case by the Jews, but not as permission to crucify Jesus.

¹⁹ Can his words should be interpreted as a sarcasm? (Doing something that in the fact he can’t do), or his play to put considerable pressure on the Sanhedrin in order to withdraw their demand? In our opinion none of these interpretations are accurate. For the third time Pilate says that there is no legal ground (according to Roman law) for Jesus’ condemnation, and because of that the Sanhedrin should judge Jesus’ case according to Jewish Law, which de facto does not allowed them to go as far as to pronounce and carry out the crucifixion. In this way, Pilate attempted to avoid the most severe punishment for Jesus.

²⁰ Worthy of note is John’s layer “You and I”, which exposes and underlines the disagreement between the Sanhedrin and Pilate.

²¹ By all means crucify Jews, although controversial but still a notorious act, during the Passover feast, it would also be more than enough cause to provoke an uprising against Romans. Probably one of the strongest reasons for Pilate’s reaction for the Sanhedrin’s demand.

who finally faces a very brutal choice in the case concerning Jesus. He acknowledges the reason and the purpose of the Sanhedrin's demand, with possible recognition that the Jews are attempting to use him to achieve their aim.

5. The third encounter of Pilate with Jesus (Jn 19, 8-11)

⁸ *When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid.* ⁹ *He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer.* ¹⁰ *So Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?"* ¹¹ *Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore, he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin."*

John starts the next subsection with Pilate's reaction to the Jewish declaration, almost a demand in v. 7. He writes that Pilate was "very afraid", noting clearly that Pilate's fear is somehow connected to the Jews declaration of the true reason for their demand. However, it is not clear if the reason for Pilate's fear is the frank way the Jews addressed him, or the title "son of God", which according to the Jews' testimony, Jesus has claimed²². The first possibility seems to be attested by this part of John's narrative which refers to the third encounter of Pilate with the Sanhedrin (Jn 19, 12-16), where an indirect threat against Pilate is revealed (Jn 19, 12). However, some scholars prefer the title "son of God" as the reason for the Pilates' anxiety²³. Usually, they point to Romans superstitions rooted in a polytheistic religious world view, whereas a claim of divine sonship could be accepted much more easily than in a monotheistic religious worldview²⁴. The second supposition seems to be less probable, since almost nothing is written about Pilate's religiousness and his superstitions. Likewise, the first supposition although supported by the text, must be consider as hardly possible if we take into consideration Josephus' account regarding Pilate's attitude toward Jews who opposed him. In our opinion, the reason for Pilate's anxiety was much more complex, and should not be limited to one of the possibilities. When from Jews (v. 7) Pilate for the very first time heard that Jesus called himself "son of God", which was new information that made Jesus' case one that had a strict religious

²² W. Carter, *Pontius Pilate*, p.148.

²³ E. W. Klink III, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. John*, p. 780; 伊吹雄、ヨハネ福音書注解 III、東京 2009、p. 327.

²⁴ This interpretation seems to be supported by Mathew's version of Jesus' trial before Pilate (Mt 27, 11-26), where a dream of Pilate's wife is mentioned.

nature. It was information that made Pilate more afraid than before, namely when he first heard Jewish accusation against Jesus that led him to start his interrogation with the question “are you the king of Jews?” (Jn 18, 33)²⁵. Pilate was convinced that Jesus was not the king of Jews, but information about Jesus’ claim to be “the son of God” brought a new aspect to Jesus’ case.

Caesar Tiberius although he was not honoured by the Roman Senate with perpetual divinity after his death was called divine names during his lifetime²⁶. Jesus by calling himself “son of God” directly confronts Caesar Tiberius, which *de facto* was a political reason sufficient for a legal trial before Roman authority²⁷. Pilate realized this fact, with fully conscious that it will be used by the Jews against him in the current disagreement. For this reason, he again met Jesus and directly ask Him if He is of divine origin (Jn 19, 9)²⁸. The question “*where are you from?*” here does not refer to the place where Jesus come from but to the issue of Jesus’ claim to be of divine origin. Jesus lack of answer to Pilates’ question made the prefect even more irritated, which lead to using the argument of power in order to get Jesus’ answer (Jn 19, 10). Pilate claims absolute power over Jesus, which is a direct reason for His declaration. Jesus boldly and directly resists the claim of Pilate’s absolute power over Him by saying “*you would have no power over me if it had not been given you from above*”. Although, Jesus recognizes Pilate’s earthly authority over Him, He indicates that both of them are under the divine power (v. 11). It is certain that Jesus was talking about God, however it is more probable that Pilate thought rather of Caesar than the God of the Jews. Jesus directly limits the authority of Pilate, saying that he is doing what he has to do (by subordinating himself to authority or by exercise of his office), which does not free him fully from responsibility for his action (v. 11). However, John’s Jesus puts the issue of responsibility on a comparative level, which favours Pilate (one who has to solve the problem) over the Jews (one who created the problem)²⁹. No one is freed from responsibility, but the degree of responsibility for each part

²⁵ Bond prefers superstition as the reason for Pilate’s fear. H. K. Bond, *Pontius Pilate in History and Interpretation*, p. 187.

