

Review of *Jesus of Nazareth, Part Two*, by Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI

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Quo Vadis, Petrus?

In the history of the Church it's not often that a private book is published by a reigning pope, but Vatican II popes apparently started a trend. John XXIII published a couple of books; Paul VI doubled that; John Paul II doubled Paul VI, and now Benedict XVI has almost doubled John Paul II, and in half the time. Prior to Vatican II hardly any pope wrote a private book on theology. I'm not sure of the reason for this trend. I am more concerned with the fact that it tends to foster what E. Michael Jones calls the "I/We dichotomy" which "demeans the papacy by allowing the pope to become a celebrity" for the purpose of "establishing the bounds of permissible discourse according to a political agenda..."¹ In other words, what cannot be said officially because of ecclesiastical constraints is said unofficially in order to achieve a desired result. Paul VI apparently saw another side to this potential duplicity when he said: "Is it really right for someone to present himself again and again in that way and allow oneself to be regarded as a star?"² Perhaps this same temptation also hampered our first pope. It was Pope Peter in Galatians 2:11-21 who, when he decided to engage in some private and unofficial commentary on the Gospel under the name Cephas, eventually shunned his Gentile converts and instead bent over backwards to placate the hostile and unbelieving Jews, upon which he was severely upbraided by Paul for "perverting the Gospel." This is an ever-present danger for a pope when he is wearing the papal tiara; how much more when he dons a hat with the title "private theologian"? As we shall see, it may be no coincidence that the Jews who made the Cephas-side of Pope Peter stumble in proclaiming the Gospel are eerily similar to the Jews today who are making the Joseph Ratzinger side of Pope Benedict XVI stumble as well. It's uncanny to see such a resemblance between the first century and the twenty-first century. In light of the dire warnings from our saints; the Fatima message; and Scriptures that speak about the rise of antichrist, who will now win this battle on earth between the popes and the Jews remains to be seen.

Be that as it may, when the pope writes a book that is disseminated all over the world and refers to the author as "Pope Benedict XVI," and which carries an emblem of the papal seal embossed on the hardcover edition, is this to be considered an "I" book written by Joseph Ratzinger or a "We" book written by Pope Benedict XVI? As Jones says, this question is especially significant when, for example, the pope addressed the use of condoms and gave the wrong answer in his private book *Light of the World: The Pope, The Church and the Signs of the Times*. Perhaps for the book *Jesus of Nazareth* the issue is much simpler because there the pope explicitly states that it "is precisely not a book of the Magisterium. It is not a book that I wrote with my authority as Pope...I very intentionally wanted the book to be, not an act of the Magisterium, but an effort to participate in the scholarly discussion,"³ adding that "everyone

¹ *Culture Wars*, Jan. 2011, p. 34.

² *Light of the World*, pp. 72-3.

³ *Light of the World*, p. 169.

is free, then, to contradict me.” Fair enough. But I don’t think the masses see it that way. If the pope says or writes something, it is like Gospel, regardless if he temporarily assumes the alias “Joseph Ratzinger.” Popes need to be very careful with the impressions they create. Benedict XVI must realize he is no longer Joseph Ratzinger and he cannot go back there, at least not without confusing the rest of Catholicism. He is the pope, the vicar of Christ, the head-hauncho, and the whole world hangs on his every word; and that, whether he likes it or not, will remain the case until he dies. The days of Joseph Ratzinger and his speculative theology are over; and it is very dangerous for Benedict XVI to try to revive them. If he is going to speak on an issue as sensitive and important as condoms then he must only speak from his magisterial chair.

The job of each Catholic is to protect the papacy and Joseph Ratzinger is no exception to that mandate. He cannot put the papacy in precarious positions and exploit it for future book sales. The Church has had enough opinions from the prelatore. It is time for hard and fast decisions about what the Church is and what it meant by what it officially stated, especially what it “officially” stated at Vatican II. Wouldn’t it be nice if the pope, after 50 years of turmoil created in the wake of Vatican II, actually wrote an official document with the express purpose of clearing up the inordinate amount of ambiguities in the major documents of Vatican II? THAT would be something to get excited about! But another book, like *Jesus of Nazareth*, which spends 300 pages delving into the finer points of historical criticism and arguing about which of the four Gospel writers got his facts right, we need like we need vinegar on our teeth.

Now, in reviewing *Jesus of Nazareth* it became apparent to me why Joseph Ratzinger, regardless of his apparent love of Scripture, must cease taking center stage under the name Pope Benedict XVI. The basic reason is, *Jesus of Nazareth*, although very uplifting and insightful in several places, contains a disturbing amount of dubious theological propositions; lack of scholarly exegesis; misuse of biblical criticism; and a general ignoring of Catholic tradition. The problem is exacerbated in that I wouldn’t expect most college professors to be able to sort out the problems in *Jesus of Nazareth*, much less would I expect the Catholic masses to do so. The latter, as I noted above, will take *Jesus of Nazareth* as Gospel, and that is precisely what frightens me the most.

In light of the dichotomy the book makes between Joseph Ratzinger and Pope Benedict XVI, I simply do not know which one to refer to when I address him. There are enough theological problems in the book that I hesitate to attribute them to Pope Benedict, but then again, Joseph Ratzinger no longer exists, ecclesiastically speaking. So I have decided to refer to the book only by its title, which I will form into a handy acronym called JON, and I will refer to JON as a he instead of an it.

What? No Longer Preach to the Jews?

