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## Report from the Symposium Organized by Joseph Ratzinger Foundation, “The Gospels. Historical and Christological Research” : Rome, 24th–26th of October 2013

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**Report from the Symposium Organized  
by Joseph Ratzinger Foundation,  
“The Gospels. Historical and Christological  
Research”  
(Rome, 24<sup>th</sup>–26<sup>th</sup> of October 2013)**

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Fondazione Vaticana Joseph Ratzinger has organized the Symposium in Rome (24<sup>th</sup>–26<sup>th</sup> October, 2013) on theme “The Gospels. Historical and Christological Research”. The conference set out to study in depth of the main themes of the thought of Benedict XVI, taking its cue from the three volumes of *Jesus of Nazareth*, published during the period 2007–2012. There is no doubt that this trilogy is a considerable contribution to theological research on Jesus. Invited lecturers came from different universities and represented different Christian denominations. More than three hundred participants from all over the world gathered together at the Pontificia Università Lateranense to listen to the interventions, to discuss and study in order to enrich the interpretation of the Gospels.

Welcoming address was given by Card. Camillo Ruini, President of the Scientific Committee of Joseph Ratzinger Foundation, and Mons. Jean-Luis Brugues, President of the Organizing Committee. The opening lecture, on theme “Research on Jesus in the Gospels. From Reimarus to Today”, was presented by Bernardo Estrada from Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome. The lecturer showed historical development of the “quest for Jesus”, underlying contributions of such famous authors as Reimarus, Schweitzer, Meier and Dunn. All the stages of the quest for historical Jesus were presented in the light of the document *Sancta Mater Ecclesia*. Then Juan Chapa from the University of Navarra in Spain spoke about the meaning of papyrological research in the interpretation of the Gospels. Chapa discussed some questions related to variant readings witnessed by the papyri, such as passages of dubious authenticity, harmonisations and readings caused by possible theological reasons. This reflection was supported by analysis of

the role of the copyists of manuscripts as interpreters of the biblical text. Very interesting was the lecture given by Richard Burridge from London (King's College), entitled "The Greek-Roman Biographies and the Gospel Literary Genre". Burridge started with the consideration of *Dei Verbum* and its implications for Ratzinger's "Jesus of Nazareth", then he passed to the explanation of his (Burridge's) original work on the literary genre of the Gospels as ancient biography, and finally he applied the results of his considerations for Ratzinger's trilogy.

The afternoon session started with the intervention of Yves Simoens, professor in Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome. His lecture was entitled "The Historical Re-evaluation of the Fourth Gospel". The lecturer examined several texts from John's Gospel (prolog, Jesus' Bethsaida disciples, baptism of Jesus, Jesus' death on the cross) and confronted the data of this Gospel with Judaism of Yavneh. Simoens concluded with statement that the Fourth Gospel is even more historical than the synoptic gospels.

After the lecture of Simoens took place a workshop on the Infancy Narratives. During the workshop the participants of symposium had the possibility to listen to four interventions. The first one belonged to Richard Bauckham from University of Saint Andrews in Scotland. He spoke about "oral history in scriptural form" in Luke's Infancy Narrative. After giving preliminary information about Greco-Roman biographies, he explained a scheme of biblical and Jewish birth narratives and then in that light he shown Luke's narratives about the purification and presentation of Jesus in the temple (Lk 2:22-24) as a part of oral tradition. The second intervention was that of Stanley E. Porter (McMaster Divinity College, Canada). The lecturer wanted to indicate extra-evangelical literary sources to the Infancy Narratives (Old Testament, *Protoevangelium of James*, the *Gospel of the Nazoreans*, the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, and the P. Cairo 10735). According to Stanley, the Infancy Narratives rarely enter into discussion of the historical Jesus in a major way. We can indicate almost three factors: the failure of Mark's Gospel to have an Infancy Narrative, the supposed historical difficulties surrounding the recorded events and how they were traditionally preserved, the failure of the Infancy Narratives according to the standard criteria of historical Jesus research. Next short-paper was presented by Eugenia Alliata, archeologist from Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in Jerusalem. He spoke about the contribution of archeology in the Infancy Narratives research, stressing the case of 1<sup>st</sup> century archeological evidences in Nazareth. The workshop was concluded with the lecture given by Armand Puig Tàrrach, entitled "Historical Interweaving in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke". He put attention of course on historical background of the Infancy Narratives.

