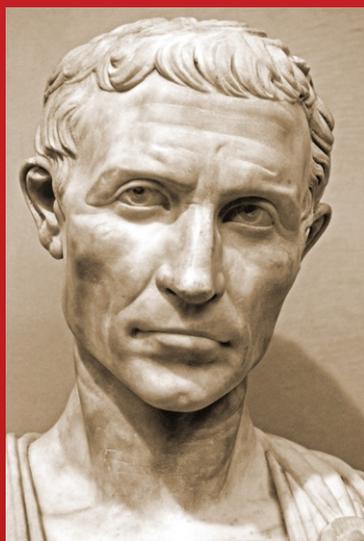


INRI



“What I have written, I have written”

FRANK ARUNDELL

ישוע בן נצרת מלכא דיהודא
JESUS·NAZARENVS·REX·JUDAEORVM
IHCOYC·O·NAZOPAIOC·O·BACIAEYC·TON·JOYAAION

“Quod scripsi, scripsi”

FRANK ARUNDELL

I N R I

“What I have written, I have written.”

Prologue: Encyclopedia Britannica:

“**Pontius Pilate**, Latin **Pontius Pilatus** (died c. 39C.E.), Roman prefect (governor) of Judaea (26–36C.E.) under the emperor Tiberius who presided at the trial of Jesus and gave the order for his crucifixion.”

“According to the traditional account of his life, Pilate was a Roman equestrian (knight) of the Samnite clan of the Pontii (hence his name Pontius). He was appointed prefect of Judaea through the intervention of Sejanus, a favorite of the Roman emperor Tiberius. (That his title was prefect is confirmed by an inscription from Caesarea Maritima, discovered in 1961)”

“Protected by Sejanus, Pilate incurred the enmity of the Jews by insulting their religious sensibilities, as when he hung worship images of the emperor throughout Jerusalem and had coins bearing pagan religious symbols minted. After Sejanus’s fall (31C.E.), Pilate was exposed to sharper criticism from the Jews, who may have capitalized on his vulnerability by obtaining a legal death sentence on Jesus (John 19:12). The Samaritans reported him to Vitellius, legate of Syria, after he had attacked them and killed many on Mount Gerizim (36C.E.) He was then ordered back to Rome to stand trial for cruelty and oppression, particularly on the charge that he executed men without proper trial. According to Eusebius of Caesarea’s

Ecclesiastical History, Pilate killed himself on orders from Emperor Caligula in 39C.E.”

“Judgments of the man himself must be made inferentially, almost entirely on the basis of later Jewish and Christian writings, chiefly those of Josephus and the New Testament. Josephus’s references appear to be consistent. They seem to picture a headstrong strict authoritarian Roman leader who, although both rational and practical, never knew how far he should go in a given case. He provoked both Jews and Samaritans to riot. Josephus tells us: “in order to abolish Jewish laws,” and with the intent of diminishing privileges Jews had hitherto enjoyed, Pilate ordered his troops to encamp in Jerusalem and sent them into the city with images of the emperor attached to their ensigns. When the Jews demonstrated in Caesarea, Pilate’s residence city, he threatened them with death unless they desisted; but when the Jews showed their readiness to die, he ordered the images removed. Josephus states his inferential judgment that Pilate “was deeply affected with their firm resolution,” suggesting his own strength of character.”

“The New Testament suggests that Pilate had a weak, vacillating personality. The mob insisted he release Barabbas instead of Jesus on the feast day (Mark 15:6 ff.) Pilate weakly capitulates. (*We clipped the entire Britannica article here, but found questionable references regarding the trial of Jesus before the prefect. We will clarify the story below using several other sources.*) His wife, Claudia Procula, sent him word of a dream which she had (Matthew 27:19), and Pilate abdicates his responsibility to the emperor. In John (19:7–11), Pilate is depicted as having accepted the Christian interpretation of the meaning of Jesus, and he rejects the Jews’ reminder that Jesus has merely said that he is ‘the king of the Jews’” (19:21).

“On the other hand, John’s picture of Pilate delivering judgment from a tribunal in front of the prefect’s mansion fits typical Roman procedure. Clearly, as an index to the character and personality of Pilate, the New Testament is devastating. But it is preoccupied with concerns of the nascent Christian communities, increasingly making their way among the Gentiles and eager to avoid giving offense to Roman authorities. An early church tradition that had taken a favorable opinion of Pilate still persists in some churches today.” (Encyclopedia Britannica, modified)

Mentions of Jesus and Pilate in Classical Literature:

Tacitus: (58-117)

The *Annals* passage (15.44), which has been subjected to much scholarly analysis, follows a description of the six-day Great Fire of Rome that burned much of Rome in July 64 AD.

In the key part of the passage Tacitus mentions Jesus and Pilate. (Translation from Latin by A. J. Church and W. J. Brodribb, 1876):

“Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christ, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty (crucifixion) during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus; and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judæa, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular.”

NOTE:

Primarily the Christians in the city of Rome were accused of cannibalism; a rumor spread by the Jewish population that the Christians were eating the flesh of their infants. No one truly understood what consuming the “body of Christ” in the Eucharist was really all about. There were many other crimes they were accused of, and in later persecutions were put to death for not following the state religion of Rome. It was not until Constantine the Great (274-337), that the martyrdom stopped. Ironically, Christianity became the state religion through him in 306C.E.

Josephus (37-100)

“About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who performed surprising deeds and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Christ. And when, upon the accusation of the principal men among us, Pilate had condemned him to a cross, those who had first come to love him did not cease. He appeared to them spending a third day restored to life, for the prophets of God had foretold these things and a thousand other marvels about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.”

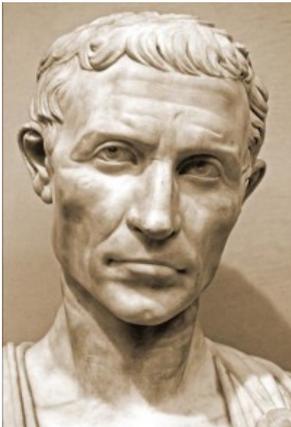
(Flavius Josephus: Antiquities of the Jews)

Behold; The Other Man.

