

**IS CAIAPHAS OFF THE HOOK?:
A HISTORICAL-CRITICAL AND
POSTCOLONIAL ANALYSIS OF JOHN 11:50
AND ITS APPROPRIATION TO DUTERTE'S
DRUG WAR**

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The High Priest Caiaphas is often presented in biblical commentaries as passively cooperating with the Sanhedrin (Morris 1995:565; Reinhartz 2011:179), Roman authorities (Martin and Wright 2015:212), and the divine plan (Bultmann 1971:314). His fateful remark in Jn 11:49b-50 is even qualified in v. 51 as a prophecy. This Johannine portrait infers that he could not be implicated in Jesus' crucifixion since he was only acting as a diplomatic leader who wanted the practical safety of the Jews. Meanwhile, Flavius Josephus indicates that high priests were directly appointed by Roman rulers (Ant 18.35, 95), triggering them to be cunning and driven to protect their hold of authority. Caiaphas' closeness with the Roman procurator Pontius Pilate suggests that he was playing politics more than working for the common good (Michaels 2010:652).

Amidst these two opposing portrayals, this paper investigates the text of Jn 11:50, examining the repercussions of Caiaphas' words to the crucifixion of Jesus. Using the post-colonial approach of Warren Carter (2008:59), Richard Horsley, and Tom Thatcher on John's counter-imperial stance (2013:1, 18), this paper employs the concept of Roman enabler (Thatcher 2009:16-17; 2017:3-38) and relates it with the current attempt to spare former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte from culpability for the lives lost in the Drug War. In the end, this paper argues that Caiaphas should be held liable for instigating the death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel and

appropriates it with the move of the International Criminal Court to implicate the orchestrators of the Drug War.

INTRODUCTION: HOW IS CAIAPHAS ORDINARILY VIEWED BY BIBLICAL READERS?

The high priest Caiaphas¹ is often presented in biblical commentaries as a passive actor in the Johannine narrative. His name occurs five times in the Fourth Gospel, all directly leading to the crucifixion of Jesus (Jn 11:49; 18:13, 14, 24, 28). In John 11, he was a part of the Sanhedrin that fatefully decided on Jesus' arrest. His speech was monumental for implementing such a plot: "You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed" (vv. 49b-50).² This remark impresses that he was prudently weighing the possible consequences of the Sanhedrin's inaction on Jesus' growing popularity among the Jewish public vis-à-vis the preservation of the *Pax Romana*.

¹For a thorough study of the identity and role of Caiaphas in the Gospels, see John Paul Heil, "Jesus as the Unique High Priest in the Gospel of John," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (1995): 729-746; Helen K. Bond, *Caiaphas: Friend of Rome and Judge of Jesus?* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 2004); James G. VanderKam, *From Joshua to Caiaphas: High Priests after the Exile* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2004); Rainer Metzner, *Kaiphās: Der Hohepriester jenes Jahres: Geschichte und Deutung*, *Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* 75 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), esp. 247-268 ["Kapitel VI. Kaiphās Im Johannesevangelium"]; Adele Reinhartz, *Caiaphas the High Priest: Studies on Personalities of the New Testament* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2011); Richard Bauckham, "The Caiaphas Family," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 10, no. 1 (2012): 3-31; and Maurice Ryan, "Living with the Enemy: Why High Priest Joseph Caiaphas Was Not a Roman Collaborator," *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 17, no. 1 (2022): 1-14.

² All biblical verses in this paper are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version* (1989).

Indeed, all members of the Sanhedrin³ were anxious that once the anti-imperial movements would be left unchecked, the Ῥωμαῖοι (“Romans”) could march into Jerusalem and destroy its temple and the whole nation (see v. 48). In this light, Leon Morris views Caiaphas as someone who completely cooperated with the Sanhedrin,⁴ acting as a loyal and concerned member of the Jewish religious authorities, so to speak. Given this collective fear of the Roman Empire, Francis Martin and William Wright opine that these Jewish leaders were forced to play politics with the Roman authorities by handing over Jesus to them for execution.⁵ Thus, even though Caiaphas was the chief Jewish authority in Jerusalem at that time, he only spoke what others were already thinking. His suggestion to put Jesus to death was a result of the Jewish congregation’s *viva voce*.

This unison stance is corroborated by the Johannine evangelist’s parenthetical comment on Caiaphas’ speech:

“He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. So, from that day on they planned to put him to death” (vv. 51-53).

Using the activity of prophesying to describe Caiaphas’ pursuit, the Johannine author wished to portray the latter as speaking on behalf of God since his words were supposedly

³ For a brief discussion on the Sanhedrin, see David Goodblatt, “The Sanhedrin,” in *Jewish Annotated New Testament*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 602-604.

⁴ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995), 565.

⁵ See Francis Martin and William M. Wright, *The Gospel of John*, CCSS (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2015), 212.

supplied to him from above. Along these lines, Rudolf Bultmann reads Jn 11:48-52 as signifying to mean that the high priest cooperates with the divine plan that would be realized in Jesus' redemptive death on the cross.⁶

This passive portrayal of Caiaphas—not only in the Fourth Gospel but in the entire New Testament—led Adele Reinhartz to posit that “there is no clear evidence for [Caiaphas'] direct or even indirect involvement in the events leading to Jesus' death.”⁷ She even undermines the interpretation that Caiaphas “was disturbed or threatened by Jesus' behavior in the Temple or in Jerusalem.”⁸ She points out that the Gospel writers simply put him in the background when the decision on Jesus' crucifixion was made by the chief priests and elders, a group that would exclude him from the narrative.⁹ For her, the depiction of Caiaphas as culpable for Jesus' death was brought forth not by the Scriptures but by later Christian generations, resulting in the popular representation that Caiaphas is “[n]o longer the neutral, if strategic and dramatic, high priest, he was now the wicked Christ-killer, the enemy of all Christians everywhere.”¹⁰

This view is shared by Maurice Ryan, who reacts to the indiscriminate tagging of Caiaphas as a collaborator of the Roman Empire in general and Pontius Pilate in particular. For him, “[t]he

⁶ See Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, ed. R.W.N. Hoare and J.K. Riches, trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), 314.