²⁶ B.W. Winter, *Divine Honours for Caesars. The First Christians’ Response*, Grand Rapids/Cambridge 2015, pp. 62-74.

²⁷ The title “son of God” was frequently used in inscriptions as the title for Emperor. J.H. Bernard, *Gospel according to St John*, Edinburgh 1999, p. 618.

²⁸ E. W. Klink III, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. John*, pp. 780-781.

²⁹ The single form of the verb “to hand over” suggests individual (Caiaphas) and not collective responsibility (all Jews). F.J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, p. 500. However, if we consider that Caiaphas acted on behalf of the whole nation, a collective interpretation of this verb seems to be attested. (Cf. Jn 11, 47-53)

defers.

Summing up, in this subsection (the second interrogation of Jesus by Pilate), John puts a strong focus on Pilate, namely on his recognition of the real state of the matter he was involved in. Pilate refused to crucify Jesus based on political accusations, for which he found there to be lacking proof. After Pilate learned for the very first time that Jesus called Himself “the son of God”, his position in the confrontation with the Jews become weaker, since it was a claim reserved for Roman Caesars. In this second interrogation of Jesus, Pilate found that He is not a “son of God” in the sense Pilate understood this term (Jesus claim does not directly challenge Caesar), and for this reason he was determined to save Jesus.

6. The fourth encounter of Pilate with the Jews (Jn 19, 12-16)

¹² *From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, “If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.”* ¹³ *So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha.* ¹⁴ *Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, “Behold your King!”* ¹⁵ *They cried out, “Away with him, away with him, crucify him!”* Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar.” ¹⁶ *So he delivered him over to them to be crucified. So, they took Jesus,*

John doesn’t detail how Pilate tried to save Jesus (v. 12) rather his focus is on the Jewish reaction to his attempt. All that it is possible to learn about Pilate’s determination can be deduced from the latent aggression in their threatening statement, “*If you release this man, you are not a friend of Caesar*”, which implies that Pilate was leaning to opting to free Jesus, not just that he desired to free Him. On the other hand, it hints that freeing Jesus would be used as an example of an act of Pilate’s that showed disloyalty toward Caesar himself. Thus, providing grounds for a complaint against Pilate to higher Roman authorities, something that Pilate had previous experienced (AJ 18. 60-61)³⁰. They even give voice to the possible form of that complaint, a possible form the accusation could take, “*anyone who makes himself out to be a king opposes Caesar*”. Here the accusers return to the very first form of accusation against Jesus (the king of Jews), which takes

³⁰ Josephus writes about two cases that ended with Jews (AJ 18. 60-61 – the Temple treasure) and Samaritans (AJ 18. 85-89 – pacification of Mount Gerizim) complaining against Pilate to the governor of Syria.

a strict political character³¹.

It seems to us, that verse 12 is just a summary of much longer dialogue between Pilate and Jews, where in the end Pilate abandons his conviction (as the following narrative suggest it). Verse 13 sharply shows that Pilate is reacting to the Jews' threat presented in verse 12, with full consciousness of the consequences of a decision to judge Jesus on a political matter. This is a legal trial with only one accused man, with no possibility to choose between Jesus and Barabbas, as is presented in the Synoptic Gospels³². According to John, Pilate has made his decision, and from this point onwards something else, more important than the life of Jesus guides his words and actions. As verse 12 shows, the Jews put considerable strong pressure on Pilate that left him with no choice than to subordinate himself to the will of Jews. Defeated, Pilate (in a sense he acts against his conviction) is about to humiliate the Jews, in that he makes them acknowledge Caesar as their king³³. For this reason, Pilate makes the simple and bold statement "*Behold, your king!*" with the high probability that Jews will reject Jesus, which *de facto* is what happens in verse 15. This statement and the Jewish reaction to it, put Pilate in the controlling position in the political clash between him and the Jews. His ironic question (v. 15) is just a trap for Jews, who are ready to go as far as to confess that for them Caesar is the only king³⁴. It is a point, then Pilate breaks their Jewish pride³⁵. At the expense of Jesus, he not only saved himself but also won again the Jews.

Summing up, in this subsection that ends a whole narrative regarding Jesus trial before Pilate, John presents Pilate as the person who following his own conviction puts himself in a weaker position than his opponents (v. 12), forcing him to abandon his convictions in order to save his life (in sense of position).