Let’s start with the furor JON has created over the issue of the Jews and their salvation. On page 44, JON presents himself in quite an audacious manner when he claims to possess a better understanding of Jewish issues than everyone else before him, and more or less corrals the entire Catholic tradition as being an assortment of “many misunderstandings with grave consequences.” JON puts nothing less than 20 centuries of Catholic tradition on the chopping block, but that is not unusual for post-Vatican II popes. John Paul II did it constantly. It seems they have a need to silence the haunting voices of the past in order to give credence to their continuing novelties. Subsequently, JON sees his own “reflections” as “the beginnings of a correct understanding [which] have always been there waiting to be rediscovered.” Obviously, this implies that JON (and perhaps his immediate predecessors since Vatican II) have been the

only ones who have “rediscovered” these truths – truths that the 260 popes and prelates before them, who were apparently not guided by the Holy Spirit or refused to listen to Him, did not see. Since he has brought down the gauntlet, JON cannot very well appeal to these pre-Vatican II popes and prelates for support; so he instead goes to one famous personage of the past that agrees with him. Apparently finding no one in the first millennium, JON goes to the second millennium to find the French abbot Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153). JON extracts a single quote from Bernard addressing Pope Eugene III, which states: “Granted, with regard to the Jews, time excuses you; for them a determined point in time has been fixed, which cannot be anticipated. The full number of the Gentiles must come in first...Why did it seem good to the Fathers...to suspend the word of faith while unbelief was obdurate?” and then backs this up with a quote from an obscure modern day abbess living in Germany named Hildegard Brem, who is commandeered as the sole authoritative commentary on Bernard’s words. As such Brem states: “In the light of Romans 11:25, the Church must not concern herself with the conversion of the Jews, since she must wait for the time fixed for this by God, ‘until the full number of the Gentiles come in’...On the contrary, the Jews themselves are a living homily to which the Church must draw attention, since they call to mind the Lord’s suffering” (p. 45).

So there we have it. An obscure nun from Germany who neither claims any private revelation from God nor notable scholarly career produces such an astounding and provocative ecclesiastical and eschatological commentary; someone who has never been cited by any scholar previously, or even heard of by the public before she appeared in JON’s book, is the single source JON uses to convince the reader that his new understanding of not preaching to the Jews is the “correct understanding [which] has always been there waiting to be rediscovered.” What was JON thinking? I am truly at a loss to explain how such shoddy scholarship could come from someone who was at one time the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Irrespective of the careless scholarship, let’s examine the claims as they stand. Bernard says “it seemed good to the [Church] Fathers...to suspend the word of faith while [Jewish] belief was obdurate.” Did they? Which Fathers does Bernard have in view? Unfortunately, JON doesn’t delineate any, but that is certainly his responsibility if he is going to put Bernard on the hot seat. I don’t know of any Fathers who taught such a thing and JON gives us no names of any such Fathers in his remaining 250 pages. So we have the right to ask: why didn’t JON investigate the claims of Bernard before he chose to give us this supposed “correct understanding”? Not only are there no Fathers who teach JON’s view, there are no councils, no saints, no popes and no doctors who taught that the Gospel should no longer be preached to the Jews (save, apparently, for Bernard of Clairvaux, which is not exactly a consensus from tradition). There is a simple reason why. Regardless of how difficult it may be to preach to the Jews, not preaching to them is much worse, for it automatically consigns them to an ignominious fate that we wouldn’t wish on our worst enemy, much less on the former chosen people of God who come from the loins of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

In short, JON’s compassion is misplaced. Catering to the pressure of the Jewish lobby today by postponing their salvation until tomorrow is not being sympathetic to them at all. The mess of political pottage JON will receive from the Jews in return for handing over our Gospel birthright can only come back to haunt him, if not destroy him. Naturally, today’s Zionists are quite happy to allow the pope to think that God wants to exclude them, as a race, from Christian preaching. They are overjoyed to finally see that, from henceforth, Christians will put the onus on God to make a token gesture of Christian

salvation to the last generation of Jews. The Jews themselves couldn't have thought up a better script to keep Christians off their proverbial backs, and they are laughing all the way to the bank.

JON more or less confirms our suspicions when he says: "In the meantime, Israel retains its own mission. Israel is in the hands of God, who will save it 'as a whole' at the proper time when the number of Gentiles is complete" (p. 46). What mission? Who gave it to them? Where is this written? Where did the Church ever teach this before? Since when is it God's responsibility to preach to the Jews? Does this imply that God will take away their free will and zap the whole generation with salvation? If so, where does Scripture teach such a thing? Unfortunately, JON doesn't even think of these questions, much less offer an answer to curious minds.

Another Look at Romans 11:25-27

As we can also see, the thrust of JON's thesis is based on an exclusive yet untested interpretation of Romans 11:25. On the one hand, even if it were true that Romans 11:25 teaches that God will save the Jews at or near the return of Christ, that exegetical scenario can have no basis for whether we preach the Gospel to them now. If St. Paul believed that the last generation of Jews were going to be saved *en masse* near the end of time and that it would be futile to preach the Gospel to them now, why did he say he wanted to save them now, in the very same chapter: "if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow-countrymen [Jews] and save some of them" (Rm 11:14)? Or why, in the same chapter, did he tell us about the distinction between Israel at large who rejects the Gospel but, to this very day, "there is a remnant chosen according to God's grace" being saved by the preaching of the Gospel in Paul's time and in our time (Rom 11:5)? Or why, in the same chapter, did Paul say the Jews can and will be saved in the Gentile age: "And they [Jews] also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again" (Rom 11:23)?

We grant that most Jews do not turn to God and Christ, but Paul clarifies in the very same chapter, verses 1-11, that we should not be surprised by their obstinacy, since it started in the Old Testament! (*cf.* Rom 11:1-11; 9:27-33; 10:16-21; Heb 3:7-11; 4:2-5; Acts 13:44-52; 1Thess 2:14-16; Rev. 2:9; 3:9). The Jews have always been stiffnecked toward God. That's precisely why God rejected them (Ex 32:9; Acts 7:51). No new revelation there. But in the face of all this testimony, where does Scripture, or our Tradition or Magisterium, teach that the Jews obstinacy is a sufficient cause to cease preaching to them? In fact, Scripture teaches that we are to preach the Gospel to everyone regardless whether we think they will listen, since the Gospel is both the "aroma of death to death and to the other an aroma from life to life" (2 Cor 2:15-16). In other words, the Gospel both saves and damns, and it is not our business to decide who should hear it (*cf.* Heb 4:12-13; Jer. 1:7-10; Isa 55:11).

On the other hand, although it should have no bearing on whether we preach the Gospel to the Jews today, we should also question the exclusive interpretation that JON is giving to Romans 11:25-27, since it seems to be the sole basis for his unprecedented and destructive approach to the Jews. In these verses Paul says:

"a hardening has come upon Israel in part, until the full number of the Gentiles comes in, and thus all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The deliverer will come out of Zion, he will turn away godlessness from Jacob; and this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.'"