⁷ Reinhartz, *Caiaphas the High Priest*, 79.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁹ Reinhartz's point was negated by Helen K. Bond, Review of *Caiaphas the High Priest: Studies on Personalities of the New Testament*, by Adele Reinhartz, *Journal for the Study of Judaism: In the Persian Hellenistic and Roman Period* 45, no. 3 (2014): 429-430, who argues that Caiaphas is not independent but a part of the group of chief priests. For Bond, “if Caiaphas is to be included in ‘the chief priests’ this neutral portrait evaporates, and Caiaphas' depiction in the gospels is not substantially different to those of the church fathers [i.e., that Caiaphas is an accomplice].”

¹⁰ Reinhartz, *Caiaphas the High Priest*, 52.

term collaborator to describe the interaction of Joseph Caiaphas with Roman power is neither sufficiently nuanced, accurate, nor appropriate for employment in the ambiguous and complicated context in which the Jewish leader found himself.”¹¹ Instead, he remarks that “available evidence does not allow a definitive answer to the question of the complicity of Caiaphas in the governance of Roman Palestine by Pontius Pilate,”¹² opening the possibility that Caiaphas was simply fortunate or skillfully diplomatic to have maintained his long tenure as high priest.¹³

By and large, many commentators think that Caiaphas’ utterance in John 11 was not done to advance his ulterior motive and personal agenda. John intently demonstrated in the narrative that the high priest acted as a wise statesman who had respected the opinion of his colleagues, discerned wisely the consequences of Israel’s (in)action, and proclaimed prophetically God’s designs for the Jewish people. This notion implies that Caiaphas could never be guilty of the execution of Jesus since this sinister plot was the Sanhedrin’s collective idea. In this line of thinking, Caiaphas is technically off the hook and should not be implicated in Jesus’ crucifixion.

However, this reading needs to consider the intricacies of the socio-political system in Roman times.¹⁴ In this light, it is not

¹¹ Ryan, “Living with the Enemy,” 14.

¹² Ibid., 11.

¹³ Ryan enumerates the many possibilities on how Caiaphas stayed in power: “Maybe Annas, the family patriarch, offered Pilate bribes to keep Caiaphas in office until his own son was ready for the high priesthood. Or, perhaps Caiaphas himself offered Pilate financial incentives to maintain his tenure. Maybe his Roman bosses discouraged Pilate from deposing Jewish officials to avoid antagonizing the locals. Or maybe Caiaphas was simply good at the role he was given and it proved to be in no one’s interest to remove him from it” (ibid., 10).

¹⁴ For background on the socio-political setting in Roman times, see David G. Horrell, ed., *Social-Scientific Approaches to New Testament Interpretation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999); Wolfgang Stegemann, Bruce Malina, and Gerd Theissen, eds., *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress, 2002); Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science*

enough that the biblical passage of Jn 11:48-52 is solely examined synchronically while underestimating the pieces of information available in some significant biblical and extra-biblical writings relative to the Jesus movement. What needs to be done is to investigate the philosophies and activities of the high priests in general and Caiaphas in particular. Doing so unpacks the underlying motive of the concurrent high priest in handing over Jesus to the Roman prefect. Was he doing it to save the temple and the people of God, or was he merely preserving the *status quo* to keep himself in power?

In the proceeding subsections, I shall explore Caiaphas' speech in Jn 11:49b-50 alongside the socio-political environment of Palestine in Roman times. Subsequently, I shall inspect the ramifications of the Johannine portrait of the high priest in terms of its postcolonial effect on the Fourth Gospel's intended audience. To give flesh to this discussion and to relate it to the Philippine context in the 21st century, I shall juxtapose the Johannine image of Caiaphas with that of former President Rodrigo Duterte, particularly on the latter's alleged direct involvement in the extrajudicial killings of suspected drug criminals in the Philippines. After having made notable parallelisms between the two political figures, I shall argue that the former should be held liable for instigating the death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel and, by appropriation, the latter should be implicated for being an enabler of the bloody Drug War in line with the recent decision of the International Criminal Court to litigate all its orchestrators.

Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress, 2003); Joel B. Green and Lee Martin McDonald, eds., *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2013); and Katell Berthelot and Jonathan Price, eds., *In the Crucible of Empire: The Impact of Roman Citizenship upon Greeks, Jews and Christians*, ISACR 21 (Leuven: Peeters, 2019).

CAIAPHAS' PROPHETIC STANCE IN JOHN 11:49b-50

Amidst the anxiety of the Pharisees and the religious leaders in the Sanhedrin on what to do with Jesus, Caiaphas took the stage and delivered the following speech in Jn 11:49b-50:

*ὕμεῖς οὐκ οἴδατε οὐδέν, οὐδὲ λογίζεσθε ὅτι συμφέρει ὑμῖν
ἵνα εἷς ἄνθρωπος ἀποθάνῃ ὑπὲρ τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ μὴ ὅλον τὸ
ἔθνος ἀπολήται.¹⁵*

“You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.”

The Greek pronoun used in these verses is ὑμεῖς (“you”), a second-person plural personal pronoun. By its employment, Caiaphas was offering a piece of advice to his interlocutors that the death of Jesus would directly benefit them. It infers that he wanted to distance himself from these religious authorities, while simultaneously wishing that they would be successful in plotting Jesus’ death. His conscious separation from them might signal that he intended to wash his hands from the culpability of Jesus’ execution (see Mt 27:24). The majority of textual manuscripts also support the use of this pronoun in v. 50 with the inflected word ὑμῖν (“for you”), viz., the Papyrus 66 (c. 200 CE), Papyrus 45 (3rd cent. CE), Codex Vaticanus (4th cent. CE), and the Vulgate with the Latin word *vobis*,¹⁶ among many.¹⁷

¹⁵All Greek texts of the New Testament is taken from Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, based on the work of Eberhard and Erwin Nestle, 28th rev. ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Biblegesellschaft, 2013).

