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The Oppressed and the Oppressors in the Fourth Gospel: A Postcolonial Reading

Joshua Polanski

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The Fourth Gospel, at first glance, appears to be the least suited gospel for postcolonial criticism. On the one hand, Mark is more focused on suffering, Luke's Jesus has traditionally been interpreted as a marginal character, and Matthew's kingdom theology makes it well suited for redefining power. On the other hand, John has been used to promote anti-Semitism, Pontius Pilate has traditionally been interpreted rather positively, and the suffering theme seems absent. However, further study shows that John is ripe for postcolonial readings. This paper, as a postcolonial critique, reads John in a way that favors marginalized people,¹ clarifies power dynamics, recognizes the dominators and subordinates, and attempts to move the periphery (subordinated) to the center (place of power).² Through this interpretation, it becomes evident that the Johannine Jesus aligns himself with various oppressed people, a fact indicating that various oppressed peoples, especially Samaritans, may have played a major role in the Johannine community. Further, Jesus subverts the power of the oppressors and liberates the oppressed. For these reasons, the Fourth Gospel is a gospel for the oppressed.

Oppressed Characters in John

There are various oppressed people in John. Here, three prominent cases are examined: the Jewish believers, the Samaritans, and the blind man. In the first case, the followers of Jesus retrojected their persecution onto Jesus in a way that allowed them to see their suffering as an extension to Jesus' salvific work. Using the terminology of Gayatri Spivak, in the latter two cases the subaltern is given a voice.³ In all three cases, Jesus is aligned with oppressed people.

¹ This is similar to Liberation theology's "preferential option for the poor."

² Fernando F. Segovia, "Mapping the Postcolonial Optic," in *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections*, ed. Stephen D. Moore and Fernando F. Segovia (London: T&T Clark International, 2005), 75.

³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the subaltern speak?" *Harvard University Press*, 1999.

In one case of oppression, Jewish believers are persecuted by local authorities. Jesus's speech in John 15-16, where he speaks of the world hating him, is the strongest case of this persecution. Critically, Jesus connects the world's hatred of him and his followers. Readers don't even have to do the work to read this as a drama on two-levels (the text reflects both the ministry of Jesus and the experiences of the Johannine community) because the evangelist has already done it for them. Further, at several points the text mentions synagogue expulsion, which was not practiced by religious authorities during the life of Jesus, and therefore better reflects the experiences of the Johannine community. John 16:2 is even stronger: "They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God." This passage infers direct persecution because of belief in Jesus, and possibly even indicates that some Johannine Jewish converts were even killed by Jewish authorities. Therefore, the Johannine Christians most likely faced religious oppression.

Further, Robert J. Karris uses John 7:45-52 to argue that members of the Johannine community may have been oppressed for being *'ammê ha'ares* or "people of the land."⁴ In this pericope the Pharisees are dissatisfied with the failure of the temple police to arrest Jesus. The Pharisees then retort, "But this crowd, which does not know the law—they are accursed" (7:49). The *'ammê ha'ares*, from later rabbinic texts, were essentially uneducated people, and the attacks of the Pharisees in John 7 anticipate those of later rabbinic texts.⁵ Therefore, the Pharisees' comment in John 7 comes off as if the privileged, the Pharisees, are condemning the

⁴ David Rensberger, "Oppression and Identity in the Gospel of John," in *The Recovery of Black Presence: An Interdisciplinary Exploration*, ed. Randall C. Bailey and Jacquelyn Grant (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 80.

⁵ Rensberger, "Oppressed," 80-81.

unprivileged, the *'ammê ha'ares*, for their lack of education. This is a clear example of power being used as a weapon against the less powerful..

The Johannine community, as the subaltern, subverted their marginalized status by redefining their power through Jesus'. For example, they saw themselves through the world's rejection of Jesus. Jesus himself says, "If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you" (15:18). This gives the oppressed community of Jewish believers validation of their worth in terms alien to their oppressor—the synagogue community cannot take away their belief. The conclusion to John 9 is one of the gospel's best examples of this: Jesus turns the Jewish leaders' claims about sin on their head (9:35-41). The blind see and the seeing are blinded. In addition, the gospel's great irony that Christ defeats death by dying allows the oppressed community to find salvation in the very antithesis to life. To summarize, the Johannine believing community retrojected its own isolation and persecution onto Jesus, and then gave this persecution a permanent spiritual meaning through the salvific efforts of Jesus' death.

