

Ancestral Pride

October 15, 2011

In his second volume on the life of Jesus published several months ago, Pope Benedict XVI made remarks enabling journalists to jump to the conclusion that the Jews must no longer be held responsible for deicide, i.e. the killing of God. Worse, on May 17 the executive director of the US Bishops' Conference's Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs said that one cannot charge the Jewish people with deicide at any time in history without falling out of communion with the Catholic Church. Against what many people today want to believe, it is time to recall, however briefly, what the true Church always used to teach on the judicial murder of Jesus.

Firstly, the killing of Jesus was truly "deicide," i.e. the killing of God, because Jesus was the one of the three divine Persons who in addition to his divine nature had taken a human nature. What was killed on the Cross? Only the human nature. But who was killed on the Cross in his human nature? None other than the second divine Person, i.e. God. So God was killed, deicide was committed.

Secondly, Jesus died on the Cross to save all of us sinful human beings from our sins, and in this sense all men were and are the purpose of his death. But only the Jews (leaders and people) were the prime agents of the deicide because it is obvious from the Gospels that the Gentile most involved, Pontius Pilate, would never have condemned Jesus to death had not the Jewish leaders roused the Jewish people to clamour for his crucifixion (Mt. XXVII, 20). Certainly the learned leaders were more guilty than the unlearned people, says St Thomas Aquinas (Summa III, 47, 5), but they all cried together for Jesus' blood to come down upon them and their children (Mt. XXVII, 25).

Thirdly, at least Pope Leo XIII considered there to be a real solidarity between the Jews clamouring then for Jesus to be killed and the collectivity of Jews of modern times. Did he not in his Act of Consecration of the Human Race to the Sacred Heart of Jesus have the entire Church, from the end of the 19th century onwards, pray to God that he turn his “eyes of mercy towards the children of that race, once God’s chosen people: of old they called down upon themselves the Blood of the Saviour; may it now descend upon them a laver (i.e. washing) of redemption and life”?

But Leo XIII is by no means alone in observing such a continuity amongst Jews down the centuries. Do they themselves not lay claim today to the land of Palestine on the grounds that it is theirs by right from the God of the Old Testament? Has there ever been a race-people-nation on the face of the earth more proudly self-identifying as identical down the ages? Originally raised by God to cradle the Messiah, alas, when he came they refused, collectively, to recognize him. Collectively also, meaning there are always noble exceptions, they have remained faithful to that rejection, so that they changed their religion from that of Abraham and Moses and the Old Testament to that of Anas, Caiphas and the Talmud. Tragically, their very messianic training by God drives them to go on rejecting the one whom they hold to be a false messiah. Until they convert at the end of the world, as the Church has always taught they will do (cf. Rom. XI, 26–27), they seem bound to choose to go on acting, collectively, as enemies of the true Messiah. How can the Pope let go of such ancient truths?

Kyrie eleison.