Having visited the collection of Roman Antiquities at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and the Cloisters many times, as well as the British Museum collection in London, and the Uffizi in Florence, what has always struck me

is the life-like character of the marble portraiture of the period. The notable men and women of the Empire, immortalized in stone at the hands of talented artisans appear to us today as people not unlike ourselves. Studying their features brings a certain reality to the history of the time that one does not get by just reading the texts. Julius Caesar, Tiberius, Claudius, Hadrian, Nero, all come to life in the imagination as you read the histories. No matter what period of history one has interest in, a fix on the looks of the participants, for me, always seems to vitalize the events in the literature.

For a christian, one of the great joys of a lifetime is being able to travel to the Holy Land and visit many of the sites of Jesus's three year public ministry, places such as the re-built synagogue (built on the original foundation) at Capernaum in Galilee; the pool of Siloam and Golgotha, in Jerusalem, etc. On my visit to Israel, I distinctly remember walking up the stone steps adjacent to the house of Caiaphas, the high priest of the time, where they dragged Jesus with a rope around his neck before the Sanhedrin and accused him of blasphemy.



Looking for online accounts of the trial of Jesus, I discovered for the first time, a photo of a marble bust of Pontius Pilate. I was not able to find where the sculpture is currently on display, but the character of Pilate that shone in the sculpture impressed me very much. Here is the face of a man who stood eye to eye with Our Lord Jesus Christ at the most important time in the history of mankind for believers; the “fullness of time” for

the Jews. Obviously no one can exactly tell from a marble bust

the true character of a person, but often facial characteristics do tend to display an individual's personality; the set of the jaw, the creases in the forehead, the gaze in the eyes often silently speak volumes. As a person who has done many portraits, I have found this to be true just by the way a person poses for his or her likeness. People are very self-conscious about pictures of themselves whether painted, sculpted or photographed. One of my favorite portraitists, John Singer Sargent jokingly said: "A portrait of a person is a picture of the individual where there is always something wrong with the mouth." I'm sure Velasquez felt the same way.

After over two thousand years Pilate's place in history is secure as the man who crucified Jesus, Christ the king. The writers of the Gospels neither speak well of him nor evil of him. When Jesus called Judas: "*the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled,*" one might conclude that fulfillment of the scripture may also have been Pilate's fate, although he appears not to have been "lost" quite like Judas. Each time we confess our faith we mention the name of Pontius Pilate. We have no doubt that this will continue until the end of the age. Still, in the big picture, does the man deserve that never-ending remembrance?

Jesus's and His Time

It was no secret that the temple authorities were very much disturbed with Jesus's preaching and his miraculous works. They were historically the legitimate representatives of God to the Israelites, "As a religious institution, the priesthood was not unique to ancient Israel. Not only are priests attested in civilizations throughout the ancient Near Eastern world, but the root *khn*, from which we get the Hebrew words "priest" and

“to act as priest,” is also known from Northwest Semitic literature. While the purpose of this thematic guide is not to offer a comparative analysis of the priesthood in the ancient world, it should be noted that the picture we encounter of the priesthood in the Hebrew Bible, like many other aspects of Israelite religion, was most likely derived from and influenced by the religious systems of surrounding cultures.”

“From the time of the settlement (ca. 12th c. B.C.E.) through the close of the Hellenistic period (ca. 1st c. B.C.E.), priests played a critical role in socio-political realities, from ritual practice to cultural memory, from sacral authority to religious identity, and from political administration to foreign affairs. Priests, and especially the high priest, figure prominently in the literature of Second Temple Judaism and are critical to the sectarian beliefs on display at Qumran.” (Oxford Biblical Studies Online)

“Jesus was a Palestinian Jew. He would have grown up with stories of conquest and oppression. These stories recounted the many waves of foreign invasion that sought to subjugate the Jewish people. The Roman occupation of Israel (63 BCE.) was the last in a long line of invasions beginning with the Babylonians (539 BCE), then the Persians and the Greeks. Jewish identity also rested on stories of the Patriarchs--Abraham, Isaac and Jacob--as well as the founding story of the Moses-led liberation from the Egyptians at the Exodus. There were yet other stories that recounted successful self-rule under the Hebrew kings Saul, David and Solomon. However, history records that the Jewish people were more often the victims than the victors in their fight for national sovereignty.”

“Hebrew identity was maintained--as it is with most oppressed peoples--through a deep spiritual conviction. This conviction

was expressed in terms of a Covenant theology: the belief that Yahweh had chosen them to play a unique role in the history of the world. In particular, the Jewish people had come to expect a Messiah who, they believed, would enable them to fulfill this divine mission. There were differing understandings of the mission and role of the Messiah ranging from the establishment of a Jewish political kingdom here on earth to the eschatological notion of a heavenly kingdom at the end of the world (which many Jewish people considered to be immanent). It goes without saying that religion and politics were deeply intertwined in Hebrew faith and self-understanding.”

“By the time of Jesus’s birth, the Romans had established a two-tiered system of government consisting of Roman overseers and Jewish leaders who exercised control in the name of Rome. This was the system of power in which the family of Herod the Great grew to prominence. Although half-Jews, the Herodian family was detested by the Jewish people for its tyrannical rule and also because of its key role in selling out the Jewish heritage to a foreign power. One of Herod’s sons, Archelaus, was so brutal in his exercise of power in Jerusalem, that Rome replaced him with one of its own governors, Pontius Pilate, who was to play a significant role in the crucifixion of Jesus. Another of the sons, Herod Antipas, was responsible for the beheading of John the Baptist. It was the same Antipas who is accredited with the mocking of Jesus at his pre-crucifixion trial.”