¹⁶ See *Nova Vulgata Bibliorum Sacrorum* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1986).

¹⁷ The textual exegete Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies’ Greek New*

However, some manuscripts feature the 1st person plural pronoun ἡμῖν (“for us”) as seen in the Codex Alexandrinus and some Syriac and Coptic documents, while the Codex Sinaiticus altogether omits it. The preference for the inflected term ἡμῖν in these alternative Greek versions suggests that in the narrative Caiaphas included himself among those directly affected by any wrong decision the Sanhedrin would make concerning Jesus. He would have been similarly anxious like the other religious authorities, fearful of the impending coming of the Ῥωμαῖοι.

Deciding between ὑμῖν and ἡμῖν may not be achievable in this paper since both have equal following from established biblical manuscripts, needing more textual inquiries on this matter. Incidentally, the course of the story seems to point toward the latter. The Pharisees initiated the convening of the Sanhedrin after receiving reports that Jesus had influenced the crowd to believe in and follow him. They exclaimed, “What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation” (vv. 47b-48).

Ordinarily, Pharisees were never included in the Sanhedrin, as evidenced in the Synoptics (see Mk 14:55; Mt 26:59; Lk 22:66). Their surprising involvement in the Johannine episode hints at the seriousness of the matter. It implies that the outcome of their discussion would affect every religious group in Jerusalem, including the high priestly institution.¹⁸ For this reason, Caiaphas proposed “to have one man die for the people (λαός) than to have the whole nation (ἔθνος) destroyed” in Jn 11:50. This formula had

Testament, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 200, also affirms the high likelihood of this reading.

¹⁸ For a discussion on the role of the Pharisees, see, among many, Anthony J. Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society: A Sociological Approach* (Wilmington: Glazier, 1988); Jacob Neusner and Bruce D. Chilton, eds., *In Quest of the Historical Pharisees* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2007).

been employed by the Pharisees earlier in their remark: “the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place (τόπος) and our nation (ἔθνος)” in v. 48. Caiaphas’ repetition of the term ἔθνος in v. 50 may mean that both the religious authorities and the high priest perceived the political repercussions of this predicament on all of them. The Johannine evangelist used the same word (ἔθνος) in v. 52 to comment on the possible effect of Jesus’ impending crucifixion (v. 53) on the people. Later, Pilate is portrayed to have confirmed this impression, saying, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation (ἔθνος) and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?” (18:35).

Accordingly, John accentuated the effect of Jesus’ ministry to all sectors of Jewish society, inclusive of the concurrent high priest. In this line of thinking, Caiaphas was also personally affected by the Jesus problem. This stance is affirmed by Helen Bond who perceives that it was Jesus’ direct attack on the temple institution that motivated the high priest to plot his arrest. It is because “Jesus threatened everything that Caiaphas held most dear... [and, hence, the latter] would have had no scruples about handing Jesus over to Pilate.”¹⁹ Bond thinks that Caiaphas felt the pressure of keeping the temple operations running by taking seriously his responsibility of protecting it at all costs.²⁰

CAIAPHAS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND WORKS OF FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS

The name Καϊάφας (“Caiaphas”) occurs 9 times in the New Testament, viz., Mt 26:3, 57; Lk 3:2; Jn 11:49; 18:13, 14, 24, 28; Acts 4:6. Outside the Fourth Gospel, it was only in the Gospel

¹⁹ Bond, *Caiaphas: Friend of Rome and Judge of Jesus?*, 89-90.

²⁰ See *ibid.*, 47.

of Matthew that Caiaphas' role in the crucifixion of Jesus is underscored:

"Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas" (Mt 26:3).

"Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, in whose house the scribes and the elders had gathered" (Mt 26:57).

Even if there was a mention of Caiaphas in Matthew (not in Mark nor Luke), his involvement in the death of Jesus cannot be quickly established. Matthew narrates that the chief priests and elders instigated it (Mt 26:3),²¹ had Jesus arrested (v. 47) and brought to Caiaphas for trial (v. 57), and even persuaded the crowd to plea before Pilate for his crucifixion (27:20). Caiaphas' house served, though, as the venue of the plotting and trial, but the initial decision to arrest Jesus came from the group *in toto*: "they conspired to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him" (26:4). In John, however, Caiaphas' participation is clearly manifested, having an elaborate speaking part in the Sanhedrin that decided on Jesus' fate (Jn 11:49b-50).

Meanwhile, the term ἀρχιερεύς ("high priest") occurs 122 times in the NT, viz., 25 times in Matthew, 22 in Mark, 15 in Luke, 21 in John, 22 in Acts, and 17 in Hebrews. This term is not used restrictively to Caiaphas alone but to any priestly aristocracy who served as high priests in Jerusalem over time, occurring 67 times in its plural form, i.e., οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς. In the Synoptics, they were seen as working in connivance with the scribes (Mk 11:18; 14:1; Lk

²¹ The same leading role in the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus is seen among the chief priests and elders in Mark (14:1, 43, 53, 64; 15:11) and Luke (22:2, 4, 52, 54, 66, 71; 23:1-5).

19:47; 22:1-2), elders (Mt 26:3-4), and/or the principal people (Lk 19:47) who decided to hand over Jesus to the Roman prefect. Conversely, in the Fourth Gospel, however, they were portrayed as being in close collaboration with the other members of the Sanhedrin (συνέδριον) in making this similar resolve (see Jn 11:45-54).²²

The culpability of the high priests in the crucifixion is well established, occurring both in the Synoptics (as seen above) and in John. In Jn 19:6, they were the ones who initiated the idea of crucifying Jesus: “When the chief priests (οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς) and the police saw him, they shouted, ‘Crucify him! Crucify him!’” Evidently, they are presented in the gospels as adamant in plotting the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus. However, the frequent use of the plural form ἀρχιερεῖς in the Synoptics can potentially water down Caiaphas’ political participation since it talks only about a congregation of high priests, of which he was only a member. He might be involved in this collectivity but only as a passive participant, as seen in Mt 26:3, 57. However, in the Fourth Gospel, both Caiaphas and the group of high priests were explicitly described as actively planning how they could hand over of Jesus to the Ῥωμαῖοι. There, his elaborate speech sealed the Sanhedrin’s deliberation on the fate of Jesus (Jn 11:49-50, 53).