Now, it is certainly within the realm of interpretive possibilities that Paul is pointing to a time after the Gentiles are saved in which the last generation of Jews will be saved at or near Christ's return. Jerome, Cyril of Alexandria and Chrysostom held a similar view.⁴ But is this certain or even likely? Where else does Scripture teach such a scenario? Has this interpretation been thoroughly examined so that every word and phrase has been parsed and exegeted? Are there other viable interpretations for this passage that are not being considered? The truth is, many pro-Jewish interpreters, most of them premillennial Protestants, have commandeered Rom. 11:25-27 to teach their eschatological view of a future *en masse* conversion of Jews, but no Catholic, past or present, that I am aware of has ever demonstrated it by a thorough exegesis, including Bernard of Clairvaux and Hildegard of Bingen. JON certainly doesn't provide any exegesis. He just assumes his interpretation is correct and/or infallible.

Interestingly enough, in the one place "the times of the Gentiles" appears outside of Rom 11:25, namely, Luke 21:24, JON admits, according to Jesus' own words, that it is followed immediately in verse 25 by "the end of the world" (p. 42). So how could there be a Jewish period of conversion between the "times of the Gentiles" and the end of the world? JON offers no exegetical solution. But this does raise an intriguing question. If the concept of an *en masse* conversion of Jews so blatantly contradicts the chronology of Luke 21:24-25, where did this clumsy idea originate and how was it justified? The answer lies in a not-so-glorious moment in our Catholic history. There was a belief among the early Fathers (Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Papias, Tertullian, Origen, Lactantius) called premillennialism – the belief that, in accordance with Apocalypse 20:1-6, Christ, at his Second Coming, would set up a kingdom on earth for 1000 years in which the Jews would be converted *en masse* and reign on earth with him. In this way, Luke 21:24-25 presented no contradiction, since the *en masse* conversion came after both the "time of the Gentiles" and the Second Coming, and, in fact, actually made sense, since in this scenario the *en masse* conversion had the distinct purpose of filling the earthly millennium with converted Jews. A dramatic shift in eschatology arose, however, when Clement of Alexandria, Chrysostom, Augustine and Jerome rejected premillennialism in favor of amillennialism – the belief that the 1000 years of Apocalypse 20 was a symbolic number that referred not to a Jewish period at the Second Coming but to the reign of the Catholic Church beginning at the First Coming, and until the end of time. As such, the passages in the Old Testament that prophesied a glorious future for "Israel" (e.g., Isa 66:9-14; Zech 12:1-9; Ezk 36:22-28) were reinterpreted by the amillennialists to be symbolic prophecies about the Church age, not Israel. This dramatic shift became official as the Council of Ephesus endorsed the amillennial view and said that the binding of Satan (which, according to Apoc 20:1-3, happens at the beginning of the 1000 years) occurred at the cross, not in a future millennium.⁵ Many years later the premillennial view was also rejected by Pius XII as a system that "cannot be taught safely."⁶

Incidentally, it is quite interesting to see current Jewish converts to the Catholic faith (e.g., Roy Schoeman) attempting to reintroduce a neo-premillennial view into Catholic eschatology, in which the Old Testament prophecies of a future glory for "Israel" are being reinterpreted as applying literally to the

⁴ Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, Ch. 2; Cyril: *Commentary on Genesis*, Bk. 5; Chrysostom: *Homily on Romans*, 11, 7, 11.

⁵ See Denz. 140.

⁶ Decree of the Holy Office, July 21, 1944, Denz. 2296.

present nation of Israel and not to the Catholic Church. Additionally, Schoeman claims that the “times of the Gentiles” ended in 1967 and the future glory and *en masse* conversion of Jews has thus already started.⁷

Back to our story. When Augustine and the Council of Ephesus rejected premillennialism, a curious problem arose. Although the amillennialists got rid of the future 1000 year Jewish period and turned it Catholic, somehow the premillennial baggage of an *en masse* conversion of Jews hung on for quite a while. This had a seriocomical twist to it. Based on a odd mixture of Apocalypse 11 and the apocryphal literature they were reading at the time,⁸ the premillennial Fathers predicted that Elijah and Enoch would come back to preach to the Jews at the Second Coming. So some of the amillennial Fathers kept predicting the same return but without a millennium in which to put the converts! Whereas premillennialism had room for an *en masse* conversion in its 1000-year paradise on earth, it wasn’t so easy for amillennialism, due to the contradiction it created with Luke 21:24-25. To this day the problem persists, since the Catholic Church hasn’t given much paper to eschatological concerns, except for brief, elementary and somewhat confusing entries in the 1994 Catechism.⁹ The solution, of course, is to drop the *en masse* conversion, which is quite easy since Scripture doesn’t teach it. Of course, if JON has to drop the *en masse* conversion, he also has to drop the heretical idea that we are to cease preaching the Gospel to the Jews.

So if neither JON nor any other source can show that “all Israel” refers to a future generation of Jews at Christ’s coming, then who is it? Well, there are a couple of other possibilities that JON doesn’t consider. In the context St. Paul seems to have already answered the question. In Rom 9:6 he stated that “not all Israel are those who are descended from Israel,” and in the beginning of Romans 11:1-11 he says much the same as he speaks of a “remnant of Israel who is saved by grace and the rest are hardened.” Hence, one possibility is that “all Israel” consists of all the Jews who have been saved by grace, from their inception in Abraham to the present day. In context, this makes perfect sense. When the “fullness of the Gentiles” is reached, the fullness of the Jews, or “all Israel,” is reached, and then Christ comes back for a full harvest. Notice that this scenario requires we preach the Gospel to the Jews all the way up to the Second coming of Christ, since there is a remnant of Jews God will save until the end of time. And as Paul says in Rom 10:11-17: “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ,” how are the Jews going to hear unless we continue to preach to them?