Life in Galilee

“Jesus was a Nazarene. He lived most of his life in the town of Nazareth within the province of Galilee. Although a small village, Nazareth was close to the metropolitan centres of

Tiberias and Sepphoris. Unlike those predominantly Gentile (non-Jewish) cities, Nazareth was a Jewish enclave. It was also relatively poor and overpopulated; there was a scarcity of natural resources such as water and fertile soil. In such a situation, there tended to be a fair amount of sickness and disease. Nonetheless, Nazareth could not be called destitute. Jesus came from a family of craftsmen or carpenters which suggests a reasonable socio-economic standard of living.”

“Education was a priority for Jewish people. Jesus would have learnt the Bible at the village school (until the age of twelve) and at the local synagogue. This accounts for Jesus’s knowledge of Hebrew (the language of the Bible) and Aramaic (the language in which religious discussion was held). It was also the custom of the time for young adults to attach themselves to a local teacher or sage. Although we know little of Jesus’s young adult life, we do know that he eventually chose to be a disciple of John the Baptist. Certainly, by the time of his ‘public ministry’ Jesus was well versed in the Scriptures and the Jewish tradition. This suggests that he spent many years learning and discussing his Jewish faith and heritage.”

Jerusalem

“Jerusalem was the centre of the Jewish world. Male Jews were supposed to make a pilgrimage to the Jerusalem temple for the three major Jewish feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. However, since Nazareth was a three or four day journey from Jerusalem (about a hundred miles), it is unlikely that Jesus made the trip often. The Gospels tell us that he went with his family at the age of twelve. He also visited Jerusalem during his public life (once or three times depending on the Gospel). On one visit to the temple, Jesus is recorded as

reacting violently to those who were using the temple for commercial purposes. It is highly probable that this action of Jesus is related to his trial and eventual execution. Of further historical interest is the fact that the temple was destroyed by the Romas in 70 CE.”

Society and politics

“Judaism at the time of Jesus was a complex mixture of divergent social, political and religious ideologies. In general terms, we can speak of four distinct movements, ideologies or life-options. It is helpful to situate Jesus in terms of these social groups of his day in order that we can come to appreciate the distinctiveness of his own life and mission.”

“The Zealot movement took the revolutionary option. It advocated outward violence, even armed rebellion, to rid Israel of Roman oppression. Nothing else, they figured, would bring final liberation to the Jewish people. Depending on the point of view, Zealots were looked upon as freedom-fighters or terrorists. One thinks of the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka or activities of the Irish Republican Army during the 'troubles' in Northern Ireland. Certainly Jesus had zealots among his followers, for example 'Simon the Zealot'. Moreover, Jesus came into conflict with both the Jewish temple and the Roman state. Finally, he was executed as a zealot revolutionary. However, few would argue that Jesus was a violent revolutionary. Like other non-violent figures in history, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Jesus posed a more radical threat to the established order than any armed person might do.”

“The Sadducees were the great pragmatists of the day. As wealthy lay-nobles, priests and aristocrats, they sought to

conserve their wealth and power through compromise with Rome. Politically speaking, this was the most realistic option. Most of the members of the Sanhedrin were from the Sadducee group. In many ways, the Sadducees could be described as the least religious group as is evidenced by their non-belief in the resurrection from the dead. However, it would be wrong to see them as agnostics or atheists as some have argued. They were committed to the Jewish faith on the basis of the earlier books of the bible. Moreover, as the people at the top of the pecking order in the Jewish society of their time, they were much more concerned with present-day affairs than speculation on the life-to-come. In the Gospels, it is evidently the Sadducees who are the main opponents of Jesus at the time of his trial and death. They rightly saw that Jesus's radical brand of religion threatened their power and status.”

“The Pharisees were in many ways the idealists of Jewish society. Most of the Scribes (the scholars of the day) were Pharisees. In general, despite their bad reputation in the Gospels, the Pharisees sought to live a life of spiritual purity by meticulously following of the torah (Jewish law). They did not believe in compromise with the Romans (as did the Sadducees) nor in revolutionary activity (as did the Zealots). No doubt their emphasis on the law could result in legalism which may, in turn, become a pretext for hypocrisy. Nonetheless, many Pharisees were highly committed and deeply spiritual people. They believed in the resurrection of the dead. From their perspective, Jesus seemed to relativize the law which explains their anger towards him.”

“Finally, there were the Essenes who solved the problem of Jewish identity in a Roman-occupied Israel by withdrawing to a monastic-like setting. They were, if you like, the hippies of the day insofar as they completely opted out of mainstream

Jewish society. The most notable group in Jesus' time was the Qumran community who lived an ascetic life and were waiting for God's apocalyptic intervention in human history. It is unlikely that Jesus had any contact with this particular group. Still, he was introduced to the ascetical option through his contact with the disciples of John the Baptist who represented a quasi-Essenic withdrawal from mainstream society. Jesus's public ministry demonstrates his decision to engage directly with the wider members of his society."

"Consequently, while Jesus had dealings with the various socio-political groups and religious ideologies of his time, he took his own unique life-option. It was a position that had certain parallels with the likes of his mentor, John the Baptist, though there were significant differences in their teachings and ministry. Some scholars compare Jesus to a near-contemporary of his, a teacher named Hillel. Both Jesus and Hillel had profound respect for the Jewish torah, but they were also renowned for preaching compassion, forgiveness and love. Their ministries were profoundly people-oriented. However, Jesus was more than a teacher. He was also experienced as prophet, miracle-worker, healer, defender of the poor and oppressed. Nonetheless, Jesus's distinctiveness needs to be appreciated in the context of his Jewish life and times. This was a context in which religion and politics were intertwined in a much more complex way than we think of them today." (Gerard Hall S.M., School of Theology, McAuley Campus, Banyo, Brisbane - Australian Catholic University.)