The second day of the symposium started with contribution of Klaus Berger from the University of Heidelberg in Germany. Berger spoke about reliability of the Gospels. According to him the question about the credibility of the Gospels cannot be resolved by modern standards. It is rather to ask what criteria were used by the organizers of the New Testament canon, when the four canonical Gospels were accepted (instead of circa sixty eight other gospels that existed than). These criteria can be reconstructed when based on a comparison between the four Gospels and those other writings. Berger stressed on the fact that in today's research one should renounce the model of the gradual increase of the divinity of Jesus and one must abandon the theory that the Gospel of John was late and historically worthless. John P. Meier (University of Notre-Dame, USA) gave his short-paper concerning the historical figure of Jesus, paying attention to the historicity of Jesus' parables. Meier spoke mainly about the Good Samaritan parable giving a presupposition that this parable is a creation of Luke himself and not belonged to *ipsissima verba Jesu*. Then Antonio Pitta from the Pontificia Università Lateranense (Rome) presented his short-paper about Jesus and Paul. Pitta questioned the thesis that Paul was the first who invented Christianity. Between Jesus and Paul were the apostles and than early communities of the Church, he argued.

The afternoon session started with the presentation of Card. Prosper Grech (PUL-Augustinianum, Rome) on theme: "From the Gospels to Patristic Christology". Card. Grech spoke about the *regula fidei*, which developed in 2<sup>nd</sup> century, based on early creeds, liturgical hymns and formulations against heresies. Craig A. Evans from Acadia Divinity College in Canada presented short-paper entitled "The Last Days of Jesus' Life. Did Jesus Anticipate the Cross?". Evans rebuked thesis of some scholars that Jesus did not anticipate his death in Jerusalem. The lecturer indicated internal evidences in the Gospels that Jesus did anticipated his suffering and death on the cross, and sought to find meaning in his death and to explain it to his disciples. These evidences consist not only in the formal predictions of the Passion, but in a number of supporting and incidental factors (title "son of Man", explanation why disciples do not feast, parable of the Wicked Vineyard Farmers, Jesus' reaction to his anointing by the unnamed woman, the fear during the prayer in Gethsemane). Then Etienne Nodet from the École Biblique of Jerusalem presented the Last Supper as a sacrifice of the New Covenant. He spoke on the efficiency of the Eucharist, based on biblical (1 Cor 1:22-25; 2:4-6a; Wis 1:1-4; 7:22-26; 13:1-2.6) and extra-biblical (Epictetus, *Dissert.* 4.7.6-7; DSS, *4QH<sup>a</sup>* 7i; Philo, *QG* 4:125; Josephus, *Ant.* 1:19; 18:3; *Ag.Ap.* 2:168-170) sources. About the Last Supper spoke also Ermenegildo Manicardi from the Pontificia Università Gregoriana (Rome). Manicardi tried to explain the

significance that Jesus gave to his death during the Last Supper. The last intervention on the second day of the symposium was a lecture presented by Roberto Vignolo from the Facoltà Teologica dell'Italia Settentrionale in Milan. Vignolo indicated the sources of Jesus' hope of resurrection in light of Mk 14:25; Mt 26:29 and Lk 22:16.

The third and last day of the symposium took place in the Vatican City, first in the Old Synod Hall, than in the Sala Clementina. Very interested was the first lecture on that day, given by Thomas Söding (University of Bochum, Germany) on theme: "Invitation to Friendship. 'Jesus of Nazareth' by Joseph Ratzinger". According to Söding, the trilogy of Ratzinger / Benedict XVI is an invitation to friendship with Jesus, and friendship with Jesus is nothing else as friendship with God. Basing on John 15:12-15 the lecturer highlighted a Christology of humanity presented by Ratzinger in his books. This Christology is characterized by the love of God, and it expresses a relation of great closeness, which is signed by intimacy and respect. The last short-paper during the symposium belonged to Card. Angelo Amato, Prefect of Congregation for the Causes of Saints, who spoke on theme: "Theological Content of the 'Jesus of Nazareth' and Methodological Exemplarity".

At the end of the symposium Pope Francis in the Sala Clementina rewarded two scholars with the "Joseph Ratzinger" prize. The recipients of this prize were Richard Burridge and Christian Schaller. The first one is the English Biblical scholar, dean of King's College London and minister in the Anglican Community. He is the first non-Catholic to receive the Ratzinger prize. The second recipient is the German lay theologian Christian Schaller, professor of Dogmatic Theology and deputy director of the Pope Benedict XVI Institute of Regensburg, Germany, which is publishing the complete works of Joseph Ratzinger. In his address the Pope said that Benedict XVI had given to the Church and to all Christians a precious gift: the three volumes of "Jesus of Nazareth", the books that testify deep understanding of Jesus by Joseph Ratzinger.