Another similar possibility, which was advanced in one of Augustine’s alternative views and backed by Theodoret, is that “all Israel” refers to all the Gentiles and Jews that are saved throughout the Church age, which Church age is also “the times of the Gentiles.”¹⁰ This interpretation flows quite nicely from the particular Greek word Paul chose to introduce the verse “and so all Israel will be saved.” The word “so” is the Greek adverb οὕτως, which means “in this way” or “in this manner,” and acts to tie together the two groups in verse 25, the remnant of Jews and the fullness of Gentiles, who will thus form one entity of the

⁷ See Roy Schoeman’s book, *Salvation is from the Jews*, pp. 303-327.

⁸ E.g., “The Revelation of Paul,” “The History of Joseph the Carpenter,” “The Gospel of Nicodemus,” “The Revelation of St. John the Theologian.”

⁹ E.g., paras. 673-677.

¹⁰ Augustine, *Letters* 149; Theodoret, *Commentary on Romans*, Migne 82, col. 180.

“saved” (cf. Eph 2:13-22; Rom 9:22-24), combining a spiritual Israel with the physical Israel into one body, “all Israel.”

So, in the end, while we can certainly leave it as a remote possibility that Paul is teaching a future conversion of Jews in Romans 11:25-27, it is by no means certain, and, in fact, appears quite dubious. We can say this much for certain: no one in the Catholic Church should be concluding that we should cease preaching the Gospel to the Jews today based on the idea that God has plans to save their last generation in the future. That position verges on heresy. No pope or theologian wants to be caught dead saying so, for God’s judgment will be severe for anyone who tampers with the Gospel.

Matthew 27:25: “His blood be upon us and our children”

Now we will turn to other issues in *Jesus of Nazareth*. This next one also deals with the Jews, and it is quite serious. In his interpretation of Mt 27:25 (“And the whole people said in reply, ‘His blood be upon us and upon our children’”) JON seems to go out of its way to make this passage say the exact opposite of what it says. The passage is very clear. It says the “whole people” (which is literally and correctly translated from the Greek πᾶς ὁ λαός). But, of course, if Cephas can be persuaded that what he is seeing is not really what he is seeing, we then have the means by which “the whole” can be made into a part. In other words, if one’s theology about the Jews has been shaped by fifty years of brow-beating “dialogue” from which JON succumbs to saying that there are now “two ways of rereading the biblical texts – the Christian way and the Jewish way – into dialogue with one another” (p. 33),¹¹ in addition to receiving visits from Abe Foxman at the Vatican to help create Judaized doctrine for Catholics; along with regular chastisements from Rabbi Rosen; accompanied by annual visits to synagogues and prayers at the Wailing Wall; along with twisted interpretations of *Nostra Aetate* and the “Old Covenant is not revoked” from liberal Catholics, well, it is almost inevitable that passages such as Mt 27:25 will somehow be neutralized of their first century impact. So it should come as no surprise that JON concludes: “Matthew is certainly not recounting historical fact here.” Note well: JON knows precisely what Matthew is saying, but he rejects it as incredible. JON’s excuse: “how could the whole people have been present at this moment to clamor for Jesus’ death? The real group of accusers are the current Temple authorities...” (p. 186). So Matthew, who we previously understood from tradition was inspired by the Holy Spirit, somehow got it wrong. No apologies. Yet the Gospel of John, which seems to be in agreement with Matthew by his incessant repetition of the phrase “the Jews” in negative contexts, somehow got it right, because, as JON insists, John didn’t actually mean all the Jews but only “the Temple aristocracy.” We can easily see what JON is trying desperately to do. He is willing to put the veracity of Matthew on the chopping block and force John into a defined mold in order to arrive at a position (which will inevitably placate today’s Jews) that the New Testament never once implicates a single Jewish citizen for hating Jesus and wanting him crucified, except for the Sanhedrin, the “Temple aristocracy.”

Will it stick? Let’s see. First, JON doesn’t consider the possibility that Matthew’s “whole people” refers to all of the Jews in the crowd at that particular time, not the whole of Jerusalem. Second, he ignores other passages that implicate the Jewish populace in addition to the Temple aristocracy. For example, Acts

¹¹ This may, perhaps, be the same reason why Cardinal Ratzinger had no problem approving the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s 2002 document “The Jewish People and the Holy Scriptures” which said: “The Jewish Messianic wait is not in vain...the Jews are waiting for the first coming, the Christians the second.”

3:14-17 says: “But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you [see Jn 19:15] and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses....And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance,¹² as did also your rulers.” We see that the crowd gathered at Pentecost, who were mostly Jews, are said to be guilty of murdering Jesus just as are their “rulers” (the “Temple aristocracy”). Third, JON provides no evidence from the Gospel of John that “the Jews” refers only to the Temple aristocracy. He does no etiological study on the phrase (and this is especially egregious since “the Jews” occurs 70 times in John); and he gives no contextual study of the Jewish crowds that left Jesus in unbelief at various times in John’s Gospel. The irony of JON’s dealing with Mt 27:25 is that later in his book he reacts strongly to one of Adolf Harnack’s faulty interpretations by complaining: “But an exegesis that turns a text into its opposite is no exegesis” (p. 165). But JON turned “whole people” into its opposite – a very small part called the Temple aristocracy, which appears to be an interpretation forced by his Jewish ecumenism. To be sure, the issue here is not so much whether the Jewish people of today are somehow responsible for the death of Christ, but more on how JON twists the Scripture to arrive at his favored position.