Meanwhile, Flavius Josephus mentioned the name Caiaphas twice in his corpus, both in the *Antiquities of the Jews*:

“[A]nd when he had possessed that dignity no longer than a year, Joseph Caiaphas was made his successor. When Gratus had done those things, he went back to Rome, after he had tarried in Judea eleven years, when Pontius Pilate came as his successor (Ant 18:35).

²² The συνέδριον was also present in the Synoptics but was explicitly active only after Jesus’ arrest (see Mk 14:55; 15:1 // Mt 26:59; Lk 22:66).

“[B]ut Vitellius put those garments into our own power, as in the days of our forefathers, and ordered the captain of the guard not to trouble himself to inquire where they were laid, or when they were to be used; and this he did as an act of kindness, to oblige the nation to him. Besides which, he also deprived Joseph, who was called Caiaphas, of the high priesthood, and appointed Jonathan, the son of Ananus, the former high priest, to succeed him. After which he took his journey back to Antioch” (*Ant* 18:95).

The first citation speaks about the beginning of the high priesthood of Caiaphas, which is identified as assigned to him during the 11-year procuratorship of Valerius Gratus (see *Ant* 18:33-35). The second passage states that Caiaphas was deposed from his post by Vitellius (governor of Syria, see *Ant* 18:88), replacing him with a former high priest in the person of Jonathan. These two incidents in Josephus indicate that Caiaphas’ post was merely given to him by the Roman Empire. At that period, his office could be awarded to and removed from him (and given to somebody else), depending on one’s degree of favorability with Rome. This setup is corroborated in the earlier actions of Gratus in appointing previous high priests as narrated below:

“This man deprived Ananus of the high priesthood, and appointed Ismael, the son of Phabi, to be high priest. He also deprived him in a little time, and ordained Eleazar, the son of Ananus, who had been high priest before, to be high priest: which office, when he had held for a year, Gratus deprived him of it, and gave the high priesthood to Simon, the son of Camithus” (*Ant* 18:34).

Caiaphas’ deposition from his post came, too, from a Roman official. It happened after Vitellius visited Jerusalem to

show kindness to the people and win their immediate support as described below:

“But Vitellius came into Judea and went up to Jerusalem; it was at the time of that festival which is called the Passover. Vitellius was there magnificently received, and released the inhabitants of Jerusalem from all the taxes upon the fruits that were bought and sold, and gave them leave to have the care of the high priest’s vestments, with all their ornaments, and to have them under the custody of the priests in the temple; which power they used to have formerly” (*Ant* 18:90).

Earlier, Vitellius had just relieved Pilate from his post after receiving complaints about the latter’s violence over the inhabitants of Samaria (*Ant* 18:88-89). Seeing probably that Caiaphas was Pilate’s chief ally, Vitellius also deposed the high priest. This decision also appeared favorable to the people of Jerusalem since Vitellius’ intent was to please them “as an act of kindness, to oblige the nation to him” (*Ant* 18.95). Accordingly, Josephus wanted to portray Caiaphas as somebody already unwanted by both Rome and Jerusalem.

Josephus also attested that many insurrections occurred in Palestine in the 1st century CE, occurring in the regions of Judea, Galilee, and Perea (see *War* 2.56-65; *Ant.* 17.271-284). Many messianic movements sought independence from Roman hegemony, such as the Samaritan-initiated ascent to Mt. Gerizim (*Ant.* 18.85-87), the Theudas-led gathering in the river Jordan (see *Ant.* 20.97-99), and the rally organized by a Judean self-acclaimed prophet in Mt. Olives (see *War* 2.261-263; *Ant.* 20.167-172).²³ From

²³ See also Christopher Rowland, “Messianic Movements,” *NIDB* 4:67a-68a; David B. Levenson, “Messianic Movement,” in *JANT*, ed., Levine and Brettler (2017), 622-628.

this list, it is conclusive that there was a vast and persistent anti-Roman sentiment among the Jews in the first century CE that eventually led to the First Jewish Revolt in 66 CE and the Fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE (see *Wars* 5, 6, and 7).

At the height of this political unrest, the supposed principal role of both the Roman prefect and the high priest was to contain all political insurgencies in Palestine. Unfortunately, Pilate and Caiaphas could not perform it, causing them to lose their respective positions. This negative image of a shrewd and cunning Caiaphas is not hinted at in the Synoptic Gospels but is quite evident both in the Fourth Gospel and the works of Flavius Josephus.

HIGH PRIESTS IN ROMAN TIMES

In the Old Testament times, the office of high priesthood²⁴ is attributed to Aaron, who served as Moses' right hand in guiding the Israelites in the observance of their covenant with YHWH (Exo 28:1-2; 29:4-5). All high priests are supposed to follow this genealogical line passed on through many generations (Lev 6:15). In the time of Solomon, it was transferred to Zadok, who transformed it within an institutional setup via the introduction of temple worship (1 Kgs 2:35; 1 Chr 6:38). All later high priests would follow the Zadok-based succession of bloodline (1 Chr 5:34-40) and serve for the whole duration of their lives, except when political unrests happen like those in the Hasmonean days (e.g., Simeon's high priesthood in 1 Maccabees 13).

²⁴ For a background on the high priesthood office, see David Instone-Brewer, "Temple and Priesthood," in *The World of the New Testament*, 197-216; and Sylvie Honigman, *Tales of High Priests and Taxes: The Books of the Maccabees and the Judean Rebellion against Antiochus IV* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2014).

