



# GUILTY

FRANK ARUNDELL

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miserere nobis. Agnus Dei, qui tolis  
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“Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on  
us. Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, grant us  
peace.”

Jesus was found guilty by the Sanhedrin, the supreme judicial and ecclesiastical council of ancient Jerusalem. He was accused of blasphemy. The high priest of Jesus' day, Caiaphas, is said to have rent his garment in anger. This rending was an opportunity for psychological relief. It allowed a mourner to give vent to his pent-up anguish by means of a controlled, religiously sanctioned act of destruction. In our opinion, the fact that so many Jews were following the self proclaimed Messiah, supported by biblical prophecies, that what Caiaphas was “mourning” was his losing power over the people. There was no other way to stop this disrupter other than by his death. *“So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, ‘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.’ But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, ‘You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man*

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*die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.' 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."* (John 11:47-53)

“Jesus’ interrogation before the Sanhedrin had concluded in the way Caiaphas had expected: Jesus was found guilty of blasphemy, for which the penalty was death. But since only the Romans could carry out the death sentence, the case now had to be brought before Pilate and the political dimension of the guilty verdict had to be emphasized. Jesus had declared himself the Messiah; hence he had laid claim to the dignity of kingship, albeit in a way peculiarly his own. The claim to Messianic kingship was thought to be a political offense added to his blasphemy, and had to be punished by Roman justice as well. With cockcrow, daybreak had arrived. The Roman Governor used to hold court early in the morning.”

“So Jesus is now led by his accusers to the Praetorium and is presented to Pilate as a criminal who deserves to die. It is the “day of preparation” for the Passover feast. The lambs are slaughtered in the afternoon for the evening meal. Hence cultic purity is preserved; so the priestly accusers may not enter the Gentile praetorium, and they negotiate with the Roman Governor outside the building. John, who provides this detail (18:28-29), thereby highlights the contradiction between the scrupulous attitude to regulations for cultic purity and the question of real inner purity: it simply does not occur to Jesus’ accusers that impurity does not come from entering a Gentile house, but rather from the inner disposition of the heart. At the

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same time the evangelist emphasizes that the Passover meal had not yet taken place and that the slaughter of the lambs was still to come.”

“Essentially, the four Gospels harmonize with one another in their accounts of the progress of the trial. Only John reports the conversation between Jesus and Pilate, in which the question about Jesus’ kingship, the reason for his death, is explored in depth (18:33-38). The historicity of this tradition is of course contested by exegetes. While Charles H. Dodd and Raymond E. Brown judge it positively, Charles K. Barrett and Bart Ehrdman are extremely critical: ‘John’s additions and alterations do not inspire confidence in his historical reliability.’ Certainly no one would claim that John set out to provide anything resembling a transcript of the trial. Yet we may assume that he was able to explain with great precision the core question at issue and that he presents us with a true account of the trial. Barrett also says: ‘that John (and or his surrogates) has with keen insight picked out the key of the Passion narrative in the kingship of Jesus, and has made its meaning clearer, perhaps, than any other New Testament writer.’”

“Now we must ask: Who exactly were Jesus’ accusers? Who insisted that he be condemned to death? We must take note of the different answers that the Gospels give to this question. According to John it was simply ‘the Jews’. But John’s use of this expression does not in any way indicate—as the modern reader might suppose— all the people of Israel in general, even less is it ‘racist’ in character. After all, John himself was ethnically a Jew, as were Jesus and all his followers. The entire early Christian community was made up of Jews. In John’s Gospel this word has a precise and clearly defined meaning: he

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is referring to the Temple aristocracy. So the circle of accusers who instigate Jesus' death is precisely indicated in the Fourth Gospel and clearly limited: it is the Temple aristocracy—and not without certain exceptions, as the reference to Nicodemus (John 7:50-52) shows.”