But this arbitrary treatment of Holy Scripture is only the symptom of an even larger problem in the hermeneutics of JON. On what basis can an exegete declare that one of the Gospel writers simply got his historical facts wrong? Isn’t Matthew supposed to be writing by direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit who cannot lie? Didn’t the Council of Trent, later confirmed by Leo XIII and Vatican I, teach that “the Holy Scriptures...at the dictation of the Holy Spirit, have come down even to us, transmitted as it were from hand to hand” and thus “it is absolutely wrong and forbidden...to admit that the sacred writer has erred”?¹³ The 1964 Pontifical Biblical Commission, when it was an authoritative arm of the Church, said the same: “the Gospels were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who preserved their authors from every error.” Even Joseph Ratzinger’s CDF said the same in 1998: “the absence of error in the inspired sacred texts” (*Professio Fidei*). The role of the Holy Spirit becomes an interesting question throughout the whole of JON’s book, especially when we notice that not one time in its 300 pages does JON state that what we have in the Gospels today was inspired by the Holy Spirit. There is only one place

¹² The phrase “acted out of ignorance” (κατά ἄγνοιαν) does not mean that the people are guiltless for putting Christ to death. The distinction between “acting in ignorance” and “acting in full knowledge” comes from the Mosaic Law. Num 15:27-29 shows that there are sins for which sacrifices can be made. But Num 15:30-31 shows that there are other sins for which the sinner is simply cut off without any forgiveness. Lev 4:27 shows that after the person who acted in ignorance finds out about his sin, he must offer a sacrifice for a “sin offering.” Hebrews 9:7 shows how important this distinction is. It shows that “acting in ignorance” was the common sin in Israel, so much so that, on the Day of Atonement, it was only the sins of ignorance that were atoned: “but the second tent is entered only once a year, and then only by the high priest who takes in the blood to make an offering for his own and the people’s faults of inadvertence.” (Heb 9:7 NJB). The phrase “faults of inadvertence” is the Greek ἀγνοημάτων, which is literally “ignorances,” and comes from the same Greek word ἄγνοια used in Acts 3:17. The corollary would also be true, that is, if the people who sinned in “ignorance” were then made to realize that what they did was sinful (as Peter did to the Jews in Acts 3:13-15), and if these same people chose not to repent of their sin (as Peter commanded them to do in Acts 3:19: “Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away...”), then they would move out of the “ignorance” category and be “cut off,” as the person in Num 15:30-31 was “cut off” if they had sinned intentionally.

¹³ Denz. 783; 1941-1953; and Vatican I: “Further, this supernatural revelation...is contained in the written books...from the apostles themselves by the dictation of the Holy Spirit, and have been transmitted as it were from hand to hand” (Denz. 3006).

where JON mentions the “guidance of God’s Spirit,” but that is downplayed as merely a process of the evangelists gradually “remembering” in their own mind what occurred in the life of Jesus (p. 137). Conversely, there are numerous times that JON speaks about “strains of tradition” that were the sources for the Gospel narratives, but never does JON specify a supreme power that weaves all the strains together into a unified and inerrant whole. There is a good reason for that: JON doesn’t believe the New Testament is without error. Welcome to the world of Historical Criticism. But, you say, it can’t be! How can a Catholic claim that the actual Gospel writer, Matthew, made an error? Doesn’t JON believe in at least some kind of divine inspiration of the biblical writers? He may, but the way around that is to claim, as Historical Criticism does, that the Gospel we know as Matthew is actually a redacted (*i.e.*, edited) text created by those who lived a generation or so after Matthew (JON, pp. 27, 127), and that we can only guess as to what was original and what was redacted. And since that generation had neither eyewitnesses to the words and acts of Jesus nor were inspired by the Holy Spirit, then the history they redacted is often in error.

Yet, by the same token, we are also assured by these same “scholars” that even though all the Gospels were redacted, somehow the salvation message in those same Gospels was preserved from error! So says Fr. Raymond Brown (who is also cited in JON’s book) and his cadre of liberal theologians who twisted Vatican II’s *Dei Verbum* 11’s innocuous phrase “for the sake of our salvation”¹⁴ to mean: “Scripture teaching is truth without error to the extent that it conforms to the salvific purpose of God” (*New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 1169),¹⁵ against all of Catholic tradition prior. So not only is scriptural inerrancy limited to what Fr. Brown says is “salvific” (which is never defined by him or his colleagues, allowing them license to question even the spiritual concepts in the Gospels), they fail to explain how the salvific content can be preserved error free but the historical content could be riddled with errors. And you wonder why the Church is in such a mess? This kind of usurpation of Scripture is precisely the reason that when Pope Pius XII allowed an investigation into the merits of Historical Criticism in his 1943 encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, he did not do so without a resolute warning to its practitioners not to take the criticism further than the Tradition would allow. But the men of JON’s generation ignored that warning and went far beyond it, to the point that we hardly know what true Scripture is any longer. JON’s book is filled with instances in which the biblical writer’s account is called into question, and JON is often tempted to pick the account that is in accord with the ecumenical appeasement he wishes to promote – and we’ve already seen that his ecumenical purpose is to exonerate the Jews to a status where they don’t need to hear the Gospel and still retain an independent “mission from God.” This is not biblical exegesis; it is biblical tyranny. It is not what our tradition taught us. Tradition taught us that Scripture is inerrant in all that it says; that the Gospels, like the Epistles, were written by eye witnesses that were inspired [even “dictated” as Vatican I says] directly by the Holy Spirit so as not to make any errors; and that the days of the Jews are over and they no longer have a “mission from God” that is separate in any way from the Church. Ironically, JON himself admits to some of the excesses of Historical Criticism (*e.g.*, pp. xiv, 82,

¹⁴ “Since, therefore, all that the inspired authors, or sacred writers, affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture, firmly, faithfully and without error, teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the sacred Scriptures” (*Dei Verbum* 11, Flannery edition).

¹⁵ Edited by Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy, Prentice Hall, NJ, 1968, 1990. The context of *Dei Verbum* says the opposite, as well as do the five footnotes in the original *Dei Verbum* edition, but Brown ignores them, as do all other liberal Catholic scholars with the same agenda.

103-104) but it is too little too late and certainly not enough for JON to hold the mirror up to his own face.