However, when Pompey occupied Jerusalem in 63 BCE, Israel became a part of the Syria-Palestinian province of the Roman Empire. Herod the Great, being an Idumean by birth, enjoyed some degree of independence, beginning with his reign over Palestine in 37 BCE. His death in 4 BCE divided his kingdom into tetrarchs and Judea was assigned to Herod Archelaus. However, ten years later, the latter proved ineffective in governing the region, forcing Rome to put the regions of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea under the direct supervision of a Roman prefect/governor. During the ministry of Jesus, Pontius Pilate was the governor until he was deposed by Vitellius in 36 CE.²⁵

The high priesthood post radically changed its rules on succession with the overarching Roman control of Judea and the city of Jerusalem. The high priests no longer followed the usual genealogical succession since Rome began interfering with it, particularly selecting people favorable to the empire. Below is a list of the appointed high priests in this period:

- Annas (6-15 CE)
- Ishmael son of Phiabi (15-16 CE)
- Eleazar son of Annas (16-17 CE)
- Simon son of Camithus (17-18 CE)
- Caiaphas son-in-law of Annas (18-36 CE)
- Jonathan son of Annas (36-37 CE)
- Theophilus son Annas (37-?)
- Simon Cantheras son of Boethus (41 CE)
- Matthias son of Annas (41-44 CE)
- Elionaeus son of Cantheras (44-46 CE)

²⁵ Pilate was procurator of Judea from 26 to 36 CE; see Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, translated with an introduction by Michael Grant, rev. ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 365; and Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Jerusalem: The Biography* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2011), 119.

- Ananus son of Annas (62 CE)²⁶

From the list above, one easily notices the prolonged rule of both Annas and Caiaphas. Annas is mentioned, too, in the Fourth Gospel, appearing in Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin in Jn 18:13, 24. He was politically astute because all the succeeding high priests were biologically or socially related to him after his term. Annas managed to keep himself in power for nine years by purportedly relating himself closely with Roman authorities. However, his feat was surpassed by his son-in-law, who doubled his years of service as high priest. Allegedly, Caiaphas is perceived as a close friend of Pontius Pilate; in fact, he was deposed from the high priesthood in the same year, i.e., 36 CE,²⁷ when Pilate was recalled back to Rome for his ineffective containment of the Samaritan rebellion.

This information led Raymond Brown to theorize that "it is quite possible that he [i.e., Caiaphas] held his office through a financial understanding with Pilate."²⁸ Apparently, Caiaphas began his high priesthood after being appointed by the Roman prefect Gratus and stayed in power while being tightly associated with the subsequent Roman prefect Pontius Pilate. His hold to his office, most likely, depended on his friendship with the Roman officials at that time. This thinking is supported, too, by Dominic Crossan when he claims that "[i]t is not unfairly cynical to presume that there was close cooperation between Caiaphas and Pilate, that it often offended Jewish sensibilities, and that eventually it became

²⁶ David Instone-Brewer, "Temple and Priesthood," in *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, 201.

²⁷ See Urban C. von Wahlde, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 2 vols., Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2010), 518; D.A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1991), 421.

²⁸ Raymond Brown, *The Gospel according to John: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, vol. 1, Anchor Bible 29 (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1966–1970), 440.

necessary to break up that cooperation in Rome's best interests."²⁹ What is affirmed, here, is that a cooperation—some even call it collaboration or friendship—existed between the two leaders in Jerusalem to maintain peace in the city as well as the *status quo*, from which they both benefitted.

If the Johannine evangelist was fully aware of this political makeup, it can be surmised that Caiaphas' speech in Jn 11:49b-50 is not his plain show of concern over the welfare of the temple institution and the Israelite nation. Extra-biblical sources infer that he was thinking mainly about how to continue staying in power, evident in how he ruled within an unprecedented 18 long years. In this reading, when he began saying either "it is better for you..." or "it is better for us...", he most probably meant "it is better for me..." being more concerned about securing his position as high priest.

A POSTCOLONIAL LOOK: CAIAPHAS AS AN ACTIVE ENABLER OF ROME

In the biblical language, the name Ῥωμαῖοι is normally associated with the autochthonous colonizers from the Latium. It occurs only 13 times in the entire New Testament, once in the Gospel of John, 11 times in the Acts of the Apostles, and once in the letter to the Romans (as a part of the name of the title of the epistle). Ordinarily, they are referential of Roman soldiers, centurions, procurators, and the emperors, who are all non-Jews by genealogy and religion.³⁰ However, in a postcolonial reading of the biblical narratives, some scholars redefine the composition of the Ῥωμαῖοι in the NT.

²⁹ John Dominic Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?: Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus* (San Francisco, California: Harper San Francisco, 1995), 149.

³⁰ See Michaels, *John*, 648-649.

For Warren Carter,³¹ the term Ῥωμαῖοι includes “emperors, client kings appointed by Rome, governors, and soldiers of various ranks such as tribunes, centurions, and unranked soldiers.”³² He finds it true in the Roman city of Ephesus in the 1st century CE, in which “urban Asian elites clearly had long recognized Rome’s unassailable power. They also experienced the benefits and rewards of status, power, and wealth that loyalty and assimilation into these political, societal, and economic networks produced.”³³ Seeing that Jesus had disturbed the *Pax Romana* with his alleged subversive teachings and activities, Warren observes that “[t]he Jerusalem elite rejects Jesus’ claim and revelation of God’s purposes of life, preferring to defend the status quo by putting him to death.”³⁴

Tom Thatcher³⁵ thinks that the Roman empire in the Fourth Gospel points to what he calls three heads, viz., “the Jewish religious authorities and Rome’s visible representatives, Pilate and the cross.”³⁶ The former “essentially act like Roman prefects, or at least like a puppet aristocracy that serves as an interface between the procurator and the masses and thereby attempts to maintain the imperial status quo.”³⁷ In a later work,³⁸ he and Richard Horsley believe that included in the category Roman collaborators are “local client kings and other rulers, who became the face of Roman power”³⁹ as well as “priestly aristocracy at the head of the temple-

³¹ See Warren Carter, *John and Empire: Initial Explorations* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008).