“In Mark's Gospel, the circle of accusers is broadened in the context of the Passover amnesty (Barabbas or Jesus): the ‘ochlos’ enters the scene and opts for the release of Barabbas. ‘Ochlos’ in the first instance simply means a crowd of people, the ‘masses’. The word frequently has a pejorative connotation, meaning ‘mob’. In any event, it does not refer to the Jewish people as such. In the case of the Passover amnesty (which admittedly is not attested in other sources, but even so need not be doubted), the people, as so often with such amnesties, have a right to put forward a proposal, expressed by way of ‘acclamation’. Popular acclamation in this case has juridical character (cf. Pesch, *Markusevangelium* II, p. 466). Effectively this “crowd” is made up of the followers of Barabbas who have been mobilized to secure the amnesty for him: as a rebel against Roman power he could naturally count on a good number of supporters. So the Barabbas party, the ‘crowd,’ was conspicuous, while the followers of Jesus remained hidden, probably out of fear; this meant that the vox populi, on which Roman law was built, was represented one-sidedly. In Mark's account, then, in addition to ‘the Jews,’ that is to say the dominant priestly circle, the ochlos comes into play, the circle of Barabbas' supporters, but not the Jewish people as such.” (Benedict XVI, Book II, *Jesus of Nazareth*)

“In confronting the crowd who sought the death of Jesus, Pilate taunted them: ‘Shall I crucify your king’? It seemed that he had

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no problem in ceding the man whom he had so unjustly scourged and allowed to be crowned with thorns, a kingship over the Jews. He even insisted that the title ‘King of the Jews’ be posted at the top of the Cross in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, much to the chagrin of the chief priests.” ( According to Benedict, (above), Pilate must not have made the distinction between the majority, i.e. the Jewish People, and the minority, the “vociferous mob,” in terms of who in fact was condemning him.

“It would seem also from the Gospel account that Pilate had no real use for Herod Antipas, other than to wash his own hands of this Jewish affair and pass it off to Caesar’s lackey, who had been raised in Rome and appointed tetrarch over Galilee. This Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, had a gentile mother and could not be considered Jewish. Therefore, he was not recognized as a legitimate king for the Jews who required that the mother be Jewish for legitimacy. His father, as well, was himself only half Jewish, being the son of Antipater, an Idumean, and a Hebrew mother. It is interesting to note that when the Magi came to Jerusalem asking where the King of the Jews was born, Herod ‘and all Jerusalem’ were ‘troubled.’ Note that Antipas did not counter the Magi with the stipulation that he was the Jewish king.

This brings us back to the scene before Pilate.

“When Pilate asked the Jewish leaders, ‘Shall I crucify your king?’ they protested, ‘We have no king but Caesar.’ Note, not Antipas, but Tiberius Caesar.”

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“An astonishing admission! They acknowledged that the prophecy was fulfilled, that the scepter had passed from Judea, and the ‘expectation of the nations’ was come (Genesis 49:10).” The Kingdom of God had arrived in Jesus Christ.

“‘Away with him, crucify Him!’ As if to say, ‘We would rather have our conqueror Caesar rule us than the this phony Messiah King.’ This was the lie cleverly used to recover the status-quo. To destroy Jesus was a necessity in order to maintain control. Still Pilate may have wanted to do justice, this time if not at other times, perhaps due to his wife’s dream, perhaps due to the royal bearing and bloodied, but noble face of the holy man before him; or more than likely it was ‘given to him from above.’”

([catholicism.org](http://catholicism.org) modified)

John’s gospel, what ever some may feel about its historicity, records the event:

*The soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ and striking him on the face. Pilate went out again and said to them, ‘Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.’ So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, ‘Here is the man!’ When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, ‘Crucify him! Crucify him!’ Pilate said to them, ‘Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.’”*

*“The Jews answered him, ‘We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son*

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*of God.' Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, 'Where are you from?' But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, 'Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?' Jesus answered him, 'You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.' From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, 'If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.'*

*When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, 'Here is your King!' They cried out, 'Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!' Pilate asked them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but the emperor.' Then he handed him over to them to be crucified."*

Was Jesus guilty?

It seems that according to Pilate, the case that was presented by the Temple authorities had not been sufficient for him to convict Jesus of any transgressions against the Emperor; so for him, personally, the verdict would have been "not guilty." It appears that he was intimidated by the Temple authorities and the crowd by the attribution of their own but bogus loyalty to Caesar. The suggestion was that his (Pilate's) loyalty would be put into question were he to release the self proclaimed Son of God, therefore, King of the Jews. More than likely, pragmatism or self preservation had him convict an innocent man. He was

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tricked by a wily religious crowd on an issue of primarily a political nature, i.e., survival of the current authoritarian system lucrative to the Roman State.