Bad Company Corrupts Good Manners

We can usually tell the path a biblical exegete is going down by the names he drops along the way. In JON we see very few references to the Fathers and medieval theologians, and none to the Councils, but we do see a whole showcase of modern biblical scholars presented to us from the liberal and historical critical schools, many of them Protestants, including the German Protestant and thorough-going liberal Rudolph Bultmann, who seems to be one of JON's favorites (e.g., p. 155: "As Bultmann rightly observers..." although JON does take issue with him from time to time, e.g., pp. 94-95; 213; 243). Although it is certainly true that Bultmann is capable of giving us a valuable insight into a text of Scripture, the fact is, Bultmann was an unbeliever who didn't accept a word of the Bible as true, much less something that could impinge on his personal life. Much like the typical liberal scholars coming out of the Tübingen school in Germany during his day, Bultmann treated the Bible like he would treat Shakespeare, Homer, or any other piece of human literature. Bultmann's trademark theological term was "Kerygma," which he claimed was the hidden divine truth behind what he believed were the human myths in the Gospel narratives. In other words, the Gospels were invented stories in order to promote a particular religious view. Bultmann and his Tübingen colleagues used the same words we do (e.g., incarnation, resurrection) but didn't mean the same thing. Bultmann's students took him to heart. On one of his birthdays they gave him a beautifully bound book with the title "Kerygma" on the front cover. But when Bultmann looked inside he saw only empty pages. The students had a point. Bultmann's hermeneutic had emptied the Bible of its contents. But these destructive theological foundations undergirding Bultmann and many of the other liberals who are quoted as authorities in JON (e.g., Jeremias, Pesch, Gnllka, Schnackenburg) are never revealed to the reader. Bultmann is quoted as if he's just a modern Augustine, and the reader is left with the impression that Bultmann is just as great, or even greater than our Catholic Church Fathers or other great Catholic doctors and saints. The Catholics JON quotes are all from the liberal ranks and are partisan advocates of historical criticism. Fr. John P. Maier, professor at Notre Dame (See Jones' book: *Is Notre Dame Still Catholic?*), the only non-German quoted by the pope and one who is said to be aware of the "limitations of historical criticism," is the very source JON uses to support the idea that the Gospel of John trumps the Synoptics (Matthew, Mark & Luke) since the latter three made more mistakes (p. 112). Without the slightest bit of shame, these theologians have no qualms in making the Gospels compete with one another to see who among them can get away with false statements and exaggerations. This is the sad state of biblical hermeneutics in the Catholic scholarly world today and JON unabashedly perpetuates this sorry condition. The German Protestants began the departure from an inerrant Bible back in the 1700 & 1800s and it spread like a disease all over the globe. Ever since the late 1940s Catholic exegetes not only imbibed the Protestant hermeneutic but surpassed it. What took the Catholic Church 19 centuries to construct and teach under such great believers in full inerrancy like Augustine, Thomas and Bellarmine, and which was made official by the great councils, was destroyed in little more than 25 years by Catholic liberals in the 20th century. Their onslaught wouldn't be half as bad except for the fact that there is not one alternative voice (those who follow the Catholic tradition) quoted in JON to even make it a fair fight.

The Atonement: Is it Protestant or Catholic?

Since many of the sources JON cites are Protestant, it may come as no surprise that the theory of the Atonement presented in JON is much closer to Protestant theology than it is Catholic. This is an important point because allusions to the meaning and application of the Atonement permeate JON. The first mention of the Atonement appears on page 39 where JON translates the Greek word *hilasterion* with the word “expiation.” This is the first indication of a departure from traditional Catholic theology since the common Latin or English translation of *hilasterion* has always been “propitiationem” or “propitiation,” not expiation. Technically, expiation refers to the result of the Atonement (*i.e.*, men are cleansed of their sin and attain righteousness with God), whereas propitiation refers to the cause or reason the Atonement can be procured (*i.e.*, God has been propitiated with the proper sacrifice and thus provides salvation to man). Theologically, the two concepts are miles apart, since expiation claims Christ absorbed our sin and guilt and was thus duly punished for them, whereas propitiation says Christ absorbed no sin or guilt precisely so that he could serve as an acceptable sinless sacrifice to appease the wrath of God.¹⁶ Hence, to describe what Christ actually did for the Father on the cross, propitiation is the only correct term. As sad as it is, Catholic theologians, influenced as they have been in ecumenism by Protestant theology, hardly talk about propitiation any longer. The last one I found came from a book written by theologian William Hogan in 1963.¹⁷

Expiation was never used in Catholic theology until the 20th century, but now appears prominently in the New American Bible. It was originally introduced by Protestant Bibles (*e.g.*, RSV) to demarcate against the Catholic concept that the atonement was a sacrificial appeasement of God the Father by God the Son. The Protestants wanted to reinforce the Reformation concept of penal substitution, *i.e.*, that Christ absorbed our sin and guilt, or actually became sin, and that God punished him because of that sin and guilt, a position that JON embraces (pp. 39; 119-120; 155). Luther¹⁸ and Calvin,¹⁹ for example, believed that Christ was punished with the equivalent of an eternity in hell to pay the exact price for the sins of the

¹⁶ “In discussing reconciliation and atonement it has become customary to draw a distinction between propitiation and expiation. In propitiation the action is directed towards God or some other offended person. The underlying purpose is to change God’s attitude from one of wrath to one of good-will and favour. In the case of expiation, on the other hand, the action is directed towards that which has caused the breakdown in the relationship. It is sometimes held that, while God is not personally angry with the sinner, the act of sin has initiated a train of events which can only be broken by some compensatory rite or act of reparation for the offence. In short propitiation is directed towards the offended person, whereas expiation is concerned with nullifying the offensive act.” (From the Protestant: *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown, Vol. 3, p. 151). See my book: *Not By Bread Alone*, Appendix 2: A Study of Propitiation and Expiation, Queenship Pub. 2000.

¹⁷ “It should be kept clear that Christ did not assume the guilt of sin, but the obligation of making satisfaction for the sins of all men...Christ remained free of all guilt, and that He was always loved by His Father. Christ assumed the responsibility of making satisfaction for the sins of men but not the guilt of their sins. He freely undertook to give to the Father something that was more pleasing than the sins of men had been hateful. He also took the responsibility of discharging the penalties due to men’s sins. This does not mean that Christ was punished in man’s stead. He freely accepted, out of love and obedience, sufferings by which He freed men from the burden of suffering the penalty of eternal damnation” (*Christ’s Redemptive Sacrifice*, pp. 43, 81).

¹⁸ *Operatio in Psalmum 22* (21), 1583 Wittenberg ed., III, 331-334. Cited in *Sin, Redemption and Sacrifice* by S. Lyonnet and L. Sabourin, p. 229.