In addition to the oppression of Jewish believers, Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman depicts an outsider, the woman, moving from the periphery to the center (in postcolonial terminology). The text does this by depicting the woman as a disciple, including Samaritans in the Johannine community, and by referencing Jacob's well. Sarah Schnieders convincingly argues that the Samaritan woman acts like a disciple through the similarity of her testimony to that of the disciples. The Fourth Gospel says that she has "come to him," which Jesus explicitly says about his disciples in 6:37.⁶ Additionally, the woman has an incredibly deep theological

⁶ Sarah M. Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003), 103.

conversation about Samaria and Jerusalem.⁷ For these reasons, she seems to play a discipleship role.

The text also moves her to the center through the inclusion of Samaritans in the Johannine community. This is supported by the fact that the Synoptics' Jesus never goes to Samaria, and that when the disciples go in Acts they never mention Jesus' visit. In addition, the gospel gives Samaritan and Samaritan-friendly cities more import, which allows the evangelist to rhetorically appeal to the Samaritans. For example, Freed linked four cities in John, Aenon (3:23), Salim (3:23), Sychar (4:5), and Ephraim (11:54) to Samaria via textual, traditional, and historical evidence.⁸ Further, in John 4 the disciples leave to get food, and when they return, they misunderstand what Jesus is doing.⁹ As a result, "the evangelization of Samaritans [falls] squarely on the Samaritans," through the witness of the woman.¹⁰ By making the Johannine mission to the Samaritan a Samaritan led mission, John further validates the Samaritan mission and guarantees a decolonized evangelism story.

Lastly, the text moves the Samaritan woman to the center by referencing Jacob's well. Jacob, as the younger son, was not the heir by birthright, and therefore can be seen as the character of lesser social power in his story. However, Jacob still received the blessing. In this way, he is an example of power subversion, and the mentioning of his well would have recalled that subversion. Sathiananthan Clarke and Sharon H. Ringe clarify Jacob's resemblance with the Samaritans: "just as Jacob breaks with convention in handing down the blessing of God to

⁷ Schnieders, 138-139.

⁸ Edwin D. Freed, "Samaritan Influence in the Gospel of John," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30, no. 4, (1968): 580-581.

⁹ Musa W. Dube, "Reading for Decolonization (John 4.1-42)," in *John and Postcolonialism: Travel, Space and Power*, ed. Musa W. Dube and Jeffrey L. Staley (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 64.

¹⁰ Dube, "Reading," 64.

Joseph . . . so also will the give of eternal life be handed on to the Samaritans.”¹¹ Therefore, through the woman’s discipleship role, the probability of Johannine Samaritans, and the resemblance between Jacob’s situation and Samaritan situation, John 4 depicts the marginalized moving to the center.

In the same way that the Samaritan woman represents the complete outsider, the blind man represents the completely oppressed. In addition to and because of his illness, the man is poor (9:8), religiously marginalized, and socially isolated. But his oppression doesn’t end there. Because of his belief in Jesus, his family abandons him and furthers their son’s social and religious isolation (9:34). The chiasmic structure of the passage highlights the parents’ abandonment of their son by guiding readers to focus on the parents’ response to the Pharisees. By the end of this chapter the man’s oppression has been noticed and subtly changed. Jesus acknowledges the man, who as probably uneducated, poor, and disabled, would have been invisible in first-century Palestine.¹² While the man represents the Johannine community through his faith, and not necessarily through his other disadvantages, he still gives a positive response to Jesus that may allude to the gospel’s relationship with the socially marginalized.¹³

Oppressors in John

For there to be oppressed people, there must be oppressors. In John, Satan oppresses spiritually, and socially and religiously oppressed people by working through others. The next oppressors are “The Jews,” who persecute the Jewish believers discussed above. Nicodemus’

¹¹ Sathiananthan Clarke and Sharon H. Ringe, “Inter-location as Textual Trans-Version: A Study of John 4:1-42,” in *Postcolonial Interventions: Essays in Honor of R.S. Sugirtharajah*, ed. Tat-siong Benny Liew (Phoenix: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 61.

¹² Rensberger, “Oppression,” 82.