What about the Jews?

As a Jew, Jesus was extremely well versed in the scriptures; probably more so than any of his contemporaries. Even as a child he is said to have astounded the priests and scribes with his knowledge. He began his public ministry while John the Baptizer was gathering many followers by calling for repentance, baptizing the willing by immersion in the Jordan River, cleansing them of their sins, since the late prophets had predicted the end of times, “The Apocalypse.” The Jewish Encyclopedia will give you chapter and verse on the origin and details of the “Apocalypse”:

Briefly, “It is a revelation of mysteries, things which lie beyond the ordinary range of human knowledge. The Most High gives to His saints (the Prophets in this case) definite instructions in regard to hidden matters, whether things altogether foreign to human experience, or merely events in human history which have not yet come to pass.”

<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/1642-apocalypse>

In other words the Prophets have given us a heads-up on what the future holds via first-covenant scripture. In the First Century CE, the time of Christ, the end appeared to be near for the Jews according to apocalyptic literature . Jesus was central to this situation, he brought on the world’s Messianic age— he, the Messiah, had come to his own, the Jews; not as a political savior but as the spiritual savior claiming that he and the

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Father, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob *is* ONE. Since monotheism had come through the Jews, by extension, Jesus was *one* with the universal God of *all* mankind; in fact, he was the spiritual Savior of the *world*. Only after his death and resurrection were his adherents and their successors able to fully fathom that the Father, i.e., God in Christ, had visited his people as one of them: “And he said to them, ‘Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation.’” (Mark 16:15)

*“Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, ‘The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There it is!’ For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.’”* (Luke 17:20)

When Jesus tells us that the Kingdom of God is a “fact” among us, we ought to assume that it is recognizable to us in our “reality,” not part of our personal “transcendental faith capability,” but exists in the concrete for *all* to see. Yet, at the same time, it is not a thing that can be observed— like the Kingdom of Brunei or Swaziland, etc. According to Pope Benedict XVI: *“When Jesus speaks of the Kingdom of God, he is quite simply proclaiming God, and proclaiming him to be the living God, who is able to act concretely in the world and in history and even now is so acting. He is telling us: “God exists” and “God is really God,” which means that he holds in his hands the threads of the world. In this sense, Jesus’ message is very simple and thoroughly God-centered.”*

I am always amazed with Benedict’s literary clarity, however, this time the explanation seems to me a little vague as to a

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“kingdom” more closely related to reality but still unobservable like an “it”— represented by a living human being, a “King” with scepter and crown. Most believers are spiritually conscious of the Living God among us because of the order of nature and reason; others may be aware of all things being “in” God and God “in” us as the Holy Spirit through Christ, our Lord. With that understanding, Christ’s Kingdom (which he told Pilate was not of this world) can be thought of as being formally established and instituted *in* this world as a result of Christ’s life, death and resurrection. God’s Kingdom come “*on earth as it is in heaven.*” By his life through the Jews; his kingdom was physically among us. By his death; mankind was fully redeemed from sin by the last “traditional” blood sacrifice of the Son of God on the cross. And by his resurrection; humanity was given the conditional option to be ONE with God through Christ in the Spirit: the “glorious” state of life everlasting is offered as a reward for those faithful who love God and neighbor, and trust in his mercy.

Although it is a bit difficult for most of us who live in a democratic-republic to sense monarchical governance, the notion of “Christ the King” gives us a comprehensible understanding of the Kingdom of God as a real non-political governance of the “people of God” by the Church with Christ as its King. (Not an unusual concept in ancient times: a king, as a deity) Of course it would be easy to conclude that the hierarchical Roman Catholic Church with all its constituents, led by the vicar of Christ, the Pope, *is* in effect the Kingdom of God; but that would be myopic; because it would be exclusionary of all the other human-beings outside of the “Holy See”. The God-man was sent by his Father for all mankind, even before Abraham — He was, is now, and forever shall be!