³² Ibid., 830b-832a.

³³ Ibid., 59.

³⁴ Ibid., 169.

³⁵ See Tom Thatcher, *Greater than Caesar: Christology and Empire in the Fourth Gospel* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress, 2009).

³⁶ Ibid., 15.

³⁷ Ibid., 52.

³⁸ See Richard Horsley and Tom Thatcher, *John, Jesus and the Renewal of Israel* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2013).

³⁹ Ibid., 17.

state in Jerusalem thus became, effectively the face of Roman imperial rule in Judea”⁴⁰ and “legal-intellectual retainers who served the temple-state.”⁴¹

In sum, these thinkers agree that the term Ῥωμαῖοι comprises, too, all local retainers who actively participated in the perpetuation of the Roman empire either as local rulers or collaborators. As discussed above, Caiaphas was not only a passive actor in the unfolding of the Passion of Christ. He was a sly operator, skillfully orchestrating Jesus’ arrest while appeasing the Roman authorities to ensure his prolonged hold of power. In a postcolonial reading of such a behavior, the high priest becomes tightly associated with the Ῥωμαῖοι, making him equally responsible for the activities of the collective Roman hegemony. In this line of thinking, this paper argues that Caiaphas should never be off the hook from being held liable for the atrocities of the Ῥωμαῖοι in general and the crucifixion of Christ in particular.

ICC’S ATTEMPT TO IMPLICATE RODRIGO DUTERTE ON THE DRUG WAR

After establishing the close collaboration between Caiaphas and the Ῥωμαῖοι in governing the Jewish people, this paper assumes that political savviness was highly employed at that time by high priests in controlling the socio-political landscape of Judea, which was still under the Roman prefecture. Caiaphas’ shrewdness even resulted in Jesus’ crucifixion—performed by the Ῥωμαῖοι themselves since capital punishment was adjudicated and implemented by the Roman empire’s representatives alone. He did it by controlling the public narrative against Jesus and,

⁴⁰ Ibid., 18.

⁴¹ Ibid., 29.

subsequently, pressuring the Sanhedrin and the Jewish crowd to demand the latter's immediate execution without solid bases.

This behavior of Caiaphas is not new at all. In fact, it is continuously felt in many global societies today. In the Philippines, this astuteness is paraded, too, by the previous president of the Republic of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte. Even though Duterte is not a religious leader like Caiaphas but an elected public official of the land, both apparently used their cunningness to propagate fabricated narratives and persuaded policymakers and law enforcers to legitimize their enemies' arrests/executions, while maintaining good public image as protectors of public welfare and crusaders of justice. Furthermore, it can be assumed that, like Duterte, Caiaphas is also a political figure, given that high priests since the Hasmonean regime—especially with the consolidation of the offices of high priest and ruler as embarked by John Hyrcanus I⁴²—had immense control over commerce, norms of conduct, Mosaic laws, hegemony, and temple treasury in Judea in general and Jerusalem in particular. Hence, both figures are influential in their respective localities.

Duterte has been (in)famous for his so-called Drug War.⁴³ In his own words, this program is designed to eliminate the rampant use and selling of illegal drugs in the Philippines. For him, the Philippines had become a narco-country where prohibited substances had been widely circulating, ruining the lives of the

⁴² See Larry R. Helyer, "The Hasmoneans and the Hasmonean Era," in *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, 38-53, at 41-47.

⁴³ For essays and writings on Duterte's Drug War, see the following recent publications: Nicole Curato, ed., *A Duterte Reader: Critical Essays on Rodrigo Duterte's Early Presidency* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2017); Jonathan Miller, *Duterte Harry: Fire and Fury in the Philippines* (Melbourne and London: Scribe, 2018); Earl G. Parreño, *Beyond Will and Power: A Biography of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte* (Lapu-lapu: Optima Typographics, 2019); and Eleanor R. Dionisio, *Women and the Duterte Anti-Drug Carnage: Grieving, Healing, Breaking Through* (Quezon City: Pilipina, 2020).

youth and exponentially enriching the drug lords who profit from these activities. The complete eradication of drugs is one of Duterte's "illiberal fantasies,"⁴⁴ but one which won him the presidency in May 2016 after receiving huge public support, banking on his promise to fight and end this societal menace.

It was not surprising that at the beginning of his presidency, he immediately ordered "Operation Plan Double Barrel" (a.k.a. "*Oplan Tokhang*") in July 2016 to confront and/or round up suspected drug addicts and pushers in all local communities. The Philippine National Police (PNP) boasted some 41,155 successful operations in its first six months, in which

[The PNP] arrested 44,334 drug suspects, knocked on the doors of over six million households, made over a million drug users surrender, and seized over PHP 3.7 billion (USD 74 million) worth of illegal drugs. Casualties in drug-related operations hit a total of 2,217, although human rights groups and journalists' estimates reach up to over 6,000 deaths.⁴⁵

Many among those arrested died during the operations, primarily because of the publicized narrative that they violently resisted arrest and initiated scuffles with the men in uniform. However, the perspective of the victims' families differs from this chorus, claiming that their deceased relatives were summarily executed despite their non-retaliation. The exact number of fatalities differs, too, ranging from around 2,500 to 30,000,

⁴⁴ Nicole Curato, "We Need to Talk About Rody," in *A Duterte Reader*, 1-36, at 16-17, uses the term "illiberal" to mean that "human rights are viewed as particular, not universal," which, for Duterte, implies that "illicit fantasies are built on five components: (1) the scaling up of the Davao model; (2) the secularization of the drug menace; (3) the mobilization of the state's coercive apparatus; (4) the projection of public support; and (5) weak mechanisms for accountability in the drug war."

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

depending on whose viewpoint is heard.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that thousands perished in this crusade. The irony is that this state-sponsored campaign failed to eradicate the drug trade in the country; worse is that it is feared to have escalated the price of illegal substances in the open market and have allowed the proverbial big fish (i.e., the drug lords) in the industry to continue operating.