¹³ While this passage may be rich for disability criticism, this is beyond my scope of study, even though that is intimately related to power dynamics.

oppression is through his inability to side with marginalized. And finally, the gospel subverts the colonizing Roman power through Jesus's trial before Pilate.

Satan is the most obvious oppressor in John, and he oppresses people spiritually.¹⁴ For example, when Jesus speaks to the Pharisees in John 8, he claims that they are children of the devil and because of this, they do not believe Jesus: "You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him" (John 8:44a). And as most scholars agree, sin is defined as unbelief in the Fourth Gospel. Thus, the Pharisees reject Jesus because they are following the devil. In John, leading others to unbelief is a form of oppression because belief in Jesus determines eternal salvation or life (John 17:3), and thus, because of John's dualism, implies eternal death. For example, Jesus says later in John 8 to the Pharisees, "whoever keeps my word will never see death" (8:51). Jesus defines himself as life (11:25), and through John's dualism, Jesus's foil, the devil, would have to be death. This is highlighted by the gospel's dualism and omission of the demonic exorcisms that frequent the Synoptics. The author of John, by omitting exorcisms, gives more significance to Satan as the "cosmological representative of all evil."¹⁵ In other words, because Satan stirs unbelief, which has significant stakes in the gospel, he is a spiritual oppressor. In John 8, Jesus himself even links this lack of faith with oppression through the Egyptian enslavement (8:33-34).

However, Satan's oppression is not strictly spiritual. By operating through the Jewish authorities, Satan seems to have "caused religious-social oppression for [Jews]."¹⁶ This is

¹⁴ Cornelis Bennema, "The Sword of the Messiah and the Concept of Liberation in the Fourth Gospel," *Biblica* 86, no. 1 (2005): 50.

¹⁵ André van Oudtshoorn, "Where Have All the Demons Gone?: The Role and Place of the Devil in the Gospel of John," *Neotestamentica* 51, no. 1 (2017): 67.

¹⁶ Bennema, 51.

exemplified when reading of the gospel as a drama on two-levels. John 9 was J. Louis Martyn's key passage for this hypothesis. In John 9, Jesus heals the man born blind and the subject's parents worry that they could be thrown out of the synagogue community because of their status as secret believers. But because this passage is anachronistic, it reflects Johannine experiences. Therefore, by reading their experiences with Jewish authorities into the life Jesus, Johannine Christians probably viewed the Pharisees as religious oppressors. In 8:44 the gospel writer links the Pharisees with Satan, which clearly demonstrates a precedent for this thinking. The Pharisees, as already established, are key religious and social oppressors. Through this link, Satan becomes associated with the oppressive acts of the Pharisees, which makes him more than a spiritual oppressor. Likewise, Satan's possessing of Judas combines spiritual and non-spiritual oppression. As a result, Judas's betrayal leaves him eternally separated from Jesus (17:12), which then makes this an act of spiritual oppression for the devil. But it's more than spiritual for Jesus and his followers. As Segovia noted, Satan, through Judas, hands Jesus over to the colonial power, the Romans, who then execute him.¹⁷

Like Satan, the Pharisees' oppressive role is rather obvious. As Rensberger claims, every time the Pharisees show up in John, they are a hostile group.¹⁸ This is because by the time John was written, the Pharisees were the authorities of post-temple Judaism. As the religious power, the Pharisees had the power to persecute minorities sects by ejecting them out of the synagogue community (9:12). Even in the beginning of the gospel they are put in a negative light when they send others to investigate John the Baptist (1:24). Additionally, only in John do the Pharisees

¹⁷ Fernando F. Segovia, "The Gospel of John," in *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia and R. S. Sugirtharajah (London: T & T Clark, 2009), 166.

¹⁸ Rensberger, "Oppression," 86.

play a role in the persecution, trial, and death of Jesus.¹⁹ These hostile relations are reflected in 5:18, where the “Jews,” which we can infer to mean the Pharisees, begin their plot to kill Jesus. Historically, this is extremely unlikely as it took place too early on in Jesus’ ministry for it to have initiated the plot to kill him. Likewise, Jewish law did not require Jesus to be put to death, and the gospel itself admits this: “The Jews replied, “We are not permitted to put anyone to death” (18:31b). Thus, this extreme reaction, being less historical, seems more likely to be reflective of the Johannine community’s experiences with the Pharisees. Through the combination of their power position and oppression, the Fourth Gospel reorders power. The otherwise powerless, like the Samaritans and various social outcasts, are empowered through their belief in Jesus.