The Dreaded Taxes

"Rome was the fourth world power to get possession of Palestine and to make the Jews vassals. The latter, while

retaining the characteristics of their nationality and laying a greater emphasis than ever on the externals of their religion, had not been an independent nation for any great length of time since the beginning of the Babylonian captivity. Even the reign of the Maccabees proved to be only a last desperate attempt to return to their ancient power and glory. Disrupted by a civil war between the Hasmonean Sadducees and the Pharisees, the nation was not in a position to present a united front against an external enemy. The Roman general Pompey, who was just then conducting a campaign in Syria, gladly availed himself of the opportunity to interfere. The hatred of the opposing parties made a peaceful settlement of their differences impossible, and so Pompey finally took the city on the 23d of Sivan, a fast-day, in the year 63 B.C. Although he entered the Temple, and even visited the Holy of Holies, he did not interfere with the worship of the Jews, being content with having made them tributary to the power of Rome.”

“At the beginning of the Christian era the Idumean Herod was king of Judea, which included practically the entire country as it had been in the time of David. After his death, Archelaus became ruler of Idumea, Judea, and Samaria, under the title of ethnarch. In the year 6 A.D., he was banished to Vienne, in the province of Gaul, and his dominions were annexed to the province of Syria. Thus it was that the southern part of Palestine was ruled by governors, among whom were Pontius Pilate, Felix, and Festus. These were under the supervision of the Roman legate for Syria, and they made Caesarea their capital, visiting Jerusalem only occasionally. Herod Antipas became tetrarch of Galilee and Perea. Philip received Batanea, Trachonitis, Auranitis, Gaulanitis, Panias, and Iturea, and resided at Scythopolis, later at Caesarea Philippi. At his death his territories were included in the province of Syria, and in 37 given to Agrippa.”

“The Romans, in the case of Judea, followed the same policy which they had employed toward their other provinces and tributary countries. They made it a point not to interfere with the religion of a people nor to hinder any religious usages, so long as they did not conflict with the glory of Rome. But the laws of Rome had to be enforced, and Roman garrisons were stationed in the principal cities, that of Jerusalem occupying the tower of Antonia, adjacent to the Temple. The adjustment of religious differences was in the hands of the ecclesiastical authorities, but punishments of a civil and criminal nature were in the hands of the government, including the sentence of death pronounced upon the basis of a religious transgression. The presence of Roman soldiers was always deeply resented by the Jews, and especially by the Pharisees, as an unjustified encroachment upon ancient liberties.”

“The greatest difficulty, the chief point of contention, between the Jews and the Roman government lay in the question of taxes. The members of the Jewish Temple, both in Palestine and in the Diaspora, (John 7:35), felt the obligation of maintaining their elaborate form of worship as a heavy burden. The voluntary contributions, the oblations and offerings, did not afford sufficient revenue for the up-keep of the Temple and for the payment of the many priests and Levites, and so assessments had to be levied upon every member of the Temple. The annual Temple-tax imposed upon all those that were numbered was, at the time of Jesus, half a shekel, or a double drachma, about 60 cents, (Matt. 17:24-27).”

“The collection of taxes for the Roman government was in the hands of the equestrian order. The members of this order, in turn, sold the privilege to prominent men in the provinces, who, after figuring a good profit, turned the matter over to the tax-

gatherers proper, all of whom were just as anxious to turn a penny to their own account. The result was a system of robbery which left nothing to be desired for thoroughness. Unjust valuation, extortion, blackmail, was the order of the day, and the people had to suffer. The Talmud distinguishes two classes of publicans, the tax-gatherer in general and the custom-house official. The former collected the regular dues, which consisted of ground, income, and poll-tax. Here was opportunity for unjust exactions, since the ground-tax amounted from 10 and even up to 20%, the income-tax to 1%. But the cruelty of the system became especially apparent in the case of the custom-house official, for there was tax and duty upon all imports and exports, and on all that was bought and sold, bridge-money, road-money, harbor-dues, town-dues, etc. A merchant's journey was rendered anything but pleasant when he had to expect to unload all his pack-animals, open every bale and package, and have his private letters opened. The fishermen paid taxes on their catch as well as a toll when crossing the Sea of Galilee from one territory to another.”

“At the time of Jesus a decree of Caesar had changed the system of tax-gathering somewhat by having the taxes levied by publicans in Judea and paid directly to the government. But this change did little to ease the burden of the people, and only made the publicans more unpopular, as being the direct officials of the heathen power. It mattered little whether the publican was well established like Zacchaeus, (Luke 19:2), and employed substitutes, or an individual who stood at the receipt of customs himself, (Matt. 9:9). The publicans, though, for the most part members of the Jewish nation and Temple, were disqualified from being judges and witnesses, and were generally treated as social outcasts, on a level with known sinners.”

(Kretzmann Popular Bible Commentary, 1922-4: modified)

The Situation

Joseph Aloysius Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI

Using various old and new web sites we have tried to set the stage to tell the strange story of the of the three part trial of Jesus. Back in the early twenties Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith, later BenedictXVI, began what would become a trilogy, titled *Jesus of Nazareth*. We have had the good fortune and the enormous pleasure of reading almost everything Benedict has written, and especially this incredible work. His erudition and clarity of style, accompanied by great translation (he writes in German, though speaking twelve languages) it is truly remarkable. In order to present this earth changing story we will cherry-pick certain passages of part-two of Benedict's three book piece: *Holy Week: From the Entrance Into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*. We will see how the man Pilate fits into the matrix, and whether he deserves either guilt or innocence for the judgements he made regarding the Messiah; which, of course, as a pagan, he never truly understood.

The Trial of Jesus (Extracted from Part Two, Ch. 7)

“All four Gospels tell us that Jesus' night of prayer was brought to an end when an armed group of soldiers, sent by the Temple authorities and led by Judas, came and arrested him, leaving the disciples unharmed. This arrest—evidently ordered by the Temple authorities and ultimately by the high priest Caiaphas—how did it come about? How did it come to pass that Jesus was handed over to the tribunal of the Roman Governor Pilate and condemned to death on the Cross? The Gospels allow us to

distinguish three stages in the juridical process leading to the sentence of death: a meeting of the Council in the house of Caiaphas, Jesus' hearing before the Sanhedrin, and finally the trial before Pilate...