¹⁹ *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2:16:10 - 2:16:12.

elect that he took into himself. This payment coincides with the Protestant concept of forensic justification wherein the justified are imputed with Christ's righteousness because Christ paid the exact legal price required for sin. Traditional Catholic theology has never taught either a forensic atonement or a forensic justification. Both were rejected at the Council of Trent. From the Fathers through the medievals the atonement has always been understood as a voluntary propitiation through sacrifice in order to appease the Father so that he will personally, not legally, move to save mankind. This is why the **1911 Catholic Encyclopedia** says: "...The second mistake is the tendency to treat the Passion of Christ as being literally a case of vicarious punishment. This is at best a distorted view of the truth that His atoning Sacrifice took the place of our punishment, and that He took upon Himself the sufferings and death that were due to our sins."²⁰ "...Redemption has reference to both God and man. On God's part, it is the acceptance of satisfactory amends whereby the Divine honor is repaired and the Divine wrath appeased."²¹ Thus we find in **Augustine**: "But what is meant by 'justified in His blood'?...Was it indeed so, that when God the Father was wroth with us, He saw the death of His Son for us, and was appeased towards us? Was then His Son already so far appeased towards us, that He even deigned to die for us; while the Father was still so far wroth, that except His Son died for us, He would not be appeased?"²² And the same in **Thomas**: "...the passion of Christ is the cause of our reconciliation with God...through its being a sacrifice most acceptable unto God, for this is properly the effect of a sacrifice that through it God is appeased, as even man is ready to forgive an injury done unto him by accepting a gift which is offered to him...And so in the same way, what Christ suffered was so great a good that, on account of that good found in human nature, God has been appeased over all the offenses of mankind."²³

Although JON is not as extreme as Luther and Calvin's putting Christ in the literal torments of hell, he comes close to the concept, and for the same reasons. For example, on page 155 JON describes Christ's suffering as one "before the abyss of the full power of destruction, evil, and enmity with God that is now unleashed upon him, that he now takes directly upon himself, or rather into himself, to the point that he is 'made to be sin' (cf. 2 Cor 5:21)." But it was **Luther** who first insisted on using 2 Cor 5:21 to establish the idea, in direct opposition to Catholic theology, that Christ was made sin and guilt and that God's "enmity" was against Christ because of that sin and guilt. Luther writes: "And all the prophets saw this, that Christ was to become the greatest thief, murderer, adulterer, robber, desecrator, blasphemer, etc., there has ever been anywhere in the world...In short, he has and bears all the sins of all men in his body."²⁴ The extent of his belief is noted here: "Whatever sins I, you, and all of us have committed or may commit in the future, they are as much Christ's own as if he himself had committed them. In short, our sin must be Christ's own sin, or we shall perish eternally."²⁵ **John Calvin** believed the same.

²⁰ Vol. 2, p. 58.

²¹ Vol. 12, p. 678.

²² *On the Trinity*, Book XIII, Ch. 11.

²³ *Summa Theologica* III, Q. 49, Art. 4.

²⁴ *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Weimar edition, 1888, WA 2, 517.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 40, 434.

Regarding 2 Cor. 5:21 and Is 53:6 he wrote: "...That is, he who was about to cleanse the filth of those iniquities was covered with them by transferred imputation."²⁶ Conversely, Augustine and Aquinas show the authentic Catholic interpretation of 2 Cor. 5:21, and it is miles apart from Luther and Calvin. **Augustine** states: "Those who know the Scriptures of the Old Testament will approve of what I say. For not once but very often 'sins' there are called 'sacrifices for sins.'"²⁷ **Aquinas** writes: "God made him to be 'sin,' that is, he made him suffer for sin, when he was offered up for our sins."²⁸ This interpretation was held by the Fathers in consensus, beginning with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, through Clement of Alexandria, Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria, Eusebius of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, Ambrose, *et al.*, and through the Middle Ages.

Additionally, it was precisely because of the Catholic understanding of a propitiatory Atonement that Luther despised and rejected the Catholic Mass, which is a daily reenactment of the cross on the altar. Concerning the Mass, in 1555 the **Council of Trent** stated: "The holy Council teaches that *this sacrifice is truly propitiatory*, so that, if we draw near to God with an upright heart and true faith, with fear and reverence, with sorrow and repentance, through it 'we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.' For the Lord, *appeased by this oblation*, grants grace and the gift of repentance, and he pardons wrong-doings and sins, even grave ones." **Augustine** said the same: "He who devoutly hears Holy Mass will receive a great vigor to enable him to resist mortal sin, and there shall be pardoned to him all venial sins which he may have committed up to that hour." Since **Luther** had no room for propitiation in his forensic theology, he obviously had no room for the Catholic cross or the Catholic mass. He writes: "He who sacrifices wants to appease God. But he who wants to appease God regards him as wrathful and merciless; and he who does so does not expect grace or mercy of Him, but is afraid of His judgment and condemnation."²⁹ He continues: "you see how all words contradict the notion that the Mass is a sacrifice given to God, and rather show that it is a mercy and gift of God given to men."³⁰ If this is not the case, Luther says, "do we not become unsure as to whether our sacrifice is acceptable to God?"³¹ Basing his critique of the Catholic Mass on his exposition of Hebrews, Luther concludes: "it is certain that Christ cannot be sacrificed over and above the one single time when He sacrificed Himself."³²

Unfortunately, for as many times as JON touches on the Atonement (pp. 39, 119, 133, 155-56, 164, 172-173; 209, 229-231) he never gets around to telling us exactly how Christ's suffering and death procured it. The words "propitiation," "appeasement" and "satisfaction" (all traditional Catholic nomenclature to describe the atonement) simply do not appear in JON, although Protestant concepts like "vicarious

²⁶ *Institutes* 2:16:6.

²⁷ *Sermon*, 134, IV, 5.

²⁸ *Epistle to the Galatians*, III, 5.

²⁹ WA 8, 517, 24f.

³⁰ WA 8, 513, 22.

³¹ WA 8, 517, 17.