While all these things were transpiring, the international community was observant of the alleged abuses in the Drug War, especially after hearing the complaints raised by many appalled communities, journalists, and institutions who publicly expressed their opposition to the systematized killings.⁴⁷ The International Criminal Court (ICC) sent delegates to the Philippines to inquire and demand explanations for the alarming tally of deaths in police operations.⁴⁸ The Philippine government refused to cooperate, even withdrawing in March 2019 its membership from the Rome Statutes and, hence, from the ICC. Insisting that the Philippine justice system is functional and efficient in rendering a fair trial to the victims' families, the current Marcos administration did not dissuade the ICC, nonetheless, from its resolve to investigate these human rights violation cases.⁴⁹ If proved that there were abuses,

⁴⁶ See "Victims of Duterte's Drug War in the Philippines Exhumed as Leases Run Out on Their Graves," *The Guardian*, May 23, 2022, accessed September 14, 2024 at <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/may/23/victims-of-dutertes-drug-war-in-philippines-exhumed-as-leases-run-out-on-their-graves>.

⁴⁷ See Philippines' 'War on Drugs,' *Human Rights Watch*, September 21, 2023, accessed September 15, 2024 at <https://www.hrw.org/tag/philippines-war-drugs>.

⁴⁸ See ICC's report of its proceedings concerning the Philippines' campaign against drugs at <https://www.icc-cpi.int/philippines>.

⁴⁹ After rejecting the petition sent by the Philippine government in November 2021 to defer probes on the Drug War, the appeal chamber of ICC ruled in July 2023 to resume its investigations in the Philippines; see "ICC Affirms Prosecutor's Inquiry," *Human Rights Watch*, July 18, 2023, accessed on September 14, 2024 at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/07/18/philippines-icc-affirms-prosecutors-inquiry>. As of 12 March 2025, ex-Philippine President Rodrigo R.

those involved in extrajudicial killings would be tried in court and meted with the appropriate punishment based on international penal laws. In this scenario, the orchestrators of the Drug War would necessarily be implicated and even incarcerated along with their accomplices.

Being the chief architect of the Drug War, Rodrigo Duterte is among those anticipated to be tried in the international court in The Hague and, possibly, incriminated for the thousands of lives lost. Conversely, pro-Duterte supporters have propagated on social media that he should not be linked with these heinous crimes for several reasons:

- First, his threat of killing all drug addicts and wiping them out from the face of the earth should not be treated literally; such was merely his rhetoric to drive home his main point of taking seriously the fight against illegal drugs.
- Second, he never literally ordered to kill any of those arrested; if there were isolated abuses from the police, it came from some police officers irresponsible use of firearms.
- Third, the *Oplan Tokhang* that he engineered received much public support from local heads of *barangays* (“small communities”); these leaders were the ones who provided the police with a list of suspected drug users and pushers.
- Fourth, the Drug War was never created to draw blood; if it did, it was only out of self-defense and the

Duterte has been arrested by the Interpol in the Philippines in accordance with an arrest warrant issued by Pre-Trial Chamber I for charges of murder, torture, and rape as a crime against humanity. He is currently under the custody of the ICC in The Hague, Netherlands. See <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-philippines-rodrigo-roa-duterte-icc-custody>, 12 March 2025; accessed 24 March 2025.

deaths resulting from it were just unavoidable collateral damage of any regular police operation.

- Fifth, the whole concept of the Drug War is to protect ordinary peaceful families from the untethered violent activities and tendencies of illegal drug dependents; many domestic and local incidents of violence were usually carried out by drug users, who would act out of their sane minds. By waging war against drugs, Duterte was only fulfilling his sworn duty of being a father to the Philippine nation, protecting it from the menace brought by these addicts.⁵⁰ True enough, he is *Tatay Digong* (“Daddy Rodrigo”) to many.⁵¹

This discussion can be expanded to include other subtopics that can unveil the authentic picture of the Drug War, viz., Duterte rhetoric, electoral insurgency, American and/or Chinese influence, international drug cartel, the rise of populism, Filipino fatigue in mediocracy, and curtailing of human rights, among many. However, this paper is focused only on establishing the possible relation of the Johannine portrait of Caiaphas with the

⁵⁰ Parreño, *Beyond Will and Power*, 217, describes the fanaticism of Duterte-followers as described vividly at his last presidential campaign rally in May 2016: “When Digong came up the stage just before midnight, the throng erupted in rapturous excitement as they cheered, ‘Duterte, Duterte, Duterte.’ The thunderous applause lasted several minutes.... Digong’s supporters hung on his every word, laughing at his jokes. They cheered enthusiastically when he talked about government corruption and incompetence.”

⁵¹ Oppositionist Senator Risa Hontiveros, “Duterte as the Abusive Father of the Nation,” *Senate of the Philippines 19th Congress: Press Release*, July 22, 2018, accessed on September 13, 2024 at https://legacy.senate.gov.ph/press_release/2018/0722_hontiveros1.asp, qualified what kind of father Duterte truly is: “President Duterte is an abusive father. Like the abusive father who lives in a decrepit house where he repeatedly maltreats, torments, and injures his wife and children. President Duterte is drunk with power, presiding over a broken country drowned by the blood of the poor.... This toxic and abusive relationship must end.”

renowned image of Duterte among Filipinos. The exposition above elucidates that Caiaphas is presented in the Fourth Gospel as involved in the plot to kill Jesus. It is corroborated by Josephus' accounts that he was put into and deposed from the high priesthood Roman rulers in Syria-Palestine. Even if Caiaphas' participation in the arrest of Jesus is influenced only by the Sanhedrin's resolve, he remained to be the head of this collectivity. His advice of keeping the Ῥωμαῖοι away from Jerusalem signaled that he wanted to preserve the *status quo* in Jerusalem. In a postcolonial outlook, Caiaphas is nothing but a political retainer who helped perpetuate the Roman hegemony in his native country and among his people.