“In the early stages of his ministry, the Temple authorities had evidently shown little interest in the figure of Jesus or in the movement that formed around him; it all seemed a rather provincial affair. The situation changed on “Palm Sunday”. The Messianic homage paid to Jesus on his entrance into Jerusalem; the cleansing of the Temple with the interpretation he gave to it, which seemed to indicate the end of the Temple altogether and a radical change in the cult, contrary to the ordinances established by Moses; Jesus' teaching in the Temple, from which there emerged a claim to authority that seemed to channel Messianic hopes in a new direction, threatening Israel's monotheism; the miracles that Jesus worked publicly and the growing multitude that gathered around him—all this added up to a situation that could no longer be ignored.”...

“As its immediate occasion, the popular movement generated by the raising of Lazarus was a large contributor. The common fear was “The Romans will come and destroy both our Temple, and our nation.” One is tempted to say that the motive for acting against Jesus was a political concern shared by the priestly aristocracy and the Pharisees, yet this political interpretation of the figure of Jesus and his ministry caused them to miss completely what was most characteristic and new about him. Through the message that he proclaimed, Jesus had actually achieved a separation of the religious from the political, thereby changing the world: this is what truly marks the essence of his new path.”...

“It is important to distinguish between this underlying religious and political motivation on the part of Israel’s leaders and the specific power-interests of the dynasty of Annas and Caiaphas, “To this extent the death sentence passed against Jesus is characterized by a curious overlapping of two layers: the legal concern to protect the Temple and the nation, on the one hand, and the ambitious power seeking of the ruling group, on the other.”... “John’s gospel expressed with great clarity this striking combination in Caiaphas of carrying out God’s will and blind self-seeking. While the Council members were perplexed as to what should be done in view of the danger posed by the movement surrounding Jesus, he made the decisive intervention: “You do not understand that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish” (11:50). John designates this statement expressly as a “prophetic utterance” that Caiaphas formulated through the charism of his office as high priest, and not of his own accord.”...On the surface, the content of Caiaphas’ “prophecy” is thoroughly pragmatic, and, considered in those terms, it seems reasonable from his point of view: if the people can be saved through the death of one man (and in no other way), then this individual’s death might seem the lesser evil and the politically correct path. But what on the surface sounds and is intended to be merely pragmatic acquires an entirely new depth on the basis of its “prophetic” quality. The one man, Jesus, dies for the nation: the mystery of vicarious atonement (dying for the sins of mankind) shines forth, and it is this that constitutes the most profound content of Jesus’ mission.”... “The one dies for the many—this prophetic utterance of the high priest Caiaphas brings together all the longing of the world’s religious history and Israel’s great faith traditions and applies them to Jesus.”...

Jesus before the Sanhedrin

“The fundamental decision to take action against Jesus, reached during that meeting of the Sanhedrin, was put into effect on the night leading from Thursday to Friday with his arrest on the Mount of Olives. Jesus was led, still by night, to the high priest’s palace, where the Sanhedrin with its three constituent groups—chief priests, elders, scribes—was evidently already assembled.”...

“On the basis of Jesus’ teaching in the Temple, a second charge was in circulation: that Jesus had made a Messianic claim, through which he somehow put himself on a par with God and thus seemed to contradict the very basis of Israel’s faith—the firm belief that there is only one God. We should note that both charges are of a purely theological nature. Yet given the inseparability of the religious and political realms, of which we spoke earlier, the charges do also have a political dimension. As the place of Israel’s sacrifices, to which the whole people comes on pilgrimage for great feasts, the Temple is the basis of Israel’s inner unity. The Messianic claim is a claim to kingship over Israel. Hence the placing of the charge by Pilate: “King of the Jews” above the Cross was indicative of the reason for his execution.”...

“After the vain attempt to establish a clear and well-founded charge against Jesus on the basis of his statement about the destruction and renewal of the Temple, we come to the dramatic encounter between the serving high priest of Israel, the highest authority of the chosen people, and Jesus himself.”... “According to Mark, the high priest’s question is: ‘Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?’ And Jesus answers: ‘I am; and you will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven’ (14:62). The fact that God’s name and the word ‘God’

are avoided and replaced by ‘the Blessed’ and ‘Power’ is a sign of the text’s authenticity.

“The high priest questions Jesus about his Messiahship and refers to it in terms of Psalm 2:7 (cf. Ps 110:3), using the expression ‘Son of the Blessed’—Son of God. In the context of the question, this expression refers to the Messianic tradition, while leaving open the form of sonship involved. One may assume that Caiaphas not only based the question on theological tradition, but also formulated it specifically in terms of Jesus’ preaching, which had come to his attention.”... From all this we may conclude that Jesus accepted the title Messiah, with all the meanings accruing to it from the tradition, but at the same time he qualified it in a way that could only lead to a guilty verdict, which he could have avoided either by rejecting it or by proposing a milder form of Messianism. He left no room for political or military interpretations of the Messiah’s activity. No, the Messiah—he himself—will come as the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven.”... However, Jesus had merely pieced a few scriptural quotations together and had expressed his mission ‘according to the Scriptures,’ in language drawn from the Scriptures themselves. But to the members of the Sanhedrin, the application of the noble words of Scripture to Jesus evidently appeared as an intolerable attack on God’s otherness, on his uniqueness.”...

“In any event, as far as the high priest and the members of the assembly were concerned, the evidence for blasphemy was supplied by Jesus’ answer, at which Caiaphas tore his robes, and said: ‘He has uttered blasphemy’”

Jesus before Pilate

“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 to be 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 a political offense, one that had to be punished by Roman justice. 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 must be 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 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.”...

“Now we must ask: Who exactly were Jesus’ accusers? Who insisted that he be condemned to death?”... “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 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.”... “The real group of accusers are the current Temple authorities, joined in the context of the Passover amnesty by the ‘crowd’ of ‘Barabbas’ supporters.”