But unlike Satan and the Pharisees, Nicodemus is not a straightforward oppressor in John. Instead, he fails to side with the oppressed. Nicodemus is identified as a Pharisee, which already carries negative connotations in John. In Jesus’s encounter with Nicodemus in John 3, Jesus preaches to Nicodemus about “being born of water and Spirit” (3:5). After Nicodemus misunderstands Jesus’ teachings by thinking he literally has to be born again, he disappears from the story. Nicodemus, because of this account and his later appearance with Joseph of Arimathea, has traditionally been understood as representing a group of secret believers familiar to the Johannine community. In this encounter, Jesus says one needs to be born *anōthen*, meaning either “again” or “from above,” and as David Rensberger describes, this change can be seen as a “change of social location.”²⁰ Simply put, Jesus is asking Nicodemus, by being born *anōthen*, to identify with Jesus’ faith community. Another scholar, R. Alan Culpepper, noted how in the

¹⁹ Rensberger, “Oppression,” 87.

²⁰ David Rensberger, *Johannine Faith and Liberating Community*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988), 112.

Johannine's Jesus' de-emphasis on the first birth as a religious social identification marker, "Jesus dismisses the traditional view that one's relationship with God is based on birth rights."²¹ Nicodemus doesn't seem to pick up on this. In John 7:45-52, he only tells the Pharisees to delay judgement, which is an unsatisfactory Johannine confession. Nicodemus's last appearance, with Joseph of Arimathea (19:38-39), infers that he still hasn't changed; He still prizes his current social location and remains a secret believer. By not mentioning any sort of born *anōthen* experience for Nicodemus, the gospel forces readers to make a choice: do they remain secret believers, and consequently not align themselves with the marginalized, or not? As Rensberger writes, "Nicodemus is to be found wherever one whose life is secure must face those whose life is insecure."²² But Nicodemus is not left with power in his encounter with Jesus. Again, as in his conversation with the Pharisees in John 9, Jesus redirects the very thing that gives the oppressors power upside down and makes it the source of their newfound powerlessness before Jesus and his community. Postcolonial biblical scholar Musa W. Dube summarizes the effect: "Nicodemus' social position is further discredited through characterizing him as ignorant and elevating Jesus as knowledgeable on the basis of his origins."²³

But the Pharisees and Nicodemus are not the highest structural powers in John; that would be Rome. In John, individuals tend to represent groups of people, and in this respect Pilate can represent Roman power. Pilate's depiction, at face value, is more positive than in the Synoptics. At first, he seems "weak" and unable to stand up for his belief in Jesus' innocence. There is even an indication that the responsibility for Jesus' death can be put on the Jewish

²¹ Alan R. Culpepper, *The Gospel and the Letters of John*, (Kindle Edition, 1998), location 2185.

²² Rensberger, *Johannine*, 116.

²³ Musa W. Dube, "Savior of the World but not of This World: A Postcolonial Reading of Spatial Construction in John," in *The Postcolonial Bible*, ed. R.S. Sugirtharajah (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 126.

authorities rather than Pilate, and consequently Rome (19:16). But as Rensberger and others have demonstrated, the situation is not that simple. Rather, Pilate is a strong character who flexes his power over the Jewish leaders. The text alludes to this by having Pilate not order the execution of Jesus until “the Jews” declare Caesar is lord (19:15).²⁴ By following through with the execution after this confession, Pilate would be appeasing Jewish leaders, making them more content or at ease with Roman power. Additionally, as Rensberger pointed out, Pilate cannot be trusted. He briefly offers to free Jesus, while fully knowing what the crowd wanted to do with him.²⁵ Further, Pilate has the words “King of the Jews” inscribed to the cross. Reading this passage on its own may make it seem as if Pilate has sympathies for Jesus’ innocence. But reading this passage within the context of John forces the reader to consider the gospel’s use of irony — Pilate is not doing this because he believes Jesus is the King of the Jews, but because it will humiliate the Jewish leaders. This is symptomatic of the ultimate irony of John: following the gospel’s formula for Jesus’s miracles (request, denial, and fulfillment on own time), Jesus eschatologically fulfills the role of the messiah who overthrows Roman power.²⁶

In other words, Pilate looks good in John, but he looks good *ironically*. Rensberger calls this an attack on “Jewish nationalism.”²⁷ Pilate’s response to the Jewish authorities also sounds like an attack on Jewish nationalism: “Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law” (18:31). Pilate, an educated governor, would have known they couldn’t have done this, so he is forcing the Jewish authorities to rely on himself and Rome.²⁸ Furthermore, the crowd, without power, cries for Pilate, who possesses power, to crucify Jesus multiple times, which

²⁴ Rensberger, *Johannine*, 92.