³¹ *De facto*, in John's narrative of the trial there is not direct mention that the Jews accused Jesus of claiming to be the king of Jews. However, readers may deduce this from Pilate's use of this title during interrogation of Jesus (Jn 18, 33. 37. 39; and then Jn 19, 14-15). It is worthy to note that Jews did not specify the term king, which makes the saying "*anyone who makes himself out to be a king opposes Caesar*" to be referring rather to a general statement than directly to Jesus as the king of Jews (although without doubt the statement directly suggests it). J.H. Bernard, *Gospel According to St John*, Edinburgh 1999, p. 621.

³² Concerning the accusation, John directly blames Jews, however, from the issue of the sentence of death, he directly blames Pilate.

³³ F. Martin, W.M. Wright IV, *The Gospel of John*, p. 314.

³⁴ Bernard writes: "... they abandoned that which was most distinctive of the religion of Judaism". J.H. Bernard, *Gospel according to St. John*, pp. 624-625.

³⁵ W. Carter, *Pontius Pilate*, p. 151.

According to John's narrative, it is clear that Pilate saved himself from potential problems at the expense of Jesus' life, however it is possible also that John wants to show that Pilate treated Jesus' case instrumentally in his political conflict with Jews (vv. 14-15).

7. Jewish request (Jn 19, 31-36)

³¹ *Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away.* ³² *So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him.* ³³ *But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.* ³⁴ *But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.* ³⁵ *He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe.* ³⁶ *For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken."*

While the Synoptic Gospels, following the trial narrative relate the request of Joseph of Arimathea for Jesus' body, John alone records the Jews' request to Pilate to break the legs of Jesus and the other two executed with him (Jn 19, 31)³⁶. Pilate favoured the Jews' request, since verse 32 informs us that soldiers broke the legs of the two others, but they did not do so in the case of Jesus since he was already dead (vv. 32-34)³⁷. One notes the irony in the fact that though the Jews requested that the legs of all three be broken, such was not the case. Rather the words of Scripture, *"Not one of his bones will be broken."*, words that hint at the Messianic dignity of Jesus a claim the Jews sought to dismiss, are affirmed³⁸. Human intentions, both Jewish and Pilates, through the deft use of a single line of quotation, are shown to be supplanted by the will of God revealed in the prophets³⁹. Concerning Pilate, John presents him in the same way as he did in Jn 19, 12-16, namely as the man who favour the request of Jews. However, this presentation is balanced by presentation of Pilate in narrative concerning

³⁶ As the official reason for their request, John notes the regulation of the Law (Deut 21, 22-23) that ordered that body should be buried before sundown. F. Martin, W.M. Wright IV, *The Gospel of John*, p. 325.

³⁷ J.H. Bernard, *Gospel according to St John*, p. 643.

³⁸ Concerning the importance of these two quotations in discourse of Jesus' messianic dignity cf. R.E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, pp. 952-956.

³⁹ D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Grand Rapids/Cambridge 1991, p. 623.

Joseph's request (Jn 19, 38-42).

8. Joseph's request (Jn 19, 38)

³⁸ After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. ³⁹ Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. ⁴⁰ So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹ Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. ⁴² So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

The Jews were not the only ones that asked Pilate for a favour (Jn 19, 31-36), also Joseph of Arimathea, Jesus' disciple asked Pilate to be allowed to take down the body of Jesus, and to give it a proper burial (Jn 19, 38)⁴⁰. Pilate grants him permission, as noticed by John. That Pilate gives permission furthers the positive presentation of Pilate since it wasn't customary to hand over the body of a crucified criminal, rather they were placed in a common grave⁴¹. Pilate's permission is recorded as a great favour, though it was possibly motivated by Pilate's conviction regarding Jesus' innocence, or by his ill will towards the Sanhedrin.

9. Conclusions

John is the only author among the four evangelists, who in his presentation of Pilate concentrates not only on relations between the Prefect and Jews (like Mathew, Mark and Luke) but also pays considerable attention to the relationship between the Prefect and Jesus⁴². There are two layers commonly known as the "outside layer" and "inside layer", where the first one serves to present the relationship between the Jews and Pilate in the context of Jesus' trial, and the

⁴⁰ The narrative regarding Joseph's request is mentioned in all canonical Gospels, where the Gospel according to Mathew seems to be closest to John's version with the exception of the motive of Nicodemus.

⁴¹ D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Grand Rapids/Cambridge 1991, pp. 628-629.

⁴² With 30 verses in total, half of them regards the relation between Jesus and Pilate and second half regards relation between Jews and Pilate.

second one serves to present the relationship between Jesus and Pilate in the same context. John wants to present readers the issue of Pilate from two different perspectives, which on the one hand are strongly connected, but on other hand relatively independent. Based on the analysis of the structure of the narrative, is possible to conclude that the dominant layer is the “outside layer”, in accord with perspective of the authors of the Synoptic Gospels, where the main focus is given to relations between Pilate and the Jews. It does not automatically mean that the “inside layer” is secondary, rather, in the Gospel of John, rather it complements both John and the Synoptic writer portrayal of the “official”, Pilate with a private side that the others don’t explore.