“Let us move now from the accusers to the judge: the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate. While Flavius Josephus and especially Philo of Alexandria paint a rather negative picture of him, other sources portray him as decisive, pragmatic, and realistic. It is often said that the Gospels presented him in an increasingly positive light out of a politically motivated pro-Roman tendency and that they shifted the blame for Jesus’ death more and more onto the Jews. Yet there were no grounds for any such tendency in the historical circumstances of the evangelists: by the time the Gospels were written, Nero’s

persecution had already revealed the cruel side of the Roman State and the great arbitrariness of imperial power. If we may date the Book of Revelation to approximately the same period as John's Gospel, then it is clear that the Fourth Gospel did not come to be written in a context that could have given rise to a pro-Roman stance. The image of Pilate in the Gospels presents the Roman Prefect quite realistically as a man who could be brutal when he judged this to be in the interests of public order."

"Yet he also knew that Rome owed its world dominance not least to its tolerance of foreign divinities and to the capacity of Roman law to build peace. This is how he comes across to us during Jesus' trial. The charge that Jesus claimed to be king of the Jews was a serious one. Rome had no difficulty in recognizing regional kings like Herod, but they had to be legitimated by Rome and they had to receive from Rome the definition and limitation of their sovereignty. A king without such legitimation was a rebel who threatened the Pax Romana and therefore had to be put to death. Pilate knew, however, that no rebel uprising had been instigated by Jesus. Everything he had heard must have made Jesus seem to him like a religious fanatic, who may have offended against some Jewish legal and religious rulings, but that was of no concern to him. The Jews themselves would have to judge that. From the point of view of the Roman juridical and political order, which fell under his competence, there was nothing serious to hold against Jesus."

"At this point we must pass from considerations about the person of Pilate to the trial itself. In John 18:34-35 it is clearly stated that, on the basis of the information in his possession, Pilate had nothing that would incriminate Jesus. Nothing had come to the knowledge of the Roman authority that could in any way have posed a risk to law and order. The charge came

from Jesus' own people, from the Temple authority. It must have astonished Pilate that Jesus' own people presented themselves to him as defenders of Rome, when the information at his disposal did not suggest the need for any action on his part. Yet during the interrogation we suddenly arrive at a dramatic moment: Jesus' confession. To Pilate's question: 'So you are a king?' he answers: 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice' (Jn 18:37). Previously Jesus had said: 'My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world' (18:36).

“This “confession” of Jesus places Pilate in an extraordinary situation: the accused claims kingship and a kingdom (*basileía*). Yet he underlines the complete otherness of his kingship, and he even makes the particular point that must have been decisive for the Roman judge: No one is fighting for this kingship. If power, indeed military power, is characteristic of kingship and kingdoms, there is no sign of it in Jesus' case. And neither is there any threat to Roman order. This kingdom is powerless. It has no legions.”

“With these words Jesus created a thoroughly new concept of kingship and kingdom, and he held it up to Pilate, the representative of classical worldly power. What is Pilate to make of it, and what are we to make of it, this concept of kingdom and kingship? Is it unreal, is it sheer fantasy that can be safely ignored? Or does it somehow affect us?”

“In addition to the clear delimitation of his concept of kingdom (no fighting, earthly powerlessness), Jesus had introduced a positive idea, in order to explain the nature and particular

character of the power of this kingship: namely, truth. Pilate brought another idea into play as the dialogue proceeded, one that came from his own world and was normally connected with “kingdom”: namely, power—authority (*exousía*). Dominion demands power; it even defines it. Jesus, however, defines as the essence of his kingship witness to the truth. Is truth a political category? Or has Jesus’ “kingdom” nothing to do with politics? To which order does it belong? If Jesus bases his concept of kingship and kingdom on truth as the fundamental category, then it is entirely understandable that the pragmatic Pilate asks him: “What is truth?” (18:38).

“It is the question that is also asked by modern political theory: Can politics accept truth as a structural category? Or must truth, as something unattainable, be relegated to the subjective sphere, its place taken by an attempt to build peace and justice using whatever instruments are available to power? By relying on truth, does not politics, in view of the impossibility of attaining consensus on truth, make itself a tool of particular traditions that in reality are merely forms of holding on to power?”

“And yet, on the other hand, what happens when truth counts for nothing? What kind of justice is then possible? Must there not be common criteria that guarantee real justice for all—criteria that are independent of the arbitrariness of changing opinions and powerful lobbies? Is it not true that the great dictatorships were fed by the power of the ideological lie and that only truth was capable of bringing freedom?”

“What is truth? The pragmatist’s question, tossed off with a degree of scepticism, is a very serious question, bound up with the fate of mankind. What, then, is truth? Are we able to recognize it? Can it serve as a criterion for our intellect and

will, both in individual choices and in the life of the community? The classic definition from scholastic philosophy designates truth as “*adaequatio intellectus et rei*” (conformity between the intellect and reality; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 21, a. 2c). If a man’s intellect reflects a thing as it is in itself, then he has found truth: but only a small fragment of reality—not truth in its grandeur and integrity.”

“We come closer to what Jesus meant with another of Saint Thomas’ teachings: “Truth is in God’s intellect properly and firstly (*proprie et primo*); in human intellect it is present properly and derivatively (*proprie quidem et secundario*)” (*De Verit.*, q. 1, a. 4c). And in conclusion we arrive at the succinct formula: God is “*ipsa summa et prima veritas*” (truth itself, the sovereign and first truth; *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 16, a. 5c).

“This formula brings us close to what Jesus means when he speaks of the truth, when he says that his purpose in coming into the world was to “bear witness to the truth”. Again and again in the world, truth and error, truth and untruth, are almost inseparably mixed together. The truth in all its grandeur and purity does not appear. The world is “true” to the extent that it reflects God: the creative logic, the eternal reason that brought it to birth. And it becomes more and more true the closer it draws to God. Man becomes true, he becomes himself, when he grows in God’s likeness. Then he attains to his proper nature. God is the reality that gives being and intelligibility.”