²⁵ Rensberger, *Johannine*, 93.

²⁶ Warren Carter, *John and Empire: Initial Explorations*, (New York: T&T Clarke, 2008), 44.

²⁷ Rensberger, *Johannine*, 94.

²⁸ Rensberger, *Johannine*, 94.

reinforces the existing Rome-Jewish power dynamic.²⁹ Pilate is not a weak figure, but a manipulative state official who asserts power over the Jewish authorities. But his power is ironic. “The Fourth Gospel sets up Pilate as a strong governor, only to knock him down.”³⁰ For example, as Wright noted, Jesus has prophesied about his death the entire length of the gospel, and thus the trial deciding his death must inevitably be ironic.³¹ Jesus spoke about the correct timing of his “hour” as early as John 3. Likewise, Pilate assumes authority because of his relationship to the Roman Empire. Again, this is ironic because as any reader of John’s prologue would know, Jesus’ authority dwarfs Rome’s. For example, Pilate has to use over 600 men to arrest Jesus. Additionally, only in John, the latest gospel and thus the one most accustomed to Roman rule, does the text specify that “Jesus, the King of the Jews” was written in Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. This emphasizes the universality of Jesus’s new power. But the real key to the gospel’s attempt to poke fun of Pilate’s authority may be 18:38: “Pilate asked him, ‘What is truth?’” The truth liberates in John, and Jesus uses his truth to flip power scenarios (like in John 9). And here, Pilate asks with complete ignorance “what is truth,” to truth himself (14:6), who also represents the Johannine community. To conclude, Pilate admits his ignorance, to the Johannine representative, of the true authority of the community.

Jesus and Oppression in John

After considering the oppressed and oppressors, Jesus’s relationships to both must be addressed. Jesus spiritually liberates in opposition to Satan. Additionally, he is a social and religious liberator: Samaritans are welcomed into his community, social outcasts become

²⁹ Arthur M. Wright, “What is truth? The complicated characterization of Pontius Pilate in the Fourth Gospel,” *Review and Expositor* 114, no. 2, (2017): 215.

³⁰ Wright, 219.

³¹ Wright, 219.

in-group members, and at least one oppressed person is healed regardless of his response to Jesus. Therefore, the Johannine Jesus liberates the oppressed not just to glorify his own name, but for the sake of alleviating suffering.

In John, through his self-teachings, Jesus liberates people from Satan's primary form of oppression, unbelief. Frederick Herzog calls this "liberation of consciousness."³² Bennema notes that within the tradition of messianic apocalypticism, the "Fourth Gospel ['spiritualizes'] the concept of messiahship, in that the source of the messiah's liberating power is supernatural rather than human military."³³ In other words, the gospel reframes liberation. The Fourth Gospel illustrates this through dualism: one is either in the light with Jesus or in the dark with Satan (16:46). This dualism climaxes in John 8's strong language about the world's hatred of Jesus. In 8:33-44 the Jewish leaders lie about not being slaves, which is ironic on two-levels: Israel had formerly been a slave, and they are still enslaved to their sinfulness. The result of this spiritual oppression is eternal death and darkness. Jesus, on the other hand, brings light and eternal life (3:16). This is also exemplified in Jesus' healing accounts in John — the royal official's son, the lame man, the blind man, and especially his life-giving raising of Lazarus. By having individuals stand in for the community, Jesus' words not only liberate individuals but the community. This gives oppressed communities, like believing Jews and the Samaritans, an opportunity to move towards the center rather than remaining on the margins.

Here, Dube pushes back when arguing that Jesus' words are not liberating but colonizing. She writes, "Jesus' superiority is always based on his origins."³⁴ This calls to mind John 4:12,

³² Frederick Herzog, *Liberation Theology: Liberation in the Light of the Fourth Gospel*, (New York: The Seabury Press, 1972), 62.