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The Messiah or messianic age was not confined to the Jews, nor was Jesus confined to any specific, closed societal or political structure. As of the New Covenant, in the body and blood of Christ, The Kingdom of God encompasses heaven and earth and *all things, in all times and in all places*, still, where two or more are gathered in his name he is in their midsts. That does not mean however, that the Catholic Church becomes irrelevant; Benedict XVI explains:

“The power that Christ conferred upon Peter and his Successors (his church) is, in an absolute sense, *a mandate to serve*. The power of teaching in the Church involves a commitment to the service of obedience to the faith. *The Pope is not an absolute monarch whose thoughts and desires are law*. On the contrary: The Pope’s ministry is a guarantee of obedience to Christ and to his Word. He must not proclaim his own ideas, but rather constantly bind himself and the Church to obedience to God’s Word, in the face of every attempt to adapt it or water it down, and every form of opportunism....”

“The Pope knows that in his important decisions, he is bound to the great community of faith of all times, to the binding interpretations that have developed throughout the Church’s pilgrimage. Thus, his power is not being above, but [rather] at the service of, the Word of God. It is incumbent upon him to ensure that this Word continues to be present in its greatness and to resound in its purity, so that it is not torn to pieces by continuous changes in usage.”

“The Chair of Peter is — let us say it again — a symbol of the power of teaching, which is a power of obedience and service,

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so that the Word of God — the truth!, — may shine out among us and show us the way of life.”

For many of us the relevance of the Catholic Church, particularly the Roman Catholic Church, is the fact that it remains close to St. Peter, a man like all men, chosen by Jesus, to follow him with humility: *“He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, ‘Lord, are you going to wash my feet?’ Jesus answered, ‘You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.’ Peter said to him, ‘You will never wash my feet.’ Jesus answered, ‘Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.’ Simon Peter said to him, ‘Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!’”*(John 13:6) There was an independent streak in Peter which we all seem to share as human beings, hopefully we are not blinded by an inordinate amount of self-importance allowing us to resist the love of God shown in the humility and generosity of Jesus. No generation goes by without being taught important lessons by Peter and his successors, some of whom, sadly, resisted God’s grace. As sinners, most of us trust that our own personal frailty may always be followed by the infinite mercy of God. *“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live...(John 14:18) ‘Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”*(John 14:23)

The world asks the question: how is this possible? How can an “itinerant preacher, from the backwater of Galilee” promise this incredible connection, and then be found guilty of blasphemy and crucified? The grace of God has allowed Christians, in faith, to believe that the “life” he promised at a

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pre-emptive seder, is the life of God himself in the body of Christ, *the bread-of-life*, the unifying Eucharist available to *all* who truly believe. This Real Presence is the center of Christianity and eventually will become the center of humanity.

I would like to offer an excerpt from a book by Fr. Karl Rahner SJ (1904-1984), *Nature and Grace, Dilemmas in the Modern Church*, written during Vatican II in 1964, as a peritus (expert) in theological matters. Father Rahner was a brilliant, forward-thinking theologian whose most important contribution to the council was his fundamental notion that *grace is offered to humans universally*. During the council, this overarching theology of grace opened the door to an appreciation of the truths found even in non-Christian religions, and how they related to the Catholic Church. After Vatican II, Fr. Rahner became one of the church's leading theological voices:

“The sacrament of the Eucharist is a sacrament of the Spirit-inspired unity of the Church itself and is *not* first of all the sacrament of a private audience with God; it is the bread of the Church's unity in love, already well known. Whoever therefore receives this bread of life cannot do otherwise (as long as he knows what he is doing) than accept from the Spirit (which this body of Christ gives) the power of unity of this Church in love. All Christians receive in like manner this sacrament of supreme unity, this manifestation of the supreme unity of eternal life. No one has any preference over another in this highest sacramental symbol of Christianity's complete essence. To be sure, from the very nature of this sacrament, because it symbolizes and effects in ever greater measure the

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unity of the Church, the hierarchical constitution of the Church must likewise manifest itself in the manner of its administration. “The Lord's Supper,” in which all participate, because all are loved and redeemed in the same manner, must be celebrated in an orderly fashion, i.e., according to Christ's will, with the bishop or priest presiding. If it were not conducted by one *officially* ordained, the Lord's Supper could not possibly be a function of the Church.”