““Bearing witness to the truth’ means giving priority to God and to his will over against the interests of the world and its powers. God is the criterion of being. In this sense, truth is the real “king” that confers light and greatness upon all things. We may also say that bearing witness to the truth means making creation intelligible and its truth accessible from God’s perspective—the perspective of creative reason—in such a way

that it can serve as a criterion and a signpost in this world of ours, in such a way that the great and the mighty are exposed to the power of truth, the common law, the law of truth.”

“Let us say plainly: the unredeemed state of the world consists precisely in the failure to understand the meaning of creation, in the failure to recognize truth; as a result, the rule of pragmatism is imposed, by which the strong arm of the powerful becomes the god of this world.”

“At this point, modern man is tempted to say: Creation has become intelligible to us through science. Indeed, Francis S. Collins, for example, who led the Human Genome Project, says with joyful astonishment: “The language of God was revealed” (*The Language of God*, p. 122). Indeed, in the magnificent mathematics of creation, which today we can read in the human genetic code, we recognize the language of God. But unfortunately not the whole language. The functional truth about man has been discovered. But the truth about man himself—who he is, where he comes from, what he should do, what is right, what is wrong—this unfortunately cannot be read in the same way. Hand in hand with growing knowledge of functional truth there seems to be an increasing blindness toward “truth” itself—toward the question of our real identity and purpose.”

“What is truth? Pilate was not alone in dismissing this question as unanswerable and irrelevant for his purposes. Today too, in political argument and in discussion of the foundations of law, it is generally experienced as disturbing. Yet if man lives without truth, life passes him by; ultimately he surrenders the field to whoever is the stronger. “Redemption” in the fullest sense can only consist in the truth becoming recognizable. And

it becomes recognizable when God becomes recognizable. He becomes recognizable in Jesus Christ. In Christ, God entered the world and set up the criterion of truth in the midst of history. Truth is outwardly powerless in the world, just as Christ is powerless by the world's standards: he has no legions; he is crucified. Yet in his very powerlessness, he is powerful: only thus, again and again, does truth become power."

"In the dialogue between Jesus and Pilate, the subject matter is Jesus' kingship and, hence, the kingship, the "kingdom" of God. In the course of this same conversation it becomes abundantly clear that there is no discontinuity between Jesus' Galilean teaching—the proclamation of the kingdom of God—and his Jerusalem teaching. The center of the message, all the way to the Cross—all the way to the inscription above the Cross—is the kingdom of God, the new kingship represented by Jesus. And this kingship is centered on truth. The kingship proclaimed by Jesus, at first in parables and then at the end quite openly before the earthly judge, is none other than the kingship of truth. The inauguration of this kingship is man's true liberation."

"At the same time it becomes clear that between the pre-Resurrection focus on the kingdom of God and the post-Resurrection focus on faith in Jesus Christ as Son of God there is no contradiction. In Christ, God—the Truth—entered the world. Christology is the concrete form acquired by the proclamation of God's kingdom."

"After the interrogation, Pilate knew for certain what in principle he had already known beforehand: this Jesus was no political rebel; his message and his activity posed no threat for

the Roman rulers. Whether Jesus had offended against the Torah was of no concern to him as a Roman.”

“Yet Pilate seems also to have experienced a certain superstitious wariness concerning this remarkable figure. True, Pilate was a sceptic. As a man of his time, though, he did not exclude the possibility that gods or, at any rate, god-like beings could take on human form. John tells us ‘the Jews’ accused Jesus of making himself the Son of God, and then he adds: ‘When Pilate heard these words, he was even more afraid’” (19:8).

“I think we must take seriously the idea of Pilate’s fear: Perhaps there really was something divine in this man? Perhaps Pilate would be opposing divine power if he were to condemn him? Perhaps he would have to reckon with the anger of the deity? I think his attitude during the trial can be explained not only on the basis of a certain commitment to see justice done, but also on the basis of such considerations as these.”

“Jesus’ accusers obviously realize this, and so they now play off one fear against another. Against the superstitious fear of a possible divine presence, they appeal to the entirely practical fear of forfeiting the emperor’s favor, being removed from office, and thus plunging into a downward spiral. The declaration: “If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend” (Jn 19:12) is a threat. In the end, concern for career proves stronger than fear of divine powers. Before the final verdict, though, there is a further dramatic and painful interlude in three acts, which we must consider at least briefly. The first act sees Pilate presenting Jesus as a candidate for the Passover amnesty and seeking in this way to release him. In doing so, he puts himself in a fatal situation. Anyone put forward as a candidate for the amnesty is in principle already condemned.

Otherwise, the amnesty would make no sense. If the crowd has the right of acclamation, then according to their response, the one they do not choose is to be regarded as condemned. In this sense, the proposed release on the basis of the amnesty already tacitly implies condemnation.”

“Regarding the juxtaposition of Jesus and Barabbas and the theological significance of the choice placed before the crowd, I have already written in some detail in Part One of this book (pp. 40-41). Here I shall merely recall the essentials. According to our translations, John refers to Barabbas simply as a robber (18:40). In the political context of the time, though, the Greek word that John uses had also acquired the meaning of terrorist or freedom fighter. It is clear from Mark’s account that this is the intended meaning: “And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas” (15:7).

“Barabbas (‘Son of the Father’) is a kind of Messianic figure. Two interpretations of Messianic hope are juxtaposed here in the offer of the Passover amnesty. In terms of Roman law, it is a case of two criminals convicted of the same offense—two rebels against the Pax Romana. It is clear that Pilate prefers the nonviolent ‘fanatic’ that he sees in Jesus. Yet the crowd and the Temple authorities have different categories. If the Temple aristocracy felt constrained to declare: ‘We have no king but Caesar’ (Jn 19:15), this only appears to be a renunciation of Israel’s Messianic hope: ‘We do not want this king’ is what they mean. They would like to see a different solution to the problem. Again and again, mankind will be faced with this same choice: to say yes to the God who works only through the power of truth and love, or to build on something tangible and concrete—on violence.”