Granted that Duterte was not directly involved in extrajudicial killings as his camp claims and that the five justifications above on his rationale behind the inception of the Drug War were true, the fact that he approved and did not restrain subsequent operations amidst the mass carnage cannot be changed and undermined. Being the commander-in-chief of the PNP, he possessed the authority to legitimize and impede any of its operations. But despite the increasing toll of deaths, he remained tolerant and defensive of the assumed police abuses, even incentivizing police officers for their high turnout of drug-related arrests and confiscations.⁵² The lack of political will to hold accountable erring members of the police ranks manifests his condoning attitude toward these accused law offenders. In a postcolonial mindset as proposed by Carter, Horsley, and Thatcher, Duterte's conscious tolerance and endorsement of the Drug War

⁵² There were reports that the Duterte government would give police officers incentives amounting to 5,000 to 15,000 pesos for each slain drug addict or pusher in the War on Drugs; see "Philippines Police Paid to Kill Alleged Drug Offenders," *The Guardian*, Jan. 31, 2017, accessed on September 14, 2024 at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/31/philippines-police-paid-to-kill-alleged-drug-offenders-says-amnesty-rodrigo-duterte>.

despite its multiple criminal red flags make him a political enabler. In this regard, he should be implicated for the many lives wasted under his state-sponsored anti-drug campaign. It should be noted that the Commission of Human Rights already acceded to the recommendations of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, when she reported on June 30, 2020, the following:

The report also finds that serious human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, have resulted from key policies driving the so-called “war on drugs,” and incitement to violence from the highest levels of Government. The campaign against illegal drugs is being carried out without due regard for the rule of law, due process and the human rights of people who may be using or selling drugs. The report finds that the killings have been widespread and systematic – and they are ongoing.⁵³

In this light, the ICC has the mandates to make Duterte accountable for all the human rights violations during his term as president of the Philippines, particularly in his nationwide Drug War that has proven to be bloody and vicious, and in his display of vindictiveness against those who opposed him.⁵⁴

⁵³ See *United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner*, June 30, 2020, accessed on Sept. 15, 2024 at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2020/06/44th-session-human-rights-councilenhanced-interactive-dialogue-situation-human>.

⁵⁴ On Duterte’s alleged silencing of his critiques, see, for example, “Philippines: Duterte’s Administration Should be Held Accountable for the Killings of Activists and Human Rights Defenders,” *ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights*, March 18, 2021, accessed on September 14, 2024 at <https://aseanmp.org/publications/post/philippines-dutertes-administration-should-be-held-accountable-for-the-killings-of-activists-and-human-rights-defenders>.

CONCLUSION: THE CULPABILITY OF ENABLERS REGARDLESS OF THEIR DEGREE OF INVOLVEMENT

What was presented so far is the Johannine portrait of Caiaphas that he is a part of the main religious body in Jerusalem called the Sanhedrin that plotted Jesus' death (see Jn 11:46-54). His name was not explicitly mentioned in the Synoptics in this scene, except for the Matthean rendition that placed Caiaphas as a passive recipient of the chief priests and the elders' plans (Mt 26:3, 57). In John, the sinister plan was realized after Caiaphas delivered his monumental speech in Jn 11:49b-50.

Commentators ordinarily view Caiaphas' speech here to signify that he was overly concerned about the welfare of the religious leaders and the people of Israel, especially when he said, "It is better for you to have one man die for the people" (v. 50). He was saving them from the looming vengeance of the Ῥωμαῖοι, should the rising popularity of Jesus with the crowds continues. The proceeding parenthetical comment that Caiaphas prophesied in his remark in v. 51 adds power to the message he had delivered. However, some textual manuscripts support an alternate reading of ὑμῖν ("for you"; 2nd person plural) in v. 50 with the use of the inflected word ἡμῖν ("for us"; 1st person plural). This rendition depicts the high priest admitting that Jesus' death would benefit all of them. In the use of ὑμῖν, Caiaphas was still distancing himself from the other religious authorities, but in employing ἡμῖν he was highly involved in the plot to kill Jesus along with the other members of the Sanhedrin.

Caiaphas' malicious motive is unfolded in consideration of the indication in Flavius Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* that high priests were appointed and deposed by Roman prefects and rulers. Caiaphas' stint was awarded to him by Valerius Gratus (*Ant* 18:35) but was soon taken from him by Vitellius (*Ant* 18:95). Meanwhile, his eighteen long years of service—the longest among high priests—

hints at his astuteness on staying in power. He was renowned to many as a good friend of Pilate, the Roman prefect during the second half of his reign. This direct cooperation of high priests and Roman colonizers led postcolonial thinkers like Warren Carter, Richard Horsley, and Tom Thatcher to advance the idea that all political enablers of Rome were equally liable for the Roman atrocities committed against the populace. In application, even if Caiaphas would attempt to absolve himself from conspiring for the death of Jesus, his position of influence supported such an action, and his close connection with Rome helped perpetuate the Roman regime in Palestine.

This postcolonial reading can be appropriated to the case of the former Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte, particularly in his bloody Drug War. Despite the rigid propaganda to exonerate him from the thousands of deaths of suspected illegal drug dependents, the fact that he was the commander-in-chief of the police who committed these atrocities is more than enough to implicate him. His suggestive words, tolerating behavior, and even penchant for covering up abuses make him a political retainer and an accomplice of the erring police officers. In the postcolonial way of interpretation, he directly perpetuated the political system of violence and oppression of the poor and helpless.

Given these analyses, this paper argues for the culpability of political enablers regardless of the degree of their involvement. Such would implicate Caiaphas for the arrest of Jesus in the same way as other political retainers worldwide. In the aftermath of the Drug War that claimed thousands of Filipino lives, it may be high time to held accountable those who brought about this horrendous chapter in Philippine history, be they directly involved in the killings or mere retainers of an unjust and inhuman political system. Like Caiaphas, they should not be off the hook, too.

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