“Precisely this orderly Lord's Supper supposes from the very beginning Christ's intention towards all Christians, the whole Church. Christ offers this meal of eternal life *through* an ordained official, but He offers it to all, and even the man holding office in the hierarchy reaches the consummation of his own Christian existence not by the fact that he administers, but rather by the fact that he receives like everyone else. The Body of the Lord thus is filled with the Lord's Spirit. Here he performs the greatest activity of his own life, which is likewise similar to that of all Christians inasmuch as he believes, hopes, and loves.”

The glory of the resurrection flows directly from one specific crucifixion, essentially the death of the man Jesus who claimed oneness with the Father, the God of the Jews; the God of all creation— the God of three quarters of today's world population who only Jesus knew and had seen as the second person of the Blessed Trinity. While many of the Jews did not accept him or his subsequent church, and Islam was only able to ascertain his prophesy and found his Christians abominable for their beliefs... it was they, the Christians, who followed his teachings and believed in his spiritual real-presence in the

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Eucharist given at the “Lord’s Supper” the night before he was sacrificed for the sins of mankind on the cross.

By ritually duplicating the last-supper in his memory, Christians produce with the “Holy (non bloody) Sacrifice of Calvary, the Mass” *in real-time*: the reinstatement of the Eucharist at the Savior’s command. “This is my body given up for you: This is the chalice of my blood, of the new eternal covenant poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. *Do this in memory of me.*” The mystery of faith is... “Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again!” Among all the other institutional accreditations of the Catholic Church for over Twenty Centuries, this is, and remains her heart and soul regardless of who occupies the “chair” of Peter. The credibility of the Christian faith rests only on Jesus, her Lord and Savior, and by extension the Savior of *all* Mankind.

### The Necessary Ritual Killing (Sacrifice) of the Messiah

We remember an old saying always used around Easter time:

*“You would never have an Easter Sunday without a Good Friday.”*

This brings up the question of why an Almighty Father, all good of course, would permit the execution of his Son? Familiarity with the scriptures reminds us: (Genesis 22):

*“God tested Abraham. He said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’<sup>2</sup>He said, ‘Take your son, your only son*

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*Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt-offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you.’* <sup>3</sup>*So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt-offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him.”*

*“<sup>4</sup>On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. <sup>5</sup>Then Abraham said to his young men, ‘Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you.’ <sup>6</sup>Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. <sup>7</sup>Isaac said to his father Abraham, ‘Father!’ And he said, ‘Here I am, my son.’ He said, ‘The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?’ <sup>8</sup>Abraham said, ‘God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son.’ So the two of them walked on together.”*

*“<sup>9</sup> When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. <sup>10</sup>Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. <sup>11</sup>But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ <sup>12</sup>He said, ‘Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.’ <sup>13</sup>And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt-offering instead of his son. <sup>14</sup>So Abraham called that place ‘The Lord will provide’;\* as it is said to this day, ‘On the*

*mount of the Lord it shall be provided.*” (Genesis 22:1-14)  
NRSV

## Genesis’ Origin, (Wikipedia)

“Scholars in the first half of the 20th century came to the conclusion that the ‘Yahwist’ was produced in the monarchic period, specifically at the court of [Solomon](#), 10th century BC, and the ‘Priestly’ work in the middle of the 5th century BC (the author was identified as [Ezra](#)), but more recent thinking is that the Yahwist was written either just before or during the [Babylonian exile](#) of the 6th century BC, and the Priestly final edition was made late in the Exilic period or soon after.”

“As for why the book was created, a theory which has gained considerable interest, although still controversial is ‘Persian imperial authorization’. This proposes that the Persians of the [Achaemenid Empire](#), after their conquest of Babylon in 539 BC, agreed to grant Jerusalem a large measure of local autonomy within the empire, but required the local authorities to produce a single law code accepted by the entire community. The two powerful groups making up the community—the priestly families who controlled the Temple and who [traced their origin](#) to Moses and the wilderness wanderings; and the major landowning families who made up the ‘elders’ and who traced their own origins to Abraham who had ‘given’ them the land—were in conflict over many issues, and each had its own ‘history of origins’, but the Persian promise of greatly increased local autonomy for all provided a powerful incentive to cooperate in producing a single text.”