“Jesus’ followers are absent from the place of judgment, absent through fear. But they are also absent in the sense that they fail to step forward en masse. Their voice will make itself heard on the day of Pentecost in Peter’s preaching, which cuts ‘to the heart’ the very people who had earlier supported Barabbas. In answer to the question ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’ they receive the answer: ‘Repent’—renew and transform your thinking, your being (cf. Acts 2:37-38). This is the summons which, in view of the Barabbas scene and its many recurrences throughout history, should tear open our hearts and change our lives.”

“The second act is succinctly summarized by John as follows: ‘Then Pilate took Jesus and scourged him’ (19:1). In Roman criminal law, scourging was the punishment that accompanied the death sentence (Hengel and Schwemer, *Jesus und das Judentum*, p. 609). In John’s Gospel, however, it is presented as an act during the interrogation, a measure that the Prefect was empowered to take on the basis of his responsibility for law enforcement. It was an extremely barbaric punishment; the victim was ‘struck by several torturers for as long as it took for them to grow tired, and for the flesh of the criminal to hang down in bleeding shreds’ (Blinzler, *Der Prozess Jesu*, p. 321). Rudolf Pesch notes in this regard: “The fact that Simon of Cyrene has to carry the cross-beam for Jesus and that Jesus dies so quickly may well be attributable to the torture of scourging, during which other criminals sometimes would already have died” (*Markusevangelium II*, p. 467).

“The third act is the crowning with thorns. The soldiers are playing cruel games with Jesus. They know that he claims to be a king. But now he is in their hands; now it pleases them to humiliate him, to display their power over him, and perhaps to offload vicariously onto him their anger against their rulers.

Him whose whole body is torn and wounded, they vest, as a caricature, with the tokens of imperial majesty: the purple robe, the crown plaited from thorns, and the reed scepter. They pay homage to him: ‘Hail, King of the Jews’; their homage consists of blows to his head, through which they once more express their utter contempt for him” (Mt 27:28-30; Mk 15:17-19; Jn 19:2-3).

“The history of religions knows the figure of the mock king—related to the figure of the ‘scapegoat’. Whatever may be afflicting the people is offloaded onto him: in this way it is to be driven out of the world. Without realizing it, the soldiers were actually accomplishing what those rites and ceremonies were unable to achieve: ‘Upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed’ (Is 53:5). Thus caricatured, Jesus is led to Pilate, and Pilate presents him to the crowd—to all mankind: ‘Ecce homo’ ‘Here is the man!’ (Jn 19:5). The Roman judge is no doubt distressed at the sight of the wounded and derided figure of this mysterious defendant. He is counting on the compassion of those who see him.”

“‘Ecce homo’—the expression spontaneously takes on a depth of meaning that reaches far beyond this moment in history. In Jesus, it is man himself that is manifested. In him is displayed the suffering of all who are subjected to violence, all the downtrodden. His suffering mirrors the inhumanity of worldly power, which so ruthlessly crushes the powerless. In him is reflected what we call “sin”: this is what happens when man turns his back upon God and takes control over the world into his own hands.”

“There is another side to all this, though: Jesus’ innermost dignity cannot be taken from him. The hidden God remains

present within him. Even the man subjected to violence and vilification remains the image of God. Ever since Jesus submitted to violence, it has been the wounded, the victims of violence, who have been the image of the God who chose to suffer for us. So Jesus in the throes of his Passion is an image of hope: God is on the side of those who suffer.”

“Finally, Pilate takes his place on the judgment seat. Once again he says: ‘Here is your King!’ (Jn 19:14). Then he pronounces the death sentence.”

“Indeed the great ‘Truth’ of which Jesus had spoken was inaccessible to Pilate. Yet the concrete truth of this particular case he knew very well. He knew that this Jesus was not a political criminal and that the kingship he claimed did not represent any political danger—that he ought therefore to be acquitted.”

“As Prefect, Pilate represented Roman law, on which the Pax Romana rested—the peace of the empire that spanned the world. This peace was secured, on the one hand, through Rome’s military might. But military force alone does not generate peace. Peace depends on justice. Rome’s real strength lay in its legal system, the juridical order on which men could rely. Pilate—let us repeat—knew the truth of this case, and hence he knew what justice demanded of him.”

“Yet ultimately it was the pragmatic concept of law that won the day with him: more important than the truth of this case, he probably reasoned, is the peace-building role of law, and in this way he doubtless justified his action to himself. Releasing this innocent man could not only cause him personal damage—and such fear was certainly a decisive factor behind his action—it could also give rise to further disturbances and unrest, which

had to be avoided at all costs, especially at the time of the Passover.”

“In this case peace counted for more than justice in Pilate’s eyes. Not only the great, inaccessible Truth but also the concrete truth of Jesus’ case had to recede into the background: in this way he believed he was fulfilling the real purpose of the law—its peace-building function. Perhaps this was how he eased his conscience. For the time being, all seemed to be going well. Jerusalem remained calm. At a later date, though, it would become clear that peace, in the final analysis, cannot be established at the expense of truth.”

(Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth Book Two, Holy Week: From the Entrance Into Jerusalem To The Resurrection*, Kindle Edition.)

In our opinion the dilemma that Pontius Pilate faced is not at all unlike many people face today. We believe people are prone to act only in their own self interests at the expense of others, even in very serious matters where the “other” would be seriously harmed by the power possessed. The great war that’s taking place before our eyes today is a war against truth, and particularly increasing against truth as a person; *Jesus of Nazareth*. In the cause of peace it is imperative that reasonable people understand we are responsible for one another as Jesus taught. In the current toxic air of power politics, Lord Acton says it well: *“Everybody likes to get as much power as circumstances allow, and nobody will vote for a self-denying ordinance.”* The world in this century seems to be engulfed in very serious “schadenfreude.” The misuse of freedom has gone out of control, people go out of their way to defend the lie. In the case of Pilate, his character flaw had universal significance;

who is to say ours might not. If Jesus forgave his killers out of ignorance would not Pilate deserve the same?

The Most Holy Trinity - Solemnity

Gospel Acclamation Alleluia, alleluia.

Glory to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit;
to God who is, who was, and who is to come.

Alleluia, alleluia.