³³ Bennema, 56.

³⁴ Dube, "Savior," 127.

8:53, and Jesus' theme of fulfilling Jewish festivals throughout John. Therefore, Dube argues, albeit unconvincing, that Jesus' statements of superiority which extend from his divine origins can be seen as an oppressing move towards other Jewish leaders and traditions, including Nicodemus. She argues that this "not only subordinates all other Jewish places and subjects, it claims power over the whole world."³⁵ This power is then extended to the disciples (15:19; 20:21). Dube's argument ultimately seems weak because while Jesus does claim "spatial" power over all others, Roman state authorities still execute him. His power, like his origins, is otherworldly. More importantly, Jesus's claims give power to otherwise powerless people, which is an effort of decolonization.

Jesus' liberating activities extend beyond his life giving words with a handful of people that he alleviates from various forms of social and physical suffering. The Samaritan woman is the first example. In many ways, she is the ultimate outsider: a woman, a Samaritan, and possible social outcast, seeing as she had to draw water at an unusual time.³⁶ Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman crosses "gender, nationality, race, and religion" boundaries.³⁷ Perhaps the religious differences are the most important. According to Clarke and Ringe, Samaria is geographically on the edge and Jews were to avoid it, which is why the author brings more attention to the event by saying "he had to go through Samaria" (4:4).³⁸ Thus, Jesus breaks Jewish conventions by asking a Samaritan woman for water. However, he does not just break social conventions. He also legitimizes her social place by offering her a position as an insider to his community, which is reflected in the change of the woman's social position throughout the

³⁵ Dube, "Savior," 129.

³⁶ Benemma, 51.

³⁷ Culpepper, 2254.

³⁸ Clarke and Ringe, 60.

text. At the beginning of the passage she is an isolated social outcast with five former husbands, but by the end she testifies to her town and brings them to faith in Jesus (4:39).

Jesus also heals the lame man at the pool (5:1-18). According to Rensberger, as a lame man, this man would have been a complete social outcast.³⁹ He is “abandoned,” and incapable of going to the pool on his own.⁴⁰ As Bennema notes, the man would have been barred from participation in the social-religious life of his community for three decades.⁴¹ Additionally, the man demonstrated his lack of scriptural education by letting Jesus heal him on the Sabbath. 5:6b-8 reads: “‘Do you want to be made well?’ The sick man answered him, ‘Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up . . . Jesus said to him, ‘Stand up, take your mat and walk.’” Either the man does not know about the identity of Jesus, or he does know and is playing his cards to see whether Jesus or the pool will heal him. Regardless of which interpretation is more plausible, Jesus’ heals this oppressed person regardless of the man’s response to him. This becomes more significant when accounting for the high Christology of the Johannine Jesus. In John 1:48, Jesus knows Nathaniel because of his divine omniscience, and in the encounter with the Samaritan woman, Jesus knows intimate details about her personal life that necessitate divine knowledge. Applying Jesus’ omniscience to John 5 infers that Jesus knew the man’s response would be negative but heals him anyways. Thus, ultimately, Jesus liberates this man from oppression just for the sake of ending his suffering.

Conclusion

³⁹ Rensberger, “Oppression,” 82.

⁴⁰ Francisco Jr. Lozada, “Contesting an Interpretation of John 5: Moving Beyond Colonial Evangelism,” in *John and Postcolonialism: Travel, Space and Power*, ed. Musa W. Dube and Jeffrey L. Staley (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 81.

⁴¹ Bennema, 51.

While postcolonial readings of John are rare, because John has been used to advance anti-Semitism, they may be more important than ever. Further analysis shows that the Fourth Gospel is a gospel for the oppressed, and that by paying close attention to the power dynamics that shape John, readers can unfold the gospel's colonial setting. In particular, by believing in Jesus, the powerless or colonized can become decolonized. The oppressed characters, like the Jewish believers, the Samaritan woman, and the lame man, move to the center, and those at the center, like Rome, are pushed to the outside. The seminal postcolonial theorist Fernando F. Segovia summarizes, "The Gospel advances a view of Jesus and his group of followers as in conflict . . . with the ruling circles of colonial Palestine, the overseeing masters of imperial Rome, and the overarching ruler of the demonic this-world."⁴²

⁴² Segovia, "The Gospel of John," 194.

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