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“Genesis is perhaps best seen as an example of a [creation myth](#), a type of literature telling of the first appearance of humans, the stories of ancestors and heroes, and the origins of culture, cities and so forth. The most notable examples are found in the work of Greek historians of the sixth century BC: their intention was to connect notable families of their own day to a distant and heroic past, and in doing so they did not distinguish between [myth](#), [legend](#), and facts. Professor Jean-Louis Ska SJ of the [Pontifical Biblical Institute](#) calls the basic rule of the antiquarian historian the ‘law of conservation’: everything old is valuable, nothing is eliminated. Fr. Ska also points out the purpose behind such antiquarian histories: antiquity is needed to prove the worth of Israel’s traditions to the nations (the neighbors of the Jews in early Persian Palestine), and to reconcile and unite the various factions within Israel itself.” (Wikipedia)

It is not peculiar in my estimation, to make a connection between God’s request of Abraham to offer his son to God, in order to test his obedience; his faith in the ONE God of the Hebrews. What should be understood by us today is the scientific certainty of the wide spread use of ritual sacrifice to God or the gods of all kinds, to have him, her, it, or them, think kindly of us so we can live without fear of calamity, chaos and disaster as was so often experienced by ancient man. Even today, many of our religious excursions could very well have had the same express purpose. Religion, generally is about *us* first.

No ex altar boy will ever forget the *Suscipiat* in the Latin Mass:

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*“Suscipiat Dominus sacrificium de manibus tuis ad laudem in gloriam nominis sui, ad utilitatem quoque nostram totiusque Ecclesiae suae sanctae.”*

~

“May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, *for our good and the good of all his holy Church.*”

That is not to say we do not praise God for his goodness as we perceive it, but it was the Father’s will that Jesus needed to satisfy regardless of his own horrific predicament. As a man, his anxiety was bound to his being abandoned by his Father, not entirely unlike Isaac who was said to obey his earthly father, who in turn was obeying God, even in this mythological, insane situation, not dissimilar to the reality of Jesus on the cross. In both cases of sacrificial death, the message is clear: obedience to the will of God is essential. Initially, for the Jews, Jesus’ death was considered punitive since (Leviticus 24;16) says: “anyone who blasphemes must be put to death.” I have no doubt if we were deeply religious Jews at the time, we would have agreed that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy, strictly on the basis of calling himself “one with the Father” and “the Son of God,” but Jesus’ death became sacrificial with the very words of the high-priest himself: “...*it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.*”

We know from scripture, blood-sacrifice was intended to end with Jesus Christ on a Roman cross, having been goaded by a specific group of rebellious Jews in Jerusalem. “*Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.*” (Matthew 9:13)

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About Seven Hundred years before Christ, Isaiah had already written:

“Hear the word of the Lord,  
You rulers of Sodom!  
Listen to the teaching of our God,  
You people of Gomorrah! What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?  
says the Lord;  
I have had enough of burnt-offerings of rams  
and the fat of fed beasts;  
I do not delight in the blood of bulls,  
Or of lambs, or of goats.”

“When you come to appear before me,  
Who asked this from your hand?  
Trample my courts no more;  
bringing offerings is futile;  
Incense is an abomination to me.  
New moon and sabbath and calling of convocation—  
I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity.”

“Your new moons and your appointed festivals  
my soul hates;  
they have become a burden to me,  
I am weary of bearing them.  
When you stretch out your hands,  
I will hide my eyes from you;  
even though you make many prayers,  
I will not listen;  
Your hands are full of blood.”

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(Isaiah 1:10)

When Jesus, the last and final “blood” sacrifice for the sins of mankind was accomplished, *all* things were made new, the ways of the ancient world were closed. Man learned the true meaning of mercy from the cross of Christ:

*“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they do.”*(Luke 23:34)

In three days he rose as he had said; and the option of eternal life was offered to those willing to follow him:

*“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.”*

Obviously, historically speaking, the world has been slow to learn the meaning of Jesus’ love and mercy, but now the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity are able to flower. Since the Kingdom of God arrived with Jesus, the “people of God” have been given to know that we are in The Father, Son and Holy Spirit as he is in us. Humanity has become fully

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conscious of its relationship with God and redeemed through the blood of Jesus Christ. *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”*(John 13:34) *“Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.”*(1John 4:8)

Nativity of the Lord: Mass during the day.

**Alleluia, alleluia.**

A holy day has dawned upon us.

Come, you nations, and adore the Lord.

For today a great light has come upon the earth.

**Alleluia, alleluia.**