³² WA 23, 272, 15.

atonement” appear quite often (e.g., p. 172) – the very concept the Catholic encyclopedia said was “at best a distorted view.” I think this is because JON either has no concept of the traditional Catholic teaching or that he has been so influenced by German Protestant thought that he now only thinks in terms of vicarious expiation. When, for example, JON covers Isaiah 53:11 on page 173 he has the perfect opportunity to highlight the Catholic concept of propitiation, since Isaiah says: “he [God] shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied” (RSV).³³ Instead JON skips to the second part of the verse that speaks of the resulting expiation (“he shall make many to be accounted righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities”).

Along these same lines, JON also misconstrues the account in Exodus 32 when the Israelites sinned by worshiping the golden calf for which God was ready to destroy them save for the propitiation by Moses (Ex 32:9-14). Instead of a propitiation, JON pictures Moses as a “vicarious atonement.” But God neither asked Moses to take the sin of Israel upon himself nor asked him to vicariously suffer or die for it. Rather, Exodus 33:11-19 tells us that God accepted Moses’ propitiatory pleas because Moses was a righteous man who was “God’s friend” and with whom he “spoke face to face.” Even when God had decided not to go through the desert with the Israelites, Moses’ pleas persuade God to change his mind (Ex 33:1-5). Moses could do so because of his righteousness and personal relationship with God that he had built up over 80 years, not because he vicariously suffered for Israel. Unfortunately, JON misses all this. Instead, he cites Gerhard von Rad (another liberal Protestant theologian) to claim that at another time Moses “was vicariously suffering for Israel and likewise dying outside the Holy Land for Israel” (p. 173), but obviously JON missed the fact that Moses’ exclusion from the Holy Land was due to his own sin in striking the rock twice, not as a vicarious suffering for the Jews so that they could enter the Holy Land (*cf.* Num. 20:12; 27:14; Dt 32:51).

Things I Liked in JON

I was impressed with JON’s treatment in Chapter 3 of Jesus’ washing of the apostles’ feet. When Jesus says: “He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet,” JON shows quite well that they are analogies to the sacraments of Baptism and Confession. The first washing takes away Original Sin, and thus there is no need to repeat that action; while the washing of the feet refers to our sins committed subsequent to Baptism that need to be forgiven in order for us to stay in the Lord’s graces. I also liked JON’s treatment of Jesus’ two natures and two wills and their relationship to the Trinity. It was one of the better treatments of this difficult subject I have read in my theological career. I also liked the typology JON often used. For example, JON’s treatment of the wedding feast of Cana and the relationship between Eve and Mary; and his treatment of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane being a type of the Garden of Eden where the two Adam’s do their bidding, were excellent. Finally, I especially liked JON’s treatment of the Passover issue in dealing with the apparent contradictions between John and the Synoptics. JON poses the best solution I’ve seen, that is, that the Synoptics are not speaking of the Last Supper as a Passover meal. I myself have shown in various papers that the words chosen in the Synoptics are not those of a Passover meal. For example, the Synoptics do not use the word for unleavened bread (ἄζυμος)

³³ There is a textual variant in the Hebrew text at Is 53:11 and thus some translations (e.g., NAB) will not have this exact wording.

but use the Greek word for leavened bread (ἄρτος).³⁴ JON shows that at the Last Supper Jesus is departing from the traditional Seder meal and beginning the New Covenant with a new type of meal (which also means that those Catholics today who are practicing Seder meals during Good Friday in commemoration of the Jewish Passover are in error). Whatever the correct solution, I was happy to see that JON did not resort to the historical critical approach of saying that either the Synoptics or John somehow got their historical facts wrong about the Last Supper.

All in all I have been rather critical of JON, but I make no apologies since the material covered by JON deals with some of the most important issues in both theology and society today. There are a few other theological points I could delve into that I believe JON has mishandled. All I can say is, if JON wishes to perpetuate the idea that the Gospels contain mistakes and he promotes Protestant and Jewish theological ideas in place of Catholic tradition, then it forces us to show that he himself has erred. The only way JON can match the infallibility of the Scriptures is when JON speaks infallibly from his papal chair. Everything else, as JON said himself, is open to criticism. We can only pray that whether its Joseph Ratzinger or Pope Benedict XVI, neither will fall prey to the errors and heresies that are so prevalent today, especially regarding the place of the Jewish people in the plan of God.

Robert A. Sungenis, Ph.D.

³⁴ John 13:29 suggests that the Last Supper was not a Passover meal, since, after the Apostles had already celebrated the Last Supper, they later thought Judas was leaving in order to buy things for the upcoming Passover. As such, the closest the Last Supper could be is the Preparation for Passover, but not the Passover (which came the day after), and therefore it could not be a Seder meal. Second, the Seder meal employs only unleavened bread, but the Last Supper used leavened bread. The Greek for unleavened bread is ἄζυμος, which corresponds to the Hebrew מצות (where we get the English phrase “matzot bread”). We can see the correspondence between the two words in the LXX (e.g., Ex 12:18; 23:15; Lv 23:6). But the Greek for leavened bread is ἄρτος, and the Hebrew equivalent is חֶמֶד, and this correspondence also appears in the LXX (e.g., Lv 23:17). The importance of the distinction is this: in the passages of the New Testament that describe the Last Supper, in each case, the Greek word ἄρτος (leavened bread) is used, never ἄζυμος (unleavened bread) (e.g., Mt 26:26; Mk 14:22; 1Co 11:23-28). This must be distinguished from “the feast of Unleavened Bread” that is referred to in Mt 26:17; Mk 14:1, 12; Lk 22:1, 7. In each of these verses, the Greek word ἄζυμος is used for the word “Unleavened.” These distinctions are important considerations because, without the use of unleavened bread, there was little resembling a Passover celebration, and thus it would be difficult to make a one-to-one correspondence between the Last Supper and a Seder meal. Moreover, in the passages of the New Testament that contain a description of the Last Supper, there is a necessary distinction that is often missed between the Passover Preparation Day (Thursday, Nisan 14) and the actual Passover Day (Friday, Nisan 15), but various translations fail to make the distinction. The importance of this distinction is that the Preparation day was not the Passover day, no more than Christmas eve is Christmas day.