9.1. Relation between Pilate and Jews (the outside layer)

Concerning the relationship between Pilate and Jews as it is presented by John, without doubt the author sees it as confrontation of two opposite sides rather than two different but cooperating powers. At least two pericope attest to this, first (Jn 18, 29-31) is placed at the beginning of the narrative, and the second one almost at the end of the narrative (Jn 19, 12). Both pericopes mark the beginning of two new sections, which for the purpose of this study we called “Pilate’s domination” (Jn 18, 28-19, 11) and “Jews’ domination” (Jn 19, 12-16).

“Pilate domination” section, which contains 25 verses of 30 verses in total, is characterized by strong and persistent refusal on Pilate’s part to condemn Jesus according to the will of Jews (Jn 18, 31. 39-39; Jn 19, 4. 6. 12)⁴³. The first refusal (Jn 18, 31) is met by the Jewish counter argument, which forces Pilate to start a formal interrogation (Jn 18, 33-38). However, the prefect is controlling the situation and deciding according to his own conviction (Jn 18, 38). His generous offer to free Jesus meets Jews’ harsh opposition shortly exposed by John in words “crucify him”. In this situation, Pilate seeks another way to free Jesus that includes punishing him and setting him free (Jn 19, 1-5). Not surprisingly the Jews demand that Jesus be crucified is denied by Pilate (Jn 19, 6). The Jews’ counter-argument forces Pilate to another interrogation of Jesus that convinces him even more of Jesus’ innocence (Jn 19, 7-12). It was most probably Pilate’s determination to free Jesus that made Jews turn to blackmail as the strongest and the final argument in their struggle with the Prefect (Jn 19, 12).

“Jews domination” (Jn 19, 12-16) starts in John’s narrative following the Jewish blackmail threat (Jn 19, 12), to which Pilate offered no answer, so conceding to the Jews control of the confrontation. From here on, Pilate actions respond to the will and intentions of the Jewish leadership. The official process, the final stage

⁴³ This section contains also all encounters of Pilate with Jesus (Jn 18, 35-38; Jn 19, 1-3. 8-11).

when a final verdict is made is in accordance with the Jews' demand presented in verse 6. John then presents a last successful attempt by Pilate to humiliate Jews and at least partly reclaim his dominant position as a Roman official, by drawing forth from the Jews a confession of their loyalty to Caesar, but it was at the expense of the life of Jesus (Jn 19, 14-16). The Jews achieved their aim, and Pilate avoided a potential problem by sacrificing his convictions.

9.2. Relation between Pilate and Jesus (the inside layer).

Concerning the relation between Jesus and Pilate, all of them are placed in section called by us "Pilate's domination" (Jn 18, 28-19, 11). There are three encounters of Pilate with Jesus (Jn 18, 33-38; Jn 19, 1-3; Jn 19, 9-11) corresponding to the "inside layer". All of them are strong and positive influences on Pilate's conviction regarding Jesus' innocence. The first encounter (Jn 18, 33-38) concerns the political accusation that Jesus claimed the dignity of king of Jews (Jn 18, 33). The interrogation led Pilate to the conclusion that Jesus is free from any political charge and should be released (Jn 18, 38).

During the interrogation, Pilate recognized that Jesus' understanding of the term king and kingdom differs from his understanding of these terms and has much in common with philosophical ideas rather than with political opposition toward Roman. The second encounter of Pilate with Jesus has indirect character and it concerns Jesus' flogging, which was ordered by Pilate, but was executed by his soldiers (Jn 19, 1-3). This punishment was part of Pilate's unsuccessful attempt to release Jesus after He was rejected by the crowd (Jn 18, 40). The conclusion of this encounter is presented in Jn 19, 4-5, where Pilate again confesses Jesus' innocence and his human condition, which probably was designed to appeal to the Jews' compassionate side. The third encounter of Pilate with Jesus was a consequences of Pilate discourse with Jews, when he learned about Jesus' claim to divine son ship (Jn 19, 7). The main aim of this narrative is to point to a comparative perspective on the responsibility for Jesus' death (Jn 19, 11)⁴⁴. John does not free Pilate from the responsibility, but he limits it to a degree relative to his office (Jn 19, 11)⁴⁵. His responsibility is much smaller than that of the Jews, who have initiated the event, by handing Jesus over to Pilate.

⁴⁴ H. K. Bond, *Pontius Pilate in History and Interpretation*, pp. 188-189.

⁴⁵ W. Carter, *Pontius Pilate*, p. 149.